

Design Resource

## Mud Toy Making - Madurai, Tamil Nadu

Ecofriendly Traditional Dolls

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Guna D. /

Hariharasudan T.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/mud-toy-making-madurai-tamil-nadu>



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## Introduction

As the land herself, the story of Indian toys and dolls is timeless. Toys have existed in India since the Indus Valley Civilization. Toys and games were not only meant to keep children entertained, but also to teach them how to develop their minds and understand what life had in store for them. They were simpler in nature, easy to use, colourful and depicted the tradition of the region. Traditional Indian toys and games were simple and took their inspiration from nature, unlike the fancy and expensive toys sold in stores today. They were designed based on how a child would react to them and how it would apply to real life. The simplicity of these toys that provide not just amusement to the child but also the means to learn while playing.

Traditional Indian dolls were made from the simplest materials varying from plant shoots, cloth and clay. At times, a mixture of cow dung, sawdust and clay were shaped into dolls and coated with bright paints. The abundant natural raw material present around the villages is used to fashion harmless, interesting and inexpensive toys. These toys are biodegradable and made from environment friendly products. Old clothes and other fabrics are used to make stuffed toys and animals. Wood and clay are almost a part of all toys made in rural areas, as both are commonly available. Example, the wooden cart, lakdi ki kathi is a legend. The pull cart with wheels trailing behind a child is a part of the Indian countryside. Made from wood and coloured brightly, it may be in the shape of an animal or at times just a flat cart. Drawn with a string, it follows the child through mud and dust.

The list of toys characteristic of rural India is endless; from whistles, toy trains, catapults, and marbles to swings. Unlike the mechanical mindless dolls of today, these toys are more natural and close to real life. They teach a child about the bounty of nature and enable understanding and appreciation of nature from an early age. While the child might colour its imagination, with the timeless Indian toys and dolls, the adult, too shy to confess his attraction to dolls and toys, might put up a brave front and boast of these as rare collectibles.

Place:

Tamilnadu is a land famous for its arts and crafts which attracts the foreigners. The arts and crafts of Tamilnadu has developed from the ancient times and is still practiced in many places of Tamilnadu. The beautiful carvings in our temple stands as an example explaining the skill of our craftsmen.

Chennai may be the capital of Tamil Nadu, but Madurai claims its soul. Madurai is one of the oldest cities in India, a metropolis that traded with ancient Rome and was a great capital long before Chennai was even dreamed of. Madurai is one of the ancient cities of South India with a glorious history. It is famous for its world acclaimed Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple. The city of Madurai has been constructed in the form of a lotus and is built around the temple. It is situated on the banks of the river Vaigai. Owing to its rich cultural heritage and architectural splendour, the city is often referred to as the 'Athens of the East'. The origin of Madurai dates back to the Sangam period, the golden period of Tamil Literature.

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According to mythology Madurai was earlier a forest called Kadambavanam. Once a merchant passing through the forest saw Indran, the King of Gods worshipping a Swayambhulingam under a Kadam tree. This was immediately reported to King Kulsekarer Pandayan. The king cleared the forest and built a splendid temple, known as the Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple, around the holy Lingam and later built a beautiful lotus-shaped city surrounding the temple.

It is said that centuries ago Lord Shiva himself appeared on the naming ceremony of the city and blessed it. The divine nectar (madhu) from the tangled locks of Shiva fell on the blessed city and so, the city came to be known as “Madhurapuri”. Legend says that Lord Shiva performed sixty-four wonders, called “Thiruvilaiyadals”, in Madurai. Thus, the holy city finds reference in the great Indian epics - Ramayana, Kautilyas and Arthasastra. Madurai also served as the capital of Pandayan Kings.

