1. Purpose of the study

One of the important problems in contemporary urban politics is the lack of deliberate attempts by politicians and political parties to mobilize people at grassroots level. The political process, especially, democratic process can not continue without mass mobilization. The politicians do realize the necessity of mass mobilization, but surprisingly no systematic and deliberate efforts on part of the politicians to directly contact people and to mobilize them for political support are visible. However the politicians and political parties, instead of spending their energies on mass communication and mass mobilization seem to prefer to manipulate and appropriate the forces developed through mobilization and communication at grass-roots level. It is a practical and result oriented approach of the politicians about mass mobilization. Also there is increasing apathy on the part of masses to participate in political activities like public rallies, processions or any movement. Such reluctance is seen among the political activists also. In recent years, the political meetings are not drawing crowds as they used to and same is the case about other political activities. The labour movement is also loosing its dynamism and impact. Nowadays no strikes or movements by labour unions like those in earlier times are witnessed. Yet, the fact remains that the political process can not develop without any mass support. The very legitimacy of the political process depends on mass support. Since, the political process is going on as usual, it leads to questions- from where does the political system draw its mass base? How does the vacuum in mass mobilization, created due lack of political initiative, is filled by other means? What role do cultural and social events play in mass mobilization?

In an urban setting the process of mass mobilization for political purpose becomes more complicated and difficult. The social and economic system in urban areas is totally different from that in rural areas in India. This difference leads to differences in the nature of political process in urban and rural areas. Towns and cities are larger both in terms of population and area. This makes it difficult to develop communication channels all over the demographic unit (of city) and form a cohesive and effective social group. Such a group is a necessity in any demographic unit to develop political power, since cohesive group forms the basis of political organization or party.
In an urban setting the society is heterogeneous and there is no single dominant social group. There exist a number of social groups in urban setting. These groups have their roots in religion and caste system. Since, no group can dominate unilaterally; there is always competition among these groups for dominance. Like the social system, the economic system in urban setting is also composed of various heterogeneous groups. The urban life cannot be singularly dominated by one profession and that results in variation in economic interests. The socio-economic system in urban setting becomes more complicated because a person from one social group (like caste or religion) is likely to have different economic interests than some other person from the same social group. Many times two persons from two different social groups have similar economic interests. The variation in social and economic interests creates hurdles in developing a consistent and constant communication among people and mobilizing them. The difficulty in mobilization is reflected in the difficulty in conversion of social mobilization into political power. It becomes difficult to raise some single social or economic issue, which will appeal to all sections of society and mobilize people around this rallying point.

Since, independence, India has witnessed continuous and consistent urbanization. This has led to expansion of cities and their population has also increased rapidly. According to the provisional census report on 2001, the urban population of India, in 1981 was 158.2 million i.e. 23.2% of total population. In 1991 the urban population rose to 215.7 million and its share in total population increased to 25.5%. In year 2001, the urban population of India, was 285.4 million i.e. 27.8% of total population. In case of the state of Maharashtra, the urbanization has been more than that in India. In Maharashtra, in 1981, the urban population was 22 million i.e. 35% of total population. In 1991 the urban population in Maharashtra was 30.5 million i.e. 38.7% of total population. In the year 2001 it was 41 million i.e. 42.4% of total population of the state. With increasing urbanization, the social and economic life in cities has become more and more heterogeneous. In the last two decades service sector has grown fast. In India the service sector experienced quantum leap in 1990s. The trend was visible in 1980s. In 1990s the growth in service sector turned out to be higher than those in agriculture and industrial sector. The share of service sector in Indian economy in 1998-99 was 46 percent of GDP, while the share of agriculture sector declined to 27 percent of GDP. The industrial sector surpassed agriculture in 1997-98 in terms of share of GDP. During the year, share of industrial sector was 27.8 percent.
which was higher than 26.7 percent of the agriculture sector. (CMIE, 2000, p2) This phenomenon has added to more variation of life styles and socio-economic interests. It has become more difficult to find a single social or economic issue, which would be appreciated by most people.

Thus it becomes meaningful to investigate the contemporary ways of mass mobilization in an urban setting from which the political system derives its legitimacy, support and communication channels. The urban setting of city of Pune has been chosen for this purpose.

Pune City is a city with a tradition of knowledge and education. The centers of production are separated geographically. The public life has been dominated by social issues. The attempts of rationalists to modernize Hindu society, the challenge by Mahatma Phule to brahminical dominance and the non-brahminical movement comprise a great part of legacy of Pune City in modern times. Being the capital of Peshawas, the city has witnessed the traditional dominance of Brahmins in the fields of politics and education. Traditionally, popular mobilization has always been on the basis of some social issue. In recent decades Pune has been transformed in to a metropolitan city. The population of city according to provisional figures of the census of 2001 is 25,40,069 and the literacy rate is 77 percent. The population of Pune City (in the limits of Metropolitan Corporation) according to census in 1991 was 15,59,558. Thus, the population of Pune City has increased by 62.8 percent in the decade of 1991 to 2001.

