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Cultural Tapestry



HERITAGE THE INDIAN TOY STORY

India boasts a rich heritage of toy making. With the launch of the country's first virtual Toy Fair, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the important role traditional Indian toys play in the development of a child and also encouraged traditional toy-making communities to carry forward their craft. We bring you a few of the lesser-known indigenous toys from across the country

"The best thing a child can do with a toy is break it," believes Arvind Gupta, scientist and toy inventor, who was awarded the Padma Shri in 2018 for his unique contribution to education. Toys are an integral part of childhood. It helps in developing decision-making abilities as well as aids in the cognitive growth of a child. Indian toys, popularly believed to date back 5,000 years, also serve

as a medium to acquaint a child with the myriad culture, traditions and communities of the country. Take, for example, the wooden and clay dolls and figurines from Krishnanagar (West Bengal) and Kondapalli (Andhra Pradesh) that beautifully portray people from varied walks of life and depict, to the very last detail, their dressing styles and professions.

The importance of Indian indigenous toys and the role of local toymakers in the Indian economy was highlighted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he inaugurated the country's first Toy Fair recently, in the virtual mode. "Our [Indian] toys reflect reuse and recycling that has been a part of the Indian lifestyle. Most Indian toys are built out of natural and eco-friendly materials. The colours used in them are natural and safe," PM Modi had said

during the inauguration ceremony. The Prime Minister also urged toy manufacturers to use less plastic and more recyclable material in their products during the inauguration address.

Toys are a nation-wide interest, and a nation which encourages the manufacture of indigenous toys is one that exhibits signs of growth and happiness. In most societies today, toys and games are manufactured in factories, leading to the action of global and mass consumption, making communities industrial in nature. Earlier, toys and games were designed and made by children, families and local artisans. Today, most toys are mass manufactured. But like the silver lining in every grey cloud, there still exist, albeit in fewer numbers, a handful of self-organised and artisanal sectors that continue to be rooted to their toy making traditions, thereby retaining their own unique identity. Here are a

few lesser-known indigenous Indian toys.

Kondapalli toys

A cultural icon of Andhra Pradesh, Kondapalli toys – delicately carved from wood and hand-painted – derive their names from the eponymous village where they originated over four centuries ago. The themes of these beautiful and expressive toys range from such iconic modes of transport as lorries, rickshaws, palkis (palanquins) and bullock carts, to episodes from Hindu epics and mythologies and even depictions of rural life, animals and birds. The Dasavatharam (ten avatars of Lord Vishnu) set is the most elaborate and popular Kondapalli toy.

Asharikandi terracotta dolls

Tucked away in Assam's Dhubri district is Asharikandi, a village popular for its unique terracotta dolls. Terracotta is believed to be one of



Characters from Hindu mythologies and epics are among the most recurring themes of Kondapalli toys. Here, a Kondapalli toy set depicting (from left) Lord Lakshmana, Lord Hanumana, Lord Rama and Devi Sita – characters from the Hindu epic Ramayana. Each part of a Kondapalli toy set is carved separately and then joined together with the help of makku (an adhesive prepared with crushed tamarind seed powder and sawdust). Kondapalli toys and dolls, created from a soft wood known as Tella Poniki, received the Geographical Indications tag in 2006

the world's oldest craft materials and is the result of baking a special type of soil called hiramati. Created using such traditional tools as kodali (spade), khota (a thin bamboo tool used for removing impurities) and pitna (a tool used to shape the clay), the artisans of Asharikandi craft figurines of local deities, animals, birds and also objects from daily life. But one of the most iconic and popular Asharikandi terracotta toys is the Hatima putul (putul in Assamese means doll). A symbol of cultural significance, the Hatima putul depicts a mother with an elongated face and elephant-like ears holding a child in her arms or her lap, and, in some designs, a child on one side and a pradiptani (earthen lamp) on the other.

Channapatna toys

An iconic production of the Channapatna town of Karnataka, these delightful toys are said to trace their origin to the reign of Tipu



An assortment of Channapatna toys, including models of vintage cars, motorbikes, contorting toys and xylophones. Channapatna toys and dolls received the Geographical Indications tag in 2006

Sultan (1782-1799), a prominent ruler of South India. Traditionally, these durable toys were made from ivory wood but over the years have evolved to incorporate woods of trees like rubber, sycamore, sandalwood, teak and pine. Minutely carved and finished with a coat of glossy paint, some of these toys are also educational. Artisans in Channapatna, also known as Gombegala Ooru or 'toy town', create trains and rocking horses along with such utility objects as pen stands and candle stands.

