

Ayurvedic Concept of Toys

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Abstract:

A toy is an item that is used in play. Playing with toy is an enjoyable means of training young children for life. The origin of toys is prehistoric. The oldest known doll toy is thought to be 4,000 years old. Ancient Ayurvedic scholars had put sufficient attention to the toys i.e. amusement, safety and other aspects, which is evident from reference available in Ayurvedic texts. As per Kashyapa Samhita (*Balkridkani phishtamayani jatusham*) toys for infants/children need to be made from powdered wheat, rice, barely flour etc food materials including *Laksha (lakh)*. Such toys are children and echo friendly because being devoid of harmful chemicals or any contamination. Ashtang Samgrah and Kashyapa Samhita have specially described the characteristic of playground, where infants/ children, are to play. Ayurvedic texts have very specifically advocated various musts while preparing toys because particular shapes may not be user friendly. Ashtang Samgraha has specifically mentioned the shapes of toys. Toys must be having the shape of vegetarian animal and birds like cow, horse which induce *Satvic Bhava* in children. Surface of toy should be smooth with least tendency to injure delicate skin of child. Unnecessary curvatures and bends must be avoided in toys to be used in infants and early childhood.

Keywords:

Kridnaka, Kridabhumi, Kanamb, Siktha, Vichitra, Ghoshvant, Ramniya, Atikshan.

Introduction:

A toy is an item that is used for playing. Toy is a mean of enjoyment as well as training, young children for life. The origin of toys is pre-historic. The oldest known doll toy is thought to be 4,000 years old. The excavation of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa has produced a great variety of toys and playthings. It exhibit that the people of the Harappa period, paid sufficient attention to the enjoyment of the younger population. The origin of the word "toy" is unknown, but it is believed that it was first used in the 14th century.¹

Newborn possess certain inherent reflexes and skills, however, as the age progress, some new reflexes and psycho-motor activities also develop which help in coordinated growth and development of children. Hence, some additional efforts are needed by parents while selecting specific toys for their psycho-motor advancement.

It is believed that the existence of toys and dolls in India is dated back to the civilization of Indus in around 4000 years ago. The phenomena of this art practice and its advancement with the time reflects many secrets of the history of evolution. A large scale of diversity is found in the style of toy and doll making in India because of its diverse cultural and traditional practices. Ancient Ayurvedic scholars had put sufficient attention to these aspects, which is evident from reference available in Ayurvedic texts.

Ayurveda, especially the field of Kaumarbhritya provides enough references in this regard. The word "*Kumar*", itself indicate toward the toys. As per Amarkosh² (1/1/40) *Kaumarm kridayam*, *kumaryati kridati* i.e. the one who plays, love playing enjoys playing^{3,4,5,6} or devoting enough time in plying is *kumar*, playing helps in enhancing motor as well as psychic development.

Ayurvedic texts are not confined to explaining types of toys but also had provided special importance to the playing area because it adds to safety of infant /child. Specific selection of raw material to be used in manufacturing of toys has also been mentioned. Ashtang Samgrha⁷ (Utt. 1/75-76) has specifically referred the material by which toys are to be manufactured.

As per Kashyapa Samhita⁸ (*Balkridkani phishtamayani jatusham*) toys for infants/children need to be made from powdered wheat, rice, barely flour etc food materials including *Laksha (lakh)*^{9,10,11,12}. Such toys are children and echo friendly being devoid of harmful chemicals or any contamination. Above mentioned materials, due to their easy accessibility, being fresh and in any case ingested, shall not harm infant/child. These toys are less costly and user friendly, thus safe, affordable as well as easily disposable. Although, due to various reasons preparation of such toys has gradually lessened however needs to be propagated due to having advantage over the presently available toys in the market. Wooden⁸ and mud toys have also been referred in various texts like *Mricchktikam*. Such toys are also child friendly, non toxic and easily disposable. These types of toys are still available but due to painting of these toys with toxic paints, has made them non child friendly.

Presently, due to innovation of new materials like PVC (Poly Vinyl Chloride) as well as due to electronic advancements, classical toys are now almost obsolete but from point of view of their serious hazard, reconsideration of material which is children friendly needs to be used during infancy and early childhood.

