



CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the research report titled **Channapatna- The land of Toy Making**, submitted by the undersigned students, was carried out under my supervision. All the material that has been obtained from other sources has been duly cited.

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CONTENTS

Page Numbers

<i>Certificate</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Contents</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Maps</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Boxes</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>vii</i>
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1: Historical Overview	3
1.2: Channapatna or Gombegala Ooru – The Land of Toy Making	3
1.3: Research Methodology	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review	11
Chapter 3: Channapatna: The Toy Town	22
3.1: History of the Origin	22
3.2: Raw Materials	24
3.3: Process	27
3.4: Evolution	32
3.5: External Organisations	33
3.5.1: Government	33
3.5.2: Non Government Organisations	37
3.5.3: Private Firms	40
Chapter 4: Conclusion	41
Bibliography	47
Glossary	50



List of Figures

Page Numbers

Fig 1: A Channapatna Top : The Finished Product	1
Fig 2: Interviewing workers in Maya Organic, NGO	4
Fig 3: Wooden toys of Varanasi	13
Fig 4: Wooden toy from Kachchh	14
Fig 5: Wooden toys of Sawantwadi, Maharashtra	15
Fig 6: Ivory wood used for toy making	24
Fig 7: Colouring of the wood using lac	24
Fig 8: Various tools used	25
Fig 9: Local artisan working on a patri	26
Fig 10: Shaping the wood	28
Fig 11: Polishing the toy	29
Fig 12: Modern designs	32
Fig 13: Government initiative, KSSIDC	33
Fig 14: Women working in Maya Organic	37
Fig 15: Shilpa Trust	38
Fig 16: Sri Beereshwara Arts and Crafts	40
Fig 17: Comparison of the patris used in Kachchh and Channapatna	41

List of Maps

Map 1: Channapatna, Karnataka	4
Map 2: Woodwork in India	11
Map 3: Etikoppaka, Andhra Pradesh	12
Map 4: Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	13
Map 5: Sawantwadi, Maharashtra	15



List of Boxes

Page Numbers

Box 1: Abid	17
Box 2: Biraya	21
Box 3: Iliaz Pasha	23
Box 4: Abdul Kadar	35
Box 5: Venkatesh	39
Box 6: Safety measures	45



ABSTRACT

The craft of toy making in Channapatna is one of the most prevalent part of the Indian wooden toy industry. This research report revolves around understanding and documenting the toy making process of Channapatna. Therefore, its complimentary aims are at exploring and understanding the origin of the craft, every method involved in the toy making process, the transition of the craft from its inception to present day, and the impact of external organisations on it. All the data provided in the report is based on preliminary research conducted over a weeklong trip to Channapatna.

The lives of the people in Channapatna revolve around this craft form and thus the report also attempts to understand the perceptions of various people in Channapatna about it. With the market being a powerful force, it also attempts to see the changes in designs and the technology used to make the toys according to the changes in trends and therefore, the demands of the market. These transitions are due to extremely tough competition that the craft is facing and this report also studies the initiatives taken by the government and other external organisations such as Non-governmental organisations and private firms to sustain the craft, and the effective reach of these initiatives.

Furthermore, through the course of our research, we found that there are a few other places where similar practices of toy making are practiced. Thus, through this paper, we have attempted to analyse and compare the similarities and differences between the toy making processes in these various parts of the country. Therefore we aimed to look at the Channapatna toy making craft through a holistic approach to fulfill our research objectives.



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*“I close my eyes, they flash across
the snails and dolls and dancing tops.*

*I hear my ringing laughter; I
can see my smile light up my eyes.*

*And though my childhood years have gone,
my toys have changed to books from blocks;*

*Those wooden trains will continue
to undeterred, go chugging through
the realms of my imagination, still
tugging strongly at my heart’s strings.”*

- Taanya Malhotra



Figure 1: A Channapatna Top: The Finished Product



The wooden toys of Channapatna have been synonymous with childhood in India for generations. Many will recall with fondness the brightly hued trains and tops that dominated their playtime years ago. But these colours are fast fading: instead of spinning across the room making the elders trip and the children laugh, these toys now sit on tables and shelves, adorning hallways and living rooms.

Nonetheless, they have not lost their charm or significance in our lives. These unassuming yet eye-catching toys, even today, stay stubbornly put in our hearts and in our memories. They are more than just playthings; they are humble embodiments of our culture, skilfully crafted from the fabric of tradition, aesthetics and artistry. With their beauty lying in their simplicity, their closeness to and respect for Mother Nature and their strong ties to their ancestral history, discovering Channapatna toys would truly be, discovering India.

With this in mind, motivated by memories and armed with the desire to know, we delved into the world of toys, journeying through the lands where wood comes to life.

But as we scoured through pages and pages of both, books as well as the internet, we realised that there is more to Channapatna than just pieces of painted wood; there are faces: faces of the artisans, people with the ability to give these pieces of wood the power to make dreams come true. With the dawning of this realisation, the scope of our research broadened; but this was not the limit. As we progressed, more faces emerged; faces of organisations - governmental, non-governmental and private – that continue to support and push the artisans in today's ruthlessly competitive times, so they can continue to bring joy not only to their own children, but to children across the country.

Active in Channapatna for multiple decades now, these organisations have taken various steps to not only help stabilise the toy making industry as a whole, but also empower the individual artisans involved. As we moved on to studying these initiatives, we realised that though the Channapatna toy making industry itself has not been documented in detail, the extent of study of this aspect in particular is grossly inadequate in context of its importance. As a result, we decided to focus our research on: ***'To study the toy making process in Channapatna and the impact of external organisations on it'***.



1.1 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Since the beginning of mankind, children love to play; they often mirror the important elements in their lives. They explore, learn and develop through this process. But, can you imagine play without toys? Objects in the form of human and animal figurines have been found in the deposits from ancient Sumer dating 2600 BC. The earliest written historical archive of toys comes around 500 BC, which mentions the yo-yo made from wood, painted terra-cotta and metal. In India, animal figurines made of clay are dated around 2500 BC. Later, brass, bronze and wooden objects were introduced in the form of animal figures. Therefore, wooden toys have been a common part of childhood since thousands of years but only in the 19th century have they gained their popularity.

Ever since, wooden toys have been a vital element in the Indian culture, and there are multiple places in India where wooden toy making practice is carried out. These places are Etikoppaka in Andhra Pradesh, Varanasi, Kachch and Sawatwadi in Maharashtra. However, the most famous and historically rich practice is in Channapatna, Karnataka. Similarly, Channapatna lacquered wooden toys manufacturer, Kaveri craft emporium in Channapatna, states that “wooden toys represents the joy of colourful childhood, its playfulness and its yearning to grow up into high spirited butterflies”¹. Thus, our main focus is to document in detail the Channapatna toy making practice.

1.2 CHANNAPATNA OR GOMBEGALA OORU- THE LAND OF TOY MAKING

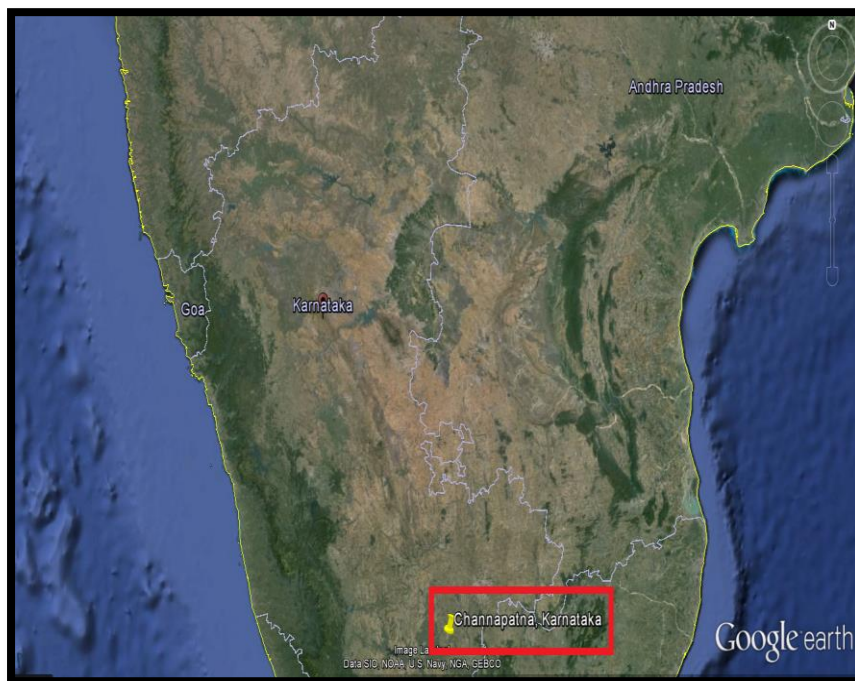
The state of Karnataka lies on the western half of the Deccan Plateau bounded by Andhra Pradesh in the east, Maharashtra in the north, and Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the south, with a long coastline to the west. The hills of the Western Ghats are rich in biodiversity, which includes forest hardwoods such as teak, rosewood, sandalwood and hale. It is these natural resources that have supported a variety of crafts in and around the region. Its craft repertoire is replete with many traces: royal patronage, Hindu and Islamic influences, colonial impact, and contemporary fashions. Additionally, silks, wooden toys, cotton weaving, leather puppets, *bidriware*, stone carving and lace making, among others, make Karnataka a state rich in craft.²

¹ Kaveri Handicrafts Industry, <http://www.kavericrafts.com/aboutus.asp?ProID=2>, 14-02-14.

²Ranjan, Aditi. 'Handmade in India'. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009.pp. 363.



In this state of Karnataka lies the small city of Channapatna is located 60 kms south- west of the Bangalore- Mysore state highway.³ The town is spread over symmetrically about this highway, just like the symmetry of their toys. It is famous for its wooden toys and lacquer ware. Manufacturing and twisting of coconut and raw silk is also a major product of Channapatna. The Channapatna Taluk comes under the Ramnagar district and its headquarters are located on the Bangalore- Mysore highway. It is one of the 57 cities in Karnataka under the Nirmala Nagara- Municipal Governance project. Under this project, the city obtained its website and the Public Grievance & Redressal module.⁴ This craft has been showcased in major exhibitions throughout India under the distinctive label of toys of Channapatna. These toys have also been featured for Michelle Obama, during her recent trip



to India. Thus, the reach of these toys is globally wide. Thus, our main aim is to document the unique toy making process in detail. But, only documenting the craft will not provide enough data to understand the holistic view of the Channapatna industry.

