

Striving for Ecological Balance: Idols and Water Conservation

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Abstract

This study explores the reasons favouring the installation and worshipping of Lord Ganesha's POP Idols during Ganesh Chaturthi and their subsequent immersion in rivers and water bodies in Surat city and recommends action to check their permissible height and replace POP idols with clay Idols for ecological preservations. The article also urges cautious use of brightly coloured oil paints; fluorescent paints; quick drying paints; artificial jewellery; and, other decoratives to decrease the water pollution hazards consequent to immersion of thousands of such Idols and preserve water quality.

Sir,

Interviews of organizers and three persons coming for worship at 30 Ganesha Pandal (temporary sites where Idols of Lord Ganesha are house for a period of 10 days) sites in Surat city were conducted during morning and evenings prayers during Ganesh Chaturthi i.e. from 15th September 2007 to 24th September 2007 on various aspects pertaining to the issue of Ganapati Idols and water pollution. Ganesh Chaturthi is a festival when Idols of Lord Ganesh are installed at many sites and worshipped for 10 days before their immersion in rivers and various water bodies. It was observed that 73.3% Idols were made up of Plaster of Paris. The main reasons given by organizers for favouring POP Idols were lower cost (28.8%), better resilience and better finishing and appearances (24.2%), lack of pollution problem awareness (16.7%) and the relative unavailability of clay Idols (7.6%). Interestingly more POP Idols were installed among sites where organizers professed unawareness of water pollution hazards. It was observed that 40% of the Idols are of 5-7 feet long, following by those 7-9 feet (33.3%). The majority (63.3%) of organizers were aware about city authorities appeal to decrease Idol's height. The reasons of organizers favouring bigger Idols were custom (24.4%), viewing of their Idols as not big (20%), necessity due to decoration and exhibition needs (20%), such Idols don't cause pollution (18.8%) and ample availability of funds (6.7%). Their overall perception was that Idols below 9 feet ceiling are small as they fall in permissible category. These Idols were brightly coloured with oil paints and

fluorescent paints and quick drying paints. The Idols were decorated with artificial jewellery and other decoratives. The perceptions among individual respondents were similar to that of the organizers.

These findings reveal the need to explore ways and means to decrease the water pollution hazards consequent to immersion of thousands of such Idols. POP Idols take months to dissolve in water and poison the waters of lake, ponds, river and seas, kill the aquatic flora and fauna and facilitate mosquito breeding. POP look alike often may contain even more harmful chemicals. Oil based, bright and fluorescent and quick drying colours and junk jewellery could contain bond colour, plastic colour, primer, binder and substances like Mercury, Cadmium, Lead, and Carbon which after Idol immersion significantly alter water quality. These observations points to the eventual need for alternatives as the use of eco-friendly clay Idols painted with natural colours or the reuse of permanent Idols and in the interim decreasing the permissible height from 9 feet to 6 feet as this appears satisfactory to the majority of respondents.

The cut off height sets the benchmark and any reductions could mould the future trends. The right to environmental protection and pollution free environment is well established by now against the backdrop of our Constitution, including the Directive Principle of State Policy and Article 51 A(g), 47, 21; 31, "Sustainable development and intergenerational equity", "Precautionary principle" and "Polluter pays principle", "Relocation of hazardous industries", "Development of green belts and open spaces", "Control of

occupational exposure” and “Amendment of Locus Standii Doctrine”¹. Let us hope that we can find lasting solutions to religious practices affecting ecology for sustainable development.

References

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