

tradition and hope.

A flood of losses

In Jogeshwari East, Ballal Gore's workshop, located inside Mangalya Hall, was inundated by sudden flooding that swept away dozens of finished idols. "I live just five minutes away, but by the time I reached after getting a call, at least 25 idols – between 18 and 30 inches were already washed away," Gore said. Some of these idols had been booked by families, making the loss even more critical. Along with finished idols, Gore's raw materials and equipment were spoiled beyond use, resulting in estimated losses of nearly Rs 1.5 lakh.

"The idol sculpting process is usually completed by May, followed by a drying period, with final painting and detailing in the weeks before the festival," Gore explained. "At this point, it's simply impossible to make new idols." His main workshop in Pen – Maharashtra's traditional hub of idol-making suffered even greater damage. "This was supposed to be our busiest time of the year, but instead, we are counting ruined idols," he lamented.

Fragile art

For many artisans, the damage goes beyond the monetary. "We wait all year for this season, and now, just before Ganeshotsav, it is gone. The



loss is both monetary and deeply emotional," said another idol maker from Mumbai's western suburbs.

At a small idol-making school and store in Chinchpokli, Sushant Pohekar stood staring at a cracked paper idol – an eco-friendly creation, fragile against the harsh monsoon. "My paper idols, which are mainly made of paper with a bit of Plaster of Paris (PoP) to hold the base, are very sensitive. The heavy showers over the last few days have completely damaged around four to five of them," he said.

Elaborating on the painstaking care his craft requires, Pohekar said, "It takes 4 to 5 days to make a PoP idol

with minimal damage, but a paper idol requires 7 to 8 days. It needs protection not just from water, but from hard pushes and the weather itself."

With the rains still pouring, the pressure to remake these idols before the festival clock runs out is immense. "I have only one left now, and it's damaged but still standing. I must remake the others, but it takes more days than expected."

Fight against time

Siddhesh Mhatre, a small idol-maker and store owner in Chinchpokli, described the scale of the devastation. "I have around 150 to 180 PoP idols

Artisans with broken idols in their workshops; (below left) Jogeshwari Ganapati workshops filled with water on Tuesday

and 80 to 90 shadu miti (natural clay) idols. The heavy rains have been devastating, especially for the shadu miti idols. They are so delicate that even a little excess moisture ruins them."

"About 10 to 15 idols were entirely destroyed, and another 30 to 40 got damaged – some lost their hands, others their ears, some developed cracks," Mhatre continued. These idols are more than just works of art, they are symbols of faith and culture, usually priced between Rs 4,000 and Rs 5,000 for shadu miti idols. But as demand surges close to the festival, prices can rise to Rs 6,000 to Rs 7,000, reaching up to Rs 10,000 including transportation.

"It's nobody's fault – neither ours nor the customers but we bear the burden," he added.

Working under Immense pressure

Nearby in Kalachowki, Rohan Patil from Pen echoed similar struggles. "It's not just the time, it's the care needed to remake idols from scratch. We have to deliver on time, but the rains haven't stopped, and the pressure is immense," he said.

Despite these hardships, artisans remain resilient. When customers

learn of the damage, reactions vary. "Some are kind and understanding – they book new idols. Others don't understand. They want the exact idol they ordered," Patil explained. "We offer alternatives, invite them to come early to book, but the losses weigh heavily."

With many idols beyond repair, artisans must make difficult choices. "Some idols have reverted to their original form – just clay. The few that are damaged but still intact, we try to touch them up and sell again," Mhatre admitted.

Season of uncertainty

This year's monsoon has not only tested Mumbai's infrastructure but has struck at the very heart of a centuries-old tradition. What should have been a season of celebration, devotion, and economic opportunity for thousands of idol makers has instead become one of distress, heartbreak, and uncertainty.

As Ganeshotsav draws near, the city's artisans – usually working quietly behind the scenes – now stand as emblematic figures of resilience. They continue to labour, remaking idols and seeking new hope amid adversity, carrying forward a legacy that refuses to be washed away.

Rights body issues BMC chief notice over sanitation workers

Civic body to submit report on poor working conditions; failure to do so may result in summons to Bhushan Gagrani

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The Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC) has issued a notice to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), asking it to submit a fact-finding report on the poor working conditions of sanitation workers.

The Human Rights Commissioner will conduct a hearing on September 22, and if BMC fails to submit the report within the given timeframe, an inquiry will be conducted and the BMC chief, Bhushan Gagrani, may

be summoned.

The MSHRC action follows an August 18 Mumbai Mirror report highlighting the poor working conditions for sanitation workers in the C ward. The Human Rights Commissioner took suo motu cognizance of the report and issued a notice to Gagrani on August 19. A copy of the notice is with Mirror.

The notice issued to the civic chief says: "If the allegations in the newspaper report are found to be true, this amounts to a gross violation." Justice A M Badar, chairman of the commission, will hear the matter.

The Mirror report focused on how gloves, masks, and necessary safety gear were not provided to the sanitation workers in the Bendi Bazaar and Nalbazar areas. Often, when the workers are carrying out their job, they get filthy from the waste that falls on them in the narrow lanes of chawls.

There are around 7,000 contractual sanitation workers appointed by the BMC. According to the BMC contract agreement, the contractor must provide safety gear to the labourers. These workers receive a monthly salary of Rs 16,000 to Rs 17,000.



The August 18 Mirror report highlighting the plight of sanitation workers