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Language and the Shape of the Worldview

1. Introduction

In the fall of 2008, I was exploring wooden artefacts produced by Banarasi craftsmen for the collection of an upcoming craft museum. Amidst the hustle and bustle of Banaras, a range of brightly coloured, often small wooden representations of deities, common people and animals, moving toys and wall hangings could be seen in the famous local market at Vishwanath Gali. All shops displayed a similar variety, quality and price range of wooden artefacts. The origins of neither the designs nor the designer were known to anyone. Upon further probing, the shopkeepers directed me to the Karkhanas where these artefacts were being produced by young as well as old craftsmen in the same material and technology. When questioned, the craftsmen were also unaware of the origin of the artefacts or their makers. But, all craftsmen knew how to make them.

An ethnographic study (Patil and Athavankar 2012) further revealed that in the Banarasi community every craftsman specializes in a single skill set, making all craftsmen mutually dependent on each other for completing a product. The craftsmen very often do not follow a hierarchy where a few lead the others. For any given order by the client, the craftsmen associate with each other according to the skills required for the order, such as that of carving, assembling templates or turning on the lathe machine, followed by painting. Every member of the group completes a task and hands over the artefact to the next craftsman. In case any changes are made to the artefact, the next craftsman is expected to coherently complement the alterations with his skill even in the absence or lack of explicit instructions regarding the method of doing so. These groups of different skill sets were re-formed for every new order. Many such groups of craftsmen working in the same technology, material and design were brought together and disbanded as and when the demand for an artefact was raised.

Despite multiple members making multiple changes lacking explicit knowledge transfer, the Banarasi artefacts were not only coherent but also manifested a Banarasi identity. Manifestation of coherence or

identity is not surprising in design where artefacts are mostly produced under a single vision; but a Banarasi artefact lacks both the supervision of a single decision maker and a centralized plan. This increased my curiosity regarding the collective disposition of the community members which facilitated coherent inferences or consensus of decisions of making a design amongst multiple members of the group. How do multiple members separately conceptualize different parts of an artefact in the absence of a single decision maker lacking explicit knowledge transfer and yet attain coherence in the final product?

Consensus in decision making of multiple minds in the absence of a common plan implies the presence of a shared set of implicit underlying principles or perceptions between all members of the community which informs the explicit practice of making a toy. Perceptions of a community determine the appearance, function and meaning of the objects of their world and the world in general. Therefore, the artefact and its maker are said to be dependent on their worldview which guides material actions, mental constructs and value systems. Changes in the worldview affect *why* we design things and processes, which in turn affects *what* and *how* we design (Wahl and Baxter 2008: 72). Therefore, worldview often becomes the framework of generating, sustaining and applying knowledge. Put more emphatically, the worldview of a community or an individual is the strongest determining factor in solving a design problem (Rittel and Webber 1973: 166).

Worldview is a powerful expression of how a culture sees the *world*, and makes it visible. A new material culture redefines both what it is to see, and what there is to see (Alpers, in Latour 1986: 9–10). Gabora (2004: 125) further suggests that worldview takes shape through the influence of many others, though some, such as those of parents and teachers, will predominate. It is initially learned by children from their parents, close relatives and teachers but over the course of a life time constantly changes as new ideas are acquired, filtered and assimilated with existing information before being applied

and retained. As the worldview changes so does the situation in which an artefact is produced and consumed. More importantly for this study, a well-refined worldview also includes information about features and rules about how and when to acquire them and their extent of possible transformation for an artefact (Eerkens and Lipo 2007: 250–3). Features and rules can further throw light on how decisions are taken by craftsmen in a given context.

But it has been felt by Moalosi et al. (2008: 175) that current design approaches with their standards, rules and guidelines fall short with respect to issues related to the cultural context. Lack of a concrete theoretical and cultural framework for designers has resulted in emulating the western design concepts regardless of the local context. Similarly, Lee (2004: 19) observes that most topics in cultural design are still only limited to identifying aesthetic stereotypes such as shape or colour. A similar gap in understanding the craft thinking of the craft communities of India has also been observed. Even though the manufacturing details of most crafts are well archived in India, the much needed information on the unwritten standards, rules and guidelines on the design and use of these artefacts has not been sufficiently analysed. This information on features and rules contained in a refined worldview can throw light on the decision making of craftsmen.

But the tacit nature of the worldview, the knowledge of which is often embodied in everyday actions, rituals or beliefs rather than made explicit in written or oral principles is difficult to elucidate. It is a well-known fact that Indian craftsmen are unable to verbally articulate, write or draw concepts and explain their thinking. Moreover, there are differences in my worldview and that of the craftsman, which makes it even more important to analyse the thinking of the craftsmen as an insider rather than through the influence of the worldview of the researcher. Is it possible to capture craft thinking embodied in the worldview in the absence or lack of explicit means of externalizing craft knowledge?

