

**Divya Teja P**

## **BOMMALA KOLUVU: ENCULTURATION OF CHILDREN THROUGH TOYS IN SOUTH INDIA**

### ***Abstract***

*Games have been considered as unproductive and insignificant leisure time activities since long time. But when they are closely observed, one can understand that they are not just for leisure and pleasure purposes but are designed systematically to execute various social and individual functions through processes like enculturation and socialization. Thus, games and toys act as vehicles of information through which the information is learnt by the children at various ages and situations as a part of development. The present paper focuses on how games as a part of leisure time activities in the olden days were designed to install various social concepts in the minds of the young children. The paper is an excerpt from the researcher's Ph. D work on traditional games and their social and cultural implications. The research was based on an ethnographic research focusing on the cultural and social aspects of traditional games in rural villages in South India. Bommala Koluvu, is an event in many parts of South India which is called by different local names and is conducted during one of the main Hindu festivals, Dusshera. The event Bommala Koluvu signifies the importance of toys and games which are used to subtly introduce social and cultural aspects to the children and young minds in a strategic design. The concepts of marriage, gender roles, expected behavior patterns by the society are reinforced in the minds of the children as a process of socialization through certain games. Thus, this paper throws light on how games and toys are used as traditional tools of enculturation in relation to the contemporary social conditions.*

**Keywords:** *Bommala Koluvu; Enculturation; Toys and dolls; Children; South India;*

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### **Introduction**

Studies on games, toys, various play and leisure time activities and the discussions on the functional dimension of play are less in both number

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**DIVYA TEJA P**, Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad

and magnitude. The extent of research carried out is mostly monotonous and repetitive. The existence of mixed ideologies ever since the beginning of the studies on play could be identified in two parts. One in which play and games were treated as mere leisure time activities and the other in which the functional aspects of games in terms of psychomotor development of the children are discussed as topics of developmental studies. The study of social perspective of play and games is rather interesting as here leisure and pleasure activities are systematically designed to execute various social and individual functions such as identity formation, enculturation and subliminal build of ethnocentrism especially in caste and gender based hierarchical societies, role fixation which ensures continuum of traditions and values of the society.

There is a fundamental difference in between the concepts of play and games that are prevalent in the West and the East. The emergence of Industrial revolution may have necessitated an ideology where citizens of the nations are to involve in repetitive and monotonous work in industries to ensure the highest possible magnitude of production. Hence, calling games and play as mere leisure time activities is not only a consequence of the situations that prevailed in those geographies but a necessity to contribute to the mission of achieving economic dominance through industrialization by limiting the want of leisure among the working classes through institutions. The dominance of the economic powers over the world situations may have allowed the diffusion of such ideologies into the Eastern world as well. This hybridization of concepts further greyed the difference of ideologies. As late as 1980s, the importance of work over leisure has been a constant topic of importance as the growing market economies required more working hours from the individuals. This forced condition among the Industrial societies may have required the support of institutions and culture to make the citizens work relentlessly. Haworth and Veal (2004) emphasized that according to Warr (1987) the paid work has been given importance for well-being in modern societies. But this condition is different and the compartmentalization of work and leisure are either faded or non-existent in several non-urban and non-industrial societies. Among the Eastern countries, especially the ones which are viewed as countries which missed the industrial revolution, the functions of games and play are multi-faceted and are not limited to the domains of recreation and relaxation only. Veal (2004) explained that according to Wilensky (1960) there are two ideas of the work and leisure relationship which are namely segmentation and fusion. Segmentation is the clear and sharp division between work and leisure aspects of life. Fusion is an intertwined view in which every activity is observed as a resultant of both work and leisure aspects. The fusion perspective viewed work as play and play as work by reducing the gap between the two aspects. Here, the discussion about work alongside of leisure and their relationship is important as we emerge to an understanding of how the perspective of play and games in Eastern ideologies are distinctly different. Though fusion perspective has a more intertwined approach, it is still inadequate as it does not constitute the

perspective of viewing play as a tool to train, educate and perpetuate the cultural attributes and values and traditions of a society.

