

Bangle Bouquet

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO RESIST THE LURE OF LAAD BAZAAR | By ARUNDHATI NATH



Nestled in Hyderabad's Old City (left), Laad Bazaar is a heady swirl of colour, scent, and sound. Most popular among the market's wares, are flashy, crystal-studded laad (lacquer) bangles.

Watching the honking cars choking the old, narrow street near the Charminar, I wonder if I'll ever be able to cross the road. Despite the heavy traffic and scorching heat, I am on my third visit to Laad Bazaar, a jewellery market in Hyderabad's Old City area, famous for its colourful lacquer and glass bangles. A young traffic policeman who helps me cross the road, waves me across with a smile and sage advice: "Be sure to bargain well. Don't settle for anything less than 40 per cent lower than the price quoted." I smile back, and walk into the four-centuries-old market.

Located a short walk west of the city's iconic Charminar, the kilometre-long stretch of Laad Bazaar is filled with shops selling bright, dazzling bangles in every imaginable colour. There are also shops that sell wedding finery, a variety of *ittar*, henna, handicrafts, pearl jewellery, and many other knick-knacks.

ATLAS

Hyderabad, Telangana



The Old City area has a number of markets besides Laad Bazaar. There's Begum Bazaar for household things, Patel Market for wholesale cloth, and Gulzar Hauz for gold and pearls.

My eyes dance excitedly over the many distractions as the calls of shopkeepers fill the air. At every stall there are rows and rows of bangles, piled neatly from top to bottom. I step into Aarzo Bangles and Jewellers, one of the first shops I see. Faiyyaz, the salesman who attends to me, shows me bright golden *kadas*, studded with green and red stones. He gauges my size and slips a thick bangle onto each wrist. The intricate stone work is bewitching. Faiyyaz quickly adds an assortment of shimmering glass bangles on to my wrists, making me feel like a princess.

According to local lore, Golconda's sultan and founder of Hyderabad, Muhammed Quli Qutb Shah is believed to have built this bazaar for royal guests during the wedding of his daughter. The word "laad" simply means lacquer.

This vibrant arcade is considered the largest bangle market in India. Prices for a

pair start at ₹6 and can go up to ₹10,000. Haggling with the shopkeepers is an important part of the experience. The huddle of shops never seems to run out of customers who want to try on and buy different styles. At another stall, I must have a delightful set of white bangles adorned with multi-coloured stones. Like me, other women around are also quickly stacking up their purchases. Surrounded by the smell of *ittar*, the glitter of the bangles, and the warmth of the people who work here, for a brief moment I feel I've caught a glimpse of a lost era of Nawabi royalty, where *tehzeeb*, the right etiquette, reigned. ●

Vitals

Laad Bazaar is located on the road branching out west of the Charminar in the Old City area of Hyderabad (daily 11 a.m.-9 p.m.).