

*Indigenous Indian Toys: The repository for traditional wisdom, cultural heritage and a global economic opportunity*

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## Introduction

Play is a universal phenomenon and joyous way to learn and understand the world around! The moment children take birth, they are eager to know the world around them. Everything is new to them whether color, taste, shape, sound or texture. Children use available objects as tools to perform some activities to construct meaning of the things and experience the phenomenon. Toys are not only such easily accessible objects but are appealing and exciting to the children. Each of the toys promotes certain concepts, ideas, and words and have effect on the holistic development of children (Guha & Murthy, 2017). While playing they need a variety of age and developmentally appropriate toys to manipulate and have fun with. This process makes them happy, strengthens their fine motor control, develops eye hand coordination, and nurture skills related to various domains of development such cognitive, language and socio-emotional. Wadhwa , in the year 2009, conducted a study on Rajasthani toys for children has reported that each of the toy/ play material promote certain concepts, ideas, words and have effect on the holistic development of children. Toys such as building blocks, interlocking blocks, dolls, clay, puzzles, and toys for sand and water play engage children's senses. Such toys help them develop logical thinking, problem-solving and promote spatial relations skills i.e. understanding of how things fit together. Apart for this, these can also be used as prompts for storytelling, story making and make believe play thus spark imagination and nurture creativity in children. Toys for babies help stimulate their senses and their developing vision. While

toys for toddlers are more focused towards the development of motor skills and building basic concepts such as colors, shapes, texture, sound etc. At later stage (preschool and above) these toys turn into educational material for reinforcing the learning in a joyful manner.



In all cultures, toys are designed to amuse, educate, develop life skills and prepare children for academic readiness and life. It is a well known fact that indigenous toys enhance learning opportunities, provide early stimulation to the children and ensure their well being. Indigenous toys are not only colorful, and appealing but are unique and locally available too. It helps us to preserve indigenous values and other aspects of cultural background important for cultural identity, positivity and uniqueness. Globally, looking at the importance of indigenous sense of teaching learning, many countries are promoting the use of indigenous toys especially at early childhood stage. Even Africa has indigenous Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) curriculum framework with lot of focus on development and use of locally available learning material and indigenous toys (UNESCO IICBA, 2013). Similarly, Bangladesh has the practice of using indigenous toys in pre-primary centers. A study was conducted in 2013 in Bangladesh on BRAC Pre-primary schools that has also reported the development and use of indigenous

toys.

## Indigenous toys

India is a diverse country having rich traditions and different cultures that have persisted over time. Indian toys are the important cultural assets or the repositories of traditional wisdom, civilizational greatness, cultural heritage, creativity and imagination. State and culture specific variation is very obvious that provides unique sets of toys for children even on the basis of material used such as terracotta, wooden, iron, and cloth made toys. Rattle, lattoo, dug-dugi, dolls, puppets etc. are quite popular among children and are still in use. The beauty is that, the toys of Rajasthan are different from the toys of North East, West and South regions. There are few famous indigenous toys like:

- Kodapalli Toys of Andhra Pradesh (made of soft wood)
- Asharikandi Terracotta Toys of Assam (made of clay, sand, straw)
- Channapatna Toys of Karnataka (made of wood)
- Thanjavur Head Shaking Dolls of Tamil Nadu (made of terracotta materials, marble, clay, wax)
- Natungram Dolls of West Bengal (made of wood)

Indian children also build toys on their own using locally available material and waste products. This needs to be preserved but not in the Museums but in the hands of every child, even globally. Indian toys are beautiful, artistic and symbolic that is why used for decorative and entertainment purposes also. Looking at the current scenario, there is an educational value to such toys and demand also as these are simple, durable and safer than modern toys. These toys are based on the people, animals and thing around us and gives lot of hands on opportunities for face to face interaction, pretend play and solve problems thus children learn faster.

## Initiatives to Promote Indigenous Toys

India has this vision and has a long history of supporting, developing, promoting and using the indigenous toys. In 70s, NCERT and UNICEF collaborated for an Early Childhood Education (ECE) project aiming at the development of prototypes of inexpensive materials/ toys

of educational and entertainment value for children. The project also aimed at developing State level expertise in the use of traditional toys and games and developing new play materials contemporary in nature. The project led to establishing ECE Cells in different States such as Bihar, Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. The programmes were effective even in increasing enrollment and the subsequent retention of children in primary schools. Later, a National Toy Making Competition was held in the year 1979 to motivate teachers to use local specific low cost materials in early childhood education programmes. In this series, the State level toy making competitions were also organized in the States/UTs followed by the National level toy making workshops-cum-competitions (NCERT, 1978). Later as support material a handbook for teachers entitled 'Easy to Make Toys and Games' was developed by the NCERT (1993). Till now the spirit of development and use of indigenous toys is stills present and can be seen in one of the guiding principles of the preschool curriculum (NCERT, 2019) developed by the NCERT, recently.



