

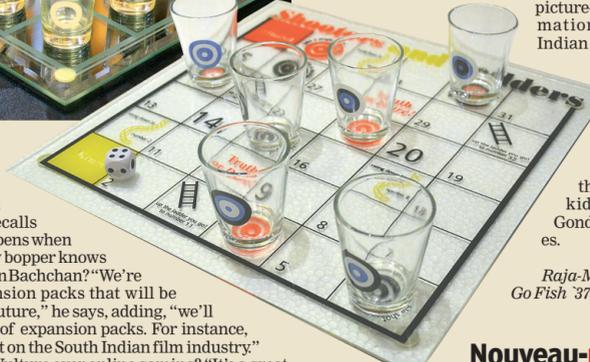
faces

Large cover story

pastime



STATE OF Play



Meet these new-age game designers whose quirky products test you on obscure pop culture references, your capacity for alcohol, Indian handicrafts and more. **By Shefali Rao**



Bangalore-based company The Fuller Life launches Pop Vulture today — a brand new game, they think, might keep you entertained past the city's curfew and through the Diwali party season, all set to get into high gear this week. Another city company, GoGifts, takes a 'shot' at its own version of Snakes and Ladders, while Dotteddi has gifting options for your special someone. And Delhi-based company The People's Project presents a childhood favourite with a twist. Here's why these games should be at the top of your 'play'-list.

Culture vulture

Rattling off ten recurring characters from *Tinkle Digest*, humming Bappi Lahiri's catchy tune *You Are My Chicken Fry*, or miming the cult dialogue 'Mere paas ma hain' from the 1975 film *Deewaar* — sounds easy? Now throw in two teams, a timer, a three-sided die, lots of noise, and you've got Pop Vulture, the newest kid on the gaming circuit.

Trivia central: A product of city-based recreation management company, The Fuller Life (TFL), Pop Vulture is a team-based card game that "celebrates pop culture as we know it," explains Srikanth Nishtala, head of TFL's New Product Development team (featured below). The game covers four categories — TV, Music, Movies and Mixed Bag (sports, books, etc) — with a whole gamut of Western and Indian popular culture. The timed tasks, with names like 'Mmm' and 'Ad the Following', include miming, drawing, humming and more. Begin with a tribute to mega star Rajnikanth — the team with a birthday closest to his (December 12) gets to start.

"Pop culture in India is unique, because we have Western and Indian influences. We know our Beatles and our Bollywood. The game was inspired by Indian pop culture and the fact that there isn't a board game industry in India worth talking about," he tells us. "Games are still viewed as something for kids, which is not the case abroad. And in Bangalore, which shuts so early, there isn't much to do if you have 15-20 people at the after party. This is a great way of going down memory lane for anyone between the ages of, say, 21 to 50. It's a fun drinking game, but you could play it with your family too," he adds.

Testing waters: Pop Vulture, which can be played by four to 20 people, started out as a board game, but eventually took on its current avatar once the team realised it would be easier to cart around that way. It was tested on groups of people across the country, from Chennai to Delhi. "We had to keep reworking our content. For instance, a task that required the translation of an

English sentence to Hindi bombed in Chennai, but people in Delhi and Mumbai were creaming it," recalls Nishtala. So what happens when five years later, a teeny bopper knows more about Bieber than Bachchan? "We're going to create expansion packs that will be more relevant in the future," he says, adding, "we'll also have other kinds of expansion packs. For instance, there might be one just on the South Indian film industry."

So why opt for Pop Vulture over online gaming? "It's a great ice-breaker. Plus, I've noticed from testing sessions that it tends to bring out people's alter egos. Quiet ones tend to get a little competitive while the louder ones suddenly realise they're losing big time. At the end of the day, we all love a little competition," he concludes.

₹850. Available on the webstore. Upto seven days for delivery. Details: popvulture.in

Shot in the dark

Snakes and Ladders is arguably one of the top five board games we've all enjoyed while growing up. And now, it's going a little adult, along with another childhood favourite, Tic-Tac-Toe, thanks to GoGifts. The Bangalore-based company's version of the classic has been remade as Shooters N Ladders, with shot glasses replacing the snakes on the board. Tic-Tac-Toe sees six shot glasses arranged on a Tic-Tac-Toe board. And the third edition to this series of bar games is the Toy Drinking Roulette — a sure shot winner at any Diwali party you're planning to throw. No matter which number the wheel stops on, everyone gets to down a shot.

Party props: "All three games have a premium look and feel. We wanted to make sure they could be used as bar accessories since these are essentially bar games. The Shooters N Ladders and Tic-Tac-Toe boards are made of glass, for a sophisticated touch," says Rohit Chhabria, partner, GoGifts. All games see players knocking back shooters from cutesy single-ounce

glasses, which Chhabria points out could be fun for kids too, if you replace the alcohol with soft drinks.

"The idea is to make gifting more fun. People are tired of the standard old mugs and cards. There's a huge gap in the retail sector for fun products in India, so these are always a good idea at a party," he adds.

