

Analysing the Observational Learning in the Intergenerational Transmission of Toy Craftsmanship

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Abstract: A wide variety of skills and crafts enrich Indian society. These crafts have been part of our society since the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation. The terracotta figures, animal figurines, toy carts, and many more are known for their intricate designs and patterns. These examples emphasise the traditions of toymaking in India. The craftsmanship of toys is well represented in the cultural heritage and holds significant value, as it includes the knowledge, skills, and techniques needed to create a plaything.

The products of the craftsmanship of toys are well preserved in various museums in India. Despite many attempts, numerous living craft traditions have faded into memory. One such example is the fading tradition of using cloth dolls to play. These traditional Indian toys are not just craft forms but also act as vital tools for the cognitive growth of a child. These toy crafts, which nurture young minds, are now struggling to survive in the modern world. Still, some people are trying to keep these crafts alive and pass on their valuable knowledge.

This study investigates the craftsmanship of *drumbeat toy cars*, which works on the phenomenon of simple physics, and the craftsmanship of *Kathputli*, with a specific focus on the process and techniques used to craft them, along with the dissemination of knowledge of making them to future generations. This research collects and documents the data on how the process of transmission of knowledge happens and what role they are playing to ensure the survival of these toy crafts, through surveys and interviews. Also, the main objective of this study is to examine the significant challenges faced by the artisans in this transmission and propose practical ways to address them. Thus, this study will help highlight the traditional knowledge of toy craftsmanship and the toy-making traditions of India that need to be safeguarded through transmission and documentation.

Keywords: Craftsmanship, Toys, Living crafts, Traditional Knowledge, Drumbeat toy cars, Kathputli.

I Introduction

The origin of crafts in India can be traced back to ancient civilisations, as archaeological evidence from the Indus Valley Civilisation reveals various crafts, including pottery, figurines, seals, beadwork, and many more. These crafts are an integral part of their daily life and are also associated with spiritual practices. These skills were passed down through generations within families and guilds, evolving through the influence of successive rulers, regional materials, and local cultural narratives. From the weaving of textiles and the working of metals to the creation of pottery and jewellery, each craft developed as a symbiotic expression of utility, the natural environment, and profound religious and symbolic beliefs, narrating the history of craftsmanship in India [1].

'*Hastyakala*' or handicrafts means a method of making something meaningful by hand. There are several communities, groups and individuals that are still known for their knowledge and skills associated with the making of crafts. The Traditional Craftsmanship is also recognised by United Nations Educational (UNESCO) as a part of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as it involves artisanal skills, crafts and

techniques. This craftsmanship is also acknowledged as a part of living heritage. Among the various crafts, the craftsmanship of toys in India maintains a significant space.

Focusing on the craftsmanship of toys, India has a tradition of making toys with various materials, including leather, wood, cloth, and clay. Among various toys, this study focuses on the tradition of Kathputli, which not only narrates the storytelling tradition but is also seen as a plaything for children [2,3]. Additionally, it examines the Drumbeat toy car, which is well acknowledged by some scholars as a category of Indian toys [4]. However, these traditions are fading with time as society moves into a modern world.



Figure 1: Map of India highlighting diverse toy crafts.

Presently, the livelihood of toy-making artisans faces formidable challenges. The crucial one involves the overflow of cheap, mass-produced plastic toys in the markets. Furthermore, rising costs for traditional raw materials, such as wood and clay, contribute to it. Due to economic pressure, societal modernisation, and a lack of interest among younger generations, many artisans were forced to change their careers [5]. However, saving these traditions is an urgent necessity, as they act as living repositories of cultural identity. Also, the promotion of such crafts helps to shape and develop the mindset of children from an early age. According to ICOM [6], the preservation of such Intangible practices involves the transmission of knowledge and skills across generations through various ways, including workshops, formal integration into education, documentation, and others. Currently, the government of India, under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, has initiated vocational training courses that must include the learning

of the craftsmanship of such crafts.

Thus, recognising the need to preserve such traditions, the artisans themselves put in efforts. They are transforming their crafts to meet the needs of young minds, making their toys more relevant to modern lifestyles while preserving the core techniques and values. This study discusses the efforts of Mr Lakhmi Chand, an artist who creates drumbeat toy cars for children, as well as the efforts of Mr Babulal Bhatt and Pappu Bhat regarding the preservation of Kathputli making, which is quite popular in Rajasthan [7].

