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## Ganesh Festival

by [Dipak G. Parmar](#) • August 30, 2004 • [0 Comments](#)

The Ganesh Festival is a ten-day festival celebrated with great pomp and festivity. This festival falls in late August or early September. It begins on the fourth day of Bhadrapada Shukla Paksha and concludes on the fourteenth day of Bhadrapada Shukla Paksha, as per the Hindu calendar.

During British rule over India, freedom fighters were prohibited from gathering in public places. To circumvent this restriction, India's revolutionary freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak, popularly known as Lokmanya Tilak, organized the Ganesh Festival in Maharashtra in 1894, promoting it as a public festival. During the Festival, they performed stage shows and used other means to keep alive and spread the need and importance of freedom, while also creating a social solidarity among the people. Today, its celebrations are held throughout all of India, and more particularly in Maharashtra. This Ganesh festival is considered an essential part of Maharashtra life and they celebrate it wherever they are, whether inside or outside of India. It is a festival for worshipping Lord Ganesha, the remover of obstacles and conqueror of the soul and mind. All Hindus worship Lord Ganesha before any important function, praying to the Lord to remove all obstacles to prosperity.

This custom springs from the mythological story of God Shiva and Parvati who had remained childless for a long time after the birth of their first son Kartik. While Lord Shiva went to the Himalayas for tap (religious austerity), Parvati, in order to avoid loneliness, created a statute of clay in the form of a son and using her divine power instilled life into Ganesha.

One day Parvati told Ganesha to see that nobody entered their home while she was inside for her daily abluion. Ganesha stopped Lord Shiva from

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entering his home. Lord Shiva was enraged by this and chopped off Ganesha's head. Parvati explained that Ganesha was her son and demanded restoration of his life. Lord Shiva could not find the head of Ganesha and so he resolved that he would fix the head of the first living being he came across. This happened to be a baby elephant. Lord Shiva chopped off the head of the baby elephant and fixed it to the headless body of Ganesha. That is how Ganesha became Gaja-Mukha (Gaja- means elephant and Mukha means head), an elephant headed god.

Parvati voiced her displeasure and fear that her son, Ganesha, would not be accorded equal status with the other gods. So Lord Shiva issued a divine decree that henceforth Ganesha would be the first invoked before starting prayer to other gods and good work.

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On the first day of the Ganesha Festival, I, along with my friends and relatives, carry a clay idol of Lord Ganesha, beautifully painted, into our homes and mandaps (community centers). It is quite an exciting moment. We hire people to play Dhol (a musical instrument like the drum), and we dance and chant "Ganpati Bapa Moriya, Mangal Murati Moriya" as we transport the idol.

The idols of the Lord come in different sizes, designs and shapes. Normally small idols of one to three feet are brought into homes, whereas big idols ranging from six to thirty feet are carried into mandaps.

Soon after installing an idol in the home or the mandap, we immediately perform the first aarti (prayer) to Lord Ganesha and also offer modak (sweets) and other fruit to the Lord and distribute the same for eating amongst all devotees. Twice in a day we perform aarti – once in the morning and again in the evening. During aarti, hymns are sung and children cling jhanja (small gongs), while the grown-ups sing hymns and clap their hands. As a child, I clanged jhanja; but now I sing the hymns.

As a child I remember going to see the different types of Ganesha idols in the homes of our friends and relatives, and in nearby mandaps. It is an ideal time to meet old friends and relatives. It is a sort of get-together. The festival, apart from its religious importance, also helps in creating social and emotional bondage among people.

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Various functions and competitions such as local dance, fancy dress and stage shows are organized for the evenings. As a child, I used to participate in the dance competition and stage shows. We began rehearsals for these two months prior to the Festival.

The festival reaches its climax on the day of immersion of an idol, which is either on the second, third, fifth, seventh or tenth day, depending upon the family custom. We perform aarti before taking an idol to the seashore. This is the longest aarti, which lasts two hours. For this aarti, all residents gather. At our mandap, it starts around 2.30 p. m. on the tenth day. After aarti, we drink coffee and have a snack break before starting the immersion. We start the immersion process around 6.00 p. m. and reach Girgum Chowpaty (near the sea shore) around 12.00 p. m. Although it is only 30 minutes away by walking, we dance and chant “Ganpati Bapa Moriya, Mangal Murati Moriya, Pudacha Varshi Lavkar Ya” (Lord Ganesha, come soon in the next year) all the way to Girgum Chowpaty. It is amazing to see countless idols and all men, women and children performing aarti, chanting “Ganpati Bapa Moriya, Mangal Murati Moriya, Pudacha Varshi Lavkar Ya”, and dancing all the way to the sea. This immersion process continues until the early hours of the next day.

This custom is practiced in our office as we bring an idol of Lord Ganesha to celebrate the Festival. All staff, regardless of their positions attends the aarti, and we perform the immersion process on the 5th day. During the Festival, our day in the office begins with a morning aarti and ends with an evening aarti. It is great to have lord Ganesha celebrated in the office too.

Ganesh Festival 2004: 18-28 September

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