Map 1: Channapatna, Karnataka, India.⁵

Therefore, external organisations such as NGOs, private firms and the local government body play a vital role in the Channapatna toy making industry. Hence, to understand the relationship between the artisans and the external organisations in Channapatna will emphasis

³Baral, Dr.Bidhudutta, 'Channapatna Toys of Karnataka', <http://www.dsource.in/resource/channapatna-toys/environment.html>, 20-12-13.

⁴Baral, Dr.Bidhudutta, 'Channapatna Toys of Karnataka' <http://www.dsource.in/resource/channapatna-toys/environment.html>, 20-12-13.

⁵ Channapatna, Google Earth



and provide further insights in the working of the toy making industry. As a result, our aims and objectives are as follows:-

- To record the various prevalent theories of the origin of toy making in Channapatna
- Within the domain of process of toy making:
 - ❖ To document:
 - method
 - materials
 - tools and machinery
 - ❖ To study:
 - The design of the toys
 - Evolution and development of the machinery
- Within the domain of external organisations such as government, NGOs and private firms:
 - a. To explore the different initiatives taken by them in Channapatna to support the toy making industry
 - b. To study the effective reach of these initiatives and the reactions of the local artisans of Channapatna to the same
 - c. To study the reactions of the private firms and NGOs towards the initiatives taken by the government

Thus, through our analysis, we aim to trace the origin of the toy making practice of Channapatna, which will help to better understand and document the current toy making process. Moreover, by exploring the different initiatives taken by the external organisations in Channapatna, a clearer understanding of the functioning of the Channapatna industry will come into focus. In addition, the reactions of the local artisans will provide a detailed reach of these initiatives to the local community of Channapatna. Hence, our approach will provide a holistic knowledge and understanding of the current Channapatna industry scenario, with the core emphasis lying on the documentation of the toy making process.

However, it should be noted that there are certain limitations to this research. Firstly, language may be perceived as a barrier, as certain features of the toy making process and the knowledge of the initiatives and its reactions towards them may be lost in translation, owing to the fact that a small yet important portion of our research was dependent on the local



translator. Secondly, documentation of both audio and video recording was not permitted in certain government areas. Due to this, we were unable to record the government perspective on our research topic. Additionally, the Development Officer who did agree to giving an interview also provided us with very superficial information, thus taking away an important perspective of our research. Lastly, we were unable to find sufficient secondary sources pertaining to our research topic and so we have focussed our research on primary data collected during the research trip. Due to this, our research has taken a completely qualitative form, with no quantitative analysis whatsoever. Thus, we do not claim that our data is exhaustive as our main focus to study the Channapatna toy making practice by the process of audio-video documentation of the toy making process and exploring its complementary external organisations by recording the reactions of and conducting interviews with the local artisans in order to obtain a holistic scenario of the Channapatna toy making practice.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to obtain maximum knowledge and research data, in relation to our research questions and its complimentary objectives, we followed the following plan of action:-

❖ Preliminary Research

As a part of our preliminary research, most of our time was spent searching for secondary sources about Channapatna toy making. Even after visiting the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Library, MIT and the Deccan College library; we inferred that there was insufficient achieves available on Channapatna. However, 'Handmade in India' by Professor M.P. Ranjan, did facilitate our research by providing basic data on Channapatna and he also provided contact details of local artisans in Channapatna. On the other hand, the online articles did provide with contact details of the external bodies naming NGO's (Maya Organic and Shilpa Trust), Firms (Kaushal Toys Emporium, Katerpillar) and local government body in Channapatna. Moreover, there were controversial newspaper articles which provided insights on the current market scenario of Channapatna and the controversial origin of this craft. Moreover, Mr. Azmathulla Shariff, who has researched on how the toy town of Channapatna is adapting to the changing trends of the global economy, also provided his insights of the current Channapatna market situation.



Given the lack of secondary sources, our research is exploratory in nature, as there is not enough clarity or proper insight on our topic of study. Thus, we wish to clarify that this research is a purely qualitative one and may not provide conclusive statistical or quantitative evidence. Rather than statistical analysis, our focus is on video, audio and written documentation of the toy making practice and on subject interpretation of the art and the external body intervention in Channapatna. This will directly help guide our data collection process to answer our research questions and its objectives.

❖ Primary Sources

A. Interviews: We have divided the respondents into six categories in order structure and organise our research data in order to achieve our objectives. The four groups are as follows:-

1. Local Artisans- This group varies from the local artisans who have been in this field for 10 to more than 60 years. Thus, this sample represents the Channapatna local



Figure 2: Interviewing the workers in Maya Organic, NGO.

artisan's
community.

The names of these artisans are Biraya, Iliaz Pasha, Abdul Kadar, Noor Ahmed Sayyed and his family. This group did not only help document the entire toy

making process by *patri* method and the lathe machines, but also demonstrated and symbolised the reactions and their views about the different initiatives taken by the external bodies in Channapatna on the present day toy making process. This sample



represents the relationship between the Channapatna toy making practice and the external organisations in Channapatna.

2. Local community- The local residents of Channapatna, Karnataka form a crucial part of our respondents because it is essential to understand the background and atmosphere of the Channapatna town. Maximum interaction with them ensures maximum exploration and understanding of various elements that define and signify the Channapatna toy making practice. The group comprises of: the tea vendors, barbers, government school teachers and students, shop owners, etc. Thus, this group revealed the old and current scenario of the Channapatna toy making process and its market situation.

3. Non- Government Organisation or NGO

This category is divided into two NGO's situated in Channapatna:-

- a. Maya Organic: This group consisted of the main manager, Anil Gupta, and the artisans that work in the NGO. As Maya's main target of employment was the women, therefore we conducted two focus groups consisting of 10 women each. According to Lederman, a focus group is "a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being 'focused' on a given topic"⁶. Therefore, the purpose of these focus groups was to induce its distinctive and informative group dynamics, in a comfortable setting as they have similar socio-characteristics. Hence, the "type and range of data generated through the social interaction of the group are"⁷ deeper and richer than those obtained by one- to- one interviews.

Also, a one- to one interview was conducted with Mr. Anil Gupta which provided informative knowledge of the origin and the current working of the

⁶ Rabiee, Fatemeh. 'Focus- group interview and data analysis'. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*. 63 (2004): 655.

⁷ Rabiee, Fatemeh. 'Focus- group interview and data analysis'. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*. 63 (2004): 656. Print.



Maya Organic NGO. In addition, he also provided with the initiatives of Maya and reactions towards the initiatives by the government.

- b. Shilpa Trust- One to one interview was conducted with Mr. Dilip Sharma, manager of the Shilpa Trust, who emphasised on the modernisation of the toy making process in reference to the changing demand of the customers and external competition, especially, from the Chinese market.

4. Private firms-

This category is divided into two main private firms in Channapatna:-

- a. Katerpillar- One to one interview was conducted with Mr. V. Venkatesh, who is the founder of Katerpillar Toys Emporium. He narrated his struggle of starting his own factory and expressed the relationship of the current toy making industry with the government and NGO initiatives. He also demonstrated the working of the entire toy making process in relation to the working of his own factory.
 - b. Kaushal Toys Emporium- One to one interview with the manager Kaushal Ramasingham, of the household toy emporium. He narrated his story from working with the Maya Organic NGO to starting his own household factory. He provided his insights of the functioning of NGO's especially Maya Organic in Channapatna. Also, he showed his own process and factory of toy making.
5. Government- One to one interview with the Developmental Officer of Shri. M.S. Diwakar, and also visited the Design and Developmental Centre in Bangalore which provided with archives and reports of the government initiatives in Channapatna. Also, we visited the government schools and had focus group interviews with the students and the teachers. This sample represented the local population of Channapatna and also provided with additional knowledge of the views on the Channapatna toy craft.
6. Academics/ Scholars- A brief research was carried out by NID Professor, M.P. Ranjan, and MIT Director Mr. Dhimal Panchal. One to one interviews with these



academics offered a balanced perspective of the Channapatna toy making scenario and also provided an insight of its toy making practice.

B. Observations:

The entire toy making process, with all its raw materials, was observed and documented in the form of audio and video, in our trip to all the factories of local artisans, private firms and NGO's. This process of toy making was carried out in the mechanised lathe; however, while visiting the bead village in Channapatna, we came across a traditional method of toy making in a smaller scale on a *patri*. This method was also documented in the form of audio- video technique.

Moreover, participant observation was a key means of collecting information while conducting the focus groups and also during the interviews. This method was key to understand the reactions of the artisans towards the initiatives taken by the government and NGO.



CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INDIAN SCENARIO

India is a vast multi- cultural land with abundance of cultural practices. These practices vary from dances, drama, music, oral traditions, etc, but the intrinsic toy making process is sometimes overlooked. Thus, it is important to understand the toy making industry in India. Indian toy industry is large and growing and only needs a more organised approach to face the challenges of marketing and factor distribution.⁸ And Channapatna toy making industry is no exception. The Chinese toy market is flooding the domestic market but Indian markets have thus been changing their designs in order to provide a more Indian style. The Indian toy industry is fragmented and region based such as the Indian wooden toy industry is spread over Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Varanasi and Kachcch.



