7. Conclusion

The god Ganapati has been worshipped in Maharashtra for hundreds of years. There have been temples of Ganapati in and around Pune and people go to these temples for pilgrimage. The Brahmins especially Chitpawan Brahmins in and around Pune established Ganapati as an important deity. The Ganapati festival was celebrated in Pune in the palace of the Peshwas, with royal grandeur. The Ganapati was tutelary god of the Peshwas and some other Chitpawan Brahmins. The Peshwas were the most powerful rulers for long time and hence, the festival of Ganpati celebrated by them, became royal festival. On this background the beginning of the Ganapati festival as a public event turned out to be a totally different development.

The tradition of celebrating the Ganapati festival was well established by the time the British defeated Peshwas and established their rule in the city of Pune. After the Peshwas were defeated, the tradition was carried on by the families of their nobles. The characteristic of this tradition was that the celebration was restricted to domestic level. The historical rupture in this tradition took place when in 1893 the Ganapati festival was celebrated as a public festival, for the first time in Pune City.

The concept of celebrating Ganapati festival publicly caught on with wider and larger participation and it did evolve as a social unifier and a potent mass mobilizer against the British rule, thus making Tilak’s attempts successful. The Ganapati festival expanded along the length and breadth of the state, with great participation from all sections of society, making it the most important festival in the state. The festival no more remained the glorification of Ganapati by Brahmins alone instead the non-Brahmins became the promoters and controllers of the festival and it became an effective medium for non-Brahmins usurping the brahminical ways of religiosity.

In this thesis we have studied the Ganapati festival as a public festival celebrated in the contemporary period of 1985 to 2000 is studied. There are seven chapters in this thesis. In the first chapter, the problem of political mobilization at grass-roots level is defined. In contemporary period, the political parties and leaders do not seem to make conscious efforts for mobilization at the grass-roots level. Rather they appropriate the social forces developed through mobilization at the grass-roots level due to some social or cultural phenomenon. In the city of Pune, the Ganpati festival is an example of this process. The Ganpati festival is celebrated by people by forming local groups called mandals. Anybody in the locality can join such mandal. The
mandals are connected to families in the locality. The mandals are composed of young people. The festival is celebrated with the money gathered from people. Thus, the mass mobilization is done at the grass roots level through the celebration of Ganapati festival by mandals. The politicians make use of the communication channels and set of activists developed through mandals. Taking part in the Ganpati festival also helps a promising young political activists to develop his image in the locality. An attempt has been made to study this relationship between mass mobilization through Ganapati festival and the political process in the city.

The second chapter is about the god Ganapati and the tradition of worshipping it. The god Ganapati has been worshipped in India especially in Maharashtra for centuries. The importance of this deity in the public eye has been increasing.

In the third chapter, the beginning of the Ganapati festival as a public festival in Maharashtra is studied. The Ganapati festival (as a public festival) was started in 1893 and it got rooted and expanded due to intellectual sponsorship of the great nationalist leader Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The festival was started on the backdrop of the first Hindu – Muslim communal riots in 1893. It has been alleged that the festival was started to develop organized power of Hindu community against Muslim community. It was also alleged that the Ganapati festival was an imitation of the Muslim festival called Mohurrum, especially regarding establishment of tableaus and taking out procession. It has been thought that the Ganapati festival was a covert attempt of mass mobilization against the British rule, taking advantage of the fact that the British adopted the policy of non-intervention in religious matters after the uprising of 1857. Interestingly, the festival was opposed by both conservatives and reformists among Hindu community. The festival was opposed by the Satyashodhak Samaj, which strongly rejected the brahminical ways. The Muslims also opposed it. There were various reasons for this opposition from various quarters. But in spite of such opposition and some prohibitory intervention by the British rulers, the Ganapati festival became immensely popular among masses with participation by people belonging to all castes in Hindu community and to other religions also. The Ganpati festival as a public festival with no bar on participation turned out to be a rupture in the brahminical tradition of its celebration.

The contemporary celebration of the Ganapati festival in the period of 1985 to 2000 in the city of Pune has been noted in the chapter 4. The focus is on noting the important incidents and developments in the Ganapati festival. More and more
participation of masses in the Ganapati festival is noticed during the period. People have more and more interest in the religiosity and religious rituals. At the same time people have rejected all attempts of establishing religious dogma through Ganapati festival. The masses have insisted on the plural, liberal, loose and accommodative nature of the Ganapati festival. The masses have rejected order, authority, norms of purity and pollution, hierarchy, formality etc. while celebrating Ganapati festival.

