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Original Research Article

Economic impact of festivals: a case study of Lord Ganesh idols manufacturing in the state of Maharashtra, India

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ABSTRACT

In order to understand how a festival and related events contributed to the growth of this creative sector, this article makes an effort to describe and quantify this cultural industry in the state of Maharashtra on the West Coast of India. Although a wide range of commodities and services may be regarded as products of cultural industries, this research is only concerned with the creative creation of Ganesh idols, a minor business in the state that does not support the economy. This research is confined to addressing particular business that has thrived because of its connection to the celebration of a festival, despite the fact that the author is aware of several other such creative enterprises whose contribution to employment and commerce represents enormous figures. The essay briefly examines the development of the festival celebration as well as the significance of the Lord's idol in the fun. The study specifically discusses the factors that have contributed to the success of the idol manufacturing businesses in Pen, a seaside town in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. The report provides information about the locations of the workshops at Pen, the composition of the workforce, the cultural mindset of the artists, their devotion to their job, their incomes, as well as the variables affecting competition and collaboration. These specifics are crucial because when culture is institutionalized, products become more anaesthetized and loaded with cultural references.

1. Introduction

In Western India, there is a ten-day annual ritualistic festival of idol worship known as the Ganesh festival that is both a household- and community-level celebration [1]. While larger-than-life idols are moulded for public settings, little ornamental ones tailored to various budgets are made for houses. Ten days are dedicated to festivities related to Lord worship. On the eleventh day, the idol is carried through the streets in a parade with dancing, singing, and fanfare before being submerged in a river or the sea to represent the Lord's traditional farewell on his departure to his dwelling. It's time to get back to work for those involved in making the Ganesh idols so they can meet the demands of worshippers for the upcoming year.

The empirical data used in this study on a festival-related creative business was gathered by the researcher throughout the course of 2009–2010. The raw material for this work came from participant observation of the artisans creating the idols' sculptures and paintings, as well as from formal and informal interviews with some of the workshop owners, idol makers, and decorators. This research is significant because there haven't been many attempts to evaluate the position of the cultural industries on a national scale, perhaps because academics and policymakers have traditionally placed a greater emphasis on manufacturing and services and frequently view cultural production as a form of derivative entertainment or a component of social welfare.

According to Bourdieu [2], Lash and Urry [3], Harvey [4], and Zukin [5] the Ganesh idol-making industry is an example of a creative industry with distinct traits but without fundamentally knitted linkages of production and consumption that are a part of daily life. In order to understand how a festival and related events contributed to the growth of this creative sector, this article makes an effort to describe and quantify this cultural industry in the state of Maharashtra on the West Coast of India. Although a wide range of commodities and services may be regarded as products of cultural industries, this research is only concerned with the creative creation of Ganesh idols, a minor business in the state that does not support the economy. This research is confined to addressing particular business that has thrived because of its connection to the celebration of a festival, despite the fact that the author is aware of several other such creative enterprises whose contribution to employment and commerce represents enormous figures.

The present study briefly examines the development of the festival celebration as well as the significance of the Lord's idol in the fun. The study specifically discusses the factors that have contributed to the success of the idol manufacturing businesses in Pen, a seaside town in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. The report provides information about the locations of the workshops at Pen, the composition of the workforce, the cultural mindset of the artists, their devotion to



their job, their incomes, as well as the variables affecting competition and collaboration. These specifics are crucial because, as culture is institutionalised, products become more anaesthetized and loaded with cultural references. The Ganesh idol sector produces and consumes products and services that are largely valued aesthetically. This research also looks at the laws that regulate idol-making, the people who buy them, and the process itself. The availability of a certain type of clay and the seasonal employment pattern of the rural Indian economy are both mentioned as driving forces for the growth of the sector. It is outside the purview of this study to determine whether or whether this industry has an influence on commerce, generates intangible income, or supports employment throughout all of India. The study also makes an effort to recommend actions for the growth of the Ganesh idol manufacturing sector as a means of promoting tourism in western India.

2. Tracing the historical background of the Ganesh Festival

Chatrapati Shivaji, the Maratha emperor, founded the religion of Ganesh worship in order to advance culture and nationalism in western India. The festival thrived in coastal Maharashtra, whose capital is Mumbai, and reached its zenith under the Peshwa kings' control in the late 17th century. In order to propagate the message of the liberation movement and to rebel against the British who had forbade public gatherings, Lokamanya Tilak reintroduced the event in 1893 [6]. The Indian people who were under occupation were inspired and brought together by this idealistic and romantic image of nationalism via this celebration. It was successful in bridging caste, regional, and religious divides to foster national unity [7]. Today, the whole city and state, as well as individual homes, housing societies, commercial businesses, and social groups, participate in the celebration. People flock to this carnival not just to worship the deity but also to take in the décor, jewellery, and celebrations.

