

# Report from the puppetry workshop at the Rupantar Theatre in Khulna, Bangladesh.



On 19 - 22 September 2011. A collaborative project between Theatre  
Rupantar and Puppet Theatre Tittut.



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## 1 Prehistory

First in 2005, five members of the Puppet Theatre Tittut went to Theatre Rupantar in Khulna Bangladesh. Tittut colleagues conducted a two-week workshop around the theme "theatre for preschool children." Participants were actors from Theatre Rupantar and Rhakal Theatre, Dhaka. Tittut staff also conducted a short two-day workshop in Kolkata at the Theatre Nandikar with the same theme. The workshops were part of a larger project "Children's Voice" hosted by the Swedish Theatre Union and was supported financially by SIDA. Its basic idea was to strengthen the weak and vulnerable children and give them a way into the community through theatre. The project's first part took place in India and Bangladesh. Selected theatres in the project were such which also has a social commitment

Tittut's tools are animation, with puppets, objects and shadows. Also the puppeteer plays an important role as a participating actor. The arrangement also had as a purpose to deal with attitudes towards preschool children, gender and role models for girls. At Theatre Rupantar there has emerged an understanding of the puppets immediate address to the young children.

Tittut also provides great opportunities to produce puppets that has proved useful in the expression and function as opposed to the puppet shows with strong expressive traditions that are often locked into given stories. To create new stories with relevant content and puppets with different quality of expression is of great importance.

## 2 Workshop's purpose and content.

The purpose of the workshop held on September 19 to 22 was to provide a basis for a puppet theatre section at the Theatre Rupantar and have a discussion on future cooperation between Rupantar and Tittut in order to develop and permanent a Rupantars puppetry department. Representatives for Tittut was Sven Wagelin-Challis, puppeteer and Artistic Director of Tittut, and Jeanette Challis dance and movement teacher.



Each day began with a physical motion session in the order to work with bodily awareness since a player can also use his own body for animation and then you have to know what the physical expression looks like.



Day one began with the presentation and introduction of our joint work. Schedule and goals. The rest of the day we worked with the puppet theatre's founding principles. An approach to animation, different techniques and materials. We dealt with questions like: Where is the soul of the object and where is the expression? The Player's focus and physical approach.

Day two we worked half the day with more advanced techniques, plus mesh, rod puppet and hand puppet. The meeting between the puppet and the living man.

Second half of the day we began production of playable items. We had decided to create different dimensions of the game by size, shape, pattern of movement to produce items in four different study sites. Large and small three-dimensional stuffed doll, mesh, rod-puppet and finger puppet.



Day three we continued to work on production and we looked at how to physically play with the different elements.

Day four Sven presented a performance idea built on five tableaux. Participants thought it was a good proposal. We used the rest of the day improvising each tableaux's own story. Then we looked at the portrayal, how the puppets functioned, the relationship with the audience and how music can be used to enhance the story. The story was seemingly simple, but proved to have more dimensions than we had first imagined.

On the evening of day four we played up our performance for invited children and adults. It was received with great enthusiasm.

### 3 Results

Representatives from research, school and theatre afterwards expressed that our idea had a value on several levels. Many children in Bangladesh are traumatized by the country's many natural disasters and need support to dare to imagine and understand that they have the right to have dreams, fantasize and play. Our performance affirmed that both by its form and content.



Theatre Rupantars actors are currently continuing working with the show content, design, games and puppets look. In mid-October they expect to have their first puppet theatre performance.

The workshop had four representatives from two other theatres, Theatre Bitra from Chittagong and Theatre Rhakal from Dhaka. They have also began puppet theatre work as a result of our joint workshop.



#### 4 Value.

Swapan Guha, one of the Theatre Rupantars leaders expressed that there is an old tradition in Bangladesh with the puppet show but it is not working anymore. It is also strongly connected to old traditions and solid stories. He further expressed that the type of puppets we have introduced are far more functional and useful in a modern theatrical thinking. The puppets can be produced and tailored to the needs of the story.



### 5 Visions.

The vision is that within a year we will come back and train puppetmakers, and continue play training. The theatre will select a smaller group which will be the puppet theatre section of Rupantar.



Year 1. From a specific story make puppets and set design at the Theatre Rupantar and putting up a show. All with an educational perspective, but also artistic and content. This also included Bitu Theatre and Theatre Rhakal but Rupantar Theatre is the manager of the project.

Year 2 and 3. Work continues on the basis of discussions and shared ideas between Tittut, Rupantar and other participants.

The modern puppet theatre is spread in Bangladesh. It can be used for many purposes, both artistic and educational. Through the children we can also reach the adults and create an understanding of children's need to be seen and respected.



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