

# India *in porcelain*



Spanish brand Lladró is now capturing select aspects of the Hindu culture and life in India... and, along the way, numerous Indian hearts, discovers SONALI SHAH.

Images courtesy Lladró Boutique, Worli



Best known as the Spanish brand that creates some of the world's most beautiful hand-crafted figurines, the name Lladró is synonymous with porcelain statues across the globe. Evoking images of Valencian girls with a flower basket in their hands, brides, choir boys, angels and animals, the story of Lladró goes back to a Moorish furnace and sculptures influenced by trends of the 18th century.

A typical Lladró is often a figurine depicting mood, occasion or profession. The costumes mirror those worn in Spain, the brides always in white gowns with veils, and the men in hats. But among all this depiction of life in the

West, artist Salvador Furió sculpted the 'Hindu Goddess' and 'Hindu Buda' (Buddha) for Lladró in 1972, and 'Hindu Prince' in 1974. Considered exotic, these figurines were for the Western audiences who were fascinated with the 'Hindustan' that had gained popularity during Colonial rule.

The colonies were eventually freed and the world now came to associate India with Mahatma Gandhi. Lladró then released, in 1991, 'Three Wise Monkeys', based on the Gandhian doctrine. Also during the '90s came the 'Indian Princess', 'Hindu Children' and 'Hindu Dancer'. Beautiful and delicate, they enjoyed popularity among Westerners.

In 2001, with a limited edition of only 2,000 pieces, Lladró released a 'Lord Ganesha' figurine and everything changed. How could Indians resist buying their favourite God in aesthetic porcelain? In quick succession, 'Radha-Krishna,' 'Goddess Lakshmi' and 'Shiv Nataraja' were also released.



## HOT OFF THE PRESS!

Lladró has recently released their debut figurine depicting a Zoroastrian belief. The 'Lamassu' (a mythological bull and human-like Minotaur) is one of their latest launches.

## HOW TO TELL AN ORIGINAL LLADRÓ FIGURINE FROM A FAKE

All Lladró figurines come with an embossed emblem at the bottom of the piece, so checking for that can be your first step.

There is an authenticity code on the figurine as well as the box. If they don't match, the originality of the figurine is dubious.

For limited edition pieces, apart from the code on the figurine, you will also be given a certificate of originality.

Keeping Indian sensibilities in mind, Lladro was slowly but successfully conquering India as one of their chief markets. NRIs made a mad dash to display the divine figures in their living rooms.

"Chennai was the city that first stocked Lladró pieces, and India's first exclusive Lladró boutique was opened in Mumbai in 2006," says Vinit Bijani, the Store Director at the Lladró boutique in Atria Mall, Worli.

Ragini Mohta\*, a housewife from Peddar Road, loves her existing Lladró collection, but says that she hasn't bought the Indian designs yet. "I have received some pieces as gifts, and have bought some myself. I am aware that Lladró has come out with figures of Indian gods. When I do up my house again, I will probably buy a few pieces. Right now, I have the 'Fisher Woman' collection and the 'Clown' one. I especially adore the latter and have displayed it in my house because the figures are always smiling and look happy," she says.

In 2004, Lladró shed the 'Hindu' word that seemed to accompany most of its pieces based on India

\*Name changed on request

## Collector's special

when it released three versions of a "Young Indian".

Renowned sculptor Arzan Khambatta is a Lladró lover too. "I am very fond of their 'Elephant' series. These are beautifully detailed and have a matt finish, which I adore," he confesses. An artist himself, he appreciates Lladró's move to cater specially to the Indian market. "I am happy that the Lladró designers have adapted to the Indian design sentiment. To adapt and change according to the needs of the viewing audience and buyers is the trait of a good designer. The combination of the foreign element, their oriental designs and also the tremendous Indian influence in their pieces is a welcome sign, and I endorse it totally," he adds.

Assuring us about the popularity of Hindu figures, Bijani says, "Our sales are fantastic and on the rise. New stores have opened in all major metros of the

country. Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad... they all have their exclusive Lladró boutiques."

Arzan reveals his trick of always choosing the right piece. "Upon entering the showroom, you must head for the sculpture that immediately catches your eye," he says. "You have to actually fall in love with the piece to be able to relate to it. I also think that the selection of the theme vis-à-vis the location where the sculpture is to be placed is very important. Finally, the proportions and the colour of the sculpture should complete the effect for you," he explains.

Arzan's Lladró story is yet to take off. "I live in a very tiny house and do not have the luxury of being able to show any sort of curios or sculptures made from delicate materials like glass or porcelain, lest they get knocked over," he smiles. **BG**



*You can start your own Lladro collection by visiting these exclusive Lladro boutiques in Mumbai.*

- Lladro Boutique, Shop No. 1, Sunder Mahal 141, Marine Drive, Churchgate Mumbai - 400020.
- Shop No.42, Ground floor, Atria Millennium Mall Dr Annie Besant Road, Worli, Mumbai 400018