The term 'play' is broadly defined by Oxford Dictionary of English (2010) as to engage in an activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose. There are various other meanings signified by the term play such as, to engage in game or activity, amuse oneself by engaging in imaginative pretense (imitation), engage in without proper seriousness or understanding, fiddle or tamper with, be part of a team, to strike a ball or to execute a stroke in a game, represent a character in a drama, theatrical performance, perform on a musical instrument, move lightly and quickly in an aimless way, flicker etc. Though the meanings are many, the term 'play' itself is centrally ideated around the themes of amusement, recreation, imitation and non-constant movement. The multiple meanings of the term 'play' may have emerged because of its implications for various purposes. For instance, the pretense or imitation concepts are central to theatre. A theatre performance itself is called a 'play' and the one who writes for a theatre play is called a playwright. The actors by pretense or imitation attempt to tell a story and empathize the audience. The influential power of theater which could make the audience appreciate and follow the characters is here the considerable factor. This influential power could be used to train, educate and constrain the society with the installation of institutions, traditions and values. Whether the theatrical performances are called plays because of their influential power or their recreational aspect is debatable in the etymological dimension of the term. But the influential power of 'play' whether the context is theatre play or a joyous activity of amusement appears to have been discovered long ago. Playfully conveying a story, whether it is intended to deliver a moral to the audience or work as a legend to continue the following of a tradition across generations is the central idea.

In rural India, we could still witness several games and forms of play that have ritual connections amplified by legends carried across generations. Here the children's play is utilized to teach them the cultural values, institutions and traditions. The current paper attempts to bring to light a tradition called *Bommala Koluvu* followed in South India where dolls are utilized to bring upon a social conformity among the young girls and boys by initiating in them a processes of role fixation and the various other influences playfully introduced and followed but result in permanent establishment of institutions that ensure cultural continuum. Periodical iteration of the legends and activities allows the preservation of the concepts and the intended results are ensured. The event or ritual of *Bommala Koluvu* is celebrated every year during the Dusshera festival which is one of the main festivals celebrated in India. The festival is celebrated across various regions in India with various flavors and variations though the central theme remains the same.

### Research Process

The current paper is derived from the excerpts of the researcher's anthropological study of traditional games, toys and dolls that was conducted for the purpose of Ph. D research over the social and cultural implications of games on the society and the influence of society on the games played among the agrarian societies. The study was conducted for a duration of thirteen months between 2015 and 2016 in the villages of West Godavari District in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. Though the study is primarily focused on the village Marteru, it also focused on the surrounding villages of Marteru in order to understand the impact of change and growth in terms of development on the villagers especially, on the games people play and their pastimes. Research data was collected by focusing on both past and contemporary leisure time activities of the people among the children and adults in the village. The researcher used anthropological tools and techniques like in-depth interviews and both participant and non-participant observation in order to collect ethnographic data on the games. The village Marteru is an agrarian society where agriculture is primary occupation since many years. It is a patriarchal society with multi religious and multi caste people among whom Reddy, the landlords and agriculture farmers are the dominating community both politically and economically in the village. The domination is clearly visible at the time of festivals and village celebrations in order to acquire and maintain the status and power domination in the village. In Marteru, the status of women is always associated with divinity and their involvement in religious activities which become part of their everyday life along with social and economic domination. This involvement in religious activities is taught to the children especially girl children from their early age itself so that the child meets the social expectations of the society. This is prominent from the participation of women in the celebration of major Hindu festivals like Dusshera, Diwali, Sankranthi, Sri Rama Navami and festivals of local deities.

### The Festival: Dusshera

Dusshera also called as *Dasara* or *Vijayadashami*, is one of the most important festivals celebrated among the Hindus in India which is celebrated on the tenth day after *Navarathri* (nine nights). *Navarathri* is celebrated in the months of *Ashwayuja*, seventh month in Telugu calendar which starts generally in between 21st September and 19th October in Gregorian calendar. This festival reflects the celebration of good over evil or *dharma* over *adharma*. The etymology of the word *Vijayadashami* includes two words 'Vijaya' and 'Dashami' which means victory and tenth respectively. Thus, combining the words, the meaning of the word *Vijayadashami* is victory on tenth day. The same is also reflected in the word *Dusshera*, which consists of two words *Dus* and *ahar* which means ten and days respectively, combining the words it means a ten days festival.

In Andhra Pradesh, it is celebrated as a recall of victory of Goddess *Durga* over the buffalo headed demon *Mahishasura* to restore peace and harmony on Earth. Among many versions, the story of the incarnation of *Shakthi*, the power as *Mahishasura mardhini* who was born from the power of the three Gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva to kill the demon *Mahishasura* is famous among the people in the villages of Andhra Pradesh. It took nine nights and ten days for *Shakthi* to kill the demon, *Mahishasura* and thus got the name *Mahishasura mardhini* where *mardhini* means to kill in Sanskrit. Thus, this festival is celebrated as the symbol of victory of good over evil and also indicates the women power, that is, *Shakthi* which is also praised and worshiped among the people.

