‘Current state of puppetry in Pakistan and the efforts of Rafi Peer’

By

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the current state of puppetry in Pakistan with particular focus efforts of The Rafi Peer Theatre to revive puppetry through the formation of Sim Sim Hamara.

The paper draws in depth study of Sim Sim Hamara, an educational series of shows for children. An adaptation of Sesame Street, it has been created by RPTW in collaboration with the Sesame Workshop, New York, and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The project is the outcome of extensive research as it includes participants from different provinces. They work with the government and other educational experts so that they can cater to the educational needs for the children.

The research strategy used was qualitative data since it mostly focuses on the views of the people who are passionate and have been involved in this profession for a number of years. To get a better understanding of their efforts and problems they have faced in Pakistan to educate the masses by using puppetry
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Introduction

A couple of months ago, I attended the Karachi Literature Festival. As I walked into the space filled with literature enthusiasts and art lovers, I almost felt the energy coming from the end where I saw a group of puppeteers perform and entertain the crowds. In an instant, the overwhelming success of this technique, used in the 90's induced a nostalgic feeling. It not only reminded me of my childhood days when I enjoyed puppet shows with my parents at carnivals, birthday parties, and in school, but in fact it reminded me of the methods that our schools would use to introduce this form of art in our daily routines. It was almost necessary for primary schools to have an arts and crafts class which involved making your-own hand puppets with socks and develop stories and characters around them - the given importance to which was much like any other theory subject.

The popularity of Uncle Sargam’s show on Pakistan Television (PTV) remains unparalleled to date. I have a number of memorable recollections which include sitting cross-legged at a certain hour during the day to watch a show starring him titled, ‘Kaliyan’. Uncle Sargam plays a very significant role in the hearts of the 90’s child. He was an iconic figure, so much so, that even the street vendors would sell his face masks. He could be caught on TV, newspaper; in fact Sargam earned dominance in the hearts and minds of many while the show lasted. In addition, to keep the spirit of Sargam alive, a statue was placed in Islamabad for his remembrance. Although, many efforts were made to revive the character back by PTV and Dawn News. Truth be told, little or no appreciation has been received by this show, as it had in the past.

Similarly, another form of puppetry that is still active in Pakistan is folk puppetry. But with the advent of technological changes, lack of funds and constant developments, this form of
art and its popularity is also retreating into darkness. Now only a handful of puppeteers exist that perform at festivals and in small villages to keep their art alive.

Puppetry around the world is used as a tool for communication and social development, however in a country like Pakistan where art and education are the least of government’s concerns; it becomes difficult for people to carry on with such projects. In such circumstances the Peerzada family has taken a step to revive puppetry by forming Rafi Peer Theatre.

Rafi Peer gave puppeteers a platform to perform despite the hindrance they faced from the lack of government support and private sector. In a time where such entertainment was one-dimensional and created for the elite, they took the initiative to overtly open it to the common man.

My interest in this area grew when; Sim Sim Hamara was aired on PTV, a local adaptation of Sesame Street. It not only gave an enormous rise to puppetry but also created a means of educating the children who were unable to attend school. Since Pakistan’s education system is in shambles, where half the women cannot read and school funding comprises only 1.5 per cent of GDP, this initiative seemed liked a good idea by Rafi Peer in order to reintroduce a whiff of youthfulness, energy and creativity in the young minds.

In this dissertation I am going touch upon the current state of puppetry in Pakistan with particular focus efforts of The Rafi Peer Theatre to revive puppetry.

**Literature Review**

Puppetry captures the imagination and interest of young students and therefore, is used in many schools in the west and east as a medium to communicate and teach the children. Stories
are told and retold through toys, gestures, animals and puppets using dramatic voices and theatrical effects. The popularity of puppets as a method for teaching can be traced back through centuries. In the Flemish manuscript, "The Romance of Alexander", written in 1340, there is an illustration of glove puppets. Xenophon and Plutarch mention the use of marionettes. Medieval morality plays are performed by marionettes, and the puppets' popularity is alluded to by Cervantes and Ben Jonson, Haydn, Mozart and Bach, who have composed brief operas for marionettes in the wealthy court circles of the eighteenth century.¹

In “Puppetry as an Educative Media”, Roberta Jane Confino reveals how puppetry can be transformed into an effective media by the educators today. Puppetry is often related to artwork and brings out the creativity in children, as it mixes both memory and imagination; it seeks expression rather than true representation.² It becomes the educator’s responsibility to guide, encourage and build a rapport with the child. "The most important function of the teacher in an art room, and perhaps in every other school room also, is to create a creative atmosphere."³

Puppets can be created from various objects such as fingers, which involve paper cut outs and material to fit over a child finger, to form a puppet. Hand puppets involve movement of the entire hand with fingers and different areas. Shadow puppets are created when rod puppets are shown on a screen illuminated from behind. Marionettes, or string puppets may be simply worked with one or two strings or they may be made more complex.⁴ Puppets may be made of materials found around the house or in nature. Painted branches or twisted scraps of wood are the

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² Roberta Jane Confino, ‘Puppetry as an Educative Media’.


⁴ Roberta Jane Confino, ‘Puppetry as an Educative Media’.
beginning elements of characterization, paper-bag puppets, milk container puppets, puppets with simplistic design, and puppets with detailed colour or features. These puppets offer great opportunities for diversity, the possibilities are almost endless and creativity and imagination can flourish.

Technological advancements have also played a major role with animation and computer graphics. These days, characters are made on the computer and shown on television catering to a larger audience. Steve Tillis, in “Art of puppetry in the Age of Media production”, questions if the figures made of the computer can be termed as puppets and if not, what are the reasons for it. Is a person operating a puppet (tangible or virtual) in real-time doing what puppeteers have always done, while a person working at a keyboard with a virtual puppet (despite the fact that one is controlling the movement of the puppet) is seemingly disengaged in the same activity, despite the fact that the result (i.e., movement of the figure) is the same? One might say that the computer has freed the puppet from its dependence on conventional puppeteers, but computers have not freed the puppet from the necessity of human control of one sort or another.

Steve Tillis brings the issue of tangibility; as computer graphics figures are not tangible, they cannot be touched. However, there are striking similarities in the creation of computer graphics figures and puppets: the creation of both involves the construction of a figure. In short, both are artificial human constructs designed for manipulation (of one sort or another) by

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5 Roberta Jane Confino, ‘Puppetry as an Educatve Media’.


7 Steve Tillis. “The Art of Puppetry in the Age of Media Production” p 21
people. Despite the similarities, I feel tangibility is a significant part that distinguishes the two. Puppets are, as we have known them be, thought of as "tangible", while computer graphics figures are thought of as "virtual" puppets.

The hands on experience of making the puppet, interacting with it, learning about it, integrating culture and history to it, cannot be compared to a figure made on computer. There is a pleasure still to be found in the live performance of a tangible puppet, the direct confrontation between an audience and a "living" object that is distinct from the particular pleasures of media puppets.

Rachel A. Bonney, in her article on “Teaching Anthropology through folklore”, for the Anthropology & Education Quarterly, brings an anthropological view on the importance of folklore as an educational tool for children and the society, as these stories hold value, cultural traditions that are passed on from one generation to the other.

In the aforementioned article, Rachel A. Bonney focuses on how storytelling can be used for educational practices not only for children, but at college level as well. She has been using this method for the past ten years as a teaching aid in both introductory and advanced anthropology classes. She describes three separate uses of folklore: collecting folklore through fieldwork interviewing, analyzing themes in these stories and using folklore through puppetry and plays. She points out how folktales are used as sources of information and insights on child-rearing, and makes them more aware of other cultures and on their morals, traditions and

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8 Steve Tillis. “The Art of Puppetry in the Age of Media Production”

9 Rachel A. Bonney, “Teaching Anthropology through folklore” for the Anthropology & Education Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 4 pp 13-14

values. However, children are more familiar with their own culture and traditions than of others and therefore, she relied on American and European culture to analyze folklore material, as it is easier and effective to identify and relate.

