



Marigolds are one of Lord Ganesha's favorite flowers.

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Ganesh Chaturthi

Ganesh Chaturthi is a 10-day Hindu festival that celebrates and honors the birthday of Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Lord Ganesha represents wisdom, prosperity and good fortune.



Annual celebration

Because the Hindu religion uses a lunar calendar, festivals do not fall on the same date every year. Ganesh Chaturthi always takes place during a waxing moon. This year, it begins on Saturday, August 22.

Where in the world

Lord Ganesha is worshipped in Hindu communities around the world, but especially in India, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nepal and China.

Traditions

During the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi, many people place Ganesha clay or papier-mâché idols in their homes. Colorful public **pandals** (temporary shrines or stages) are set up, and offerings of food and prayers are presented. Sweets are distributed from the pandal to the community. In addition to the reading of Hindu texts, group feasting and athletic and martial arts competitions are also held.

The festival ends after 10 days, when a public procession (with music and singing) carries the clay idol to a nearby body of water, where it is immersed. It is estimated that in the city of Mumbai alone, about 150,000 statues are immersed every year.

As the clay idol dissolves, it is believed Ganesha returns to Mount Kailash and his parents, Parvati and Shiva.

Festival history

The exact history of Ganesh Chaturthi is not known, but it was celebrated as a public event by **King Shivaji** of the **Maratha Empire** in the 1600s.

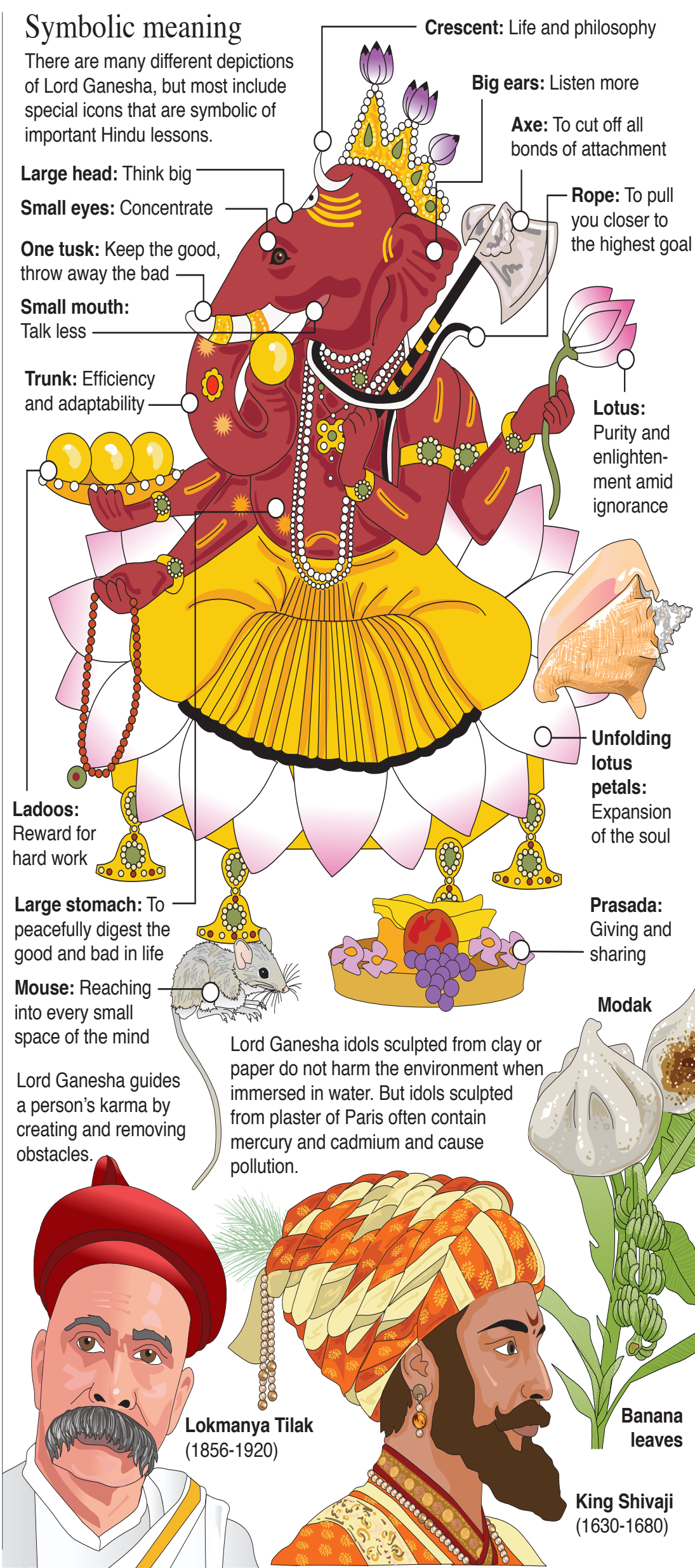
In 1893, an Indian rights activist named **Lokmanya Tilak** advocated for a public Ganesh Chaturthi celebration as a way to circumvent the colonial British government's ban on Hindu gatherings.