This festival is celebrated throughout the country in different ways at different places. In Andhra Pradesh, *Navarathri* or the nine nights are celebrated by worshiping the idols of Goddess *Durga Devi*, a form of *Shakthi*, in nine different forms or incarnations which includes Goddess *Parvathi*, *Lakshmi* and *Sarasvathi* which symbolize the energy and power of females at the time of crises and need. Along with the worshipping of different incarnations of *Shakthi*, the festival also celebrates children and their childhood through a unique system of celebration called *Bommala Koluvu*. The celebration of *Bommala Koluvu* is observed among many Telugu families who belong to the twice born communities of Hindu caste system. Though the celebration was restricted to the Brahmin and *Vyshya* communities in the earlier times, it got spread among the *Kshatriya* communities and also among the dominating peasant communities like Reddy caste in the villages in the later times.

### ***Bommala Koluvu***

*Bommala Koluvu* is a celebration of displaying dolls and toys of children during the festival of *Dussehra* or *Vijayadashami* along with the idols of different Gods and Goddesses. Women, young girls and children participate in the preparation of *Bommala Koluvu* which is celebrated throughout the nine days of *Dussehra*. Women both married and unmarried conduct *pooja* or worship for the health and prosperity of their (future) husbands and families. For this, the women worship *Gowri Devi* who symbolize the auspiciousness of husbands and children. Though the prayers offered by women and young girls are for the well-being of husbands, the power and ability vested in the women are also celebrated through this festival.

On the first day of *Navarathri*, women and young girls, also children who help them, build a rack of shelves using wooden planks. The number of shelves should indicate an odd number like three, five, seven, nine or eleven. After arranging the planks, the shelves are to be covered with a large white fabric and clipped to make the fabric stick to the planks. The idols and the figurines of Gods and Goddesses, along with the toys and dolls with which the children play are displayed here. Some dolls with which the children play or

the dolls that were once played by the elders and preserved carefully are displayed as part of the celebration. After decorating the *koluvu* with dolls and idols, it is further decorated with small lights and flowers. In the evenings, women invite each other from their neighborhood to their houses to view the displayed *Bommala Koluvu*. During this social gathering, the women chant *slokas* and devotional hymns, perform *pooja* or prayer by lighting up an oil lamp and distribute the food prepared as *prasadam* to the guests and exchange *thambulam* which contains betel leaf, Areca nut, two bananas, turmeric and *kumkum* packets and a blouse piece. This is continued till the ninth day of *Dusshera*.

On the last day of *Navarathri*, the ninth day, prayers are offered to Goddess *Saraswathi*, the Goddess of wisdom, arts and literature, along with other two powerful Goddesses, *Durga* and *Lakshmi*. This celebration is called *Ayudha pooja* as it signifies the importance of weapons and tools which are used to earn a livelihood directly or indirectly. On this day, people worship equipment, weapons, tools and vehicles to gain the blessings of the Goddesses such that all the tools, vehicles and weaponry perform well in their profession which are extremely important for professional success. The worship of equipment got expanded to the worship of toys, dolls and play-ware of games like cricket bat, ball, shuttle bats and corks, chessboards etc. along with books, tools and other instruments. When a game becomes profession to a person, the status of the game or a toy related to the game is not of a lesser standard any further when compared to other professions. The seriousness of the player towards his or her game and their relationship escalates the status of the game or a toy from a mere expression to a serious profession. This indicates the seriousness with which games are considered as they are treated at par with all the professional paraphernalia. This is reflected on the children's games and toys for which they are serious about their play. On the tenth day, the evening of *Vijayadasami*, after offering prayers, the women windup the *Bommalla Koluvu* by making one of the dolls from the *koluvu* to sleep which symbolizes that the dolls and idols are put to rest till the next year. By doing this, they end up the successful completion of that year's *Bommala Koluvu* celebration and pack the toys for next year.

