

Name of the Element: Shadow Puppet Theatre Traditions of India

Community/ies: The communities which are distinctively associated with it are:

Form Community/group Province

1. Chamadyacha Bahulya Thakar Maharashtra
2. Tolu Bommalatta Killekyata/Are Kapu Andhra Pradesh
3. Togalu Gombeyatta Killekyata/Dayat Karnataka
4. Tolu Bommalattam Killekyata Tamil Nadu
5. Tolpava Kuthu Vellalchetti, Nair Kerala
6. Ravanachhaya Bhat Orissa

Region: The geographic locations of the six traditions of shadow puppetry in India, range from Maharashtra in the west of India to Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the south, and to Orissa in the east.

Brief Description: There are six shadow puppet theatre traditions across different regions in India, which are locally known as: Chamadyacha Bahulya in Maharashtra, Tolu Bommalatta in Andhra Pradesh, Togalu Gombeyatta in Karnataka, Tolu Bommalattam in Tamil Nadu, Tolpava Kuthu in Kerala and Ravanchhaya in Orissa. Though these forms have distinct regional identities, languages and dialects in which they are performed, they share a common worldview, aesthetics and themes.

The narratives are mainly based on the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, *Puranas*, local myths and tales. They communicate significant messages to the rural community besides entertainment. The performance begins with an invocation on a ritually set up stage in a village square or a temple courtyard. Stock characters provide comic relief. A sense of rhythm and dance is inherent in all the traditions, across regions. The puppets are crafted from either goat or deer skin. They are manipulated from behind the screen, where lighting is provided to cast shadows. Puppet performances are a part of festivals, celebrations of special occasions and rituals, and sometimes staged to ward off evil spirits and to invoke the rain gods in times of drought in rural areas.