

## Research Article

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# Heterotopic Assemblages within Religious Structures: *Ganesh Utsav* and the Streets of Mumbai

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**Abstract:** Indian urban public spaces have witnessed massive transformation post liberalization and globalization. In 2017, city spaces offer novel experiences and unravel new political dynamics in tune with the paradigm shifts in socio-political, economic and cultural domains. The city was shaped by the colonial and later modernizing forces, is being foregrounded in the postmodern, postcolonial discourses, and its public spaces therefore emerge as significant components in the social developments as witnessed in the new millennium. *Ganesh Utsav* in Mumbai is closely linked to India's history of political struggle against British colonialism. There has been a phenomenal growth in its popularity and visibility, as a festival for ten days, encapsulating the whole city, transforming its identity as a financial capital of the country to a multiple layered carnival ground, with processions and festivities involving the majority of its population. Post globalization and neoliberalisation, the festival has transformed itself, assumed an identity uniquely political along with the rise of the right wing to power. My paper will be an attempt to critically evaluate this festival and the paraphernalia of sacredness that encapsulates the city space for ten days every year. While the spatial identity of religious practices is fascinating to observe, the ten-day festival of *Ganesh Utsav* builds a fabric of the sacred and profane across the city. The theoretical tool used in this study is Foucault's heterotopias and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage. The de/re-territorialising aspects of these spaces will also be examined.

**Keywords:** sacred spaces, heterotopia, carnival, assemblage, de/re-territorialisation

## Introduction

Urban public spaces in India have been radically redefining themselves in the new millennium. Modernity saw the gradual shift from rural to urban, yet agriculture and its allied occupation remained the backbone of the economy and hence rural India remained a strong presence in building identities and shaping Indian sensibility. With economic liberalization and the receding dream of a socialist welfare society, Indianness started imagining itself around urban spaces, and a major paradigm shift became visible. Post globalization, India has been witnessing these altered perceptions about Indian identity with city spaces as the epicenter for all the transitions being witnessed in the country. Since urban spaces are the platforms that capture the social transformations and their manifestations on spatial and temporal dimensions, cities like Mumbai emerge as illuminative and instructive from a Cultural Studies perspective. Cultural practices like *Ganesh Utsav* that are religious in essence, and encapsulating the whole city, cutting across intimate spaces and public spaces, demand a close reading due to their socio-political and economic relevance in defining these city spaces. *Ganesh Utsav* in contemporary India articulates the complex and dynamic flow of power within the political, economic and cultural discourses that define the nation.

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*Ganesh Utsav* is a celebration of *Ganesh Chaturthi*, or *Vinayak Chaturthi*, the birth of Lord *Ganesha*, who is one among the Hindu pantheon of gods. It is a festival celebrated across India, and with enormous zeal in the State of Maharashtra, where *Ganesha* idols are installed in houses, ritually worshipped and then immersed in water on the tenth day when the festival comes to a colorful conclusion. *Ganesh Utsav* was primarily a festival of the Hindus confined to private spaces and celebrated with *Ganesha* idols, temporarily installed, and paying obeisance to those idols for a maximum of ten days. One of the leaders of India's struggle for independence, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, envisioned the possibility of adopting the festival as a significant trope to instill a sense of community and to exploit its importance among the Hindus in the Maharashtra region in order to bring them together in the fight for independence from the British imperialist powers. As the venue shifted from within homes to public grounds, the sanctity of the ceremony gave way to larger causes of a nationalistic nature. Later, it emerged as one of the major events in postcolonial India that assisted in bringing the religious dimension closer to the politics of the nation. The secularization hailed by post-independent India saw a distinct paradigm shift, especially in the ascent of the right-wing Hindutva political power. This shift saw its manifestation in the manner in which *Ganesh Utsav* was imagined by the people and the aggressive manner in which the festival began to grab its space in public venues across Maharashtra. Political, cultural and economic dimensions deepened the complexity of this annual exercise and in an urban space like Mumbai it is starkly visible. The festival with its socio-political, economic and cultural dimension occupies not only the corporeal space, but also the virtual spaces, thereby altering the essential character of the festival.

## Ganeshotsav: Tracing History in the Context of Mumbai

“Spatial politics are not determined just by the power of the state or the capital, but also by mythologies, magical thinking and the imaginary” (Brash 349) and this pervasive presence of religious identity associated with spatiality is most visible in the observance of *Ganesh Utsav*. Spaces are negotiated at several levels, within the intimate domestic spaces to the profane street spaces which are converted to ritualistic spaces, encompassing within themselves profane elements in various forms. Homes, neighborhoods, street corners and finally, the processions that move across the city with large statues of humungous proportions signifying the aggressive male Hindu identity, shape the new Indian selves, and, urban spaces and the social interactions that mark these spaces emerge as powerful signifiers that define the new nation.

