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By Anant Pai



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No traditional Hindu will launch upon a new undertaking without invoking Ganesha, for it is he, as Vighneshwara, prime remover of obstacles, who clears the path to success. The Sarvajanik puja or public worship of Ganesha, however, is popular mostly in Maharashtra and Orissa. Contributions are collected from the neighborhood and a huge idol of the deity, is installed in a public place. A variety entertainment is held after the daily worship each evening, when the devotees assemble before the deity. The idol is later taken in procession and ceremonially immersed in water. The legends about the birth and exploits of this deity are many; different Puranas giving different versions of the same incidents. Our story, however, is based solely on the Shiva Purana version. On the heights of Mount Kailasa, the divine household of Shiva and Parvati stood divided; for, Shiva came and went as he pleased and Parvati was irked by his intrusions on her privacy. Out of that divine dissension was born Ganesha, who rose to become perhaps the most lovable deity in the Hindu pantheon. His lineaments are familiar - for song, story and ritual have made them so - elephant head with trunk curled gracefully over a generous pot-belly, four arms bearing his distinctive emblems of godhood and his portly figure mounted on a tiny mouse, his chosen vehicle. There are many interpretations of this unique combination. The most popular is that in the deity are embodied the power and the wisdom of the elephant and the mobility of the agile mouse.



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