

“DHINGLA AND DHINGLI”- RUG TOY FROM GUJARAT

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ABSTRACT

The Kutch region in India is known for the beautiful amalgamation of people from two countries that have come together for the best. While it has the beauty of the Indian desert, clothing, flavours, temples, and palaces. It also gives us the most skilled set of artisans that migrated from Pakistan to Sindh to Kutch, dividing themselves into different communities that worked and specialised in particular handicrafts. The present research paper aims to document one such textile toy craft of *dhingla and dhingli*, which is being practiced by the *Rabari* artisans of Sumarasar Sheikh village of the Kutch district. The multi-visit approach was adopted for authentic data collection. A personal interview with the master artisan Babra ben was conducted to know about the in-depth process of making these dolls. The research outcome shows that with proper design intervention and imparting marketing skills, the *DhinglaDhingli* dolls can find their own place in the traditional toys market of India.

Key Words:Craft, *Dhingla- Dhingli*, Preservation, Rug dolls, Toy

1. INTRODUCTION

Dhingla&Dhingli dolls of Kutch, Gujarat have a rich and fascinating history that dates back several centuries. *Dhingli* in Gujarati refers to female dolls and *Dhingla* refers to the male doll. The origins of these dolls can be traced back to the nomadic communities of Kutch, who would make these dolls for their children to play with. Over time, these dolls became an integral part of Kutchi folk art and have been used for various cultural and religious events. The unique feature of these dolls is that they are made entirely from scraps of cloth and are filled with rags, making them eco-friendly and sustainable.

The paper further examines the role of the artisans who make these dolls. They are usually from the Kutchi Rabari community, which is a nomadic pastoralist community that has been known for its rich cultural heritage, including its textiles, jewellery, and dolls. The community is known for its skilled craftsmanship, and many of its members have passed down their traditional doll-making techniques from generation to generation. These artisans work from their homes or in small workshops and use a variety of materials, including cloth, wire, and various types of decorative materials, to create their dolls. The study emphasises that despite working with pre-established designs, the community artisans skillfully modify tools and materials, utilizing leftover textile waste and threads from embroidery and applique work to handcraft toys for their grandchildren.

The research aims to study the lesser-known ancient traditional craft of toy making of a rural community of Kutch, Gujarat and thus attempts to revive it by documenting its techniques and practices

2. METHODOLOGY

For the research paper, a descriptive research design was employed. A semi-structured interview schedule, developed following preliminary visits to the community and a thorough review of related literature, was utilized to gather comprehensive insights into the craft under study. The selection of the sample involved choosing a master craftsman, Babra Ben, renowned for her extensive expertise in embroidery, applique, and *Dhingla-Dhingli* craftsmanship. The semi-structured interview schedule, tailored specifically for the master craftsman, was meticulously designed to elicit detailed craft-related information, complemented by visual aids such as photographs. Additionally, the observation method was employed to enhance the depth of understanding. The qualitative data was collected through field visits and desk research. Various forms of data, including documents, photographs, videos, verbal responses, and observation notes, were analyzed for authentic documentation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The *Dhingla & Dhingli* dolls of Kutch, Gujarat are a unique and important part of the cultural heritage of the Kutchi people. Despite facing several challenges, including the decline of traditional craftsmanship, the increasing popularity of modern toys, and the lack of recognition from the wider public, the tradition of making these dolls has been kept alive for generations. This paper brings into focus the long lost forgotten traditional innovative fabric-based crafts of India with particular reference to Gujarat State. The paper is a detailed in-depth study of the *Dhingla & Dhingli* toys made by the community womenfolk of Sumarsar village in District Kutch.

a. Significance of the dolls

These dolls have been a part of Kutchi culture for generations and have been passed down from one generation to the next. The origins of these dolls can be traced back to the nomadic communities of Kutch, who would make these dolls for their children to play with. Over time, these dolls became an integral part of Kutchi folk art and have been used for various cultural and religious events. The unique feature of these dolls is that they are made entirely from scraps of cloth and are filled with rags, making them eco-friendly and sustainable. The doll size varies from 6 inches to 12 inches maximum.

b. Community practicing the craft

The artisans who make these dolls are usually from the Kutchi *Rabari* community, a nomadic pastoralist community known for its rich cultural heritage, including its textiles, jewelry, and dolls. The *Rabari* community is known for its skilled craftsmanship, and many of its members have passed down their traditional doll-making techniques from generation to generation. These artisans work from their homes or in small workshops and use a variety of materials, including cloth, and various types of decorative materials, to create their dolls.

c. Case study of the artisan

Babra ben, aged 70, graciously shared her profound knowledge and experiences during the data collection process. She operates within the esteemed NGO, Kalaraksha, and manages her independent venture titled "The Craft Village." Notably, she stands as the sole artisan creating *Dhingla* and *Dhingli* within the Kalaraksha community.

The master craftsman Babra Ben was selected as a sample for the data collection as she was a most experienced craftsman. She at the age of 70 was kind enough to share her extensive knowledge about both embroidery and applique along with *Dhingla- Dhingli*, she works at an NGO called Kalaraksha while running her own business called "The Craft Village". At Kalaraksha, she is the eldest amongst all the female artisans and the one who makes *Dhingla* and *Dhingli*.