### **Types of Toys**

Each *Bommala Koluvu* includes different toys and dolls that are played by both boys and girls. Most of the times, these *koluvus* include toys and dolls of children aging from infants to twelve years. The *koluvu* includes idols which depict the stories and characters from epics and mythologies like *Puranas* and *Etihasas*; toys from everyday scenes and actual life like cars, buses, trains, scooters, cranes, ships etc. animals like elephants, giraffes, monkeys, dogs, birds, horses etc. weddings include traditions and customs of different places in the country but majorly reflecting the local marriage tradition; infant toys

include rattles, learning toys, pulley toys etc. kitchen utensils; dolls played by girls, rural folk life which indicates activities like oxen cart carrying sacks of grains, rural women working, a man ploughing, a Brahmin couple, agriculture activity, vegetable seller, fruit seller etc. and royal processions like procession on elephant, palanquin with bearers etc. The toys displayed in the *koluvu* are mostly wooden and mud toys which are bought from traditional toy makers of Kondapalli, Etikoppaka, Tirupathi, Mysore and Chennapatna of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka states. The toys are made from different kinds of material like wood, clay, sand, fiber, dry leaves, green leaves etc. Most of the toys used in *Bommala Koluvu* are wooden and clay toys. Wooden toys are made from different types of wood like white sanders, sandal wood, red wood, neem (*Azadirachta indica*) wood etc. Along with these toys, a special pair of dolls called *Raja Rani* (King and Queen) or *Pelli koduku* and *Pelli koothuru* which means bridegroom and bride dolls are also showcased by placing them in the array of dolls at the racks of *Bommala Koluvu*.

### ***Pelli Koduku and Pelli Koothuru dolls***

The *Pelli Koduku* and *Pelli Koothuru* dolls are the figurines of the characters of South Indian bride and bridegroom. These dolls are made of white sanders, neem wood, sandal wood, red sandal wood or red wood. These dolls are manufactured at Tirupati and Kondapalli where toy making has been a traditional occupation among the toy makers. Traditionally, these dolls are black or dark brown in color. But, to add more attraction, the toy makers use vegetable colors to decorate the toys. These dolls are generally eight to ten inches in length and three to five inches in breadth. It is believed that these dolls possess medicinal values and are non-toxic to the children when they play with them. The wood that is used to make these dolls like neem (*Azadirachta indica*) consists of medicinal values to prevent eye disorders, intestinal worms, stomach upsets, liver problems, skin allergies, gum diseases, etc. when the children carry the dolls and infants try to lick or bite the dolls and such medicinal benefits are believed to be transferred via saliva to the child. Because of the medicinal values that are embedded in the dolls, the children are encouraged to play with these dolls rather than plastic or any other material which is hazardous to the children and infants.

### ***Children with Pelli Koduku and Pelli Koothuru dolls***

The relationship between the dolls and the children evolves and attains various forms beginning from their early childhood, extending into their adolescence, married life and beyond. Children's first interaction with these dolls begins as they play with them as mere play items. The siblings, elders and other kids in the families introduce the dolls to the child and make it a part of her or his play as they decorate the dolls with ornaments made of small beads and glittery items, drape a piece of cloth as a grand wedding attire,

weave pieces of a black cloth around the head to represent *Jada* which is the prevalent way of wrapping the hair in the local village. It is a creative way of playing with the toys as the children actively participate in procuring pieces of silk cloth from their elders and involve in draping the cloth around the toys to represent the wedding attire of the bride and the bride groom. The children enjoy decorating the toys and often do it along with the fellow children at home or neighborhood. After decorating the dolls, sometimes, the children proceed to play the game by conducting a marriage to the dolls. The elders in the family as well participate in the play by singing songs and helping the children to conduct the mock marriage to the dolls. Children divide as two groups, each of them taking the side of bride or groom and imitate the role of elders in families as they negotiate a suitable match and give their son or daughter in marriage. The entire play has songs and a session of rhythmic questioning in between the bride's group and the groom's group which has questions such as 'Where do you hail from?', 'What are you giving to our son as dowry?', 'How is your daughter an ideal match to our son?' to which the bride's group answer in a rhythm saying that their daughter is worth gold of her weight and that the groom should be lucky to get a chance to partner with her. The questioning and answering happens in a playful way with songs and even the elders in the families are seen supporting and participating actively in the play. The same dolls are displayed in *bommala koluvu* festival as well. The festival ensures the iteration of the tradition and the attached play with the dolls every year. The game of imitating the marriage event need no festival or ritual attached to the play. It is played during the gatherings in the neighborhoods, during holidays, during the festivals and events when many children group to play.

