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CHILDREN

Dolls of Devotion

Why settle for trite toys for tots when kids can play with the Gods?

Necessity is the mother of invention, they say, and according to one inventive mother, Rukmini Devi Dasi, Hindu children need divine dolls to play with. "Children want heroes," she explains. "And the media provide a host to choose from--Barbie, Barney, Ninja Turtles, G.I. Joe and others. But it's in the Vedic literature that we find the most heroic personalities. When Cabbage Patch dolls were popular, I saw how attached children became to them. Those mundane dolls became their heroes."

Rather than introducing her own daughter, Mallika, to such secular companions, Rukmini created her own, aptly calling them Dolls of Devotion. "For Mallika's third birthday, I made twenty-five dolls--Radha and Krishna, Lord Chaitanya, Nityananda, Sita, Rama, Hanuman, Lord Narasimha and many more. My idea was not to start a business. I just wanted to give my daughter an opportunity to play in Krishna consciousness." But good news travels fast, especially when carried on the feet of jubilant children, and soon Rukmini's dolls were the heart's desire of Mallika's young friends. "Other parents saw the dolls and asked me to make some for their children. Now I receive orders from all parts of the world."

Rukmini recalled that her original inspiration developed out of her own childhood desire for a Krishna doll, which went unfulfilled. "I grew up in an ISKCON ashram where a few of my friends had dolls of Lord Jagannatha, and I wanted to have Krishna dolls, too. An Indian lady gave me a doll, but because it wasn't related to Lord Krishna, I didn't like it. By the time I got a Krishna doll, I was already out of the ashram. So, I regret that I didn't get to grow up taking care of Lord Krishna. But this made me determined to provide my own children with sacred dolls."

Rukmini confesses that she still loves her dolls. "Not only do the dolls help the children's awareness of Krishna, they also improve mine. When I make the dolls, I become fully absorbed in thoughts of the Lord." Each doll is custom made, signed and dated and takes 13 hours or more to make. Their sacerdotal threads come from cloth worn by temple Deities. For Rukmini, "they are too much work to mass-produce." She recommends that parents train their children to consider them sacred and handle them reverently.

"Several mothers ordered Lord Narasimha dolls [photo above] because their children had disturbed sleep," relates Rukmini. "The children had so much faith in Narasimha that as soon as they received Him they slept peacefully. Parents call or write from all over the world thanking us for doing this service. This response keeps me going."

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