

A PUPPET MASTER WITH A CHIP IN THE BRAIN

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New avatar:Leather puppets with robotic movements on display in Palakkad.Special Arrangement

When tradition meets modernity, the result can sometimes be amazing. A puppet with robotic movements may not sound very charming but in a melding of traditional art and cutting edge technology, a shadow leather puppet in Kerala's famous temple art Tholpavakkoothu is being animated by a robot.

For the first time, the famous shadow leather puppets will tell stories of the epic Ramayana with the help of robots.

M. Lakshmana Pulavar and his son Sajeesh Pulavar from Harishree Kannan Tholpavakkoothu Kala Kendra, Koonathara, are set to animate their leather puppets using robotics with help from Inker Robotics, owned by Rahul Balachandran.

The first robotic leather puppet was installed at the Palakkad District Heritage Museum, which was inaugurated by Minister for Museums Kadannappally Ramachandran, on Thursday. Although there is a wide variety of art and cultural symbols showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Palakkad at the museum, the shadow leather puppets installed at Navarasa zone-5 have been a big draw with visitors with their robotic movements.

According to Lakshmana Pulavar, the most difficult part of Tholpavakkoothu is the limb movements of the puppets. These are now being controlled through robotics.

"We have puppets in several museums across the country. But this is the first robotic leather puppet," said Sajeesh Pulavar, who graduated from the NSS Engineering College in Palakkad. He has turned to Tholpavakkoothu full-time to preserve and promote the temple art form. "It was a dream come true for me," said Mr. Sajeesh.

Tholpavakkoothu is a traditional temple art in Kerala having its roots in Palakkad and neighbouring regions. It used to be performed in the Bhadrakali temples of Palakkad, telling tales from the Ramayana. It is also known as Nizhalkkoothu and Olakkoothu.

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