3. The idol manufacturing industry at Pen

Without the Lord Ganesh idol, the Ganesh celebration is trivialised. It is best done at Pen to combine culture and creativity while creating the idol for the festival. The Pen location of the Ganesh idol manufacturing businesses covered in this research is in Maharashtra's Raigad district, one of the most industrialised regions in the nation. With a population of over 30,000, Pen is located about 120 kilometres from Mumbai. Numerous cultural enterprises, such as those that produce wooden toys, chess pieces, rolling pins, and beautiful statues, are successful in the Raigad area. Additionally, businesses produce culinary items and handcrafted paper. Only the industries that create Ganesh idols operate year-round; all the others only operate during specific seasons. Although various Gods and Goddesses were first produced at the factories, Lord Ganesh's idol soon became the most popular in every home and factory, and Pen is now known as the Ganesh Capital of India.

The demand for and price of idols marked "Created in Pen" is higher than that of idols made in Mumbai or elsewhere. Today, Pen manufactures idols in approximately 500 units, with a yearly revenue of roughly Rs. 6 crores. Passersby in Pen

have the opportunity to see how the Ganesh idols are carved, sculpted, created, and painted thanks to the numerous roads lined with Ganesh idol production facilities. For many people, this cottage business is a source of employment.

It's interesting to note that idol production at Pen got its start accidentally. Small idols were first created by the town's destitute and needy residents, who then bartered them to the local landowners in return for food or as rent. Bhikaji Krishna Deodhar founded the first Ganesh idol making business in Pennsylvania. In fact, he is credited with being the creator of the Pen idol business, which emerged around the beginning of the 20th century [8]. Up until that point, the Deodhar family was engaged in the age-old pagdi or headgear manufacturing industry. Given that he had a large family to support and ongoing financial issues, Deodhar shifted to making and selling Ganesh idols, which provided him dignity and a different line of work. Clients first came to Deodhar's workshop through word-of-mouth in the early days. But when Lord-worshippers were drawn to the exquisitely made idols and the commitment of the Deodhar family, commerce flourished in this cottage industry. The Deodhar family company is now run by the fourth generation. The Wadke family is another prosperous family in Pen. After the Second World War, goldsmith Waman Manik Wadke's company faltered and he made the decision to start making Ganesh idols. Once his sons got involved, it quickly turned into a family enterprise. He eventually included his daughters-in-law as well, who assisted in colouring the idols. Generally speaking, this is the tale of the majority of the Pen families involved in the manufacture of idols.

The production of Ganesh idols started as modest workshops to meet household necessities, but with time, they evolved into cottage enterprises that support many people's livelihoods while also allowing others to express their artistic abilities. The majority of the workshops still employ family members to create the Ganesh idols. There is often a flurry of activity in these workshops as the festival day draws near because everyone in the family works day and night to make the idol beautiful. Orders must be fulfilled, and the idol must be maintained available for delivery. It's interesting to note that the Pen idol industry has a branch office in the Mumbai suburbs. Seasonal festivals are a business within an industry in this little town. For the past fifty years, Penkarpada has been producing replicas of Ganesh idols created in Pen. Pen-based artisans who have relocated to this Mumbai suburb operate year-round manufacturing facilities there. The carved idols are transported from Pen's studios to Penkarpada, where skilled artisans add the finishing touches. The idols are prepared for sale once they have been painted and varnished.

In the past, the idol was created of clay on the day of the festival while sacred lyrics were chanted, according to some of the Ganesh idol builders who are knowledgeable about the stories and tales surrounding the celebration of the Ganesh festival. The festival rites were more significant back then than the idol's visual appeal. While a modest, symbolic statue is still created nowadays after checking the calendar on an auspicious day, the actual carving process starts months beforehand. Consumers and salespeople both stop by the shops to make reservations and choose the size and posture of the idol.

The fact that this celebration has grown to be the most frequently observed event in the city of Mumbai is one explanation for why so many Ganesh idol manufacturing facilities have sprung up in recent years. One factor driving the desire for variation in sculpture is the festival's communal celebration, which includes competitions of many kinds for best-sculpted/decorated idols, best-decorated pandals (tents), and most-frequented idols. For Mumbai, which has seen an increase in housing complexes and community festivals in the post-globalization period, Ganesh idols as large as 25 to 30 feet are created [9].