*Ganesh Utsav* is one of those ritualistic religious practices observed at several levels—both as a personal and a collective ritual, as a secular act with political dimensions, a sacred observance involving chanting of mantras, along with offerings to propitiate the gods. Jeffrelot speaks of the increasing politicization of the *Ganesh* Festival as early as 1969 when it was incorporated into the political agenda (355). In fact, Aparna Devare quotes Savarkar to emphasize the political dimension of the festival. He wanted the religious dimensions to be downplayed so that the nationalist purpose to unite the masses would be served (176). Against the political environment of freedom struggle, *Ganesh Utsav* was a deterritorialising act involving the community, and it was observed as a religious ritual intended to challenge the power centres and the establishment that was bent upon perpetrating an exploitative imperial administration. In the celebration of this festival, we see a “direct transference of private and public religious idiom into the nationalist campaign and a use of that idiom as a metaphor in the secular struggle” (Messelos 209). The late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a transformation of the festival under the leadership of Bal Gangadhar Thilak, who envisioned the possibility of uniting the people against the oppression of the British through this religious festival that was till then confined to a celebration of a much smaller proportion. After independence the mass appeal of the festival attracted political parties which donated huge amounts and also assumed the leadership in setting up gigantic installations. If the number of pandals in 1985 was 3000, in 2016, they rose to 12000 (Singh).

As the festival got reterritorialized in the post-independence period, its nature transformed and it was absorbed into the normative practices accepted and validated by the State machinery. After the rise to power of *Shiva Sena*, a party that thrived on an exclusionary political strategy and the Bombay riots of 1992, the festival was refurbished again with a wider participation and greater emphasis on its ethnic religious

identity along with greater acceptance and encouragement from the hegemonic power elite. According to Parthasarathy, there is an increasing presence of political parties as well as other collectives at festival venues which serve to increase the visibility of these parties due to the large-scale participation of the masses. It became “a mobilization strategy for political parties” (51).

Tracing the history of *Ganesh Utsav*, Bombay’s (Mumbai) religious festivals unfold in two spaces that were once mutually exclusive, namely, domestic and public spaces. “In the private or semi-private aspects of the festivals, specific group or religious solidarity was affirmed. Those who participated formed the core for the later display associated with the public part of the festival. It was they who marched, carried gods or symbols, and sang and danced through the streets” (Masselos 206). When the festival begins, idols of *Ganesh* are installed in homes and in public spaces across Mumbai. There are *sarvajanikmandals* where these idols are installed, with larger than life idols and involving the participation of volunteers, artists, sculptors and vendors. Theme-based *pandals*, eco-friendly idols, *mandals* with a cause ranging from “conservation of trees, the efforts of the city’s silent heroes, and organ donation” all form part of the spirit of this festival. (Your Guide) After rituals and prayers are offered to the idols, they are carried out as a procession and the idols immersed in water (*visarjan*), be it a river or the seas. Mostly, men do the immersion, accompanied by drums and trumpets, and the streets turn into predominantly male dominated spaces.

Post neoliberalism, *Ganesh Utsav* occupies a unique position within the socio-political and cultural discourses, especially with regards to Mumbai. While major paradigm shifts in religious practices happened, this festival re-imagined itself into another commodified cultural product. Now, it has become a garrulous display of opulence, satisfying the phallic fantasies of a predominantly patriarchal culture. Snippets of data on the festival in Mumbai will clarify this further. In 2017, Keshavji Naik chawl, Girgaum became the oldest *mandal* which has been celebrated since 1893. (Your Guide) In 2017, 7610 public mandals and 119 points of immersion were arranged across the city of Mumbai (Police) and Lalbaugcharaja Sarvajanik *Mandal* had a footfall of 1.5 crore in 2016 (Your Guide). The temporarily built *Ganeshapandals* often encroach into footpaths and roads, but officials are reluctant to remove them, even when they are installed without permission. (Space to Pray) The pervasiveness of this festival across the city is overwhelming, and violations, be it in the case of noise pollution or encroachments, are ignored by the authorities. “Civil society organizations, and corporate spokespersons both condemn and speak out against illegal occupation of urban spaces, while they simultaneously collaborate in this practice through sponsorship of these cultural events” (Parthasarathy 52).