2. Language and the shape of the world

Artefacts are conceptualised, constructed and communicated in language. In a community, language coordinates the perceptions and actions of its speakers while enacting their conception of the artefacts that they use. The meanings that artefacts acquire in use are often framed in the language of a particular community well before they are actually used by people as social or cultural artefacts. In a

community, language coordinates the perceptions and actions of its speakers while enacting their conceptions of the artefacts that they use. The meanings that artefacts acquire in use are often framed in the language of a particular community well before they are actually used by people as social or cultural artefacts. Therefore, the meanings of artefacts in language denote how artefacts come to live in the narratives of their speakers, in effect making the artefacts available or unavailable for use. Thus, the fate of all artefacts is decided in language (Krippendorf, 2006: 148–9).

Underhill (2009: 99) has elaborated the thoughts of Humboldt explaining that the world is processed in the mind through language. The worldview of individuals is shaped by their language. For Humboldt, worldview resides in language. A language not only shapes the worldview, but also brings the world into being.

Boroditsky (2009, 2011) supports the writings of the American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf to claim that different languages may impart different cognitive skills, attempting to establish evidence to prove that speakers of different tongues may also think differently. She considers language as central to our experience of being a human being. In an interesting study of the Kuuk Thaayorres, Boroditsky showed that one's native language plays an important role in shaping habitual thoughts such as our perception of colours, objects and space, and also of time, thus concluding that the languages we speak profoundly shape the way we think and see the world. Speakers of different languages also differ in how they describe events, and as a result how well they can remember who did what. English speakers tend to phrase things in terms of a person/people doing the thing. Speakers of Japanese or Spanish, in contrast, are less likely to mention the agent when describing an accidental event. In Spanish one might say 'Se rompió el florero', which translates as 'the vase broke' or 'the vase broke itself.' Thus the agent or the author of the action remains unknown in such a conversation whereas in English the authorship is clearly established. This insight has an interesting correlation with this study of Banarasi artefacts. In Banaras, all craftsmen making a wooden toy irrespective of its source of origin or ideation state 'Humhiye to banaye hain' (we have made this). If prodded further to know the original author of the artefact, the craftsmen simply say that they do not know, but still lay claim to the artefact. However, the word 'Humhiye' in Northern India embodies both a singular as well as a plural person, In English

this would mean, that the word 'Humhiye' denotes 'I' and 'we' simultaneously, therefore instead of saying 'I made this', a Banarasi craftsman literally says 'we made this' while essentially connoting a singular self. The absence of a name or memory of the original author combined with the use of the first person plural pronoun by all members for different instances of the same artefact connotes that every artefact is equally owned and shared by all. Thus, the community ownership is manifested in the individual agency in the Banarasi language.

If this is so, can the Banarasi language shed some light on the Banarasi worldview? This paper attempts to study the language of the Banarasi craftsmen from dictionaries and encyclopaedias, as well as oral transcriptions of formal and informal interviews with eight craftsmen, eight consumers and five shopkeepers. Besides Banarasi Hindi (the language spoken in Banaras), Sanskrit (an ancient Indian language) and English (the language influencing the Banarasi vocabulary in recent times), vocabulary was also analysed. Despite the fact that the worldview encompasses all aspects of the community life, this study concentrated and is limited only to the context in which a Banarasi artefact is produced and consumed. This is discussed in the forthcoming sections.

3. From a *Khilona* to a toy: an etymological overview

The Dutch historian Huizinga has written extensively on the notion of play – so much so that his 1938 book is titled *Homo Ludens* (man the player). He says that every language in forming its idea and expression of play has found a different word to describe it. Words define and perhaps limit the use of an idea. In the plethora of understandings of what play could possibly mean, Huizinga summarised it as an intrinsic activity that exists for its own sake, outside of ordinary life. This status of play and its consciousness outside the ordinary life of the player is similar to the Indian concept of *Leela*. It is God's spontaneous and joyous expression of a purposeless world (Aleaz,

2004: 4–5). *Leela* means divine play: God plays the world into being outside of himself. Similarly *Rasleela* (*rasa* means aesthetics and *leela* means act/play, therefore *rasleela* means play of aesthetics) is also considered a divine sport played by Lord Krishna with his escort Radha and other *Gopis* (milkmaids) on the occasion of *Janmashtmi* (Hindu festival which celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna) on the banks of the river Yamuna in Vrindavan. Therefore, it is often said by the Banarasi community and also Hindus in general that God is playing his *Leela*. Huizinga, who was also proficient in Sanskrit, speaks of two more verbal roots for the play concept in Sanskrit. *Kridati* denotes play of animals, children and adults. *Divayati* connotes gambling, dicing and also joking, jesting or mocking another.

Kridati and *Kridanaka* (literally a 'plaything' or a 'toy') share the same root, i.e. *Krida*; *Krida* denotes play and is also a root for many other kinds of activities ranging from dalliance to an artificial hill of pleasure (Macdonell, 1979: 77). Sastri (2003) divided the Sanskrit word *Krida* in his Sanskrit to English dictionary into two sets. He speaks about *Krida* that is performed by *Samanyajan* or the common folk, which is similar to the idea of play with a ball, sport or pastime jokes. Along with this, he also mentions twenty-two other kinds of *Krida* that are practised by the *Vilasijan* or elite folk as mentioned in the ancient Sanskrit text *Saraswati kanthabharana*. These twenty-two kinds of adult play were largely played by women according to the seasons of the Hindu calendar. These plays were associated with religion, festivals and the seasons with a wide variety of activities ranging from fasting to playfully hitting each other with flowers, playing *Holi* and bathing and boating during the summertime in the river. The adults were an important participant in this meaning of *Krida*, unlike the play for *Samanyajan*, which included children. The adult play required very limited artefacts such as the ones mentioned in Table 1, row 1, and instead had a strong component of pretend play (see rows 6 and 11).