II Research methodology

The research methodology involved direct, one-to-one interactions at the grassroots level. A survey has been conducted that includes information on the creation of these crafts and documents the efforts made by the artists in disseminating their knowledge. The data has been collected majorly from two artisans, Mr Lakhmi Chand, Drum Beat Car artisan from New Delhi and Mr Babulal Bhatt, a Kathputli maker, originally from Jaipur currently living in New Delhi. With this, the author has carefully observed the behaviours of children while learning these crafts. Apart from it, the secondary sources, including articles, journals and books helps this study to reach its conclusion.

III Process & Techniques of Making Kathputli & Drum Beat Toy Car

The region of Rajasthan is known for its cultural heritage. The making of Kathputli, a traditional performing craft, is quite popular throughout the region [2,7]. It is also commonly seen in the hands of children used as a plaything. Similarly, the drum beat toy car, operates on the principle of sound, produces loud, rhythmic sounds [4]. The making of these crafts requires raw materials and tools that help to shape them [8]. These tools help convert raw materials into finished products.

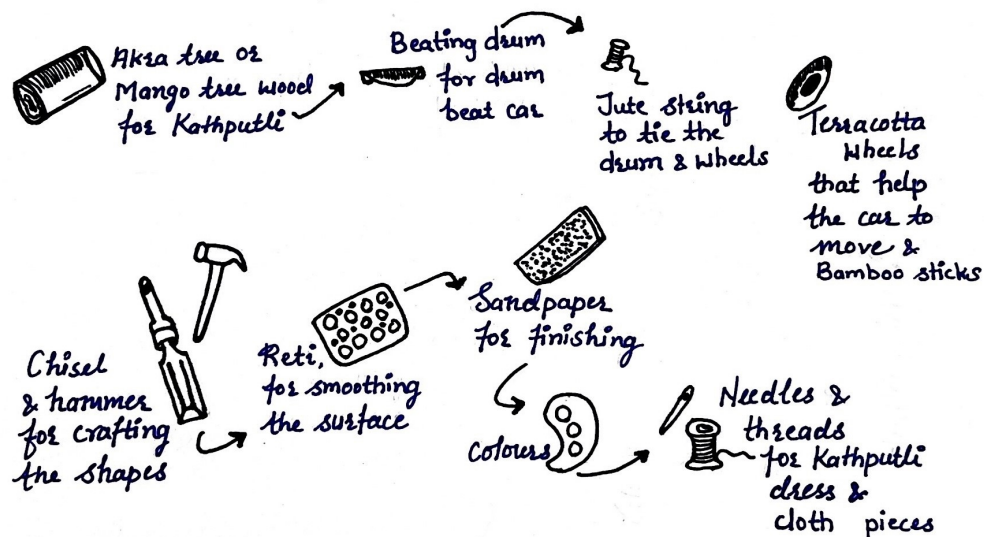


Figure 2: Raw materials and tools for their craftsmanship (Source: Author)

The transformation from raw materials to a finished product requires some process and techniques. This process directs the selection of materials and step-by-step instructions. Techniques, on the other hand,

refer to the skills employed during the craftsmanship. For example, shaping the face of a Kathputli out of the wooden log [8]. Although the process and techniques are both essential for the culmination of a craft.

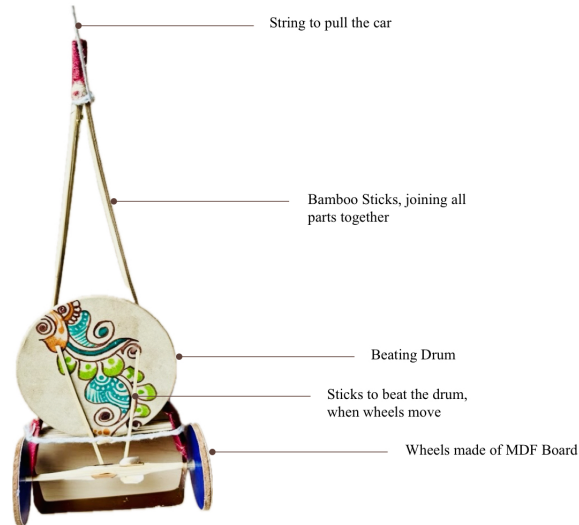


Figure 3: Drum Beat toy car (Source: Author)