The Ganpati mandals are the carriers of the tradition of Ganapati festival. The mandals were studied by surveying them. The findings of the survey are noted in the fifth chapter.

The members of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) are the politicians most closely related to the people at the grass-roots level. These members (corporators) were interviewed to elicit their experiences and opinions about the Ganapati festival and the political process in the city. The political rise of these corporators is also studied. The findings of this study are noted in the sixth chapter. This chapter helps in understanding the exact relationship between the Ganapati festival and the politics in the city.

The Ganpati festival during 1985 to 2000 in Pune City is marked by the ever-increasing gigantic participation by masses. Except Ganapati festival, no other social, religious, cultural or political event in the city commands such participation and spontaneous response from the masses. As the Ganpati festival has become festival of masses, it has not remained restricted to only one community or caste. Historically the Brahmins especially the Chitpawan Brahmins have played pivotal role in establishing Ganapati as an important deity. But, once the Ganpati festival became public festival anybody from any caste or religion could participate in the festival publicly. This phenomenon became quite clear in the contemporary period. Just as there has been more and more expression of reverence towards God Ganapati by people belonging to various castes, the increasing initiative by the Ganapati mandals for social activities has also been witnessed during the period. The non-Brahmins have been always enthusiastic about the Ganapati festival. As it has been noted in the chapter no. 4, the public Ganpati festival has not been celebrated with much enthusiasm in Brahmin dominated areas.

It is clear from our data that the activists of Ganpati festival and hence masses in general are not much supportive about the norms of purity, pollution, order, formality, authority, hierarchy etc. At the same time the masses have shown tendency towards
religiosity and modern ways of life. This trend became clear in the events regarding the Ganapati mandal named Shreemant Dagadhusheth Halwai Sarvajanik Ganapati Trust, (popularly known as Dagadusheth) as well as regarding the Express Citizens forum. The support, Dagadusheth got for its religious initiatives and its failure to organize mandals, homogenize the celebration and thus to develop a center of social power, clearly shows the tendency of the masses to indulge in more and more religious activities at the same time to reject religious dogma. The limitations of the government and the elite class in order to control the festival became evident in the case of Express Citizens Forum. This important episode about the Forum also indicated the opposition of the hundreds of thousands of activists of Ganapati mandals to organized intervention by any force and their assertiveness of them about their space created through Ganapati festival. Interestingly, those who opposed the forum in this episode raised same issue of civic inconvenience due the festival, later on vindicating the stand taken by the Forum. Thus, the people participating in the festival have also shown the tendency for modern ways of life as well as to maintain the open pluralistic nature of the festival. Whenever the establishment including the government and the elite class tried to create some order to limit the celebration, the attempts were opposed tooth and nail by the activists of the mandals with the support of the masses. In such cases the otherwise disunited and pluralistic mandals and their activists got united temporarily to oppose the dogma. While the masses opposed intervention in the festival, they have tolerated it when it was convenient to them. This trend was evident when the masses tolerated the intervention by the Andhashraddha Neermulan Samiti regarding the immersion of the Ganapati idols.

Thus, an interesting trait regarding the Ganpati festival was observed. The Ganapati mandals and their activists are always disunited and individualistic when it comes to celebration and exploring the social, cultural and religious space available through the festival. The activists of Ganapati festival have rejected the norms of purity, pollution, authority, order, formality and hierarchy etc. At the same time these very activists have asserted in various ways whenever there was an intervention in the festival to control or to regulate it. The people participating in the festival have rejected all attempts of establishing dogma. In case of such rejection these activists of Ganapati mandals, which are otherwise disunited have spontaneously united and opposed the organized interventionist attempts tooth and nail. In such cases the activists have behaved as one entity and again when the intervention has been
repelled and the pluralistic form and the space has been maintained, they have got disunited and individualistic.

The Ganapati festival as a public festival was started on the backdrop of the first Hindu-Muslim communal riots in 1893. In modern times, in case of relationship between the Hindu and Muslim communities, the festival has become both the causes of estrangement and reconciliation. In fact both the forces interested in estrangement and reconciliation could utilize the festival for their interest. The relationship between Hindu and Muslim communities with regard to the Ganapati festival denotes that the festival provides ample social and cultural space to be utilized by the forces interested in conflict and conciliation. But, since the Ganapati festival celebrated in the contemporary period is positive in nature, the social forces interested in reconciliation are more dominant. This point has been discussed in the later part of the chapter.