Lefebvre speaking on spaces, described the rhythms that define the experience of spatiality. Lived spaces appropriate themselves through the rhythms that “change ceaselessly. As it approaches the shore, it takes the shock of the back-wash: it carries numerous wavelets, right down to the tiny quiver that it orientates, but which do not always go in its direction. Waves and wave forms are characterized by frequency, amplitude and displaced energy” (Lefebvre and Regulier 9). Though the work on rhythm analysis offers immense scope in analysing urban spatial experiences and had the potential to be developed further, it was one of his last projects. *Ganesh Utsav*, for the participant and for the observer, opens up a plethora of possibilities to experience the urban spaces as they get transformed during the festival. Lefebvre uses the image of seas to explain the movements of the rhythms of the city space. He says: “there is something maritime about the rhythms. Currents traverse the masses. Streams break off, which bring or take away new participants. Some of them go towards the jaws of the monster, which gobbles them down in order quite quickly to throw them back up. The tide invades the immense square, then withdraws: flux and reflux” (Lefebvre 35).

In Indian spaces, these rhythms are complex since our public spaces are governed by ethnic, religious, class and caste hierarchies. The interventions of power structures are multi-dimensional in nature, thus any analysis of social interactions unravels the tripartite divisions of space and their mutual interventions.

They (rhythms) go on to discuss the differences between the public and the private spheres. The description of the private sphere remains as close as possible to the body, to gesture, to behavior, to habits. Hence, close to everyday life (the way the meals are prepared, how one sleeps) and to what is outside everyday routine (the way one dances, sings, makes music). State power and the citizens contend with one another for urban public space. Political power tries to intervene, to dominate space with its own monuments. ... The citizens live their everyday and business rhythms in this struggle for the appropriation of public space. By making this urban public space the place of strolling around, of encounters, of

discussions and negotiations, of intrigue and spectacle, they appropriate it spontaneously. The time and rhythms of the people combine with the space these people inhabit. (Meyer 158)

## Dissolving Binaries of Sacred and Profane Spaces

*Ganesh Utsav* subverts the norms and blurs the borders that separate profane and sacred spaces, on the streets through hierotopia, thereby creating sacred spaces within profane spaces. Sacred spaces are complex and involve polysemic processes, with body and performativity playing significant roles. Another aspect is religious rituals and sites that are considered sacred and this sacredness is ensured through rituals that are performative and involve spaces, in this age, both corporeal and virtual. “Ritual...can transmogrify spaces both large and small through its capability to transplant objects, bodies, light, sound, and community from one location to another” (Corrigan 164-5). Ritualistic religious practices “denatures, mutates, and restyles space.... Through prayers, bodily motions, tears, silence, sexual relations, and by a multitude of other means, ritual sacralizes landscapes of various scales and locates them with reference to a human body, a community, or an axis mundi” (Corrigan 165). Rituals thus help fix the boundaries of the sacred and profane as we define religious sites. “Threshold ablutions, such as washing in a fountain or sprinkling holy water on one’s person, typically fulfill this requirement” (Corrigan 168). Along with rituals, religious structures and iconography play key roles in this definition of the sacred and the profane. Yet this categorisation of the sacred and the profane is a fluid one, as we glance beyond the rigidity of the places of worship, and more towards alternative spaces in society. Orlando Woods, while discussing the church-houses in Sri Lanka states that sacred spaces are temporary and symbolic with their own ritualistic practices. “Knowledge of how the body is implicated in the production and maintenance of sacred networks at various scales of analysis—from the embodied (e.g. in spirited worship), to the congregational (e.g. collective effervescence), and the transcendental (eg. spiritual healing and exorcism)—is needed in order to connect the microscale practices of the body with more broad-based assertions of spiritual authority” (Woods 1073). As we move further to a festival such as *Ganesh Utsav*, the practices and the processes change further. “There are many ways in which every-day spaces can be implicated in religious meaning-making, legitimating, maintaining and enhancing, but also challenging religious life, beliefs, practices and identities” (Kong 758). In Mumbai’s public spaces, religious identity remains at the subliminal level, hardly visible amidst the cacophony of class identities and the wide gender spectrum. Its political presence, post the Bombay riots of 1992, is a forceful one, yet the business of everyday living and the struggle to succeed keeps the masses preoccupied.