Symbolic meaning

There are many different depictions of Lord Ganesha, but most include special icons that are symbolic of important Hindu lessons.

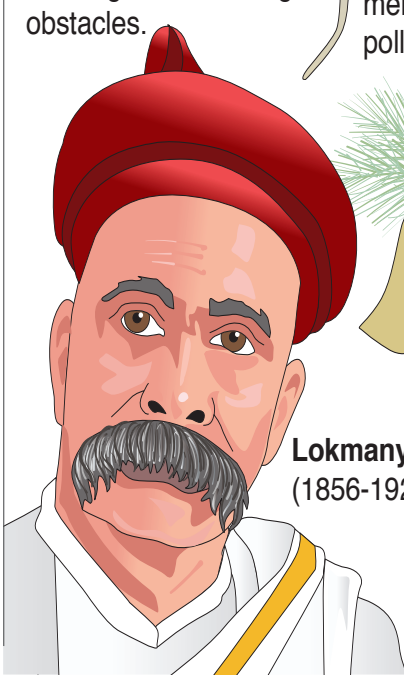
- Large head:** Think big
- Small eyes:** Concentrate
- One tusk:** Keep the good, throw away the bad
- Small mouth:** Talk less
- Trunk:** Efficiency and adaptability
- Ladoos:** Reward for hard work
- Large stomach:** To peacefully digest the good and bad in life
- Mouse:** Reaching into every small space of the mind

Lord Ganesha guides a person's karma by creating and removing obstacles.




- Crescent:** Life and philosophy
- Big ears:** Listen more
- Axe:** To cut off all bonds of attachment
- Rope:** To pull you closer to the highest goal
- Lotus:** Purity and enlightenment amid ignorance
- Unfolding lotus petals:** Expansion of the soul
- Prasada:** Giving and sharing
- Modak**

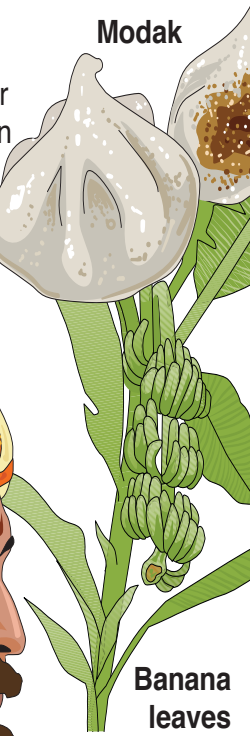
Lord Ganesha idols sculpted from clay or paper do not harm the environment when immersed in water. But idols sculpted from plaster of Paris often contain mercury and cadmium and cause pollution.



Lokmanya Tilak (1856-1920)



King Shivaji (1630-1680)



Banana leaves

Did you know?

Ganesha is known by 108 different names, including **Vighna Harta** (remover of obstacles) and **Buddhi Pradaayaka** (giver of wisdom and intellect).

Some devotees chant the "Om Ganeshaya Namah" mantra at least 108 times while performing the **puja** (morning worship ritual). It is believed that those who chant the mantra will achieve all desires.

Lord Ganesha is often depicted holding a **conch shell**. The conch shell is important in Hindu culture because it makes a unique and holy sound.

Lord Ganesha is sometimes portrayed with just one tusk, because Ganesha once broke his tooth and hurled it at the Moon for laughing at his belly.

It is traditional to present 21 blades of **durva grass** (Bermuda grass) to the Ganesha idol. Durva strands are tied together, dipped in water for freshness, and then offered to the deity. Durva grass cured Lord Ganesha's stomach pain after he swallowed a demon.

Food for thought

Many devotees of Lord Ganesha will fast for the first day of the festival (Lord Ganesha's birthday), while others choose to fast for all 10 days.

Those who are not fasting might enjoy sweets such as modak, laddoo, gajak and rewari.

Modak is one of Lord Ganesha's favorite sweets. These small sweet and savory balls of rice dough are boiled and stuffed with grated coconut along with jaggery and dry fruits. The plate presented to Lord Ganesha should have exactly 21 pieces.

The elephant-headed god is also fond of fresh fruit, especially bananas. People also offer garlands made with banana leaves along with the stem of the banana plant and banana flowers.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://www.indiatoday.in/>; <https://rgyan.com>; <https://www.timesnownews.com>; <https://daily.bhaskar.com>

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