

Will salvation score over the bug?

With Swine flu playing havoc in the city, Mumbaikars will Ganesh Utsav will be celebrated with the usual pomp and enthusiasm

Gayatri Pagare and Aanchal Gera finds out



Pic: Friday Team

Lord of Salvation visits us annually

Traditionally Lord Ganesha has been named as 'Vignaharta' the Lord of Salvation who visits his devotees every year. His presence denotes that all problems will vanish and his immersion signifies that the sins of the devotees are washed away.

Ganesh Utsav has been a widely celebrated festival in India especially in Mumbai and Pune since 1896 when Lokmanya Tilak began the tradition of welcoming this favourite *bappa* (God) on public platforms instead of relegating it to individual spaces. Tilak, a fervent freedom fighter, started this trend in order to bring people together and unify them against the British rule. Since then, every year thousands of people come together and celebrate this festival with great pomp and splendour. Numerous *Ganesh-mandals* (groups) install their own Ganesha idol in huge *pandals* that are painstakingly created and decorated in innovative ways, for the occasion. All in all, it is an occasion for great joy and thus, a much-awaited affair.

A 'bug' has also visited us this time

This year, however, the festival has come face-to-face with a dangerous 'bug' called H1N1 Virus that

is spreading the disease commonly known as Swine Flu! The recent 'Dahi hundi' festival almost got cancelled because of the Swine flu panic and was thus celebrated with subdued vigour. It now seems as if it is the turn of Ganesh Utsav.

The effect of Swine flu on the scale of Ganapati celebrations in Mumbai and Pune seems more pertinent. This is because more Swine flu victims have been found in these cities and these are the cities where Ganapati is celebrated on a large scale.

"Every year the number of devotees to Lalbaug keeps increasing and we feel that this year too the same thing is going to happen. Swine flu will not decrease the number of visitors. Every year we have all health care facilities and well educated doctors kept ready for them." says, Satish Khankar President of Lalbaug Ganesh mandal.

The Swine flu panic

Swine flu is an international disease and is spreading like wild fire all over the world. Swine flu is a disease spread by the H1N1 virus and first erupted in Mexico, USA. In India, it first came to light in Pune and from there spread to Mumbai. Everyday, we hear of someone or the other getting killed by this fatal disease. Mumbai has witnessed the mighty scare of Swine flu in the last few weeks. Every day, scores of people rush to doctors for check up. On the road, we see people wearing masks or covering their mouths with a handkerchief.

As a precautionary measure against the multiplication of Swine flu victims, the Government had declared a one week holiday to schools and colleges. People were also advised against frequenting public places such as malls and exhibitions. Multiplexes were shut down for a week and release of blockbusters was also delayed.

Will the H1N1 rule?

Today, the common fear is that the precautionary measures might lead to a clamp down against peo-



Pic: Friday Team

ple congregating for Ganesh Utsav. Huge crowds gather on roads and public places on 'Ganesh Chaturthi' and 'Anant Chaturthi'. It is very easy for the H1N1 virus to spread in such a big mob. When we bring the Ganesha idol, we have big celebrations with gulas being flailed, people dancing. Thus on those days people get in contact with many other people, as also on the 10th day i.e. on the day of 'Visarjan' (Ganesha idol immersion). Now, the government will need to take precautions to minimize the spread of Swine flu during Ganesh Utsav in such a scenario. Dahi handi was only a one day celebration but Ganpati will go on for ten days, thus increasing the risk of Swine flu all the more.

H1N1 spreads easily



So does that mean that Mumbaikars are indeed under a larger threat?

In Mumbai Siddhivinayak and Lalbaug are two places that see the largest number of devotees each year. People come to seek blessings from 'Lalbaug cha Raja' not only from Mumbai but from other parts of India too. Lakhs of devotees flock the Siddhivinayak temple only to get a glimpse of the Lord and seek blessings. It is therefore desirable that these two big Ganesh associations should take special care and provide facilities to people to be safe from Swine flu.

Mumbai has survived the worst problems including several bomb blasts, floods and terrorist attacks. But every time Mumbai has resurfaced triumphant. Mumbai is perhaps the only city where all hurdles are overcome in the fastest possible time and life comes back on track the soonest.

Ganesh Mandals say

"Every year the number of devotees to Lalbaug keeps increasing and we feel that this year too the same thing is going to happen. Every year have all health care facilities and well educated doctors kept ready for them. Swine flu will not decrease the number of visitors." says Satish Khankar President of Lalbaug Ganesh mandal.

Ashish Shelar, Municipal Corporator of Bandra constituency said "This year we plan to have sepa-

rate queues for men, women and children due to the Swine flu scare. I am sure Mumbaikars would show the same enthusiasm as they do every year."

What does the Mumbaikar feel?

Ipsitaa Panigrahi a Bandra resident says, "The fact that people celebrated 'Dahi hundi' in a considerably decent number, shows that Swine flu is not a big deal and should be treated like any other disease. But the necessary precautions must be taken and I really feel that people should come out and celebrate Ganpati with festive spirit. I will be participating in the festivities as always. I may wear a mask whenever I move in a crowd."

Svetalana Mishra, Khar resident says "There can be no limits in celebrations however; definition of 'limit' varies from person to person. Either completely we ban the celebration or whatever happens just go ahead and celebrate. We cannot stop anybody. But I do feel that there might be lesser crowd during Aarti and Visarjan this year."

Rohini Ahire, a Bandra resident says, "I don't think there will be less enthusiasm amidst people for Ganesh festival because 'Dahi hundi' was celebrated by the people quite enthusiastically."

Spirit of Mumbaikars never dies in any situation. Mumbai citizens face the situation and make their way out of it. Thus, all in all, with proper precautions in place, Ganesh Utsav should be celebrated with the same gaiety as every year.

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