For her study, she used Grimm’s fairy tales, such as “Hansel and Gretel” and “Little Red Riding Hood”, because these stories are popular in the American culture, despite their Medieval European origins and cultural change. Furthermore, she tells us how these stories are dramatized with puppet plays where students make their clothes, give them a face and make the illustrated surroundings, manipulating them to be culturally appropriate. They may range from stick puppets to socks to scraps of cloth or paper plates etc, and are often performed in a small scale setting and therefore, are cost effective. Often additional sounds effects are used, for example music, back vocals that are taped to enhance the dramatic presentation. Through background research for script writing, students learn about another culture in depth; for example if the students were putting up a puppet show about “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves”, they would have to look in to the historical background, the roots of the characters, what they wore in that time and so on.

Rachel A.Bonney’s argues that folklore might be seen as “high tech” in modern America, but her approaches have successfully shown us how Western and non-western values can be integrated to a child’s bringing up, not only in the literate society but as an effective device in non-literate society. She further builds her argument by saying that anthropology is not

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11 Rachel A.Bonney, “Teaching Anthropology through folklore” p20.
12 Rachel A.Bonney, “Teaching Anthropology through folklore” p20
13 Rachel A.Bonney, “Teaching Anthropology through folklore” p20.
exclusively an exotic and esoteric discipline for the study of ‘primitive society’. Anthropology is not for a few elite, but for everyone.\textsuperscript{14}

Her study on folklore tales is not restricted to the Western world, but also relatable here in the Subcontinent. Much of the puppetry in the Subcontinent is associated with folklore stories based on historical themes. They hold great pride in their stories, as they have been passed on from generations through oral history, and have become a central part of identity, tradition and culture. Common folklores in the subcontinent are of: “Heer Rahja”, “Sassi Pannu” and “Laila Majnu”; these characters are recognized and referred to in everyday lives. For example, when someone falls madly in love, he will usually be referred to as “Majnu”, not Shakespeare’s Romeo. Shakespearean characters Romeo and Juliet represent undying love; such is the case with Laila Majnu. Many additions and subtractions have been made to the story over the years, but what remains constant is Majnu’s love for Laila.

Puppets are portrayed differently around the sub continent; for example in India they are popular in Tamil Nadu, Orrisa, Andhra Pradesh, Assam and the West Bengal. They portray unique features of the art and are operated through strings attached to the knees, hips, wrists, shoulders that make each and every part of the body move in different directions, just as humans do. This method is practiced till today. Thyagaraja Sharma, an English Professor, said that the art dated back to Indus Valley Civilization.\textsuperscript{15} Excavations of clay dolls from the site were an indication of this long tradition. A lot of information about puppetry was seen in Sangam literature too. They are often religiously portrayed from epics like Mahabarata, Buddha’s life and Raamayana. Besides dealing with religious themes, Indian puppetry also conveys useful

\textsuperscript{14} Rachel A.Bonney, “Teaching Anthropology through folklore” p21.

\textsuperscript{15} G.Srinivasan, ‘Pulling the strings to resuscitate a dying art.
messages from Panch`ntra and other mythological and historical epics.\textsuperscript{16} Started initially as a medium of entertainment, puppetry became the media for propagation of ideas, dissemination of information, and educating the masses.\textsuperscript{17}

Anna Sobel, a professional puppeteer and an activist, was intrigued by a show put up by the Indian puppeteers in the Smithsonian gallery in Washington DC. She spoke to them later and found out that they use puppets for social awareness programs such as AIDS in villages back home. In September, she went to India, on a nine month Fulbright grant, to study Indian puppetry as a tool for social change in the primitive society.\textsuperscript{18}

In her article \textit{“Mutual respect: Re-examining puppetry in India”}, Anna Sobel discusses how the uneducated class in India respond to puppetry and how their behaviour changes because of it. As mentioned above, India has a rich cultural association with puppets, and with the help of government funding educational puppetry is not a foreign concept amongst the locals. The puppeteers took this responsibility as a moral obligation to the public, which includes adults and children.\textsuperscript{19} Sobel observed that the children in the village would get up as early as four in the morning to practice and recite the story of \textit{Ramayana} which they performed for forty one nights straight. They took this opportunity to provide extensive commentary on healing properties of local herbs and discussed educational themes.\textsuperscript{20} She further observed how puppeteers were able to adapt a show to the local ambiance (and was much better than what she saw at the

\textsuperscript{16} G.Srinivasan, ‘Pulling the strings to resuscitate a dying art’.
\textsuperscript{17} G.Srinivasan, ‘Pulling the strings to resuscitate a dying art’.
\textsuperscript{18} Rachel A.Bonney, ‘Teaching Anthropology through folklore’ pp25
\textsuperscript{19} Anna Sobel, ‘Mutual respect: Re-examining puppetry in India’ p16-17.
\textsuperscript{20} Anna Sobel. ‘Mutual respect: Re-examining puppetry in India’ pp 18.
Smithsonian), as the audience recognized the stories, songs and characters. In addition, the live performance of the puppetry allowed direct rapport with the audience allowing them to be involved directly, thus, increasing the likelihood of them remembering the message than if they saw the program on the television for example.

Folk puppetry is the traditional form of marionette (string puppets); it is the most common form of puppetry that is practiced in Pakistan for decades. Most of the folk stories can be recently mapped out through the tales of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. The puppets mostly come from Rajasthan, India where they learned the art of storytelling and the craft. Therefore, one can see the similarity between the puppets of India and Pakistan, they both who strong oral tradition which has ensured a much closed environment where the secrets are passed on from generations.

As a rule they do not perform in huge public gathering like ‘melas’ (festivals) because they prefer smaller audiences. Their shows are probably designed in a manner that is meant for smaller groups rather than large crowds as their size of puppets and set is small as well so it can be appreciated in a smaller gathering. Sarwat Ali is her book ‘Exploring the life and state of Folk puppetry in Pakistan: Puppeteers in the Dark’ discusses how the traditional puppeteers do not feel safe in larger congregations, especially protecting their women as they are harassed and demanded for commercial sex. There use to be a time when they would roam in the streets of villages and cities hawking for children to see the show, as soon as they would find an audience they would set up start performing.


Their stories are mostly traditional a few are kept aside keeping in view of the time and the audience. One of the main reasons for the lack of interests in folk puppetry Sarwat Ali mentions in her book is that the audience is unable to understand the dialect of these folk tales especially in the urban areas.24

Live shows are more common in the rural areas in the subcontinent because they do not have much access to mass media, such as television or newspaper. This may be the reason why in the cities puppetry is not common anymore; media has replaced this source of entertainment. However, the Indian government has still reinforced this craft because they use this as a tool for religious education.

Puppetry can influence simple behaviour patterns and guidance. They can show the child the importance of brushing your teeth before sleeping, or how to cross the road through informal learning. Etter believes puppetry is a creative means to aid all areas of the language arts. She outlines how children gain through puppetry in classroom learning: a) overcoming of shyness and timidity; b) gaining of confidence, acceptance, feeling of security; c) feeling of success; d) benefits of working in a group; e) novel change from studying; children learn by doing, thus enjoyment and understanding; f) learning is retained25. Besides the classroom, the use of puppets in shows and exhibits has proved that children are more responsive and tend to remember more through informal learning. The Ministry of Education in Mexico has often made use of puppetry shows in schools and remote areas to aid in the mass education of the people. Similarly, Javier

24 Sarwat Ali ‘Exploring the life and state of Folk puppetry in Pakistan: Puppeteers in the Dark’ p 27.

Villafañe has performed his puppetry shows in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile encouraging both dramatic action and creativity in children by the making of their own puppets.²⁶

In 1969, a series of educational programs by the name of “Sesame Street” was aired in America; it was the first show where a detailed and comprehensive educational curriculum was designed. Its target audience were children from the lower group of income; it was found out through research that many children watched the program before starting school, which gave them a head start; therefore, it set out to provide not only early, but compensatory education (i.e., education geared preferentially to children of poverty).²⁷ The program was effective as 97% of all U.S households possessed a television set, thus making is accessible for children from all different cultures, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.²⁸

Sesame Street’s series reinforced early educational skills like numbers, colours, patterns and sounds that encouraged kids to be curious and aware of their surroundings. Set in an urban neighbourhood, the Muppet characters like The Count, Cookie Monster, Big Bird, and Oscar the Grouch, lived alongside their human pals like Maria, Bob, and Gordon. Recurring themes in each developed phonics skills, and interpersonal relationships. The show's ever-evolving curriculum also instructed kids on issues like healthy eating and caring for the earth, science and art topics, and were blended into the format through a range of engaging music, dance, and cultural segments.²⁹

²⁶ Roberta Jane Confino ‘Puppetry as an Educative Media’ Vol. 49, No. 3 (MARCH, 1972), pp. 450-456

²⁷ Edward L. Palmer World Media Partners with Shalom M. Fisch ‘Children’s Television Workshop’.

