

TAMIL NADU

A curious game of cat and mouse revolving around adult toys



ILLUSTRATION SATHEESH VELLINEZHI

Sunitha Sekar

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While such items are widely available online, regular seizures continue at the port and airport; the toys serve a medical purpose, say experts

On Thursday – a day after Valentine’s, no less – the Chennai Customs Sea Port announced that it had seized two consignments of adult toys, worth ₹79 lakh, being imported into the

country from China.

The seizure of a total of 6,452 articles being imported by two Chennai-based companies was made around three months back. The contents had been listed as wall clocks, broom stick, baby chairs, yoga mat and show pieces.

A statement from the Commissioner of Customs said imported adult toys fall under the category of a pornographic article or figure. "As per the Section 11 of Customs Act 1962, any goods or materials of specified description which would cause grave injury to the maintenance of public order and standards of decency or morality are prohibited for importation and exportation," it explained.

Despite these toys being widely available online, Chennai Customs regularly acts against adult toys. In 2016, adult toys worth ₹30 lakh were seized at the port.

Two categories

The Chennai airport too, regularly acts against adult toys. Officials said they categorise such consignments into two: those that weigh over 2 kg and 'Letters Mails and Articles' (LMA). A total of 19 parcels arrived in the last one year along with 661 LMAs. "Each LMA will contain about one or two toys. This month alone, every day, about 3-4 such have arrived at the airport," said an official.

"Usually, when such mails or parcels come, we issue a show cause notice, ask for an explanation and then, issue a warning. We can only make an arrest when the value is ₹1 crore and above. Subsequently, we destroy the toys," an official said.

Adult toys are available, hassle-free, online. Apart from the usual guarantees offered by online marketplaces, websites selling adult toys offer services like 'customer self pick-up' and 'discreet delivery.' Based on sales data published by thatpersonal.com, Tamil Nadu and Chennai are the website's fourth largest State and city markets respectively. Coimbatore is eighth on the list of upcoming cities.

Dr. T. Kamaraj, sexologist at the Aakash Fertility Centre and Hospital, said that adult toys can also serve a medical purpose. He said that most adult toys were not available for his patients.

Websites also have specific sections that claim their product is legal.

"We get each and every product approved and cleared by an experienced legal team before we even place the order with our suppliers in Europe. India has certain laws governing 'obscenity'. So as a premium retailer in India, we have to be naturally aware of the culture we are living in and be respectful of it. So we are careful about two things: ensuring that our products do not look obscene and making sure we don't present and sell the products in any kind of exploitative or offensive manner," a representative of lovetreats.in told *The Hindu*.

The seizure of adult toys could be the result of how widely laws are structured. “This is a decentralised power, where the local presiding officer has the authority to decide what complies and what doesn’t. Given the wide ambit of the law, it's very discretionary in some sense,” said Kartik Maheshwari, senior member at Nishith Desai Associates.

At the end of the day, it depends on the officer at the port. “The law permits officers to be extra-vigilant. At some points, someone will allow for the same thing and others will not. There is no uniform application in this,” said Mr. Maheshwari.