

“Gombegala Ooru”: The Town of Ecofriendly Toys

Channapatna Toys Cluster, Karnataka



Channapatna is a township in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka known for its handcrafted wooden toys, popularly known as “Gombegala Ooru” or Toys Town. Toy making in Channapatna is a 200 years old craft made from local wood known as ‘hale’, painted with dyes and lac resin. The products range from toys like dolls, planes, trucks, telephones, complete kitchen sets, jigsaw puzzles and a host of other items that are unique and exotic in nature as well as tough and eco-friendly, making them safe and child-friendly. The craft has been awarded the Geographical Indication (GI) tag to give its artisans their due rights. But with the rise in industrialization & availability of cheap plastic toys, the market for Channapatna toys faced a lot of challenges. The artisans started migrating to nearby cities as the craft alone couldn’t sustain their livelihood. The women got engaged in occupations like bidi rolling, incense stick making and sericulture which were hazardous and low paying.

To tackle these problems, Ms. Shaheda, belonging from a family of Channapatna toy artisans, mobilized women & existing artisans to provide them with skill training on channapatna toy making, lacware, embroidery and garment making that gave them a sustainable income as well as a dignified livelihood. Within a few years, some women successfully started their own tailoring businesses, a few started working in garment factories and many others continued making Channapatna toys. Later they were collectivized into a producer company known as ‘Artisans pride producer company’ owned and run by the artisans themselves. Her idea was to divert the women from hazardous works and engage them in productive activities like toy making and lacware that would empower them economically and help in preservation of the dyeing craft. But in order to meet the current market needs for toys, new designs and technology interventions had to be introduced.



Figure 1 Ms. Shaheda giving an introduction to the artisans on the channapatna craft

IMEDF developed the Channapatna lacware cluster with the idea of introducing newer designs and technologies for production and promote the use of natural dyes and lac resin on toys. Today, these toys are being designed as play and learn tools, keeping in mind the learning needs of children especially in their growth years. Presently, Ms. Shaheda works as the CEO of the producer company, wherein 252 artisans are engaged. She believes that in order to sustain this craft, the new generation can make use of their education & introduce new technological interventions into the cluster to enhance production process and new innovative toys.

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