

News Analysis: THE HINDU

MAY 7

Puppetry hangs by a thread in Prakasam

- **CONTEXT** : Some families of the **Prakasam district** are determined to practice the old art of '**Tholu Bommalata**', the shadow puppet theatre tradition of **Andhra Pradesh**, while relying on odd jobs to make a living by the day.
- **Tholu Bommalata**
 - ✓ It is the shadow puppet theatre tradition of Andhra Pradesh.
 - ✓ Tholu Bommalata literally means "**the dance of leather puppets**" (tholu – leather & bommalata – puppet dance).
 - ✓ Its performers the part of a group of wandering entertainers and peddlers who pass through villages during the course of a year and offer to sing ballads, tell fortunes, sell amulets, perform acrobatics, charm snakes, weave fishnets, tattoo local people and mend pots.
 - ✓ This ancient custom, which for centuries before radio, movies, and television provided knowledge of Hindu epics and local folk tales, not to mention news, spread to the most remote corners of the subcontinent.
 - ✓ The puppeteers make up some of the various entertainers who perform all night and usually reenact various stories from Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

When NECTAR turned poison for bamboo

- **CONTEXT** : President's **ordinance** in 2017 amended the **Indian Forest Act** to rid bamboo, botanically a **grass**, of its **tree tag** for 90 years and exempting it from requiring permits for felling or transportation.
- India has the world's largest fields of bamboo. It grows on nearly **13%** of the country's forest land.
- The eight North-eastern States – **Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim** and **Tripura** – grow 67% of India's bamboo and have 45% of global bamboo reserves. Nearly **35 species** of superior quality bamboos are found in the region.
- The **Department of Science and Technology** (DST) had in 2004 launched the **National Mission on Bamboo Application** (NMBA) with an outlay of Rs. 200 crore. In almost a decade since, the NMBA has spent Rs. 100 crore on building demo bamboo houses that hardly impacted lives across India's bamboo belts.
- An amount of Rs. 40 crore, refundable in installments, was also provided to **entrepreneurs as technology development assistance** for partly procuring machinery and equipment. But NMBA also failed to **develop market linkages** and virtually went off the radar.
- To add to their misery, the Centre slashed duty on **imported bamboo** products from 30% to 10%.
- Unable to compete with cheaper bamboo products – allegedly Chinese routed through Southeast Asian countries – in the domestic market, 99.7% of the 385 bamboo units formed with NMBA's assistance shut shop.
- Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has allocated Rs. 1,290 crore in Budget 2018 for a restructured National Bamboo Mission (NMB).

Inter Country Parental child abduction

- **CONTEXT** : A committee set up by the Centre to prepare a report on the issue of **inter-country parental child abduction** has questioned one of the basic principles of the **Hague Convention** by arguing that the return of the child to his or her habitual residence may not necessarily be in the best interest of the child.
- There is immense pressure on India from the U.S. to accede to the Hague Convention on the **Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction**, which is a **multi-national treaty** that seeks to protect children wrongfully removed by one of the parents from the custody of the other parent.
- At the heart of this treaty is the criterion of “**habitual residence**” of the child, which is used to determine whether the child was wrongfully removed by a parent as well as to seek the return of the child. The **Justice Rajesh Bindal Committee** feels that the concept of habitual residence is not synchronous with the best interest of the child. It adds that returning a child to the place of habitual residence may result in sending the child to an **inharmonious set-up** as well as overlook the fact that a mother is the primary caregiver of the child.
- The panel has also prepared a draft law to safeguard the interest of the children, as well as those of the parents, particularly mothers.

- The Justice Rajesh Bindal Committee was set up last year to suggest a model legislation to safeguard the interest of the child as well those of the parents when an NRI (Non Resident Indian) marriage goes sour and one of the parents flees from one country to another with the child.
- The report also requires the setting up of an **Inter-Country Parental Child Removal Disputes Resolution Authority**, which will be the nodal body to decide on the custody of the child, mediate between the warring parties, as well as order the return of the child to the country of habitual residence.
- The panel has also emphasised the importance of the “Indian family system” in ensuring the best interest of the child, seemingly to question the logic behind returning the child to a place of habitual residence outside India.
- The important conditions under which a child’s return can be refused are — best interest of the child, domestic violence or mental or physical cruelty or harassment against the parent who fled with the child, the parent claiming the return of the child was not exercising the custody rights at the time of removal, and if there is a grave risk that the child would be exposed to physical or psychological harm.

Partial success for Gram Swaraj Abhiyan

- **CONTEXT** : The **Gram Swaraj Abhiyan** was launched by Prime Minister on April 14, 2018 the **birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**, to reach out to villages, most of which have a majority of Dalit and tribal homes.
- The objective of the outreach programme is to “promote social harmony, spread awareness about pro-poor initiatives of government, reach out to poor households to enrol them in various welfare programmes.”