This aspect of space is witnessed in case of Dalits and women who have utilized the festival and thus the social, cultural and religious space created due to it to transgress the social and cultural prohibitory norms as well as to declare their arrival in the mainstream of the society.

The developments in the period of 1985 to 2000 about the Ganapati festival in Pune City demonstrate the significant growth of the festival in terms of popular participation, economic turnover, political support, religiosity and enthusiasm of the masses. There have been paradoxical situations where the Ganapati festival that is basically a religious event was appropriated by traditionally oppressed classes like women and Dalits to occupy social space which was denied to them and it led to increased religiosity. The festival became a reason for increased tension among Hindu and Muslim communities at the same time it was used as a platform to develop conciliation among these two communities. The masses that participated in the festival in increasing numbers indulged more and more in religious rituals but strongly opposed the efforts of establishing a certain religious pattern or dogma. The Dagadusheth Halwai Sarvajanik Ganpati Trust became almost the leader of the Ganapati mandals in the city but was snubbed by the mandals when it tried to establish a confederation of the mandals and thus develop a socio-religious power through it. The hundreds of thousands of activists of Ganapati mandals utilized the festival as a carnival at the same time took major social initiatives with great responsibility. Thus, the masses have rejected order, propriety, norms of purity and pollution as well as authority through Ganapati festival. At the same time these very
masses have utilized the Ganapati festival for their urge for sanskritisation and modern ways of life. This paradox is the most important aspect of the contemporary celebration of Ganapati festival.

The tradition of the festival has been carried forward by the Ganapati mandals. The Ganapati mandals are the groups of local people. The members of the mandal necessarily live in the same area adjoining the mandal. In some cases the members of the mandal do not live in the locality but they live at far away places and come to the locality for the celebration. But, in such cases, these members used to live in the locality of the mandal and have migrated to other part of the city for various reasons. This local bonding is the most important factor in case of the members of the mandal. On an average a Mandal has 118 members or activists. Thus the mandal is directly connected to about hundred families in the area. The members of the mandal undertake preparation for the celebration of the Ganapati festival for average 39 days. The duration of the preparation for the festival varies from Mandal to Mandal. But, it is clear that the boys work together and communicate with each other for about a month, thanks to the Ganapati festival. The communication among these members of the mandals is formal as well as informal. There are average five meetings held for the Ganapati festival. These meetings are a good platform for formal communication among the members of the mandal. The young boys do learn about organizational matters due these meetings. The members of a Ganapati mandal is a group of young boys. According to the survey of the Ganapati mandals, the average of the minimum age of the members of the mandal is 17 years and that of the maximum age is 40 years. Of course there are enthusiastic members of Ganapati mandals who are much younger or older than these averages. But, by and large the activists of Ganapati mandal are in the age group of 15 to 40. The activists of Ganapati mandals are well educated and employed and not 'rowdies' as they are considered to be by the white collared conservative class. In 77% mandals the educational qualification of the members is from High school to University graduation. There are very few illiterate activists of Ganapati mandals. It was found that 51% of the activists are well employed, either in service or having a business of their own. In case of others majority are students. Few activists are unemployed. The Ganapati mandals continue their activities besides celebrating Ganapati festival, through the year.

As the Ganapati mandals are the groups of young, enthusiastic local people, they do take part in the political process, especially campaigning during the elections. But
not all of the members take part in political activities. It was found during the survey that average of the number of activists per mandal taking part in political activities, especially election campaigning is 61. The average of total number of activists in the Mandals is 118. Considering these figures it is clear that 51% of the total activists or members of Ganapati mandals participate in political campaigning. Thus, the number of activists of Ganapati mandals who remain away from political activists is 49%. Out of the surveyed mandals, members of 87% mandals participate in political campaigning and only 12% mandals made it clear that their members do not take part in political campaigning. Hence, the members of majority of mandals take part in political activities but the proportion of the members who participate in political activities and who do not is almost the same. Significant majority of mandals i.e. 59% mandals made it clear that they do not support any political candidate on the basis of the mandal. Thus, most of the mandals do not take any political position and leave it to the members to act as per their will. The support of the members of mandals to political parties is also varied. The proportion of the mandals in which the members support different political parties is about 61%. Thus, although Ganapati mandals are groups of young, enthusiastic local people with very good communication at the local level, the mandals can not be used as political support bases as a whole group. There are significant number of members who prefer to stay away from political activities and in case of those who take part in political activities especially campaigning during elections, there is great variation in their choices.