Thanjavur Dolls

The most unique feature of Thanjavur dolls is their bobbing heads, which is why they are called Thanjavur thalaya "i bommai in Tamil, which translates to Thanjavur head-shaking doll. Originating in Thanjavur, a city in Tamil Nadu, these dolls are hand-modelled using materials like clay, marble and wax to resemble figurines of Bharatanatyam and kathakali dancers. Thanjavur dolls also include roly-poly figures of a couple appearing like a king and queen, symbolising the royal dynasties that reigned in Thanjavur. Such is this toy's distinctiveness that it received a Geographical Indications (GI) tag in 2008.

Natungram Dolls

Originating in Natungram, a village in the Burdwan

district of West Bengal, is another indigenous range of toys carved out of wood, minutely painted with vibrant hues and named after the eponymous village. The Natungram dolls date back to the wave of Bhakti Movement that flourished in Bengal during the 15th and 16th centuries, and began with a pair of wooden figures depicting Gour, a revered Indian saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and Nitai, the saint's disciple and friend. Although the variety of Natungram dolls range from Lord Krishna and his consort Radha to soldier dolls influenced by the erstwhile royal kingdom of Burdwan, its most popular product is an iconic pair of owls.

Indian toys aim not only to serve as objects of entertainment but also of education. And the government, led by PM Modi, is leaving no stone unturned to popularise Indian toys and encourage local craftsmen to carry forward their artistic heritage. In fact, toy is one of the 24 focus

Babushka dolls, also known as Russian nesting dolls, carved from wood are a speciality of Haryana



sectors in which India wants to become self-reliant and reduce imports. Working towards the cause, the country has already increased the import duty on toys from 20 per cent in 2020 to 60 per cent and established a Quality Control Order, according to which, all toys and associated materials for children below 14 years of age will be certified by the Bureau of Indian Standards. With support from the government and institutions like the National Institute of Design, India's toy making industry will not continue to flourish but will also add to the Prime Minister's visions of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Make in India and Vocal for Local.



SUDARSHAN KHANNA, SURABHI KHANNA

A pioneer in the research of indigenous toys and crafts communities across India, professor Sudarshan Khanna was Head of Toy Innovation Centre at the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad. In 1996, he was conferred the National Award for his lifetime work for design-science by the Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India. Surabhi Khanna, is a designer and faculty member at National Institute of Design Haryana (NIDH). She has been working on heritage and culture-based designs since 2011.

Source : India Perspectives | Issue 02 | 2021

1 to 29

Every Sundays
4.00pm

Monthly Lecture Series - 1

Online Yoga lecture / workshop sessions for Param Dhamma Chaitya Pirivena, Ratmanala
by Shri Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga expert from India

**75th Independence Day
of India Celebrations**

15
Sunday

6

Friday
6.00 pm

Sanskriti Sandhya Series - 1

Pandemic poses – An evening of Bharatha Natyam Recital
by Thushyanthy Velauthan the founder of Satvika School of Dance along with her little students Nikethanaya.

**Monthly Lecture Series - 4
Nikni Full Moon Poya Day Celebrations**

20
Friday

7

Saturday
7.30 pm

Monthly Lecture Series - 2

Online Yoga session – Yoga for oncology, immunology, auto immune diseases
by Shri Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga expert from India

Sanskriti Sandhya Series - 2

Indian Cuisine – An online cookery demonstration
by Tahin Ojah Sharma, Owner of cloud kitchen named Helonci, which specialises in Assamese cuisine

27
Friday
10.00 am

14

Saturday
7.30 pm

Monthly Lecture Series - 3

Yoga in Shrimad Bhagwatgeeta
by Shri Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga expert from India

Monthly Lecture Series - 5

Documentary Lecture – “The role of Lord Krishna in Mahabhartha”.
by Dr.Subashini Pathmanathan, renowned Bharatha Natyam exponent and scholar

30
Monday
6.00 pm

For details in regard to online classes on
Bharatha Natyam, Kathak, Sitar, Violin, Tabla, Carnatic vocal, Yoga and Hindi
please call on tell no. **011 2684698** or email to iccrcolombo2@gmail.com.
For upcoming facebook live events, visit www.facebook.com/ICCRSriLanka

Free Events. All are cordially invited