²⁸ Edward L. Palmer World Media Partners with Shalom M. Fisch ‘Children’s Television Workshop’.

The show gained its popularity after the first season, and their next step was to create an outreach program to develop educational material in preschool settings. Early outreach efforts included mobile viewing of the show in inner cities; for example, the Native American communities and immigrant works camps. Further on, they developed the Sesame Street preschooling Education Program (PEP), which was aimed to assist preschools, by combining television viewing, books, hands-on activities, and other media, in using the show as an educational resource.\(^{30}\) The workshop outreach programs provided material to non-English speaking children and adults.

In the 1960’s it was a policy in Pakistan to have at least one programme for children every day.\(^{31}\) A puppet called uncle Sargam was created by Farooq Qaiser, it was aired at PTV (Pakistan television network) which was watched by the adults as well as children as he managed to combine humour with satire comedy that hinted at the political scenario of the country.

Akkar Bakkar, another puppet show that started in the early 1970 by Farooq Qaiser, the cloth puppets in the show had great mobility and through them he found new ways of providing mirth and social messages.\(^{32}\) The programme contained subtle messages in the form of satire, which brought to light the social and civic problems of the community. Over the three decades,


\(^{31}\) Unknown, Childs play (Posted May 1, 2005) \(\text{http://archives.dawn.com/weekly/images/archive/050501/images16.htm#top} (\text{Date accessed: May 22}^\text{nd} \text{ 2013}).\)

\(^{32}\) Unknown, ‘Childs play’ (Posted May 1, 2005) \(\text{http://archives.dawn.com/weekly/images/archive/050501/images16.htm#top} (\text{Date accessed: May 22}^\text{nd} \text{ 2013}).\)
Uncle Sargam, Haiga, Masi Musibtay, Hadharam, Noni Bha, Deloo, Sawalakh and other puppet-characters have developed an identity of their own and are now household names.33

In Pakistan, Rafi Peer Theatre workshop (RPTW) is one organization that has revived puppetry through theatre, dance and music that has provided a rich cross cultural experience to audiences in Pakistan and abroad. RPTW is a non-government organization which is doing pioneer work in the field of Arts and is run by the Peerzada family. It has built a Museum of Puppetry, where local and international puppets are kept on display. It runs the Universal Child Art Foundation, promoting child art and visual learning globally. Presently, it is developing a Theatre Arts Training Institute.

RPTW most important milestone is the establishment of the Museum of Puppetry in 2004. To this date, it has organized over 25 international performing arts festivals. Festivals are one of the most popular attractions of cultural tourism, and have been part and parcel of South Asian culture for a long time.34 Pakistan Children Television (PCT) can be considered a landmark when it comes to educating children who lack formal education opportunities. Accessing early childhood education is close to impossible, and those who do attend, usually dropout at an early stage due to financial and family issues. Through PCT, they started a show called Sim Sim Hamara, an educational series of shows for children. An adaptation of Sesame


Street, it has been created by RPTW in collaboration with the Sesame Workshop, New York, and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The project is the outcome of extensive research as it includes participants from different provinces. They work with the government and other educational experts so that they can cater to the educational needs for the children.

This TV series was set to provide high-quality early education resource for a larger audience. Their goal is to educate families and children and emphasize that learning can happen in formal and non-formal means. They use examples from the real world: for example, reading prayers from The Holy Quran, buying vegetables from the local market, attending school, how to communicate with other people, measuring ingredients for ‘roti’ (bread) as a basis for storylines and materials.

**Research Methodology**

This research will be divided into two parts; the first part will be focused on the current state of folk puppetry in Pakistan. Secondly, it will analyze efforts that have been made in Pakistan specially Rafi Peers efforts to revive this form of art, particularly focusing on the formation of Sim Sim Hamara through Pakistan Children Television.

In order to understand the folklore puppetry in Pakistan, secondary research on this topic was needed not only by local writers but as well existing articles, journals and books published by western writers in order to prepare for the primary research. One of the main article that has been discussed “Teaching Anthropology through folklore” by Rachel A. Bonney, not only does

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this article shed light on folklore story but most importantly how these tales can be used as a source of insight on child rearing and how the stories can be adapted in different cultures. In addition, the article “Mutual respect: Re-examining puppetry in India”, Anna Sobel discusses how the uneducated class in India respond to puppetry and how their behaviour changes. This was highly beneficial as it gave me a good understanding of how the audience responds to informal learning through puppetry.

For my primary research qualitative data was mostly employed since my topic mostly focuses on the views of the people who are passionate and have been involved in this profession for a number of years. This is to get a better understanding of their efforts and problems they have faced in Pakistan to educate the masses by using puppetry. Therefore, was pertinent to interview well established people who are currently working for such projects.

Due to lack of local articles and books provided on this subject it became necessary for my research to travel to Lahore and visit The Rafi Peer Theatre workshop. They are currently the only company that is actively promoting folk puppetry by holding festivals, not only do Pakistani puppeteers from all regions perform but international puppet groups are also invited.

I overcame this problem by applying for a scholarship grant that is provided by the Liberal Arts department, I travelled to Lahore during their Folk puppet festival from the 21\textsuperscript{st} to 24\textsuperscript{th} March.

As mentioned above, the method of research has been largely qualitative. This process involves the use of semi-structured interviews, only varying in the case of an individual's professional status or the direction in which an interview was proceeding.
Most interviews were conducted in person, and recorded with permission. Two interviews were not recorded and notes were taken down, while one was conducted via Skype, according to the convenience of the interviewee.

Saadaan Peerzada along with his brother is the founder member of the Rafi Peer theatre group, being in the field for over twenty years he has extensive knowledge and experience about puppets as as he has witnessed and been a part of the rise and fall in this industry. Yamina, daughter of Saadan is from the second generation of the Peerzada family, she is practicing puppeteer and played the role of Rani in Sim Sim Hamara, also provided and insight on the current situation of puppetry in Pakistan and how Sim Sim Hamara came into being. Syed Zain, the ex marketing manager of Rafi peer was interviewed in order to know how Sim Sim Hamara was marketed and its success and failures.

Bahadur Shah a local folk puppeteer who came to perform and the festival was also interviewed to give a better understating on folk puppetry and it’s condition in comparison to his forefathers time.

Kazim Shigri an NCA grad and a puppetry teacher at the Karachi University provided an insight on how puppetry use to be during the eighty’s and as to why there has been a fall in this form of art. Whereas, Usman a current student of NCA and the head of the puppetry society there was able to provide information as to why the current generation is not involved in puppetry due lack of understanding and non serious attitude towards it.

Interviews were also conducted of a puppetry group that came from Norway to perform, by the name of Kattas Figuteater Ensemble. Their insight on the topic was importance so that a
comparison could be made between the different country and the difficulties they have to go through to sustain puppetry.

In addition, the dissertation also consists of quantitative research which has been used to judge the opinion of the general strata of the upper middle class who have written about puppetry and Sim Sim Hamara.

