

## INDIAN NEW YEAR WELCOME PROCESSION

--Its concept, planning and scope

The greatness of Indian thought is being acknowledged world over in spheres of life including knowledge, science, philosophy, arts, sports, culture and education. The rising young Indian generation of Indians in India and in the nook and corner of the world is marching ahead with heightened sensitivity upholding the Indian culture tradition. While achieving economic prosperity at this juncture, it has become imperative on our part to conduct ourselves with uniform and single-minded thinking.

It is said in the "Rigveda", you should come together, you all should speak alike and wisdom should get real knowledge. We have been taught this ever since the Vedic period. In the present day, the life has become so complex and fast that we hardly meet each other personally. It is doubtful whether our mobility is increased or decreased due to the availability of computers or mobile phones. Personally we are missing the spirit of Vedic scripture referred above. On one hand we are talking about the globalization and on the other we are becoming narrow minded and self-centered. It is easy to say that there is unity in diversity but what is the ground reality? We are supporting the divisiveness. The globalization will succeed in real sense of the term only if we shed our sickly passions and increase our conscience. The concept of globalization has its origin in Indian philosophy. 'The entire earth is a family' the entire world should see the spirit of dharma'. The real meaning of globalization lies in the enfoldment of these principals. But why is it that the Indians have forgotten them? The reason is: We were enslaved by foreigners for centuries. Our own motherland had become a large prison for all of us. We lost our identity and self-respect. We took pride in emulating evaluating our political masters. There we forgot our strength and ability. Now the time has come to remind ourselves. "Arise! Awake and stop not till the goal is reached".

We must present before the world the legacy of Indian thought when the globalization has just started developing under the influence of purely economic considerations. But the question is we mean whom? Government? Can Government undertake this responsibility? In fact, we the people should take up this matter and present over legacy as per our capability. Our forefathers have imbibed on our mind that we are the sons of immortality. So we should never say, who am I and shrink our responsibility.

I don't ask much from you. Your precious little time in a year. Just a few hours on the Varsha Pratipada - The Hindu New Year Day. Normally we give sometime to our family. Now let us come together as a society with enthusiasm and also with a sense of pride, on the day of Varsha Pratipada our own Indian new year day. Not on the dark midnight of 31<sup>st</sup> December but at the dawn of Gudhi Padwa, the first day of Chaitra, when the light starts spreading.

We cherish this day as a beginning of the New Year. But it is also known for the birth of Universe. We believe that Lord Brahma created this world on this very day. So not only Indians but also the people all over the world should celebrate this day with reverence. In fact globalization is synonymous with "the earth itself is a family." Lord Rama returned to Ayodhya on this very day defeating his evil-spirited enemy. For us it is a day of victory of good over the evil. In fact, the entire world should celebrate this good occasion. But if the world does not realized the message of this day, we must make them realize its meaning.

The world rejoiced festivals and so it would definitely appreciate the grand meaning of this day. Let us undertake the responsibility of conveying this message to the world. Let the whole world celebrate this day of the birth of universe and the day of victory of good over the evil. Our forefathers must have celebrated this day wherever they were. Over a period of time man has progressed a lot through struggle and co-ordination.

Today let us come together with the understanding that the Earth is our mother and we are her sons and daughters. Thanks to the development of science and technology so that the fastest means of communication are at our disposal. We can communicate through print media, i.e. dailies, weeklies, monthlies or other periodicals and also through audio-visual means, computers and cell phones. We can communicate and express our joy through these mediums. Can we not include them in this venture? Yes, we certainly can. Those who request us to celebrate first January as new year day can be told to celebrate the Gudhi Padwa since we are just following their footsteps. As we listen to you, you please listen to us. Let us collectively celebrate the birthday of this universe. If Diwali is celebrated in the White House, the presidential palace in America, and China government has granted permission to Indians residing there to organize the New Year welcome procession, it means the Indian concept of New Year has been universally accepted all over.

We must explain to the world, a rationale behind this celebration. We must explain to them that the Indian wheel of time is more realistic and scientific and as per cycle of the season. If November is 9 and December is 10, how did they become 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> month? If March means proceed or go ahead, should it not be the first month of the year? Chaitra is the month of 'March' in India. It accelerates the wheel of time. In many years the financial year starts around this time. So Chaitra means beginning of the cycle of time is not merely a mathematical phenomenon but it has a living relationship with the nature and its five elements.

In many parts of India Gudhi Padwa is considered as a New Year day. New year Welcome procession has started in many of these parts and cities therein. In Maharashtra, this concept is gathering momentum in many places. IN foreign countries, Maharashtra Mandals have started taking initiative in organizing public celebration of this event. Thousands of people from Maharashtra have sent the reports of this celebration in India to their kiths and kins as well as friends and relatives settled in foreign countries. Naturally in many countries outside India, this celebration is being organized regularly and enthusiastically. The local people of these countries have been explained the concept and significance of this day, i.e. the birthday of this Universe. SO they have also started participating in these celebrations.

Let us give a philosophical foundation to this movement. Here there is no discrimination based neither on caste, creed and religion nor on the basis of political differences. Politics or political considerations should not be allowed to enter this noble movement. It is a festival of all people, rich and poor alike. It is a grand vision of social assimilation where we stand as one people. Let us all come together on this day for a couple of hours in festive mood and share the joy of this day. Those who join this celebration of Gudhi Padwa will understand the importance of organized social life and will get inspiration effectively run their organization throughout the year. Individuals will also get inspiration to make this concept universal so that it will be accepted all over.