### **Social significance of the dolls**

The dolls attain a multitude in their symbolic representation. The dolls of *Pelli koothuru* and *Pelli koduku* have their representation symbolize bride and groom on the surface, but there are deeper connections with the culture and values in the society when investigated and analyzed. The significance of these dolls reflect the practice of early marriages in the societies when the children are still in the age of playing with dolls and toys. The dolls along with their representation as bride and groom signify the event of marriage. It may be analyzed that the dolls are devised to introduce and reinforce the importance of marriage and family right from childhood along with the element of play and fun because of their young age. Families, being the fundamental units of the society, are entities inspired by love, bonding, mutual help, responsibility and every trait that influenced, supported or addressed the human need for social connections. Since marriage is viewed as the most important event that brings two people together for the start of a family, the recognition of its importance is essential for the harmonious progression and perpetuation of the human kind. This requisite of introducing the concept of marriage to the



children may have resulted in the birth of the customs that are woven around these dolls which were born ages ago and are followed till date. There are several aspects of marriage that could be magnified including but not limited to all the intricate matters of conjugal alliances, sex, children, financial interdependencies, familial responsibilities, relatives etc, but other than the event of marriage itself, no other related concepts reflect in the children's play with the dolls.

The dolls transform in terms of their symbolism as the children grow listening to the related stories, customs and build their understanding of the world around. A close relationship develops between the child and the dolls as he or she plays with them from a very early age. The relationship, though it starts with a mere play without any consideration to the meaning and purpose, it attains sanctity and importance when the children get to listen to the stories, believes and legends attached.

The dolls symbolize the God *Venkateswara* and his Goddess wife *Padmavathi* and even in the play of *Bommala pelli* in which the children imitate elders and conduct the marriage, the bride is treated as *Padmavathi* Goddess and the groom is treated as the God *Venkateswara*. By this belief, the dolls are viewed as the symbols of divinity which installs the aspects of respect and devotion towards the play. Children have their interest in marriage and related aspects naturally evolving, as they grow into adolescence and begin to be influenced by the impact of the physiological changes and recognize the need for a mate. The girl children, especially, begin to imagine the groom doll as a symbol of their future life partner. The already established symbolism of divinity merges with the representation of the future partner. This is more pronounced in the case of girl children as the entire play and the related events have the participation of more girl children than boys. By this, the society may have designed a plan for a programmed result in the girl child's thinking. They are subliminally taught to value marriage and their future partner equal to God indirectly through dolls and all the rituals, legends and play attached to them.

The dolls have their importance extending into the lives of the girls even after marriage. The dolls are sent by the parents of the girl along with the girl to her in-law's house as she begins to live with her husband after marriage. The gesture is carried out as a ritual and hence has the aspects of divinity and sanctity attached to the event. Here, the dolls attain the role of companions from her parents' family, being sent to ensure that the girl does not feel lonely when she begins to live with her husband's family leaving her home town. The dolls may be construed as siblings of the girl or an uncle and aunt being sent along as companions during her shift from her parents' place to her in-laws' place. This gesture of giving the dolls to the girl to carry them to her husband's place also has other meanings. It is about symbolically expressing the wish of the girl's parents to see their girl as a mother very soon. It is like the dolls are gifted by the girl's parents to their future grandson

or granddaughter so that he or she could play with the dolls. The tradition continues this way across generations. Sometimes, these dolls are gifted as an auspicious present during weddings that happen among the close relatives' families. If they are gifted as such, new dolls are purchased and they are considered with the same values and traditions as the old toys. Since the girl develops an emotional connection with the dolls right from her childhood, to her they become symbols of her happiness, parent's family and one of the first dolls that her child would ever play with.

The girl during her childhood days at her parent's place celebrates the event of *bommala koluvu* and plays the game of *Bommala pelli* with her fellow kids and the elders who actively participate in the imitation marriage event and guide the children as they play. This play symbolizes how a girl should mingle with all the relatives and family members and become the loved one of everyone among the relatives socializing in an amicable manner with all the ones around. Similar traits are expected of the girl who begins to live at her husband's place afresh after marriage. The girl is to become the loved one of all the family members on her in-laws side as well as most of the families are joint families. The sociable nature, the amicable mindset and the aspects of responsibility, sharing and family that are induced in the girl right from her childhood through tools such as the dolls of *Pelli koothuru* and *Pelli koduku* dolls become her guiding values and principles throughout her life. The values, traditions and all the aspects that she practiced will be inducted through culture to the next generation by the girl as she becomes a mother and takes up the responsibility of bringing up her child as desired by the society, its rules and attributes. Hence, it is a chain of values and traditions that is transmitted from one generation to the other utilizing the cultural tools, events and a social setup that facilitates the nurturing of the younger generations such that they do not ever desert the values and traditions of the society. The desired gender role indications as per the institutions and values of the society could be identified in the reflections of the legends, rituals and many cultural aspects prevailing in the society. It is like a guided journey through the concepts of marriage, supporting autonomy and flawless development without the attachment of any unwanted traits.

