

# THE AWARE CONSUMER

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## How Safe

Are the

# TOYS

Sold in  
India for  
Children?



### IN FOCUS

Toy Safety Standards in India:  
Are They Enough?

### INTERVIEW

Meer Arif

Artisan and Authorised User of  
GI tag Channapatna Toys and Dolls



PLUS

ROUND UP • RESEARCH FEATURE • MY MARKET



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# VIEWPOINT



## MESSAGE FROM PUBLISHER & EDITOR

### Ensuring Safe Play for Our Children



**THE BEST THING** about childhood is playing. And play is incomplete without Toys! Be it rattles, dolls, cars, guns, teddy bears, kitchen sets or fancy electronic toys, every child cherishes these playthings. And, we adults love to indulge the little ones with the latest toys on the market.

However, over the years, parents are plagued with concerns about the safety of the toys. This is not limited to the fear of choking hazards or injuries from sharp edges of toys. Bigger apprehensions loom in the form of substandard materials and harmful chemicals which can impair the children's development and even prove to be toxic. This is especially so in the case of cheap toys manufactured by unregulated entities, not to mention the ubiquitous counterfeit toys in the market.

What about the lasting psychological effects on the young minds when they play with 'violent' toys? Then again, the current obsession with 'smart toys' is opening up new frontiers of dangers related to not just security and privacy, but also hindering their natural development!

Given the young and extremely vulnerable profile of the consumers, we are advocating for safe toys that meet the standards of quality and sustainability. The

current regulatory environment needs to rise to the occasion as toys that appear harmless and even attractive on the shelves may turn critically harmful for the children.

This is also a wake-up call for parents as many of them may not be aware of the safety issues with toys. We would like to help you make informed toy choices for the utmost safety and well-being of your precious children. Let not the affordability factor alone drive your purchase decisions, as unregulated toys can pose severe safety risks. A simple rule of thumb - if you have any doubt about a toy's safety, don't ever let your child play with it!

Let's not take the toys for granted anymore!

Prof. Bejon Kumar Misra  
Publisher & Editor  
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# PRAFULL D. SHETH

Editorial Board Member

## OVERCOMING TOY TROUBLES!



**IF THERE'S ONE** thing that every kid absolutely loves, it has to be toys! Be it a small rubber toy or a big fancy one, these playmates spell hours of fun and joy, with some learning thrown in for good measure! However, everything is not as hunky-dory in *Toyland* as it appears. The market may be flooded with a diverse range of products, but silent dangers lurk around almost every toy and then some more!

Given the grave perils, why can't we go back to our traditional handmade wooden toys which were much-loved at one time before the shiny plastic creations started clouding our preferences? This non-toxic avatar is balancing safety with the cultural and artisanal value of the creations.

Prime Minister Modi pushed for bringing back the traditional Indian toys and even came up with a National Action Plan for Toys to promote 'Make in India' initiative for toys. The focus is on fostering an environment that nurtures innovation and creativity in the toy sector.



Kudos to the government for finally establishing some mandatory safety standards and certification regime for toys as well. The regulations cover a wide range of aspects, including the materials used, design of the toys, production, testing, age appropriateness, and labelling and packaging. The safety checks may be in place, but inconsistency is the name of the game as proper implementation is lagging as usual. Alas, most of the unregulated sector manages to evade the standards and continues to make hay while the sun of toy-obsessed children and parents shines!

The onus is also on the manufacturers and retailers to realise that ethical practices are essential for safeguarding our children's health and well-being as well as the future of the nation.

India can still learn a lot from the global best practices and international toy safety regulations. What we need is an empowered regulator, an efficient reporting mechanism and timely product recalls - as prevalent in the developed countries. ▶



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India boasts a rich history in toymaking. We have come a long way from the days of yore and toy safety policies are in place today like many other parts of the world.



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THE LAST MILE

### THE DANGEROUS GAME OF COUNTERFEIT TOYS



**Consumers,  
— Beware —**

# What Every Parent Needs to Know About **TOYS**

Toys bring fun and enjoyment. But, they should be safe too! Indeed, playing with toys can expose children to harm in more ways than one. Prioritising children's safety is the number one concern now!



**Toys are unleashing safety issues that parents weren't even aware of earlier!**



**CHILDREN LOVE PLAYING** with toys. And parents enjoy watching them beam with joy as they stack rings, construct with blocks, solve puzzles, race cars or drift off into an imaginative world with their dolls/action figures.

Alas, the innocent and pleasurable realm of play has become tainted with dangers galore. The bright, shiny and colourful world of toys can unleash hidden hazards that can cause physical injuries to the children, impair their health, interfere with their development and even cost them their life.

## Toy Risks Parents Must Be Aware Of

Not all toys are created equal. Some of the simplest looking toys can harbour grave perils for the little humans in our lives.

**Injuries** – Toys with sharp edges or points can cut or wound smaller children when they play with them or put them in their mouth. If a toy gets chipped or breaks, it increases the chances of getting hurt.



**Choking Hazards** – Small toys or those with small parts can easily end up lodged in a child's throat, nose or ear. In case the button batteries or other parts become loose or break, they can pose choking risks for children. There are umpteen cases of significant tissue damage or perforations in the internal organs of children from swallowed toys, sometimes even requiring surgery. A toy lodged in a windpipe can even lead to a tragic end of a young life!



**Strangulation** – Cords or strings on toys can be a strangulation hazard, especially for infants and young children.



**Shooting Toys** – Toys that fly, shoot or fire objects can end up injuring the eyes or other body parts of children. Similarly, toys that make shrill or loud noises can potentially damage a child's hearing.

Young children have issues after ingesting such chemicals and parents, especially the ones from the lower income strata, have no idea why their child has got sick.



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product regulatory compliance including toys

**Toxic Metals** – Certain hazardous chemicals can have a deleterious effect on the human body. Children are more vulnerable to these toxic elements on account of their fast metabolic rate, high surface-area-to-body-weight ratio and rapid growth of organs and tissues.



Alas, toy materials like metals, plastics, paints and even fabrics contain chemicals of concern which can affect children in many undesirable ways. Lead (usually present in paints) can hinder brain development, cause learning difficulties, nerve damage and even cancer. Cadmium (found in batteries) is an endocrine disruptor that affects reproductive development. Chemicals like mercury, lead and arsenic interfere with the hormone system and cognitive development in children. Some are so toxic that they can lead to asthma, lung problems, etc.

**Plastics** – Plastic forms the core material of most of the toys sold around the world. It not only makes toys colourful, strong and durable, but also low cost and accessible. However, there is a dark side to them in terms of potential effects on children's health as well as the environment.

In a study by the Quality Council of India in 2019, 30% of plastic toys and 45% of soft toys failed the safety tests for phthalates.

Phthalates is commonly used to make plastic toys softer and more flexible, like teething rings, rubber ducks and beach balls. This is a highly toxic chemical that can cause allergy, asthma, skeletal defects, etc. It has also been shown to disrupt hormones, impair the lungs and reproductive system and lead to cancer. Then there is bisphenol A (BPA) in transparent, hard and unbreakable plastic toys and baby bottles. It is linked to a range of health problems, including developmental delays, behavioural and neurological issues. Moreover, microplastics, which flake off plastics products, are also a growing concern.

Children run a risk every time they put such toys in their mouths and chew or even lick them. What's more, they can also get exposed through inhalation or contact with the skin. The chemicals can turn poisonous if swallowed or even handled too much!

**Cheap Toys** – Many toys are made from low-quality materials to reduce costs. India being a price-sensitive market, such toys find a lot of takers. However, being poorly designed and of cheap quality, they can break easily, thus

posing a risk to children's safety. Their chemical composition is also not clear and they are likely to have toxic contaminants which impinge on the health and lives of the children. The electronic ones are known to get extremely hot and can result in burns and fires.

**Used Toys** - Opting for second-hand toys from friends and family can be cost-effective as well as help reduce waste and promote sustainability. However, it is advisable to avoid very old hand-me-downs as they may be worn from play and can break or become hazardous.

Moreover, they may not meet current safety standards and contain high levels of undesirable materials.

Similarly, the use of recycled materials can end up introducing hazardous chemicals as unintentional contaminants in toys which will translate into potential health issues.

### Final Word

Some toys can end up doing more harm than good. Hence, parents need to closely examine the dangerous elements of toys and opt for safer alternatives that do not compromise the health of their children! ▶

We hope for a day when parents will not have to worry whether the toys their children play with pose a risk to their health and life!

**Always follow age recommendations on toy labels.  
Keep toys for older kids out of reach of babies and toddlers.**





## Toy Safety Standards in India: Are They Enough?

Considering the age profile of consumers of toys on the one hand and the sheer size of the Indian toy market on the other, safety regulations are extremely crucial. Moreover, proper implementation is essential to ensure airtight accountability on the manufacturers, importers and other stakeholders!



**The Toys QCO 2020 has tightened the quality norms for both domestically manufactured and imported toys!**



**TILL THE TURN** of this decade, unsafe toys were sold in every nook and corner of India – from big cities to villages and from flashy toy stores in shopping malls to the corner shops. Small toy producers operated unchecked across the country. Toys from countries with low manufacturing standards could easily be imported into the country. As a result, the market was flooded with poorly constructed toys containing small parts and hazardous materials.

Given the critical importance of material and construction safety in toys, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) - the national standards body of India - established 10 specific standards for toys under IS 9873. They cover a wide gamut of potential risks like material quality; finish; physical, mechanical and electrical properties; chemical hazards; flammability; labelling and environmental considerations. However, the standards were voluntary and manufacturers could apply for the certification at their discretion.

It was in 2020 that the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, issued a Quality Control Order (QCO), 2020 on 'Safety of Toys' under Section 16 of the BIS Act, 2016 to improve the quality of toys sold in the Indian markets.

Accordingly, from 1st January, 2021 it became mandatory for toys for children under 14 years of age (including imported ones) to conform to seven Indian Standards for safety of toys and also bear the ISI Mark under a licence from BIS. Since then, no person is permitted to manufacture, import, sell, distribute, store, hire, lease or exhibit for sale toys that do not conform to the specific BIS standards and do not bear the ISI mark.

●● Toys given to children as young as one-month-old like teething rings come under the ambit of safety regulations specific for the age group. ●●

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a single-window operator for all  
product regulatory compliance including toys

**BIS Standards for toys are aligned with the existing international standards for toy safety formulated by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC).**

## The 7 toy standards address different aspects of toy safety, like:

- IS 9873 (Part 1):2019 deals with physical and mechanical safety aspects, i.e., tests are prescribed to see if toys present a choking hazard or have sharp points or edges that can injure a child, have clearances that can cause a child's finger to get crushed, etc.
- IS 9873 (Part 2):2017 deals with flammability aspects, i.e., tests to determine that certain toys shall not catch fire and cause burns to children.
- IS 9873 (Part 3):2020 addresses migration of certain elements such as lead, mercury, cadmium and chromium from toy materials and parts.
- IS 9873 (Part 4):2016 deals with the safety of swings, slides and similar activity toys for indoor and outdoor family domestic use.
- IS 9873 (Part 7):2017 prescribes requirements for finger paints, which are used in toy craft kits, etc., to be tested for various physical, chemical and electrical safety requirements to ensure that they are safe for children.
- IS 9873 (Part 9):2017 prescribes safe limits for certain toxic phthalate esters in toys.
- IS 15644:2006 addresses aspects related to the electrical safety of toys.

If a toy does not have the BIS quality mark, parents can lodge a complaint against the errant manufacturer and seller with the local office of BIS or email to [complaints@bis.gov.in](mailto:complaints@bis.gov.in). Complaints can also be filed on the website, [www.bis.gov.in](http://www.bis.gov.in) or the BIS Care app.



**P.S.** We would like to know about the number of complaints received and the action taken by the authorities. However, the information is not available on the public domains.

Even if a toy has the ISI mark but is not of the standard, parents can still lodge a complaint and BIS can recall the product, ask the manufacturer to replace the defective product or else refund the money. If there has been an injury, parents can demand compensation for the injury suffered by the child as well as the mental anguish they have endured.

**With the ban on manufacturing, storage and sale of non-BIS certified toys, any violation can lead to heavy fines, imprisonment and criminal liability. Violators are subject to a penalty of Rs 2 lakh or two years jail for the first offence and a fine of Rs 5 lakh, at least, for subsequent offences. However, data on number of violations or penalties is not currently available on the online platforms or public databases.**

### Role of BIS

The QCO 2020 established the BIS as the certifying and enforcement authority for all toys exported, imported and manufactured in India.

The toys are classified into two categories for BIS license:

- Non-electrical toys (ordinary toys that don't have any electrical function)
- Electrical toys (with at least one function dependent on electricity)

BIS grants licences to toy manufacturing units to use the ISI mark on toys based on:

- Assessment of their manufacturing and testing capability through a factory visit and
- Testing of toys in a BIS lab or BIS-recognised lab as per the Indian Standards

Hence, the toys undergo stringent tests for various physical, chemical and electrical safety requirements to ensure that they are safe for children before being licensed to enter the market. The tests check for:

- Choking hazard, sharp points (Sharp Point Test) and sharp edges (Sharp Edge Tests) which could puncture the skin and injure a child.

- Chemical tests to determine concentration of certain toxic elements - such as antimony, arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, lead, mercury and selenium - to ensure that they are within safe limits.
- Tests cover electrical aspects like power input, electric strength, moisture resistance, heating and abnormal operation.
- Other tests ascertain the mechanical strength, construction, screws and connections, protection of cords and wires, clearances and creepage distances, components, resistance to heat and fire, etc.

As a part of its market and factory surveillance activities, BIS conducts surveillance visits at the licensed manufacturing units. It also randomly collects toy samples from both factories and the market for testing at BIS labs and BIS-recognised labs.

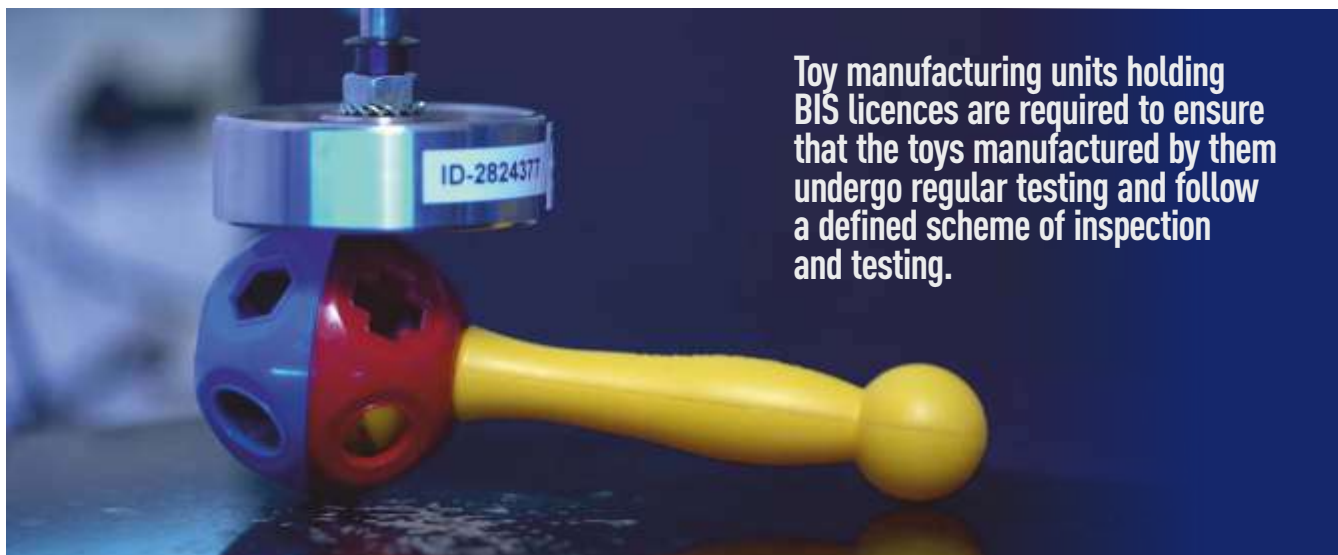
For instance, BIS had tested nearly 2500 samples of toys drawn from factories and markets until January 2023. A majority of the samples were found to be compliant with the standards. Only 17% failed to meet certain requirements related to constructional and labelling parameters.

Such manufacturers were advised to take suitable corrective actions.