Madurai has become a big commercial centre in the south. It is famous for its textile industry which is growing in stature with time. The city contributes immensely to the textile wealth of the county. The textile industry still uses its ancient techniques of weaving. The textile from the region is exported to all over the world. There is a vast variety offered by Madurai in both the textile material as well as the weaving techniques. Apart from textiles, there are a number of other small industries that contribute to the arts and crafts of the city. Spinning and weaving are widely practiced here. The city is known for its cotton textile industry, which also serves as the main occupation of its people. Cotton and silk threads are finely spun. The silk cloth is produced by tying knots on the ends. The muslin produced is very fine and carries floral designs of different colours. Embroidery is also done on the cloth, which serves to be an added attraction. Dyeing is also done on loin cloth. Earlier, apart from Silk and cotton, a fibre was made of wood which was called Sirai Maravuri and Naarmadi. Woollen goods are also sold in the markets of Madurai. Madurai specializes in fine gold-bordered veshtis, which are medium weight cotton sarees with fine Zari and fabric painting. These saris are popularly called the Madurai sungudi.

Mud Toy:

In Southern states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the festival of Navrathri is called Kolu or Navratri Golu, where women set up decorated planks in a corner of the house and decorating it with dolls which are collected over the years. The origin of the word Kolu can be traced to Tamil Kolu or Telugu Koluva, which means a sovereign sitting in his royal durbar. As per belief, the concept of arranging these Navrathri dolls on the plank is to depict that Goddess Mahishasuramardini is sitting in her Kolu, prior to the slaying of the demon Mahishasura.

During this period, it is customary in many homes in Tamil Nadu to display a “Golu”. This is an exhibition of various dolls in odd numbered tiers (padis). The golus vary in theme from house to house - from the elaborate, extravagant ones to the simple, traditional and artistic ones.

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It is significant that the Navarathri Golu is set up with an odd number of steps (usually 7, 9, or 11), and the placement of different idols of Gods on them. It commences with the keeping of a Kalasam. Kalasam is a brass or silver pot filled with water and adorned with either a coconut or a pomegranate amidst mango leaves. This Kalasam is kept in the first step.

Generally, when people come to a person's house to see the Golu, they are given prasada (the offering given to God that day), kumkum, and a small bag of gifts usually containing a mirror, a comb, a small box of kumkum, and fruits. These are only given to girls and married women. This is chiefly a woman's festival.

From the second day after the Mahalaya Amavasya, friends and relatives are invited to take a look at the Golu and receive the tamboolam.

In the evenings, a small lamp called kuthuvilakku is lit, in the middle of a decorated "kolam" (Rangoli), before the golu and devotional hymns and slokas are chanted. After performing poojas, the food items that have been prepared are offered to the Goddesses.

Golu is adorned with dolls - predominantly with that of the Gods and Goddesses depicting mythology. Common ones being Dasavatharam, Ramar Pattabhishekam, Meenaakshi Thirukalyanam, Murugan and Valli, Krishna in Aayarpaadi etc.,. It is a traditional practice to have the wooden dolls called Marapaachi (a pair of a boy and girl) as these dolls indicate fertility.

Golu does not only mean that the dolls are kept on the steps. Innovation plays a vital role. Creativity and divinity combine to form a genuine presentation. Themes such as marriage, school are adopted. Every night arthi is taken for the dolls.

On the 9th day (Saraswathi Pooja), special poojas are offered to Goddess Saraswathi - the divine source of wisdom and enlightenment. Books and musical instruments are placed in the pooja and worshipped as a source of knowledge. In addition, tools are placed in the pooja - as part of Ayudha Pooja. Even vehicles are washed and decorated, and poojas are performed for them.

The 10th day - Vijayadasami, is the most auspicious day of all. It was the day on which evil was finally destroyed by good. It marks a new and prosperous beginning. New ventures started on this day are believed to flourish and bring prosperity. Kids start tutoring on this day - to have a head start in their education.

In the evening of Vijayadasami, any one doll from the doll exhibition is symbolically put to sleep and the Kalasam is moved a bit towards North. - to mark the end of that year's Navarathri - Golu. Prayers are offered to thank God for the successful completion of that year's Golu and with a hope of a successful one the next year. Then the golu is dismantled and packed up for the next year.

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Pandhru udiyaan artist experienced in mud idol making.



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Artisan making designs on the idol.



Artist involved in coloring the mud dolls.



Lord Ayyappa made of mud/clay.