Ganapati festival is celebrated with the money collected from people. According to the survey, the average income of the mandals is Rs. 3,09,395. This figure has been computed considering the income of Dagadusheth Halawai Ganapati Trust, whose income is about Rs. 30 million. Excluding Dagadusheth, the average income of the mandals is Rs. 71,117 and the median of income is Rs. 22,500. Thus, the mandals get significant amount of public money at their disposal due to Ganapati festival. Most of the money collected is spent during the festival and thus the process gives temporary boost to local economy. The members of the mandals also get access to significant amount of public money due to the festival.

The Ganapati mandals continue their activities through the year. The total number of such activities undertaken by mandals except Ganapati festival is 85. There is great variation in the other activities except Ganapati festival, these mandals undertake. Thus, the members of Ganapati mandals get an opportunity to explore social space...
according to their will. It also underlines the individualistic nature of the Ganapati mandals.

Members of Municipal Corporation, directly elected by people, are the most important politicians at the grass roots level. These politicians are considered to be closely linked to the Ganapati festival. But, the study made it clear that the members of Pune Municipal Corporation are not as closely linked to the Ganapati festival as is believed. About 32% members made it clear that they are not related to Ganapati festival or the Ganapati mandals. Although, the proportion of those not related to the Ganapati festival is much less than those who are related, their number is significant. In case of others who are related to the Ganapati festival, their relationship is not of a die-hard activist of Ganapati mandal. But, these politicians are very well aware of the potential and the utility of Ganapati mandals regarding communication and mobilization at the grass roots level. The members of Municipal Corporation participate in the activities of Ganapati mandals and utilize this social platform for their own social activities. They also use the set of activists developed through the mandals for their activities of mobilization.

The Ganapati mandals do play a significant role in political campaigning. Most of the mandals do not support any candidate on the basis of a mandal, but the members are free to take part in political activities.

By and large the Ganapati mandals have become service providers for the politicians. The concerned politician has to negotiate with the mandals for their support. But, the politicians avoid to be too close to any particular mandal for the fear of opposition from other mandals. The politicians are dependent on the mandals for provision of activists and communication channels with local people.

The relationship of these politicians varies from party to party. In case of Bhartiya Janata Party and Republican Party of India, who have their committed voters as well as supporters and activists, the dependence on the Ganapati mandals is the least. But, the independent members of the Municipal Corporation do not have support of any party structure and they are comparatively more strongly linked to the mandals. The relationship of members of Congress party with the Ganapati mandals varies depending upon their patronage in the party, nature of their constituencies and their support bases.