Type of Play	Play
1.Games	<i>Aandolan Chaturth</i> : playing on swings during rainy season Under the <i>shamal</i> tree women play blindfolded games
2.Ritual	<i>Asthmi Chandrak</i> : In the month of <i>Chaith</i> women break their fast after making an offering to the moon <i>Madanotsav</i> : On the eve of <i>holi</i> , prayers are offered to <i>Kamdev</i>
3.Feasting	Sweets are kept under the rays of the full moon of <i>Sharad poornima</i> for the whole night and eaten in the morning <i>Abhyushkhadika</i> : Raw or roasted green peas from the farm are eaten <i>Ikshukhadika</i> : Freshly cut sugarcane is eaten.
4.Dalliance	<i>Chutbhajjika</i> : Plucked flowers of the mango tree are offered to <i>Kamdev</i> and then used to decorate the hair. <i>Chutlatika</i> : With the stems of a plant women hit each other and tell their lover's name <i>Biskhadika</i> : Lovers pluck the lotus from the ponds and eat it together <i>Kautuk</i> : Wanton curiosity <i>Griha</i> : Pleasure house <i>Kanana</i> : Pleasure grove
5.Leisure	<i>Kanda chaturthi</i> : Women spread barley on the floor and sleep on it <i>Pushpakyachika</i> : Women pluck the flowers of the <i>Maulsiri</i> tree in a wine cup. <i>Kasara</i> : Pleasure pond <i>Parvat</i> : Artificial pleasure hill.
6.Pretend play	<i>Ashokottasika</i> : Rich women dress up and theatrically hit the <i>Ashoka</i> tree in a bid to make it grow higher. <i>Navratrika</i> : After the first rain, girls play pretend marriages on the lawn <i>Kopa</i> : Feigned anger for fun
7.Adornment	<i>Suvasantak</i> : Welcoming the spring with yellow clothes and flowers
8.Sports	<i>Toyakrida</i> : Swim in the river during summer
9.Celebration	<i>Yaksharatrika</i> : To celebrate <i>Diwal</i> – a Hindu festival <i>Udakshevadika</i> : To throw water on each other with a water gun in the festival of <i>holi</i>
10.Spectatorship	<i>Preksha</i> : To watch a play with the family
11.Jest	<i>Kadambyuudha</i> : In the rainy season using the stalks of tender sugarcane or flowers. friends hit each other playfully <i>Bhutmatruka</i> : One friend cajoles the other friends in a group <i>Kapitavya</i> : Jestng imitation of a monkey <i>Kaushal</i> : Art of jestng

Table 1 Kinds of play expressed in Sanskrit.

But Sanskrit is not used in common parlance any more nor does a category of adult play along with its twenty-two manifestations as they do not exist in India in general or Banaras in particular today. Sanskrit was replaced by Hindi and Urdu in day to day communication in the colonial days and, after independence, Hindi was declared the national language of India. In Hindi, toys are known as *Khilona* a derivative of the word *Khel* which means ‘to play’. *Khel* includes some meanings that are close to the Sanskrit words mentioned before, for instance *Leela* or the categories of adult play mentioned in the *Saraswati kanthabharana* such as rituals and ceremonies. The Sanskrit words are not used any more but their meaning is still visible in the activities considered as play in Hindi. Bahari (2006) refers to these meanings of *Khel* and *Khilona* in his dictionary.

Khel – masculine

- 1– Activities done for relaxation and pleasure
- 2– *Kartab* feat or a trick for instance acrobats in a fair
- 3– *Tamasha* a show, an exhibition, stunts for instance the monkey man, a dance performance or acrobats
- 4– *Abhinay* acting, performance for instance a *Nautanki* (popular folk theatre performance), or *Vidushak* (Jester)
- 5– *Leela* spectacle, game show for instance killing of Ravana in *Ramleela* (a dramatic folk performance of the life of Lord *Ram*) or *Nagnathiya* (a theatrical enactment of the story of *Krishna* killing the serpent *Kailya mardan*)

Khilona- female

- 1– Objects of play such as a wooden toy
- 2– Objects of entertainment
- 3– Very cheap objects

