

SECTIONS

- ^ [City News](#)
- ^ [Profile](#)
- ^ [Debate](#)
- ^ [Perspective](#)
- ^ [Monthly Calendar](#)
- ^ [Youth](#)
- ^ [Business](#)
- ^ [Immigration](#)
- ^ [Healthwise](#)
- ^ [InVogue](#)
- ^ [Fiction](#)

INTERACTIVE

- ^ [Classifieds/Matrimonials](#)
- ^ [What's Cooking?](#)
- ^ [Melting Pot](#)
- ^ [Snapshots](#)
- ^ [A Day In The Life Of...](#)
- ^ [Family Portrait](#)
- ^ [Birthday Greetings](#)
- ^ [Baby Of The Fortnight](#)
- ^ [Model Mania](#)
- ^ [Kids Corner](#)

CITY NEWS

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Atlanta

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When The Puppets Visited Atlanta ♣



A.I.D. volunteers with Ramdas Padhye and the Bunny.

BY SUMITRA SRINIVASAN

The Lijjat Papad bunny arrived on stage to his puppeteer's chides, and a lot of laughter chimes !

It was the day of the Ramdas Padhye puppet show in Atlanta on May 15 and the auditorium in Georgia Tech resounded with hearty laughter. The creators of Lijjat Papad bunny, Ramdas Padhye and Aparna Ramdas, presented their array of puppets, their gamut of personalities – funny, naughty, lovable - and legendary. The puppet show was organized by A.I.D. (Association for India's Development), a volunteer based non-profit organization committed to the social development of India.

The momentum of the show caught us at the very onset. Enter Tom the Terrific - intent on annoying Padhye. Tom, the enthusiastic puppet, kick-started the show with his ever-ready naughty responses to Padhye's questions. The other puppets that followed took the cue ... and we were on a roll. The setup of the show was such that puppets and Padhye conversed about various things, involving contemporary desi humour. Unlike any stereotypical understanding of puppet shows with strings and music, this one presented the traditional art with modern techniques. Life-size puppets, string puppets, rod puppets, hand puppets and finger puppets amazed the audiences, who also learnt the history of the various types of puppets. Padhye's talent as a ventriloquist, to continually hold the conversation between him and the puppets was breathtaking - He,

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certainly, didn't seem short of breath. The deftness with which the couple maneuvered the puppets as well as the conversational stories marks this show as one of its kind. Ramdas Padhye also embeds social messages like family planning, small savings, food for all etc. in the presentations.

The audiences were thrilled to behold the legendary Lijjat Papad bunny in "flesh and blood." Having grown up with the bunny, most people at the show were excited to see the new generation children introduced to the good old Lijjat Papad days as the auditorium reverberated with the kids' imitation of the bunny's nostalgic laughter.

For over three decades, Ramdas Padhye has been pursuing the art of ventriloquism or voice illusion. A mechanical engineer from the reputed VJTI in Mumbai turned devoted puppeteer, after receiving formal training from his father, Prof. Y.K. Padhye who pioneered the art of ventriloquism as early as the 1920s in India. Ramdas Padhye's wife, Aparna Ramdas is an accomplished singer, and an actress and puppeteer herself. Padhye's dedication to this art and his expertise received international recognition, when he was invited in 1992 to perform at the International Ventriloquists Convention in Cincinnati – He is the first and only Indian to have received this honor so far.

A.I.D. volunteers believe that promoting such folk art as well as social development lies at the heart of the organization. Founded in 1991, A.I.D. has 36 chapters in the U.S. with a non-salaried volunteer base of over 500. It supports and initiates efforts in various interconnected spheres such as education, livelihoods, natural resources, health, women's empowerment and social justice.

The Atlanta community has always been an integral part of A.I.D.'s activities - the thronging crowd at the puppet show, as well as the support extended via sponsorship by Madras Saravana Bhavan, Western Union, Shalin Financials etc. speak for the growing community participation. The two shows in Atlanta not only raised money for noble causes, but also a lot of interest in A.I.D. among the Atlanta community - especially, college students. Currently, A.I.D. has 15 committed volunteers comprised of working professionals as well as students.

Please visit www.aidindia.org/atlanta. You may also contact us at (770)-517-2752 and atlanta@aidindia.org.