**In 2023, the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) issued notices to e-commerce entities including Amazon, Flipkart and Snapdeal for alleged sale of toys without the BIS quality mark. It even tabulated the toys listed available on these platforms in violation of the compulsory BIS standards enforced by the government. But, there is no public information about any follow-up on the notice!**

Year	Search and Seizure Operations Conducted By BIS
2021-22	40
2022-23	74
2023-24	12

(Source: Reply in Lok Sabha by Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution)



**Toy manufacturing units holding BIS licences are required to ensure that the toys manufactured by them undergo regular testing and follow a defined scheme of inspection and testing.**

**BIS conducts capsule courses to train Indian toy manufacturers regarding quality control and testing of toys as per Indian Standards.**

The BIS teams even conduct enforcement raids across the country, including toy stores in malls and at airports, on a regular basis. They target establishments selling toys without the ISI mark and confiscate the non-certified toys, both Indian-made as well as imported.

**For Imports:** Under the consignment-based testing of imported toys, toy samples are randomly picked from each import consignment and sent to NABL-accredited labs for testing and custom clearance. Earlier, the imported consignment samples were tested at the manufacturer's choice of laboratory which is not permitted now.

In case any toy samples fail to meet the required standards, the consignment is sent back to the exporter or the shipment is destroyed at the importer's cost.

**BIS has granted 1454 licenses to domestic manufacturers and 36 licenses to foreign manufacturers for safety of toys as per IS 9873/IS 15644 as on January 2024.**



**SOM PARKASH**  
Union Minister of State for  
Commerce and Industry,  
Government of India

**Ground Reality**

There are about 8,366 registered Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) toy manufacturing companies in India. It is clear that only some of them have kept up with the change in regulation with the others still remaining outside the regulatory purview. Not to mention the unregistered components of the market! Hence, educating consumers to demand only ISI marked toys is what can bring about the required change in the quality of toys sold in the country!

**Conclusion**

The government has improved the level of compliance of toys with safety standards, thus paving the way for making safe toys available in India. Though a lot more needs to be done in terms of implementation and compliance, parents can now purchase toys bearing the BIS/ISI mark with the assurance that they are safe for their children. ▶

**The ISI mark is the gold standard for quality and safe toys in India!**

**The Toys (Quality Control) Order, which was long overdue, finally gives due recognition to toy safety in the country. Of course, given the nature of the toy industry in India and the illegal cheap imports from China, implementing the quality control order will not be an easy task for the Bureau of Indian Standards, the certifying and enforcing authority under the order.**



**PUSHPA GIRIMAJI**  
specialist in  
consumer law and  
consumer safety





## GUIDE TO BUYING **Safe Toys** FOR CHILDREN

Buying toys is no 'child's play'! Gone are the days when one could buy a toy just because it looked fun or attractive. Safety parameters have become a prime consideration for toy purchase decisions.



**Ensuring safety should be at the forefront of every parent's mind when buying a toy!**

**MANY TOYS CONTAIN** hidden hazards for children and have been related to far too many injuries! Irrespective of whether the government pulls up its socks or not, the onus is on the parents to ensure their children's safety when playing with toys.

And the responsibility begins with choosing and buying the right toys. This may seem overwhelming at first. However, the following pointers can ensure that you make the right decision time and every time!

**Think Big** – Especially when it comes to infants and small children, bigger is always better. A simple check - The toy should be bigger than your child's mouth to prevent choking. Avoid toys with strings, sharp ends, small detachable parts or stuffing that can be swallowed. Be careful of toys with balls, coins, marbles and batteries or even eyes, buttons or wheels that can be pulled loose.



**Rule of Thumb: If a toy passes through a toilet paper roll, it is generally not suitable for children under three years!**

**Go Natural** – Opt for toys made of wood, cloth or paper and avoid plastic as much as possible. Toys made of fabric – like stuffed toys – should be washable and flame resistant. All the parts should be sewn on tight and the seams and edges should be secure. Even wooden toys should not be painted with paints containing lead or treated with toxic chemicals.



**Low on Sound** – Electronic and musical toys and even rattles should not make excessive noise. Choose toys which have volume controls or adjustable sound levels.



**Quality Matters** - When buying plastic toys, ensure that they are well made, sturdy, good quality, durable and free of hazardous compounds. The plastic should not break easily and should be able to withstand chewing. Even art materials – like crayons, paints and markers – and craft sets should be labelled 'non-toxic'.

**While many plastic toys meet safety standards and regulations, you should ensure that the specific toy you are purchasing is safe for your child!**

**Most parents tend to select toys based on the colours, features, specifications and pricing without considering the safety measures.**

**Secure** – Battery cases on electronic toys should be properly secured with screws so that it does not become loose or a child cannot pry it open. Be careful of toys with magnets as they can come off and be swallowed by a child. Strong magnets can stick together inside the child's body, causing serious injury or even death.



**Do not buy a toy just because it is on sale!**

### Age-Appropriate Toys

Always check the age criteria of a toy and buy accordingly. Do not give a toy to a child under the recommended age range even if you consider them mature beyond their age as the toy will be graded for both usage and safety. The age grading indicates:



- Choking or safety risks
- Physical skills required to play with the toy
- If a child can understand how to play with the toy
- If the toy will match the child's needs and interests at their stage of development

**Choose toys that match both the age and skills of your child!**

### Check Safety Labels

All well-designed toys come with disclaimers on the box itself. Check the back of the package for instructions and warnings.



This will provide important information about how to use the toy and also indicate the safety of the toy. Check for markings indicating that the toy is free from lead, phthalates, BPA and other hazardous substances. And, always follow the instructions mentioned on the packaging to ensure the child's safety.

### Safety Certifications

Make it a point to look for safety certifications on all toys. **In India, check for the ISI/BIS mark issued by the national standards body which indicates compliance with safety norms.** Also check the country of origin as unsafe toys can come from any place without strict regulations.

**When you check the expiry date before buying a carton of milk, why don't you check the ISI mark before buying a toy?**



**File a complaint if you see any toy being sold without the ISI mark.**

**Research**

Why not research a toy before purchase just like other goods? Why not check reviews of other parents from reliable sources in terms of safety, quality, durability, suitability, etc.? Parents should also keep themselves updated about toy safety concerns associated with specific types/brands of toys.

**Used Toys**

Used or older toys cannot simply be used as is. You should inspect them carefully for any potential hazards – like small, loose and broken parts - and ensure that they are thoroughly cleaned before use. Keep in mind that toys manufactured earlier may not have been subject to safety checks and regulations and will not have age recommendations either. Be especially wary of the presence of lead in the paint and other hazardous chemicals. Toys with flaking paint should expressly be avoided.

**Repair or throw away any broken toys, be it new or used!**

**Buying Online**

It has become easy and cost-effective to shop online for anything including toys. However, there can be hidden dangers of buying from an online platform. A cheaper price tag may seem attractive, but it often comes with a higher risk of potentially hazardous toys.



**The easiest resource for offloading counterfeit goods is online platforms.** So, try to verify the credibility of online sellers and ensure the authenticity of the product. Keep in mind that everything sold online is

not always supplied by the said retailer. What's more, online platforms don't even have to check that toys from the sellers are safe!

**Impact on Environment**

While at it, do ensure that the toys bought for children do not pose an environmental hazard. Check the carbon footprint of a toy and try to reduce waste and promote sustainability. Bear in mind that plastic toys end up in landfills or oceans when discarded and add to the pollution.

**Reliable Products**

Golden rule – Always opt for safe and reliable products from established manufacturers and renowned brands. They may be expensive, but as it's always said, there's no price for safety!

Some of the leading established toy brands available in India are:

- Funskool
- Tripple Ess Toys
- ToyZone
- Fisher Price
- Buddyz
- Funcorp
- The Maison Company
- Zephyr Toymakers
- Peacock Toys
- Skoodle
- Natkhat
- Khanna Toys
- Mattel
- Brainsmith
- Clever Cubes
- Win Magic Toys
- Afterskool Toys
- Aditi Toys
- Ekoplay

**Keep in mind that the toy manufacturers can uphold safety standards and come up with safer alternatives if they consider children's health and life a priority. For instance, LEGO has products made from sugarcane 'plastic'. The company has committed to abandon regular plastic completely by 2030.**

**Summing Up**

Parents have to take the requisite precautions to ensure their children's safety. They should provide safe, engaging and eco-friendly toys that promote healthy development and play. ▶







## Accelerating India's Toy Sector - Transforming India into a Global Toy Hub

The government is providing all round support for creating a conducive manufacturing ecosystem for the toy industry. The focus is on promoting 'Made in India' toys, monitoring quality of toys, designing toys based on Indian values, culture and history, using toys as a learning resource and most importantly, restricting imports of substandard and unsafe toys.



India is being Vocal for Indian Toys by taking bold steps towards revitalising its toy sector!

**PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA** Modi expressed his desire to position India as a global toy manufacturing hub in his 'Mann ki Baat' address in August 2020. The clarion call for 'Vocal for Local' stressed on the need for increasing international footprint, achieving organic synergies across demographics, and leveraging availability of raw materials and artisan skillsets to achieve this goal.

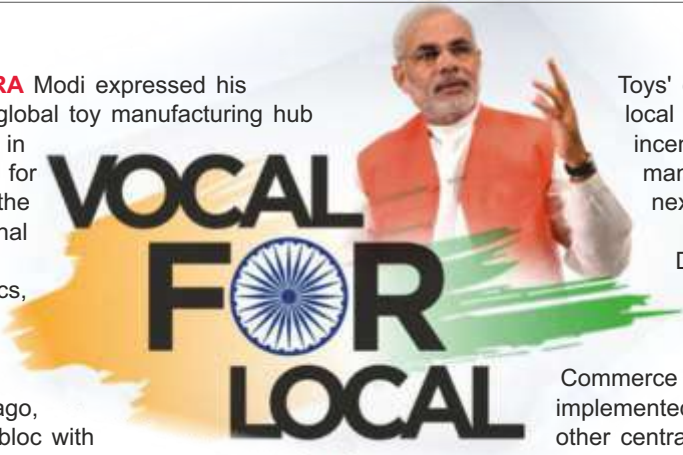
Indeed, until a few years ago, most toy stores were choc-a-bloc with 'Made in China' toys. 70% of the toys sold in India were imported from China. Moreover, with India importing around 85% of the toys sold in the domestic market, local manufacturers were almost nowhere in the picture.

There was a crucial need to free the toy sector from the clutches of cheap Chinese toys which had ensnared Indian markets riding on the cheaper prices and new designs. In 2009, the government had implemented a six-month ban on Chinese toys citing public safety reasons, but the imports resumed uninhibited post the ban.

According to a report by Quality Council of India in 2019, over 67% of imported Chinese toys failed to meet Indian quality standards! Since then, the government has undertaken a series of initiatives to fulfil the PM's vision, with commendable success at that.

### National Action Plan

The Government of India formulated a comprehensive 'National Action Plan for



Toys' (NAPT) in 2020 to boost local manufacturing and incentivise toy and handicraft manufacturers to make India the next global hub of toys.

It was commissioned by the Department for Promotion of Industries and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry and is implemented in collaboration with 14 other central ministries/departments, including education, textiles, railways, science and technology, and information and broadcasting.

**The National Action Plan for Toys and other initiatives has had a good impact, but we need to do much more. The sector holds huge exports and job potential.**



The NAPT comprises 21 action items across four broad themes to support the toy ecosystem. The themes are:

- Promoting Trade and Investment
- Designing and Manufacturing of Toys in India
- Promoting Indigenous Toys
- Toys as Learning Resource

The individual initiatives include creating indigenous toy production clusters, introducing schemes to encourage manufacturing and exports, enhancing research and development, ensuring quality standards, integrating toys with education, and organising toy fairs and exhibitions.

The plan articulates various measures to streamline the regulatory landscape, making it more conducive for manufacturers to thrive. It also outlines actions to bolster infrastructure so that

### RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

Former Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), GoI



The National Action Plan for Toys provides a structured roadmap for growth and sets the stage for a renaissance in Indian toy production. This strategic framework is not merely a policy document; it is a manifesto for change designed to breathe new life into the Indian toy manufacturing landscape. At the heart of the plan lies a dual focus: enhancing the quality of domestically produced toys while simultaneously fostering an environment that nurtures innovation and creativity in the toy sector.



In December 2020, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) made special provisions to grant licenses to micro scale units manufacturing toys without testing facility for one year and not to insist on establishing an in-house facility. On industry representation, the relaxation was extended up to a period of 3 years.

**The Toys (Quality Control) Order, 2020 aims to not only ensure safer toys for children but also keep non-essential imports under check, especially halting the flow of cheap substandard toys in the Indian market!**

become customised, self-sustained ecosystems catering to export markets. The government is also providing incentives at each step, from setting up a plant and facilitating key resources at subsidised rates to incentivising running costs with the single goal of attracting investments and building export capacity.

### Other Promotional Initiatives

Several other initiatives are being undertaken to promote indigenous toys and encourage innovation.

**The Indian Toy Fair 2021** – This first-of-its-kind fair was organised in February 2021 to bring together all stakeholders in the Indian toy industry on a virtual platform to foster long-term sustainable linkages and stimulate discourse for the sector's overall development. It was held on the digital platform of the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) with the Union Ministry of Textiles serving as the nodal body.

The event attracted more than 1000 exhibitors including toy clusters, manufacturers, exporters, craftsmen, fair trade organisations, self-help groups, doll museums, toy stores, design centres and even startups like Smartivity/Skillmatics. It served as a platform

the toy industry becomes well-equipped to compete on the global stage. A key element is the emphasis on sustainability and eco-friendliness, reflecting a commitment to responsible manufacturing practices.

To make the Indian toy industry self-reliant in the manufacturing of safe toys and limit cheaper imports, the government even went a step ahead and raised the customs duty on imported toys by 200% - from 20% to 60% - in February 2020. This was subsequently increased to 70% in March 2023.

### PLI Scheme

A Rs 3500 crore Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme was launched for the toy industry to enhance productivity and boost domestic manufacturing. It aims to attract investments in key sectors, ensure efficiency, bring economies of size and scale in the manufacturing sector and make Indian companies and manufacturers globally competitive. The financial incentives provided under the scheme help the manufacturers improve their competitiveness by investing in advanced technologies, research and development, design capabilities and quality improvement. This is developing a favourable ecosystem for the production of high-quality toys for both domestic and worldwide markets.

### Toy Cluster Programme

90% of the Indian toy industry is unorganised with thousands of micro, small and medium enterprises operating across the country. To streamline the sector, the government announced the 'Product Specific Industrial Cluster Development Programme' in 2020 to build toy clusters on dedicated SEZs and help them

Under the recent Free Trade Agreements (FTA) including India-UAE Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement Trade (ECTA), the partner countries are providing zero duty market access for exports of Indian toys.

**The 15th Toy Biz International B2B Expo 2024 was organised in New Delhi in July this year. "It is a big platform for Indian toy makers to showcase their products and capabilities to the global audience. It helps us attract new customers and partners, expand market reach for our toys and boost exports."**



**NARESH KUMAR GAUTAM**  
Senior Vice President, Toy Association of India  
and  
CEO of Noida-based Little Genius Toys Pvt Ltd.



for the industry and the government to collaborate for promoting toy manufacturing, sourcing, attracting investments and promoting exports. The participants even got an opportunity to meet with toy exhibitors from various toy clusters in India.



Later, the 'Swachh Toycathon' competition was also launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs as a convergence between the National Action Plan for Toys and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM 2.0) to explore solutions for the use of waste in the creation or manufacturing of toys.

**Toycathon** – The government intends to organise hackathons and grand challenges for toy designing and manufacturing to promote toy production among domestic players, particularly rural entrepreneurs.

The Common Service Centre (CSV), a special purpose vehicle (SPV) under the Ministry of Electronics and IT joined forces with the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to launch Toycathon in January 2021 as a first-ever hackathon to rediscover/redesign traditional Indian toys based on Indian civilisation, history, culture, mythology and ethos. It was aimed at conceptualising innovative toys based on the Indian value system that instils positive behaviour and values among youngsters.

This inter-ministerial initiative was organised by the Ministry of Education's Innovation Cell with support from the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of MSME, Ministry of Textiles and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to crowdsource solutions to problems faced by the toy industry. It invited students, teachers, start-ups, toy experts and professionals to innovate and submit feasibility assessments for local manufacturing of creative toys, games and concepts.

