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Home

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Corporate News

Views

Columnists

Business of Life

Technology

Marketing & Media

International News

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# Chinese lead scare helps revive

## Maya Organic says it will export around Rs80 lakh worth of Channapatna toys this year, mail

Kavitha Srinivasa



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**Channapatna, Karnataka:** The controversy over lead in China-made toys couldn't have come at a better time for the toymakers of Channapatna, a town 60km south-east of Bangalore. Over two centuries ago, Tipu Sultan, then king of Mysore and its surrounding areas, invited wooden toymakers from Persia to teach the art to local artisans. The toys were initially made from



Bangalore-based NGO Maya Organic encourages village women to make toys at Channapatna.

rosewood, ivory and sandalwood. Today, the use of ivory has been banned, and rosewood and sandalwood have become expensive.

Toymakers at Channapatna use cedar, pine, teak, or just about any wood they can lay their hands on. Things were not looking good for the 3,000 surviving toymakers of Channapatna. Their simple wood toys had lost out to imported Chinese toys, mostly

mechanical or electrical. Raw materials were not easily available, and there was no organized effort to market the toys. Many toymakers had even abandoned the vocation and become workers in the booming construction industry. Maya Organic, a Bangalore-based non-governmental organization that looks at livelihood issues related to Channapatna's toymakers, has been working with the toymakers of

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Channapatna in an effort to improve the quality of their produce as well as find a market for it overseas.

Then the China controversy erupted.

According to B.K. Srinivas, the person in charge of research, quality and a few other functions at Maya Organic, there has been a spike in demand over the past few months because customers, both in the local and export markets, are turning away from China-made toys.

Maya Organic says it will export around Rs80 lakh worth of Channapatna toys this year, mainly to the UK and other parts of Europe. It plans to enter the US market later this year.

Channapatna's toys are made from wood that is not chemically treated, and the toymakers largely use vegetable dyes to paint them. The toymakers have also learnt to look beyond toys—at home accessories and decorative items.

The revival of interest in wood toys has helped people such as 33-year-old Rukamma, a mother of three. Rukamma, who uses only one name, owns a lathe with which she makes small toys. She earns between Rs80 and Rs150 a day by selling her produce to small retail units in Channapatna.

The revival of demand has encouraged Krishna Singh, a 38-year-old electronics graduate, to come back and take up his father's profession—toymaking. "My father set up this manufacturing retail unit 45 years ago. We have now developed clients in Delhi and Mumbai, who have an eye for children's toys and handicraft items." Singh's company has even started branding its products (under the name Zanzibar) and exporting them.

#### Play station:

1. Stocks of [raw wood](#) for meant for making toys.
2. Bangalore-based NGO [Maya Organic](#) encourages village women to make toys at Channapatna.
3. [B.K. Srinivas](#) take cares of R&D, quality control and despatch at the NGO's Channapatna unit.
4. All the parts of the toys undergo [quality check](#) before assembly and packaging.
5. [Packaged toys](#) being loaded for their retail destinations.
6. Channapatna toys on display at a retail outlet, [Cauvery Art & Craft Emporium](#), on Bangalore's MG Road.

*(Photographs by Hemant Mishra)*

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