### **Identity Formation, Careful introduction of sensitive concepts through ritualization**

In the development trajectory of a child, he or she travels through various stages and combats with various situations, where at the end of each situation or condition, the emergence of a solid personality aspect occurs. This was explained by Erikson 1968 in his works regarding identity formation and the crises a child travels through in the developmental processes. He further emphasised that the development in the later stages could be adversely effected if an incomplete resolution of any of the crises occurs in any of the preceding

developmental stages. His theory exposes the susceptibility of a child to incomplete conditions of resolutions to various such crises or combat situations. The combat as explained by Erikson (1968) could be between Trust against Mistrust, Autonomy against Shame & Doubt, Initiative against guilt, Industry against Inferiority, Identity against Identity confusion, Intimacy against Isolation etc, which are the crises in the developmental processes that a child passes through from the ages of infancy to young adult hood.

Autonomy is a topic of importance in the developmental stages and as a component of identity formation. In an Indian rural condition, where a multiplicity of influences could constantly put the child through a confusion which could influence the identity formation, the attainment of autonomy and the resolution of the crisis at that stage of development is rather complex. Though children draw immediate reference and the strongest influence from their parents in almost all aspects, the social influences, the media, influence of the education and western trends and a scientific temper installed in the children's minds from a very early age to investigate the reasoning and rely on logic further makes Autonomy a difficult to achieve condition and the doubtfulness over their own thoughts and subsequent lapse of confidence are much observable traits.

When rituals and traditions ruled over reasoning and logic, the scope for such ambiguous autonomy is limited. Ritualization of various concepts may have allowed the guided introduction of certain sensitive concepts with utmost care limiting the adverse consequences and the possibilities of faulty personality aspects. Erikson (1968: 135) said that 'the youth who is not sure of his identity shies away from interpersonal intimacy or throws himself into acts of intimacy which are "promiscuous" without true fusion or real self- abandon'. The crisis of autonomy fundamentally handicaps the ability to form identity thus extending the victims into teens and adulthood as well.

In the current context, *Bommala Koluvu* signifies the concepts of marriage, male and female roles in the society, idols of the Gods and the legends connected to them on the superficial level. It paves way innately towards forming the fundamental institutions and the identity formation. The children listen to the stories and identify the characters of the legends as the heroes and heroines and a reflection of the ethical and socially desirable qualities portrayed by the characters in those stories begins to surface in them. The ritual also nurtures the installation of common values and attitudes held in the community. Compliance to the community values is on an auto-setup process through these rituals. Children who have their identities formed in such a socio-cultural environment become protectors and perpetuators of the same values and traditions as they grow into adults. Appreciation from the adults when children involve in any activity of the ritual further motivates the children to fit into the socially desired and ritually designed slot. Autonomy is granted almost automatically to the children who comply with the values and

traditions as such behaviour is considered to be responsible and mature. In a cyclical way the confidence component of the identity and the requirement of keeping up to a certain standard of compliance continuously influence each other to form into a socially acceptable and desirable man or woman. A crisis situation which is described in the popular works of Erikson (1968) in terms of identity is generally less pronounced in these rural conditions. Physically, the display of strength is appreciated when teen boys help the adults in the family to carry anything heavy, use a tool etc. In *Bommala koluvu*, we observe figurines of men working hard in the farm or carrying a load. The symbolic of physical strength and hard work is thus represented which is another absorbable concept to the young children who participate in the ritual.

When children go through adolescence, the changes that occur in their bodies and the onset of sexual developments and maturity are subtly taken care in a rural condition. The otherwise constrained concepts to the young children in the western influenced urban societies such as marital life and marriage ceremony are introduced with the addition of the aspect of sacredness and responsibility at a very young age to the children. The proactive introduction of such concepts through rituals depletes the ambiguity and crisis which is characterised by curiosity around these topics further slimming the chances of any identity crisis. Shying away from intimacy and the taboos of viewing the man-woman sexual relationships as sins or classified topics are less seen traits in these rural conditions. Here, ritualization offers scope for the safe and pious introduction of relationships and responsibilities to the children. Society plays a crucial role in the formation, correction and adaptation of the identity of a person and in that light the social hierarchies and roles that exist in a society are to be studied to further analyse the concepts of identity.

