

GIRANGAON PUBLIC AND FESTIVAL IN MILL LANDS



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The name **Girangaon**, coined from **giran** meaning loom and **gaon** meaning village, by the Marathi-speaking migrant workers of Bombay, signified an ambition and agenda to carve out a village-like network in the city's industrial zone of Byculla–Lalbaug–Parel–Lower Parel – an area that was, till the 1990s, dotted with textile mills and chawls (workers' living quarters). The agenda was largely successful through the formation of community and clan-based cultural squads (**gaonkari mandals**); women-run informal eateries catering to region-specific tastes (**khanavals**); and the adaptation of rural cultural forms to the urban milieu. The trade union movement that was vibrant till the 1980s too mobilized the workers through cultural events.

Traditional Ganesh worship turned into a large-scale public event with **Lalbaughcha Raja** in 1934, where the Ganesh idol was dressed like a Koli man (traditional fisherman). Around



independence, in 1946 the idol resembled Subhas Bose, in 1947 Nehru and in 1948 Gandhi. From 1960 onwards, with the formation of the Shiv Sena, the nationalist undertones of the festival gradually succumbed to frenzied parochialism. The euphoric mass appeal of **Ganeshotsav**, especially the immersion of the Ganesh idol in the sea at the end of the festival (**Ganapati visarjan**), has been a popular device in films on Bombay (**Salam Bombay**, 1988; **Agneepath**, 1990; **Satya**, 1998) to whip up a highstrung image of the metro-public.

As long as the mill lands were not appropriated by real-estate speculators in the name of redevelopment, public festivals enjoyed sprawling displays across low-rise neighbourhoods. Since the early 1990s, however, the verticality of the cityscape has begun to literally breathe down the neck of workers' quarters and tighten the noose on public spaces in the city.