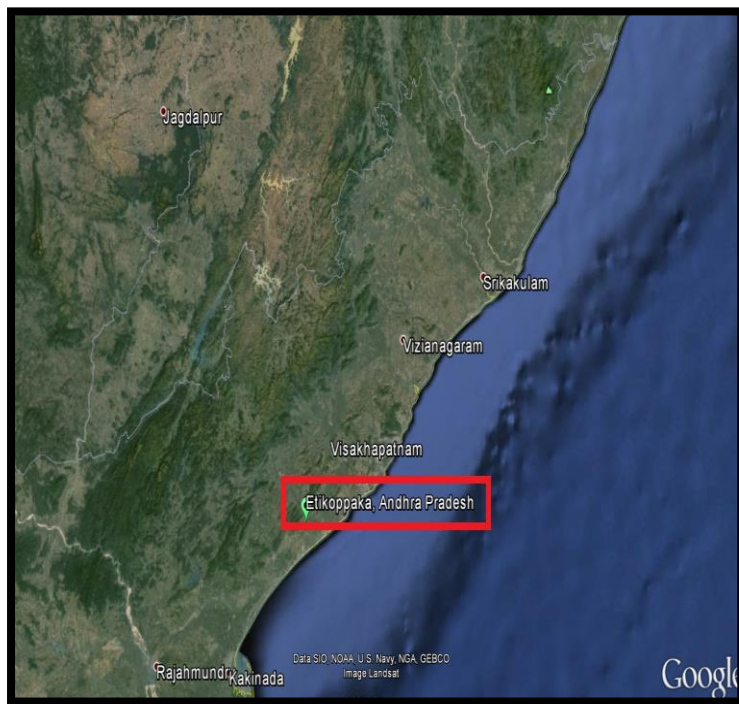
Map 2 India Red: wood carving, Yellow- wooden toys, Green- Wood and lac turnery⁹

⁸ Indian Toy Industry, <http://www.indianmirror.com/indian-industries/toy.html>, 13-02-14.

⁹ India, Google Earth



Wooden and Lac Turnery of Etikoppaka, Andhra Pradesh



Etikoppaka is a well-known crafts pocket in the Visakhapatnam district, with over 300 local artisans trained in the lac ware crafts.¹⁰ Etikoppaka wooden toy making practice was believed to have started two centuries ago in Nakkapalli (it is a village and a mandal in the Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh). The founder Dimili Bangaram of Nakkapalli along with the fifth generation

Map 3: Map showing Etikoppaka, Andhra Pradesh.¹¹

craftsmen and the Vijaynagara kings (also known as the Rajas of Etikoppaka) were the first patrons of this art of toy making. Etikoppaka toy practice “specialises in turned wood lac-coated toys including complete toy sets of cooking vessels, table-ware and furniture”¹². In the process of lac turnery, the seasoned wooden piece is evolved into specific wooden objects on a lathe by skilful manipulation of suitable hand tools, after which they are coated with lac in order to provide a polished attractive surface. The local artisans of Etikoppaka have marketed their ware in exhibitions and also several designers have collaborated with them in developing newer designs.¹³

¹⁰ Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009.pp. 281.

¹¹ Andhra Pradesh, Google Earth

¹² Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009.pp. 281.

¹³ Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009.pp. 281.



Figure 3: Wooden toys of Varanasi¹⁴

Map 4: Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.¹⁵

Varanasi: Wood and Lac Turnery

Mr. Dhimal Panchal, MIT Director, who has worked with Channapatna toys in the past, provided a comparative with Varanasi wooden toys, saying “when I was young I used wooden tethers of rosemary made in Varanasi”¹⁶.

The wooden toy making craft was introduced 400 years ago from Udaipur, Rajasthan by the ruler Kashi. The lathe workers or *Kharadis* in Varanasi make “brightly lac- coated vermilion containers, tethers and toys”¹⁷ in wood. The *sindora* or Vermillion boxes, in all shapes and sizes, are the Varanasi’s hallmarks. The “turned wood toys are simply fashioned and brightly lacquered”¹⁸; and the articles which are exported use better quality wood, fine grained

¹⁴ Varanasi Lacquerware Toys, <http://mydelhiadventures.wordpress.com/2010/10/18/varanasi-lacquerware-toys/>, 14-02-14.

¹⁵ Uttar Pradesh, Google Earth

¹⁶ Panchal, Dhimal. Personal Interview. 18-02-14.

¹⁷ Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009.pp. 159-160.

¹⁸ Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009.pp. 159-160.



kahema instead of *chapra*, pure lac and eucalyptus. The delicate lacquering process starts with pressing a leaf known as *kesar* dipped in oil to give the lac an everlasting shine. Afterwards, the painting is done by the *Kohars* craftsmen belonging to the *Prajapati* community. The adjoining Chitrakoot district also practices this craft but specializes in *sindora* and small toys.¹⁹



Figure 4: Wooden Toy made from Kachchh²⁰

Kachchh: Wood and Lac Turnery of Wadha Kohlis Tribe

Kachchh district is well- known for its wooden carvings but in addition the *Wadha Kohlis*, “a semi nomadic community of lathe turners and carpenters”²¹, the *Meghwals* and *Maniars*, have undertaken the wood and lac turnery. The wood is turned and shaped into a specific object on an indigenous lathe made of two iron rods, with chisels and hand tools creating a desired shape by varying degrees of pressure. After the wooden object is formed, it is then smoothened on the lathe using crumpled pieces of coarse clothe dipped in oil. Following, lac and a mixture of vegetable oil is applied on the object. Similarly, the *Hala* work of Sindh, uses identical materials and technique, however, there is a mark of difference in the appearance of the wooden products from the two regions and Kachchh specialises “a unique pattern of a marbled of colours”²².

¹⁹ Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009.pp. 159-160.

²⁰ Kachchh, <http://www.indiantravelportal.com/gujarat/bhuj/>, 14-02-14.

²¹ Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009.pp. 418.

²² Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009.pp. 418.

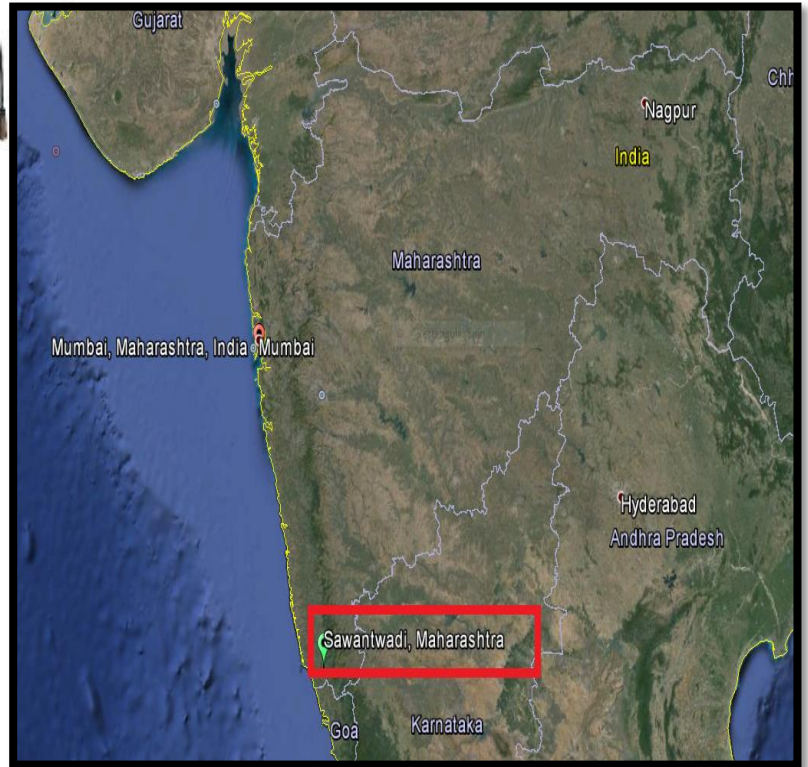


Figure 5: Wooden toy of Swantwadi.²³

Map 5: Swantwadi, Maharashtra.²⁴

Sawantwadi: Wooden Toys of Maharashtra

Sawantwadi is popularly recognized as '*lakda chi khelni*' because they are wooden toys that are made from the wood available from the local mango trees.²⁵ Originally, this craft was done by *Chitari* or *Chitrakas*, but in the present scenario, other communities have also adopted this form of craft due to its economic success. These wooden toys are made by the technique of wood and lac turnery. Firstly, the seasoned mango wood is turned into a cylindrical shape with the aid of chisels and then its surface is smoothened using lac mixed with colours. At least, four to five toys are turned on a lathe simultaneously. Lastly, the

²³ Sawantwadi Toys, <http://aartianddesign.blogspot.in/2010/08/sawantwadi-toys.html>, 14-02-14.

²⁴ Maharashtra, Google Earth

²⁵ Ranjan, Aditi. 'Handmade in India'. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009.pp. 300.



finished wooden object is separated from the lathe and the base of each finished object is applied with sander.²⁶

Along this genre of woodwork, Channapatna is one of the most well-known toys making industry in India and not properly documented and archived.

2.2 CHANNAPATNA SCENERIO

Historical Overview

Channapatna, also known as Gombegala Ooru or ‘Toy Town’ of Karnataka, has a legacy of toys which can be traced back to hundred years.²⁷ The craftsmen in Channapatna are referred to as ‘Acharyas’ who belong to the community of ‘Chitragars’.²⁸ Earlier, their work revolved around making wooden masks, human and animal figures, and painting temples in and around Channapatna.²⁹ The origin of the toy industry is often attributed to the reign of Tipu Sultan, who invited Persian artisans to train the local Channapatna artisans in the wooden craft of toy making.³⁰ While traditionally this was a purely toy-making industry, in keeping with the times, the product range has spread from traditional toys to production of articles for interior decoration, household utilities, salt and pepper box, coaster sets, coat hangers, key chains and wide range of corporate gift items.

Literature review of the process of toy making

Moving towards the actual process of manufacturing the wooden toys, professor Baral explains that there are various tools and machines which are used.³¹ Files and chisel are commonly used by the artisans to shape and develop the product. Vernier callipers, hammers and dividers, too, are useful in the process. Conventionally, artisans used hand lathes to make

²⁶ Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009. pp. 300.

²⁷ Baral, Dr. Bidhudutta, ‘Channapatna Toys of Karnataka’ <http://www.dsource.in/resource/channapatna-toys/environment.html>, 20-12-13.

²⁸ Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009. pp. 362.

²⁹ Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009. pp. 362.

³⁰ Ranjan, Aditi. ‘Handmade in India’. New Delhi: Abbeville Press, 2009. pp. 362.