### Workshops

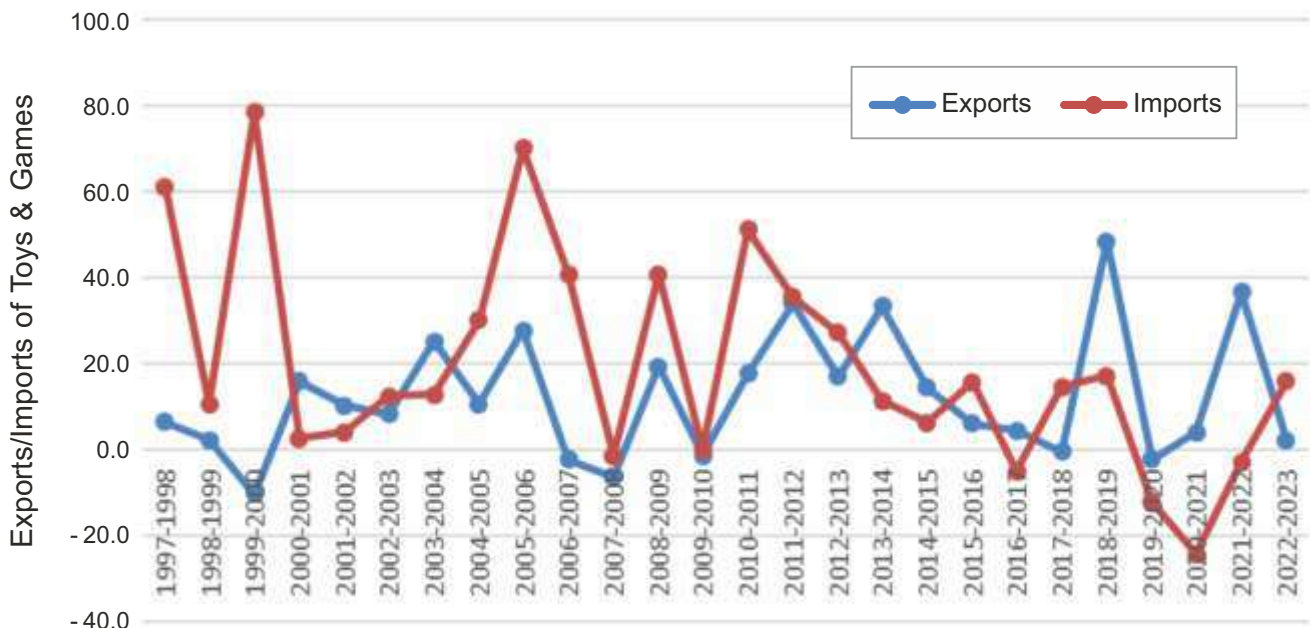
The DPIIT organised a workshop on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2024 to increase market access, develop new-age marketing skills and enhance the global competitiveness of the Indian toy industry. Flipkart and Walmart participated in the workshop, providing insights into their quality standards and requirements to help the toy manufacturers understand the nuances of online selling and synergise the industry with online marketplaces, thereby enabling opportunities for growth.

The aim was that the e-commerce platforms will offer toy manufacturers greater access to a much wider customer base, reduce the operational costs, generate valuable brand exposure and provide data on consumer buying habits which will empower them to develop products catering to the market demands and preferences. This will enhance India's position and capabilities in the global toy supply chain.

### The Numbers Say It All!

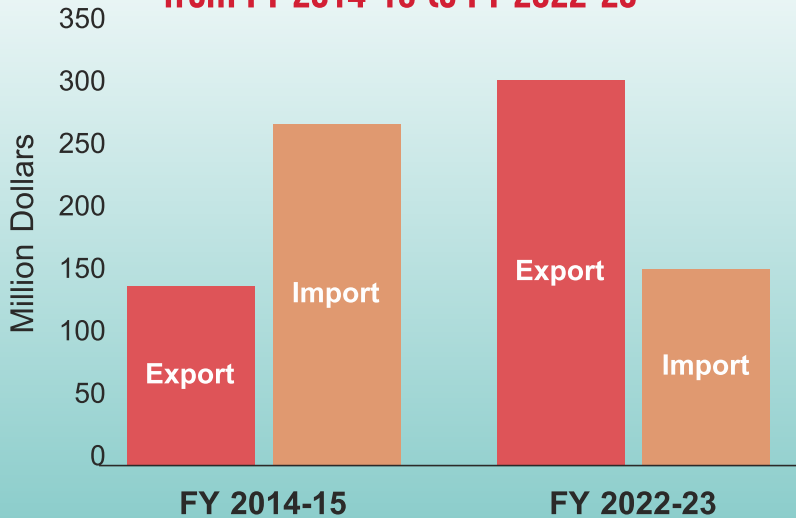
The Indian toy industry has witnessed remarkable growth riding on the ongoing government measures. Apart from

## Annual Growth Rate of Exports and Imports of Toys and Games in India (in percent)



(Source: Computation of the data obtained from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India)

### STATUS OF THE INDIAN TOY INDUSTRY from FY 2014-15 to FY 2022-23



checking the substandard imports from China, there has been a substantial decrease of 52% in the overall import of toys. Toy imports fell from US\$ 332.55 million in 2014-15 to US\$ 158.7 million in 2022-23. Meanwhile, toy exports surged by a whopping 239% from US\$ 96.17 million in 2014-15 to US\$ 325.72 million in 2022-23.

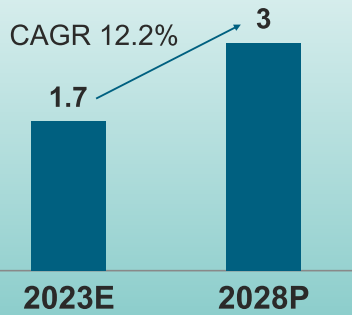
The government initiatives have played a crucial role in creating a favourable environment for toy manufacturing, which addresses supply-side challenges in the toy supply chain. India is no longer a net importer of toys and is anticipated to become the global hub for toys by 2025-2030.

Moreover, according to the Economic Survey 2023-24, "India's import bill for toys from China dropped from \$214 million in FY'13 to \$41.6 million in FY'24, leading to a decline in China's share in India's toy imports from 94 per cent in FY'13 to 64 per cent in FY'24, indicating India's competitiveness in the international toy market."

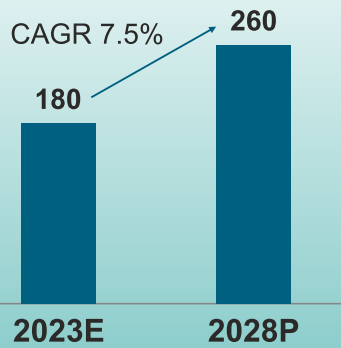
#### Conclusion

The manufacturing ecosystem has definitely improved and there has been an overall enhancement in the quality of toys available in the domestic market. We are witnessing a decided shift towards self-sufficiency and global competitiveness which promises to unlock the immense potential of the toy sector, paving the way for India to emerge as a frontrunner in the global toy industry! ▶

#### INDIAN TOY MARKET SIZE - \$Bn (Domestic + Exports)

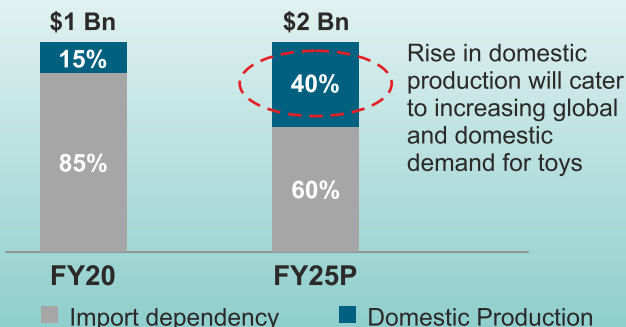


#### GLOBAL TOY MARKET SIZE - \$Bn

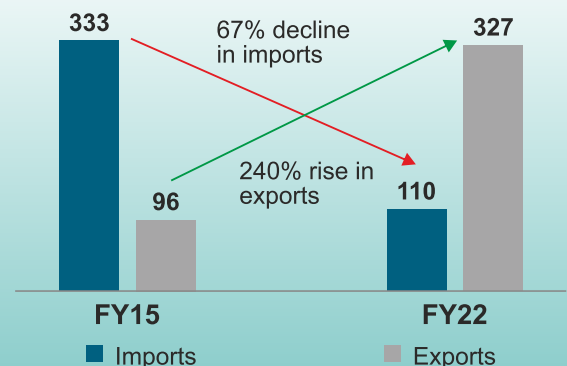


Source — IMARC group (E – Estimated; P = Projected)

#### India's Market Size (\$Bn) - Domestic Production and Import Dependency



#### India's Import and Export Market (\$ Mn)



Source — KPMG, Forbes



## Meer Arif

### Artisan and Authorised User of GI tag Channapatna Toys and Dolls

Mr Arif is a third-generation artisan reviving the 200 year old art of Channapatna wooden toys and dolls at Meeran Art and Crafts, Channapatna, Karnataka. He shares his insights on the current state of toy safety regulations in India and his vision for the future of toy safety in India. He also discusses how they align traditional craftsmanship with modern safety standards and their approach to ensuring eco-friendly and non-toxic products so that children have access to safe and sustainable toys.





**Q Do you think there is a growing demand for safer, eco-friendly traditional toys in India?**

As third-generation toy makers of the world-famous Channapatna wooden toys and dolls, we are observing a clear and rising demand for toys that are not only safe but also environmentally responsible. Parents today are more aware of the potential hazards posed by toxic materials and synthetic chemicals found in many modern toys. This awareness drives them to seek out alternatives that are both safe for their children and kind to the environment. Traditional toys meet these needs perfectly as they are typically made from natural, non-toxic materials and are crafted using sustainable methods.



of toy manufacturing. This not only ensures the safety of the toys themselves but also contributes to the overall well-being of the environment in which children grow up.

**Continuous Adaptation and Innovation:** While we are deeply rooted in tradition, we also remain open to innovation to ensure full compliance with modern safety standards. We continually update our processes and materials as new safety regulations emerge, ensuring that our traditional methods remain relevant and safe in today's market. This adaptability allows us to preserve our heritage while meeting the evolving needs of consumers and regulatory bodies.

**Q Do the traditional methods of toy-making align with modern safety standards?**

The time-honoured traditional methods of toy-making not only reflect our rich cultural heritage but also align remarkably well with modern safety standards.

**Use of Natural, Non-Toxic Materials:**

One of the core principles of traditional toy-making is the use of natural, non-toxic materials. Our toys are crafted from locally sourced, sustainable wood, which is inherently safe for children. Additionally, we use natural dyes and finishes, such as vegetable-based colours and non-toxic polishes like beeswax and almond oil.

These materials are free from harmful chemicals, ensuring that the toys are safe for children to handle, even for infants who may put toys in their mouths.

**Craftsmanship and Attention to Detail:** Traditional toy-making methods emphasise meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail. Each toy is handcrafted, allowing artisans to closely monitor the quality and safety of the product throughout the production process. This hands-on approach ensures that any potential safety issues, such as sharp edges or loose parts, are addressed before the toys reach the hands of children.

**Durability and Safety Testing:** While traditional toy-making techniques naturally produce durable and safe toys, we also recognise the importance of adhering to modern safety testing protocols. To ensure that our toys meet or exceed contemporary safety standards, we subject them to rigorous testing for durability, mechanical strength and chemical safety. This combination of traditional craftsmanship and modern safety testing guarantees that our toys are not only beautifully made but also safe and reliable.

**Sustainability and Environmental Responsibility:** The use of sustainable materials, coupled with eco-friendly production processes, reduces the environmental impact



**Q Which materials do you use and which ones do you avoid to ensure toy safety, and why?**

Ensuring toy safety is at the heart of our craft. Our commitment to producing safe, eco-friendly toys is reflected in the careful selection of materials we use, as well as those we consciously avoid.

**Materials We Use:**

We primarily use locally sourced wood, such as wrightia tinctoria (commonly known as ivory wood), which is known for its smooth texture and durability. This wood is a natural, renewable resource that is free from harmful chemicals, making it safe for children of all ages. The use of such wood also supports eco-friendly practices, aligning with our

commitment to environmental responsibility.

For colouring our toys, we use natural dyes and vegetable-based colours, derived from organic sources like turmeric, indigo and katha (catechu). These dyes are non-toxic, free from synthetic chemicals and safe for children, even if ingested accidentally. Natural dyes also help maintain the traditional aesthetics of Channapatna toys while ensuring their safety.

To polish and finish our toys, we use natural and non-toxic substances like beeswax and almond oil. These materials provide a smooth, glossy finish without the use of harmful chemicals. They are safe for children to handle, and their use preserves the natural look and feel of the wood.

In cases where brighter colours are needed, we use water-based paints. These paints are non-toxic, free of heavy metals like lead, and meet stringent safety standards. Water-based paints are safer for children, particularly those who may chew or suck on toys, as they do not pose the same health risks as oil-based or solvent-based paints.

**Materials We Avoid:**

We avoid using plastic and synthetic materials in our toys because they often contain harmful chemicals such as

BPA, phthalates and PVC, which can be hazardous to children's health. Additionally, plastic is not biodegradable and has a significant environmental impact, which goes against our commitment to sustainability.

Lead-based paints and other toxic chemicals are strictly avoided in our manufacturing process. Lead is highly toxic, especially to young children, and can cause severe health issues if ingested or inhaled. We adhere to international safety standards that prohibit the use of such substances in children's toys.

We steer clear of materials containing heavy metals (such as cadmium and mercury) and formaldehyde, which are commonly found in some industrial paints, finishes and adhesives. These substances are harmful to health and do not align with our safety and eco-friendly principles.

Synthetic polishes and varnishes often contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that can emit harmful fumes, posing a risk to children and the environment. We prefer natural finishes like beeswax and almond oil, which are safer and environmentally friendly.

**Q With the rise of electronic and imported toys, how do you ensure that your products compete well in the market?**

Competing in a market increasingly dominated by electronic and imported toys presents unique challenges for traditional toy makers. However, we leverage several key strategies to ensure that our products not only compete effectively but also stand out in this dynamic landscape.

**Emphasising Unique Craftsmanship and Heritage:** In a world saturated with mass-produced, often impersonal toys, our products offer authenticity and a story. Each toy is a unique, handcrafted piece of art, reflecting the skills and cultural heritage of our artisans.

**Focus on Eco-Friendliness and Safety:** We pride ourselves on using sustainable materials and keeping our toys free from harmful chemicals, making them a safer alternative to many imported toys, which often lack stringent safety standards.

**Educational and Developmental Benefits:** Our toys are designed to stimulate creativity, imagination and cognitive development. They are not just toys but educational tools that encourage open-ended play, problem-solving and motor skill development. As concerns grow about the negative impacts of excessive screen time, our toys offer a healthy, engaging alternative that supports child development.

**Customisation and Personalisation:** We offer the option to customise toys, adding a personal touch that electronic and mass-produced toys often lack. This could include custom colours, engravings or even bespoke designs based on customer requests.



**Strategic Pricing and Value Proposition:** While we maintain high standards of quality, we also strive to offer our products at competitive prices. We highlight the long-term value of our durable, timeless toys compared to the often short-lived appeal of electronic gadgets.

**Collaboration and Innovation:** We collaborate with designers and educators to continuously innovate our product offerings, ensuring they meet the evolving needs and preferences of modern parents and children. Innovation keeps our products fresh and appealing, allowing us to introduce new lines that blend traditional craftsmanship with contemporary design and functionality.

**Q What are your views on the toy safety regulations in India?**

We fully support the importance of toy safety regulations in India. These regulations are crucial to ensuring that the toys reaching the hands of children are safe, non-toxic and meet the highest standards of quality. They are comprehensive and align with international standards, which is essential for protecting consumers, especially young children. We believe that these regulations not only safeguard the well-being of children but also elevate the reputation of Indian toy manufacturers on the global stage. By enforcing strict safety standards, India ensures that the toys produced here are competitive in the international market, which is particularly important for traditional crafts like ours.

**Q Do you face any challenges in adhering to the toy safety regulations?**

While we are committed to adhering to the regulations, we do face certain challenges:

**Testing and Certification Costs:** The costs associated with rigorous testing and obtaining certifications can be quite high, particularly for small-scale artisans and traditional manufacturers. Access to affordable testing facilities and subsidies for certification costs would greatly help artisans in complying with these regulations without compromising on quality.

**Access to Modern Equipment:** Adhering to safety standards often requires the use of modern machinery and technology, which can be a challenge for traditional toy makers. We are skilled in traditional methods of toy making, but integrating modern safety requirements can be challenging without the right equipment and infrastructure. Support in upgrading our tools and machinery would allow us to meet these standards more effectively.

**Awareness and Training:** Ensuring compliance with safety regulations requires continuous learning and adaptation. Many artisans





may not be fully aware of the latest safety standards or may lack the training to implement them properly. Initiatives focused on educating and training the artisans about safety regulations would be highly beneficial.

**Packaging and Labelling:** Proper packaging and labelling that meets safety standards is another area where challenges arise. The costs and knowledge required for compliant packaging can be burdensome for traditional artisans. Support in this area, such as access to cost-effective packaging solutions, would be invaluable.