Thus, the Ganapati festival in Pune City is like a big independent sphere accommodating people belonging to all castes and religions. Anybody who wants to
participate in the celebration can enter this sphere. There are no qualifications required to enter the festival except minimal reverence for the god, Ganapati. Although the Ganapati festival is a religious festival, no special knowledge about the religious sanctions and practices is required to celebrate the Ganapati festival as a public event. The sphere of the Ganapati festival has a minimal but consistent identity and it is free for all once, that minimal identity of the festival is accepted. Even in public eye the god Ganapati has necessary minimal identity and it is free to express the image of the god in one’s mind when that minimal identity of the lord is accepted. Thus, in the sphere of the Ganapati festival, the norms of purity and pollution, authority, hierarchy, order, propriety etc. become meaningless. All the attempts of establishing any such norms or a dogma in the sphere of the Ganapati festival have failed. In case of such attempts the otherwise open, loose, liberal and free for all structure of the festival becomes rigid one and the activists of Ganpati mandals with the support of the masses, unite to oppose such unitary attempts. Every attempt of the homogenization of the festival and developing a power through it has failed and the activists have maintained the pluralistic, open and liberal character of this sphere of Ganapati festival. As the Ganapati festival is a universal sphere with minimal identity and open, pluralistic nature, people belonging to various faiths have been exploring the infinite social, cultural and religious space created in this sphere according to their own interests and understanding. Hence, oppositional forces may be seen to be operating in the festival simultaneously. Paradoxical situations like the women and Dalit utilizing the festival to transgress the social, cultural and religious prohibitory norms by conducting religious activities and in effect leading to increased religiosity in the society, are quite common in the festival. One point should be noted that although the religious activities in the festival have been increasing, it is not leading to increased orthodoxy or fundamentalism. Thus, this is a one more paradoxical characteristic of the festival that it leads to increased religiosity but at the same time demolishes the dogmatic fundamentalist tendencies. This characteristic is due to the open and accommodative nature with minimal identity of the sphere of the Ganapati festival. Since there are practically no prohibitory norms of any type in the festival, it becomes a plural, open and accommodative system and hence making it popular among masses. But, this very characteristic of the festival creates hindrance in developing a power of sorts, which require homogeneous group committed to certain belief or thought. Hence, the Ganapati festival is not directly useful for political
mobilization like an organization or a party, but the social platform produced by the festival can be utilized indirectly for one’s political ends, albeit indirectly. The large sphere of the festival allows the politicians to explore the space and utilize the forces developed through the festival but they can not appropriate the whole festival. Taking over the celebrations and controlling it for one’s political purpose is simply impossible. Hence, the Congress party with its loose, pluralistic, open structure finds more support of the social forces developed at local level through Ganapati festival. At the same time the political parties like Bhartiya Janata Party or Republican Party of India who believe in narrow interpretation of their ideology and are cadre based parties find less support in the festival. The festival is like an ocean where anybody can take its treasures but should not try to own it. Hence, those who believe in pluralistic, open system and getting advantage of the system by negotiating with it rather than demolishing or owning the system stand to gain from the Ganapati festival. Those who do not believe in plural and diverse system can not take advantage of the festival. Hence, the social mobilization at the grass roots level developed through Ganapati festival can be used for political purpose by low profile method of negotiation but the whole of the Ganapati festival does not become an apparatus of social mobilization for political ends.

Such a pluralistic and diverse nature of the Ganapati festival and rejection of authority, order, hierarchy, norms of purity and pollution, formality has led to the situation where those who believe in orthodox or narrow religiosity as well as social system and authority have opposed the public Ganapati festival. In Pune City, as it has been noted with evidences in the form of news reports, the Brahmins have remained somewhat away from the festival. Brahmins are not opposed to this festival of God Ganapati but they are opposed to the lack of any homogeneity in the celebration. They are opposed to the free for all nature of the festival, which leads to chaotic situation and many times gives carnivalesque nature to this religious festival. It is quite true that many times the young activists of Ganapati mandals cause inconvenience by playing loud speakers to unbearable level of volume or sometimes indecent behavior takes place in the huge crowd gathered for the festival. Such, behavior is beyond comprehension for those who insist on orderly way of life and civic sense. Hence, most of the educated white-collar middle class people do not approve the ‘non-religious’ behavior and carnivalesque activities during the festival. Majority of the Brahmins in the city belong to this class. Apart from the disciplined ‘civil’ behavior
the Brahmins believe in strict religiosity and they are on the forefront in denouncing the rowdy behavior of the celebrants. The protest is mainly expressed by the letters to the editor, published by local newspapers. It does not mean that the Brahmins are totally away from the public Ganapati festival. But by and large the festival is controlled by the non-Brahmins and some Brahmins who do not belong to this group of educated white collar middle class, which strongly believes in social system and order, participate in the festival.

Such an observation is made by Courtright also. He says, “Some Hindus, particularly conservative Brahmins, complain that the festival has declined in quality and religiosity as it has increased in the numbers of participants. They object to its secular character, to the use of popular movies in place of devotional singing, and to the iconographic innovations and what they take to be the obscene behaviour of celebrants in their dances during the procession. Older Brahmins recall nostalgically the earlier years of the festival when Tilak attempted to transform it into an occasion of social uplift. This criticism may also mask another complaint many Brahmins have. To some extent these criticisms may also lament the relative decline in Brahminical influence in the festival and in the Brahmins’ status in Maharashtrian culture, society and economy generally. During this century the festival has ceased to be the province of the Brahmin community. More and more Ganesa belongs to all the people, each group responding to him according to their own tastes and values.” (Courtright, 2001: 200)