³¹ Baral, Dr. Bidhudutta, ‘Channapatna Toys: II’, http://www.dsource.in/resource/channapatana_toy_II/tools_and_machines/index.html, 20-12-13.



the toys. Gradually with the aid of royal patronage, the craft progressed from the artisans turning wood by hand to using power lathes, which facilitated greater output combined with economy in the cost of production and human labour. Lathe machines run on motors which derive their power from electricity and have a conveyer belt connected to one end. These machines can be customised by the craftsmen to suit their comfort and needs by dismantling and reassembling the components.³² They have been adapted into various forms, in fact, to cater to different manufacturing needs of the different products; for slender or delicate articles, for example, hand lathe is preferred.³³

Box 1: Abid

Abid is a businessman who owns Good life Handicrafts, a firm making gift products for the corporate sector. His involvement in the handicrafts business comes as no surprise. “My grandfather’s brother in law, Bavasmia, got the technology of the automated lathe to Channapatna. He did a lot for the craft and people here, like opening up factories and giving people employment, as there was very little scope for work here, close to nothing to help people sustain themselves. There was no education either.” I wondered about the kind of incentives provided to the artisans today. “The common facility centre instituted here by the government, which is set up to help the artisan produce more efficiently, is completely of no use. It is a huge investment by the government, but the artisans do not have access to it. Firstly the artisan cannot go there, and even if he does, he cannot get any work done because it is expensive. Say for instance if something is costing him Rs. 5 here, making the same thing will probably cost him Rs. 10 there. Other than that, the machines are too advanced for the artisan to work on, and they are technically meant to be for carpenters, which is why they are rendered useless to the artisans. Thus, there is no incentive for him to go there and get his work done, and that is not right.” So what about you? Why not make the traditional Channapatna toys anymore? “The thing is that at the end of the day, I want money. I don’t mind making either toys or gift articles, but I will manufacture and produce whatever gets me my money. If I start making toys, I will not make as much money as I do by making gift articles.”

³²Baral, Dr.Bidhudutta, ‘ Channapatna Toys: II’,

http://www.dsource.in/resource/chennapatana_toy_II/tools_and_machines/index.html, 20-10-13.

³³Baral, Dr.Bidhudutta, ‘ Channapatna Toys: II’,

http://www.dsource.in/resource/chennapatana_toy_II/tools_and_machines/index.html, 20-10-13.



The manufacturing process of Channapatna toys starts with procuring the wood (usually hale wood or ivory wood, chosen for its close grained, moderately hard nature, making it ideal for turning), post which it is left for a few months to be seasoned. The wood is then cut into desired shapes according to the design given by the master craftsmen. The pruning and carving of the toys occurs on the lathe. After this, the process of lacquering begins which contains four steps: (1) lac is applied; (2) it is pressed against woodwork to be lacquered; (3) heat generated by friction softens lacquer; (4) designs can be painted by brush on lacquer later by the artisans. Mostly, vegetable dyes are used in the colouring process in order to ensure that they are safe for use by children.³⁴ The finished work piece is filled and finished using sandpaper. Lastly, it is coated with wax for lustre and sheen, and the finishing details of the design are added with the help of a permanent marker.³⁵

Mr. Bibhudutta Baral, professor at NID campus, Bangalore, explains the concept of master craftsman.³⁶ The Master Craftsman is the head of the workshop unit in Channapatna. The prototypes designed by him are introduced to the local artisans, who then create the designed toys. He is skilled in the procedure and can perform the entire procedure of the craft of toy making, adapting with the needs of the market as required.³⁷

Current Situation of the Channapatna Market

The toys were initially made of rosewood, ivory and sandalwood but since 2007 the use of ivory has been banned. As a result, sandalwood and rosewood have also become expensive. Therefore, the artisans at Channapatna started using pine, cedar and teak wood. It seemed like the traditional crafts of Channapatna toy making were becoming extinct; there was lack of raw material and no organised marketing of these toys. Moreover, their simple wooden toys were being challenged by the imported Chinese toys, which were mostly electrical and

³⁴Baral, Dr. Bidhudutta, 'Channapatna Toys: II', http://www.dsource.in/resource/chennapatana_toy_II/tools_and_machines/index.html, 20-10-13.

³⁵Baral, Dr. Bidhudutta, 'Channapatna Toys: II', http://www.dsource.in/resource/chennapatana_toy_II/tools_and_machines/index.html, 20-10-13.

³⁶Baral, Dr. Bidhudutta, 'Channapatna Toys of Karnataka' <http://www.dsource.in/resource/channapatna-toys/master.html>, 20-12-13.

³⁷Baral, Dr. Bidhudutta, 'Channapatna Toys of Karnataka' <http://www.dsource.in/resource/channapatna-toys/master.html>, 20-12-13.



mechanical. Due to this, many artisans abandoned their vocation and became workers in a nearby construction industry.

The situation, however, was going to get better. Kavitha Srinivasa in her article ‘Chinese lead scare helps revive Channapatna toys’, from The Wall Street Journal says that the controversy over the presence of lead in China made toys revived the popularity of the traditional wooden toys of Channapatna.³⁸ According to B.K. Srinivas, the R&D manager of Maya Organic, a Bangalore based non- government organisation with the main aim of looking after the livelihood issues of Channapatna artisans that has been working with the artisans of Channapatna in an effort to improve the quality of their products as well as introduce these toys to the overseas market, reported that the demand for Channapatna toys have risen in the import and export markets due to its lime light in the news.³⁹

Along the same lines, Azmathulla Shariff mentions in his article ‘Toy Town changes with new trends’, published in the Deccan Herald,⁴⁰ that the major source of livelihood for the majority of the people in Channapatna city is through the wooden toy making industry of Channapatna. The past setbacks in this industry were not due mainly to the lack of marketing skills, but the core issue was that the entire Channapatna toy industry did not keep pace with the changing scenarios of the world’s demands and was resistant to change. In the recent years, the craftsmen in Channapatna are opening up to new ideas and concepts in order to survive in the rapidly growing, and changing, world market. They are beginning to adopt major attitude shifts in order to match their production to the present market demands. The way this entire industry has adapted to this market transformation is a true testimony to the vision of Tipu Sultan, who can be considered the pioneer of the said industry in India. Neiman Shariff, a junior assistant Lacquer ware Crafts Complex says that “Earlier there was no competition for the industry, but today, the industry faces competition from Chinese

³⁸Srinivasa, Kavitha, ‘Chinese lead scare helps revive Channapatna toys’,

<http://www.livemint.com/Companies/Q3hu2RGU8mZ0UMktG5AeTJ/Chinese-lead-scare-helps-revive-Channapatna-toys.html>, 21-12-13.

³⁹Srinivasa, Kavitha, ‘Chinese lead scare helps revive Channapatna toys’,

<http://www.livemint.com/Companies/Q3hu2RGU8mZ0UMktG5AeTJ/Chinese-lead-scare-helps-revive-Channapatna-toys.html>, 21-12-13.

⁴⁰Shariff, Azmathulla, ‘Toy town changes with new trends’,

<http://web.archive.org/web/20070420034609/http://www.deccanherald.com/deccanherald/mar292005/spt1.asp>, 21-12-13.



products and this has prompted the Design Centre of Development Commissioner Handicrafts, Bangalore to come out with prototype designs designed by its master craftsmen and make the same available to the industry and craftsmen willing to adopt and produce the same.⁴¹

Literature on External Body Intervention

In the recent years, Channapatna toy making industry has been associated with many private firms and non- governmental organisations. With the craft form being protected by the state government and the World trade organization, the Karnataka government and NGOs and firms help market the products and support the artisan communities.

Redbug is an organisation which aims to inculcate in the younger generation a sense of appreciation for Indian tradition and culture through craft kits that combine traditional craft and toy making techniques with a modern purpose. These kits are inspired by one or more traditional crafts of India and contain products that are handmade by traditional craftsmen. This is done in order to simulate creativity and develop an interest for the traditional Indian crafts among children.

Through this, Redbug strives to achieve several goals, which include helping the artisan communities continue their work, spreading awareness about the different crafts, and make sure that these crafts do not use any material that can cause harm to the environment.

Apart from their aim of getting the younger generation to appreciate old world charm, Redbug's ultimate aim is to preserve these traditional craft and keep them from disappearing. Traditional crafts are an important part of Indian heritage, which cannot, and must not be lost.⁴²

Maya Organic aims at helping traditional craftsmen, workers, and micro-entrepreneurs capable of producing world class lacquer ware products. It not only supports the artisans with contemporary designs through product development programs but also provides training to

⁴¹Shariff, Azmathulla, 'Toy town changes with new trends',

<http://web.archive.org/web/20070420034609/http://www.deccanherald.com/deccanherald/mar292005/spt1.asp>, 21-12-13.

⁴²'Redbug: Kreative Kits', <http://www.Redbugstore.com/AboutUs.aspx>, 21-12-13.



new and younger artisans, and encourages women to participate in the handicraft cluster. The initiative also includes marketing and skill-enhancing programs.

This organisation aims to create a cluster of artisans and eventually institutions fresh with skills and designs, which are also competent enough to deal with future challenges from the market, social conditions, environment and politics.

Maya Organic markets and develops designs for the different products and services, which are backed with professional inputs and contemporary and relevant designs. It believes that more than financial backing, or technological knowledge, building capabilities is more important, as the former may not be relied on at all times. Therefore, building and enhancing capabilities becomes the most sustainable and effective way to alleviate poverty.⁴³

Shilpa Trust is a Non-governmental organisation based in Bangalore, which aims at helping economically disadvantaged artisans, some who have not had access to education, and provide them some form of security through children's educational assistance, free health check-ups, social security insurance, loan programs and skill training and product development.⁴⁴

Box 2: Biraya

Started work at the young age of 9, Biraya is a toy maker in Channapatna who has been in the profession for about 67 years. Being the senior most artisans we met, we inquired about the condition of the craft form in the present day. "The working conditions of the artisans are gradually deteriorating. Constant power cuts, irregular income are our major problems. Because of lack of protective gear, some of us have respiratory problems. Not only that, but illiteracy among the artisans also poses a problem, as then nobody knows about the concept of unions to stand up for our cause. This results in lack of unity among the artisans which are from the Hindu and Muslim communities. However, this does not translate to any ethnic or communal conflict between the Hindu and the Muslim workers.