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## Tools and Raw Materials

Following are the tools and raw materials required for mud toy making:

- **Clay:** The base material with which the article is made.
- **Clay Rolling Machine:** Its used to grind the clay and make it even.
- **Plaster of Paris (PoP):** Mould is prepared using this.
- **Wooden Tools for Clay Modelling:** These tools are used to sculpt the article.
- **Metal Scrapper:** Its used to scrap out PoP.
- **Kerosene:** Kerosene is applied on the article for PoP to easily be removed after drying.
- **Paints:** Its used as a finish coating and to make the dolls look attractive.
- **Brush:** Its used to apply paints on the idols.
- **Sprayer:** Its used to apply liquid paints on the idols.
- **Chalk Powder:** Its used on the article before applying PoP so that PoP does not stick.
- **Sand Paper:** Its used to rub on the surface of the idol to make it even for painting.



Various sizes of molds used for preparing the mud dolls.



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Blending machine used for mud blending process.



Mud is used for making the basic model of the final product.



Standard colours used for enameling the dolls.



Plaster of Paris used for preparing the mold.

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## Making Process

The process starts by blending of clay by using a clay rolling machine. Blended clay is mixed with small amount of water to avoid the clay from drying as the clay idols are made in large quantity. The sculptor sculpts the model required using clay modelling tools and the idol is kept aside for drying.

Chalk powder is sprinkled on the idol after it is completely dry. Chalk powder is applied on the idol to fortify itself from PoP sticking on minimal details. The artisan, with the help of clay, builds a wall and boundary around the idol. Thick liquid PoP is poured quickly on top of this idol. This is left for drying. After the PoP is dried on one side, it is flipped over and kerosene is applied on the idol after which PoP is poured on the other side as well. The drying time of PoP is about 7-10 minutes. Kerosene is applied to ensure that clay model does not stick to the PoP.

The artisan marks the mould with a metal scrapper on both the sides with parallel lines which makes it easier for the mould to break open in the centre. The mould is split into two halves and the clay inside is taken out. The left-over clay bits are cleared out and the mould is brushed clean. The two halves of the moulds' edges and corners are evened out using a metal scrapper. Now the mould is ready to be used further.

Clay is filled on both the halves of the mould and the mould pieces are fixed together. The mould pieces fixed are removed in less than 5 minutes' duration. The output idol is ready for the finishing process.

During the finishing process, the artisan ensures there are no air gaps in the idol. If any gap is found it is filled by using very minute amount of clay and is smoothed using water and clay sculpting tool without damaging the originality of the idol. A hole is made on the bottom of the idol for air to ventilate inside, this helps the idol to dry in less span of time. The idols are not kept under the direct sun for drying. They are let to dry gradually in room temperature.

After it is dried, white primer layer is applied on the idols as a base for coloured paints. This primer is smoothed and evened with sand paper after it is dried. This makes the application of colourful paints easy. Desired paints are applied on the idols using brush to make it attractive and captivating.