Although the Hindi meaning of play and toy is narrower than the Sanskrit term *Krida*, it emphasises the child as an important user of the *Khilona* while also referring to its ludic character. The artefact takes a significant role in these definitions as it is characterised by various attributes such as ‘wooden toy, cheap and entertaining’. The adult in this meaning becomes either a participant in creating an object or a spectator of performances such as the *Nautankis*. But unlike the *Saraswati kanthabharana*, no specific adult play is mentioned here. According to this set of meanings, *Khel* refers not only to sports such as *Gilli danda* (a game with a stick and a ball) or *Kushti* (wrestling) but also to performances and representation of stories. Huizinga (1950) describes representation as a function of play. *Tamasha*, *Abhinay*, *Leela* and *Kartab* are all representations of performances, very often of a story. For instance,

Nautankis in Northern India enacted during *RamLeela* are amateur folk theatres with elaborate sets narrating the life of Lord Rama. *Nagnathiyya* in Banaras is the theatrical representation of the child *Krishna* dancing on a serpent’s head performed in the river Ganga itself. These religious performances are also called *Leela*, which involves *Abhinay* of actors but Aleaz (2004) differentiates it from its *Sanskrit* meaning mentioned before. These religious performances or dramatizations are theatrically staged, played by ‘actors’ unlike the divine play of the supreme referred to in Sanskrit.

This understanding of *Khel* as a folk and religious extension of performance and display broadens the number and kinds of artefacts that can be accepted in extension as a *Khilona*. Some of the objects such as elephants, kings and queens allow children to engage in pretend marriages, processions and other celebrations (Roopnarine et al. 1994: 19–24). These toys, used for both pleasure and education as well as performing rituals, are not similar to the wooden toys made for children to play with that perform a ludic function alone. The meaning of *Khilona* here embodies an enculturative mechanism. That is through *Khelna* or play, children learn societal roles, norms and values (Schwartzman 1978). The *Banarasi* toys are a good instance of enculturative *Khel* and *Khilona*. Here, children may rely equally on stories as a medium of play as well as a stimulant for their imagination (Roopnarine et al. 1994: 23). In Banaras, stories and storytelling are an important part of life. The myths and stories woven around the gods written in the *Puranas* and the epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* form the main source of representations in *Khilonas* – especially the statues.

Khilonas are representations of stories

Extract 1: Jeeravati Devi, a local resident of Banaras
These stories are read in various holy texts or heard in the numerous *Paaths*, *Pravachans* or *Katha-kathan* by the *Pandits* or other scholars. Stories are also told in the performances staged during the various *Melas* or fairs of Banaras. Even the representation of all statues of deities is based on the descriptions of them in such texts. Therefore, *Vishnu* and *Krishna* have blue bodies, the eyes of all living beings are *Kamalnayani* or lotus-like, *Brahma* is shown with three heads while *Ravana* has ten. Statues of gods are made as couples and not as individuals, such as *Radha–Krishna*, *Shiva–Parvati* or *Vishnu–Laxmi*. This also holds true for the vehicles or the *Vahanas* assigned to every god – Lord *Ganesha* on the rat, Lord *Shiva* on the *Nandi*, or Lord *Kartikeya* on the peacock. All these cues of

representing a god either visually or symbolically draw their roots from the stories narrated in the holy texts and popularly recited in the *Banarasi* culture at home or in a *path*.

Humans live in story. Humans explain through story. Humans explore their world through story. Humans design their worlds as stories. Individuals are born into the stories until they die. Similarly what one knows of an artefact is the stories one has heard one tell of it. The artefacts that people surround themselves with mean the very roles they play in the stories in which they occur. (Krippendorf 2006: 169–71)

Parents in Banaras believe that *Khilonas*, seeped in customs and religion, teach children not only beautiful stories but also infuse them with values. *Banarasi Khilonas* enact stories on tableaux or *Jhanki* made in every house during festivals. *Jhanki* is a *Leela* playfully created by mortal humans instead of the gods. It is a temporarily real world of its own in which a sacred performance is played, performed or created (Aleaz, 2004). Most statues of deities, especially those of Lord *Krishna*, have become an element of decoration for enacting a story, handled by children and adults during the festival of *Janmashtmi*, which is the celebration of the birth of Lord *Krishna*. Stories of *Krishna* dancing with the *Gopis*, *Putna vadh*, *Vasudev* with the baby *Krishna* sheltered by a serpent are mostly enacted through wooden *Khilonas* in Banaras (see Extract 2 and Figure

1) Children help their parents during the festivals in displaying episodes of mythical stories. Here *Khelna* is an activity not just between child–object, child–child but also child and adult where the child and adult can be both a participant and a spectator.

Extract 2:

Seema Agarwal, housewife residing in Vishwanath Gali, Banaras

Seema: Look at this. This is the *Dandiya Raas* (a form of dance in which Lord *Krishna* dances with his *Gopis*). This is a big boat. In this, Lord *Krishna* and *Radha* will go for a ride in the *Ganga*.

Author: Where is the *Sakha* in this?

Seema: The *Sakha* is not here now. The *Sakhi* is playing *Dandiya* with the god (note the use of the word *Khelna* or play here. *Dandiya* is a dance form but it is not performed but played by the *Sakhi* with the god). And this tree here is also made of wood. This here is a peacock (*Sakha* and *Sakhi* are friends of *Krishna*).

Author: What is this wooden tree called?

