

Celebration of Eco-friendly Ganesha Festival 2017-A Success story

The Karnataka State Pollution Control Board in compliance to the directions of Hon'ble National Green Tribunal, Principal Bench, passed in Application No.65/2012 dated 9th May 2013 has issued Notification on 20-7-2016 under Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 banning Plaster of Paris (POP) and coloured idols in order to protect the water bodies from pollution. In the said Notification, directions have been given to the Local bodies, Deputy Commissioners & Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike to comply with the directions.

The Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka in WP No.927 to 931 of 2017 & WP Nos..1322-1323 of 2017, dated 30.1.2017 has dismissed the writ petitions and upheld the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board Notification. Again, in W.P.No.35047/2017 & 35448/2017 (GM-RES-PIL), dated 8.8.2017 the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka has dismissed and observed that

Quote

"We do not find any fault in the decision taken by the Pollution Control Board prohibiting Plaster of Paris and painted idols during the festival, as this endeavour would save the environment and the water bodies".

The Karnataka State Pollution Control Board has taken up extensive awareness on banning of POP and painted idols involving the Local Bodies, line Departments, NGOs, Media, and the public. This has resulted in reduction of POP idols to a significant extent. According to Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike of the total 2,08,585 Ganesh idols that were immersed in designated lakes and mobile tanks in the city of Bengaluru on the first day of idol immersion, 12,077 idols were made of POPs and remaining constitute clay idols. Hence, the POP idols immersed constitute less than 6%. Further, in total 3,48,085 idols immersed over nine days 16,353 idols are made of POP which comes to less than 5%.

Compare to previous year 2016 data of POP idols immersion of 40%, there is considerable reduction of usage of POP idols in the current year 2017 which is less than 5%. The similar trend is noted in all the districts of the State. It is noteworthy to mention the observation made by the leading news paper in its editorial column.

City did well to avoid PoP Ganesha

A section of Bengaluru's residents failed the city's water bodies yet again this year. Despite a ban, Ganesha idols made of Plaster of Paris (PoP) were on sale and bought by devotees this year as well, albeit on a smaller scale than in previous years. According to the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, of the total 208,585 Ganesha idols that were immersed in designated lakes and mobile tanks in the city on just the first day of idol immersion, 12,077 idols were made of PoP. On the bright side, the number of clay idols far exceeded the PoP ones in the markets. That indicates that a growing number of people are waking up to the toxic impact of PoP idols on our environment. It is heartening to see that people are moving away from using them. The awareness campaign through the media and in schools as well as the ban seems to be bearing fruit. It is distressing, however, that a section of Bengalureans still bought and sold PoP idols unmindful, even uncaring, of the impact this has on the city's water bodies.

Tamil Nadu was the first state to ban the use of PoP Ganesha idols in 2004. It was followed by Gujarat and Maharashtra in 2011 and Goa in 2013. In 2014, the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB)



"But the govt did little to implement ban on PoP idols."

imposed a ban. Prior to that, it would, along with environmentalists, appeal to the public to use clay images. Those appeals fell on deaf ears, prompting the KSPCB to decide to ban PoP images. Manufacturers and sellers appealed for time, saying they had large stocks of PoP idols. They even went to court to challenge the KSPCB decision. The court ruled in favour of the pollution control board. Some opposed the ban on PoP idols claiming that it hurt religious sentiments, a shallow argument since no religious text makes PoP idols mandatory.

There was no valid excuse for using PoP images this year. The KSPCB was reasonable in its approach; it gave people ample time to adjust to the decision. And many did, by switching to clay images. It is unfortunate, however, that the government did little to implement the ban. PoP idols were being sold in the open and were on public display in the pandals. Yet no action was taken. One hopes that the government will have woken up by the time Ganesha comes around next year. Up next on our watch: how will Bengaluru celebrate Diwali this year? Will it be the festival of light, or will it be the festival of noise and chemical pollution?