Analysis

Folk puppetry in Pakistan is a dying art. Puppeteers have been a part of Pakistan’s history and culture for years, but now they live in poverty on the outskirts of Punjab in temporary huts and small mud houses. These people are left with no hope or motivation to continue this art form, which was passed on to them from their forefathers.36

Bahadur Ali, a folk puppeteer from Punjab says, “I do not see my children following my elders footstep as there is no reward in return, my son now sells boiled eggs in the city, at least we are getting money from this”.37 Furthermore, he says the art of making puppets from wood does not exist anymore because all the puppets that they operate are the old ones which they have inherited. They do not make new puppets anymore and when he was asked why they do not, he replied saying that it is time consuming and it is not worth the effort. They continue to make minor changes to the old ones as wood puppets can last for years if they are taken proper

36 Sarwat Ali’Exploring the life and state of Folk puppetry in Pakistan: Puppeteers in the Dark’pg 20.

37 Bahadur Ali,A local puppeteer (Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed): 21st March 2013
care of.\textsuperscript{38} He further said that two years back we had given up but now since Raafi Peer has revived their festival they are back in business by getting more work from schools and colleges.

It has also been suggested that due to their rigid performance routines, puppeteers are losing their audience. They can no longer captivate them with mere traditional stories neither do they thrive on improvisation; they remain, more or less, faithful to their story line. However, it was observed during the folk puppet festival that the audience had no difficulty in identifying with a routine in which puppeteers had incorporated songs with popular films songs. The effect was completely different from those traditional songs as the essence and feel of the show transformed into a commercial one, desperately trying to gain attention. Thus, unfortunately, lack of awareness, motivation and experimentation has led the puppeteers in Pakistan to fall back on commercial songs.

In “Mutual respect: Re-examining puppetry in India”, Anna Sobel observed how folk puppeteers incorporated social and moral issues in traditional stories they told the public, which included both adults and children.\textsuperscript{39} However, here the folk puppeteers stuck to their traditional narration and story line about the Mughal emperor, King Akbar and his argument with his dhobi (washer man).

It was further observed that people were having trouble understanding what the folk puppeteers were saying. Usman, a student of NCA (National college of Arts), who came to watch the performance had a similar problem. He was not familiar with the Sindhi dialect and, therefore, could not understand the story, as a result of which he lost interest halfway through,

\textsuperscript{38} Bahadur Ali, A local puppeteer (Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed): 21st March 2013

\textsuperscript{39} Anna Sobel, ‘Mutual respect: Re-examining puppetry in India’ pp29-30.
though he was able to understand a bit more when the folk puppeteers performed in Punjabi. A suggested solution could be that the folk puppeteers add more value to their story, changing their dialect would be close to impossible as the hold great pride in it, but what is important is to be able to retain the audience’s attention to the art of narration through puppetry.

In Addition he said that students no longer want to spend time on puppetry as it is time consuming, they rather go join the theatre group and act. This points out the lack of motivation the students towards puppetry even though they have a puppetry society no one is willing to join.

The Rafi Peer Theatre group gives folk puppeteers a platform to perform at their venue. Since 1992, they have been hosting a three-day-long festival once every year. Not only do puppeteers from Pakistan perform but those from Norway, Iran, India, Denmark, France and China have also come to Lahore to participate. In fact, since the last couple of years, the festival has had local as well as foreign participation.

A Norwegian group by the name of Kattas Figuteater Ensemble came to perform at the Rafi Peer festival that was held from the 21st to the 24th of March 2013. Their style of performance was different from those of the Pakistani puppeteers. They performed with different shapes like squares, circles mostly abstract forms, incorporating acting as a part of their performance. It was interesting to see this shift of performance and was thoroughly enjoyed by the audience. This could be ascertained from their apt reactions, as they clapped, laughed and remained quiet where it was required for them to do. This was an exhibit of how different performances are accepted and understood by the Pakistani audience, when they are provided with diversity in performance.

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40 Usman, Student at NCA, (Interview was conducted in person, notes were taken and transcribed): 21st March 2013
Saadan Peerzada, one of the brothers who started the Rafi Peer Theatre workshop said that, ‘After the bomb blast that happened during our festival stopped funding such events’. In order to host or give a grand performance, we need to have big multinational companies sponsor us – it’s all about the money. Our own resources are so tight that we are only able to have these small folk festivals’.\(^{41}\) When asked why they don’t approach the government he said, ‘Any art form in Pakistan that is funded by the government taken on by different people. The respective department falls under the domain of national council of arts and ministry, this is given to bureaucrats of the cultural heritage and the money is never allotted to the purpose’.\(^{42}\) Saadan Peerzada further went on to say that, “In my thirty years, nothing has changed in this country”.\(^{42}\)

Similarly in Norway, the tradition of puppetry has been practiced for decades. An official puppeteer from the Kattas Figuteater Ensemble said, ‘Folk puppetry has been struggling since the last couple of years and the only support we get is from theatre fans, who appreciate this sort of performance’.\(^{43}\) She further said that, ‘The government has lost interest, and it is resilient to contribute to this sector of art’.\(^{44}\) This is a global issue which has stopped the progress of puppetry in many countries. Coupled with a lack of government interest resulting in less awareness among masses, this art form has catapulted into decline.

\(^{41}\) Sadaan Peerzada, Director of Raafi Peer Theatre group. (Interview was conducted in person notes were taking down and transcribed): 20\(^{th}\) March 2013

\(^{42}\) Sadaan Peerzada, Director of Raafi Peer Theatre group. (Interview was conducted in person notes were taking down and transcribed): 20\(^{th}\) March 2013

\(^{43}\) Kattas Figuteater Ensemble, Norwegian puppetry group. (Interview was conducted in person notes were taking down and transcribed): 23\(^{rd}\) March 2013

\(^{44}\) Kattas Figuteater Ensemble, Norwegian puppetry group. (Interview was conducted in person and was recorded and transcribed): 23\(^{rd}\) March 2013
Though Rafi Peer Theatre group is considered a pioneer of puppetry in Pakistan, Kazim Shigri, an NCA graduate and a puppeteer disagrees with Rafi Peer’s approach. ‘It’s sad to see that Rafi Peer Theatre have so many resources they could have used to encourage the tradition of puppetry, but they did not use it to their advantage’. He further expressed that in NCA when they would go to perform at the Rafi Peer Festival, every group would take up a different topic and experiment with shadow puppets, glove puppets and Benraku (a traditional style of puppetry in Japan). The audience would enjoy the variations that were provided to them. However, Shigri claims that Rafi Peer’s performance had been the same for many years and they would not experiment with puppets to create the much needed variety for the audience.

The RPTW is solely run on funds. It charges no prices on tickets for attending the festival so everyone can come and visit. This year around, there were barely any sponsors; however, the RPTW managed to carry on the three day festival and invited the Norwegian puppeteers. The Pakistani government, as Sadaan Peerzada mentioned, has never taken interest in such forms of art because of the lack of seriousness associated with puppetry. The reason for this, too, is owing to the fact that people are not aware of how differently it can be used as a source of entertainment and teaching or otherwise, in contrast to the widely held perception that puppets are only used for little children as entertainment value. However, it goes to the RPTW’s credit that in spite of little to no support from the government or any local party, it managed to pull host the folk festival.

Active puppeteer Yamina Peerzada, daughter of Sadaan Peerzada, feels that the only way to make people aware of puppetry and its many benefits is to incorporate it in to school and

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45 Kazim Shigri, A former NCA grad and a puppeteer.(Interview was conducted in person and was recorded and transcribed): 12th January 2013.
college curriculum. She says, “Photography, just a couple of years back, was considered a hobby at best. But since it’s been added in schools and colleges as part of the course material, it’s become a profession”.  

Research has shown that early childhood intervention through puppetry stimulates development through characterization, building a plot and theme for a story and improves the child’s comprehension. Thus suggesting that there is credence to what Yamina said.

She strongly feels that puppetry can make a difference to educate the masses through story-telling. A year ago, Rafi Peer was approached by the Sesame Street– a company established in America in 1969 to increase the literacy rate of those who are living in low income households. The USAID had invested over $20 million in this project. Rafi Peer took this initiative and localized Sesame Street in Urdu and made a child friendly curriculum, enhancing children’s social and cognitive skills which helped in character-building through interactive means. The show was called “Sim Sim Hamara”. Its target was to educate one third of Pakistani children, which is approximately 20 million children, who don’t have access to schools. As Rachel Bonney pointed out, puppetry can be used as sources of information and insights on child-rearing and making them more aware of other cultures, their morals, traditions and values. Keeping all this in mind, ‘Sim Sim Hamara’ was aired on PTV (Pakistan television) last year in December. A total of 78 episodes were to be aired in Urdu, over the following three years, as well as 13 in each of the four main regional languages, Balochi, Pashtu, Punjabi and

46 Yamina Peerzada , A former NCA grad and a puppeteer.(Interview was conducted in person and was recorded and transcribed): 21st March 2013.