Mission mode		
A status check on the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan* launched by the Prime Minister on April 14		
Scheme	Target beneficiaries	Achieved
Ujjawala (gas connections)	14.41 lakh houses	5.63 lakh houses
Saubhagya (electricity connections)	14.55 lakh houses	4.01 lakh houses
UJALA (LED lights)	16,850 villages	10,280 villages
Jan Dhan	18 lakh	18.5 lakh
Jeevan Jyoti Bima (life insurance)	17.1 lakh	12.5 lakh
Suraksha Bima (risk insurance)	24.8 lakh	21.8 lakh
Mission Indradhanush (immunisation)	1.75 lakh children	1.67 lakh children
(*Data for the last 3 weeks)	44,680 women	42,676 women

Aranmula's snakeboats will waltz along this year

- **CONTEXT** : The famous Aranmula snakeboat regatta in Kerala will not be a competitive race in the river waters at this year's Onam festival, and will instead return to its roots as a spectacle of colour and song.
- The cause of concern was the **influence of competitive sport** on the **legacy** of style and colour.
- Aranmula Vallamkali has strong moorings in the traditions of the centuries-old **Sree Parthasarathy** temple at Aranmula, regarded as one of the **101 Vaishnava Tirupatis**.
- The **Vallamkali** marks the anniversary of the idol installation at the Aranmula temple, with the participation of about 50 units called **Palliyoda** (snakeboats) Karayogams in and around Aranmula.
- The **high-crested boats** that take part are distinct from those used in races elsewhere in Kerala. They are meant to be paddled, in tune with the rhythmic **Vanchippattu**, which are verses in praise of Lord Krishna.

Defying the logic of democracy

- **CONTEXT** : The implications of holding **simultaneous elections to the Parliament and State Assemblies** run contrary to the spirit of democracy, as well as that of federalism.
- Democracy enables a peaceful transfer of power from one political elite to another. It is relatively more economical than authoritarian governments, which spend an **inordinate amount of money in suppressing dissent**. And above all, democracy provides **legitimacy** and enables **accumulation of power in the name of 'the people'**.
- Elections enable the selection of candidates who will speak for and to the citizens and allow citizens to hold representatives responsible. That is, elections ensure a necessary correlation between the **interests of the citizens** and the **accountability of the ruling class**.
- In between elections, citizens can hold the rulers responsible for all acts of **omission and commission** through participation in **movements, campaigns and other modes of representation** in civil society. Elections facilitate and develop the conversation between citizens and representatives. Elections are not equivalent to democracy but they are a definitive component of the democracy project
- If it fails to do so, and if the Opposition can muster the numbers in the legislature, it can vote the government out and provide an alternative government. Alternatively, the country can go to the polls to elect a **new government**. Under the proposed scheme, if the government fails to heed the mandate given by citizens, but the Opposition cannot offer an **alternative government**, and elections cannot be held before the stipulated time, the government will continue to rule, but illegitimately. This is the disadvantage of simultaneous elections.

- Citizens should be well informed on affairs of the state(regional, local and global) and should be able to distinguish between national issues, for example **foreign policy and defence**, and local issues that affect their day-to-day lives like **lack of education and health**, the pathetic **state of roads and water bodies**, provision of infrastructure, and ease of living one's life in relative autonomy from political intervention. The case for a federal form of government is constructed precisely on the need for decentralised power, decentralised finances, and accessible governments. Across the world the trend is towards regional autonomy.
- Citizens are **stake-holders in the political system** — therefore, they have the **right to participate in processes of decision-making** that affect them individually and collectively. Participation in **national and State elections expands the spaces of citizenship**.
- A fixed system of elections provides representatives with a god-given chance to **ignore the constituency for five years** and come back only during the silly season. Repeated elections are good for democracy as it ensures the **principle of accountability** is followed.

Rupee is dancing to more tunes this year

- **CONTEXT** : The Indian currency has been facing some selling pressure for the last 4-5 weeks, chiefly on the back of **rising crude price**.
- This has come at a time when the **U.S. dollar** seems to be on a **cyclical recovery path** against other major currencies on the relative strength of the U.S. economy.
- On all such occasions in the past, the rupee as well as the **capital account** of the country's **Balance of Payments** came under pressure.
- This repeat of history now has other elements that compound the overall external sector vulnerability: **overvalued rupee, rising current account deficit, sudden reduction in capital inflows**.

Hawking's paper cuts 'multiverse' theory down to size

- **CONTEXT** : With a science paper published after his death, Stephen Hawking has revived debate on a deeply divisive question for cosmologists: is the universe just one of many in an infinite, ever-expanding “multiverse”?
- According to one school of thought, the **cosmos** started expanding **exponentially after the Big Bang**.
- In most parts, this expansion or “**inflation**” continues eternally, except for a few pockets where it stops. These pockets are where **universes like ours are formed** — multitudes of them that are often likened to “bubbles” in an ever-expanding ocean dubbed the multiverse.
- If we do live in an **ever-inflating multiverse**, it would mean the **laws of physics and chemistry can differ from one universe to another**, a concept that scientists struggle to accept.
- In his last contribution to cosmology, Hawking — with co-author Thomas Hertog does not dismiss the multiverse concept, but proposes dramatically scaling it down.
- The new hypothesis relies on a branch of theoretical physics known as **string theory**, and concludes that the cosmos is “**clearly finite**”, Mr. Hertog said.