⁴³'Maya Organic', www.mayaorganic.com, 21-12-13.

⁴⁴'Shilpa Trust', <http://www.tenthousandvillages.com/shilpa>, 21-12-13.



CHAPTER 3: CHANNAPATNA – THE TOY TOWN

“The experience in the toy making unit was an eye-opener, a reiteration of how skilled craftsmanship alone, without any fancy tools, technology or artificial enhancements, can result in such extraordinary outcomes.”⁴⁵ - Gitika Saksena

3.1 THE HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN

The toy making industry began as a household craft in Channapatna approximately two centuries ago.⁴⁶ The artists were known as the ‘*Chitragar*’,⁴⁷ who engaged in wood turning and lacquering. The artisans would mainly sell their produce on the local streets, and the overall productivity was low. However, over the past few years, the industry has shown significant growth. Small and medium scale industries are now present in Channapatna which heavily rely on the export of these items produced. Due to the phenomenal growth and the influence of market forces from abroad, the nature of employment, the demands on artisans and the character of the artisans has changed dramatically.⁴⁸ However, there is a lot of vagueness and ambiguity surrounding the origin of toy making in the town. According to most of the secondary sources that we went through before going on field, it was Tipu Sultan who invited artisans from Persia to teach this craft to the locals. However, when we went on field and asked artisans and the locals of Channapatna about the craft’s origin, they had a very different story to tell.

We met and interviewed artisans and families who were a part of this profession for years together. When quizzed about Tipu Sultan’s role in the commencing of the industry, there were three sets of people and answers. There were those who very confidently disagreed and said that he had absolutely no role to play in the development this craft. “Tipu Sultan jung

⁴⁵ Saksena, Gitika. ‘Photo Story: Channapatna Toy Town’. <http://thealternative.in/arts-culture/photo-story-channapatna-toy-town/>. 13-02-14.

⁴⁶ Das, Goutum. ‘Channapatna Toys: Toy Story’. <http://businesstoday.intoday.in/story/revival-channapatna-toys-comeback/1/201836.html>. 14-02-14.

⁴⁷ FAO Corporation Document Repository, ‘Chapter 3: Case Study 2: Lac- Turnery And The Lacquerware Industry’. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5859e/x5859e04.htm#3.5>. 14-02-12.

⁴⁸ FAO Corporation Document Repository, ‘Chapter 3: Case Study 2: Lac- Turnery And The Lacquerware Industry’. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5859e/x5859e04.htm#3.5>. 14-02-12.



ladhega, ya khilone banayega?”⁴⁹ (“Will Tipu Sultan fight the war or make toys?”) was one of the artisans’ puzzled reaction to our misconception. The second were those who did not have any idea about the craft’s origin, and then there were those, who credited the development of the craft to Bavasmia.

Bavasmia was a local artisan in Channapatna who went to study lacquer ware in Punjab. He experimented with the craft and was able to mechanize it by introducing the automated lathe.⁵⁰ We were lucky enough to meet Bavasmia’s family during the course of our trip. However they had a completely different version of the story. According to Mr. Abid, Bavasmia’s grand son-in-law, Bavasmia was an army general/colonel who went to Japan on a project. While he was there, he saw a similar practice of making items on a mechanised lathe, which he decided to get back to India and develop further. Bavasmia is also credited to have introduced the craft in the Industrial School of Channapatna and encouraging people from all castes and religions to join it. He convinced Muslims and people from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes to join the course and today there are a lot of people from these communities who are practicing this craft as a profession.⁵¹

Box 3: Iliaz pasha

Iliaz Pasha is a 60 year old artisan who has been a toy maker for some 40 odd years. “Nobody in my family is in this profession.” So what motivated you to be a part of this industry then?

I inquire. “There were people around me; neighbours and such, who were in this profession. I developed an interest and joined it.” An independent artisan, he is not in the purview of the government’s initiatives, but works with Kaveri emporium. “The orders come to me through Kaveri, but if the customer wishes, he can come directly to me and purchase the toys. About the government, I don’t even know what the government is actually doing. I have neither lost anything nor benefitted from these schemes of the government. My work is going smoothly, that’s it.”

⁴⁹ Khan, Abid. Personal Interview. 09-01-14.

⁵⁰ FAO Corporation Document Repository, ‘Chapter 3: Case Study 2: Lac- Turnery And The Lacquerware Industry’. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5859e/x5859e04.htm#3.5>. 14-02-12.

⁵¹ Khan, Abid. Personal Interview. 09-01-14.



3.2 THE RAW MATERIALS

The Wood:

The wood used for toy making in Channapatna is known as “Ale Mara”. It is the best kind of wood to use as it is available easily in Channapatna and is also easy to carve. ‘Doodhi ki



lakdi’ or milk wood (because of its whitish colour) and hale wood (Scientific Name: *Wrightia tinctoria*) is also used to make toys. These kinds of wood are favourable to work with as they are close grained, moderately hard and light which makes it easier for them to be

Figure 6: Ivory wood used for toy making.

turned into fine shapes by hand or by the automated lathes. They also have low moisture and oil content.

The Lac:



Lac is a natural resin that is produced by the insect *Technadria Lacca*. It is found on a number of forest trees, particularly the *Kusum* tree. Most of the lac is imported to Channapatna from Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Punjab. Three different varieties of lac are used in

Figure 7: Colouring of the wood using lac.



the lac-turnery process. The highest quality lac is referred to as button lac. It is light and golden coloured and can cost up to Rs 120/kg. The second is a medium brown colour and sells for Rs 80/kg. The third, poorest quality lac is dark black and sells for Rs 60/kg.

Being expensive, colours from the lac can be made by the artisans themselves. It is a simple process. The lac is stuck onto two wooden sticks and heated. Once heated, the lac becomes soft and malleable. It is beaten continuously to maintain the softness of the lac. A few pinches of vegetable dye are then added into the lac and it is heated and beaten till the correct shade of the colour desired is achieved. Soon after, the lac starts becoming rubbery, which is why it needs to be heated again and removed from the wooden sticks. It is then shaped into bars and cut for use. About 5 sticks of one colour are made at a time. However, it is necessary to use these within a month, as the lac slowly starts becoming harder and thus unfit for lacquering.

The Talegiri:

Talegiri or the screw pine leaf (*Pandanus odoratissimus*) is an extremely important material for lacquering the toys. The tree has palm-like evergreen nature with leaves which are thick and long and can be either densely branched, or have a bowl of up to 6 metres in height. These are found on the coasts of rivers, lakes, canals, fields and ponds.

Other than lac, there are a lot of synthetic substances that are now used to colour the toys. These include lithopone, which is a white pigment that helps the lac to lose its transparency and become opaque. The colour used to prepare the lac bars, which are known as aniline colours are also becoming important by the day.

Tools

Cutting tools:

The basic cutting tools used for the process of toy making include chisels, gauges, snappers, hand saws, axes and hammers. The traditional Kannada names of the tools and their uses in the toy making process are:



Figure 8: Various tools used.



- *Hoobaruli* (Sharpener)
- *Ooli* (Cutter) - divides the wooden logs into smaller pieces
- *Cheerna*- shapes the toys and makes them hollow
- *Birige*- used to make holes in the toys, and comes in different sizes.
- *Paachi* (Hammer) - Used to fix the log of wood into the machine and to make small chunks of the log.
- Compass- used to take measurements

The machines: The *patri* and the automated lathe

The most important tool is the lathe. Traditionally, before the advent of electricity and electric machines, most of the items were produced using simple hand lathes called *patri*,



which were made by local carpenters. The structure of the *patri* is fairly simple as well. A bow string is used to turn a rotating axle in the center of wooden lathe. The turning tool is held in the free hand and pressure is added with the foot, shaping the spinning wood. The *patri* becomes a convenient tool for production

Figure 9: Local artisan working on the *patri*.

because of its simple construction and being easily operable. Even today, the *patri* is used to make certain items, mostly smaller and thinner items which need a lot of detailing. For example, beads are made on *patri*. These cannot be made on the automated lathes as they are highly delicate and are at the risk of breaking.

Over the years, with the advent of electricity a power lathe is used to make toys in Channapatna today. A power lathe has a head stock that consists of a revolving axle attached to two belt pulleys. The belt runs over a pulley mounted on a revolving shaft that is driven by an electric motor.



3.3 THE PROCESS

Step one: Seasoning

The wood, Ale Mara is cut into chunks and distributed among/sold to the artisans by the agriculture department of Channapatna. As it comes freshly cut and green, there is a lot of moisture content in the wood. That is why, it is left for about 2-3 months to season, which is the process of removing all the moisture from the wood. The wood is kept stacked in such a way that it lets enough air to drain out the moisture from the wood. This is an extremely important step in the process of toy making, as it is only after this that the wood can be used to make the toys. Keeping the wood idle for too long does not spoil the wood, but most factories/workshops utilize the entire amount of wood bought within a year. In spite of being an extremely time-consuming process, there are valid reasons as to why seasoning is extremely important. A few of them are:

1. It reduces the gross weight of the wood, which is why the subsequent transporting and handling costs are also reduced.
2. Increases dimensional stability
3. Increases most strength properties and fastener holding power (therefore, joint strength)
4. Increases electrical resistance
5. Improves paintability and gluability
6. Improves thermal properties of the wood

Drying wood also makes it impervious to biological degradation, as long as it is not re-wetted. Thus, attack by wood destroying fungi and bacteria are prevented.⁵²

⁵² Eckelman, C.A. 'Seasoning of the Wood'. <https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/FNR/FNR-155.pdf>, 14-02-14.



Step two: Cutting, shaping and smoothening of the wood

After being properly seasoned, the wood becomes ready to use. The seasoned wood is then cut into various shapes and sizes as per the different toys and brought to the workshop. These logs are then to be inserted into the machines. The wood is fixed into a rotating metal base using a hammer. Once inserted, the base rotates at a high speed during which, the wood is chiselled and carved into a cylinder. This is the basic shape to make any kind of toy. The wood is now ready to be turned. After making the cylinder, the wood is then given more detail and shape to make the desired kind of toy.