Apart from the unique nature of Mumbai spaces and the context of *Ganesh* festival, Hindu religious practices are also distinct and exceptional unlike the sharply divided spaces of the sacred and the profane as in the rest of the world. Bodley, while discussing Hindu religious traditions has written about this blurring of boundaries of the profane and the sacred in Hindu rituals. Diana Eck also highlighted this aspect of Hindu religious aesthetics. “The use of the word *murti* in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavat Gita* suggest that the form is its essence...the term itself suggests the congealing of form and limit from that larger reality that has no form of presence itself” (7). Icons are therefore not representations of the divine, but “the image is ultimately the message” itself (Davis qtd in Bodley 220). “These images are not a substitute or simulacra of something else, but a form of presence itself. In this context, the ‘copy’ culture of producing divine imagery, that extends from ancient sculpture to contemporary poster art, does not increase the viewer’s distance from the original; instead such artworks multiply rather than limit our access to the divine” (Bodley 220). This makes it permissible to have temporary idols across the city, with their sacred haloed divinity intact, even when surrounded by makeshift structures and profane practices. *Darsan* in temples, Bodley opines, is a “visual activity” that is “reciprocal and inter-subjective.” “Inter-subjective encounters have the power to transform the person who merely sees or hears the artwork—in the temple, the gaze is a soteriological one, remaking the observer like an initiation” (Bodley 220). *Darsan* in temporary venues, are deemed equally sacred and treasured for their divine presence since the divinity is ascribed through secular practices like the art and aesthetics employed in creating these spaces. “... (Hinduism) contains an aesthetic system that makes culturally distinctive assumptions about art, worship and the relationship between secular and

sacred. Hinduism uses religious art as a powerful tool for helping individuals at all levels of the social hierarchy to experience a feeling of contact with an ultimate eternal reality that transcends their daily mortal concerns” (Bodley 221). This was also a method to override caste differences that restricted entry into temple premises and other places of worship. Such venues entitled with divine presence were conceived using the principles of hierotopy, which resulted in dissolving the binaries of sacred and profane, though caste hierarchies remained persistent with regards to sacred spaces with the Brahmins enjoying a monopoly of it.

Alexei Lidov postulated this new concept called hierotopy in 2001, which was the output of extensive research done around Christian religious culture. Hierotopy discusses religious icons as socially constructed and built around performative aspects of human social interactions. “Hierotopy is deeply rooted in the studies of relics and miraculous icons” and “the most significant aspect of relics and miraculous icons was the role they played in the creation of particular sacred spaces” (Lidov 64). In building a spatial environment of sacredness, these icons play a significant role. “This milieu included permanently visible architectural forms and various pictures as well as changing liturgical clothes and vessels, lighting effects and fragrance, ritual gestures and prayers, which created a unique spatial complex every time” (Lidov 62-3). This environment is created deliberately through systematic planning and designing. “The creation of sacred spaces can be compared with pictorial creativity, which also belongs to visual culture and appears spontaneously at the very early stage of the shaping of personality” (Lidov 64).

The venue of *Ganesh Utsav* is the *sarvajanikmandals* temporarily constructed across the city, often encroaching into footpaths and roads, thereby obstructing the daily commute. They dazzle the worshipper by creating an atmosphere using “complex dramaturgy of fire and light” (Lidov 66). The architecture, though temporary, resembles the mythical past, often borrowing heavily from stories and legends of the past, and recreating palaces, temples and similar structures. “The same is true for the realm of fragrance, which presents every time new combinations of incense, the smells of wax candles and aromatic oils in lamps” (Lidov 68). The spatial identity of the *mandals*, though erected in the middle of a crowded street, is meticulously maintained using the principles of hierotopy. It displays “detailed elaboration of a concept of particular sacred space, a kind of “spatial icon,” which included, beyond material images and venerated holy objects, various rituals, and chanting, lighting, censoring effects” (Lidov 71).

The interaction between the site, altered through “spatial icons” (Lidov 77), and the visitor is a dialectical one, with the venue creating sacredness and the beholder validating it by ascribing those qualities on to them. This complicated system of interaction aids in the meaning making process, thus dismantling the sacred/profane dichotomy. As mentioned earlier, in the context of Hindu belief system and Hindu sacred rites,

...the most characteristic feature of hierotopic phenomena, however, is the participation of the beholder in the spatial image: he finds himself within the image as its integral element, along with various representations and effects created by lights, scents, gestures and sounds. Furthermore, the beholder, as endowed with collective and individual memory, unique spiritual experience and knowledge, somehow participates in creating the spatial imagery. Simultaneously, the image exists in objective reality as a dynamic structure, adapting its elements according to an individual perception, some aspects of the spatial entity being accentuated or temporarily downplayed (Lidov 77-78).

