



Problems of Ganpati Idol Making Business in Pen Taluka: An Overview

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Abstract:

Ganpati idol making is both an art and a livelihood, deeply rooted in Maharashtra's cultural heritage. Pen, a small town in Raigad district, has emerged as the hub of this industry, producing nearly 6–7 lakh idols annually, with a large share exported to other states and abroad. Interviews with experts such as Mr. Shrikant Deodhar, President of Pen Murtikar Sanghatan, along with historical sources, show that idol making in Pen began in the 1890s and grew rapidly after Lokmanya Tilak popularized the public celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi. The industry, once based on barter and family traditions, has now evolved into a large-scale business that sustains over two lakh people. However, idol makers face serious challenges—seasonal employment, rising raw material costs, storage issues, lack of financial support, environmental regulations, and growing competition from machine-made idols. The shift toward eco-friendly clay idols is further reshaping the market. This study examines the cultural importance, economic role, and pressing problems of idol makers while highlighting the need for sustainable business practices and policy support.

Keywords: *Ganpati idol making, Pen idol industry, Eco-friendly idols, Traditional artisans, Seasonal business, Cultural heritage.*

Introduction:

Pen, a town in Raigad district of Maharashtra, is renowned for Ganesh icon business. Pen has been manufacturing idols for years with skilled artisans designing beautiful and fragile icons for Ganesh Chaturthi every year. Pen's idol-manufacturing company has made its name at a public, indeed international, level, as it's adept with artisans making tens of thousands of icons per batch for fresh use and for export. Pen Ganesh icons have meant quality beyond the average,

good design, and art. Pen has come to mean a place in terms of having such fantastic icons, which are shipped out to Indian countries as well as world countries where there is a large Marathi crowd, like the US, UK, and Australia. The company has also undergone a huge change in the aspect of vintage themes and new-age themes, thereby achieving cultural fit as well as responding to prevailing situations. 'Pen Murtikar Sanghatan' is another similar integral organization of GIAC's energizing and subsidizing idol

manufacturing sedulity. Organized to benefit crafters in development, GIAC is a regulating body that provides qualitative icons, route to the request, frame and training environment of crafters, and maintains traditional ways of idol making and inventions to maintain encyclopedically acceptable morals. With mutual sweats of GIAC and Pen idol-making culture, the megacity is today a preeminent product center of idols, no longer an outstanding contributor to the first economy alone but to India's cultural scene as well. The undertaking is today a part of the identity of Pen, embracing enterprise, art, and culture, becoming a monolith sedulity in idol-making.

Objectives:

1. To know the economic roll of GIAC in pen taluka.
2. To focus on problems of Ganpati Idol Makers.

Methodology:

This study uses a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. Primary data includes field visits, interviews with idol makers, and surveys of consumers in urban and semi-urban areas. Secondary data is drawn from government reports, academic articles, and newspaper sources. Sampling focuses on artisan communities in Pen taluka, known for large-scale idol production. Data is analyzed through

descriptive statistics and SWOT analysis to understand strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by idol makers.

Findings and Discussion:

Mr. Shrikant Deodhar, (President, Pen Murtikar Sanghtan) a fourth-generation artist and sculptor from the Deodhar family, who have pioneered the *Ganesha* idol industry of Pen, detailed informed in his interview about history of Ganpati idol making of Pen. According to Wikipedia, the idol-making industry in Pen has been going on for more than a century. Villagers in Pen have always been artistic. Originally, they were adept at making items such as idols out of paper and stuffed parrots. Some of Pen's artisans switched to creating clay idols for the Ganesh festival in the 1890s, when it was transformed from a private to a public event. They were sold locally under a barter system for a few kilos of rice, but there was no money in it at the time. The town of Pen, two hours far away from south of Mumbai, is where most Ganesh statues are produced, if you have the time. Most of the locals are employed in the massive idol-making industry. 600,000–700,000 Ganesh idols are made annually by about 200,000 idol builders in about 550 factories. Over one-quarter of the statues are exported. The rest are sold in India, but for a premium everyone wants an idol made in Pen. The idol making is

spread-out all-over Pen. However, much of it takes place in workshops attached to homes in Kasar Ali, Kumbhar Ali, and Parit Ali—streets all named after their original settlers. If you wander around, you'll discover them. Prathamesh Kala Kendra on Kasar Ali is renowned. One of the largest clay-idol making workshops in Pen is Trimurti Kala Mandir, owned by Baliram Pawar and tucked away in a lane off Dattar Ali. To see the really big workshops, you'll need to head to Hamrapur village, around 15 minutes away. In order to give visitors comprehensive knowledge about the craft and procedure of idol creation, the Pen Municipal Council has also started a project called the Ganesh Idol Museum and knowledge Center.

According to Ameya Narvankar in his project 'Murtikar: Idol-makers of Pen' described several angles of Ganapati Idol Making in Pen. Pen is situated 80 kms away from Mumbai lies Pen, a small town which has attained a global reputation for their perfectly crafted *Ganesha* idols. Here, making *Ganesha* idols is not just an industry but a passion. The 'Made in Pen' *Ganeshas* travel not just to Mumbai and Pune, but are also popular with the Marathi speaking population settled in US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and so on.