Seema: This is called a tree only. It is the *Kadam* tree on which the god used to play (note the use of the word *Khelna*, to play, here. The tree is displayed because it has a significant role in the play of the god. It is the site of play for the god). And here is a boat, a cow. This is the god. It is such a beautiful statue. This is a jail here – a small jail where the god was born.



(a) Krishna lifting Mount Govardhan



(b) Vishnu's siesta



(c) Gwalan carrying a milk pot



(d) Krishna and Radha in a baby boat ride on Ganga



(e) Jhanki



(f) Vasudev carrying Krishna under a snake hood



(g) Krishna stealing clothes of Gopis



(h) Kaliya mardan

Figure 1 Scenes of a *Jhanki* from a Banarasi household during *Janmashtmi*.

Most *Khilonas* used for *Janmashtmi* are removed on *Chatti* – the sixth day after a child is born. It is on this day that a child is given a name. After *Chatti*, *Khilonas* are neatly packed and stored for the next year. These wooden statues of deities are considered as objects of play and not as sacrilege because the rituals of their *Sthapana* or installation in the temple have not been performed. These *statues* are handled with respect, as they do not serve a ludic purpose alone (see Extract 3). If the statues break or are disfigured for some reason, it is believed that they have become *Khandit* or defiled and are therefore inauspicious. The *Khandit* statues are given away to the river Ganga. This is not the case with the objects of decoration or ludic play, which are simply thrown away if they break. Dongerkey (1954) says that a child playing with toys representing religious personalities or characters learns to handle them with great care because of the reverence and respect that they evoke in his mind. The child's destructive tendency can be checked by religious subject matter:

These *Khilonas* are meant for decoration but they are also given respect. We are careful not to touch them with our feet or that they are not lying around on the floor. The plastic toys can be easily given to the children. (Dongerkey 1954: pp. 64-6)

Extract 3: Jeeravati Devi, housewife residing in Gadolia, Banaras

These ritualistic *Khilonas* used during many festivals differ from each other according to the story and the festival being celebrated in Banaras. Aleaz (2004) relates religious festival with play because both are above ordinary life; mirth and joy sometimes dominate in both. They are limited to time and place and combine strict rules with genuine freedom. During *Ramleela*, various masks of gods and goddesses are worn by children, who play around the streets enacting the story of the triumph of good or evil with bows, arrows and swords made of bamboo or wood. This *Abhinay* being played on the streets is 'outside ordinary life', enacted within a physical and temporal boundary according to the rules of the mythical story. Here, the story is *played* by actors rather than statues with the help of *Khilonas* like the bow and arrow.

As the festivals change, so does the production of *Khilonas*, making forms of play seasonal in Banaras. The local market does not have clay *Khilonas* of animal figures after July as *Janmashtmi* is celebrated in the month of *Magh*, i.e. August. During *Diwali*, generally *Khilonas* made of clay are sold. In

Nagpanchami, clay *Khilonas* of the snake charmer along with the *Sugga* (parrot) and the pigeon are seen in the market.

Although, as mentioned earlier, the category of adult play mentioned in the *Saraswati kanthabharana* no longer exists, it is interesting to observe vestiges of ritual (*Ashtamichandrak*, *Madanostav*), dalliance (*Chutbhajjika*, *Chutlatika*, *Biskhadika*, *Kautuk*, *Griha*, *Kanana*) and celebration (*Yaksharatrika*, *Udakshevadika*) in a symbolic form in *Banarasi* ceremonies of the adults. No Hindi equivalent of these Sanskrit terms is found in the vocabulary but the symbolic gestures are enacted in the ceremonies nevertheless. For instance, in the celebration of marriage, the newly wed bride is presented with *Khilonas* in the ritual of *Bharai*. *Bharai* is an auspicious offering or a gift. A set of *Band-baja* (music players) along with other *Khilonas* like a *Chusni* (dummy) and *Jhunjhuna* (rattle) are included in this ritual as a symbol of fertility. The wooden *Sindora* (a small box to store vermillion or *sindoor*, which a married women applies on her forehead as a marital symbol) is also given as a gift, wrapped and tied in a red muslin cloth. A *Gudda* (male doll) is specially offered as a sign of the birth of the first son. Recently, *Samdhi Ka Khilona* (an erotic toy) has also become a part of this ritual for fun and laughter. Interestingly, this covert play used to tease and embarrass the bride is similar to the adult category of dalliance mentioned before. But such instances are rare and not expressed in any specific word in the vocabulary (see Extract 4).

Extract 4: Seema Agarwal, housewife residing in Vishwanath Gali, Banaras

Seema: These toys are sent by the in-laws to the bride's family, which we call *Hathpudi*. In the *Hathpudi*, apart from sarees and jewellery, there are also toys.

Seema's father in law: And the doll also goes at this time. But this doll is a male doll. After the marriage during the night this ritual is carried out.

Seema: This ritual is called *Bharai*. In this ritual all toys are put in the lap of the bride and then she is sent off to her new home.

Seema's father in law: In order to have the first child as a son, the male doll is given. Everything is sent – sweets.