Figure 4: Craftsmanship of a Drumbeat Car (Source: Author)

IV Outcomes

The transmission of knowledge about traditional craftsmanship from artisans to the present generation occurs in different ways, affecting each individual differently. These methods include the informal to formal educational integration that reflects diverse ways to preserve such cultural heritage [9]. Through the interaction and observation with the artisans, the following are the ways they are using for the transmission of knowledge to the younger generations:

- **Intergenerational family transmission:** Traditional craftsmanship is commonly passed down through generations within the family. As seen through the examples, Mr Lakhmi Chand, from Delhi, has two daughters who are well-versed in the craftsmanship of drumbeat cars. Despite having jobs, they still help him to decorate the drumbeat cars with intricate designs. Similarly, Mr Babulal Bhatt, from Delhi, has transmitted his knowledge of making the katputlis to his sons

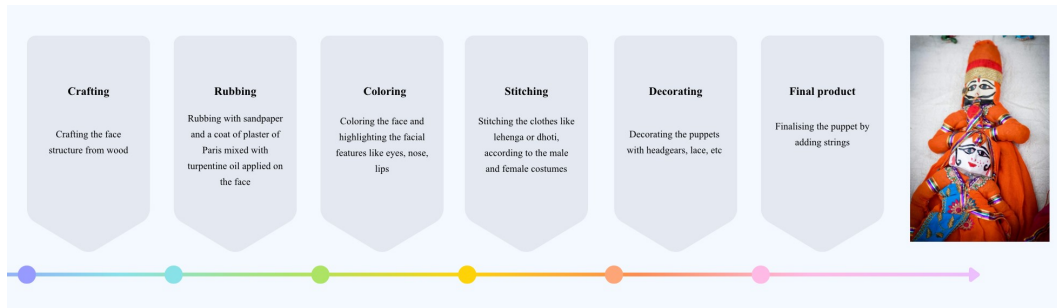


Figure 5: Craftsmanship of a Kathputli (Source: Author)



Figure 6: Learning in Schools (Source: Artist, used with permission)

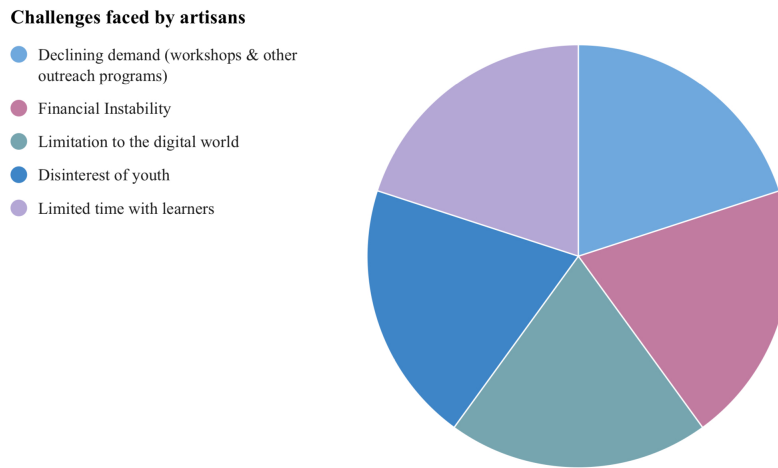


Figure 7: Challenges of Artisans (Source: Author)



Figure 8: Adaptive Strategies for Craftsmanship Development (Source: Author)

and daughters-in-law. They even make the Kathputlis and often perform the puppet shows on various occasions. Thus, within the families, elder generations transmit knowledge through daily experiences and participating in craft activities from an early age gives them vital skills about the techniques of craftsmanship.

- **Community-based learning:** Artists facilitate the transmission of knowledge within their own community, enabling them to generate innovative ideas through discussions and interactions with diverse community members. For example, in the case of Drumbeat toy cars, artists used to insert baked clay wheels to move the cars, but these wheels would break easily. For this, the artists came to the solution of using wheels made of MDF boards [4].
- **Learning through the formal education system:** Artists are often a part of the formal education system. They help to transmit the knowledge of craftsmanship at an early stage through schools. For example, Mr Pappu Bhatt, from Jaipur, often visits schools and colleges to showcase his mastery of puppetry. Similarly, Mr Lakhmi Chand visits several schools, including Lotus Valley International School in Gurugram, The Heritage School in Rohini, and Shri Ram Global School in Pritampura, among others. Such interactive sessions in classrooms help to bring younger generations closer to the traditional practices. Although there is always a limited time for teaching these skills, given by the authorities.
- **Learning through workshops:** Present-day artists are successfully conducting workshops at various institutions, organisations, marketplaces, and even at their own factories. As seen through the example of Mr Pappu Bhatt, who is associated with Rajasthan Studio and provides tourists with an experience in puppet making [7]. Through this means, he and many other artists attempt to preserve the heritage and engage with young audiences. As seen in figure 6, in which Mr Lakhmi ji teaches the craftsmanship of drum beat cars to the young children inside the school premises.