The spatial icons thus created, encompass the artistic, visual and ritual elements that construct the environment and it functions primarily through its visual elements. It is not elements of mysticism or the divine stature that is projected on to the idol, that works the magic, rather it is an integrated whole constructed through these “image-paradigms” (Lidov 78). While the binaries are thus dismantled, *Ganesh Utsav* remains a deeply religious ceremony, yet it seeks to transcend the boundaries to emerge as a political act that helps build a narrative which shapes contemporary India.

## Contemporary Scenario: Saffronisation and Neoliberal Practices

“The cultural is continuously interpenetrated by the political and is thereby transformed into ideology (and)...the political is constantly expressed, articulated and objectified in terms of cultural forms and performances” (Cohen 8). Within this framework of the cultural and the political structures, *Ganesh Utsav*, with its political and social implications, ought to be analysed in the context of its relationship with its spatial identity and its relationship to national identity. In the context of carnivals as cultural expressions that articulate political reality, Cohen postulated the concept of masquerade politics which seems the apt term to describe the carnivalesque identity of *Ganesh Utsav*, that inundates the public urban spaces of Mumbai during the months of August-September every year. Masquerade politics helps understand the “politics articulated in terms of non-political cultural forms such as religion, kinship and the arts” (Cohen ix). Since “political action is intended and rational,” and cultural action is unintended and non-rational,” it seems an intelligent choice to study cultural practices for a deeper insight into the political reality of the times (Cohen 8).

While evaluating *Ganesh Utsav*, as a religious and cultural practice that blends the binaries of sacred and profane, its garrulous, opulent expressions that assuage the senses of the devotee and the city dweller alike, it unfolds its carnivalesque features which are plentiful. “Carnival is a complex phenomenon, characterized by contradictions between the serious and the frivolous, the expressive and the instrumental, the controlled and the uncontrolled, by themes of conflict as well as of consensus” (Cohen 3-4) “a cultural, artistic spectacle, saturated by music, dance and drama” (Cohen 4), and it is also a deeply political act. To cite an example that elucidates the political dimension, Parthasarathy states thus: “The notorious gangster ChotaRajan’s opportunistic dalliance with Hindutva forces and his well-publicised massive installations for the *Ganesh* festival originated in the need to project his opposition to upper caste domination” (51). To establish this connection further between culture and politics that masquerade politics construes, Bakhtin’s delineation of the carnival is the ideal theoretical tool.

## Carnival and Bakhtin

Bakhtin put forth his theory of the carnival in the work *Rebels and his World* (1984). He spoke of the culture of folk carnival humor. While tracing social living patterns Bakhtin identified the official patterns intended to reinforce social hierarchies. Official feasting was one of them. Apart from the official feast, there were carnivals where the official social order was reversed.

As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all the hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. (45)

*Ganesh Utsav* as a festival that has as its sites, both homes as well as the streets, resembles a carnival in its character. Cutting across the barriers of caste and class, people assemble and share the space of the *sarvajanikmandals*. Food, as offering, as *prasad* is distributed amongst the devotees. Celebrities visit these places religiously and partake in the festivities, even though they install idols at homes and conduct *poojas* and offerings within the intimate family spaces. Carnivals were not merely a reversal of social order, they also facilitated a release of social frustrations through inversion of social discourses. The language used was in itself a liberating experience for the participants.

This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. A special carnivalesque, marketplace style of expression was formed.... (Bakhtin 46)

Mumbai with its immense slum population faces acute housing problems and is probably one of the cities in India where one can witness the huge inequality in wealth that persists in the country. The mansions of the rich and the slums of the poor form the skyline of this city. Yet during festivals like the *Ganesh Utsav*, huge public gatherings along with festive processions define this cityscape. These carnivalesque moments exemplify political discourse that is built around these cultural practices.

Carnavalesque narratives are often ritual spectacles or comic shows or comic verbal compositions, or they belong to the genre of billingsgate. Carnivals have a carnival king who is a clown or a slave crowned for the occasion. This ritual of coronation is dualistic and ambivalent which expresses the contingency of authority and hierarchic positions. Location of a carnival, according to Bakhtin, is the market place which is an unofficial site controlled by people. This offers immense possibilities for free communication. There is a reversal and the absurd gets highlighted and venerated as the official in a mock serious manner.