Author: So what are the kinds of toys sent to the girl? One is the male doll.

Seema: They are all related to the children. There is one special toy called the *Samdhi ka Khilona*. There is a spring inside the cylinder from which something pops out. That's a fun kind of a toy. Then there are toys like the rattle.

Apart from the *Vilasijan*, the *Saraswati kanthabharana* also referred to the play for *Samanyajan*, which featured children as a dominant user apart from the common adult folks. The Sanskrit word *Kridanaka* also refers to an object intended for a child. Play for the *Samanyajan* unlike that of the *Vilasijan* was ludic in nature and often did not have religious or moral intentions attached to it. Although not much has been written about play and children in Indian literature of the past, there are many other sources that imply its existence in its social and cultural life. Remnants of toys such as the bullock cart were found at the Harappa and Mohenjodaro sites. In the temple panels of Amravati dating back to the second and third centuries AD, *Rahul* is shown with a toy horse and a toy elephant, while another panel has a two-wheeled cart, a horse and children holding balls and rattles in their hands. The cart has a roof and a semi-solid type of wheel with spokes. The horse pulling the four-wheeled cart is led by one of the children with a string (Dongerkey, 1954: 38–42). There are also miniature paintings that have documented the sale and play of toys for children with a ludic intention alone such as rattles, push and pull toys, spinning tops, etc. (see Figure 2).

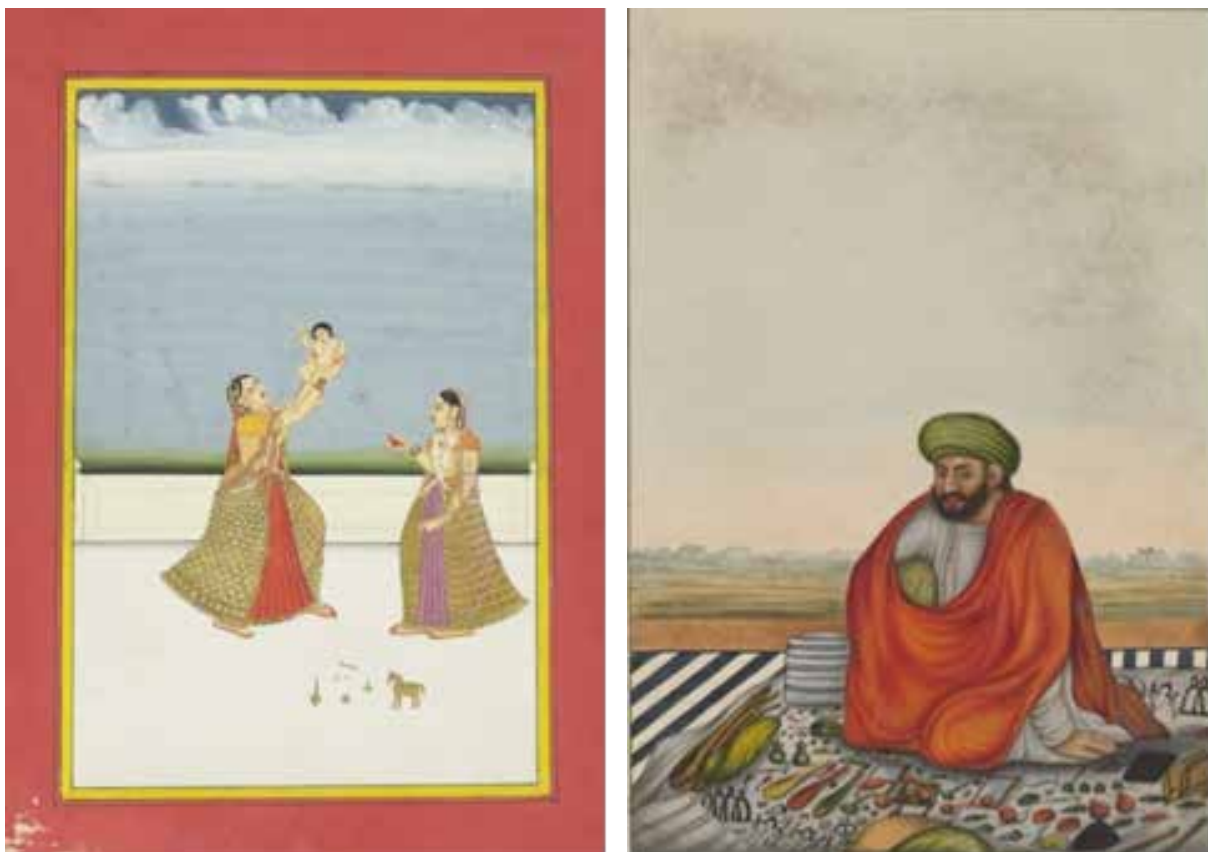


Figure 2 Toys depicted in old Indian paintings.

This ludic nature of the toy became prominent with the wide acceptance of the English word 'toy'. As stated earlier, owing to the remnant of the British *Raj*, though unfamiliar to Indian culture, the English language is still widely spoken. Many English words have entered the vernacular language. For instance, 'decoration', 'fun-type' or 'specially' are borrowed from English and used without any change in Hindi by the *Banarasi* residents.