According to the Census of India, District census handbook of Pune, the area of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) was 146.11 square kilometer. The area of PMC has increased significantly after the neighboring villages were merged in it recently. In 1991, the number of households in Pune was 3,16,347. The literacy rate was 69 percent. Number of people belonging to scheduled castes was 2,31,983 and that of those belonging to scheduled tribes was 16,751. The proportion of population in slums to the total population of Pune was 40 percent and the density of population in slums was 2,37,983 per square kilometer. The number of total main workers in Pune was 4,82,972. The distribution of main workers according to groups was cultivators- 3137(0.64%), agriculture laborers- 3285(0.68%), Workers in live stock, forestry, fishing, hunting and plantations orchards and allied activities- 5715(1.18%), Mining and quarrying - 1355(0.28%), Manufacturing, processing, servicing and repairs in household industry-13, 227(2.73%), Manufacturing, processing, servicing
and repairs in other than household industry- 2,38,754(49.43%), Construction-
55,816(11.55%), Trade and commerce- 1,08,014(22.36%), Transport, storage and
communications- 40,808(8.44%) and other services-1,35,968(28.15%). The figures in
the bracket show the percentage to the total main workers in the city. Thus, majority
of the working population of the city has been engaged in industrial sector (49.4%),
construction (11.5%), trade and commerce (22.3%), transport (8.4%) and other
services (28.1%).

It is very much clear that although the number of people engaged in industrial
sector is significant, almost equal number of people are engaged in non-industrial,
non-agricultural activities. Since, large number of people are dependent on various
activities in service sector, the social life in the city has become more heterogeneous.
In spite of the industrialization, the trade unions have failed to dominate the political
process in the city. The number of people dependent on industries has risen. Yet, there
has not been any strong, cohesive trade union, which can decisively intervene, in
political process.

As discussed above, the variation of social and economic interests has made it
difficult to find some single socio-economic issue, which will have universal appeal.
Hence, it has become a thing of past to mobilize people all over the city on the basis
of the same social or economic issue.

On this background culture seems to provide the necessary rallying point for
popular mobilization. In recent years, there has been spurt in religious and cultural
celebrations. It must be noted that the cultural festivals like ‘Ganesh Festival’ of
‘Ganapati Festival’ (popularly known as Ganeshotsava) or ‘Navratrotsava’ are
religious festivals. The modern way of celebration of these religious festivals on a
larger scale has transformed them into cultural festivals in which people from all
walks of life participate. These festivals have no more remained exclusively religious
festivals.

The religio-cultural festival of Ganapati is celebrated all over the city with
participation of hundreds of thousands of activists and citizens and it is celebrated at a
certain time of a year (in the months of August-September) for about ten days. No
social or economic issue commands such a large-scale participation with such
consistency and frequency. It appears that in an urban setting like Pune City a religio-
cultural- social event of Ganapati festival has become the most important rallying
point for popular mobilization. This social mobilization on the basis of a religious-
cultural event is converted into political power. There have been a number of instances in the city where a political activist enters public life through 'Ganesh Mandal' or 'Ganapati Mandal' (mandal is a group of local people which celebrates Ganapati festival as a public event in the neighborhood) and develops his support through Ganapati festival. The Ganapati mandals are also called kindergartens of politics in political and social circles.

The participation in Ganapati Festival gives an opportunity for the upcoming activist to enter public life, develop social contacts in the neighborhood, build communication channels and project his image as a social worker as well as to develop his set of co-workers, allies and friends. All the groundwork for developing a political career is easily done through Ganesh mandals at a small expense. Thus the Ganapati festival has become the most important rallying point for mobilization and a necessary condition for political process. This phenomenon is, therefore worth studying.

1) Aims and objectives of the study

As explained, the aim of his study is to understand the relationship between culture, mobilization and politics in urban setting. For this purpose the event of Ganapati festival, celebrated in city of Pune has been chosen. Hence, the study is focussed on Pune City.

The aims and objectives of the study are-

1. To study the organization and functioning of Ganapati mandals.
2. To study social mobilization done by Ganapati mandals.
3. To study the relationship between the mandals and political process.
4. To study the role of political activists in the celebration of Ganapati festival and to study the participation of political activists in Ganapati mandals.
5. To find out in what way the Ganapati festival helps a political activist and to ascertain the opinions of important political activists about the importance of Ganapati festival.
6. To study how a religio-cultural festival is used for social mobilization with a political motive and to study how such mobilization affects the political process.
2) Methodology

As mentioned earlier, Pune City has been chosen to study the relationship between culture, mobilization and politics in urban setting. The study is focussed on the political process in the city. It is done in three sections:

1. **The study of tradition of Ganapati festival and important events regarding it** - this is based on books and reports as well as articles published in newspapers. The historical aspect of Ganapati festival is considered for this study. The contemporary celebration of Ganapati festival in the period 1985-2000 is also studied with a view to understand the social, cultural and political aspect of the festival.

2. **The study of Ganapati mandals** - the study is done with a view to find out the exact nature of functioning of the Ganapati mandals and their impact on social mobilization. There are around 2300 Ganapati mandals in the city. Hence a few sample mandals are studied with the help of a questionnaire. Fieldwork to study these mandals as well as reference to other work in this area are the sources of information.

3. **The study of important political actors** - in this section focus is on the important political actors in the city viz. members of Pune Municipal Corporation. Since people directly elect the members of Municipal Corporation and they represent relatively small constituencies of average ten thousand voters (at the time of elections held in 1997 after which the constituencies were delimitied), they the most closely related to politics at grass roots level. There experiences and opinions about the Ganapati festival and about its ‘utility’ for politics are helpful to understand the political process at the grass-roots level. The political rise of these members from the position of a common political activist to the membership of the PMC has been studied. This study has helped to understand the usefulness of Ganapati festival for a political activist in order to develop his or her support base at the local level.