

ECO FRIENDLY GANESHA FESTIVAL



Scriptures say that Ganesh festival originated as an expression of gratitude to planet earth. It is celebrated every year in a traditional way creating spiritual awareness among people. It must also be celebrated with the spirit of ecological sustainment and protection. Ganesh festival is now one of the biggest festivals in Mumbai city with celebrations in homes and large gathering of devotees at Ganesh Mandals and later at beaches during the immersion of the idols. The festival is spread over 11 days. The festival also generates a large amount of holy waste (Nirmalya) in the form of flowers, decoration material and other religious offerings. In all, Worship & Immersion of nearly 3 lakh Ganesh idols is expected through household and community celebrations. These Ganesha idols are immersed at the various beaches and lakes across the city. The city beaches, never really known to be totally clean, get further polluted with holy waste, including pieces of idols which have not got dissolved, flowers, and decoration material etc.

Effects of Ganesh festival-

- a. Contribute to water pollution due to immersion of idol and organic waste
- b. Contribute to soil pollution by dumping thermocol decoration
- c. The broken idols float on water affects sanctity of the festival
- d. undissolved idols and non-degradable material are blocking the natural flow of water and causing stagnation
- e. Impact of noise pollution due to artificial sound system during procession.
- f. Massive use of electricity in community and household level for decoration purposes.
- g. Such pollution causes damage to eco system

Such pollution damages health by

- a. polluting drinking water sources causing health impact
- b. breathing and skin problems due to Gulal during procession
- c. Noise pollution affect psychological problem like fear, nausea, hearing problem especially for adults and infants.

Some Ganesh Chaturthi practices are harming the Environment-

However, after the celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi and immersion of the idols; the seas, rivers and lakes are often left dirty and polluted, harming all water creatures and mother earth. These are some of the ways by which the celebrations, immersions and rituals are causing harm to the environment.

Plaster of Paris (POP) Idols

Plaster of Paris (POP) is one of the most common elements used to create the Ganesha idols. POP is not a natural occurring material; hence it takes a lot of time to dissolve. It is made from gypsum. It can even take several months or years to dissolve completely.

Chemical Dyes and Colours

The chemical dyes used to paint these idols are also harmful as they result in water pollution. The chemical paints on the idols contain poisonous and heavy metals such as lead, mercury, etc. which enter the water as the idol dissolves and harm water life.

Water Contamination

After the immersions, water bodies such as oceans, seas, lakes, etc. are left highly contaminated. Along with the idols, several other items are immersed in the water such as banana leaves and coconuts making the water dirty and impure. Items used for decoration are also dumped into the seas and other water bodies.

Reduced Oxygen Levels

The toxic and heavy paints from the idols form a layer on the water surface which increases acidic content of the water and deprives fish and other aquatic animals of oxygen. That is why, many fish are found dead and floating on the surface of the water on the day after Ganesh immersions.

Celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi in an Eco-friendly Manner-

To avoid causing harm to the environment, here are a few tips and precautions you can take to ensure that celebrations are eco-friendly:

Buy Eco-friendly Ganesha Idols

One can buy eco-friendly idols for celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi. Clay idols dissolve immediately in the water, greatly lessening or completely preventing water pollution. You can immerse it in a bucket at home also. If you are keen on buying POP idols, then you sprinkle a few drops of water symbolically and give it for recycling. Many people also use metal, stone or wooden idols and symbolically immerse it by placing it under water and then removing it and reusing the same idol every year. Ganesh idols made from mud are also eco-friendly and immerse easily in water.

Buy Ganesha idols made of Paper-Mache for the Festival

Do not use thermocol or plastic as decorations or accessories for your Ganpati idol. Instead, use cloth, wood, paper, and other natural materials that are safer when immersed in water. If there is an artificial tank in your area specifically created for immersion purposes, use this instead of a natural source of water such as a lake or a stream. Collect offerings of flowers and other organic material and put them in a compost pit. These can be used to fertilize your garden. If you must immerse them, wrap them in newspapers instead of polythene bags.

Tips for Eco-friendly Celebrations

- Avoid using chemical paints containing harmful colours and dyes. Instead use natural colours such as turmeric, gheru, multani mitti, etc. for idols.
- Don't use materials like thermocol or plastics for decoration which are not degradable and which do not dissolve in water. Instead you can use biodegradable items like plain paper or colored paper for decorations.

Home Ganpati Decoration with Fresh Flowers Daily

- Flowers make the place look colorful but also add a natural beauty and most importantly brings great freshness with its smell and gives a true touch to the festival. Colorful Rangoli designs with Colors and Fresh Flowers

- Remove flowers, garlands, clothes, plastic and other decoration items before immersing the idols. Distribute food items like coconuts and fruits to the poor.
- Make a compost of all the biodegradable items including flowers, etc. Flowers can be mixed with the soil which will help the plants in your garden. All devotees of Lord Ganesha can continue celebrating the festival but they should take care to not affect the environment adversely. Take **safety precautions** to avoid freak accidents during the processions or at the sea-shore. Avoid or minimize use of loudspeakers because it causes noise pollution.
- Reduce Reuse and Recycle- If you are keen on buying POP idols, then you sprinkle a few drops of water symbolically and give it for recycling. Many people also use metal, stone or wooden idols and symbolically immerse it by placing it under water and then removing it and reusing the same idol every year.

All devotees of Lord Ganesha can continue celebrating the festival but they should take care to not affect the environment adversely. Take safety precautions to avoid freak accidents during the processions or at the sea-shore. Avoid or minimize use of loudspeakers because it causes noise pollution. Celebrating the Ganesh festival is not about how big your idol is or how expensive your decoration is. It is not about a display of wealth or showing off. Rather, it is about the religious sentiment, emotion and feelings in your heart. One should celebrate and enjoy the festival without causing damage to the environment.

WISH YOU HAPPY ECO-FRIENDLY GANESH UTSAV TO ALL!!!