A carnival is where the spectator and the performer become one and the same. Misalliances that encourage combinations of the sacred and the profane are accepted. It is a site for parody, blasphemy and profanity of all kinds. Carnavalesque imagery offers an alternative to official imagery. They are ambivalent and dualistic and seek to unite binaries of wisdom and stupidity. Since carnival provides an alternative construction of social relations, carnivalesque images are created by suspending or inverting social hierarchies. Grotesque images are created using the body as an incomplete amorphous entity. Laughter is generated to overcome fear and it is loud, collective and part of the sentiments shared by the community. It is a celebration of permissiveness and becomes an outlet to express anger and frustration that is directed at the power centres in the society. Through this unreal absurd world of a carnival, society offers a release of anger and frustration for the members of the community. It is a temporary release, suspension of social regulations. The rules are merely suspended and will be back in place once the carnival is over. This becomes a strategy employed by the hegemonic powers to ensure the sustenance of the existing power relations.

Mumbai's public urban spaces are dynamic spaces that reflect the reality of social existence. The crammed-up spaces and the overpopulated streets reveal layers of social interaction thereby unraveling the complex identity of this nation. If modern and pre-modern India had its soul in the villages, post modern, post-global India lives in the urban spaces like Mumbai. Mumbai's streets articulate the contradictory social values that plague the nation, the dialectically opposing norms and practices, that are further alienated from one another in postmodern India. Neoliberal capitalism, in the wake of economic liberalization policies of the 1990s, opened up the markets to luxury, and created a greater rift between the rich and the poor. The carnival-like moments in city spaces with its loud Bollywood music and dance, emerge as a formidable presence on the streets while the procession moves towards immersion sites. They are also meant to attenuate any sign of resistance towards the prevalent social structures. The participatory nature of the festival, the populist dimension which permits non-Brahmins to officiate as priests makes it a popular event. We witness the transmutation of the festival from that of a nationalist collective intended to unite the people against the British to that of an event meant to substantiate the claims of the Hindutva nationalist agenda. Establishing the processes that characterize *Ganesh Utsav* as being carnivalesque, further brings to focus the festival in relation to the political, economic and cultural narratives of the nation.

## Festival as Heterotopia and the Process of Territorialisation

A religious festival that is celebrated as a carnival creates a heterotopia, and during the ten days of festival, the experience of space is ambivalent as well. Heterotopia, as defined by Foucault in his essay "Other Spaces" (1984), is unlike real spaces, a utopia, that is both real and unreal like a mirror. *Ganesh Utsav* is not a crisis heterotopia, nor is it a heterotopia of deviation. It encompasses several of the principles listed out as features that help us delineate heterotopias. "It is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place, several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (6). Heterotopias are also linked "to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival" (7). Heterotopias "presuppose a system that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" (7). They are not freely accessible "like a public place" (7). There could be gestures or rites as part of a purification process thereby ensuring a

process of othering or “hide curious cases of exclusion” (7). These spaces are heterotopias of “illusion” and “compensation” (8). Public urban spaces turn into heterotopic spaces during the festival. It subverts the norms of the sacred spaces. Icons are negotiated by neoliberal practices of the market and new assemblages are formed that create these heterotopias. Its features are carnivalesque, aimed at stabilizing the urban experience, where the hierarchy, inequality, the sense of powerlessness and the miserable living conditions do not initiate dissent or revolt, due to these de-territorialising moments and events in history. Subversion of hegemony momentarily creates moments of subversion, thereby altering the patterns of social structures.

As heterotopic spaces, *Ganesh Utsav* has a long history and has evolved in its practice of religious ritualism in ways that yield to illuminating insights into the Indian social consciousness. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome that is built in interesting yet intricate ways, will help in further reading of the festival. Their coherent understanding of the process of assemblages transforming themselves and assuming new identities through a process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation aptly delineates the festival of *Ganesh Utsav* and its significance in the grand narrative of the nation. According to Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomatic structures can be explained with a few principles. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), they list these principles: Rhizome follows the “principles of connection and heterogeneity” (7), “principle of multiplicity” (8) and asserts that “multiplicities are rhizomatic” (8). “A rhizome or multiplicity occupies all dimensions and it is not possible to be overcoded and lines of flight mark the finiteness where it is not possible to add dimensions further which leads to deterritorialisation. This results in transformation of structures” (Deleuze and Guattari 9). *Ganesh Utsav* as a rhizomatic structure that is shaped within the structures of economic, political and religious multiplicities and building a dialectical relationship with one another, its religious identity being exploited by hegemonic powers, for moulding a Hindu identity.

