

Puppet show performed in Port Blair



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Puppet [dance](#), popularly known as 'Potola Nach', was once the most popular form of entertainment, especially for children, but the tradition has struggled to survive against the onslaught of modern popular culture.

For some years now, people in the State have been able to enjoy the ancient art form of puppetry due to the tireless efforts of the artistic couple, master puppeteers Binita Devi and Simanta Sarma. This couple has invested a great [deal](#) in reviving this art form with their clever and refreshing approach by adopting new but simple techniques, enacting stories through glove puppetry that act as a bridge between the child's world and that of the adult.

It has also enabled children to discover and build an emotional rapport with our rich folk tales and fables, mythological tales, as well as commentaries and stories about social issues, among others, that are interspersed with drama, poetry and songs. "Nowadays children are so glued to mobile phones and television that they hardly have any time for other activities. They can be introduced to a range of glove puppets to work on as an extra-curricular activity, which will allow them to experience the world of imagination," Binita Devi said. "They can manipulate the puppets themselves to tell their own stories," she said, adding that one needs that much enthusiasm, drive and dedication to imbibe the intricacies of the craft.

The skilled artiste, along with her husband, has been imparting [training](#) in glove puppetry to a number of pupils from all [over](#) the State at their cultural institution Surajit Academy, which is located in Jalukbari, Guwahati. Binita Devi has been making a lot of effort to teach her students in the art since its very inception in 1997. She has been conferred with a Junior Fellowship Award from the Ministry of Culture, [New Delhi](#), on her research project - 'An analytical study of Puppetry of Assam with special reference to Nalbari District'. She had also received a project from ASTEC (Assam Science [Technology](#) and [Environment](#) Council) - 'Modern technique and innovation of Puppetry making' on the basis of magnetic puppet. Interestingly, besides participating in international exhibitions and various seminars all [over](#) the country, her research works have been published in international, national as well as regional journals.

It has to be noted that five of their students have earned the CCRT (Centre for Cultural Resources and Training) Scholarships, under the aegis of Ministry of Culture, Govt. of [India](#). A number of students from the institute have also acquired lucrative government and private jobs. It has to be noted that well-known celebrities like actor Himangshu Prasad [Das](#), actress Chandana Sarma, NSDian Rajib Kalita, Prag News correspondent Diganta Sarma among others, are former students of the institute.

It's to their credit that apprentices, especially children, who once strayed away from puppet shows, are now coming in droves to enroll at her institute. Both Binita Devi and Simanta Sarma deserve immense credit for this transformation.

It needs quite a lot of practice and agility to master the art of glove puppetry, which involves the manipulation of three fingers on the puppets worn like gloves on both the hands. It has always been the primary objective of their cultural institution to promote and create awareness of this vanishing art form. The couple hopes to exert a strong influence on the imagination of the coming generations of puppeteers. [Over](#) the years, they have been enthralling audiences enjoying their puppetry in Assamese, Hindi and Bengali. It's interesting that Surajit Academy has been staging puppetry shows all [over](#) the country, winning accolades everywhere.

On the occasion of 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma [Gandhi](#), the students of Surajit Academy performed a glove puppetry play called 'Praisitta' in a function titled 'Bapu Smaran' held in Port Blair, the capital of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, recently. The half-hour play, written and directed by Binita Devi, showed some memorable incidents from Mahatma [Gandhi](#)'s childhood, which were enjoyed to the hilt by the audiences. The play's music was provided by Papu Gohain. The pre-recorded dialogue of the play, performed in Hindi, was rendered by Hardik Sarma, Swapan [Das](#), Niharendra Sarma and Binita Devi. The glove puppets were manipulated and maneuvered by Simanta Sarma, Dhruvajyoti Kalita, Hridayjyoti [Das](#), Hardik Sarma, Anita Devi, Manomati Boro and Gitima [Das](#).

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