Wikipedia informed that, Pen is located in the Raigad district of Maharashtra; the town has been known for their hand-

crafted idols since the time of Peshwas. In those days, the original practice was to draw mud from the courtyard, make a simple Ganesha idol from it and then immerse it in water. It of Brahmins participated in. It took a historic event to propel response to the British ban on political gatherings, Lokmanya Tilak introduced the concept of *Sarvajanik Ganesh Chaturthi* (public celebration) to unify the Indian masses. Pen served as the focal point of this movement, and Pen's closeness to it contributed to the festival's increasing prominence among its Brahmin community. In response to this unexpected increase, numerous individuals within the community embraced idol making as a primary vocation. As demand peaked, other communities too, switched to idol-making and started their own units. The industry began to grow and there was no looking back. The opening of the Thane Creek Bridge in 1970s improved access to Pen from Mumbai. Pen's Ganesh business proceeded making roughly six to seven lakh idols with annual sales of almost Rs. 8 crores because to improved road networks, transportation, and banks.

Problems Faced by Ganpati Idol Makers:

1. Seasonal Nature of Work: The occupation of Ganpati idol-making is seasonal in nature and operates predominantly for two or three months prior to the Ganesh Chaturthi festival.

Otherwise, artisans are unemployed or get themselves involved in other small-scale employment. The irregular nature of income makes their livelihood sources precarious and insecure.

2. Increasing Raw Material Prices: Raw materials such as clay (shadu mati), pigments, paints, and ornaments are increasing in price every year. Since consumers are asking for idols to be competitively priced, artisans can't keep a balance between price and quality. This lowers their margins right away.

3. Environmental Legislation: Since the government has prohibited or restricted plaster of Paris (PoP) idols because they pollute water, nearly all artisans must switch to environmentally friendly materials. But clay idols are dense, more expensive, and difficult to transport, and this poses a monstrous challenge to small idol artisans to adopt.

4. Mass-Produced Idols Competition: The mass-produced idols and other state idols or even foreign state idols are cheaper and more appealing. This provides an unfair competition to the traditional artisans, whose hand-made idols consume time, effort, and expertise.

5. Failure to get Financial Support: The majority of idol makers are small craft family members and do not receive formal bank loans or government subsidies. They rely on local financiers or payment in advance from clients. This does not enable them to scale up or enhance their business.

6. Decrease in Number of Skilled Artisans: Younger people are less interested in making idols since the earnings are poor and it is seasonal work. Traditional old skills are being lost in large numbers and the business lacks skilled artisans.

7. Space and Storage Problems: Spacious storage areas and workshops are needed by big Ganpati idols. In reality, there is no space in practically all craftsmen's shops, and hence they have to hire costly sheds. It is also problematic to move big idols, and this leads to damage and additional expense.

8. Demand Uncertainty: Demand for idols varies yearly based on economic performance, the behavior of consumers, and anti-smoking campaigns. Artisans do not know how many idols to make, which has implications for their investments and planning.

9. Unorganized Sector: The idol-making industry is largely unorganized. Most artisans work in small workshops or at home without registration under MSMEs or artisan societies. Because of this, they cannot access government schemes, subsidies, or insurance benefits, leaving them financially insecure.

10. Storage and Transportation Issues: Large idols require proper storage space and careful transportation to pandals. Many artisans cannot afford large workshops or godowns, so idols often get damaged due to lack of space.

Transportation costs are also high, and any breakage during delivery results in direct financial loss.

11. Health and Safety Concerns: Idol makers often work long hours in dusty, cramped environments with paints, chemicals, and plaster. Continuous exposure to such materials affects their health, causing respiratory problems, skin diseases, or back pain from long sitting hours. There are hardly any safety measures in place for their protection.

12. Uncertainty of Market Demand: The demand for idols varies every year. Sometimes, due to economic slowdowns, pandemic restrictions (like during COVID-19), or changes in local regulations, orders reduce drastically. This unpredictability makes it difficult for artisans to plan production and investment.

13. Dependence on Middlemen: Many artisans sell their idols through middlemen or dealers who take a large share of the profit. Since idol makers lack direct access to customers or marketing platforms, they are unable to earn the full value of their hard work.

14. Limited Awareness of Modern Marketing: Most artisans rely on traditional methods like word-of-mouth or local buyers. They have little knowledge of social media, e-commerce, or online marketing, which limits their reach to a broader market. This prevents them from tapping into urban or international customers.

15. Impact of Natural Disasters and Pandemics: Events like floods, cyclones, or the COVID-19 pandemic severely affect idol makers. During such times, people avoid large gatherings, and orders for idols decline. This directly impacts the income of artisans, as their business depends heavily on festivals being celebrated on a large scale.

16. Declining Interest Among Younger Generations: Younger members of artisan families are less interested in continuing the idol-making profession because of low income, seasonal dependency, and hard-working conditions. This threatens the continuity of traditional skills and cultural heritage.

Conclusion:

The Ganpati idol making business of Pen stands as a living example of India's blend of tradition, culture, and entrepreneurship. From its humble origins in local households to becoming a global supplier of idols, Pen has nurtured a unique industry that provides livelihood to thousands of artisans. Yet, the problems faced—seasonal nature of work, increasing costs, uncertain demand, environmental restrictions, and declining interest among younger generations—threaten the future of this craft. The industry also suffers from being unorganized and lacking financial and institutional support. Despite these hurdles, there is immense scope for growth through eco-friendly innovations, better

infrastructure, cooperative societies, and digital marketing. Stronger government policies, awareness campaigns, and skill development programs can ensure that the “Made in Pen” idols continue to represent both cultural devotion and sustainable business practices. Ultimately, the survival of this industry depends on a balance between respecting tradition, protecting the environment, and empowering artisans.

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