**Q How effective is the enforcement of toy safety regulations in India? What improvements are needed?**

The enforcement of toy safety regulations in India has seen significant progress. The government has made efforts to hold manufacturers accountable through regular inspections, mandatory certification and the implementation of stricter penalties for non-compliance. This has led to a gradual improvement in the quality and safety of toys in the market.

But there are still areas that require improvement to ensure the highest levels of safety for children's toys.

The enforcement of toy safety regulations can be inconsistent, with some regions and manufacturers receiving less scrutiny than others. This can lead to discrepancies in safety standards across the market. A more uniform enforcement mechanism should be implemented nationwide, ensuring that all manufacturers, regardless of size or location, are held to the same safety standards.

While large manufacturers often have the resources to comply with stringent safety regulations, small-scale and traditional manufacturers may struggle due to the high costs and complexity of compliance. The government should provide targeted support for these manufacturers,

such as subsidies for testing and certification, access to shared testing facilities, and simplified regulatory processes.

Many traditional toy makers may lack the knowledge or resources to fully understand and implement the required safety standards, leading to unintentional non-compliance. Regular training programmes and workshops should be organised to educate manufacturers, especially those in rural and traditional sectors, on the importance of toy safety and how to achieve it.

Routine monitoring and testing of toys in the market are essential to ensure ongoing compliance, but this process is sometimes underfunded or irregular. The government should invest in more frequent and thorough testing of toys, both at the manufacturing stage and in the retail environment, to ensure that safety standards are continuously met.

While manufacturers are becoming more aware of safety standards, consumers may not always be fully informed about the importance of choosing certified safe toys. Public awareness campaigns should be intensified to educate consumers on the importance of purchasing toys that meet safety standards, thereby creating market pressure for compliance.

**Q How do you see the toy safety landscape evolving in India, particularly with the introduction of new technologies and materials?**

The toy safety landscape in India is evolving rapidly, driven by advancements in technology, new materials and a growing awareness of the importance of child safety. As traditional toy manufacturers, we see several key trends and changes on the horizon:

**Integration of New Technologies:** With the introduction of smart toys and interactive features, the toy industry is



increasingly incorporating technologies like sensors, artificial intelligence and connectivity into products. This shift is pushing safety standards to adapt, particularly regarding data privacy, electromagnetic safety and the durability of electronic components. For traditional toy makers, this means exploring how we can blend technology with our handcrafted wooden toys without compromising safety. We might see innovations like incorporating simple, safe electronic elements into wooden toys, enhancing their appeal while ensuring they remain safe and eco-friendly.

#### Introduction of New

**Sustainable Materials:** The global push towards sustainability is leading to the development of new, eco-friendly materials for toy production, such as biodegradable plastics, plant-based fibres and recycled materials. These innovations present an opportunity to create toys that are not only safe but also environmentally responsible.

#### Regulatory Evolution with Stricter Safety Regulations:

As toys become more complex, we anticipate that safety regulations will continue to evolve, becoming stricter and more comprehensive. This will likely include more rigorous testing for electrical safety, chemical exposure and mechanical hazards, especially in toys that combine traditional and modern elements.

**Focus on Holistic Child Development:** There is a growing emphasis on toys that contribute to holistic child development, including cognitive, emotional and physical growth. This trend is likely to drive demand for toys that are not only safe but also educational, therapeutic and supportive of various developmental needs.

**Globalization and Export Considerations:** As Indian toy manufacturers increasingly cater to international markets, aligning with global safety standards will become even more critical. This will require staying informed about the safety regulations of different countries and ensuring that Indian toys meet these diverse requirements.

#### Q What role do consumers play in ensuring toy safety, and how can they be better informed?

Consumers play a crucial role in ensuring toy safety, and their awareness and choices significantly influence the market.

**Vigilant Purchasing Decisions:** Consumers drive demand for safe toys by choosing products that meet safety standards. By prioritising toys that are certified, eco-friendly and non-toxic, they encourage manufacturers to adhere to strict safety protocols. They should be more

**The time-honoured traditional methods of toy-making not only reflect our rich cultural heritage but also align remarkably well with modern safety standards.**



vigilant by regularly checking for safety certifications, reading labels and avoiding toys with unclear origins or inadequate safety information.

#### Awareness and

**Education:** Educated consumers are better equipped to identify safe toys and understand the importance of age-appropriate selections.

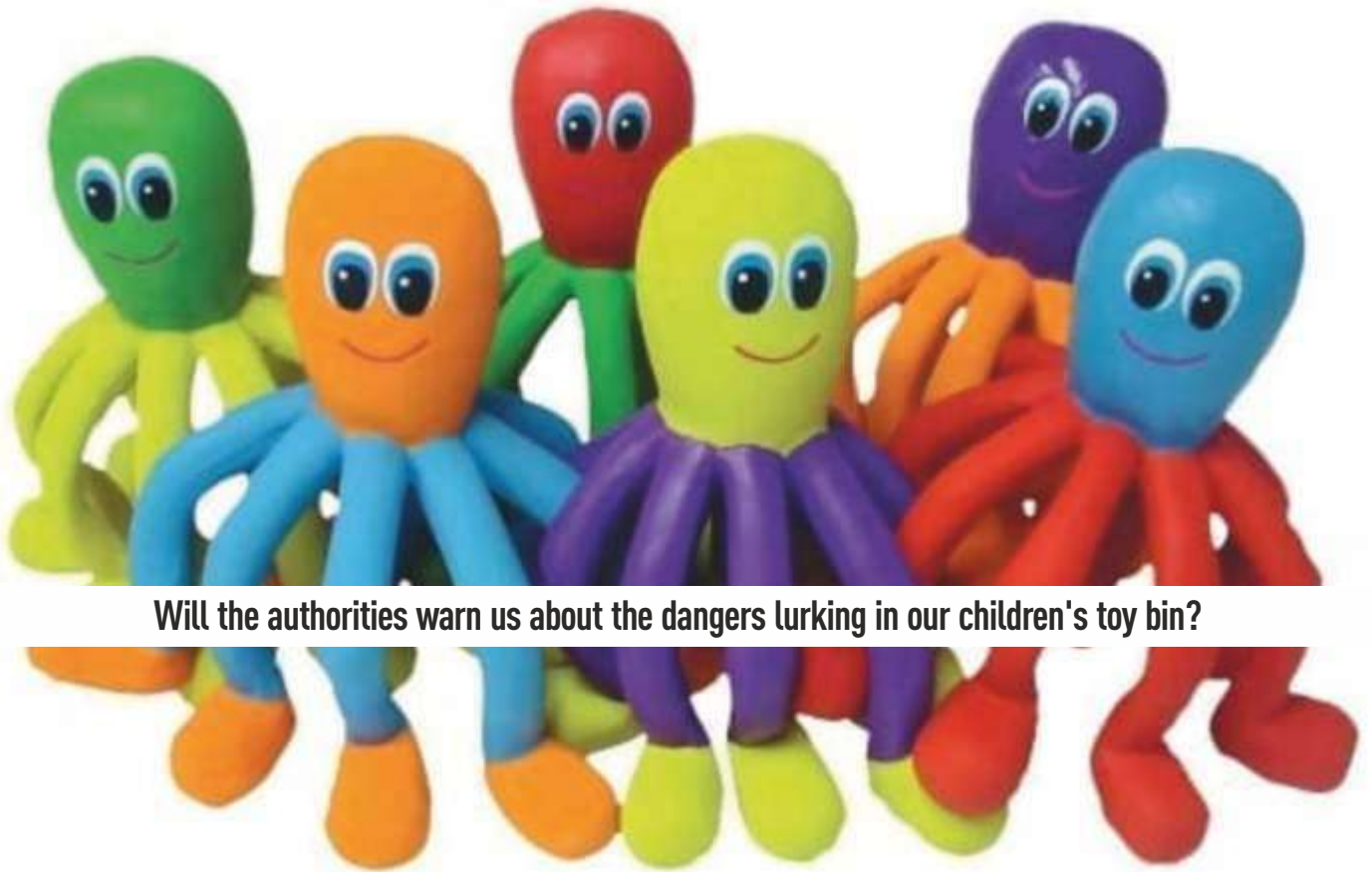
Their awareness of potential hazards, such as choking risks or toxic materials, is key to preventing accidents. Educational campaigns, both online and offline, can help consumers stay informed about the latest safety standards, product recalls and best practices for toy selection. Retailers and manufacturers can play a part by providing clear, accessible information at the point of sale.

**Feedback and Reporting:** Consumers can enhance toy safety by providing feedback on products and reporting unsafe toys to authorities. Their firsthand experiences with toys are valuable for identifying potential safety issues that may not have been evident during testing. Manufacturers and retailers should encourage consumers to report any safety concerns and make it easy to do so. Government agencies and consumer protection organisations can also provide platforms for such reporting and ensure that consumer voices are heard.

**Supporting Ethical Brands:** By supporting brands known for their commitment to safety and ethical manufacturing, consumers help set a market standard that prioritises child safety over cost-cutting measures. Transparency from manufacturers regarding their safety practices, sourcing of materials and adherence to regulations can empower consumers to make informed choices.

**Advocacy and Demand for Regulation:** Consumers can advocate for stronger safety regulations and enforcement by voicing their concerns to policymakers and participating in consumer advocacy groups. Their collective voice can push for higher safety standards and more rigorous testing protocols. Engaging with community groups, attending safety workshops, and staying informed about policy changes can further empower consumers. ▶

## Safety First: The Case for Toy Recalls



**Will the authorities warn us about the dangers lurking in our children's toy bin?**

Toys are meant to be fun and entertaining. Alas, some toys can be dangerous too. Unsafe toys that make their way into the market need to be recalled by the manufacturers or government to ensure child safety. Will we ever see an effective system of toy recalls in India?

**THE NUMBER ONE** priority of every parent is the safety of their beloved children. This extends to the toys that the children play with. Indeed, no parent will knowingly hand their child a dangerous toy, no matter how amusing or entertaining it may be!

With the rising awareness of low quality materials and toxic elements in toys, parents are now stressing on toy safety like never before. There is a growing shift towards choosing good quality and durable toys made from safe materials which will not put the children's health or life at risk. Now imagine the dismay if top toy brands also churn out playthings that are dangerous or defective?

**In case a toy with safety risks - such as choking hazards, toxic materials, sharp edges or other defects that could harm children - happens to make its way into the market, recalls remain the only recourse to ensure child safety.**

**“The ability to recall a product from the market is a necessary part of any safety legislation. If existing quality and safety checks fail to detect an issue prior to sale, a systematic method of notifying the public and removing potentially hazardous products from the market is needed.”**  
**- Toys And Safety Regulations, Published by Centre for Consumer Studies, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi**

Toys are usually recalled for:

- Small detachable parts that can be swallowed or choked on
- Sharp edges or defective parts that can break easily, leading to potential injury
- Toxic materials like lead, phthalates or other harmful chemicals



## European Union

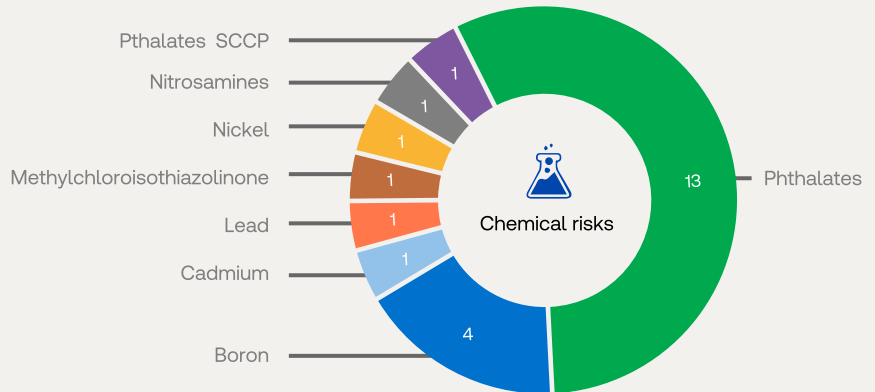
Safety Gate



### Total recalls and risk



### Types of risks & number of cases reported





- Presence of harmful plastics
- Batteries that may overheat, leak or explode or other fire hazards
- Non-compliance with safety standards or other requirements

Such toy recalls are common in countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia and the European Union. Federal agencies like the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), USA, Office for Product Safety and Standards, UK, Health Canada (Canada), Product Safety Australia (Australia) and Safety Gate, EU issue mandatory toy recalls when they receive complaints about an unsafe toy or investigate and find a pattern of serious risk from the toy.

Apart from government-ordered recalls, there are voluntary manufacturer-initiated requests for the return of defective toys. This is issued by the manufacturers when they receive complaints or information from the consumers about a defective product, or themselves discover a defect after selling the product.

**In the USA, the government/manufacturers/retailers issue press releases about the toy recall, get in touch with consumers who have bought the toy when possible, list the recall on the CPSC database and post notices about the recall in retail locations that sold the toys. The CPSC website hosts a searchable database of all recalled toys and other products.**

### The Indian Scenario

India has a regulatory framework for toy safety led by the mandatory BIS certification for toys. However, the enforcement is characterised by inconsistent vigilance and few recalls.

Yes, toy recalls do occur in India, although they are not as frequent, transparent or widely publicised as other countries. This makes it difficult for consumers to know about the specific toys that have been recalled. Neither do we have any system for collecting and collating toy-related accidents in the country.

What India needs is systems for strict market surveillance to enforce the toy standards, collection of data of toy-related accidents and effective recall of unsafe toys. Recalls will also serve well to force the hand of toymakers to ensure proper safety checks and more.

Meanwhile, the manufacturers should pull up their socks and take proactive measures to understand toy risks. They should run comprehensive tests on their products to identify potential safety issues or defects and address them before they become a problem for children and parents. This



**Back in 2007, Mattel Inc., the largest U.S. toy company, recalled over 20 million toys worldwide due to hazards from small, powerful magnets and lead in the paint. It was noted that all the recalled toys were made in China.**

**Understanding toys risks is crucial for businesses to take proactive measures. It can help ensure safety, maintain customer confidence, ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and minimise financial risks.**



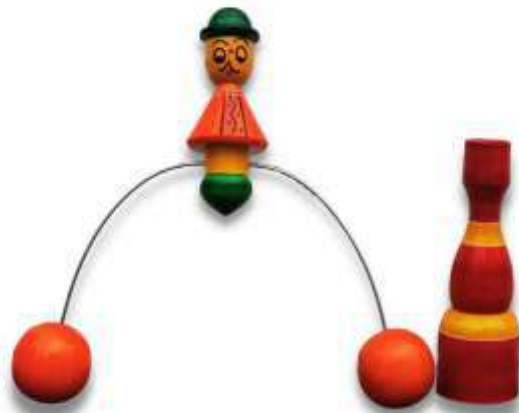
will ensure child safety, maintain customer confidence, ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and minimise financial risks to the business.

### Summing Up

The children of India need better recall processes and more public awareness about unsafe toys. Government agencies, consumer protection organisations and manufacturers should work together to improve the safety of toys and to ensure that any necessary recalls are handled effectively and communicated widely to protect the children! ▶



**Payal Agarwal**  
Editorial Consultant



# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TOYS

“Play is a huge part of children's lives. The toys they play with are simple yet potent tools for childhood development. But, do parents pause to consider the effects of a specific toy on their children? And what if they have too many already to the extent that it affects the quality of their playtime?”

– Payal Agarwal



**Toys are not just fun; they are essential tools for a child's growth and development. Don't let them overstimulate your child!**

**KIDS AND TOYS** just go together. From simple dolls, teddy bears and blocks to puzzles, board games and ride-ons to electronic and remote-controlled toys, they spell hours of unparalleled entertainment for the children. Playing with toys brings unbridled joy to the children even as it keeps them occupied while adults get their chores done.

However, it is not just about fun and play. The icing on the cake is that toys are instrumental in developing the brain in the early years. They play a crucial role of stimulating the imagination and learning while the children are engrossed in play.

Indeed, toys silently contribute to the development of cognitive, motor, psychosocial, emotional and linguistic skills. Some toys may spark creativity, curiosity, exploration and critical thinking. Some may improve their ability to plan, organise, reason, solve problems or express themselves. Others may serve to fuel children's memory, concentration, attention span, communication and even their coordination. Playing together will definitely nurture interpersonal skills such as sharing, taking turns, getting along with others and regulating emotions. The children slowly grow into happy, self-confident and secure adults.

**'Play' is essential for the development of the child and youth as it contributes to their cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being. Play improves the progress of early development from 33% to 67% by increasing adaptability with the surrounding environment and reducing social and emotional problems.**

*- American Academy of Paediatrics*

### The Case for Moderation

Parents love to buy toys and games for their children. The undiluted joy on their faces when they are given a new toy is simply unparalleled.

