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FESTIVAL

Bye-Bye Ganesha

Hundreds of thousands hold a birthday bash for the elephant-headed God

It is, of course, the residents of Mumbai who are masters of partying, especially upon the occasion of Lord Ganesha's birthday. It was here in 1910 that the legendary freedom fighter Lokmanya Tilak popularized the festival as a way to bring people together without arousing British suspicions and thus help create a strong, united Hindu India. During the eleven-day event, giant puja platforms are erected blocking streets and byways, and neighborhoods vie with one another to create the grandest image of Lord Ganesha. Ten days of spiritual fervor culminate in the Visarjana, the day of departure, when each of the carefully crafted and devotedly worshiped images is paraded to the beach and lovingly placed into the ocean. This year on September 5 millions of Hindus lined the streets and crowded the beaches to watch each of the Ganeshas be submerged--symbolic of the God's return to the Ocean of Consciousness.

Each part of India and now the world has its own special way to celebrate the festival. In Australia and other countries, His birthday is a Hindu solidarity day, celebrated by all temples and societies together for one giant function. In Bangalore,

local artisans created this whimsical cricket-playing Ganesha. It's a rendering of Divinity which might be considered an affront in other religions, but for Hindus provides just one more way to bring their beloved God into their home and life.