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Tilak – Ganesh Festival

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Why is in news? How Bal Gangadhar Tilak made the worship of Lord Ganesh a grand community festival

The ten-day Ganesh festival began on September 19 (Ganesh Chaturthi) this year. Celebrated with great devotion and festivity across India and especially in the western regions of the country, the festival is a massive public event that sees mass participation.

The Ganesh Chaturthi festival was traced back to the times of Sathavahana, Rastrakutas and Chalukyas period.

Also Chatrapati Shivaji also initiated to celebrate this festival to promote culture and nationalism.

In modern times, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, referred to as 'Lokmanya' or the Leader of the People was started the worship of Lord Ganesh as the community festival to propagate nationalist and patriotic sense among the people.

About:

Prior to 1893, the festival used to be a one-day affair, largely observed in private, primarily by Brahmins and upper castes.

In the last decades of the 19th century, a number of nationalist figures emerged across India (and some in Britain), who spoke about modern civil and political rights, and the hypocrisy and exploitation of British rule in India.

In **1893**, Tilak started the new tradition of worshipping Ganpati, the Lord Who Would Remove Obstacles and bring good luck, as a community festival where **patriotic songs would be sung and nationalist ideas would be propagated**.

Through his writings, fiery speeches, and organisational nous, Tilak **encouraged and advocated bringing the Ganesh festival into the public sphere**.

Ganesh festival societies were founded all over Maharashtra. Youths organised themselves into bands of singers.

To further the **cause of nationalist resistance**, Tilak **started the Shivaji festival in 1896**.

The aim was **to inspire nationalist ideas among young Maharashtrians**. That same year, he organised a campaign in Maharashtra to boycott foreign cloth to protest the imposition of an excise duty on cotton.

Tilak gave unprecedented public face to Ganesh festival because he believed that it was an **unique and very effective method** to engage the people with the **protest against the harsh British policies**.

Reasons for promoting Ganesh festival:

It **allowed free gathering of Indian people** thus it acted as a source of national integration

To **promote unity** among the people

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It gave **jolt to the hegemony of Britishers** as social and political gatherings were banned by them

Tilak noticed that lord Ganesh was considered 'the God for every man' as Ganesh was worshipped by both upper and lower castes hence it **bridge the gap between brahmins and non brahmins**.

Such gatherings provided means to **spread ideas of nationalism in a channelised way**

To showcase the Britishers the **might and energy of Indians**.

Paved way to **collect money** for national movement

Concerns:

The festival was criticised for creating religious divide among the people and also accused them of **being partisan (towards Muslims)**. Eg In **1893** saw a wave of **communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims** across the country.

Some ecological concerns like **plaster of Paris** instead of natural clay which takes **longer time to decompose**

Chemical dyes paint the idol acts as a source of water pollution thus harm to aquatic biodiversity

The festival that we witness today is perhaps grander than Tilak himself had ever imagined. It has also undergone major shifts over the years, becoming a space where political parties are ever active and commerce thrives. But at its heart, it is **still a product of Tilak's vision** — a grand public celebration, marked by mass participation across the Hindu fold.