Despite these methods, artisans face various challenges that threaten their crafts and craftsmanship. Among these challenges, the major ones include globalisation, which has disrupted the traditional market for handcrafted products. Due to the availability of different varieties within the marketplaces, locally made crafts are often neglected [5]. One of the common challenges is financial instability and inadequate income. Artists put in their efforts and endure hardship, but in return, they often receive the bare minimum. As seen through the fact that a pair of kathpulti is being sold for 200 rupees, and if negotiated, the artist was also ready to sell it for 100 rupees.

Along with these, due to a lack of technical knowledge, artisans are unable to showcase their talent globally. They are unaware of the platforms that can be used to sell their crafts [10]. The financial uncertainty of craftsmanship is, nowadays, driving the younger generation away. This has been shared by an artist, who explains that his daughters have sought other employment because they see no future in this craft, as it fails to sustain their livelihood [11]. Similarly, the limited access to formal infrastructure and government support is another challenge [Fig.7]. An artist highlighted the financial challenge of demonstrating their work, pointing out the significant fee required to use a government-managed space.

V Conclusion

In response to these challenges, there is a need to develop adaptive strategies. These strategies can be implemented in various ways, including combining traditional apprenticeship with digital resources and integrating the practices associated with intangible heritage into the school curriculum, among others [9]. Thus, with such efforts, an environment can be created that respects traditional methods while acknowledging modern principles. The technical feasibility can be reinforced by the existence of formal pedagogical frameworks and integrating toys into rigid school structures. This does not require the overhaul of curriculum but can be fit directly into existing subject requirements. See figure 8 that

illustrates the digital integration and outreach that enables them global market access. Apart from it, integration in the educational system, acknowledgement and funding is crucial for these artisans.

- **Digital Integration framework:** From the perspective of skill development, the government can form policy infrastructure, teacher capacity building, making craftsmen a part of education systems. The government should establish committees that document the technical specifications, material requirements and other aspects of craftsmanship of these toys. This can be developed in collaboration master artisans, National Institutes of technologies, regional institutions of education, etc. Also, the government should mandate that state skill development missions can be collaborated with school education departments to map the competencies of traditional toy crafts. There is a need to teach the artisans about the usage of social media, as showing the process of craftsmanship on these platforms may contribute to building a reliable audience that values the human effort behind the product.

As stated by UNESCO, the transmission of knowledge and skills is essential for the sustenance of any craftsmanship. Additionally, for the safeguarding of the process and techniques associated with any craft, it must be recreated and transmitted to the coming generations [6]. In this process, museums, educational institutions, as well as cultural centres can play a crucial role. Thus, there is a need to seek practical solutions that can help various craftspersons and ensure the survival of their crafts.

- **The Role of Academic Institutions and Training Centres:** Beyond the marketplaces and social media apps, the core of this transformation lies in knowledge, where academic institutions and training centres become invaluable partners. They are the bridge between traditional, inherited skill and modern, market-savvy business acumen [11]. Local polytechnics and ITIs can offer short-term, certified courses on digital literacy tailored specifically for artisans, teaching them how to use a smartphone for business [10]. Apart from that, colleges can run collaborative workshops where design students work alongside artisans to modernise their products for urban and international markets, ensuring the craft evolves without losing its essence. Management institutions can contribute by having their students study the local craft cluster and develop simple financial literacy modules or marketing plans as part of their curriculum.

In the present-day society, the practices that are intangible in nature are difficult to preserve due to various factors. Additionally, the transmission of such practices is hindered by modernisation, which leads to the loss of knowledge and skills associated with these practices. Therefore, preserving this traditional knowledge should be a priority, and each individual must contribute to its preservation. With the effort of every individual, such practices will continue to face the threat of discontinuation.

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Conflict of interest: The Authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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