### **Social Hierarchies and Roles**

The enculturation process that is onset through these rituals also feeds the social hierarchies subliminally into the young minds. The traditions of *Bommala Koluvu* and *Bommala Pelli* were followed by only twice born castes in the villages in the olden days. The tradition is now followed by various Kshatriya castes as well. Along with the caste, the traditions signify the class as well. The size and number of the figurines, the preciousness of the figurines and their value in terms of their material like various types of metal or wood, their rarity or place of origin remain as the symbolic of class. The relatives and neighbours invited to the event generally are of their own caste or of a caste of the same or higher hierarchy. Caste is a pre-sanction to the acceptability and amalgamation. Class is more about the display of status quotient symbolically represented through the dolls on display and the grandness of the celebration of the ritual. These concepts may not be outspoken or instructed by the adults to the children directly in the light of the contemporary egalitarian ideologies and law, but the impact of the subliminal

influence is unfading. In the context of *Bommala Pelli*, the songs that are sung involve questions such as ‘*meeru emitlu?*’ which means ‘to which caste do you belong’ signifying the importance of caste. The song has its function of introducing social hierarchies and concepts like endogamy to the children. By answering to the question, the children learn about their own caste and that the marriages are preferred in a same-caste condition. The question of ‘*meeremisthaaru?*’ which means ‘what are you offering to the bride groom (as dowry)?’ indicates the requisite of an equal or higher class for marriage and the concept of dowry. Each of these questions again are answered in a neutral stand which indicates a moral and political correctness. For instance, ‘*meeremisthaaru?*’ is answered with ‘our daughter is worth gold of her weight and the groom is lucky to take her in marriage’. A class related question hence is given a neutral answer where the preciousness of the bride herself (by virtue of her beauty and her character) is signified. Hence, the concept that the ultimate importance is to be given to the value of the bride by her character and beauty is introduced along with the general requisite of financial and caste-wise compliances.

### **Dolls & Role Fixation**

Role wise, the impact is sharp on both the edges. A stagnation of the social order is a trend that is introduced into the society through the children as they are influenced by the gender roles and kinship roles of the characters of the legends that are attached to the figurines and dolls from a very early age. Ethically, there are appreciable principles and institutions that are introduced to the children through the dolls displayed in these rituals. On another hand, woman’s role is subjected to a fixation through the rituals since in all the legends connected to the figurines, the female characters portray a wife who is purposed to marry, give birth to children and take care of the family and supplement their wellbeing. Woman in victorious warrior roles or elite professional activities are not generally seen. In the event of *Bommala Pelli*, there is a much deeper impact of gender fixation. Though both the bride and the groom character figurines participate in the marriage event ritual conducted, it is the girls at home who ritually continue the tradition. Girls, because of their aesthetic interests are much connected to *Bommala Pelli* event. Further, since girls are not allowed to go out in a rural orthodox setup, events like *Bommala Pelli* and *Bommala Koluvu* become their avenues of play and joy. Alongside of these connections, girls are in a way the custodians of the bride and groom figurines since they take them along to their husband’s place after marriage as companions. Woman after marriage preserve these dolls and pass them on to the next generation (only in the case of girl children). This tradition makes the entire event of *Bommala Pelli* an event more akin to the girls than boys. This also signifies how a female’s role is taken through a process of fixation through ritualization. Through the implementation of *Bommala Pelli*, marriage is institutionalised as the most important and only

purpose of a woman in the society.

