

Design Resource

## Toys of Tanjore

The Art of making Dancing Dolls

by

Ketki Saxena

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/toys-tanjore>



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2. Artists

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## Introduction

After Big Temple and Tanjore Paintings, Tanjore is famous for its traditional toy called “Thanjavur Thalaiyatti Bommai” in Tamil language, which means “Tanjore Head-Shaking Doll”. The heads of these dolls shake when disturbed and are detachable. The lower part of the body is bigger and heavier than the heads. As they nod their head with breeze, it is a delight to watch them move.

“Thanjavur Gundusatti Bommai” i.e. Tanjore Roundpot Rocking Doll is another type of Thanjavur Doll. These are basically a pair of a king and a queen symbolic of the many dynasties that homed Thanjavur. This doll is bottom heavy and gently bounces back and forth when disturbed.

These traditional Indian bobble-headed or roly-poly toys are made of terracotta or paper & clay. These toys are handmade and painted over with bright colors. This art dwelled in Thanjavur in the early nineteenth century during King Saraboji's reign. Since then these toys are found only in Tanjore. Any tourist who steps in this city won't leave without buying this toy. It is a souvenir to take home from the city.

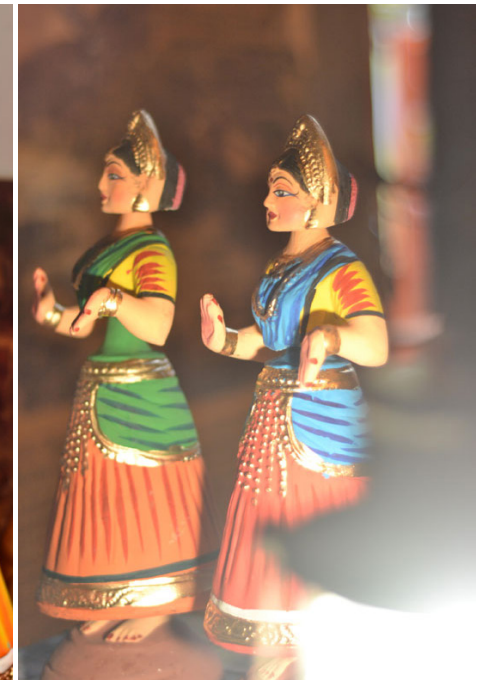
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Head-shaking toy.



Dancing dolls being sold at a shop.



Dancing dolls being sold at big temple.



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Roundpot roly-polly toy (king & queen).



Dancing dolls.

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Headshaking toys.



king and queen.



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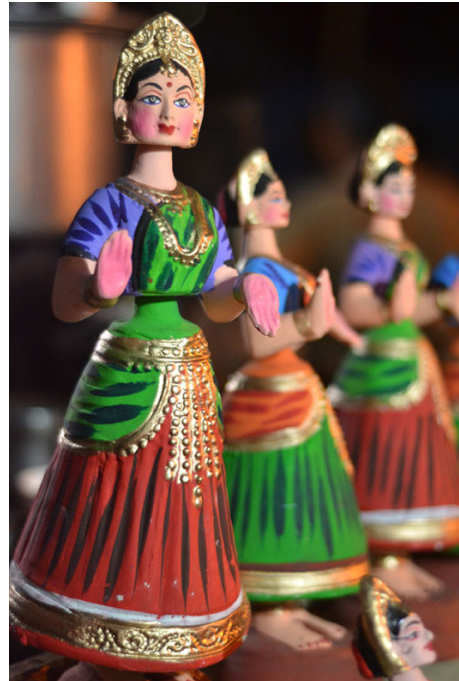
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Dancing doll being sold at big temple.



Head shaking toy.



Unfinished roly-polly toys.



Unfinished roly-polly toys.

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## Artists

Rajendra prabhu is a Roundpot Rocking toy maker from the village Puniyalur in Tajavur district. Making toys has been his family business since many generations. Rajendra has learnt the art of paper toy making from his father and he enjoys this work. He has a small workshop with two workers in which his wife and children help him.



Rajendra prabhu.



Rajendra prabh's wife helping him at work.



Sakthivel is a Bobble-head toy maker from the village Puniyalur in Tajavur district. He has been involved in the toy making business since 10 years along with his three other family members. He learned this art from another toy maker named Bhoopathy in Tanjore while he was working with him. Despite of a formal education and a job, both Sakthivel and his brother Malayandi started helping their mother in making these toys. Later they made toy-making their mainstream business.



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Shaktivel.



Shaktivel with his family.

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## Materials and Process

**Materials:**

A special kind of flour called 'bomma maavu' (toy flour), powdered paper, starch powder derived from roots (for sticking), mud for weight, paint and the mould to shape the toy which is carved from stone are required to make this toy.



Moulds used for making Tanjore Toys.

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### Process:

Toy flour is mixed with water to form a firm mixture like clay/dough. It is then flattened and pressed along the mould until it gets the shape of the mould. The extra flour material is then scrapped out.



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Once the mould is ready bits of paper are pasted on the inside edge of the piece using the starch paste. This makes the piece strong and reinforces the shape of the mould well. Both the moulds are held together and layers of newspapers are stuck along the partition to hold the two pieces together making it into a single piece. The upper part of the toy is now ready and kept for drying.



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Once it is completely dry, the terracotta bowl is stuck to the bottom with rolls of paper. Finishing is done by applying the toy flour paste all over it.



The toy is then left to dry for a while and then painted with different colors.



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The most commonly sold pair of King & Queen roly-polly toy.

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## Mechanism of the Toy

### Round-pot Rocking Doll Mechanism:

To show the continuous movement (dance-like) with slow-damping oscillations, the centre of gravity and complete weight is concentrated at its most central core at the bottom. This central core is made of mud hence the movement comes to normal seating position automatically after after being tilted or disturbed

### Wobble Headed & Dancing Dolls:

A bent wire is embedded inside the head of the toy and a loop hook in the neck/torso of the toy. When the head is precariously placed exactly on the hook it is in a state of imbalance and hence it wobbles.



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## Contact Details

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