47 Yamina Peerzada , A former NCA grad and a puppeteer.(Interview was conducted in person and was recorded and transcribed): 21st March 2013.

48 Rachel A.Bonney, “Teaching Anthropology through folklore” p21.
Sindhi. It was made for the masses not for the elite; it catered to all kinds of audience from different cultural, traditional and regional backgrounds. 49

Sim Sim Hamara reflected the urban setting of Pakistan, with art studios, garden backyards, street vendors and café’s, parks and a tall Banyan tree that provided shade to the people living around the street. 50 Besides airing on PTV, these Muppets, Rani, Baily, Baji, Munna, Haseeno-Jameel along with Elmo, their main teacher, were to be aired on radio shows and mobile TV vans to the remote areas so the people could identify with them.

Yamina played the character of six-year-old Rani in Sim Sim Hamara, who was obsessed with natural science. She would question everything — why the earth is round, what is a rainbow and other intellectual questions. In one such episode, ‘a butterfly recognizes Rani, but the Rani can’t recognize the butterfly because it used to be a caterpillar before.’ 51 This was an example of the in depth content which was portrayed in the children’s show. Also portrayed in the show was Rani’s love for cricket, such that she was the team’s captain. ‘When I was growing up, I never saw girls playing cricket. In fact, we were encouraged to play with dolls and not be sporty.’ 52 Rani’s character sought to alter the stereotypical mindset of people in favour of adopting a more liberal approach in child-rearing.

49 Yamina Peerzada, A former NCA grad and a puppeteer. (Interview was conducted in person and was recorded and transcribed): 21st March 2013.

50 Yamina Peerzada, A former NCA grad and a puppeteer. (Interview was conducted in person and was recorded and transcribed): 21st March 2013.

51 Yamina Peerzada, A former NCA grad and a puppeteer. (Interview was conducted in person and was recorded and transcribed): 21st March 2013.

52 Yamina Peerzada, A former NCA grad and a puppeteer. (Interview was conducted in person and was recorded and transcribed): 21st March 2013.
The objective of the show was to promote fundamentals, such as mathematics, science, enhance language skills, hygiene, tolerance and sensitivity to the marginalized groups in society and build social and cognitive skills. To establish this, they set a theme for every episode by selecting one word, for example the word in the first episode was ‘saath’ (cooperation) and all the stories for that particular episode incorporated this theme.

Critics of Sim Sim Hamara stated that in a country where poor children do not even attend free public schools and instead, beg on the streets, don’t necessarily sit at home at watching television to reap its benefits. Many also felt that they were promoting a brand, that was purely commercial, run by the USAID and the motives were completely different from those furthered by Rafi Peer. Writing for the newspaper, Scotsman, Syed Hammad believes that Pakistan’s educational system is in shambles. ‘This is a nuclear-armed country where half the women cannot read and where school funding comprises just 1.5 per cent of GDP’. When Sesame Street was established in America, 97 per cent of its population had television. However, this is not the case in Pakistan. He further goes on to say, ‘even if Sim Sim Hamara cannot tackle the larger problems within Pakistan's education system, it will perhaps, benefit some children through its content’.

To counter this argument Zain, an ex-marketing manager of Rafi Peer said, “Sim Sim Hamara” was not only shown on television and radio but also had an outreach programme for those children who did not have access to media. It reached out to 21 million children in about

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53 Syed Hammad, ‘It will take more than Sesame Street to sort this out’ (Posted December 12,2011) http://www.scotsman.com/news/analysis-it-will-take-more-than-sesame-street-to-sort-this-out-1-2004232 (Date accessed: May 10th 2013).

54 Syed Hammad, ‘It will take more than Sesame Street to sort this out’ (Posted December 12,2011) http://www.scotsman.com/news/analysis-it-will-take-more-than-sesame-street-to-sort-this-out-1-2004232 (Date accessed: May 10th 2013).
six months; the aim was to take the programme to remote areas in the form of live shows and screenings of the episode.”\textsuperscript{55} It was observed during one of the researches conducted that out-of-school children were aptly learning from “Sim Sim Hamara”. The Rafi Peer offices would get hundreds of phone calls from children asking to speak to the characters. In fact the technician in charge of fixing the lights said that his daughter watches “Sim Sim Hamara” and copies the way Rani makes her hair.\textsuperscript{56} The impact may have been much greater if the project was not shut down after the first season due to corruption charges by the USAID, the reasons for which are yet to be known. Despite all attempts by Rafi Peer to reach out to the masses and make the show a success for those who do not have access to schools, it is evident that the show mostly reached the upper and middle class children.

Maria Ishaq Khan, in her article Educational emergency: Losing Sim Sim Hamara, posted on The Express Tribune, conducted an online survey where she posed the question: Do you think Sim Sim Hamara would have helped to educate poor children in Pakistan? Out of 106 voters 69 per cent of voters said yes and 31 per cent said no.\textsuperscript{57} However, these statistics cannot be taken as substantial evidence of the show’s success, since The Express Tribune is an English newspaper and its readers mostly comprise the upper and middle class section of society.

\textsuperscript{55} Syed Zain, Ex-marketing manager of Rafi Peer Theatre group.(Interview was conducted via Skype recorded and transcribed): April 6\textsuperscript{th} 2013.

\textsuperscript{56} Syed Zain, Ex-marketing manager of Rafi Peer Theatre group.(Interview was conducted via Skype recorded and transcribed): April 6\textsuperscript{th} 2013.

Before the Project began, many people feared it would be incorrectly interpreted due to US funding. In a country where US involvement is viewed with increasing hostility, pre-emptive measures had to be taken, which is why the producers had to be very careful while writing the script.

Rafi Peer was faced with many criticisms. One was that the Sesame Street puppets had evolved for years. Therefore, it was unclear to which sectors of society they were focusing on in Pakistan. Kazim Shigri feels they should have developed their own local puppets instead of bringing foreign puppets and localizing them. He gave the example of Uncle Sargam and compared it to Elmo.\(^{58}\) ‘The problem here is that we don’t go a step forward. After the success of Uncle Sargam, it should have been further developed, but was not’.\(^{59}\) Nevertheless, Shigri agrees that the interaction and characters of the puppets in Sim Sim Hamara were strong.

Hamad’s criticism of this project is that Pakistan does need to have American shows teach tolerance to children in Pakistan, he says, ‘How would Americans feel if the UK or Japan, for instance, funded a TV show to “increase tolerance” in the US in order to help deal with the gun-related crimes that kill thousands of children every year?’\(^{60}\) Even though the content of Sim

\(^{58}\) Kazim Shigri, A former NCA grad and a puppeteer.(Interview was conducted in person and was recorded and transcribed): 12\(^{th}\) January 2013

\(^{59}\) Kazim Shigri, A former NCA grad and a puppeteer.(Interview was conducted in person and was recorded and transcribed): 12\(^{th}\) January 2013

\(^{60}\) Syed Hammad, ‘It will take more than Sesame Street to sort this out’ (Posted December 12,2011) http://www.scotsman.com/news/analysis-it-will-take-more-than-sesame-street-to-sort-this-out-1-2004232 (Date accessed: May 10\(^{th}\) 2013).
Sim Hamara is designed especially for Pakistani society, as opposed to the American version, he feels there is no difference and he would rather watch the ‘American version.’

The literacy rate in Pakistan is overwhelming only two per cent of the GPD is allocated for education in Pakistan for the last ten years or more. USAID has generously contributed to the education sector of Pakistan for several years through programmes such as Teach for Pakistan, Sindh education programme, teacher training programmes and etc. As a result of the Pakistani’s government’s failure to provide quality education, as a country, we have had to increasingly rely on foreign aid.