Plate 1: Babra ben making *Dhingla- Dhingli*

d. Raw Materials

The most important material used in these textile dolls was the textile waste. Apart from it white cotton cloth, white and black colour sewing and embroidery threads, multicolour beads, white pearl beads, cords, and other decorative materials were used for making of *dhingla-dhingli* dolls.

e. Tools & techniques

The tools used are limited to a needle, thread, and a scissor. The technique for

f. Process

As the reason behind the change in the type of work they did, is their increasing age, which affects their vision, they create these dolls using as simple and quick techniques as possible.

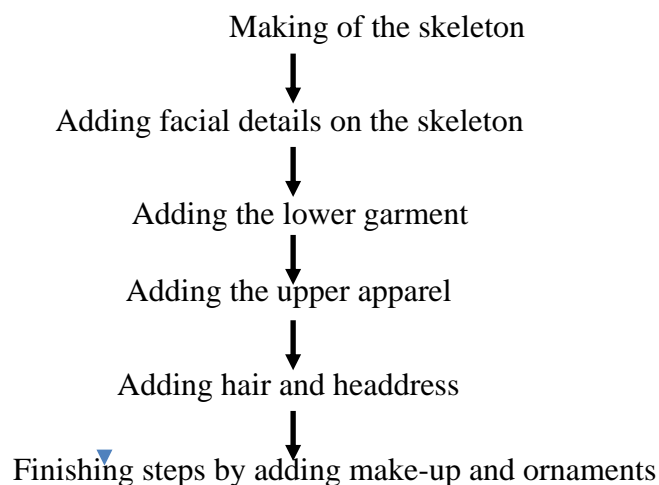








Illustration 1: Common process of making dhingla-dhingli dolls

Table 1: Step by step making process of dhingla and dhingli

Step No.	Step	Description	Image
1.	Making of the <i>Dhingla</i> and <i>Dhingli</i> 's skeleton.	<p>It involves choosing along any big piece of grey fabric.</p> <p>Folding both the edges twice inwards and seaming it using hidden stitch techniques.</p> <p>Then folding the stitched piece into half, leaving some space from the top of the loop tie a thread around to seal the loop.</p> <p>They are filling the empty gaps with the same fabric pieces.</p> <p>Adding hands is simple, using the same skeleton technique to make a similar piece with a small fabric piece.</p>	
2.	Adding facial details on the skeleton	<p>Creating the nose is a smart technique, taking a small piece of fabric and folding it into a triangular piece that looks like a cone.</p> <p>Make a small slit on a square piece of white/ (any piece of fabric you wish to be the visible skin) fabric.</p> <p>Insert the cone through the slit and attaching it to the skeleton piece of the doll.</p> <p>Using the black thread one can embroider eyes and other details.</p> <p>One can also use beads for this.</p>	
3.	Adding the lower apparel / <i>chaniya</i> (long skirt in local terms) and <i>Dhoti</i> (Draped garment for men)	<p>Using the available scrap printed fabric cut out a rectangular piece that will be used for the <i>chaniya</i>. or <i>Dhoti</i></p> <p>A thread is usually used to hold it to the centre skeleton piece.</p>	

4.	Adding the upper apparel/ <i>choli</i> (<i>i</i> (Blouse in local terms) and <i>Kadiyu</i> (Top in local terms)	<p>To add the <i>choli</i> one needs to actually create a pattern of the blouse and stitch it.</p> <p>Adding some small details always enhances the entire look.</p> <p>Choosing a fabric of the same piece of cloth or a contrasting one makes these dolls attractive. One can also use an embroidered piece.</p>	
5.	Adding other details on the <i>dhingli</i> and <i>dhingli</i>	<p>Then adding braided strands of hair, along with the <i>dupatta</i> for <i>Dhingla</i> and <i>Pagri</i> for <i>Dhingli</i> on their head.</p> <p>The <i>dupatta</i> or <i>Pagri</i> is stitched at places it is tucked in their traditional draping styles.</p> <p>The <i>dupatta and pagri</i> is decorated with the same beaded border as the <i>choli</i> or <i>kadiyu</i></p>	
6.	Finishing steps	<p>Finishing for this is done by adding some jewelry using beads and <i>zari</i> border patches.</p> <p>Adding <i>bindi</i> on <i>Dhingla</i> and lips on both using are thread gives it a traditional look.</p> <p>The top of the head is attached with a black loop for the customer to hang them.</p>	

g. Types of dolls

Dhingla and *Dhingli* dolls of Kutch, Gujarat come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and designs, each with its unique style and character. The *Dhingla-Dhingli* dolls were classified into the following categories:

1. Traditional Dolls
2. Festival dolls
3. Bridal dolls
4. Animal Dolls
5. Customized dolls

1. Animal dolls - These dolls were made in the shape of various animals, such as camels, horses, and cows, and are popular among children. They were made using the same techniques as traditional *Dhingla* and *Dhingli* dolls and were often decorated with bright colors and intricate designs (*plate 2- a,b,c,d*)