Interestingly, similar to the Sanskrit word *Krida*, the English word 'toy' also connoted more meanings of play than just a ludic one in its past usage. 'Toy' comes from the Middle English (1100–1450) 'toye'. It referred to 'amorous

play' till about 1700s. This could even be broadened to include dalliance and fondling. It is interesting to note that the word 'toy' was largely associated for at least six to seven centuries with adult pleasure. By the 1500s, the meaning of the word 'toy' shifted in the realm of the child to a 'piece of fun or entertainment' (1500), 'thing of little value, trifle' (1520s), 'thing for a child to play with' (1580s). By the seventeenth century, the toy attained the ludic meaning, which is currently in usage: 'something to play with, especially as intended for use by a child' (*Oxford Dictionary* 1966: 934; *Longman Dictionary* 1984: 1590).

Referring to the *Oxford Dictionary*, Kyburz (1994) discusses the western sense of a toy as a material object for children or others to play with, contrived for amusement rather than practical utility. This meaning of 'toy' has found wide acceptance amongst both western and eastern urban consumers evident in the global toy and games market bereft of any cultural notions. Likewise in Banaras too, the English meaning of the word 'toy' in the ludic sense for children has been accepted but some of the older

meanings of *Khilonas* have not been discontinued altogether. Today, children help their parents during the festivals in making the tableaux of mythical stories but have also gradually shifted from ritualistic traditional *Khilonas* to modern plastic and soft toys in everyday life relegating the traditional meanings of *Khelna* or play to specific time, place and occasion alone. The word *Khilona* itself has also acquired ludic adjectives such as objects of play, entertainment artefacts that are often very cheap as mentioned in the definition of *Bahari* above. This ludic connotation of play is also visible in some of the *Banarasi Khilonas*. These *Khilonas* are not similar to the ritual statues used in the *Banarasi* festivals and ceremonies. *Khilonas* that are made for ludic purpose alone are often miniaturised simplified representations of reality with bright colours. Some examples include the Helicopter, *Lattu*, *Chugti chidiya* (pecking toy), *Hilanta* (a single pecking animal), Russian nested dolls, *Sukhi parivar* (a *Banarasi* nested doll), a set of musicians, animals, birds and others (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 *Khilonas* for children to play with.

Edutainment toys that aid children to cope with their schoolwork are conspicuous by their lack or complete absence of *Banarasi* toys. This may be because *Banarasi Khilonas* largely serve an 'enculturative role' rather than an educational one as discussed earlier. A few toys such as *Chusni* (dummies), *Jhunjhuna* (rattles) and walkers associated with the physical growth of the child have been replaced by cheap plastic equivalents.

To sum up, over time many attributes of the meaning of *Krida*, *Kridanaka*, *Khel* and *Khilona* in both Sanskrit and Hindi have ceased to be a part of daily conversations such as the Sanskrit understanding of adult play. On the other hand, some parts of the older lexicon and its meanings have also been retained. For instance, the representative nature of play through performances, *Leela* and rituals still form an integral part of the *Banarasi* lexicon and practices. However, the ludic meaning of the *Khilona* has been held common by all three languages – Sanskrit, Hindi and English. Despite the widespread use of English and the westernization of the Indian life style, the English word 'toy' has not completely replaced the vernacular vocabulary and its meanings but its

growing influence also cannot be disregarded. This influence is evident in the proliferating use of Barbie dolls, Lego or computer games and their burgeoning sales, which is nevertheless strictly demarcated by the local *Haats*, *Melas* and shops that sell wooden toys. The change in the *Banarasi* user preferences and the worldview towards ludic play is a result of not just market dynamics but also that of the media.

As discussed here, some meanings have been retained over time in the lexicon while others have been assimilated or become redundant. As meanings died in Banaras so did their physical manifestations, as evidenced by the absence of the performative, amorous and ritualistic role of the adults in the *Krida* of the *Vilasijan*. The semantic change of the notion of play demonstrated by the narrowing down of its meaning from Sanskrit to Hindi and then on to

English has overlaps, alterations, replacement and elimination of notions of play and toys as represented in the Venn diagram in Figure 4. Circle 1 encloses the Sanskrit words of play and play objects. Circle 2 encloses Hindi words and Circle 3 encloses words in English. In Circle 1, all words denoting adult play are no longer in use and therefore do not overlap with either Circle 2 or 3. On the other hand, the *Samanyajan krida*, *Leela* and *Kapitava* is shared with the Hindi lexicon in Circle 2. *Nautanki* and Acrobatics is exclusive to Circle 2 but it shares its growing emphasis on child as the primary user of play with Circle 3. Circle 3 on the other hand also has many words that are limited to it alone such as edutainment or educative toys. The only meaning shared by all the three languages is that of ludic play as evident in the overlapping of the three circles in the centre.

