

Kondapalli

Not just a toy village

Kondapalli, the famous village of toys in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh has more to offer than art. It is just the location for those who love the outdoors and are looking for a quick weekend getaway to indulge in some exploration



Artisans at work outside their store in Kondapalli's Bommala Colony



The Dasavataara Kondapalli Figurine Set

NEEHARIKA SATYAVADA

Kondapalli – a dusty deserted looking town in the foothills of the Eastern Ghats, where, as of a Sunday evening, you will only see industrious artisans sitting outside their stores – that range from two room shutters to huge air-conditioned halls attached to houses – working alone and in groups. However, Kondapalli isn't just a toy village known for its lightweight wooden toys most prominently the Dasavataara Figurine Set, Ambari Elephant and bullock cart. It also holds a significant place in the history of this region.

Kondapalli was once the military stronghold of the British Empire in India. They set up their garrison in the sprawling 14th century Kondapalli Fort and trained their troops here. And, before the fort came into the hands of the British, it was ruled by the Qutb Shahi Dynasty and the Bahamani before that. For a time, it was also part of the mighty Vijayanagara Empire under the rule of Sri Krishnadevaraya. So, amongst the ruins of the fort today, you see a barrack, an English cemetery, a Dargah and granaries and reservoirs from a time when the citadel was a bustling city of people.

And, it is from the forest around the fort that the wood for the famous Kondapalli Toys – tella poniki comes from. Just as I was walking along the lanes, going from one of these toy stores to the next in search of conversation, I noticed two others who were following the same trail, from one store to the next. I was in Konda-

Kondapalli was once the military stronghold of the British Empire in India. They set up their garrison in the sprawling 14th century Kondapalli Fort

palli's 'Bommala Colony'. The Toy Colony, that was set up in the late eighties by the then Chief Minister of State, NT Rama Rao to provide the artisans with a platform to display and sell their work. Apparently, they were organising an event and wanted to give away some local crafts as mementos to attendees.

Yes, the traditional art of Kondapalli – the art of making wooden toys is surely seeing a revival again, after nearly thirty years since that Government initiative.

As more and more culturally aware locals are wanting to take pride in and showcase the heritage of the region that they come from. Even the artisans themselves are coming back to the art that has been in their families for generations. The very same art that they were driven to abandon thanks to waning interest and lack of patronage. Today even corporates are taking interest in traditional art forms of the country. Lanco, who have a major power project in Kondapalli, have in an attempt to give back, intervened to help the artisans find ways to market their toys, up their skill and even bring back the usage of vegetable colours in the toy making process.

Interestingly, even the Government of Andhra Pradesh has in a bid to revive this art and give it a modern shape has brought in designers to train the traditional artisans and develop a new line of toys that would appeal to a wider audience in the urban markets of today.

Also, in the Kondapalli Forest, are waterfalls. And, if the locals are to be believed over a hundred of these are said to dot the landscape. Regardless of the count though, it is a fact that Kondapalli is witnessing a definite surge in its popularity as more and more people are venturing outdoors to trek in its forested hills.