There is a dizzying variety of toys in the market and the price range can also be enormous. This brings us to the question of what actually drives the toy purchase decisions of parents.

Do you simply pick up whatever looks attractive, interesting or happens to catch your/your child's fancy? Can toy buying be so random and driven by whims? Why don't we pause and gauge the effects on the children, the age-appropriateness and most importantly, whether they actually need the toy? And do we ever consider the consequences of having too many toys on the children?

It cannot be denied that today's kids are inundated with more toys than they or their playroom can handle! They are growing up in a culture of overabundance with toys everywhere – from the roads, stores and malls to online websites. And it's not just parents alone,

**A study on 'The Influence of the Number of Toys in the Environment on Toddler's Play' conducted by the University of Toledo, USA compared 4- and 16-toy environments. The results showed that the duration, manner and complexity of play with each item was twice as long in the 4-toy environment than the 16-toy one. The researchers hypothesised that "fewer toys may allow for deeper, sophisticated play, because of the opportunity to become creative with each object in the environment." They concluded that parents should pack away most of the toys and just rotate a small number regularly, to encourage children to become more creative and improve their attention spans.**

grandparents, aunts, uncles galore just cannot resist gifting toys to the little children.

The intentions are good, but little do we realise that too many toys are not only unnecessary, but can actually turn harmful in more ways than one. The downside here is that a flood of toys in the play environment can have a negative effect on the children's development. The chaos resulting from excessive toys has been known to disrupt their attention and even limit the imagination. They may feel overwhelmed by too many choices and be unable to focus or play creatively.

Children with access to disproportionately high number of toys fail to appreciate the value of their possessions, tend to take the luxuries for granted and are quick to discard toys – they will simply stop playing with most of them! Such children can actually end up feeling 'bored' in a room full of toys! Alas, the 'worried' parents rush to buy

### Following is a psychiatrist-recommended checklist for buying toys

- Is this toy safe for my child's age?
- Does it stimulate my child's imagination?
- Will my child be interested long enough to play with the toy over and over again?
- Will it help my child to learn about different cultures and lands, nature or about how things work?
- Is the toy free of race and gender stereotypes?
- Does it encourage cooperation?
- Does it nurture non-violent conflict resolution skills?
- Is it appropriate for my value system?
- Is it worth the price?
- Is the packaging truthful and not excessive?



The more your kids have and the more that you buy them, the less engaged they are, the less they take care of those toys, and the more they suffer decision fatigue.



**DENAYE BARAHONA**  
Therapist

more toys and keep indulging the little ones with the latest trendy toy to hit the market!

The clutter of surplus toys can actually lead to anxiety and frustration in the children. And how can we expect them to feel responsible for their toys when they have too many of them?

In contrast, fewer toys make the play environment calmer and less stressful, reduce overstimulation in children and contribute to better behavioural regulation! The principle of less is more works well here as the children learn to be grateful for what they have, tend to take better care of their possessions and become resourceful as well.

Come to think of it, children always enjoy more when playing with the cardboard box or bubble wrap of the toy than the toy itself, don't they?

### Buying the Right Toys!

What parents need is to be thoughtful and intentional when buying toys. Consider all aspects of the toys and try to get a good mix of different types of toys while bordering on the right side of moderation.

There are some features that make certain toys better than others. The toy should be suitably engaging by aligning with the child's interest, age and development level. If you are not sure if a toy is suitable, seek advice from the specialists in the toy



Many parents view toys as casual purchases, but they should be seen as investments in a child's development!

**- VIRANG SHAH**  
Co-Founder of *Toycra*



**BINA JAIN**  
Chairman, Healthy You Foundation

Toys are an important fun and learning part of children's development. Their developing mind ignites with ideas when they spend time with toys. But, toys can come with risks too. Like many plastic toys are dangerous for children, especially the ones made of recycled plastic, which being affordable, attract the low income group. Toys impact a lot on the behaviour of children and can mould their thinking in the growing up years. Loud toys that make a shrill noise, such as toy guns, may damage child's hearing and also affect their behaviour. Toy making companies and buyers should take care of the impact of toys on children and their safety.

stores (if available) or consult child development websites.

**A Note of Caution:** Buy guns, weapons and other war toys or violent games with care. While they can be enjoyable for the children, too many or too much time playing with them can incite aggression and violence in the impressionable



minds. This is because the children may be unable to separate reality from fiction and learn to consider hurting others and other socially malevolent behaviour as fun and cool.

Similarly, 'boy' and 'girl' toys can reinforce sexual stereotypes like male domination, inferior roles for women, undue focus on beauty/appearance, etc. Some many negatively represent certain ethnic groups and promote racial biases too.



**Pyush Misra**  
Trustee,  
Consumer Online Foundation

## Rediscovering the Magic of Traditional Toys

“Our age-old toys have a timeless appeal. With the simple charm of our wooden playsets and cloth dolls lingering on the periphery, can we afford to let them die out? Most people don't realise that these traditional 'treasures' are actually quite relevant in the modern world. Not only do they make for safe playthings, but can nurture the imagination and tie in with child development!”

– *Pyush Misra*

Let's add a touch of Indian heritage to our children's playtime by going back to our roots of traditional eco-friendly toys and board games! Relive your childhood memories even as you pass on the vibrant traditions to the next generation!





**WHENEVER A GROUP** of 40-50-year olds hark back to the 'good old days', the discussion is bound to veer towards the traditional toys and games of their childhood. The misty-eyed reminiscing revolves around fun tales of playing for hours with a beloved *lattu* (spinning top), *gulel* (catapult), *kanche* (marbles), *gilli danda*, clay playsets, string puppets, nested dolls and other wooden toys.

The bright and colourful handmade toys of yore – from puzzles and stacking toys to bobbing head dolls and pull along toys - opened the doors to an endless world of happiness. Intricately hand carved and hand chiselled, they were not only playful and fun but also sturdy and safe for the children.

Every region in India has its own unique style of toys that is influenced by local culture and materials. For instance, the lacquer-finish wooden Channapatna toys from Karnataka, Thanjavur dolls of Tamil Nadu, wooden

toys from Varanasi, terracotta toys from West Bengal and *paper machie* toys from Kashmir.

### Benefits of Traditional Toys

The traditional toys are known for both their simplicity and creativity! The charming handcrafted creations promote safe, imaginative and developmentally appropriate play. These toys are not only steeped in our vibrant culture but also help develop sensory skills, balance, coordination, concentration, logical thinking and imaginative learning, thus serving as learning aids for the overall development of the children. They also promote physical development through play.

The traditional toys adhere to and even exceed current safety standards, thus demonstrating that it is possible to create beautiful, durable and safe toys without resorting to harmful materials or processes.

The traditional methods of toy making are inherently sustainable, relying on natural materials and processes – like natural wood and non-toxic, vegetable-based dyes - that have minimal environmental impact. Hence, the toy production is both safe for children and sustainable for the planet.

Alas, today these much-loved toys have taken a backseat to the modern visual games and other electronic toys.

### Breathing New Life into India's Toy-Making Legacy

The art of handmade traditional toys is an integral part of Indian culture that has been passed down from generation to generation. The rich ethos of the artistic



The traditional craft of Channapatna toys is protected as a geographical indication (GI) under the World Trade Organization, administered by the Government of Karnataka. The toys are so popular that Channapatna is known as the Gombegala Ooru (Toy Town) of Karnataka!

## INDIGENOUS TOYS OF INDIA

\*Information from NE region is awaited



The 2020 Quality Control Order for Toys QCO was amended to exempt goods and articles manufactured and sold by artisans registered with Development Commissioner, Ministry of Textiles and also by proprietors registered as Geographical Indication by the Office of Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks, Gol.



skills has to be preserved and promoted to keep it from dying away. The local craftsmen need support to keep the vibrant traditions alive amidst the growing globalisation and demand for factory-produced modern toys.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in traditional eco-friendly toys. Some toy manufacturers are reviving the traditional toy crafts to suit modern tastes by combining traditional craftsmanship with modern designs and educational elements.

For instance, Channapatna Toys ([www.channapatnatoy.com](http://www.channapatnatoy.com)) and Desi Toys ([www.desitoys.in/](http://www.desitoys.in/)) are leading the way in blending tradition and technology while emphasising on the educational and sustainability elements of traditional toys. They combine the best of both worlds to provide a holistic learning experience – like teaching science through traditional toys and interactive elements of Indian folk tales. This way they become engaging, captivating and inspiring – for both children and adults.

The government has been promoting traditional Indian toys as a means to further the spirit of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' and also spotlighting the traditional arts of toy-making through 'Vocal for Local' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives.

Under the Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI), the Ministry of Micro,

Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME), Gol is supporting 19 toy clusters to revive and promote traditional toy-making crafts, improve the livelihoods of artisans and promote the heritage and cultural value of Indian toys.

It extends financial assistance for project activities such as infrastructure development, machinery and equipment procurement to:

- Enhance the competitiveness of traditional toy industries
- Conserve and preserve traditional toy-making crafts and skills
- Upgrade the technology and skills of artisans
- Promote market access and marketing of traditional toys

### Last Word

Traditional toys play a pivotal role in shaping the future of toy safety in India. Our age-old techniques have always emphasised quality, craftsmanship and safety. As the demand for safe and eco-friendly toys increases, traditional toy manufacturers are well-positioned to lead by example. Their abiding commitment to safety can inspire other toy manufacturers to adopt similar practices, thereby raising the overall standard of toy safety in India! ▶

## Heralding the Era of **Smart Toys** for Children

Move aside static blocks, teddy bears, board games et al, the world is welcoming smart toys which can engage and interact with the children! The experience is more personalised and enjoyable, but the inherent risks are lurking close by. We delve into the primary concerns and challenges posed by AI in toys.



**AI-powered toys are transforming childhood by bringing a new dimension to play!**



**TECHNOLOGY IS UBIQUITOUS –**

AI has permeated every aspect of our life and then some more. But who would have imagined that it would invade children's traditional playtime in the form of 'smart toys'?

Indeed, smart toys are slowly making their way into the market incorporating new technologies like cameras, microphones and computer chips. These technologically advanced toys simulate human-like intelligence to offer a more engaging, intuitive and personalised experience. Like: smart dolls that can speak, sing, dance or play with the children, robotic toys that can be built and programmed by children, smart speakers that children can interact with, etc.

Many of them are wi-fi and Bluetooth enabled to connect to the internet as well as smartphones, tablets, gaming consoles and other gadgets. They can learn from the children and alter their actions accordingly to adjust to their abilities, behaviour, preferences, inputs, development needs and even the environment. This resonates with the children as they can interact with the toy, something that was inconceivable earlier....

The enhanced play value and educational features of smart toys find many takers, especially as they become a dynamic companion, playmate and 'friend' for the children! An added attraction for the parents is that smart toys are equipped with the ability to customise learning lessons and foster skills beyond traditional play.

In fact, in the course of the play itself, the children can learn social skills, perception, reasoning, emotional well-being and other valuable life skills. What's more, they can even help nurture language skills,



**Hackers can gain access to a lot of information about a child, including their physical location when playing with the toy. And while adult information can also be breached by hackers, adults can react to these breaches in a much more rational way than a child.**

**- SUBODHA KUMAR,**

**Paul R. Anderson Distinguished Chair Professor of Statistics, Operations and Data Science**

**A smart toy will not only record videos of the children but also their environment. It is privy to everything that is being said and done in the home 24/7!**

critical thinking and cognitive development.

### **More to It Than Meets the Eye!**

Smart toys do offer a much better and more enjoyable experience for the children. However, there is much more going on behind the scenes. Think about it – the AI sensors in the toys use facial recognition to recognise the child. They are constantly collecting information about the children, which includes images, videos, patterns of use and other data. The algorithms process the information in real time to interpret it and make predictions about and suggestions for their users.

This raises profound questions of the safety of the data that the toys collect and store. Concerns about digital privacy and the inherent risks enter the picture. The toys lack proper security features to protect the data and are vulnerable to hacking. This gives rise to worries about data breaches and potential misuse of sensitive information about the child and family.

Then again, subtle biases in the algorithms can subject the children to potential race, religion, colour or gender discrimination. And what if they are exposed to



**There is a noticeable increase in the awareness and demand for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) toys in recent years. These toys provide a hands-on and engaging way for children to explore these subjects, fostering curiosity, creativity and problem-solving skills necessary for the 21st century workforce.**

**Similarly, AI-enhanced toys are crucial in preparing children for a future where technology is all-pervasive. For instance, toys that teach coding skills, basic programming and other complex concepts through interactive play. By blending technology with traditional play, AI toys open up new possibilities in learning even as they provide a more holistic developmental experience.**





**DAVID CAIN**  
Patent Attorney and Tech Expert

The balance between innovation in toy design and the need for privacy and security is a delicate one. On one hand, AI offers unparalleled opportunities for personalised and engaging play experiences. On the other, it opens up vulnerabilities that must be addressed to protect our children. The goal is to create a world where children can benefit from AI-driven play in a way that is not only enriching and enjoyable but also safe and secure.



**KATHY HIRSH-PASEK**  
Stanley and Deborah Lefkowitz  
Faculty Fellow of Psychology

There are a few principles I look for in a good toy. My main one is that playing with the toy should be 90% kid, 10% toy, meaning that the child is the one driving the fun and not the other way around. The second principle is that the toy should be social. While it's okay for kids to play with toys on their own, the best toys are those that can be played with others.

inappropriate or unsuitable content? There are growing concerns about children being unable to differentiate between reality and fantasy and even becoming overly dependent on the toys to the extent of isolating from the real world.

**The Way Forward**

Responsible governance for smart toys is the need of the hour. However, privacy regulations in India are yet to

**Putting children and youth FIRST checklist**

- Fair
- Inclusive
- Responsible
- Safe
- Transparent

touch on the realm of children's privacy. Even toy makers are not focusing on safeguarding security and privacy in smart toys. Hardly a few have adequate cybersecurity measures in place.

The Smart Toy Awards – developed by the World Economic Forum's Generation AI project which examines the impact of AI technology on children and youth - have established governance guidelines for assessing smart toys, which companies can employ to responsibly design, develop and deploy AI for children in the future. The FIRST

Principles checklist comprises Fair, Inclusive, Responsible, Safe and Transparent AI technologies. Moreover, the Smart Toy Awards celebrate ethically and responsibly designed toys and spread awareness among parents, guardians, educators, children and youth about smart toys and the importance of smart toy governance.

It goes without saying that parents have to be vigilant and choose the right toys with due caution. Alas, this is a tall order given that we adults ourselves are still scrambling to understand how to deal with the monstrous ramifications of technology in our own lives.



# Guide for parents and guardians -- What to consider

## Why it matters

## Things you can do



**Age - What age is it designed for?**

### Know which developmental stage is appropriate for your child.

Toys and devices are designed for certain ages. If users are too young, the technology and content might be difficult for them to use and could expose them to risk. If they are too old, the technology and content might not be very interesting or fun.

Visit the product website. Learn more from other sources like [Common Sense Media](#) on choosing the right products for different ages and developmental stages.



**Accessibility - Can users with different abilities and backgrounds use it?**

### The technology should work for all equally despite these differences.

Users of all abilities should be able to use technology. Some have physical or mental disabilities that require accommodations and modification. Users look different and speak different languages, which could cause problems if the AI is not well designed.

Visit the product website. Read user reviews.



**Sensors - Does it watch or listen to users with cameras and microphones?**

### Find out how the technology protects privacy, such as allowing users to turn off cameras or microphones and secure information with passwords and preferences regarding data collected by these devices.

AI products use input from cameras, microphones and sensors to watch, recognize and learn from users. AI products might use facial recognition to identify your child's face or voice recognition to detect their voice. These devices and products might also store or send your information to another location or be hacked by criminals.

Visit the product website. Call the company's customer service.



**Networks - Can users play with and talk with other people when using it?**

### Children should never share personal information or engage with people they don't know, and should beware of people acting with malicious intent.

Some AI products enable users to play games and talk with other people online. Playing online with others can be fun, but you should be sure that your children proceed with caution at all times.

Read about online etiquette and online safety. Talk with your children and use resources like Google's [Safety Center for families](#) and [Be Internet Awesome](#), and other resources.



**AI use - How does it use AI to interact with users?**

### Know the strengths and limits of AI decisions and suggestions, and remember that AI decisions can be wrong.

AI products might make predictions based on the data collected and your child's prior activity. This might help your child make decisions, but it also might label or misread users.

Read user reviews. Learn more about AI and how facial and voice recognition work.