Once the basic shape of the toy is made, it is then smoothened to make the colouring process easier. Screw pine leaves are held against the rotating wood and used to polish and smoothen it.



Figure 10: Shaping the wood.

Step three: Lacquering

The next step is to colour the toys. This is done with the help of lac which is why the process is commonly also known as lacquering. A bar of lac is held against the rotating piece of wood, and due to friction, the bar melts and the wood gets coloured. Pressure is applied wherever necessary to get darker and lighter shades of the colours.



Step four: Polishing and finishing

According to Jim Makowicki,

*“A toy with a nice finish commands respect, whether it is a craft market sales booth, on the shelf of a collector or in the hands of a happy child. A quality finish lets people know that the toy is special- one to be enjoyed, but also to be handled with care.”*⁵³

After the toy has been made, the toy is polished using the screw pine leaves again. Once polished these leaves give the toy a translucent shiny finish. A little bit of varnish is also



sometimes put on the leaves and then polishing is done, to give a proper finish to the final product. A good finish ensures that the pores in the wood are sealed and protects the wood from wear and tear during the time of storage. The finish also makes the product more hard and durable.

Figure 11: Polishing of the toy.

Step five: The final cut

Once the colouring and polishing is complete, the toy is cut away from the holder using a parting tool, leaving the machine free to begin the production of another toy.

⁵³Makowicki, Jim, 'Making Heirloom Toys', The Taunton Press: US (1996). pp 15.



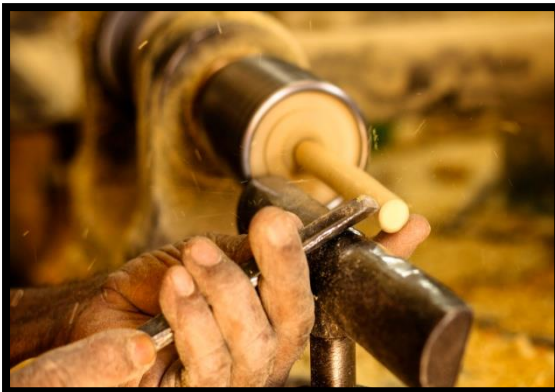
The process of toy making



Step 1: Fixing of the wood to the lathe.



Step 2: The fixed wood.



Step 3: Shaping



Step 4: Carving



Step 5: Smoothing



Step 6: Lacquering



Step 7: Polishing



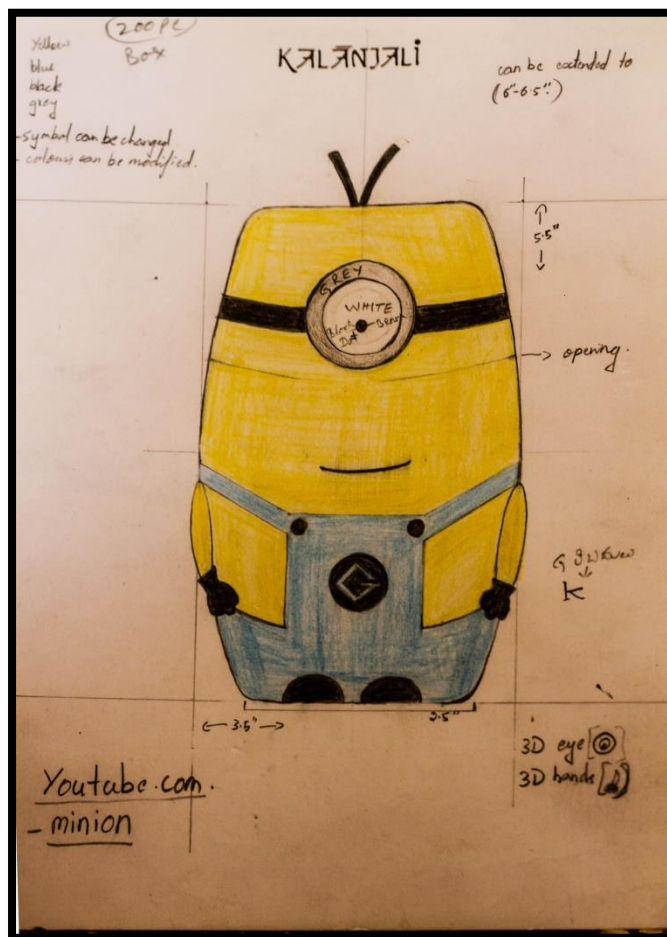
Step 8: The final cut from the lathe.



3.4 THE EVOLUTION

Design:

Every toy or item made on the lathes in Channapatna has a common feature, which is symmetry along a central axis. Either the toy as a whole, or the different parts of the toy which are made separately and then assemble together, follow this kind of symmetry. Over the years the designs made by the artisans, not only the locals but even those employed with the Government, NGOs and firms have changed. They have changed based on the changing trends. Mr. Venkatesh, of Katerpillar explained to us that there are some basic designs of



Channapatna toys that are shown to the consumers. They can make whatever changes they want keeping that basic design in mind, and thus get their own customised Channapatna toy. The original, traditional Channapatna toys are also produced, but the orders for the customised toys are much more. Similarly, NGOs such as Maya Organic too, produce various kinds of toys, using the same technology. All of these toys are not necessarily toys completely native to Channapatna. Maya aims at making educational toys as well. In the case of Shilpa trust, another NGO at work in Channapatna, it makes modern

Figure12: Modern designs

designs such as movie figures (eg: Minions) for more public appeal, and for exporting purposes.



3.5 EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

The toy making industry of Channapatna was once seen as one that focussed on preserving its cultural richness. Today, however, with accelerating industrialisation and the advent of a contemporary market characterised by fierce competition, its aims seem to be moving towards pecuniary gains. The onset of such an economy-centric perspective has been both, the cause for, as well as a result of, the entry of external organisations into this industry. Each organisation has a different place in the industry; a different role to play, a different contribution to make. The underlying commonality running across them all, however, is that every step taken by them traces down, directly or indirectly, to the local artisans. It is thus crucial to understand the exact effect of the initiatives taken by these various organisations on the toy makers themselves.

3.5.1 Government:

The Karnataka State Government has taken various steps to better the condition of the artisans in Channapatna. One major step has been to set up medical facilities and schools for the artisans' families and children. These facilities do not entail any charges and are open to all the artisans.

In addition, government launched the Design Development Scheme, where in designers from within as well as outside of the country were called in to help innovate and create new design

ideas for the artisans, so they may be able to keep up with the changing demands of the unpredictably dynamic consumer market. The benefits of this scheme and the designs thus developed were open to be accessed by the artisans and no formality or fee of any sort was required.⁵⁴



KSSIDC.

Figure 13: Government initiative,

⁵⁴ Diwakar, M.S. Personal Interview.06-01-14.



In an attempt to safeguard the many small scale industries active in the state, the Karnataka Government also set up a subsidiary organisation called KSSIDC [Karnataka State Small Industry Development Corporation], an off shoot of which is KSHDC [Karnataka State Handicrafts Development Corporation]. The artisans working in the toy making industry of Channapatna and registered in official records by the government are supported by KSHDC through the following ways:⁵⁵

- Every artisan is to be granted a Yellow Card, which serves as proof of their identity as a craftsman and gives them access to exhibitions such as Dilli Haat, where they can represent the Channapatna industry and display their products Every artisan is to be provided with quarters to live in, which is free of cost
- Raw materials are provided to the artisans at extremely subsidised rates, and exposure to newer technology is provided to help them keep pace with the market
- A Crafts Park has been built, falling under the jurisdiction of KSHDC. Its function is binary:
 - a. Set plots of lands can be taken by various small organisations and outfits working in relation to any small scale industry to set up factories, workshops or offices
 - b. A Common Facility Centre has been set up with a chain of mechanised lathes, where artisans who do not have access to machines can use the lathes to produce toys by taking them on rent at subsidised rates
- The traditional handicrafts of Karnataka, including the toys manufactured in Channapatna, are marketed by KSHDC under the brand name of Cauvery. The Cauvery emporium in Channapatna has the following functions:
 - a. It serves as an exhibit of the toys for the consumers. Being a government outfit, owing to its high level of recognition in the handicrafts market, it is able to attract customers from areas far beyond the local market
 - b. It serves as a middleman in the industry, receiving orders from customers, especially foreign customers, and contracting local artisans to complete the orders in order to receive the payment for the same

⁵⁵ Cauvery: Timeless Treasures of Karnataka, <http://www.cauverycrafts.com/aboutus.php>, 14-02-12.



While the government does claim, on record, to have launched the above initiatives, not many of them seems to have reached the artisans, many of who are not even aware of any such government undertakings.

Box 4: Abdul Kader

Abdul Kader, a 41 year old artisan who has been working in the profession of toy making for the last 21 years, explains, “Toy making has been going on in my family since the time we were under the British rule. My father still works on a *patri*, though I have shifted to a machine.” So how is the condition of craft today, I ask, “I love toy making. But it has no profit. And if no one is ready to help us we can’t do anything. We need some support, some respite. The government is not even ready to give us a loan to expand our business. If this continues, then 10 years down the line people might not even remember that Channapatna ever had the tradition of wooden toy making.

Most of the medical facilities have either been shut down or are now dysfunctional. The gravity of this situation intensifies against the context of the health hazard the toy making process poses, with the artisans being placed at a high risk of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases due to continual exposure to dust and sawdust particles. The government schools, though still running, have deteriorated in quality to such an extent that artisans prefer sending their children to private schools, even though the fee takes away a substantial proportion of their income.⁵⁶

While there is an official record of the Design Development Scheme being started⁵⁷, the effects cannot be seen in the industry. There is no evidence of any designs having been developed under the umbrella of this scheme and most artisans have no cognizance of such an initiative.⁵⁸

The Yellow Card, the artisans’ ticket to exhibitions across the country, almost seems like a myth to them. It is an extremely difficult process to obtain this card; a process that involves repeated trips to the government office, submission of various official documents and forms (the details of which are not explicitly provided at the time of application for the card), and

⁵⁶Kadar, Abdul. Personal Interview. 7-1-14.

