



Design Exploration Seminar 2020

# Ganesha Idol making

Pen, Maharashtra

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## Contents

Acknowledgment	5
1. Introduction	7
2. History of Idol Making in Pen.....	9
3. Tools and Raw materials	11
4. Making process of PoP idols	15
4.1 Casting	
4.2 Painting	
4.3 Storage	
5. Insights	28
6. Reference	29

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## Introduction

Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed god is one of the most adored deities for Hinduism, also known as Ganapati or Vinayaka. Lord Ganesha is the God of wisdom, prosperity, good fortune and the destroyer of evils, and he is worshipped in most households without divisions of caste, wealth or creed coming in the way. Due to all these qualities, he is also known as Vighnaharta and the day of Ganesh Chaturthi is called as Vinayaka Chaturthi or Vinayaka Chaturthi. The festival honoring Ganesha is the Ganesh Chaturthi that can go up to 10 days, and it is celebrated fervently in most parts of India due to his popularity as a God for all men. For Maharashtra, it is one of the main festivals. Ganesha Chaturthi is celebrated by installing idols of Lord Ganesha in households, temples, town squares or pandals and worshipped for 10 days. At the end of 10 days, the idols are immersed in water to denote the rebirth of the god. These idols, coming in all kinds of sizes and shapes according to the accommodating ability of the worshippers, are made from clay and Plaster of Paris (PoP). But the idol makers get less recognition for crafting these beautiful idols. They work all the year around to produce these idols and supply them to metro cities. During this project, I was exposed to the various processes that are involved in making these idols, the lives of the workers and the beauty of the whole process.



## **Pen and Idol making**

Pen is small town between Mumbai and Pune in the Raigad district of Maharashtra , famous for making Ganesha idols, having a history of over 100 years old. It started with the Freedom fighting movement of India when Ganesh Chaturthi was popularized and has carried on all these years, becoming an industry with exports all over India as well as to the US and the UK.

The people of Pen started making Ganesha idols when it became a public domain of worship in the 1890's. There are about 1.5 lakh idol-making factories in Pen taluka where more than 2 lakh people are employed around the year. The Ganesha idols were initially made out of clay, brought from Bhavnagar and then transported to Mumbai to be sold at cheap prices. Slowly, Plaster of Paris started to be used and the real boom happened in the 1970's with the opening of the Thane creek and transportation made easier. The people of Pen make idols the whole year round, taking a break only during the Ganapati festival for 10 days.



## **Tools**

### **Brush**

It is used clean surface of the Idols.

### **Chisel/Knives**

Chisel is used to remove unwanted part from the idols and knives are used either to detail some part or its flat surface is used smooth out any surface to give that polished look.

### **Paint brush**

They are used from shading to every detail of the idol.





## **Materials**

### **Plaster of Paris(PoP.)**

The PoP idols are not easy to make but as a material it is sturdier, lighter and can be used to make idol up to 5 feet in height.

### **Rubber Mould generation from masterpiece**

It is durable, more accurate with the impression and details and can be used to cast more than 500 idols.

### **Katha( Natural Fibers)**

It helps to increase the stability in larger idols.

### **Powdered colors / Camelin Colors**

Powdered colors are used for shading and bright colors are used for detailing.



## **Process of making PoP Idols**

### **Casting**

When clay was used for idol making , it was less environmentally harmful than PoP, a white powder used for casting the idol in shapes. The PoP sets when mixed with water, and so it is poured in Moulds shaped as the idol, and a natural fiber (Katha) is used for adding strength to the substance. The body of the Mould is rubber, kept inside the Mould. Once set, the Moulds are broken and the idols are painted with white primer to paint.













## **Painting**

Once the Mould has been broken, the hands that are made separately are attached to the idols. The process of painting begins with the coat of primer, after which the Ganesha is painted in skin colored, but fairer tones. The clothes and other designs are also painted on or embellished. The eyes are painted last, sometimes by women or girls giving it a feminine touch.







## **Storage**

Once the idols have been detailed, a coat of varnish is applied to keep the shine. They are then packed and kept aside for storage. The packed idols are airtight, to avoid fungus and molds that may destroy the idol (since it's made of clay/PoP). Only after receiving the order for the idols, they are unpacked and the final gold or silver paints are applied and loaded into trucks to be shipped off or delivered.



## Insights

Pen has about 125 years of legacy.

It gives employment to the whole village, and even the villages around have a source of livelihood through idol making.

Major sculptor or designer of idols create the main idol and replicas are made.

Men, women, children, young and old involved in idol making.

Export to other states and countries, esp US and UK.

Environmentally unfriendly products used.

Need to focus on greener production.

Proper documentation needed of history, families and legacies of the generations of workers.



## Reference

Picture credits: Soham Kadwaikar

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