

## God Ganesh goes overseas for Indian devotees!

Lord Ganesh may traditionally have a tiny mouse for a mount, but the portly elephant-headed god is now travelling across the seven seas - into the homes of Indians abroad for the Ganpati festival!

Take the case of software analyst Ashok Mallya. When he moved to California with his family for a high-flying job, his parents kept coming back to [Mumbai](#) every year to celebrate the annual Ganesh Chaturthi festival.

But for the past two years, Lord Ganesh has been welcomed at their Santa Barbara home - thanks to an idol imported all the way from India. The colourful and vibrant Ganesh festival will be celebrated in September.

Mallya says, 'My grandfather started with the worship of Ganesh every year for 11 days in our home. In the past 41 years, we have not missed this festival even once. Every year my parents used to come back to Mumbai but now we have started shipping the deity here.'

Ramesh Ganpat Rawale, proprietor of the 120-year-old Ganesh Shilpkala Art, a small shop in Lalbaug in south central Mumbai, told IANS, 'There is a lot of demand for exporting Ganesh idols.

'Last year we sold 30 idols overseas, but so far we have already delivered 25 with a few orders remaining.'

That is a significant number, if one keeps in mind there are about 20 artists in the narrow lanes of Ganesh Talkies, a small colony of idol makers in Lalbaug, who export on a similar scale.

In order to make the process simpler, Rawale plans to open a website which would allow his customers to choose from a wide variety of designs and style in one click.

Ganesh Achrekar, an artisan in Lalbaug, says most of the exported idols are headed for the US, Singapore, Canada and Britain where there is a strong Indian diaspora.

'Usually the idol size is very small, but this year we have received an order from an Indian family based in Chicago for a five-foot- tall idol,' he said.

In Maharashtra, the god is worshipped in an 11-day-long event called the Ganpati festival and tens of thousands of people take part in the procession to take the idols to the sea for immersion.

According to Achrekar, 'Unlike here where we immerse the deity in the sea, Indian families living abroad donate the deity to a temple close by or gift it to their friends and acquaintances as a traditional art form from India.'

For export purposes, artisans make the Ganpati idols out of Plaster of Paris and fibre as it is light, convenient to carry and easy to store for subsequent use.

The deities are packed in thermocol or cardboard boxes and finally in wooden boxes before being shipped. 'This ensures when the idol reaches the destination, it is in the best condition,' says Amit Kadam, another artisan there.

According to Air India cargo general manager A.S. Rathod, the Indian expatriate population says shipping the idol is a better option than sending it by air.

'By air, doing this every year will prove to be a very expensive affair for long distances like the US and UK.'

For example, the likely rate on air to New York for weights below 500 kg is around Rs.100-120 per kg compared to Rs.30-40 for shipping an item.

He recollects sending one idol of Ganesh for installation in a Chicago temple last year. 'It was not during this Ganesh festival season but since the idol would permanently remain there, this might have proved economical but still it was very expensive.'

*Varada Bhat* ( © IANS / India eNews)