The situation regarding the Brahmins clearly indicates the fact the Ganapati festival as a public festival in modern times can not be termed as a Brahminical design to revive traditions and to establish dogma. This fact becomes very clear from the criticism of the celebration of the festival by the organization called Sanatan Sanstha. As the very name indicates the organization is involved in an attempt to change the existing social system into religion based system. (Athawale, 1997, 76) The organization has undertaken a ‘campaign against untoward behaviour in religious festival.’ In this respect the organization has been trying to reach people during Ganapati festival for last few years in the city. The organization has published a book named Ganapati in which it has criticized the contemporary celebration of the festival for use of force while gathering contribution, Ganapati idols in deformed nature, huge idols, sound pollution, extravagant decoration, events which have no relationship with religion and nation, influence of politicians, tasteless songs, indecent dancing,
gambling and boozing in the pandal, indecent behavior with women, splashing gulal (red powder) in the immersion procession etc. The organization has called for discipline and maintenance of sanctity at the place of worship and the pandal, that the activists should celebrate the festival as mission keeping in mind the religious sanctions about religious activities and the deities as well as to undertake the programmes for religious and nationalistic awakening. (Athawale, 1997, 65) This criticism about the contemporary celebration by the ‘opponent’ makes it clear that the festival is not religious revivalist attempt neither it helps people interested in such attempts.

Raminder Kaur, who has done research on Ganapati Utsav (festival) also makes similar observation. She says, “Significantly, religious practices in public space need not unreservedly feed into a Hindutwa project as is argued in much of the literature on Hindu nationalism and visual culture.” (Kaur, 2001: 50)

But, some scholars have believed otherwise. Hansen says, “My main argument is that Hindu nationalism has emerged and taken shape neither in the political system such as norm in the religious field, but in the broader realm of what we may call public culture - the public space in which a society and its constituent individuals and communities imagine, represent and recognize themselves through political discourse, commercial and cultural expressions and representation of state and civic organizations. The Hindu nationalists desire to transform Indian public culture in a sovereign, disciplined national culture rooted in what is claimed to be a superior ancient Hindu past and to impose a corporatist and disciplined social and political organization upon society.” (Hansen, 1999, 4)

In fact, in my opinion it is the ‘open to all nature of the festival’ and gigantic participation by masses in to such festivals as Ganapati festival that make it difficult to establish dogma and develop a religious power through such festivals. Thus, it becomes difficult for disciplinarians to establish their social system, with a certain thought. Even if any organization of disciplinarians with certain ideology has succeeded in utilizing the Ganapati festival for their cause, they could not sustain the success due to the inherent tendency of such festivals without any prohibitions on entry or form. This point becomes clear in the study of Ganapati festival in Tamilnadu. In this case the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh started Ganapati festival as a public festival-taking cue from Maharashtra and guided it for some time. But, as the
participation in the festival increased and the festival became truly a mass festival, the RSS and its affiliates lost control over it.

C. J. Fuller has studied the celebration of Ganapati festival in Tamilnadu and according to him since 1983 Tamilnadu's Vinayaka Chaturthi has been deliberately copied from Maharashtra, by Hindu Munnani, an outfit related to the Sangha Pariwar (Fuller, 2001: 1613). He says that the festival also helped the Munnani and the RSS in general to establish its presence in Tamilnadu. He says, “the most striking feature is the sheer scale and rapidity of its expansion from one little event in Chennai to the huge public festival celebrated throughout Tamilnadu today, which has allowed the Hindu Munnani and Sangh Pariwar to make their presence felt almost everywhere, although in some northern areas they have little or no control over the festival. (Fuller, 2001: 1615)

But, in fact he has also says, “Everywhere in Tamilnadu, the vast majority of independent festivals involving installation of images came in the wake of Munnani initiatives in the 1980s, and a huge proportion of local Vinayaka temples have started new festivals or expanded old ones over the same period. Some people who organize independent festivals like those in Chennai and Madurai referred to above are vigorously opposed to the Munnani, whereas others are neutral or sympathetic to it. Yet, in Munnani eyes, their different attitudes hardly matter.” (Fuller, 2001: 1614) He has noted that, “Despite the leading role of the Hindu Munnani and its Sangh Parivar allies, they do not completely monopolize the public festival, because other groups also set up large images, take them in procession and otherwise celebrate Vinayaka Chaturthi. Yet even in places where the Munnani dominates, there can be significant independent activity as well, as there is in Madurai.” (Fuller, 2001: 1612)

The developments noted by Fuller about the Vinayak Chaturthi Festival (Ganapati festival) in Tamilnadu underline the important point that the festival may have been started and propagated by the RSS and its affiliates, for their Hinduist agenda and it may have helped them in establishing their presence, once it got expanded with mass participation, the Munnani lost control over it. This phenomenon that once a religious festival like Ganapati festival becomes public one with no prohibitions, it becomes more and more difficult to keep it as an exclusive, religious festival and to use it to develop a power. This development is the significant characteristic of the Ganapati festival in Pune and is also visible in Tamilnadu. Hence, the Ganapati festival has limited utility for political purposes, as the festival is a
positive one in nature, it can not be employed for a certain thought and turn it into a political apparatus. And whenever it is to be used for political ends, tampering with its pluralistic, diversified nature is not allowed!

