

# Idol colours could wash into drinking water too

*Immersion Tanks Of Little Help, Plaster Of Paris Models Are Biggest Pollutants*

Pics: Chethan Shivakumar, Md Asad



**IT'S HABBA TIME:** (Above) The immersion pond at Ulsoor lake gets ready for Ganesh Chaturthi (Below) Members of Vidyaranya Yuvaka Sangha are all set to celebrate the festival this year with a laddoo weighing 6,001 kg. The giant laddoo will be on display at Mallikarjuna Temple in Basavanagudi from September 19



Sunitha Rao R | TNN

**O**n an average, a whopping 2.65 lakh Ganesha idols are immersed in the city's four lakes—Sankey, Ulsoor, Hebbal and Yedyur. The damage done is anybody's guess.

The separate enclosures (pushkarnis) within the lakes to immerse the idols are hardly making a difference. And here's one more reason why you shouldn't dump idols in your neighbourhood lake: water polluted with chemicals might just flow from your tap.

Prof C Anantha, department of chemistry at MES College in Malleswaram, explains how immersion tanks are only eyewash.

"Immersion tanks situated next to lakes might not pollute the lakes directly. But the damage caused to the environment is huge.

BBMP lets the dirty water flow straight into the sewage lines, which goes into storm water drains. Even at the filtration units at Vrishabhavati, only the suspended impurities are removed and not the chemicals dissolved in water. Chemicals like chloride, nitrate, sulphate and calcium dissolve in water. If you boil water with nitrate content, it becomes concentrated as it makes the water acidic. Such pollution can cause gastrointestinal diseases and respiratory disorders," he told TOI. The professor conducts tests on water samples of Sankey immersion tank before and after idols are immersed every year.

His advice is to test water samples at frequent intervals from the Cauvery water basin and Vrishabhavathi valley. "Pollution levels near the water body immediately after the Ganesha festival must be observed. BBMP should take precautions to build public awareness on eco-friendly idols," he said.

Left untreated, water in the sewage lines pollutes the ground water table, and civic agencies have ignored this fact, he adds.

For him, the biggest problem is solid waste management. Plaster of Paris (PoP) idols that float on water bodies don't dissolve. "One kg of PoP takes two years to dissolve. Tonnes of PoP waste that accumulates is dumped unscientifically in landfills by the Palike," said Anantha.

"The idols are also transported to Mandur landfill, as we don't have any alternative now. The public buys such idols for their sheer attraction," said a senior BBMP official.

## FOLLOW THESE RULES KEEP CITY CLEAN

### Dos

- ▶ Immerse idols in specially built tanks at Ulsoor, Sankey, Yedyur and Saneguruvanahalli lakes, 32 water bodies earmarked on the outskirts, 88 mobile units deployed for this
- ▶ Dispose of flowers and other decorative articles at waste collection containers installed near immersion centres
- ▶ Park vehicles by the roadside and walk up to immersion centres
- ▶ Enter immersion centres only through designated entry points



### Don'ts

- ▶ Buy Ganeshas painted in colours that pollute water bodies
- ▶ Burst crackers and use public address systems at immersion centres
- ▶ Use banners, bunting of plastic and polythene, and other material that harms environment
- ▶ Immerse idols after 10.30pm

### MAYOR'S EXCUSE

Asked why BBMP could not nip it in the bud by curbing the sale of idols painted in harmful colours, mayor D Venkatesh Murthy had this to say: "Not everything can be achieved in one year. Ideally, the mayor should be given two-and-a-half years to work efficiently. BBMP commissioners get transferred frequently and the mayor's term is only for a year. I have written to the government to bring in an amendment on a two-and-a-half-year term for the mayor and commissioner. We should have taken some measures to curb the sale