**Data use - Does it collect personal information? Why? How?**

### Change settings and preferences to protect your child's data. Know what kind of information AI products collect, where and how long they keep it, and who has access to it.

AI products can collect data from you and your children and store it. Your family's and child's information is very important and should be protected.

Visit the product website and call the company's customer service to learn what kind of information AI products collect, where and how long they keep it, and who has access to it.

Source: World Economic Forum

*The World Economic Forum's Artificial Intelligence for Children toolkit has a guide to educate parents and guardians to help them understand considerations when buying AI-powered toys, devices or apps, such as video games, smart toys, smart speakers, education technology products and more.*

We need the right guidance to keep our children from being exposed to such heinous risks. These little mortals cannot even fathom the impact of AI on their lives, let alone understand digital rights and other issues.

**Final Word**

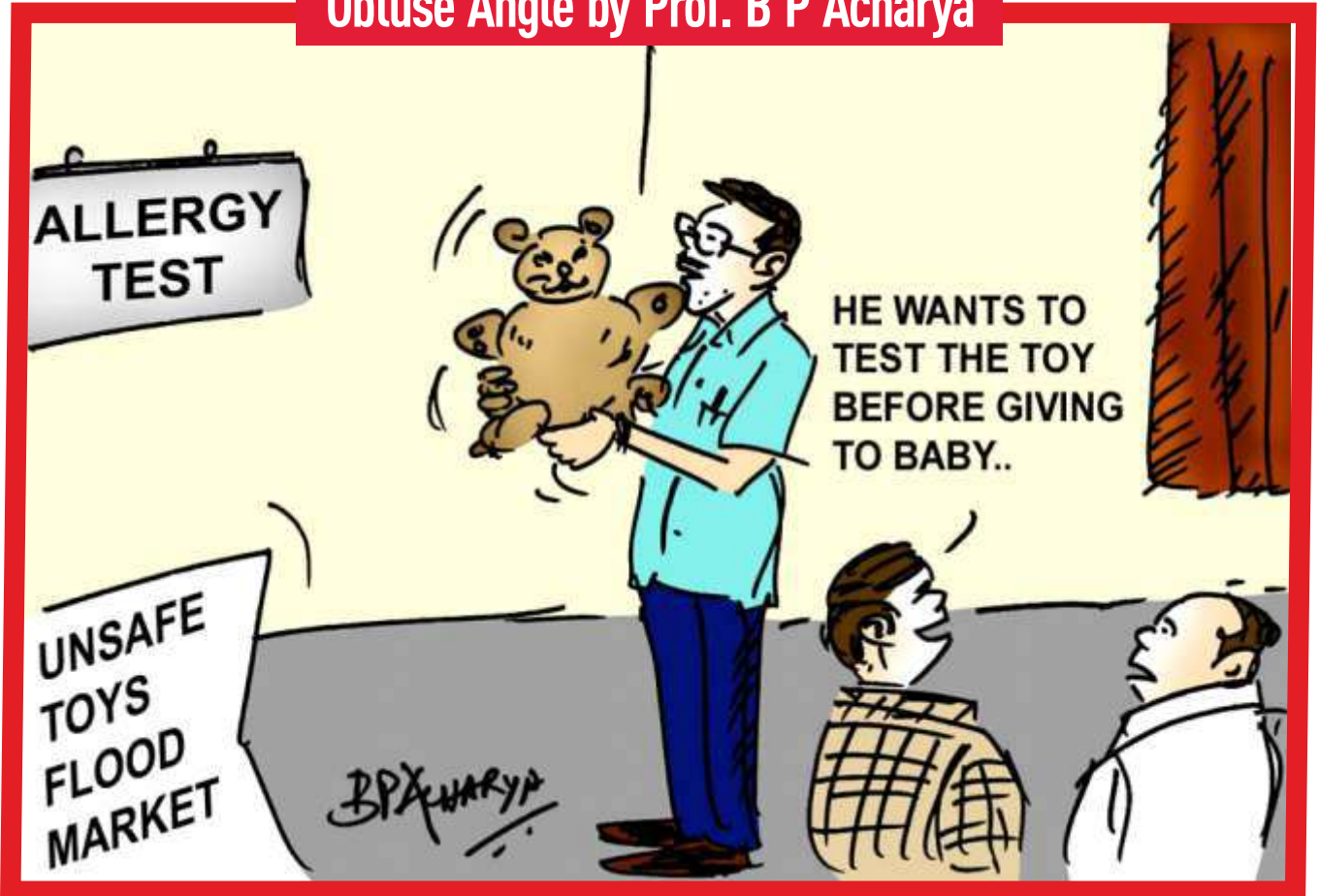
AI presents enormous promise for the future of play. The onus is on manufacturers, regulators and parents alike to ensure a secure environment for children to play and learn! ▶

**TIPS FOR SMART TOYS**


- Check if the toy comes with a camera or microphone
- Read reviews available online about possible privacy concerns
- Read the toy's manual to identify what the toy can collect and store
- Check what other information the toy will collect - for example, gender and location
- Check the label if the toy has a child-specific privacy policy — something every product designed for children should have
- Check if information the toy collected will be sent to third parties and if there is a way to turn that off
- Check if you can request a record of your child's data to see what's on file.

-- France Bélanger and Donna Wertalik, information security experts and professors at the Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech, USA

**Obtuse Angle by Prof. B P Acharya**







## An In-Depth Look at Toy Safety Regulations Across the World

India boasts a rich history in toymaking. We have come a long way from the days of yore and toy safety policies are in place today like many other parts of the world. However, we need to do much more to ensure that children are safe while playing with toys, like in the developed countries.



**INDIA HAS A** rich legacy of toymaking! The earliest evidence of toys in India dates all the way back to the Indus Valley Civilisation which flourished around 5000 years ago. Archaeological excavations in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro have unearthed a variety of ancient toys, like whistles shaped like parrots, toy monkeys with long hands, miniature ox carts, dancing dolls, etc. Made from natural materials such as bamboo, hay, clay, soil and cloth, the toys ranged from simple ones to mechanical and even sophisticated playthings crafted by expert artisans. These toys were not just for play but also served educational purposes, helping the children develop motor skills and understanding of their environment.

We have come far over the centuries with progressions in technology and mechanisms leading to fresh and inventive toys for children. Even today, traditional toy manufacturing hubs in India, such as Channapatna, Chitrakoot and Kondapalli, have artisans creating toys that not only connect young minds of our nation with our history but also augment their cognitive skills.

The desire to play remains as unabated today as ever before. Today, the toy sector is expanding rapidly on the shoulders of a growing young population, rising

Many games popularly played across the world have origins in ancient India, *Chaturanga* is the predecessor of modern day chess and *Pachisi* is the predecessor of modern day Ludo.

government to ban Chinese toys for some time. Studies done almost a decade later revealed no better results and finally led to the development of mandatory toy safety standards and certification requirements in India.

### The International Arena

Many countries have passed safety standards limiting the types of toys that can be sold. Following is an overview of some key safety standards and regulations for toys around the world:

#### United States of America:

- Toys must meet safety standards set by the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA). The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is responsible for enforcing federal standards for all children's products.
- The requirements cover aspects like sharp points or edges, parts small enough for a child to swallow, lead content, choking hazards, flammability and mechanical/electrical safety.
- The CPSC also oversees recalls of unsafe toys. People can check <https://www.cpsc.gov/> for the latest information about toy recalls.
- Consumers can call the hotline at (800) 638-CPSC to report a toy they think is unsafe.

India has more than 300 million children aged 0 to 14, making it the largest child population globally, accounting for 20% of the total population. By 2036, India is expected to have 17% of the world's child population!

– United Nations statistics

The Child Safety Protection Act recently increased the size of small balls permitted in toys because of the choking hazards associated with round objects.

disposable incomes of consumers and a slew of innovations for the junior population base. The growing purchasing power has translated into a surging demand for advanced digital and educational toys.

There is also an increased awareness of safety concerns related to various toy products. However, around 90% of the toy industry is still unorganised and fragmented in India. Safety standards have been historically poor and found wanting on various levels. In fact, a study in 2010 by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a public interest research organisation, rung the alarm bells when it revealed high levels of phthalates in all samples of the toys it tested. Over 45% of the samples exceeded the internationally accepted safe limit for phthalates. This drove the

According to IMARC, the Indian toy market size was valued at **US\$ 1.7 billion** in 2023 and is expected to scale **US\$ 4.4 billion** by 2032, growing at a CAGR of 10.6% during 2024-32. Other sources peg that the toy exports will increase by **300%** in the next four years itself.

#### European Union:

- The European Commission for Standardisation is responsible for safety standards in toys manufactured or sold in the EU.
- Toys must comply with the EU Toy Safety Directive which sets out the toy safety requirements for toys sold in the EU.
- There are specific requirements for physical, mechanical, electrical and chemical safety, flammability, labelling and packaging with strict limits on substances like lead, cadmium and phthalates.
- The CE mark indicates a toy meets EU safety standards.

The EU is focusing on banning harmful chemicals in imported toys, especially those that disrupt growth hormones, under the

**The Germany-developed GS mark has become an internationally accepted safety standard and is highly endorsed by manufacturers and consumers.**

recently proposed Toy Safety Regulation which aims to address the loopholes in the existing legislation. It will also put children's mental health and cognitive development related to the use of digitally connected toys at the core of the legislation, and limit maximum noise levels of toys to avoid damaging children's hearing. The overarching aim is to protect not only children under 14, but also the adults that play with them!



**Rapporteur  
MARION WALSMANN  
(EPP, Germany)**

**Children deserve the safest toys possible. With the revised safety rules, we are giving them just that. We are protecting them against invisible dangers such as harmful chemicals and ensuring that warnings such as age restrictions are clearly visible online. The newly introduced digital product passport will ensure that consumers have access to information they need.**

- It covers chemical, physical and mechanical safety as well as labelling requirements.
- There are specific standards for toys intended for children under 14 and those for outdoor use.
- A China Compulsory Certification (CCC) is also mandatory for toys manufactured, sold or imported into China.

In general, most countries require the manufacturers, importers and distributors of toys to ensure that the toys they place on the market should comply with the specified regulations. Accordingly, they are required to design and test their products to meet the safety standards of the markets they sell in. The toys and

facilities are also subject to regular inspections to ensure they are meeting these standards.

**Every country should regularly upgrade the standards in tune with the new developments in toy manufacturing and safety!**

**ISO:**

The ISO 8124 standards were developed through the collaboration of experts from Australia, USA, UK, China and other countries to create alignment between the world's key

standards. They have been adopted or used as a reference in the national requirements of approximately 20 nations.

The toy safety policies are mostly aligned in different countries, but differences remain in aspects like chemical requirements. For example, the EU Toy Safety Directive severely restricts chemicals known, presumed or suspected to have carcinogenic, mutagenic or reprotoxic effects for use in toys. This differs from a chemical-by-chemical approach applied in many other toy safety regulations.

Hence, compliance with the regulations of one country does not translate into compliance in another. Even meeting the ISO standards does not automatically guarantee compliance in every country.

**United Kingdom:**

- EN71 - the European standard for toy safety - covers toy safety regulations in the UK as well.
- There are seven standards and a separate standard which governs the electrical safety of toys.
- The CE Mark (applicable till 31 December, 2024) and the UKCA mark demonstrate compliance with the latest toy safety regulations.
- Consumers can report concerns about dangerous toys to Trading Standards or call the Citizens Advice consumer helpline: 0808 223 1133.

**Japan:**

- The Japan Food Sanitation Law (JFSL) is a legislative mandatory requirement for toys intended for children up to the age of 6.
- The Japan Toy Safety Standard (ST Standard) is a popular voluntary standard established by the Japan Toy Association (JTA) for toys intended for children up to the age of 14.
- The aspects covered include size, strength, flammability and chemical composition.

**China:**

- The GB safety standard for toys is applicable for all toys sold in the country.







“Toys made in China or other developing countries carry a higher risk of containing chemicals that are illegal than toys made in the US, Canada or the European Union (EU), because dangerous chemicals are less well-regulated in these countries.”

**- RUTH ANN NORTON**

*Former Executive Director,  
Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning  
(part of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative)*

The Strategic Alliance for International Chemicals Management (SAICM) - a global multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder policy framework by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to reduce the harmful effects of chemicals on the environment and human health - considers toys a priority sector under the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded project on Global Best Practices on Emerging Chemical Policy Issues of Concern. The project focuses on lead in paint and chemicals in products and aims to accelerate the adoption of measures by value chain stakeholders, including governments, to track and control chemicals in the toy supply chain.

A study commissioned by the UNEP revealed that 25% of children's toys contain harmful chemicals. It further explains that:

- Since most plastic toys are not labelled, parents do not know whether an item is harmful.
- Regulations and labelling schemes differ across regions and countries.

- Currently, no international agreement exists regarding which substances should be banned from use in toys.

## Summing Up

It is clear that while toys are well-regulated in developed countries, the low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are another matter, especially when it comes to the use of chemicals. It should be noted here that the United States reported an estimated 226,100 toy-related injuries (among children up to age 15) and 17 deaths in 2018. According to the EU Safety Gate (the European Union's rapid alert system for dangerous consumer products), toys were the most notified product category, accounting for 23% of all notifications in 2022 and 20% in 2021.

This gives an idea of the magnitude of the problem vis-à-vis playthings. The big question is when will India enforce toy safety regulations in an effective manner?

Meanwhile, consumers are advised to exercise caution and look for the relevant safety marks when purchasing toys! ▶

# REPORT



## Safeguarding a Child's **RIGHT TO PLAY**

'Every child has every right!' This clarifies that children around the world have a right to play. It goes without saying that playthings should be accessible and safe for all children. A FICCI-KPMG report reveals that India needs to rise to the occasion and embrace its heritage and inherent advantages in skill and technology to become a global player in the toy industry!



**IN 1989, THE** world leaders made a historic commitment to the world's children by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – an international agreement on childhood. This international legal framework is a promise to every child to protect and fulfil their rights and has become the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history.

The Convention states that childhood is separate from adulthood, and lasts until 18; it is a special, protected time, in which children must be allowed to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity. This has helped transform children's lives around the world.

Article 31 of the UNCRC formally enshrines the child's right to play and the right to engage in other recreational activities, including participation in cultural activities and the arts. It states:

1. Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

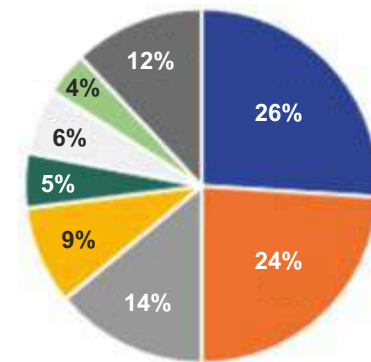
Hence, the UNCRC recognises that free play is not an optional extra for children; it is fundamental to their physical, social, mental and emotional development and intrinsic to their health and happiness in the present moment. The General Comment 17 further clarifies that governments are expected to 'respect, protect and fulfil' this right.

It follows that the free play should be safe for the children and should not put them at risk in any manner. Yet, even after being adopted 35 years ago, we still have to continue to demand that leaders from government, business and communities fulfil their commitments and take action for child rights.

In keeping with this sentiment, a FICCI-KPMG report on **'State of Play: India's Toy Story- Unboxing Fun and Beyond'** states that while the desire to play is as unabated today as ever before, the global toy industry has come a long way. The nature and techniques of play are fast evolving, keeping pace with changes in technology and market demands.

The report presents a detailed overview of the Indian toy industry focusing both on demand and supply-side measures needed to make India a global toy manufacturing hub. The position is clear - **Promoting quality toys and maintaining the affordability of those quality products are the two key pillars.** The desired model for India is to incentivise global as well as domestic players to build end-to-end, integrated manufacturing facilities.

### Key Toy Categories - India



- Infant/Pre-school toys
- Electronic Toy
- Ride-Ons and Activity Toys
- Dolls and Action Figures
- Board games & Puzzles
- Sports & Outdoor Toys
- Plush Toys
- Others

Toys for infant and preschool children under the age group of 0–5, constitute the largest share in India followed by electronic toys

## Children learn by playing and toys are the instruments that allow them to discover

SOCIO-CULTURAL			EDUCATIONAL		
Toys bring to life society's traditions, beliefs, values, and ethos	Aid in educating the children about different cultures	Act as a source of livelihood to numerous craftsmen and artisans	Toys have an impact on overall development of a child. Eg: motor, psychomotor, cognitive skills and also stimulate creativity	Toys act as a medium of self-expression, Aid better concentration, problem solving and lateral thinking	Catalyst for enhancing curiosity, creativity, sociability, self-esteem, emotional stability, and more





## VIVEK JHANGIANI

Chairman,  
FICCI Toy Sector Committee and  
Past President,  
The All India Toy Manufacturers  
Association



For a child to develop, it is important that play is integral to his/her life. The toy industry has a critical role in bringing play to every child of every strata in India, by delivering quality toys at affordable price points. This report provides an important information foundation on a hitherto unorganised industry which can be revolutionised into a large innovative and organised industry that meets the needs of children not only in India, but throughout the world.