Crafting and embellishing the Ganesh idols brings in a respectable income for artisans with experience in the field. The Ganesh idol-making workshops are not the only ones that prosper in Pen. Other related industries coexist well with them. The idol's appealing colour and hue mix contributes to its charm. The colours employed in the idol's robe, scarf, and eyes in particular make them aesthetically pleasing. Important considerations include the calibre of the water colours, the utilisation of eco-friendly colours, the properness of colour blending, and the outcome. While some artists are proud to identify as "robe experts," others are referred to be "eye specialists".

Additionally, those who work on festoons like artificial and natural flower garlands, decorative lamps, jewellery, and clothes for the Lord, as well as percussionists and performers who involve the idol during installation and immersion, as well as transporters who have the duty of supplying idols to customers across the nation, are employed by the Ganesh idol manufacturing industry. Due to the fragile nature of the shipped idols and the necessity for careful treatment, it also provides work for workers in the packaging and shipping industries. The price range accommodates any budget, and the idols of the Lord, tireless works of devotion, are not too costly to purchase. Naturally, the cost of the idols has increased through time. The increase in the cost of raw materials, such as dyes and colours, as well as transportation and labour, is blamed by producers.

It is amazing to see the passion of the artists, who are making idol after idol of their favourite Lord with tremendous devotion to their work. The idols are all pot-bellied and have twisted trunks, yet each one is unique in appearance, colour, and allure. Because of the rise in the level of life and the professionalisation of family members, artists are no longer motivated to pursue their careers by financial rewards. Making the Ganesh idols is a labour of love for the craftsmen at Pen, and their labour takes the shape of worship. In Pen, almost every home has a backyard where idol manufacturing and related activities thrive and young people learn the craft. Additionally, it should be made clear that while creating and embellishing the idol, there are no restrictions based on religion, caste, ethnicity, language, or gender.

4. The magic of Shadu Clay and seasonal employment structure of Indian agriculture

The availability of a certain kind of clay and the seasonal nature of agriculture in rural India are what drive the production operations in Pen. The appeal of Pen-made idols over those made of plaster of Paris, which are also produced in Mumbai or elsewhere, might be attributed to the availability of

shadu clay in that region. Shadu clay is renowned for giving the idol volume and solidity. This maintains it strong enough to maintain the form while keeping it malleable for moulding.

Legend has it that after the god is submerged on the eleventh day, there shouldn't be any signs of the idol still there. Plaster of Paris idols frequently float back to the coast and pollute the environment, which is against the festival practises [10]. The shortage of shadu clay is a problem for the proprietors of the workshop. Other locations of western India have clay that is comparable to shadu and is regarded as good by local craftsmen. Transporting the clay to Pen to be used in the creation of Ganesh idols, however, is not financially feasible. The craftsmen in Pen do not appreciate the idols manufactured in other States because Ganesh is the Lord of the State of Maharashtra, therefore transporting ready-made idols of the Lord is once more not a solution that has been thought of. The artists are currently thinking of other, environmentally friendly methods to create Lord idols.

Some employees in the Ganesh idol production sector at Pen work seasonally, despite the fact that majority of them are full-time employees. This cottage sector is compatible with India's rural economic system, which frequently favours seasonal employment. The workforce for Ganesh idols includes potters, goldsmiths, silversmiths, as well as those who work in the food industry and in the packaging of Indian snacks. The latter two months of July and August are busy business months, and during this time of year, the majority of houses in Pen are busy carving or painting idols. Professional artisans are forced to put up extra hours as the festival draws near due to the custom of last-minute demands for idols. The artisans who labour seasonally are frequently friends and family of those who work in the field. They receive a special invitation from their towns to help out during the celebration. It's interesting to note that some people have left rich occupations to pursue the manufacture of idols, while others have found inspiration to create idols during their post-retirement years.

5. The process of idol making and sale of idols

Making idols is a talent for which no formal schooling is necessary. According to Srikant Deodhar, new employees who start out as cleaners may quickly pick up the necessary skills to advance. However, the majority of the well-known idol-making families in Pen fiercely maintain their trade secrets and methods. This is so that each of the production facilities may distinguish itself through its unique moulds and sculpting methods. The way the eye was sculpted, its holiness, the shape of the stomach, and the position and movements of the Lord's hands all demonstrate craftsmanship and expertise. These smaller elements, which are extremely important to any connoisseur of the idol manufacturing, are the foundation of business and rivalry. In fact, there are buyers who, with only a quick glance at the idol, can identify the workshop from which it was acquired.

