



TOY VILLAGE

Just south-west of Bangalore on the road to Mysore is Channapatna, a village known for producing traditional wooden toys that date back to the reign of 18th-century ruler Tipu Sultan, who invited artisans from Persia (Iran) to train the locals.

This handicraft tradition was in danger of dying when mass-produced plastic toys began flooding the market. In recent years, however, Channapatna's toy industry has experienced a revival, with hundreds of home-based workshops producing toys not only for the local market but also for export.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ISABEL PUTIÑA



Channapatna toys are made from the wood of a local tree called Aale mara (*Wrightia tinctoria*) and coloured with natural vegetable dyes. Traditionally, artisans produce only a few designs, but as the production increased and diversified, new pieces were introduced. Today, the artisans not only make rattles, pull toys and stacking toys, but also jewellery and homeware such as candleholders, pen holders and chess sets.



Opening spread, left and right: A young girl takes a test ride on a colourful rocking horse on sale by the road side; traditional toys take on whimsical shapes.

Above: The Aale mara wood is stacked in neat piles outside the Maya Organic workshop.

Facing page, from top: Artisans at the Sri Beereshwara Arts and Crafts workshop; the block of wood is attached to a spinning lathe while the artisans shape the wood by hand using a variety of tools; the lac is melted with natural dyes into lac sticks – turmeric is used for yellow, kumkum for red and indigo for blue.



The tools and manufacturing process are traditional but the method is now mechanised and the lathes are machine-powered. As the wood spins, it is shaped using a variety of tools. Natural pigments are melted with lac into coloured sticks, which are pressed against the rotating wood. As the lac melts, the colour is transferred onto the surface. Some artisans have learnt this technical skill from their ancestors. Others received government training aimed at reviving this handicraft tradition.

This page, right and below: After the colour is applied, each piece is polished with a leaf from a plant called Talegiri to give it a glossy veneer; traditional toys, like these rattles, are popular. *Facing page, clockwise from above:* A shop in Bangalore selling Channapatna toys; the toys are intricately painted with details; putting the pieces together demands skill and patience.



The Channapatna toy industry continues to be a means of livelihood for local artisans. Non-toxic and natural, the toys are an eco-friendly and sustainable alternative to synthetic ones. Their vibrant, earthy colours make them attractive gifts and souvenirs for locals and tourists alike. Channapatna toys have stood the test of time.