Sometimes we could witness the figurine of *Meera Bai* who is a Hindu mystic poet in the array of dolls in *Bommala Koluvu*. Woman figures are seen in poses of cooperating with their husbands at fields or pottery. A popular dancing girl doll from Tamil Nadu is seen during these events in the array of dolls. The roles other than marriage are the attached cooperation or subordination that is signified by the woman figurines and the role of a devotee as signified by *Meera Bai* figurine and the role of a dancer as in dancing doll. *Meera bai* figurine is a woman with *dotara*, a string musical instrument in one hand and *kartal*, a percussion instrument in the other hand. She was a devotee of Lord Krishna and a poet. The dancing doll is a wooden arrangement in which various parts of her body are on a subtle balance of a spring mechanism which makes the body parts to oscillate when disturbed with a touch. The dancing doll has her hands posed in such a way that both the palms are shown to the world with the fingers of the right hand towards the sky and that of the left towards the ground. The gesture of the hands is symbolic of Goddess *Parvati*. Woman's roles are hence constrained to either a bride, family bearer, a devotee, a dancer or a Goddess. It need not be interpreted as objectification or disrespect attributed to woman in any manner as the woman are connected always to the holy deeds, responsible activities or the symbolic of Goddess *Parvati*. But, the role of woman is thus limited to these domains and no authoritative, advisory, warrior-like or intellectuality driven or professional roles are signified. The figurines of various Hindu Goddesses like Goddess *Lakshmi* (symbolic of wealth), *Saraswathi* (symbolic of education), *Parvathi* (Symbolic saviour of the world) are often seen in the array of dolls. But, this as well should be checked with respect to the characters of male figurines in the array of dolls. Other than the figurines of Gods, figurines of priests, sages, Brahmins, farmers, toddy workers, cart pullers, wedding music band, even the ex-President and scientist *A. P. J. Abdul Kalam*, figurines of Gods in various forms (such as Lord *Ganesh* as a body builder, cricketer, disk jockey, rock band artiste etc.), palanquin bearers, weavers, Lord Krishna with his pot of butter, figurines of gurus and *babas* such as *Raghavendra Swami*, *Sai baba* etc. are the various characters of males displayed in *Bommala Koluvu*. The discussable difference is that along with the figurines connected to devotion and divinity, we could observe figurines of toddy workers, cart pullers, wedding music band, farmers, pottery makers, weavers, palanquin bearers which have a professional significance. Such diverse professional significance is not seen among the figurines of female characters which signifies the absence of the dominating female role in any professional occupation. Even the authoritative and Goddess roles such as *Kanaka Durga* representing evil termination, demon killing etc. have legends connected to them which signify subordination to their husbands (e.g; God *Shiva*, God *Vishnu* etc.). In some of the legends, the Goddesses undertake the task of evil termination when their husbands are in the captivation of a demon or an evil. These signify the protective and fighting attitude a woman should possess in

the event of any harm occurring to their husbands and family.

It could be also analysed in another way. The figurines, though are representative of certain traits through legends, the society picks up only a few of all the traits they reflect and in the exact context that they apply to. Hence, it could also be analysed that the figurines reflect the aspects that are deep rooted in the society. For instance, in the case of Goddesses who reflect authority, evil termination and warrior-like aspects, do so in retaliation to an evil that happened to their husbands or towards protection of their husbands when they are in trouble. The same aspects are not represented as personality traits that she represents towards everything and anything in the world. To the devotees, the Goddesses are auspicious, kind and bless the woman with *Sowbhagya* which means wellbeing of themselves with healthy and wealthy husband, offspring and family. This reflects that the role of women is purposed around the concepts of marriage and family despite the reflection of other authoritative, evil termination or demon killing aspects. It may be construed that toys are not only fundamental tools to induct the cultural concepts but sometimes impactful catalysers of concepts that are already existing in the society.

Since the women's roles are being subjected to fixation, so are the roles of men as men and women constitute the societies. However, the scope of their role is not just purposed around marriage concept only. The professional aspects are reflected through figurines and the impact ritualization is almost absent on young boys and men as they are not bound to be the keepers of the dolls or traditions across generations.

### **Conclusion**

A brief discussion on the difference of ideologies regarding games, play and toys brings to light several cultural aspects that mark the significant diversities between various cultures, the developmental trajectories of children and their socialisation. We could understand how the playful activities could take the form of significant inductive or transformational tools of culture and rules for societies through the analysis of *Bommala Koluvu* and *Bommala Pelli* traditions of India. Sometimes these playful items such as dolls and toys could take the form of catalysers and intensifiers of the already existing institutions and ideals in the societies. Festivals ensure the repetition and annex the essential ritualization of these events. Hence, children's play could attain many forms, each of which could significantly contribute to the process of transformation of a child into an adult member of a society. We draw lines that clearly distinguish the conditions of the East and especially the current context of India against all the other popular ideologies, most of which are influenced by the Western thoughts that equate the benefits of play to the developmental excellence their children achieve only. Thus, toys and dolls along with games and play have influential power in transforming children to

reach the expectations of the society and become socially accepted person through the process of socialization.

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