While elaborating that opportunities to play exist everywhere, the report highlighted that the average amount spent per child on toys worldwide was USD 50-69 in 2019.

- North America - USD 300
- Europe - USD 212
- South America - USD 44
- Asia - USD 34
- Africa - USD 7
- India - USD 3

Alas, Indian children still seem to be lagging behind in play opportunities with toys and this can be attributed to the low safety measures in part. The report stresses that toys not only support livelihoods and children's right to play, but are also an essential pedagogical tool as recognised by the New Education Policy 2020!

India needs to embrace its heritage and inherent advantages in skill and technology to become a global player in the industry. States across the country are spearheading initiatives to nurture toy manufacturing ecosystems as well as developing and marketing new toy clusters, heralding a significant change in domestic toy manufacturing. Highlighting the growth opportunities for safe toys in India, the report lists:

- High export potential in toys such as dolls made of plastic and wood.
- Potential to be a major hub for electronic toy exports such as STEM toys, video game consoles, etc.
- Export potential in the range of USD 0.9 to 4.4 billion by focusing on high value toy exports to USA, EU and Middle East. ▶

Affordability and quality are key to propelling the growth of the Indian toy industry. The report reveals how the business of play can evolve to make India a global toyconomy.



## MOHIT BHASIN

Partner, Government & Public Services,  
KPMG in India





**TOY CONSUMPTION IS** a global contributor for ongoing issues about environmental justice and climate change. Each year, 60 million Barbie dolls are sold, contributing emissions equivalent to burning 381 million gallons of gasoline. In France, 40 million toys are discarded into landfills annually, and worldwide, toys make up 6 percent of all landfill plastics. Beyond the wall of indifference, manufacturers and consumers can lower these numbers using the tools of design, material selection, and marketing.

A recent study conducted by researchers at DePaul University analyzed toys' environmental footprint. The article provides estimates of the total ecological impact of children's toys over their whole life cycle - from material extraction to production and transportation. After introducing various toys, the paper compares their relative contributions to specific environmental issues, including acidification, ozone depletion, eutrophication, and greenhouse gas emissions. The selected eight toys come from familiar brands, and together they cover a high volume of sales in the industry. The list is composed of 3 Lego sets, 1 Barbie doll, 1 Jenga game, 1 plush dog, 1 plush dog with battery components, and 1 Marble Frenzy game. The article suggests straightforward environmental responses in toy design, selection, and disposal.

The paper highlights toy companies' responsibility in material selection. Use of wood exacerbates deforestation and requires substantial electricity use for material processing. Even still, wood-based toys such as Jenga are responsible for far fewer emissions than plastic toys. Given that plastic makes up 90 percent of the toy industry, improvement in plastic design could create momentum. Recently, Lego announced it would transition to a bioplastic for its blocks, acknowledging the company's annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of over one million tons. Production of computers and electronics included in some toys - such as the batteries in a plush dog - also has a serious negative impact on the environment.

Beyond material selection, production location is a crucial issue due to emissions from transportation. Currently, China hosts over 70 percent of total toy production, while the United States imports most of its toys. To better illustrate this, the article showcases two

different calculations for Barbie. In one of the scenarios, the same product is imagined to be transported from China to the United States, while the other scenario calculates the transportation value from Mexico to the United States. Reduction in the miles travelled by dolls results in 7 percent less greenhouse gas emissions and 25 percent less acidification, reducing stress on the ocean's carbon levels. Because cargo load affects transportation efficiency, toys' mass and packaging become a determinant in environmental impact per unit.

Overall, a toy's design needs to be proportional with its longevity. A heavy toy trashed after a short time has a great detrimental effect. On the other hand, intentional designs like the 2016 line of body-positive Barbie dolls could be sold at higher prices, lowering unit sales and increasing longevity. Beyond the benefit of more profitable business, informed design with extended longevity and eco-labels inspires more conscious purchases. With increased sensitivity to toy longevity, adult consumers can

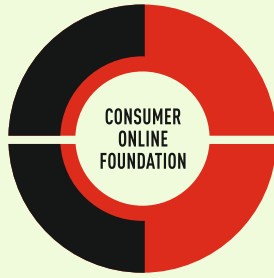


change how many toys are recycled, reused, or discarded each year. Additionally, an increase in sustainable thinking would curb the influx of barely modified, "new" designs each season.

In conclusion, from material sourcing to end disposal or recycling, there are different variables affecting overall sustainability of the toy industry. However, the article warns consumers to not only check the numbers, but to consider qualitative aspects of the design and selection process. The importance of toys in child development is undeniable, yet play is never limited by number or intended use. While excess toys are unnecessary to expand one's imagination, keeping a smaller toy box can teach kids to be environmentally conscious in their future decisions. ■

The article is sourced from Yale Environment Review (YER), a student-run review that provides weekly updates on environmental research findings. It is available at: <https://environment-review.yale.edu/most-materials-are-recyclable-so-why-cant-childrens-toys-be-sustainable>





# CONSUMER ONLINE FOUNDATION

**THE FIRST**

AND THE ONLY  
CONSUMER ORGANISATION

# CERTIFIED

AS PER  
INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD

# ISO 9001:2015

FOR

**CONSUMER  
COMPLAINTS**

**REDRESSAL SERVICES**



*A proud moment for us  
to share with our  
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**PROF BEJON KUMAR MISRA**  
Founder – Consumer Online Foundation



DEBASREE CHAUDHURI  
FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT, GOI

“The new National Education Policy (NEP) has now recognised the importance of play amongst children and the need to create a flexible, multifaceted, multilevel, play-based, activity-based, discovery-based education for children from ages 3-8 years.”

# ROUNDUP



## BIS Released Draft Standard for Toy Safety

### DATA BRIEFING

The toy industry caters to nearly 300 million Indian children below 14 years of age or **26%** of the population.

**THE BUREAU OF** Indian Standards (BIS), the national standards body of India released a draft 'Indian Standard on the Safety of Toys' for public review and feedback in May 2024.

The standard, titled 'Safety of Toys Part 12: Safety Aspects Related to Mechanical and Physical Properties - Comparison of ISO 8124-1, EN 71-1 and ASTM F963' is structured to adopt the guidelines outlined in ISO/TR 8124-9:2020 as well as ensure compliance with internationally recognised safety protocols like EN 71-1 (European Union) and ASTM F963 (USA).

After detailed deliberations, the Toys and Related Test Methods Sectional Committee had opined that this standard would enhance the informativeness of the users of the standard. It requested BIS to issue the draft into wide circulation for a period of 2 months.

“The draft standard introduces certain changes relating to operational and safety processes and logistic records that companies need to maintain..... It's of deep concern to the industry that markings are now required on the toy itself, rather than on the primary packaging itself.”



**MANU GUPTA**  
an Indian toy manufacturer

comments is long behind us and there is no update on the draft standard from the BIS or the government. ▶

Accordingly, the BIS placed the draft standard in the public domain and encouraged the stakeholders (including businesses and professionals involved in the toy industry) to examine it and provide feedback on any potential challenges they foresee in the implementation by 2 July, 2024. Further details of the draft standard can be accessed at [https://www.services.bis.gov.in/mp/WCPCD43125546\\_03052024\\_1.pdf](https://www.services.bis.gov.in/mp/WCPCD43125546_03052024_1.pdf).

Mr Gupta acknowledged that the new standard will increase the compliance burden on the toy industry, but highlighted the overarching objective of aligning standards with the international ISO 8124.

**This is part of a broader initiative aimed at improving the safety standards of toys in the Indian market.**

However, the deadline for

# Jaadui Pitara

## – A Play-Based Fun Learning Experience for Children

**THE MINISTRY OF** Education, Government of India launched Jadui Pitara - a play-based learning initiative for children between the ages of 3 and 8 as part of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Foundational Stage, which emphasises the importance of play, inclusivity and cultural relevance.

Jadui Pitara (magic box) includes toys, games, puzzles, puppets, posters, flashcards, story cards, story books, playbooks and worksheets for students along with handbooks for teachers. It comprises colourful pictures, engaging text and play-based activities to help young

learners develop their thinking skills, language and math skills and emotional well-being. The materials reflects local culture, social context and languages.

Developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Jadui Pitara is available in 13 languages to cater to the diverse needs of the learners.

A digital version - called e-Jaadui Pitara - was launched in November 2023 using the DIKSHA platform. The e-Jaadui Pitara app is available on Google Play and provides a variety of resources for children, parents and





# 15<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL TOY FAIR

Held in New Delhi

**THE TOY ASSOCIATION** of India (TAI) organised the Toy Biz B2B International Expo from 6th to 9th July 2024 at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. More than 300 domestic companies and over 100 foreign buyers from the US, Germany and other countries participated in the annual event. More than 350 Indian brands were on display with major product profiles such as children's products, puzzles and board games, traditional toys, soft/plush toys, kids cradles, sports goods, educational toys, etc. Delegations from several countries visited the fair for trade promotion.

The four-day event brought together manufacturers, traders and end users of toy products to enhance trade relations and showcase the latest innovations in the toy industry.

The Toy Association of India is the largest body of the Indian toy industry, with over 5000 members across the country, including creators and distributors of toys and games for all ages. It has been organising Toy Biz B2B exhibitions every year. The 15th edition was the largest toy fair in South Asia. ▶



It is a giant leap towards enriching the learning-teaching environment and making it more child-centric, lively and joyful for the Amrit Generation as envisioned in the NEP 2020.



**Mr. DHARMENDRA PRADHAN**  
Minister of Education, Gol



teachers, including learning and teaching materials, AI-based assistants and more. It aims to strengthen the digital infrastructure and provide a wider and diverse accessibility to its users on computers, smartphones, television and radios. ▶



# Channapatna's Traditional Toys Uphold Safety and Eco-Friendliness

“ The Channapatna toys occupy a niche market and should embrace innovative designs, promote public awareness regarding their safety and benefits as a means to sustain the craft. ”



**TARUN KUMAR**

PhD scholar and author of the research paper by Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru

**THE CHANNAPATNA TOY-MAKING** tradition traces its roots back to the 18th century and the dolls and other toys are much loved for their endearing designs. These wooden toys have captured the global imagination on occasion as well. Former U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama bought the toys during her visit to New Delhi in 2010. The one-and-a-half year old prince of Bhutan was gifted a set of Channapatna toys in 2017 by the then defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

The famed Channapatna toys are also known for maintaining both safety standards and environmental friendliness. A 2018 study by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru made a life cycle assessment of Channapatna wooden toys and mass-produced plastic toys from China. The paper revealed that the Channapatna softwood toy manufacturing is six times more energy efficient than the PVC toys from China. The study also assessed the global warming potential and human toxicity potential of both kinds of toys and found that the China-made ones emit more carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide during its life cycle and are way more toxic, affecting not just humans but also the biotic and abiotic components of the environment. The plastic toys cause lead and cadmium poisoning while Channapatna toys are non-toxic.





# CHINESE TOYS HURTING INDIAN INDUSTRY: GTRI REPORT

**A REPORT RELEASED** by think tank GTRI last month states that increasing imports of goods such as toys, umbrellas, certain fabrics and musical instruments are severely hurting Indian manufacturers as many of these products are also made by domestic businesses. Especially, the cheaper Chinese goods make it tough for MSMEs to compete, leading to struggles for survival.

The report suggests that strengthening domestic manufacturing is essential to protect these small businesses and maintain India's economic independence. ▶

〇〇 **Some MSMEs have to shut down or reduce their operations, and they find it hard to grow due to the easy access to low-cost Chinese products. These challenges affect job creation and economic growth in India.** 〇〇



Alas, the popularity of Channapatna toys is showing a downward trend. The fragile industry has been further jeopardised by the influx of China-made replicas of Channapatna toys in the market. Despite being granted the GI (geographical indication) tag in 2005 to combat duplication, artisans claim it has failed to benefit them in a significant manner. Moreover, modern aspirations are taking the younger generations of Channapatna away from this ancestral profession of toy making.

The Channapatna Crafts Park was established a decade ago to revive and popularise the traditional art of Channapatna toys. Sponsored by state and central government organisations, the park supports numerous toy-making units, provides artisans access to wood-working machines and conducts training programmes for emerging talents. Training sessions are conducted regularly and women are encouraged to participate for additional income during their free time. A total of 300 artisans were trained last year.

The need of the hour is for the traditional art to open itself to innovation. While the regular toys may have limited demand, fresh and modern designs will revive interest in the once much-loved toys. Hence, the toy making establishments here should consider collaborating with design students from prestigious institutes for best results. ▶



**AJAY SRIVASTAVA**  
Founder, GTRI





## THE DANGEROUS GAME OF COUNTERFEIT TOYS

**Real?**

**Fake?**

A counterfeit toy can cause significant harm to the children. These are look-alikes or knock-offs that use another company's name or logo and claim to be legitimate, falsely leading consumers to believe that the toy is from a trusted source.



**ALMOST EVERY PRODUCT** that becomes popular among consumers has a fake, rip-off copy to its name. This kind of unprincipled counterfeiting extends to toys as well!

Indeed, counterfeiters do not think twice before duplicating toys to make a quick profit. Driven by zero regard for health and safety, the fake toys are of cheap quality and flout the regular product safety rules. They cannot be expected to respect safety standards either.

Think about it – It is quite likely that as fake toys have low production value, they may have sharp edges or their parts may break off/come loose, posing a choking hazard for the children. Small batteries and magnets may be easily accessible, which could cause serious harm if ingested. Long cords may pose a strangulation risk. Electronics can be missing critical safety features - like insulation and safety fuses - becoming a fire hazard. The toys may contain toxic chemicals like lead and phthalates which can harm the children's health and even lead to cancer. Some may have incorrect age warnings, resulting in children using unsuitable toys.

**Many fake toys seem harmless in appearance and can even be perceived of good quality!**

They may not realise that the copy which is easily available or cheaper can actually prove to be dangerous, leading to sickness, injury or even death of their children!

The prudent approach is to always put safety first and opt for authentic toys, even if it means spending extra money or waiting until the legitimate product becomes available again.

### Tips For Purchasing Genuine and Safe Toys

- Shop from trustworthy online sellers and traditional retailers only. If possible, find out if the seller is licensed by the brand to sell their products or purchase directly from the toy brand's website.
- Scan the online product listing carefully and be wary of poor quality, blurred or photoshopped images. An abundance of spelling mistakes is definitely a red flag.
- The product description should state that the toy is an original.
- Check the age recommendations as they can be listed incorrectly from the manufacturer's recommended age range. If a clear age range is not provided, it's best to avoid buying the toy.
- Read customer reviews of the toy and the seller. Keep in mind that counterfeit products may carry fake reviews. Poor grammar and language are another red flag.
- Take an in-depth look at the seller information to check what other items they sell, where the business is located and feedback on the products. You can also do an internet search of the seller.
- If you are still unsure, contact the company's customer service.
- Check that the toy bears the ISI mark and watch for signs of counterfeiting in the packaging.
- Don't trust everything on social media. Try to avoid targeted posts or ad campaigns.
- Follow the thumb rule - If it is too good to be true, then it usually is! If the price is way cheaper than the official/competitor prices, it's probably fake.
- When the toy arrives, scrutinise the label, packaging and contents for broken seals, misspellings, missing manufacturer's information, etc. Make sure that the toy does not contain small, loose or damaged parts.

**“ It has become increasingly difficult to differentiate between legitimate and counterfeit products in online marketplaces because counterfeiters are adept at blending in on the sites. Marketplaces must be more transparent with verified seller and product information to enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions and avoid falling victim to counterfeit products. Consumers and brands should be notified when counterfeit products are identified on marketplace platforms. ”**

**- Toy Association, USA**

Alas, the counterfeit toys are not limited to shady stores or roadside hawkers. They proliferate on legitimate online marketplaces, search engines and social media platforms. It is heyday for such 'unknown' sellers, given the low barriers of entry to e-commerce websites – characterised by lack of seller or product verification. The boom in online shopping coupled with the ease with which unverified third-party vendors can set up convincingly accurate accounts is fuelling rogue operators to capitalise on the blind spot and slip their fake and unsafe toys into the hands of the innocent children.

