


Ram Temple opening brings fresh hope to Moradabad brass traders as orders for idols shoot up

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Most orders are for replicas of the Ram Temple and the Ram *darbar*. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

Lucknow resident Rajni Mishra, 43, is an ardent devotee of Lord Ram and was infatuated by the beauty of a brass idol of the deity, when she visited her friend's home a few days ago.

Wanting to possess a similar one, she searched for it throughout her home city, but in vain. At last, her search ended in Uttar Pradesh's Moradabad, which is famously called the "brass city".

As you set foot in the town, shops selling beautifully carved brass items welcome you. Over the years, artisans from Moradabad have filled people's homes with beautifully designed brassware and other decorative items.

However, despite earning the reputation of being the finest in the craft, the brassware industry here saw a decline in its fortunes over the past few years.

But now, customers like Ms. Mishra seem to have infused fresh life into the business.

The industry, which till now produced utensils and home decorative items with intricate designs, is now flooded with orders for idols of Ram, Sita, Laxman and Hanuman.

These idols are being bought by people for their homes and used extensively at religious, political and social gatherings.

Temple effect

Shoaib Shamsi, a third-generation businessman, says he is struggling to meet the increased demand despite having 40 employees, mostly Muslims, who are working hard to fulfil the orders.

He says the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya has lent much-needed support to his business as he receives orders for around 100 brass idols of Lord Ram every month.

"Till a few years ago, there was little demand for such idols. The order book for the deity's idols has shot up ahead of the **consecration ceremony of the temple on January 22**," he says.

It takes up to 15 days to make a brass idol, depending on its size and intricacies of design.

Sudhanshu Agarwal of R.M. Handicrafts says a typical idol size may vary from six inches to six feet and may cost between ₹1,000 and ₹20,000, depending on their size, polishing and carving.

Mohit Mehrotra, who is a member of the local brass manufacturers' association, says most orders are for replicas of the Ram Temple and the Ram *darbar*.

He says there was a time when the annual turnover of the brassware industry in Moradabad stood at around ₹20,000 crore.

"Now, it is just one-fourth of that," he says, citing government policies and higher cost of raw material as reasons for it.

Mr. Mehrotra says the industry has seen a rapid decline due to demonetisation as cash flows were hit and laying off of staff, who were paid in cash as the industry belongs to the unorganised sector.

He says the note ban forced hundreds of artisans to migrate and manufacturers had to shut their units.

The implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic also affected their orders amid rising cost of raw material, which is mostly brought from Gujarat and Haryana.

Mr. Mehrotra, however, admits that the demand for Ram idols has given a lease of life to the industry. "I hope the demand will not fade away, forcing manufacturers to sell their inventory at cheap rates," he says.