Conclusion

For decades, folk puppetry has been a part of history and was once an integral part of our culture. It is the government’s responsibility to maintain and preserve an essential aspect of our heritage. However, in the absence of such ownership, well-associated with our leadership, it becomes the responsibility of the citizens to carry this work forward. It is then suggested that non-government organizations and puppetry societies in various colleges look into the matter so as to create interest and awareness.

It is evident that besides a few pioneers in Pakistan and a well-known puppetry theatre group, there is no one willing to work for this art. As Saadan Peerzada mentioned, the youth is

61 Syed Hammad, ‘It will take more than Sesame Street to sort this out’ (Posted December 12, 2011) http://www.scotsman.com/news/analysis-it-will-take-more-than-sesame-street-to-sort-this-out-1-2004232 (Date accessed: May 10th 2013).

not motivated to perform puppetry as it is time consuming and does not result in instant gratification. In order to pursue the art of puppetry, one needs to be passionate and this can be achieved through exposure to it. Though Raafi Peer holds its festival every year, it is not advertised and promoted enough to garner large audiences. As mentioned earlier in my research, puppetry should be included in school and college curriculums. Perhaps through this, attitude towards puppetry could be changed at a younger age and students’ interests could be aroused in the art from.

To some extent, though, it is also the responsibility of the pioneers to teach and impart their knowledge so that it can be passed on over time. The gap between Uncle Sargam and “Sim Sim Hamara” was over 10 years or more. If the creators of these puppets, like Farooq Qaiser and the Peerzada’s had handed over the work to others, perhaps, the current situation of puppetry would have not been like this.

The release of “Sim Sim Hamara” was a small step towards the betterment of society by using puppets as a teaching tool. Like any organization, Raafi Peer has faced its share of criticism, but one cannot deny the efforts of their contribution towards the revival and sustenance of puppetry, regardless of alleged corruption charges that were levied on them by the US. Whether these charges were true or not is not a matter of importance, what is important here is that it is high time for the people and the government to realize that dependency on foreign aid and blaming each other will not resolve our . It is our responsibility to educate our people and maintain our heritage. Therefore, we alone can shoulder the responsibility of utilizing the means at our disposal and puppetry is one such mechanism, which can reap enormous benefits if furthered and promoted.
Appendices

Interview 1

Kazim Shigri, NCA grad and a puppeteer. Interviewed 12th January 201

Q) How long have you been in the puppetry business?

A) Let me explain to you some things here related to my work, my team. You must know that I am from NCA. We started puppeteers in 1992 or was it 1993. There was this international puppet festival held in Lahore in 1994 or 1995 at that time there weren’t many puppeteers in Pakistan except for a few.

Q) Like Uncle Sargam? That was also initiated by the Rafi Peer

A) No, that wasn’t. Peerzada is the pioneer puppeteer of Pakistan and apart from this Rafi Peer Theatre. The problem with us is, actually all art related fields have this problem and when it comes to performing art so it becomes harder. Whether it is theatre or any related activity. It happens with Theatre also, Napa has helped a bit with theatre but when we did theatre, for example I conducted a lot of workshops in Indus back in 1998 or 2000 ….. Lahore has more theatre Karachi doesn’t have it, because Karachi is quite a commercial city that’s why a lot of things can’t happen. But with puppets it is a very time consuming job, to make something to make a puppeteer you have to work very hard. Like when we started people used to literally laugh at us, even in college. It looked like they would just be sitting on the stairs, just looking at each other’s faces. What happened in it was that first of all the concept and manipulating that into a puppet, what kind of puppet will it be, what form will it take what will the body, mechanism be, how will you carry it, who will carry it, are there any special effects in it. There are a lot of technicalities.

Q) Do you think nowadays because technological advancements and changes the hands on experience of making the puppet are lost?

A) Yes, yes definitely. What would happen in our country actually, when we were doing it, at that time even the Internet wasn’t that common. We had no source but the library we went through books, or asking people about puppets, what types are there etc. There is this technique
called Raku puppet. The raku puppet is where the puppeteer attaches the puppet to himself. Most of the time a puppeteer tries to hide himself, even on stage he tries to cover himself. So in raku we were meant to attach it to ourselves and the problem with that was that the puppet was really small and we are really big and the performance used to have a lot of issues.

Q) What about Puppets today?

A) Puppets have become slightly better nowadays because your stop motion animations have started happening. So first the puppets are made and then they are animated. So the puppeteer’s involvement is quite significant in the film industry but with us in Pakistan there is not much of it. Over here ideas aren’t digested here. When we had theatre we used to have mime or drama, and to explain mime even was such a big deal before, but now a lot of people know it, although before it was very hard to make people digest the idea of mime. When walls ice cream came there was a lot of marketing that we did they showed some interest in puppeteer, we tried to explain to them a lot and got very tired, showed them a lot of workshops and everything and then after that they were not willing to take risks and then after that even sunsilk we tried to explain and showed them for three days, for sponsorships and the the unilever ones got interested and then they told us Sunsil black is coming and they want to do it through mime and when it’s revealed we want it to be through mime, so we gradually educated people so we did a lot of mime commercially, even for Suzuki motors so basically we need to educate people. But when it comes to puppets it gets very technical, a lot of people don’t actually take them seriously. Why don’t they take it seriously? Because they think it’s for kids. When we did it in College people used to think its some high tech thing. So these are the reasons here, basically why it doesn’t happen here.

Q) In India they use puppets as a tool for HIV awareness these groups also go to Washington as well why are such campaign not held here?

A) There is a big difference here and in India, because over here the putli tamasha, their religion has a lot of puppets in it, the mahbarat and china. How Buddhist areas have dharmayan puppets.

Q): What about our folktales?

A) They have come to us from rajistan and Thar, in history when Rome was invaded by narbarians all puppeteers fled from there, puppetry and theatre were these mediums that had let these folk stories of that time continue the culture. India mein they use it as a ritual, over here they don’t really appreciate it as a cultural thing, overthere they think of it as a religious ritual so it is good. Amitabh Bachan also promoted them.
Q) What about Uncle Sargam and all of that and then there was a gap and then puppetry and all the museum they are creating and they only started the project when the US funded it.

A) Look even Sim Sim the puppets are the sesame street puppets. One before also it started it became shelved and it was dubbed but that was from Sesame Street and called that also, but then Rafi Peer did it with aid right now they didn’t use their own puppets they used sesame puppets. They used Hega etc. and the thing is actually technology has advanced a lot and therefore puppets need to advance as well. Until they don’t advance they will look obsolete. There are so many things that I think that I want to do but there is just no time. If people like us only can’t do it then how will it happen mainly due to funding?

Q) Do you agree that everything has to have an educational purpose, art is not just performance anymore.

A) Baby tv and Sesame Street wasn’t in our language and these 2 things are working parralle to each other. In one only kids are interested in it as a 2 dimensional thing and then sesame street is something in which there was interaction with the puppets it was more of an experience. It has worked for almost 37 seasons. They’re characters are also so strong.

Q) The thing again was that it became a very cultural thing it was something they created on their own. They tried to link it by changing their language and it is very relatable through Pakistan even though they tried.

A) But I don’t know overhere there is a big gap of classes and masses and who are we catering to? Upper class? Middle class etc. and what are the common factors in it. And I think that there are a lot of factors that go into working with puppets. We did this theatre for kids and also showed it to adults also, the people who came without kids and they were very interested in it. And the thing with puppets is that it is a 3 dimensional think and you need to basically transfer your soul into it. And you can never bring that feel into it unless you don’t put your soul in it.

Q) How else can puppets be brought back to education? They have a lot of programs all over the world related to puppets. How can you do it here?

A) This woman in America told us that yes our govt helps us, it’s basically the explanation part where it gets exhausting. People just don’t take it seriously, they think it’s comedy and for kids and stuff.
Q) Why wasn’t the govt willing to sponsor
A) There is an approach for everything.