Laxman, Mohan. Personal Interview. 09-01-14.

Khaleel. Personal Interview. 04-01-14.

⁵⁷Diwakar, M.S. Personal Interview. 06-01-14.

⁵⁸Khaleel. Personal Interview. 07-01-14.

Mohammad, Saiyyad. Personal Interview. 07-01-14.



what is probably the biggest deterrent to these artisans who earn just enough to make ends meet, it requires a payment of a fee of Rs.500 – 1000. Additionally, the KSHDC authorities allegedly display a blunt preference for artisans they already have an established association with, sending the same people for all craft fairs.⁵⁹

Another major prevalent problem is that of the housing allotment. Of all the artisans working in Channapatna, only 1033 are registered with the government. Within these, only 249 have been given the living quarters promised by the government almost fifty years ago.⁶⁰ Among the houses that have been allotted, there is only a small proportion that has been occupied, as the cost of maintenance of the quarters is unaffordable for the craftsmen.⁶¹

One issue that is echoed by all the artisans of Channapatna, whether working independently or with any other firm, is that of the frequent power cuts. With the electricity going for multiple hours every single day, the artisans lose out on a lot of working hours. As a result, the artisans either have to forego the income they could have earned through production during that time, which is a substantial amount, given the high frequency and long durations of these power cuts, or they need to make up for the lost hours of work by working late into the night. While this issue has been brought to the notice of the government many times, no action has been taken and the artisans continue to work at the mercy of the sporadic electricity.⁶²

Cauvery Emporium, however, has proved to be a substantial support system for the artisans. Irrespective of whether artisans are working in direct association with the government or not, they can accept orders received by the emporium and complete them. In such cases, Cauvery sets up the payment channel for the products in the form of a direct transaction between the customer and the artisan, thus eliminating any middleman commission. Since most of these orders are export orders, they are usually of a considerable quantity, thus providing the artisan with a sizeable income.⁶³

⁵⁹Kadar, Abdul. Personal Interview. 7-1-14.

⁶⁰Diwakar, M.S. Personal Interview. 06-01-14.

⁶¹Khan, Jaffer. Personal Interview. 07-01-14.

⁶²Kadar, Abdul. Personal Interview. 7-1-14.

⁶³Hari, Biraya. Personal Interview. 05-01-14.



Thus, while the government has taken various steps in order to empower the local artisans of Channapatna, there has not been enough emphasis on ensuring effective spread of awareness and proper implementation of these initiatives so that the artisans may draw maximum benefit out of them.

3.5.2 Non Government Organisations:

Along with the government, there are also various NGOs active in Channapatna. While their central objective, like the government, is the betterment of the lives of the artisans and the survival of the industry, the context under which they operate is different, owing to the added motive of profit generation.

3.5.2.1 Maya Organic

Maya Organic is currently the largest NGO working in Channapatna. Its main focus lies in the empowerment of the women of the society in a traditionally male-dominated industry. Running training camps for thirty women biannually and offering them employment, this organisation



Figure 14: Women working in Maya Organic.

boasts of an almost entirely female workforce. Maya Organic opens its training sessions for toy making to all the women of families living in and around Channapatna, after six months of which, they are given the option of joining as an employee. These women receive a stipend during the course of their training, and should they accept a job at the outfit, they are guaranteed a fixed regular salary, fixed depending on their quality of work. In addition, they also receive benefits such as free medical care and education facilities for their children, any loans or financial aid they may require, and what is otherwise unheard of in the industry, paid leave allowance. Occasionally, Maya Organic also conducts workshops pertaining to other skills important in the industry, such as reading and analysing engineering drawings,



developing communication skills and personality development.⁶⁴ Despite having profit maximisation as a second goal to be achieved, this NGO has successfully managed to balance that with ensuring that the women are comfortable at the workplace and do not face any problem. The employees find the authorities extremely approachable and always find help through them whenever faced with a problem. Their financial problems, too, are taken care of as loans can be taken when required. The women working with Maya Organic are especially indebted to them for extracting them from their conservative environment, some of them coming from conventional Muslim families, and providing them with the opportunity to earn their own living. The only issue is that of lack of transportation, which becomes too tedious as most of these women have to walk every day from a few kilometres away. This setback, however, fades away in the wake of the magnanimity of the support provided by the NGO.⁶⁵

3.5.2.2 Shilpa Trust:

Another NGO at work in Channapatna is Shilpa Trust, which operates from a plot bought by it in the Crafts Park. Contrary to the trend seen at Maya Organic, Shilpa Trust mainly provides employment to men. . However, Shilpa Trust, too, arranges for the children of the employees to get proper education. This NGO also periodically holds free health check-ups and introduces other health benefits for all artisans and their families. The employees working here, too, are extremely happy with the benefits they receive.⁶⁶



Figure 15: Shilpa Trust

One problem that does surface in the case of every NGO, however, is that these benefits affect only the employees of the firm, thus excluding other local artisans from potentially important workshops. While these NGOs do maintain that the programs initiated by them are open for all craftsmen in the town, lack of properly planned and executed advocacy of these

⁶⁴Gatkar, Satish. Personal Interview. 08-01-14.

⁶⁵Saleema. Personal Interview. 08-01-14.

⁶⁶Mansood, Ansaad. Personal Interview. 06-01-14.



initiatives leads to their effective reach being reduced to their workforce.⁶⁷ This argument is countered by the NGOs with the allegation that it is the artisans' inertia and reluctance to accept change that causes this divide between them. Since this craft has been passed down generations for centuries, it has become an intrinsic part of these artisans' lives. Accepting that the craft will have to go through modification and modernisation in order to hold a place in today's changing market is not easy for these craftsmen, for whom this art of toy making is not only representative of their own identity, but also the identity of their fathers, forefathers and the community itself.⁶⁸

Box 5: Venkatesh

Mr. Venkatesh is a 35 year old owner of Katerpillar toys, a private firm, who has been working as an artisan for the last 20 years. How did you learn the art of toy making? "I got trained in a training institute in Channapatna at the age of 16. The government today has shut down all training schools saying that children should study and not get trained to work before 18 years. I ask them, that if one knows that he is going to be a toy maker when he grows up, why not start training early?" What is the level of enthusiasm in the future generations according to you, I ask curiously. "From the time I was 13, I have been sitting and helping my father in making toys. This exposure is what drew me to take up this profession. Because the present generation is getting exposed to a lot of other options, most of them don't want to stay in Channapatna after completing their studies. They rather migrate to the city to find a job behind the desk than sit in a hot, noisy workshop filled with saw dust and carve out toys."

⁶⁷Hari, Biraya. Personal Interview. 05-01-14.

⁶⁸Venkatesh. Personal Interview. 05-01-14.



3.5.3 Private firms

Other than the NGOs and the Government, both of who lay emphasis on development of the industry and security of the artisans, there are also private firms functioning in Channapatna. Since these firms operate with the sole motive of profit maximisation, their role in the industry is very different.

Shri Beereshwara Arts and Crafts:

Shri Beereshwara Arts and Crafts is a private toy manufacturing firm active in Channapatna. Operating under the brand name of Katerpillar Toys, this firm was started by Mr. Venkatesh, an artisan from within Channapatna who has been working as a toy maker since the age of 13 years. The owner, being from the town itself and having witnessed the intricate workings of the industry, understands the need for providing proper training to the artisans. Thus, all employees hired by the firm, are provided training before beginning work.

Such training camps have proved to be of great help to the employed artisans; however, since these firms have a sole motive of profit generation, they do not work directly for the cause of the betterment of the artisans' lives. Their main contribution to the industry is established in the form of their contribution to the economy. Dealing largely in exports to other parts of the country as well as abroad, these firms help expand the market of these toys, thus indirectly aiding the growth of the industry itself.⁶⁹



Figure 16: Sri Beereshwara Arts and Crafts

⁶⁹Venkatesh. Personal Interview. 05-01-14.



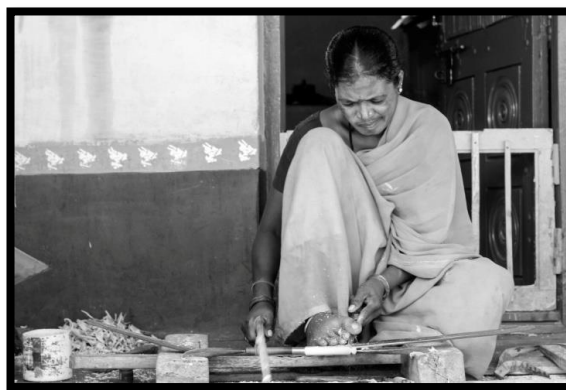
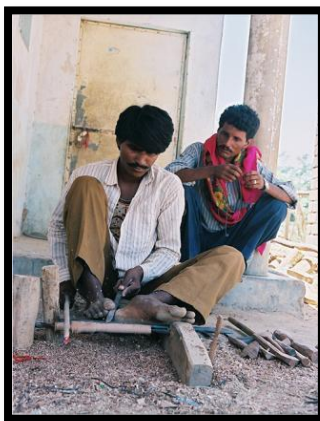
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Simplicity. Symmetry. Intricacy. Colours. Vibrancy. Design. Exquisite.

Sitting together night after night, discussing and debating the pros and cons of the various probable topics we could study for our Discover India Project, it was not without considerable contention that our group finally decided, under the added pressure of a looming deadline, to finalise on the toy making industry of Channapatna as our field of research. Six months of study and a ten-day research trip later, it is safe to conclude that we made the right decision.

During the initial phases of our research, we discovered that there are multiple places in India where the craft of wooden toy making is prevalent. Upon further reading, we inferred that there were some similarities and differences amongst the Indian wooden toy making practices in India. The main similarity seen amongst the wooden toy making practice in Etikoppaka, Andhra Pradesh, Kachch, Varanasi and Channapatna is the concept of the wood turning and rotation of the wood to make a wooden object. However, the specifications and the details of the machines and tools that they use are quite different. For instance, in Kachch there is no use of electricity in the process of toy making as it is a small scale industry in the *Vadhas* community. And it only uses a metal piece on which the wood is attached and rotated with the help of a bow and this structure is held into place with the help of large stones.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the set up the *patri* is different.

