where she was going. He went into the village, walking over the twelve kutas land covered with the thorns. The girl reached home and wrote down all experiences of her life from her wedding till the moment she dropped her husband near the village. The next day, she called her husband for madhyastha (mediation) and showed the paper to the elders.

Then she asked her husband before the elders:

“Have you not eaten the tambulam I spat out?” The girl asked.

“Yes”, the prince replied.

“Have you not carried my sandals”, the girl asked.

“Yes”, the prince replied.

“Have you not walked behind me on thorns?”, the girl asked.

“Yes”, the prince replied.

“Now, are you not my husband?”, the girl questioned.

“Yes, I am your husband”, the prince replied.

Then both of them went home and lived happily together.

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The images of deities and animate and inanimate beings have been transposed to the children’s world as toys in Andhra Pradesh. Kondapalli, Nirmal and Etikoppaka toys are the most significant wooden toys made in the state.

Kondapalli toys are made in the Kondapalli village that is 17 km away from Vijayawada in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. The artisans who make these toys are known as ‘Aryakshtriya’. It is said that these craftsmen migrated from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh to Kondapalli around the 16th century. The toys are known as ‘koyya bommalu’ meaning wooden toys. The wood used for this purpose is the Poniki wood which is soft and light in weight and are also available in the nearby forests.

The wood is cut into the required size and dried for 15 or 20 days to make the wood light. The pieces are kept on a wire frame over a terracotta bowl with burning sawdust to make it warm and easy to carve. The body of the toy is carved and again exposed to heat for moisture to evaporate. The detailing is sculpted after all the parts are joined to the main body and dried. Earlier a vegetable gum made out of a paste of tamarind seeds was used to join the components which has now been replaced by Fevicol. The toy is given a smooth finish by filing. Brown paper or newspaper or other fabric is stuck on the cracked areas using maida solution. After it dries, it is smoothed with sandpaper.

Sudda mitti (white paste) solution that has calcium carbonate and acacia gum is applied as a first coat. Once dried, the toys are painted, usually by women using vegetable colours or enamel colours and brushes made of goat’s hair. A coat of linseed oil is given to toys painted with vegetable colours to make them water proof.

Every member of the family participates in the process of making Kondapalli toys. The toys can roughly be categorized as those representing scenes from actual life, those representing deities and others that capture animal figures. The first type of the toys consists of scenes which contain more than one figure. For example, it is common to find a simple single hut with a woman cooking, man climbing a palm tree, a woman milking a cow or pounding grain or spinning a wheel or men guarding sheep. The second type of toys are connected to animal figures both domestic and wild. The third type is usually related to mythological stories. The popular ones are the ten dolls that represent the ten incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Representations of Shiva and all other gods of the Hindu pantheon are also common.

Nirmal toys:

Nirmal, a village in the Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh is famous for its toys and paintings. Nirmal toys are also carved in lightweight Poniki wood. The wooden blocks are soaked overnight and dried to lighten the colour of wood. Various components of the toys are joined together. Lacquer chips and bamboo are used for parts such as beaks of birds or stems of fruit. Sandpaper is used to smooth the surface. Sawdust and paste of tamarind seeds are applied on the toy.
After the product dries, few cracks appear that are filled with lappam, and then a coat of sudda mitti is applied on the toy. Sudda mitti is fine clay gathered from the river bank, used as a base coat before painting. The toys are finally dried and painted with vegetable or acrylic colours.

The artisans make exact copies of fruits, vegetables, birds and animals. The texture of the fruits and animals is depicted through finely painted lines. Initially vegetable dyes were used, but now water-based colours are preferred. The craftsmen make their own colours from minerals, gum and herbs. The dominant colour in Nirmal toys is gold, which is produced by boiling juices of two kinds of plants in linseed oil.

Birds are generally shown flying and a flock of three to five makes a wall plaque. The less ornamented toys are made without application of colour. Glue made of tamarind seeds boiled to the consistency of a paste is mixed with white clay and applied to the surface of the toys. Those decorated lavishly are dominated by the gold colour. Generally, the base colour is black or natural mud. Colour, variety of designs and moods mark the toys of Andhra Pradesh.

Legend says that during the Nizam’s visit to Nirmal, he was given a grand welcome. All the craftsmen indulged themselves in decorating the venue, which included an intricately designed banana bud whose petals were coloured gold. This embellishment was suspended above the Nizam’s seat. It unfurled and showered golden petals on the Nizam. This impressed the Nizam and from then on the woodcarvers who belonged to the sect of Soma Kshatriyas received the royal patronage from the overwhelmed Nizam.

The ‘Nirmal Industry’ has been growing ever since its inception in 1951 at Hyderabad. It developed Nirmal paintings and handicrafts commanding an international market. The Nirmal Toys Industrial Cooperative Society housing 60 artisans was established in 1955. This is the main toy making unit while the Hyderabad branch manufactures furniture and miniature paintings.

Toys are also made of other kinds of wood like teak besides Poniki and are given a natural finish. Solid colour lacquering is preferred here. The use of chemical dyes is prevalent. Lacquering is done by hand or machine-operated lathe. In the lac turnery method, the wooden blocks are temporarily fixed on the machine and the lac stick is pressed against the toy. The toy keeps moving and the heat generated makes the lac soft and adhere to the product. After drying, the product is given a smooth finish. The craftsman later rubs the product with Mogule leaves which impart a brilliant shine. From small toys and tops for children to candle holders, Etikopaka artisans make them in a wide range of rich and wonderful colours.

Etikopakka toys depict gods and goddesses as well as typical Carnatic musical instruments like the veena. They depict scenes like peasant woman working in the field. Several other household articles like furniture are sold in toy sizes as well.

Kondapalli, Nirmal and Etikopaka are the three main toy-making centers in Andhra Pradesh. These toys are made for commercial purposes. Other toys include the sawdust dolls and the Tirupati dolls.

Sawdust toys are mainly made in Varigonda village in Nellore district and Vemulawada and Nupuram villages in East Godavari district. Local artists here make attractive sawdust toys featuring traditional themes and historical figures from Hindu epics. They use adhesives made from plants like tumma (a thorny plant).

Tirupati toys form an entirely different style of toys. They consist largely of reproductions of the religious figures in the classical style as seen in sculptures in temples. The deity figurines are made using a red coloured wood red that gives the toy a distinctive look. Red sandal wood (red sanders or raktachandan) is used in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh to carve these dolls. This wood is resistant to white ants and fire. The dancing figures are highly ornamented and beautifully chiseled, making these dolls unique.

References

Etikoppaka toys:

Etikoppaka, in the Vishakhapatnam district, is well known for traditional lacquered toys. The products include toys, utility items like bowls, jars, and containers, and ornaments like bangles and earrings.