*Ganesh Utsav* with all its complexities provides an interesting spatial experience that can be analysed and comprehended through the concept of rhizomes and multiplicities. As a heterotopic assemblage, *Ganesh Utsav* operates at two levels: as a religious festival that has been evolving over time and as a spatial entity that elaborates upon the various socio-political entities that have evolved over time into the national discourse. As a religious structure, during the struggle for independence from the imperial rule, its heterotopic presence was part of a subversive act of resistance. It has been reterritorialising itself to evolve as a product of the Hindutva nationalistic identity. As a spatial presence, it reflects the syncretic patterns of neoliberalism and globalization, infusing within its practices, the consumerism and transnational identity, in the form of glitzy, gigantic idols, huge donations, the selfies with the idols that populate the virtual spaces and the invasive presence of popular culture within the sanctified space of the *mandals*.

Deleuze and Guattari further explain thus: “Every rhizome has lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized” (9) and “when they explode into lines of flight, there is rupture, resulting in deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation” (9). The encounter of religion with neoliberal capitalist structures defines this shift, the rupture and reterritorialisation. *Ganesh Utsav* can be used to comprehend this dynamic. Its character as a religious festival has evolved as a response to the neoliberal practices and the festival exhibits a true consumer culture, with several millions of currency trading hands during the ten days of the festival.

Globalisation triggers “resurgence of national, regional, ethnic and territorial attachments” and a “regression to tribal loyalties” (Robins 244). Urban spaces in India unfold the shift in hegemonic power structures post globalization. While emergence of the right wing has resulted in a paradigm shift, towards a rhetoric of militant aggressive nationalism, it has also weakened the nation state with alternate power centres rising stronger—namely conservative religious identities. A new State with fiercely guarded borders ferociously protecting global economic powers seems to have consolidated itself into power. *Ganesh Utsav* is a politicized religious event that is a dynamic spectacle encapsulating the shifting normative structures, towards a Hindu political discourse.

“As a response to both postmodernisation and globalization, there will be a corresponding fundamentalization of culture and society by social groups who want to oppose post-modern consumerism” (Turner 155). Urban public spaces have been witnessing an increasing saffronisation which is normalized and arrogantly asserted in the context of *Ganesh Utsav*. During this festival, the politics of presence strikes us while observing streets of Mumbai. *Ganesh Utsav* sees streets being encroached upon and political

leaders of the right wing groups actively participating and offering their leadership skills in conducting these massive processions. With noise beyond permissible levels, with crackers and drums beyond 11:00pm and *mandals* blatantly defying the rules of pollution, *Ganesh Utsav* has been growing in proportion every year. Brahmins maintain a degree of hegemony in *visarjan*(immersion) and installation, though people of other castes officiate these ceremonies as well. Beyond the sacred space of the temples, the hegemony of the Brahmin is subverted to a certain degree.

As globalisation results in neoliberal practices encapsulating social structures, *Ganesh Utsav* too turns into a tourist event. The tourist gaze is welcomed and the State of Maharashtra conducts tours through the various community organized festival venues across Mumbai. The festival also witnesses a spilling over of corporeal spaces into virtual spaces, with the festival being celebrated by the diaspora and the simulated experience of the ritualistic religious practice flourishing through social- and multi-media spaces. Surveillance in the form of cctv cameras, police and security personnel, drones, NGOs, and helicopters, ensures that the festivities are under State control, though the atmosphere of the carnival is maintained. The new identity of the festival and the investment made to ensure the grandeur associated with it, becomes evident when the insurance details of various *sarvajanikmandals* are looked into. While GSB Mandal was insured for 2642000000 INR for a period of five days, Lalbaugcha Raja Mandal was insured for 510000000 INR. Large scale social participation is ensured, nevertheless, the shifting allegiances post 2014, to a rampant Hindutva nationalism, remains visible as an arrogant presence. Hindutva politics has radically altered itself to dominate the entire urban space during the *Ganesh Utsav*. State machinery, with distinct allegiances, intrudes, and seeks to normalise a process of othering and exclusion. The increasing visibility of the saffron flags and the aggressive masculine Hindutva identity is remarkably pervasive during the festival.