Interview 2
Kattas Figuteater Ensemble, Norwegian puppetry group Interviewed on 23rd March 2013

Q) What kind of puppetry did you perform?
A) We performed object theatre, consisting of shapes and form, mostly abstract forms. Mix between acting and puppetry.

Q) what do you know about puppetry in Pakistan?
A) I know that there is a long tradition on puppetry theatre and what i seem to know is marionettes and string puppets are commonly.

Q) What about in Norway?
A) It’s a little bit similar to the one is Pakistan, where the puppets are accompanying the music or the other way around. But now its a new tradition that we have been inspired by France and Italy that has now come to Norway is the 50's.though is no strong tradition like in Pakistan like we don’t have a Norwegian form of puppetry more of European tradition and now we are adapting

Q) What are the themes?
A) For kids it loneliness and friends. We came from grownup as well we incorporate more acting, it a common practice in Europe you mix both up and incorporate other elements like dance and etc it has evolved over the years. It more called visual theatre.

Q) Do you think the old methods are dying?
A) Puppet theatre is charging form now and it's more about experimentation. We find new ways of you using and explore the form.

Q) Is puppet theatre supported by the government there?
Folk puppetry has been struggling since the last couple of years and the only support we get is from theatre fans, who appreciate this sort of performance. The government has lost interest, and it is resilient to contribute to this sector of art

Interview 3:
Yamina Peerzada puppeteer and the voice of Rani in Sim Sim Harama, Interviewed on 21st March 2013

Q)Do u think puppetry is a dying art form if so why?
A) it dies if you don’t continue so it should be school, I give a thirty years it won’t exist. Its because of the schools that the people are learning. Kathak i fear, because Seema Kirmani, Nighat Chaudhary these all are very old they’re students are not upto the same level. They’re no 25 year dancer of that calibre that i know in Pakistan. For next ten there won’t be any dance. So these dance forms has to be preserved.

Q)How was the response to Sim Sim Harama?
A) The show was popular overseas Pakistani, Canada, America, London. I mean to the extent that they were desperate to know DVDs are coming. Because they we are raising our children abroad, they don’t know the language. Because of it was on that like the puppet and the quality was not like your, no offense So the kids would get attracted would get attracted to a pakistani show like that. Even uncle sargam and all maasi mussi, they’re not a six year olds role model.

Q)The songs became a popular feature?
A) They were like oh finally, and the songs, i have to give it to that, the songs were fantastic. Jaffar did all the music he’s from kaavish. And maaz and all these people and raheel you must know him. Raheel did 12 songs. Maaz was there for the whole time. Khalid bhai who was in Aaroh. And the songs were like meesa, sajjad ali. Beaconhouse what they do they actually show the scenes from Sim Sim.

Q)What was the content like?
A) Elmo used to have the word of the day and there was a song, every episode ends with a song, Rani used to have a question of the day Rani ka sawaal and Munna had the number of the day, so it was one Yaqeen 2 and Rani would be like butterfly ka metamorphic. We just uploaded these 2 minutes, which the 15 minutes we never uploaded that because that was for the DVDs, but these 2 minutes scenes, a lot of schools started showing them in classrooms.
Q. why weren’t the DVDs out?

A) Because of the whole big USA scandal, they wanted to withdraw the money so they thought put regulations on the so the whole world gets excited so suddenly the whole show is on hold.

Q. So when its going to come back

A) Once its settled in the court. I can’t speak on this thats more political.

But yeah coming back to you question sim sim sea when there was a project, we went, we hired people we trained them. They are the ten puppeteers, the ten most highly trained puppeteers in Pakistan today are sim sim hamara puppeteers i can proudly say that. We got teachers from Africa, we got teachers from America, and we get teachers from Pakistan. So nobody is trained like that. You know i cried after my workshop, i cried for 4 hours it was that tough and I had done puppetry from supporting and Nido and all had done puppetry when they were 17, 18.

Q) Are you as equally passionate about this as your uncles?

A) I love it, like i went to NCA for the same thing but i left it for acting, i was there for just one semester and i went to Delhi to study acting but for me i used to only paint puppet, my entire thesis was puppetery in my A levels. Everything that i ever painted was either a puppet in A levels arts my o-levels was _____ in puppets. So i wanted to paint and only wanted to paint a puppet Half the puppets in the museum i painted, so growing up my uncle used to be carving and i sued to be painting for me it was like what i love. Like i love puppet. Like i used to sleep with my puppet like a doll. And i remember with my chacha the first puppet show i did was a really big one when i was 17 its called the Magic paint brush. Its a beautiful puppet show. I remember my cousin Shehriyar hes now in the states he had done the puppet show before me and before him Imran my taya had done it so finally it was coming to me and hero had done it and immu ji had done it and i remember saying to myself you better take this puppet and you better sleep with it in your bed. And otherwise you’re not going to own it. I was 17 and you dont have a doll at 17. I wouldn’t let the wrangler fix the puppet or look after the puppet in case any thing happens to them, they were these people dedicated for this job, like their jobs is to keep the puppet clean. The wranglers won’t even tough Rani when I would dress her up .I was so obsessed with puppets i used to shop for Rani. We were like mental, on our last day we were like crying hugging our puppets coz six months every day, its a really strange profession because with characters when you’re acting you become a character but its still you. Yes it takes you a while to either get rid of that depression or that life because the puppet its another object right and you blow life into it but you actually start loving the object so its you but its another person, its an extension. Even in acting its still yourself its a part of you that bring out in that character.

Like Nido the other day was saying, i said ‘Elmo has gone to New York ‘and he was like... he was in pain and he was like nahin i never liked Elmo so much because i preferred Rani so suddenly it was my character. You just start loving them more. Carol was obsessed with Munna,
Elmo loved elmo, we were so obsessed by our own puppets because puppetery has that and coming to your question kay log ab itna kyun nahin karrahay i think you have people who are that passionate about puppetery to take it up. There was no opportunity, how de he do it? You know what they did they had a.... the thing is like i agree if tomorrow if we have a academy, you can train a 100 people but opportunity for 100 people will have to create. The thing is my dad was 23, 24 they made a shaft with tin they called it a rafipir theatre workshop, they didn’t go to any puppet school, no body trained them, they didn’t go to farooq qaiser, they didn;t go to England, they on their own, they were NCA students, they left NCA after one year, they said ok we got a make our own company Saadan would carve the puppet, immu ji would write the play, my dad and all would then operate the puppet, they put lights, they put seats and they booked schools and thorty years later they built this.

Q) Is there less opportunity for this profession in Pakistan?

A) yes there are less opportunity in a country jahan daily soaps ki ziyadah opportunity hai television drama serials people I agree they give money to those ventures more but i also feel the lack of interest for puppetry in our youth. i felt when i auditioned people. I’m not saying everyone, some definitely do, we had these people come from NCA and perform and they were already doing it, I think they were even chosen, they were already doing it for some years, whether they got a big show or no show, they were still going to do puppets right. and it’s true that now they are doing different jobs all of them are not doing puppetery, someone might be teaching in school, someone's an architect also with a degree and they did more money in that. to solely be a puppeteer and earn lot of mone, even rafipir did not just do puppetery ok, yes they did it for many years, but they branched out to performing arts, to festivals, to things you know, just puppetery even with sesame it started from theatre, television show, muppet show, getting in on schools, incorporating it with the education system, you do branch out because there's less funding for this profession right,

Q) Why though?

A) maybe because its not that glamourous to be honest, i glamour hi hai na, is say pehlay Balraj SAni and all, they were doing their stuff they weren't money us main nahin tha, katrina kaif kay dance main hai. Like yesterday i was teaching at BNU and we had Puppet ka one hour session and by the end the students were going mad, they were like everyone wanted to become a puppeteer. Initialy they were like it ok, but once you do it i think schools's incorporated in the curriculum, maybe then you'll have more puppeteers rather than being a society. The minute its a society, it’s like student kay shauq say. If you have 3 year puppeteer degree or a one year minor in puppetry, suddenly the students starts to take it seriously. For years no one took photography, photography was a hobby. The minute you have it in school, you have a photography major, minor, i think Pakistan is producing excellent photographers now. In the last two years i feel, at least when i feel oh my god four year ago students were not doing that.
Q. Why isn't it coming on television?