However, it's not just about unsuspecting parents inadvertently purchasing fake toys. Some knowingly opt for knock-offs when a popular toy/gadget is in short supply, sold out or comes with an expensive price tag.

**Comparing listings for similar toys can help identify the average price range of the toy!**

**The U.S. Chamber of Commerce (USCC) and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) cautions consumers to watch out for products that are selling for cheaper than other items in the same category.**

In sum, purchasing questionable products are not worth the risk, especially for children! Stay alert for counterfeits and ensure safety at all times! ▶

UPDATE ...



Moving a Step Ahead

Update on the August edition

# Webinar on 'Safeguarding Consumer Rights in Train Travel'

**THE AUGUST MAGAZINE** edition was a starting point for creating a momentum for safeguarding consumer rights in train travel. We followed up on this by organising a national webinar - in association with RJS Positive Media - on 25th August, Sunday at 11 am.



The event was graced by the presence of **Mr ATULYA SINHA** as the Chief Guest. He is currently the Chief Administrative Officer heading the Rail Wheel Plant, Bela, near Patna, Bihar. The keynote speaker was Mr Himadri Sarkar, Director of Consumer Guidance Society of Jamshedpur and Member of the District Railway User Consultative Committee (DRUCC), SE Railway, Chakradharpur Division.

Our editor, international consumer policy expert and Member of Zonal Railway User Consultative Committee (ZRUCC), SE Railway, Prof Bejon Misra chaired and moderated the webinar.

A number of noted personalities across domains were in attendance – like Colonel Jagdish Lal, Dr Munni Kumari, Dr Umesh Mishra, Mr PCP Mahapatra, Ms Sumati Kumari, Mr Tapan Pal, Mr RS Kushwaha, Mr Ranjan Sheth, Mr Dilip Verma, Ms Sumati Kumari, Mr Ram Murty, Dr Smarita Mohanty and others.

Mr Prafull Sheth initiated his welcome address with a beautiful shloka from the Bhagvad Gita. Moving to the topic of the day, he recalled that in the earlier days there were such few train accidents that safety never crossed the mind of travellers. He questioned what has changed in the last 70 odd years that we have come to a sad day when we are discussing that will we ever feel secure in train travel. He introduced the two eminent guests and called on them to take the audience through the journey of Indian Railways.

Prof Bejon Misra informed the audience that the Indian Railways is the largest employer in the country and one of the largest rail networks in the world. He lauded that it has institutionalised consultations with the consumers and complaint redressal mechanisms. No other government entity has ever provided such prompt acknowledgments...

Keynote speaker, **Mr HIMADRI** opened his discourse by highlighting some of the salient features of the Indian Railways. He stated that the railways is truly the lifeline of India and forms the cheapest mode of transport in the country. He appreciated the



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**Live BROADCAST**  
 Date: **August 25, 2024**  
 (Sunday) at 11 AM

**RJS PBH-RJS POSITIVE MEDIA**  
 an association with  
**Consumer Guidance Society of Jamshedpur (CGS)**  
 An organizing National Webinar on  
**"Safeguarding Consumer Rights in Train Travel"**

**Speakers:**  
 Bina Jain, Himadri Sarkar, Atulya Sinha, Prof. Bejon Kumar Misra, Prafull D. Sheth

**Global Positive Media Dialogue**  
 Date: August 25, 2024 (Sunday)  
 Time: 11:00 AM

**Join Zoom Meeting**  
 Meeting ID: 96 203 676  
 Passcode: 1928

extensive modernisation and upgradation works while lauding the new trains and airport terminal-like look of the stations which has transformed the scenario of train travel.

He moved to common issues plaguing the railways and distressing passengers – like accidents, delays, lack of cleanliness and unhygienic conditions. He highlighted the stem of rot in the form of staff behaviour and rising passenger complaints. He stressed that other countries respect passenger interests, like Japan is renowned for punctual operations with train arrivals being timed down to the seconds! He also called on the Finance Minister to reintroduce the concessions for the senior citizens.

Chief guest, Mr Atulya Sinha started his address by stating that railway officers also travel like passengers and are trying their best to listen to the consumers and be as customer-centric as possible. He ran the audience through the organisational chart and systems of the railways while stressing on the massive range of



operations and activities which make it a challenge to hold everything together. He even discussed the various constraints faced by the officers and the balancing act needed to satisfy the consumers.

Moving to the lack of punctuality, Mr Sinha informed that goods and passenger trains share tracks and run at different speeds. This limits the pace which is further constrained by maintenance and development works. Additionally, passengers request stoppages which causes further loss of time. Commenting on the safety parameters, he stated that trains are running beyond section capacities without time for maintenance activities. Another problem is the lack of specialised manpower.

Highlighting the role of passengers, he requested patience and cooperation from the consumers as the Indian Railways perseveres to fulfil its services to the nation. He appealed to the audience to not stereotype the railways as everyone is committed to doing their job to the utmost.

Mr Atulya spoke about the various channels for complaints and suggestions like the integrated Rail Madad 139 helpline, CPGRAMS and the Meri Saheli service for female passengers travelling alone. He sincerely called on everyone to meet and interact with the officers for the healthy benefit of all!

Prof Misra was impressed with the details and affirmed that the Twitter channel of the railways is also actively monitored with numerous instances of passengers tweeting from the train and getting assistance/resolution at the next station itself. He also called on the attendees to rethink their role and responsibilities in the greater scheme of things while stressing that improvements hinge on customer feedback. He further informed that he had helped draft a code of conduct for passengers which was raised in the ZRUCC and reached the Railway Board too.

The session was opened to the audience for comments and many of them raised a gamut of queries and complaints. Ms Bina Jain bemoaned the lack of gates at many crossings which increased the probability of accidents. Mr Sinha clarified that all crossings are manned since the last few years, but the local public still use unauthorised crossings as shortcuts even though it

opens them to dangers. Mr Ishaq Khan stated that local trains were lesser now which inconvenienced the labourers and vendors who travel daily on such routes. Mr Sinha informed him that the distribution of trains has changed after the Covid pandemic and some routes are not operational now.

Mr Kantharia spoke about the problem of ticketless travellers boarding trains at small stations and occupying the reserved seats much to the inconvenience of ticketed passengers. Ms Anu Sunil Kumar raised the issue of men sitting on seats reserved for ladies and refusing to budge even when asked while Dr Munni Kumari inquired whether the 'Meri Saheli' facility is available in trains running in Bihar. Mr Jagat Bhai lamented the poor quality of food even on premium trains followed by Mr Kushawaha stressing on hours of delay in some trains.

Mr Himadri also complained about passengers carrying on long and loud conversations on their mobiles in Vande Bharat trains much to the annoyance of the others. He requested for rules like making calls from the corridor or other resolutions.

Mr Sinha listened to all the inputs patiently while informing the attendees about what actually goes on behind the scenes without the consumers being aware of or appreciating any of it. He exhorted the listeners to file their complaints/suggestions on Rail Madad along with the train details and assured them that they will get an immediate response 24/7.

Prof Misra summed up the informative session by applauding the various measures taken by the Indian Railways for maintaining performance, punctuality and safety. He stressed that the railways is an asset of the nation and should never be privatised. It belongs to the people!

Ms Bina Jain delivered a rousing vote of thanks by acknowledging the working and commitment of the railway officials. She said that instead of grumbling to people around us, we should get into the habit of filing our complaints on 139 so that they can lead to positive action and improvements!

The full webinar can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/live/tCgOSL96VUk>.

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A snapshot of success stories of consumer activists who are relentlessly battling for consumer rights. We will highlight decisions and awards in favour of the consumers. This should motivate other youngsters to take up the cause of the consumer for not only social benefit, but their own good too! Jai Ho Grahak!

# Uber India Slapped Rs 15,000 Penalty for Harassment By Driver

**IN TODAY'S FAST-PACED** world, ride-hailing services have become an integral part of our daily lives, offering convenience and efficiency. However, the unfortunate reality is that passengers face various issues with the cab providers and drivers ranging from extended wait times, cancellation and overcharging to driver misconduct and even harassment.

While the complaints abound, do the consumers have to just grumble and bear it as part of the deal? Do they have any recourse for their grievances which will lead to customer satisfaction?

The recent resolution of the **Uber India Systems Pvt. Ltd v Mohit Bansal and Anr** case brings a ray of hope for the much-aggrieved and dissatisfied passengers. Read on to find out more about your rights if the driver, say, does not complete your trip.

On 7th March, 2017, Mr Mohit Bansal booked an Uber-X cab for a journey from Zirakpur to Kalka in Punjab. A driver accepted the cab request, but after

travelling a short distance, he misbehaved and refused to complete the trip. Compelled to exit the cab, the passenger was left stranded. Additionally, the driver



also insisted on a fare of ₹105 for the incomplete trip. On raising a complaint on the app, Uber assured him that it will refund the fare, but failed to live up to its promise!

Consequently, Mr Bansal filed a complaint with the Mohali District Commission citing inconvenience, financial loss and breach of service. The court took up the matter to address the grievance and ensure that consumer rights are protected. After reviewing the evidence and submissions, Uber was directed to compensate the complainant ₹15,000 for mental agony, harassment and litigation costs.

Uber, feeling aggrieved, appealed to the Punjab State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, arguing that the District Commission had issued its order without granting Uber a fair chance to present its case, citing constraints related to Covid-19 during the hearing. The company's advocate SS Joshan further emphasised that Uber operates solely as a technological platform connecting drivers and passengers, and therefore should not bear liability for the actions of drivers. It underscored that drivers are independent contractors, not employees of Uber.

The State Commission observed that Uber had sufficient opportunities to defend its position before the

District Commission but failed to avail itself of those opportunities. It further determined that Uber's active involvement in the booking and payment processes demonstrated its significant intermediary role, which, under the Consumer Protection Act, meant Uber could not evade liability for service deficiencies.

Consequently, the State Commission dismissed Uber's appeal and upheld the District Commission's order of ₹15,000 penalty for mental agony and harassment.

**A coram of Presiding Member HPS Mahal and Member Kiran Sibal noted that in an employer-employee relationship, the employer is liable for the actions of third parties.**

Many consumer rights advocates have welcomed the decision, viewing it as a positive step towards imposing accountability on the online ride-hailing platforms to ensure the fulfilment of their service commitments and provide reliable services to the customers. ▶

**It should be noted that the 2017 case reached a reasonable conclusion only in July 2024!**



## Share Your Feedback

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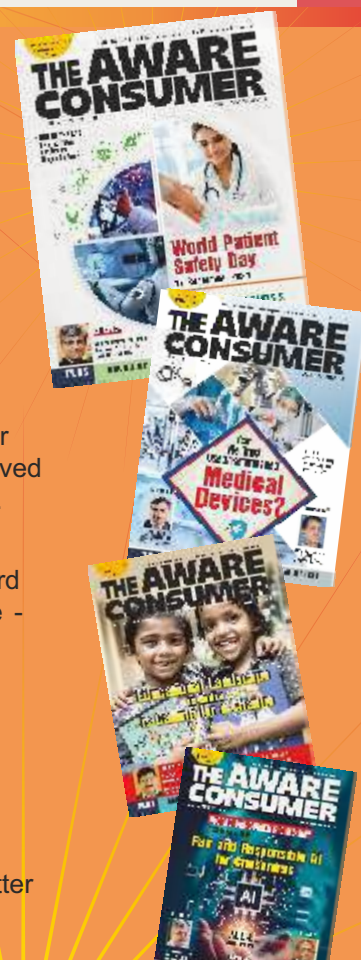
We are always striving to make our magazine better and would love to hear your thoughts. Tell us what you liked, what should be improved or any new ideas you would like to see in future issues (in about 100 words or so).

As a token of appreciation for sharing your feedback and comments on a regular basis, two of our valued readers can **win a FREE subscription** and receive hard copies for a year! Don't miss this exciting opportunity to get all the content you love - on us!

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We can't wait to hear your thoughts. Thank you for helping us make each issue better than the last!





# YOUR OPINION MATTERS

## letters to the



### editor

(August issue:  
Safeguarding Consumer Rights  
in Train Travel)

We are truly humbled by the praise and acknowledgment that is flowing in from varied sources. Please feel free to send in your comments, views or feedback on The Aware Consumer magazine at [bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in](mailto:bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in) – we will publish your opinions and implement your feedback while ensuring that your voice is heard on the right platforms.



**YOUR ISSUE ON** Railways was exhaustive. I don't think anybody would have covered it so elaborately that too independently calling a spade a spade without mincing words. It was truly a journalistic approach and I enjoyed reading it. Keep it up as always.

It is true that India has one of the largest railway networks in the world, but that is only part of what makes it an exemplary transport system. The intricate matrix of connectivity it

provides across a huge and widely populated country, coupled with an impressive frequency of trains to the remotest areas, makes it a very accessible method of travel for many Indians and tourists. Add to that the fact that it is almost 170 years old, and you know why most people put their faith in this inexpensive mode of transport even so many years after its inception.

Grahak Shakti was part of the Divisional and Zonal Railway Users Consultative Committee (DRUCC-ZRUCC) for seven terms! However, there is no specific slot for Voluntary Consumer Organisations, which is rather strange if not intriguing.

Nevertheless, it is an institutionalised feedback mechanism. Meetings take place regularly every quarter and the DRM/ZRM itself Chair the meetings. Obviously, all the subordinate senior officers attend and take interest. A declaration is also obtained that there is no conflict of interests in any way. It does generate lot of inputs for railways and improve the deficiencies as they are practical and open. However, a bureaucrat who fails to change tries to give alibis and false narratives just to get away with their inept responses.

There is a vast amount of transformation noticed whether it is the upkeep of the coaches, railway stations or the behaviour of a Traveling Ticket Examiner (TTE) with Tablets instead of the traditional Charts as well as the polite way in which they behave with passengers. Also, the toilets and maintenance has drastically changed.

My suggestions:

- Railways should provide a slot for Voluntary Consumer Organisations in every tier of Railway Users Consultative Committee.
- Senior Citizens Concession withdrawn during Covid should be reintroduced without delay which will be a great boon.

No doubt, all this has its costs which is passed on to the ultimate Consumer - the passenger; who has to grin and bear it. Concessions are slowly being withdrawn including to those for journalists which existed for a long time!

-- **Somasekhar V K, Bengaluru**

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**I MUST SAY** that this magazine is fantastic! Congratulations! And a 'magazine in its time'. Perhaps one edition in the future can be about selfcare, pharmacy services, the need to become 'the ambassador of your own health', services for the management of chronic diseases and promoting both the role of the pharmacist as well as the support for health by the pharmacy services.

-- **Lars-Åke Söderlund, Sweden**

Vice President, International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)



**I WOULD LIKE** to raise the issue that unreserved passengers can board in a reserved railway compartment. It is no problem if it is a student in emergency or others in medical emergency.

However, I was recently travelling from Tatanagar to North India. Suddenly, at 10 o'clock in the night, thousands of people boarded our reserved compartment at Jasidih station. They were returning to their homes after performing puja from Babadham. There were children aged 8-10 years old, old men and

women and young women in the compartment. They could not move from their place, no one could even go to the toilet. It was very difficult and suffocating. Next day, by 8 am everyone got down to Gorakhpur and left.

Indian Railways management should take strict action to prevent such situations at all costs. Under no circumstances should vendors and unreserved passengers be allowed to enter the reserved compartment so that the journey of those travelling on reserved seats does not become hell.

Another need is that toilet cleanliness must be of high standard. When Tata company can do this, where thousands of people work, why is it not possible in Indian Railways? Toilets should be cleaned immediately after use. A special employee should always be alert for this. It is the responsibility of our passengers also to keep them clean. Some people urinate on the toilet seat. If caught, the fine should be up to Rs 5000.

-- **Biswajit Chatterjee, Jamshedpur**  
[biswajit1sept@gmail.com](mailto:biswajit1sept@gmail.com)



The magazine looks very well made and it's filled with really good information. The division of the details and the in-depth analysis of the entire railway and transportation industry has been divided into appropriate sections exceptionally well, which makes it easy for even an average reader to digest the information. Thanks for your efforts to bring the valued information to the public domain.

-- **Col Jagdish Lal (Retd), Guwahati, Assam**

# WATCH OUT!

## for the next issue in November dedicated to **FOOD PROCESSING!**

**WITH A VAST** agricultural sector, India produces an abundance of food crops, but a large percentage is lost due to inadequate storage, transportation and distribution systems. Food processing helps to reduce this wastage by enhancing the shelf life, availability and market reach of essential food products, benefiting both consumers and farmers.

However, with the rise in food processing comes an increasing dependence on highly processed foods that pose significant health risks. The appeal of convenience should not overshadow the dangers these foods present to long-term health!

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