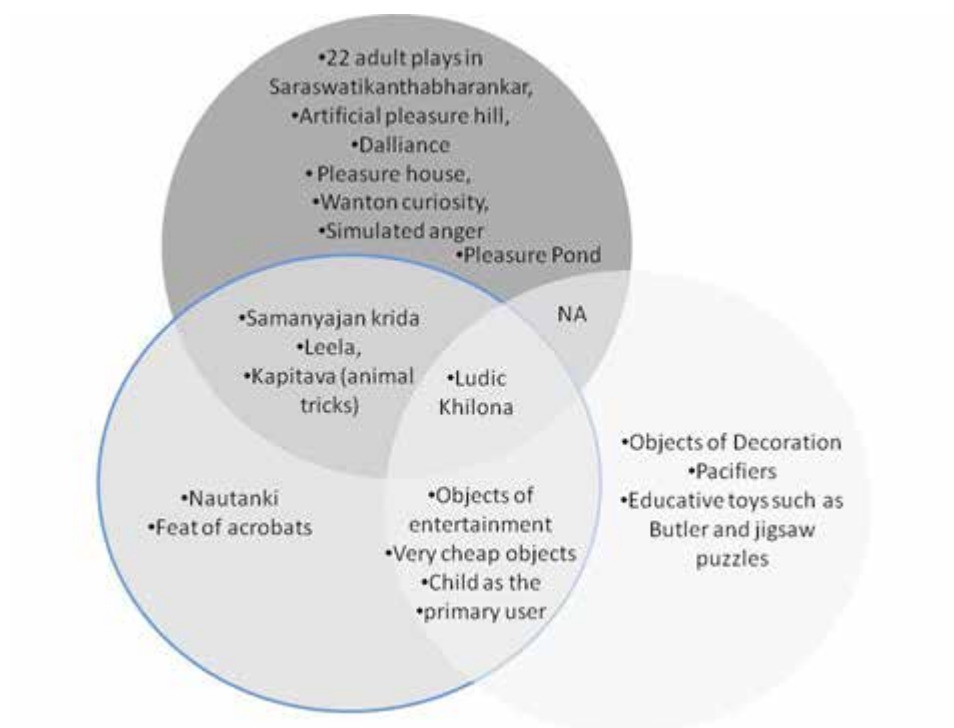


Figure 4 Venn diagram of changing *Banarasi* lexicon of play and play objects.

The change towards the modern western meaning of ‘toy’ autonomous of the cultural situation of its consumption is yet to completely replace the *Banarasi* notion of *Khel* and *Khilona*, which is specific to its worldview and expressed verbally in its vocabulary and notions apart from its distinct physical manifestations in the wooden artefacts. Most *Banarasi Khilonas* even today are related to the cultural experience of the children, and toy makers thus exclude it from the western worldview of the ludic notion of play alone. This culture-specific meaning of toys as extended to rituals and ceremonies, their seasonality and local craftsmanship of materials found close by broaden the definition of toys of Banaras from ludic experience alone to a cultural representation. As the cultural meaning of ‘toy’ is contextually specific to Banaras as manifested in its language

and its artefacts, unless otherwise specified, the *Banarasi* toys from here on will be referred to as *Banarasi Khilona* to distinguish them from their English counterpart.

4. Conclusion

Design by the traditional community-practised crafts is deeply rooted in its worldview. Artefacts are shaped by a vocabulary and the worldview but these too are shaped by the artefacts. Even though the worldview is not written or coded in any tangible manner, members of a community largely share and follow it.

Vocabulary reflects the proper member of a group of artefacts: vernacular vocabularies help in understanding the notion of a proper toy for a community. Some meanings are retained over time in the lexicon while others get assimilated or become redundant. In the study of the *Banarasi khilonas*, the semantic meaning narrowed down over time from divine play to ludic play, affecting not just the nature of play but that of the players too. The local lexicon of the word '*khilona*' has shifted from a cultural representation to a ludic product and more recently into exhibition or display.

As words die, so do their physical manifestations: changes in vocabulary reflect changes in the worldview of the *khilona* as words are added, eliminated or evolve. For instance, the category of adult play which featured twenty-two meanings of play is no longer a part of the Banarasi worldview. The lack or absence of words denoting the twenty-two meanings of play are also reflected in the lack of physical manifestations in *Khilonas* or rituals to express the same, today.

Method of elucidating design decisions through language as well as artefacts: in the paucity of explicit forms of elicitation of craft knowledge, the local Banarasi lexicon used in common parlance within the *Karkhana* became a veritable source of cues to capture the worldview of the *Banarasi Khilona* makers. Although language is a common tool of elicitation in many areas of studies, in Indian crafts it has been rarely used due to a lack of verbal articulation by craftsmen. This study has elucidated a method of analysis of lexicon related to the artefact from a vernacular language. The success of the method questions the limitation of language in reflecting tacit knowledge and provides possible future directions for the study of craft practices. This could be specifically observed in the Banarasi lexicon through the nouns that denote the artefact, process and meaning. The timeline of various words used to denote the same artefact or use, further revealed a pattern of change not only in the conception of an artefact but also in its

physical manifestation, as seen in the changing Banarasi vocabulary from *Kridanaka*, *Khilona* to a toy.

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