The Ganapati festival has been useful for the non-Brahmins to express their rejection of traditional hierarchy and order. This characteristic has been witnessed by Suzanne Hanchet about the village called Bandipur in the state of Karnataka. In this village there used to be an annual procession of god Narasimha, an incarnation of Vishnu. She has given details about it; “The harvest festival (jatra) is also a prolonged festival, lasting twelve days in January and February. Unlike the Ganapati festival, its financing and management is primarily from Brahmin community. On ninth day when the ancient temple cart, carrying the god Narasimha and his two wives is circulated around the Brahmin sector of the village. The procession is organized according to specific sociological principles. Harijans push it, Brahmins steer and non-brahmins pull at the front of the procession.” (Hanchett, 1972, 1518)

But, in 1961 the Non-Brahmins introduced a new festival event into the village festival cycle. This was an elaboration on the Ganapati festival. One of the more active members of the Non-Brahmin community, who had a taxi business, had gone outside the village and gotten the idea for such a festival. All these events (regarding Ganapati festival) were primarily by Non-Brahmins, and financed by contributions from all houses in the village. The Ganesha procession was organized very differently from the jatra temple cart procession. These differences are not frivolous embellishments, but serious attempts on the part of the Non-Brahmins to establish their new position in the village in a dignified manner. (Hanchett, 1972, 1516-1521)

Notable features of the Ganesha procession have been noted as, the statue of lord Ganesha rides with the Brahmin priest on a bullock cart; the Harijans are not adjacent to the cart or the idol, as they are in jatra procession (rather they are kept at a considerable distance ahead of the procession), unlike jatra cart procession the Ganapati procession goes through both the Brahmin and Non-Brahmin sections of the village and the Bandipur Brahmins contribute offerings to Ganesha as the procession passes each of their houses. (Hanchett, 1972, 1521)

She says, “To summarize Bandipur case, then, relations between the major groups of castes are changing. The introduction of a new festival event at Ganapati represents an attempt to legitimize and confirm the position of a newly independent and powerful caste group- the Non-Brahmins. The Brahmins have been forced by the
circumstances to acknowledge the independence and importance of the Non-Brahmins. And they do symbolically by participating in the Ganapati festival and by sharing some of their ritual privileges in both festivals with Non-Brahmins.” (Hanchett, 1972, 1521)

The case of Bandipur as studied by Hanchett has been noted above. It makes it clear how; the Ganapati festival became useful to express changing social relations in the village. Here in case of Pune City, at the end of the 20th century, similar trends about how the festival has been utilized by the oppressed classes to transgress the norms have been noticed. These trends are well discussed in concerned chapter about the contemporary celebration of the Ganapati festival in the city.

Perhaps it is the nature of any religious event celebrated publicly, to be pluralistic and diversified in nature and with no prohibitions on entry. Such, pluralistic nature and openness has been witnessed in case of the Durga Pooja celebration in the state of West Bengal. Jyotirmayee Sarma notes that, “Voluntary associations form for the purpose of sponsoring annual religious ceremonies or pujas. Such associations may be composed of men of any caste, and although they observe religious ceremonies, they also provide many secular diversions.” (Sarma, 1969, 579)

There is a striking similarity between the Ganapati festival in Pune and the Durga Puja festival in West Bengal. Just like the Ganapati mandals, usually puja committee is composed of members of various castes and the bonds that hold them together are friendship and neighborliness. (Sarma, 1969, 585) As in case of the Ganapati festival, “in the sarvajanin pujas, there is much laxity in the observation of the pure and the impure elements. The priests are still Brahmans, but they need not be the best of Brahmans. Families on other hand, are very particular about the genealogies of their priests. The preparation of the fruits and dry rice offerings are made by boys and girls of the families of the subscribers irrespective of caste, and they consider this work to be great fun.” (Sarma, 1969, 591) “ The ritual flower offerings is very popular in the sarvajanin puja centers. No questions are raised about caste and no one is denied.” (Sarma, 1969, 592)