Before starting the sculpting process, the buyers are shown rough sketches of the idol. Plaster of Paris and grass are mixed together and poured into a rubber mould to create an idol. The rubber mould is removed when the liquid has dried and is left to air dry for a few days. To remove the grass off the idol, it is fire blown and burned at 180 to 260 degrees Celsius for about

10 minutes. An air blower is used to remove soot from the idol's surface, and something like sandpaper is used to polish the idol.

Batches of clay are used to create the idols, which are then painted with dye and plaster of Paris. To prevent the paint from being absorbed by the plaster of Paris, this is then painted with white wash or distemper and let to dry. The work of painting the idol is started after it is polished with a cotton cloth, making it glitter. The painted idols are then varnished and given a pearl sheen. The Lord's idol must have a golden sheen, thus golden powder is used where it is called for. The idol is then given a five- to six-hour drying time. Each idol is the product of the efforts of six to seven artists, and the preparation procedure for one idol takes roughly eight hours.

Due to its religious significance, the manufacture of Ganesh idols does not need a great deal of formality in terms of obtaining government licences and permissions. The only requirements for contract workers to work in the production unit are a municipal authorization and licence. However, there are a few government regulations that must be followed, such as abstaining from obscenity and considering the feelings of the populace when designing the idol, not using the hollow for illegal activities like the transportation of taxable goods or the smuggling of drugs, not using copyright designs, and paying royalties for patented idols.

The production and embellishment of the idol are the responsibility of the Pen craftsmen, but the owners of the workshops are also in charge of shipping the idol throughout the nation and beyond the world. The majority of small-scale businesses that produce Ganesh idols are wholesale traders rather than retailers. The idols made at Pen are in great demand both domestically and overseas, and they are also shipped to the USA and the UK, where there is a sizable Indian population. There is a desire for larger idols, which are transported from India and are mostly from Pen since they celebrate the occasion as a communal event. The Ganesh idol has also captured the interest of foreigners, who physically visit Pen to make orders for idols. They specify the colours the craftspeople should use and the attitude they want the Ganesh statue to be in. Despite the fact that they have to produce more idols now than in the past, the cottage industry at Pen is nevertheless able to satisfy demand.

It's also noteworthy to note that the majority of Ganesh idol producers have devoted patrons who have been purchasing their products for years. It is unclear what draws people to the biggest production facility, the oldest workshop, the most variety, the best colours and designs, the clay used to make the idol, the fact that the workshop and outlet selling the idol is adjacent to a temple, or a combination of things. However, the majority of consumers continue to purchase their idols from the same factory or store year after year, and they have no plans to break this pattern.

6. The future of this creative industry

As long as the Lord retains control over the hearts of the people in western India, the idol-making business will endure. However, due to the immersion of plaster of Paris idols in lakes, rivers, and the ocean during the Ganesh celebration in recent years, there has been significant environmental concern.

The Ganesh idol-making factories are also recognised business entities, and the employees there are incorporated into union workers. For sculptors, damages from natural disasters like flooding result in enormous losses. While smaller workshops are not even covered by insurance firms, the larger units struggle to recoup their losses via insurance claims that are rife with complications. In times of such hardship, the owners of the smaller firms prefer to seek government assistance and hope that the banks may forgive their debts or prolong the repayment term.

7. Promoting tourism in Maharashtra state

There are many tourists in this small city since Pen is where the majority of the idols for the festival are made. Recently, there has been some improvement as a result of this. Spencer's Daily has established itself here as a retail business and multiplex movie theatre. It is possible to improve and make this creative sector more tourist-friendly because of the most significant event for the people of western India. Naturally, this would bring in money, which might be used to improve the working conditions at these workshops in Pen. An excursion to the neighbourhood bazaar, followed by a Maharashtrian lunch, might serve as the tour's grand conclusion after a tourist tour of the Ganesh sculpture production facilities and painting and decoration areas.

For this, it is crucial to rebuild the fundamental infrastructure first, including the roads, water supply, and drainage system. Establishing cafes and restaurants that provide wholesome, sanitary local cuisine is also necessary. Restrooms, banking services, a Ganesh museum staffed with local guides, and a Ganesh gift store would all contribute to Pen's booming tourism industry.

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