Figure 17: Comparison of the type of patris used in Katchchh (on the left) and Channapatna (on the right).



⁷⁰Khamir: A Kaleidoscopic Craft. <http://www.khamir.org/crafts/lacquered-wood>. 14-02-14.



Another similarity was the situation of acquiring wood in all the regions where toy making is practiced. “The forest department imposes a fine on us if we try to get *Ankudu* wood (scientific name *Wrightia tinctoria*), as there is no legal means of obtaining wood directly from the forest other than buying from vendors,” complained Kasi Koteswara Rao, the vice-president of the Etikoppaka Mutually Aided Cooperative Society.⁷¹ Similarity, while interviewing the local artisans, firms and the NGO’s, they stressed upon the issue of no means of obtaining legal wood from the market. This hindered the accounting process of the firms and NGO’s.

The major differences that were prevalent amongst these practices included the type of wood used. In Etikoppaka, “one of the major hurdles is the availability of *Ankudu* wood (scientific name *Wrightia tinctoria*), which is most suitable for making toys.”⁷² *Ankudu* or ivory wood is also used in Channapatna. However, in Varanasi ‘*Bhurkul*’ or ‘*Gulhar*’ wood or Benjamina wood is used. These differences observed are due to the geographical region of the practice of toy making. Moreover, the themes of the toys produced by these wooden toy making practices in India are quite different as it is mostly regional and culturally specific.

Channapatna, though not the only town associated with the toy-making practice that involves wood turning and lacquering, is definitely the best known for it. Rumoured to have seen the first traces of this craft in the 18th Century when Tipu Sultan brought in Persian artisans, this town soon developed its identity as the toy town of India, or ‘*Gombegala Ooru*’, as it is known in the area’s vernacular language, Kannada.

As we began our research trip, our first stop was to document the actual process of toy making, one that is almost unique to this town. The wood piece is rotated at a high velocity, and by simply holding the tools and colour bars against it with varying pressure, a toy is produced. The technique seemed brilliant; the ingenuity lay in the simplicity of the entire process. It was on taking a closer look, however, that its distressing effects came to light. Due to the continuous chipping away of the wood, there is constant exposure to miniscule sawdust particles, which enter the artisans’ system and cause blockages in both, the respiratory as well

⁷¹Kanth, K. Rajani. ‘Etikoppaka toy industry on verge of closure’. http://www.business-standard.com/article/sme/etikoppaka-toy-industry-on-verge-of-closure-111010400023_1.html. 15-02-14.

⁷²Kanth, K. Rajani. ‘Etikoppaka toy industry on verge of closure’. http://www.business-standard.com/article/sme/etikoppaka-toy-industry-on-verge-of-closure-111010400023_1.html. 15-02-14.



as cardiovascular networks. This increases the risk of contracting diseases such as Asthma and makes the artisans more prone to experiencing cardiac arrests.⁷³

Moving beyond the production process and looking at the finished toys, the picture turns rosy again. Shiny smooth toys, expertly crafted and brightly hued, all so perfectly symmetric about an axis, caught our attention in every household, factory and shop we entered. There are various kinds of designs currently under production. There are those which have been passed down generations, such as the iconic spinning top and train. There are certain designs which have developed over time, owing to modernisation, development, and the changing trends of the market, as can be seen from toys shaped as cars or aeroplanes, or those crafted into pencil tops and sharpeners, among others. The influence of the global market is also evident in the form of Russian dolls and other foreign concepts. The firms established in Channapatna are developing their own toys as well. Maya Organic, for example, has its own range of products unique to it, including the snail and the rocket. Some producers have also started making custom orders, wherein the customer provides the details of the design to be produced; usually popular items such as minions (characters from an animated movie). With the entry of foreign producers into the economy, especially Chinese producers, many of the Channapatna artisans are struggling to maintain their place in the industry. In order to adapt, several have either developed new designs to match these foreign products, or have moved out of the domain of toy making itself, producing wooden articles such as decorative pieces and corporate gift articles.⁷⁴

With such a massive shift in the structure of the industry, many argue that the essence of the traditional craft, and its cultural relevance have been lost. This, grouped with the extremely low financial returns in the industry and lack of substantial support from the external organisations, is discouraging the youth of Channapatna from taking up this profession that has been passed down centuries of generations. The elders too, are supporting this decision as they do not want their children to have a life of low quality as they did. Many, in fact, who were artisans, have moved into alternate professions as they were not being able to support their families with the meagre income that they were getting.⁷⁵ With this trend in place, the

⁷³Kadar, Abdul. Personal Interview. 7-1-14.

Mansood, Ansaad. Personal Interview. 06-01-14.

⁷⁴Khan, Abid. Personal Interview. 09-01-14.

⁷⁵Sayyed, Akbar. Personal Interview. 07-01-14



local artisans predict that it will not be long, maybe another ten years, until the ‘toy’ will vanish from the ‘toy town’ of India, leaving no traces of this traditional craft so deeply reflective of the culture of our country.⁷⁶

Every art form goes through its peaks and troughs; each has a period of prosperity and prevalence, and also faces the threat of becoming extinct. The toy making craft of Channapatna has been no exception to this trend. Our research, therefore, in addition to the basic documentation of the craft, was focussed not on establishing this craft as a dying art form, but on acknowledging that fact and using it as a base to understand the specific reasons behind its decline and, subsequently, discussing possible measures to help sustain the industry. After studying the different aspects of the industry as well as assessing the current scenario of the industry with a holistic view, we were able to develop certain possible solutions to help it not only survive, but also grow.

To begin with, if an art form has to survive, so must its propagators. It is thus important to take preventive measures for the artisans’ health wherever possible. The first step could be to ensure that all artisans are provided protective gear such as goggles and nasal masks, so that the particles do not enter their body and the health risk decreases. Additionally, more medical facilities, completely functioning and easily accessible to the artisans, should be set up so that receiving treatment does not seem unachievable.

Khan, Jaffer. Personal Interview. 07-01-14

Bano, Sabina. Personal Interview. 07-01-14.

⁷⁶Mohammad, Saiyyad. Personal Interview. 07-01-14.

Kadar, Abdul. Personal Interview. 7-1-14.

Gatkar, Satish. Personal Interview. 08-01-14.



Box 6: Safety Measures:

Wear proper eye protection for lathe operation

Lubricate the dead centre with oil or beeswax

Use wood turning tools for lathe works

Securely lock the tailstock before starting the lathe

Turn rough stock a few times by hand to make sure it will clear the tool rest

Always stop the lathe when checking the diameter of the stock with calipers

When sanding or polishing on a lathe remove the tool rest to prevent accidents

Hold all turning tools firmly with both hands

The next logical step would be to ensure a proper support system for the artisans. While the government and NGOs have taken various positive measures in the desired direction, the next step should be to ensure effective implementation of these measures so that the intended results can be achieved.

In order for this goal to be realised, it is also crucial to develop and put into place a well-planned communication system which connects not only the organisations to the local artisans, but to each other as well. Through this, each unit can be made aware of the initiatives being taken, allowing for the locals to make full use of these opportunities, leading to the holistic functioning of the industry as a unified entity.

While it is important for the industry to survive, it is equally important to preserve the essence of what it stands for. This will be possible only if the artisans have the freedom to create toys that they feel are representative of the original craft without having to worry about those designs not selling. In order to achieve this, there must be some regulation and restriction on the entry of foreign producers into the target market of the Channapatna industry.



If these measures are successfully implemented, the status of the artisans will be uplifted. This will allow them to work in this industry without the uncertainty of whether they will be able to earn enough to put food on the table for their family. Without this pressure of providing for their family, the artisans will be able to lay more focus on the work itself and rediscover the reason they had entered this industry: the cultural relevance, the reflection of their history and their love and passion for the craft itself. In the words of a local artisan of Channapatna:

"It's like bringing up a child when you are an artisan. You get that satisfaction when you see your product transform into the final shape, like them taking the first footsteps, then getting shaped, then making their initial forays into the market, and finally, you have to sell them. It's like holding their hands through this entire process and then giving them away. It's more than the money."⁷⁷

⁷⁷Hari, Biraya. Personal Interview. 05-01-14.



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Local Community:

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Khan, Jaffer. Personal Interview. 07-01-14.

Sayyed ,Akbar. Personal Interview. 07-01-14.



GLOSSARY

- Acharyas- craftsmen in Channapatna who belong to the community of chitragars.
- Ankudu- Ivory wood
- Bhurkul- Wood with thick fibres used for lightweight toys
- Birige- A tool used to make holes in the toys, and comes in different sizes.
- Chapra- shell lac
- Cheerna- A tool which shapes the toys and makes them hollow
- Chitari/ chitrakas- community which makes toys made from wood available from the local mango trees
- Chitragars- Artisans who use lightweight wood to make toys
- Doodhi ki lakdi- ivory wood
- Gombegala Ooru- Toy town (The tag given to Channapatna)
- Gulhar- Wood with thick fibres used for lightweight toys
- Hala- A city in the province of Sindh which is famous for its globally recognized handicrafts.
- Hoobaruli- sharpener
- Kahema- A kind of wood used as a substitute for eucalyptus
- Kesar- saffron (used as a colouring agent)
- Kharadis- Lathe workers in Varanasi
- Kohar- Craftsmen belonging to the Prajapati community
- Kusum tree- A tree which is commonly known to host lac insects
- Lakda chikhelni- wooden toys made from wood available from the local mango trees
- Maniar- communities working with wood and lac turnery
- Meghwal- communities working with wood and lac turnery
- Ooli- A tool which divides the wooden logs into smaller pieces
- Paachi- A hammer used to fix the log of wood into the machine and to make small chunks of the log
- Patri- A hand lathe used in the process of wooden toy making where in the wood block is placed between two metal pins fixed on an adjustable frame and manually rotated using a bow.
- Prajapati- Community of painters based in Varanasi



- Sindora- Wood from tropical rain forest Sindora trees
- Talegiri- Screw pine leaf; a material used for lacquering toys.
- Vadha- Community which makes toys with lacquer
- Wadha Kohlis- Semi nomadic community of carpenters and lathe turners