Shooter N Ladders ₹1,399, Tic-Tac-Toe ₹899, Toy Drinking Roulette ₹1,399. Available at the store in Phoenix Market City. Details: gogifts.in/67266138

India connect

Long summer vacations, endless time on hand and a group of bored children more often than not resulted in successive rounds of that quintessentially Indian game, *Raja-Mantri-Chor-Sipahi* — a game that, as The People's Project (TPP) puts it, is "the most brilliant card game of detection and guesswork, created by tired parents." And so much does the art studio-cum-residency in Delhi believe in its sheer genius, that they've created a modern version of the classic.

Revival strategy: The original has you pick up chits with Raja, Mantri, Chor and Sipahi (with 1,000, 500, 100 points and 0 points, respectively), with the Mantri detecting who the Chor is. TPP's version replaces chits with cards and tongue-in-cheek instructions like, "You need eight bored-but-enthusiastic/drank-beyond-their-wits people to play."

"This is an example of a cultural game that died out. I remember playing it all the time as a child, but when we had interns coming in to work, I realised none of them played the games we grew up with," says Medhavi Gandhi, director of Happy Hands Foundation, the non-profit organisation that attempts to revive traditional Indian arts and crafts, TPP's parent outfit. So giving it a quirky twist as a card game, plus doubling it up as a potential drinking game, has ensured its place as one of their most popular products. Ostensibly for players aged five and above, Gandhi reveals that it essentially targets "people, between 16 and 32."

Other interests: Another bestseller is Go Fish, a memory game which substitutes random picture-associations with information and pictures of 30 Indian arts. "We've grown up playing memory games with Disney characters, so this is a good way for children today to identify Indian arts. I'd be thrilled if after playing it, kids would know about a Gondhpainting," sheenthuses.

Raja-Mantri-Chor-Sipahi 250, Go Fish 378. Available on shopo.in. Details: happyhands.in

Nouveau-poly time

Get a customised version of the iconic game Monopoly, Cupid-style, thanks to Dotteddi. The city-based company, which specialises in themed events and products, has a product named Lovopoly, the ideal gift for your better half.

Two's company: "We've kept the basics the same, but change the names of locations according to buyers' specifications," explains Naadia Mirza, owner of Dotteddi. "We ask for a list of places special to the couple and 15-16 pictures of them. A Bangalore couple asked us to list places on the board like Cafe Noir, UB City, Pecos — even a bathroom in Toit! It's all very personalised," she adds.

It can also double up as a game for the family. "A lady once gifted the game to her family, which was in the construction business. The builder called later, saying while playing the game, he felt he was actually mortgaging his property, since the names were the same," recalls Mirza, who's still trying to customise her favourite, The Game of Life.

Also on offer: Dotteddi also has a game called Love Uno, with Cupid printed on the cards, while the Dare To Do activity cards are perfect to spice up a bachelorette party, with players earning points for anything from kissing a bald man's head to getting a stranger's phone number. And in the pipeline? An activity-based version of Spin The Bottle.

Lovopoly 2,950, Love Uno 500, Dare To Do activity cards 250. Details: thedotteddi.in

Pics: Jithendra M | shefalirao@newindianexpress.com

In the arena Blah Games

Mumbai-based company Blah Games has one mission — to introduce India to a wide range of imported board games that go beyond the usual suspects like Snakes And Ladders and Cluedo. 1960: The Making of The President sees players taking on the roles of John F Kennedy and Richard Nixon, with an electoral map of the US, while The First Sparks is a strategy game set in The Stone Age. They also organise regular meet-ups for board-gamers in Mumbai. And for Diwali, there's a 15 per cent discount on almost all games. ₹1,000 upwards. Details: blahgames.com



Kreedagames

Kreedagames works on the premise of reviving almost forgotten Indian games and traditions, adding some of its own quirks. With about 16 games developed till date, the Chennai-based organisation believes that traditional Indian games were eco-friendly, and involved large groups coming together, a trend that needs to come back. So for instance, while Memories of Madras is a card game with nuggets of trivia on the city, Vanavaas is a board game that follows Rama, Sita and Lakshmana through the forest. ₹40 upwards. Details: kreedagames.com

Revamped edition

Our pick of the old favourites with a new twist

The age-old game of perseverance, Jenga, now comes with a new twist — Funschool's Truth or Dare Jenga has 18 natural blocks, 18 blocks with unusual dares and 18 blocks with "truth" questions. Played in a small group, this game is really about testing your limits. ₹599. Available on flipkart.com

Mathura-based Mona Bhansal has taken one of India's favourite activities — Tambola — and put her own spin on it. Her Theme Tambola Tickets come in variations of Birthday, Polka, Gambling and more. Another ideal set to have lying around at this year's Diwali do, ₹70 upwards. Available on shopo.in

If you thought the original guessing game Guess Who was fun, think again. Guess Who Extra is really packed with loads more to keep you entertained. Instead of the same old characters with a strategy based purely on elimination, this version has different characters themes, 120 new characters, an electric timer, light and sound for that extra zing. ₹1,144, approximately. Details: amazon.com