## Challenges in the Promotion of Indigenous Toys

Wadhwa in the year 2009, while evaluating the traditional Indian toys for children reported that manufactures and users both understand the important of toys for the development and learning of children. However, studies have shown that most of toys are handmade thus time

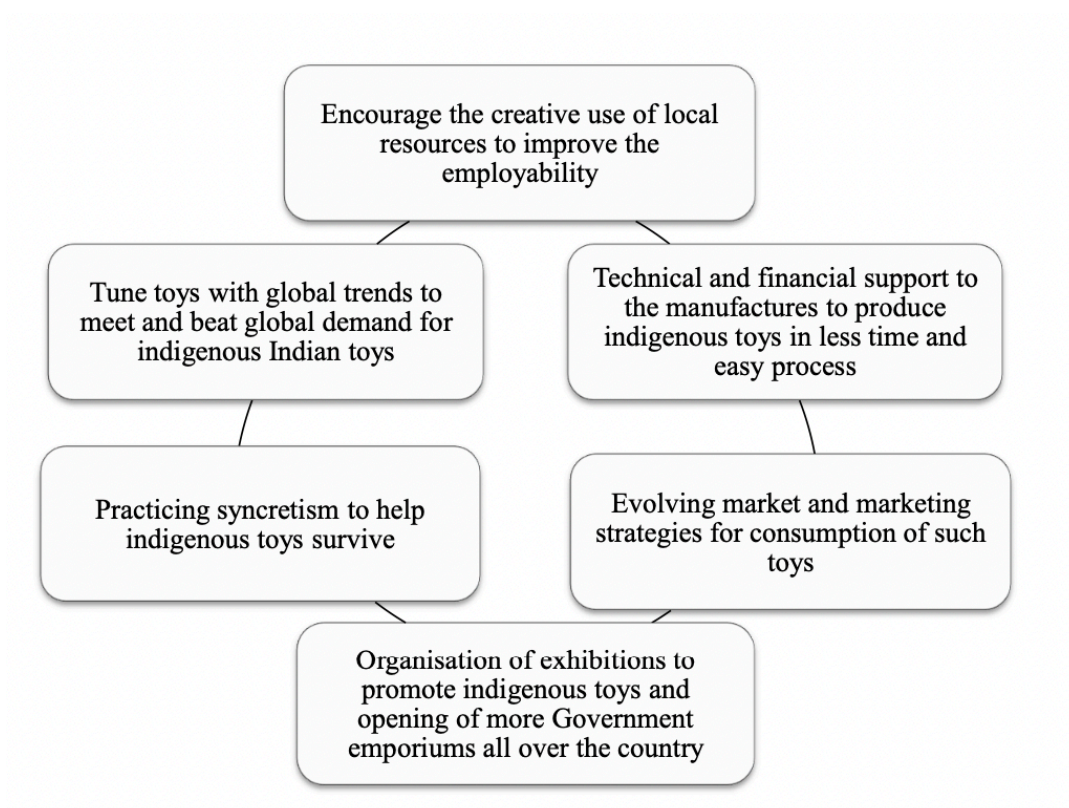
consuming, tedious process and brings low return. Users also need variety and cheap material. Guha & Murthy, (2017) also reported poor working conditions for toy makers/ workers, reduced profit due to the presence of middle man, lack of demand for indigenous toys, and reduced profit margin due to the raising manufacturing cost as constant threats to the existence of indigenous toys. As a result, many manufacturers have started bringing their own innovative designs or modify the indigenous design for more sale and huge profit. Due to such practices adopted by the manufacturers and use of commercial toys by the users indigenous toys are dying out.

## **Strategies to Promote Indigenous Toys in the World of Globalisation**

The only thing that is required is the strategic planning, support, promotion and globalization of Indian toys. The care should be taken to ensure that toys are age and developmentally appropriate, according to the interest of children, provide scope for manipulation, promote developmental skills, provide opportunity to explore and experiment, safe, non-toxic, durable, repairable, trendy, and low cost. Apart from this, such toys must be modified or reproduced in consultation with the child development professionals for design, material and technical inputs. Here are some strategies which might help to revive the indigenous Indian toys and toys manufacturers.

‘Vocal for Local’ a National Initiative under ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ campaign and development of toys based pedagogy as per National Education Policy-2020 (MHRD, 2020) for integrating toys in education could be the great move in this regard. The Government of India commits to explore the possibilities to promote the new prospects in toy sector to become the global toy hub.

In order to promote toy industry and trim down the toy import the Government has launched ‘Toycathon-2021’. The purpose was to provide a platform to bring all kinds of stakeholders including designers, developers and users together to share the ideas for advancing and developing traditional toys to endorse and preserve Indian culture. Such moves would help developing toys sector and create vibrant global market for Indigenous Indian toys leading to increased economy and employability among Indian citizen.



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