Characteristics of Play Ground (*Kridabhumi*)

Ashtang Samgrah⁷ (Ash. Sm. Utt. 1/60) and Kashyapa Samhita⁸ have specially described the characteristic of ground/ place, where infants/ children, are to play during early childhood because they are more prone to infection and physical injuries due to low levels of immune status and low physical tolerance. While describing these parameters, it has been stressed upon that the area of play must be devoid of curves and should be comparatively soft. Such play area should not possess hard gravels, any metal scrapes etc.

The specific word *Shuchaudeshah*¹³ has been referred which means the play ground needs to be very clean and safe. It also conveys that the particular part of land should not contain any infectious material. One must take care to select such a place where toxic fumes from industry cannot spoil the environment of the play area. The site must have cross ventilation and appropriate sunlight. The play space needs to be free from human and animal debris.

Further, the play area must be free from sharp weapons, ponds and source of fire (*Shastratoya agnivarjite*). Infants and children, being unaware of do's and don'ts of play, can be injured to sharp articles made of metals, fire articles⁸.

Ayurvedic texts have specially mentioned specific decoctions of drugs so as to disinfect the play area for example (*Kanamb siktha nimbodaken va*) the decoction of Pippli, Siktha, or Nimba¹² needs to be sprinkled over the play ground to disinfect it and thus the chances of infection. These drugs are known for their antiseptic, bactericidal /static properties.

Basic qualities/precautions while making toys:

Ayurvedic texts have very specifically advocated various musts while preparing toys because particular shapes may not be user friendly Charak Samhita¹⁴ (Ch. Sa. Sh. 8/63);Ashtang Samgraha⁷ (Asht. Sam. Utt. 1/60);Kashyapa Samhita⁸ (Kas. Sam. Khil 12/8). Charak Samhita has elaborated following characteristics of toys to be used by infants/children:

a) Assorted Shapes (*Vichitrani*)

Toys made for children needs to be having various sizes, shapes and colors as well as must be very attractive. These are required to be tempting and specific to age of infant/child. Children have also the tendency to acquire toys as per their choice / acceptance. Even choice of color may be specific. Shapes of known animals and articles also prompt them to play with them. Sex related acceptance must also be offered. Hence, all such considerations need to be considered before preparing/ purchasing the toys by mother/parents.

b) Sound of toys(*Ghoshvanti*)

As per age of infant/child, the sound produced by the specific toy promotes/ demotes the liking of children. The pitch of sound also affects acceptance. Usually soothing and known sounds are acceptable. High pitch sounds may initiate fear in the child; moreover it may harm the hearing levels. However, the quality/ intensity differ as the age progress. Parents can also judge the hearing capacity of child through such toys. Sometime it may help to convey to the physician because proper hearing is the key to the speech quality as well as learning process.

c) Playable/Amazing toys (*Ramaniya*)

It is the essential quality of any toy. Infant must be able to hold/handle the toys without any strenuous effort. Toy must be so attractive in shape/colour/sound, that infant/child loves to play with it more frequently and freely. The toys having learning skill quality adds further to its utility.

d) Weight (Aguru)

Weight of the toy is also the basic quality as it makes them playable / unplayable as being is closely related to infant/child. Heavy toys, at particular age, may not be acceptable; hence, weight of toy must be taken care while selecting toys. The criteria, mentioned by Charak Samhita¹⁴, really reflects the deep concern of ancient Acharayas, as weight of the toy make them playable/unplayable. Appropriate weight of toy make it more playable, manipulative and child friendly as well as may help to improve psychomotor coordination and physical skill.

e) Blunt edges (*Atikshnani*)

Any toy made for infant/child must not have sharp edges because sharp edges toys may cause injury. Children, especially infants, have the tendency of putting toys in oral cavity during dentition period (oral phase). Sharp edges may cause injury to nostrils and eyes accidentally.

f) Very tiny Toys (*Aasya Apraveshaini*)

The size of toy should not be very small as infant/child may put whole toy in oral cavity, which may pass down and creating chances of aspiration.

g) Totally safe (*Apranaharani*)

Safety is essential characteristic of any toy made for infant. Toy must not, in any circumstance, pose any threat to life. Accidental deaths of the infants due to swallowing of toys have been reported, which is caused due to aspiration. Heavy toys, coated with dangerous chemicals/paints, initiate more incidents of "Pica" in children specially those having high level of stress.

h) Appealing/non frightening (*Avitrasanani*)

Toys must not pose any type of fear psychosis in children hence, must be much liked in terms of shape, color and sound. Usually, red colored as well as fear creating shape toys needs to be avoided in children being the source of fear, worry etc. Loud and uncomfortable sound producing toys must ever be avoided in infants.