A) Personally, I don't know the exact reason in a sense what I have felt that puppetry is something that either it's passed on from generation, it's totally like an instrument, either its passed on from generations that happened with me as well, see if my father was not a puppeteer, my father and his twin brother they've been puppeteers from 1976 if I'm not mistaken or 79, and I was born in 83, so I grew up with two puppeteers, there was only Uncle Sargam and Rafi Peer at that time. Uncle Sargam was on TV because it was more like a political. So I think Uncle Sargam got away, one thing in puppetry you can get away with is that a puppet can say anything, they're not going to take it to jail. See that they create characters, they say a lot of stuff but in the end its like oh its a character. So with a puppet you can't hold a puppet responsible right, so that was a clever way. With us, Rafi Peer always did work for children, we never did a puppet show for adults. Target audience wasn't six year old at all. Its this Avenue Q, its the same kind of puppets but its provocative and sexual, and they did very PG, very adult humour. But of course shows like sesame and the muppet show gives birth to shows like that. So you have people, but I think after uncle Sargam and Rafi Peer what happened is not so many were trained to be puppeteer. See everyone cannot get up and have a puppet. It takes a lot of training like me being an actor, like my degrees in acting and for two years I did not act during Sim Sim Hamara. I did not had the time, any serial that came my, for two years we gave our lives to Sim Sim Hamara and bara mushkil hota hai for people today to do that unless you're passionate. Its that profession which I've realised you can't do it just to earn money. You're not gonna get up, have your hand out for 15 hours, blow life into an inanimate object you can't just do it for money even for acting its easier because you go you say a few lines you know. With puppeteer its like labor literally mazdoori. And the thing is that the schools don't introduce this that's what I feel. You know the 4 other puppeteers other than were also from NCA. NAPA, you cannot find one person.

Rafi Peer did train them for three months, prior to even Sim Sim like sesame, they came from New York for a two week workshop but then training them for three months but again it was if you see Shoaib Uncle, latif, amin, zia they didn't have puppetry 25 years ago they came to work, they were train by rafi pir. And today, they're your only professional puppeteers you see. Coz we do our own puppet shows, we travel... but the thing is obviously Rafi Peer traine all these people for the company, for the show they do. I got trained under Rafi Peer but again you can't... eventually if you have an institute its Rafi Peer, because we're not like BNU and NCA, we dont have a performing art institute, we have a theatre company jis main we do train people like when you have University when you have a structured course, which eventually they do want to do, we might start from a like an evening course sort of a thing which in the it gets into a degree, first a certificate diploma and than a degree, you can't just start from a university. But the university that already exist I mean is there from 2000. NCA been there since forever. Indus Valley is been there for the last what 15 years atleast. I dont know who designs a course. Sculpture is another thing, if you notice everytime I go to a school painting is a hit right, architecture is a hit.
Q) Why does this gap exist?

A) I personally think now it may pick up a lot more specially after there was a huge a gap like farooq qaisar and all, i don't know if they taught people it wasn't so much in TV but we travelled a lot, we do a lot of puppet theatre. I travel, only last year i didn't because of sim sim and were shooting, and workshops. But before that i performed in Norway, every take I take two performances abroad. So Pakistan doesn't gets to see that but i performed in like 12 or 15 countries

In Pakistan, we have a puppet festival, we have it every year. In fact threes not been one year that we haven't had a puppet festival, its on a smaller scale here because of the political situation and all, the multi nationals don't fund. But we've had the biggest festivals in the world. I travel to so many festivals in the world, i can say that Raafi Peer is the biggest after maybe the Edinburgh French.

Q. Does Sim Sim cater to a certain class?

A) No, i don't think it caters to some type, i just think that people don't get out. But sim sim hamara was only made for masses and the TV screens use to go to every town to show it to them, it was made for them. It wasn't made for the elite kids because elite kids have already seen Sesame street. I mean for them its nothing new, they've already seen Bert and Ernie.

Interview 4
Syed Zain , Ex-managing director at Rafi peer .Interviewed 12th January 201

Q)How long have your working for Rafi peer?

A) From 2009 to 2011

Q)Where u there during the sim sim production

A) I was there though I wasn’t a part of their production. I was a part of their hiring and bidding and getting things together. I was a part of promoting their museum and folk festival

Q) What is Rafi Peers marketing strategy

A) It was divided into two parts. One crated on their cultural complex that included the peerus cafe and the museum and the museum by getting people to come to the peerus cafe where there would be live music of cultural elements of Pakistan and all around the world so that when they come there and visits the museum.
Q) How successful were they in promoting puppetry?

A) What we did was we had several approaches for people who were not interested in puppetry we had live sufī performances and qawwals at the cafe so whenever they would come for those performances we would encourage and ask them to go to the museum. In the day we called school children to come and watch the shows.

Q) Could u tell be about sim sim's outreach programme?

A) The issue was the programme was planned, we had 2 seasons for it after making the first season we contacted media groups like PTV and Geo. The idea was to get it out in the first season to the mass media using TV and radio and on the second season you would go further down in the grass root level of Pakistan where the people had no access to radio or TV. However, this was not successful as the programme was shut down. However the response was great we would get 100 phone calls tell us that their daughter wanted to dress up like Rani. So in some extent we can say it was successful but not entirely.

Interview 5
Bahadur Ali, Folk puppeteer, Interviewed on 21st March

Hum multan mein rehtay hai hamramat baab dada ka pesha hai. Kaam toh hum aur bhi kartay hai mazdoori ka. mager is kaam mein maza hhi kuch aur hai.is kaam ko hum yaad rakhtay hai kyun hai barsoo se yeh chala a raha hai.school mein bhi hota

Q) kiya app ke bachay yeh kaam kare gay?

A) mushkil hai ab toh hum toh mazdoori ke ailawa anday bhejtay hai paiso ke liye. chor diya na hab toh hum ne naye puthli bana choor diya hai,koi fiada hi nahi hota, puranay wale istamal karte hai.

Q) kis kism ka app kaam kartey hai school mein

A) jo hum yahan karte hai wahan school mein bhi hota hai. Aksar mazakiya performance hoti hai hamri. Akbar badshah ki khani hoti hai mughlighian khanndaan ki. Ek din un ke khwab aya ke puptli ka tamasha karo. us waqt se yeh chala a raha hai

Q) Rafi Peer ke ailawa app aur kahan kaap kar te hai

A) saal phelay tak toh koi kaam nahi hota tha bilkul khtam hogaya tha Aisa kyun howa? jaise dur balta hai waise mahool bhi badal raha hai. Phir usman aur faizain saab inhoun ne phir dobara shuru karwaya hai.
Interview 6:
Saadan Peerzada, director of Rafi Peer, Interviewed on 20th March 2013

Notes:

- There is no funding for arts in Pakistan, and without it its very difficult to produce anything. The govt has a very different approach and they have no clue about what's happening in the arts

- This is how Pakistan works

- Any art form in Pakistan that is funded by the government taken on by different people. The respective department falls under the domain of national council of arts and ministry, this is given to bureaucrats of the cultural heritage and the money is never allotted to the purpose

- In his 30 years of working in this field he has never seen the govt take initiative and they have no clue about what’s going on

- When Rafi peer started it was inspired from folk puppetry and not everyone was aware of that folk puppetry and thus many were skeptical about their work initially

- After the bomb blast that happened during our festival stopped funding such events

- They initially started with one theatre in Karachi

- They built another one soon after, started performing in schools and hotels, learning at work, Started developing writings and their museum - which started off at a house and the collection used to be exhibited once a year

- Museum first initiated in Karachi during Benazirs time

Interview 7
Usman, Student of NCA, Interviewed on 21st March.

Notes:

- No one is interested because it is time consuming

- Students feel the need to be on stage

- There is no motivation or energy to carry on puppetry even though they have a society inn NCA for years

- The dialect of folk tales is difficult to understand that’s why I don’t understand most of their stories. Only the one is Punjabi is understood you can tell by the audience and their reaction.
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