Openness in the celebration of the festivals like Ganapati festival have made them very popular among masses with no comparable popularity for any other cultural, social or religious festival. The pluralistic and diversified nature of the festival provides vast space for varied groups to explore it according to their varied interests at the same time creates hindrance in establishing dogma. Hence, such important festival
like Ganapati festival is not directly useful for political purpose but can be utilized indirectly if one respects the pluralistic and diversified as well as accommodative nature of it and negotiates for support!

Positive nature and inherent depoliticization

The Ganpati festival may have been started a century ago for the mass mobilization against the British rule or to repulse the influence of the Western culture on Indian masses or to develop a force against the Muslims; in the contemporary period the festival has become a positive one against nothing. In the contemporary period, the Ganapati festival is celebrated by people only because of their urge for religious, cultural and social celebration. Most of the people in the city participate in the celebration through some Ganpati mandal or other. All of the participants of the festival may not be the members of the mandals, but the participate in the procession of the mandal and the functions arranged by it. Thus, it can be considered as a public festival celebrated by the masses. Hence, the Ganapati festival is a festival for the sake of celebration itself and not against anybody or any ideology. The festival also has a characteristic of mass participation with no prohibitions. These two characteristics lead to peculiar situation regarding politics as well as divisive forces. Since, there is spontaneous mass participation in the festival, it helps to develop one’s image as an activist and also to develop communication with people in the area. These two factors help for democratic politics. But, since the festival has a positive nature and ‘free for all’ characteristics it can not be used for any single thought or for divisive purpose or against anybody, thus making it difficult to convert it into a political apparatus. So, the Ganpati festival has a limited political utility as a launching pad for promising newcomer in the politics and also as a service provider to the political establishment for campaigning and communication at the grass roots level.

As the Ganpati festival has a ‘free for all’ characteristic it can not be employed for certain thought, making it difficult to utilize it as a potent weapon.

The Ganapati festival has a positive nature and social, cultural and religious tensions are released peacefully in the festival and also the gaps are bridged due to increased communication and overall happy mood. Therefore, the forces interested in social estrangement get little scope in the festival. This is witnessed in case of relationship between Hindu and Muslim communities. As it has been said earlier,
there is a space for both the forces interested in estrangement and reconciliation in the sphere of Ganapati festival. But due to the positive nature of the festival those interested in reconciliation among Hindu and Muslim communities has got the upper hand. The existence of the ‘Ram-Rahim Ganapati Mandal’ in the Ghorpade Peth of the city is one such concrete example. But, numerous incidences of Hindu and Muslim members working together in the Ganapati Mandal can be seen all over the city. A Ganapati mandal having Muslim president or some important office bearer is not a rare phenomenon. Thus, the social and other tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities are released during the festival. On the other hand since, the Ganpati festival is basically a Hindu religious festival, it leads to some heightened awareness about Hindu identity and this situation becomes useful for forces interested in estrangement in both Hindu and Muslim communities. Hence, it becomes easier for divisive forces, on both sides to start a conflict. But, in case of Pune, at least for the last 3 or 4 decades, such conflicts have never been fierce in terms of violence and destruction. Whenever there was such a conflict related to the Ganapati festival or some activities related to it, never there was a violence or killings on a mass scale, but what has been witnessed as a heightened tension and uneasiness (which was again released in subsequent Ganapati festivals). Consider the example of the riot regarding the desecration of the Ganapati idol of the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati Trust, there was a lot of social tension and fear created due to it but not much violence. (This incident is noted in great detail in the Chapter 4.) In the Ganapati festival or regarding any activities related to it, there have never been serious riots like those after partition of India or regarding implementation of Mandal commission recommendations or after the Babari Mosque was demolished.

There is one more point regarding estrangement and Ganapati festival. The Ganapati mandals form the basis of the festival. The mandals are groups of local people bound together by emotional bonds of neighborliness and acquaintance. This characteristic leads to inherent opposition to estrangement but it leads to reconciliation.

Therefore the Ganapati festival with its positive nature and free for all accommodative characteristic has an inherent tendency of depoliticization allowing a limited use of it for political purpose without loosing its autonomous existence and plural, diverse and accommodative nature.