Shapes and surface:

Ashtang Samgraha (Asht. Sam. Utt. 1/76) has specifically mentioned the shapes of toys. Toys must be having the shape of vegetarian animal and birds like cow, horse which induce *Satvic Bhava* in children. Surface of toy should be smooth with least tendency to injure delicate skin of child. Unnecessary curvatures and bends must be avoided in toys to be used in infants and early

childhood. Newly introduced toys need to be deferred in infants because mother/parent may not be knowing their qualities/injurious effects properly.

Movability of toy depends on shape and size of toy. Hence, big sized toys must be avoided as child may not be able to handle properly.

Liking and fun creation (Ruchi, Vinodman)

These two aspects are must in any toy made/used for children, otherwise child may not accept it. Thus this aspect must be considered before creating/procuring any toy for children.

The above description clearly conveys deep concern and concentration of ancient Ayurvedic scholars in terms of preparation and procurement of toys for infants/children. These are very essential aspects/qualities for promoting play activity as it closely related to their psycho motor skill development including safety.

Playing is an essential part of childhood life i.e. babies, toddlers and preschool as well as school-age children. Toys assist in development of children. Choosing the right toy offers many possibilities which can be very rewarding. Parents need to respect and understand more about the world of play and its great value for all babies and children.

Largely, toys for children can be categorized as following¹⁵:

- a) **Activity toys:** These develop coordination, improve small and large motor skills, and balance. Begin with balls and beanbags; add a tricycle, bike, wagon, or skates. A jump rope and a kite are great for outdoor fun. Always check whether your child is ready for the activity. Also, don't forget the valuable experiences of gardening, nature walks, and exploring.
- b) **Creativity toys: Such toys** stimulate self-expression. The child can create with crayons, finger-paints, watercolors, clay and craft sets. Children learn from following directions, a sequence of activities, and gain satisfaction in completing a project. Don't forget activities like making something new with a cardboard box to stimulate imagination, singing or listening to or making music, or trying other creative projects.
- c) **Learning toys: Such toys** contribute to the acquisition of knowledge. These toys include books, tapes, videos, software, CDs, puzzles, and board games. The child should read books, listen to music, solve puzzles, and play games.

Essential features of toys¹⁵:

1. Versatility i.e. can be used more than one way.
2. Durability is an important feature of toys as they will last for a long time. Children play hard and subject their toys to lot of wear and tear.
3. Toys must be attractive and appealing to the children because they offers an opportunity for fun, learn, and thinking.
4. Toys should inculcate creativity and expand their area of imagination in art, crafts, hobbies, language, reading, music, movement, and drama.
5. Toys must be helpful in expanding positive self-esteem, values, understanding, and cultural awareness.
6. Toys should offer practice in skill building, eye/hand coordination, fine and large motor skills.
7. Toys should help in developing communication skills and need to educate the child about the environment, the community, the world, the history, science and/or technology.

Open-ended toys and their importance:

Open-ended toys and activities are like blocks, puppets, dolls, and art supplies which stimulate creativity, sense of humor, sense of discovery, wonder, reasoning, social development etc.

Age vs. toys

Children in different ages play, explore and learn in a variety of ways. Newborns remain quite still for a few weeks after birth, sleeping most of the time and waking in between only to feed. They like being swaddled because it reminds the safety of the mother's womb. During the waking hours, babies observe faces and try to become accustomed to the surroundings.

Vision of babies, during first few months is not fully developed and playing at this stage is parent's prerogative and as usual show the baby around the house, cuddle, nurse or talk and sing, learns to trust and depend on mother and family. Babies at this age enjoy watching a cot mobile for long times as it revolves and play music.

As the time passes, and baby's limbs start straightening out, usually one month old lying on back and moving legs up and down. This is the beginning of physical play and her way of exercising her arms and legs. This builds strength in the limbs and prepares them for bigger challenges ahead. When on tummy, children try to raise head and chest building strength in their neck and back muscles.

Touching, mouthing, banging, throwing and pushing is a favorite way of playing for babies in six to twelve months age-group.

1 -2 years old

Toddlerhood is the wonderful stage when baby becomes more and more independent and dependent, at the same time. In the beginning stranger and separation anxiety develops. On the other hand, a toddler wants to put to use newly acquired skills like crawling and walking and seldom not like too much help. Thus, baby is becoming an individual.