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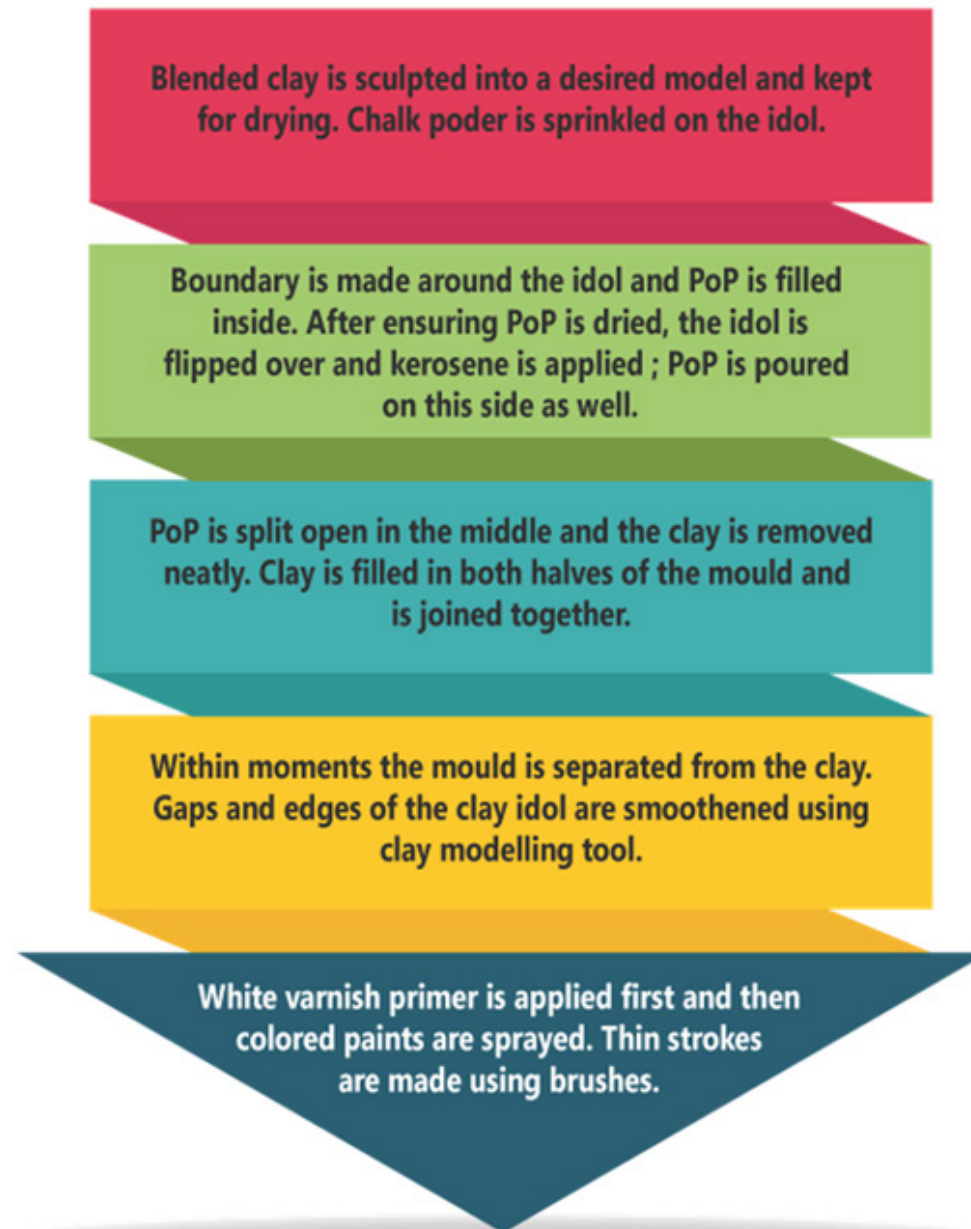
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Flow Chart:



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Collected mud from the lake is blended using a blending machine.



The clay is kneaded to enhance for inner flexibility.



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Artisan preparing the temporary model for making of mold.

Layer of kerosene is applied on the model to avoid stickiness of mold material.

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Plaster of Paris, water and cement are mixed thoroughly to obtain the required consistency and poured into the mold.

Once the POP mold is dried, it is cut into two halves.

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Further the clay is removed completely from within.



Artisan filing clay both half of the mould.



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Clay is filled with little pressure to reach the cavities.

The extras are removed and smoothed to obtain the appropriate doll.



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The product is allowed to dry under the sun light.



Artisan arranging dolls for baking process.



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The baking process is carried out for 2 to 3 hours depending on the quantity of the dolls.



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Premier coat is applied on the mold before painting process.



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Spray gun is filled with color and then the dolls are colored using spray gun.

Artisan beautifully paints the doll using bright colors, accordingly.

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## Products

The mud toys made are usually depicting Gods and Goddesses from epics and puranaas of Hindu mythology like Ramayana, Mahabharata, different forms of Lord Krishna, and popular festivals like Jallikattu, events like a wedding ceremony etc.

Size of the mud toys varies from 6 inches to 2 feet. Price range is from INR 60-1500 depending on the size of the toys and intricacy of the work.



Numerous idols of lord Vishnu kept for sale.

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Idol of lord Rama with vibrant bright colors.



The finished idols of lord Ganesha and goddess Gowri.



Idols of the Indian vedic students.

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## Video



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