2. Traditional dolls - These dolls were made in the traditional style and feature typical *Kutchi* clothing, jewelry, and headgear. They were often made in a variety of sizes and are popular among collectors and enthusiasts (*plate 2-f &*)
3. Festival dolls - These dolls weremade to commemorate various cultural and religious festivals, such as Navratri and Holi. They were brightly colored and decorated with traditional designs and symbols, making them a popular choice for festive occasions. (*plate 2- e*)
4. Bridal dolls - These dolls were made to represent the bride and groom and are often given as gifts on the occasion of a wedding. They were intricately decorated with traditional clothing, jewelry, and headgear, and were highly prized among *Kutchi* communities (*plate 2- h & j*)
5. Customized dolls - These dolls were made to order and can be customized to reflect the buyer's specific requirements. They can be made in any size, style, or design and are a popular choice among those who want a unique and personal piece of art. (*plate 2-i*)



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Plate 2 : Various types of *Dhingla-Dhingli* dolls (a) cow (b) horse (c) camel (d) bird (e) Festival dolls (f & g) Traditional Dolls (h) Wedding couple-1 (i) Customised dolls (j) Wedding couple-2

h. Costing & Selling

The cost price of making *Dhingla* and *Dhingli* dolls varies depending on several factors, such as size, level of detail, and materials used. On average, a small traditional *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* doll can cost anywhere between 100 to 200 Rupees, while larger and more intricate dolls can cost upwards of 500 Rupees.

When it comes to selling prices, *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* dolls are often sold at a premium, reflecting the time, skill, and effort that goes into making them. On average, traditional *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* dolls can be sold for anywhere between 500 to 1000 Rupees, while larger and more intricate dolls can be sold for upwards of 1500 Rupees. It is worth noting that the prices of *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* dolls can vary greatly, depending on the location, market conditions, and demand. For example, dolls made by master craftsmen and sold in high-end tourist areas may be sold at a much higher price compared to dolls sold in local markets.

Overall, the cost price and selling price of *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* dolls are determined by a number of factors and can vary greatly. However, despite these variations, these dolls remain an important and cherished part of Kutchi culture and tradition and continue to be highly prized by collectors and enthusiasts alike.

i. Preservation & popularization of the craft in the recent scenario

In the early 20th century, the *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* dolls of Kutch gained widespread popularity and were sought after by collectors and enthusiasts worldwide. This popularity led to the establishment of several workshops in Kutch, where these dolls were made on a larger scale. However, the number of workshops gradually declined in the latter half of the 20th century due to the increased availability of mass-produced toys and the decline in the popularity of traditional handicrafts.

The market potential for *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* dolls can be substantial, especially for those who appreciate traditional forms of folk art and the rich cultural heritage of Kutch. In India, the demand for these dolls is high in regions where there is a significant presence of the Kutchi Rabari community, as well as in cities with a thriving arts and crafts market.

For marketing and selling *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* dolls, one can target arts and crafts fairs, traditional festivals and markets, and cultural events in cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Jaipur, as well as online marketplaces such as Amazon and Flipkart. Additionally, partnerships with local art galleries and cultural centers can also help promote and sell the dolls to a wider audience.

It is also important to note that while the demand for *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* dolls is high within India, there is also a growing international market for these traditional folk art pieces. Exporting the dolls to countries with a strong interest in traditional forms of art, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe, can help to expand the market for *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* dolls and provide more opportunities for the Kutchi Rabari community to share their rich cultural heritage with the world.

To preserve and promote the heritage of *Dhingla* & *Dhingli* dolls, various initiatives have been taken by both the government and the local communities. The government has established several training programs and workshops to teach the traditional methods of making these dolls to young artisans. The local communities have also come together to organize events and exhibitions showcasing the dolls and the rich cultural heritage of Kutch.

In addition to these efforts, several non-profit organizations and cultural groups have been established to promote the cultural heritage of Kutch, including the *Dhingla&Dhingli* dolls. These organizations work towards promoting the dolls both within the country and abroad, through various means such as exhibitions, workshops, and cultural events.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The *Dhingla* and *Dhingli* rug dolls originating from the arid expanse of Kutch, Gujarat, offers a profound glimpse into the culturally rich heritage of this desert region. These dolls exemplify an intriguing blend of innovation and simplicity, illustrating a compelling narrative of how new craft forms emerge as artisans innovate creatively. This craft embodies innovation and sustainability, ingeniously repurposing waste textile materials. While the range of materials required is extensive, the tools used are remarkably simple, consisting of everyday essentials such as needles, scissors, and threads. The study could be further taken forward to safeguard the existence of this indigenous craft, which persists today with only a handful of dedicated artisans. Notably, it opens opportunities for design intervention, if more artisans embark on the journey of creating *Dhingla* and *Dhingli* dolls. The involvement of professional designers offers a promising prospect for generating novel prototypes. However, it is important to acknowledge that this craft remains relatively obscure and is often perceived merely as a byproduct, lacking an established market for the dolls. The absence of marketing and promotion for this indigenous toy craft presents an opportunity for the *Dhingla* and *Dhingli* dolls to find their rightful place within the expansive marketplace for traditional handmade toys in India.

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