Babies at this age need some assistance while playing. Once provided instructions that how a particular toy works, they can take over and try themselves. Board books can be of great fun for them as they enjoy pictures and try to relate them to things around them.

Push-toys can help the toddler in walking by giving minimum support. Pull-toys are great for a baby who is proficient in walking. Rockers, stacking cups and rings and shape-sorters are good toys for this age-group. Baby should know how a toy works, but then take a back-seat and let them explore on their own. Don't try to intervene too much. At the same time, always keep an eye on them. Good toys are ones which do something and teach the baby something rather than just looking cute.

2-4 years old

Children, till two years, like to watch others but would prefer playing by themselves. As toddlers grow, they become more aware of other kids and would want their company.

Role play and imitation is very common in this age and only goes to show how much they are imbibing from their surroundings. Parents will soon find their baby serving tea or cooking or shaving like father.

Babies at this age start taking control of their play-time and soon parents will become mere participants in the game.

Playhouses, kitchen sets, scribble board, small cars, trucks, ride-ones, and musical instruments like xylophone, guitar etc are good for kids in this age-group.

Start of symbolic play is also seen at this stage which means baby will take an empty shoe box and drag it around as a car or pieces of paper will become bread/ chapattis.

Parents need to be a part of their children's playtime at young age. Children depend on parents in more ways than one and spending time will not only make them happy children now but also help in building self-esteem and confidence for life. Some parents just give their babies a lot of toys and assume baby will be able to entertain oneself. Reading or telling stories can be very enjoyable for both you and the baby. It also builds language skills.

Another important thing to remember is to let the baby take the lead. Do not expect baby to play just because you want her to. Stop whenever you feel baby is getting tired or cranky.

Shopping of Toys

Keep few things in mind while shopping of toys for babies. Points, to be remembered when buying toys for an infant, are as under:

- Buy only those toys which are recommended for infants. Manufacturer's instructions must be known that a particular toy is safe as per age.
- Never buy toys with small parts as these can cause choking hazard.
- Toys for newborns should make noise, soft, cloth balls or blocks. Look for toys in bold primary colors. Rattles and cot mobiles are great for newborns.
- Ensure that the toys are from a good company and safe for infants. Babies put toys in mouth, so ensure toys are washable and are made of BPA free plastic.
- Whenever buying wooden toys, look for nails, chipped corners etc. They can be hazardous. Paint used must nontoxic and safe for babies.
- Never buy toys with long strings /ribbons as baby may get entangled in them.
- Toys should grow with your baby, so that can be used them for a long time and get the best value for money.
- Toys must enhance curiosity and call for action rather than just looking cute.
- Toys which will encourage in developing hand-eye coordination as well as motor skills should be purchased.
- When buying toys, ask other parents for their feedback. As they may guide by their experience with toys and also help to locate best place to buy them.
- Internet is the best source for review on toys and recalls if any. Sometimes, toys are deemed unsafe in some countries but are still available elsewhere. Pay attention to the reasons of recall.

Choosing right toy¹⁵

The toys for children should possess following features:

1. Must be safe without any potential health hazards.
2. Toys should never be too small, without sharp edges or loose ties.
3. Should be nontoxic and can be clean easily.
4. Element of fun, must be present in the toys. These must amuse, delight, excite the child and are enjoyable. Must provide practice of skill.
5. Toys should meet Consumer Product Safety Standards.
6. Toy should be as per Child's age, skills, abilities and interest.
7. Needs to be well-designed and are easy to use as well as good looking.
8. Toy should be versatile and durable.
9. Toy is supposed to be enticing and engaging.
10. Should expand creativity and imagination.
11. Toys must help the child to express emotions, experience.
12. Toys need to help teach positive self-esteem, values, understanding.
13. Toys also should offer skill building, eye/hand coordination and fine and large motor skill communication.
14. Maintenance of toys needs to be easily.
15. Toy must be affordable.

Safety norms for toys¹⁶

Many countries have passed safety standards, limiting the types of toys to be sold. Most of these seek to limit potential hazards, such as choking or fire hazards that could cause injury. Children, especially very small ones, often put toys into their mouths, so the materials used to make toys so as to prevent poisoning. Materials are also, regulated to prevent fire hazards. Children may not yet learn to judge, what is safe and dangerous. Parents cannot think of all such possible situations, so statutory warnings and regulations are important for manufacturing of toys. Every country has its own regulations for toy safety.

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