Social structures assume the form of assemblages which “in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows and social flows simultaneously. There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)” (Deleuze and Guattari 22-3). They establish connections with multiplicities and form multiplicities, the rhizomatic structures getting revealed further, as the structures shape and reshape themselves. While this cancels the concept of evolution and binaries, we can perceive the concept of territorialisation in this context. Deleuze and Guattari understood social structures and biological beings as segmented in every way possible. “The human being is a segmentary animal. Segmentarity is inherent to all the strata composing us. Dwelling, getting around, working, playing: life is spatially and socially segmented” (208). Awareness of this segmentarity enables us to perceive social reality in its intricate ways. “Primitive segmentarity is characterized by a polyvocal code based on lineages and their varying situations and relations, and an itinerant territoriality based on local, overlapping divisions. Codes and territories, clan lineages and tribal territorialities, form a fabric of relatively supple segmentarity” (209).

These segmentarities are experienced at molar and molecular level. “The stronger the molar organization is, the more it induces a molecularization of its own elements, relations, and elementary apparatuses” (215). Lines of flight are molecular and they define social relations and sensibilities at any point in time. “The issue is that the molar and the molecular are distinguished not by size, scale, or dimension but by the nature of the system of reference envisioned. And in every instance, we can locate a “power center” at the border between the two, defined not by an absolute exercise of power within its domain but by the relative adaptations and conversions it effects between the line and the flow” (217). Each power centre is molecular and works with the finest details, thus “ensuring exercise of its power on a micro-logical fabric in which it exists only as diffuse, dispersed, geared down, miniaturized, perpetually displaced, acting by fine segmentation, working in detail and in the details of detail” (224). The State apparatus as a molar structure, defines these molecular structures along with war machines and other assemblages.

As molar structures, “ethnicity and religion ... are cross-cutting and competing more effectively than before with national vectors of power” (McAlister 251). While religious discourse assumes ethical and moral dimensions and is believed to be distanced from political discourses, the reality is that they share a dialectical relationship, mutually influencing and shaping national sensibilities. In the era of de-secularising Hindutva identities, spatiality is a core element, with exclusion and inclusion playing

a dynamic role in defining the nation space. From the universalizing Nehruvian policies of secularism, Hindutva has shaped itself, spatially identifying itself, through remapping cartographies and redesigning iconographies. For the new nationalist Hindutva brigade, the pride and honor felt over a mythical past, as revealed and celebrated through the religious televised series of the 1980s, has become more potent than the abstract norms and values, as corroborated by the ruling elite of the post-Nehru decades. As a rhizomatic structure, as an assemblage that is evolving, the new Hindu identity, evolves through these ritualistic moments, and by being carnivalesque, it resists its own decadence. The flows and changes, made possible through its carnivalesque properties, enable this festival to be a key element in shaping the identity of the new Indian self. These heterotopias consolidate the power structures, with least resistance, since they are moments in time and space where utopias are created, and hegemonies are challenged in order to consolidate the new hegemonic structures in society. “The contemporary spatial strategies of *Hindutva* may be said to be based on three specific ideological constructs (or heterotopias), namely, the site, the locality, and the route; These strategies partly complement and partly contradict other contemporary ideologies (notably, that of “globalization”), so that the overall outcome of their complex interaction is difficult to determine” (Deshpande 3220).

## Conclusion

*Ganesh Utsav* and the ten days of carnival, transforming the city spaces in a monumental proportion, offers an excellent experience of the heterotopic space where assemblages deterritorialise and reterritorialise, responding to the social structures that are evolving, post globalization and economic liberalization. The magnitude and grandeur of the festival stretches out to normalise the process of saffronisation that has successfully tagged itself to the festival that was once a subversive, yet secular strategy, to instill a sense of community against the imperial rule.

Mumbai as a global city, exhibits transnational sensibilities, is connected to the rest of the world and foregrounds its cosmopolitan character to the world. Its humungous density of population along with the challenges it offers to the urban planners, does not deter the city, in its constant re-shaping of its destiny, to suit the social reality of the times. Mumbai’s public spaces foreground its identity, as an Indian city, a global entity and reveal a cultural identity that is deeply entrenched in its ethnic and religious sensibilities. *Ganesh Utsav* ideally exposes these complex structures simultaneously manifesting themselves as rituals, norms and values. Globalisation and neoliberalism, with its resultant social changes, have complicated it further. The rampant Hinduisation with stricter adherence to ritualistic religious practices, and the exclusionary political strategies of the right wing leadership have resulted in an added significance to this event which is largely religious. The principles of bricolage that the festivities display, as we now celebrate as *Ganesh Utsav* is the new assemblage, reterritorialised to the new Indian aesthetics and politics that has been shaping the new nation in the new millennium.

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