The spirit of this festival is to free this world from the shackles of differences, quarrels and hostility and the spirit of liberation should prevail. The Shri Ganesh Mandir

Sansthan took the initiative in forming the New Year procession. Their experience is unique. It has become a festival of youth. They not only participate in this procession but by materializing novel concepts they add new dimensions to this activity. The youth of the 'Chaturang' a socio-cultural organization decorated a chariot conveying a message "To vote is not only your right, but it is your duty as well. Even the former President of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam overwhelmed when he knew about this. Shri Ravi Shankar founded the organization called "Art of Living". The local youth of this organization decorated a chariot-with the slogan 'Cleanliness is next to godliness' to imbibe the concept of social cleanliness in the minds of the people. Many people serve tea, coffee or water to the pilgrims on the route of this procession. Many others pick up the use glass and empty bags to keep the road clean. There is a healthy competition to keep this city clean as well as beautiful. Host of people carry placards carrying messages, run decorated chariots, play Lezim - A grand reflection of the social association where young and old forget the difference in their age. All pilgrims try to maintain the sanity and purity of this occasion. Beautiful rangavli are drawn by women folk enroute the procession. Their presence adds new dimension to the beauty of this procession.

Co-operation, co-ordination, mutual understanding, all inclusiveness and sense of beauty are the hallmarks of the New Year welcome procession. Now a days it is rarely found in our social life. Even at the international level nobody thinks beyond self. Latest example is of the failure of the much talked about Copenhagen conference on protection of environment. We are all heading towards the destruction of the nature but there is no unanimity in plan and actions to protect and save the nature and our environment. Still we are tomtoming about the globalization. Unless the common man wakes up to realize the ground reality and stand united against this ill tendency, neither the conferences like this not the globalization will never be successful. We made a humble beginning in Dombivli. Now it has been accepted all over Maharashtra and beyond. We are confident. It will be appreciated, accepted and followed world over. This perhaps is the best means of true globalization. Can the birth of this universe be celebrated in a better way?

We are in the new era, when knowledge, science and information are marching ahead with good speed. In this long march let us not forget or ignore the welfare of the mother earth.

In this age of creativity, let us not forget the character building.

In a devastating storm of selfishness, let us not forget the welfare of mother Earth.

Those who understand and realize this should celebrate this grand occasion along with all others. Beginning must be made. Well began is half done. Our aim and objective is to bring welfare to this world and it is not a small goal.

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## **Planning of New Year welfare celebration in Dombivli (Maharashtra)**

The trustees of the Ganesh Mandir Sansthan, Dombivli conceived the idea of New Year welcome procession. In December 1993 meeting a topic was raised about the celebration of New Year on the midnight of 31<sup>st</sup> December and the preparations going on about it. Some trustees objected to this celebration and criticized this tendency. Rather than participating in this celebration why should we not give an effective alternative to it? Indian New Year dawn on Chaitra Shuddha Pratipada alias Gudhi Padwa. Why not should we make a fervent appeal to the people to come together and celebrate that day with grandeur, we thought.

Our principal deity, lord Ganesh, motivated us and we started working in that direction. We sent written appeals to all the religious institutions and various sects in Dombivli. The religions united and sincere activists welcomed this idea and responded favorably. We called a meeting which was attended by the representatives of the most of the organizations and sects, and promised us about their active participation.

Second letter was dispatched to all socio cultural organizations. In their meeting, it was realized that they also have welcomed our appeal. They felt that all those who have faith in the village deity should be encourage to come together. Let us bury the differences, if any, and relate the religious concept to the social concept to the social content and harmony, they opined. Detailed discussion was held; many ways and means of participation were suggested. The idea of decorated chariots was propounded. The entire city should be cleaned up and decorated. They unanimously accepted the suggestion that meetings of the individual organizations be convened at the earliest and public support be ensured to make this event a grand success.

It was thought that instead of sending printed appeals through the newspapers or door-to-door campaign, co-operation of educational institutions should be sought to reach the people and families effectively. The head masters of the schools responded to this idea enthusiastically. They made arrangements of handing over these appeals to their students through their teachers. Thus we reached the guardians with personal touch and appeal. Thousands of pamphlets reached thousands of homes and we received overwhelming response from them.

'Goal can be reached if all of us come together' goes the saying. We formed a reception committee incorporating leaders and opinion makers from all walks of life. We made a sincere appeal to all of them to bury our petty differences and bring out a single grand procession on the day of Varsha Pratipada. They responded whole-heartedly and assured us of their participation.

In the successive meetings, we received grand response from all over the city and it helped us to broaden the scope of this activity. Various programs were organized to ensure the participation of the various strata of society. A colorful play of firecrackers was arranged in different parts of the city on the eve of Gudhi Padwa. Tens of thousands of children and their parents enjoyed the show. The artist also performed various items to entertain the audience.

The whole city was agog with different programs throughout the next couple of months. In the first year itself sixty nine thousand people participated in the procession. Decorated chariots, artists groups enriched the contents of the procession. Self-discipline

was its hallmark. The procession started dot on 6 a.m. of the Varsha Pratipada and routed through pre-determined direction to reach the Ganesh Temple exactly at 9:30 a.m. People wore traditional dresses and participated in this disciplined venture. No colors were thrown in the precession. Everybody experienced free atmosphere as there was minimum control exercised. People showed remarkable sense of understanding. No untoward slogans were shouted to mar the spirit of the procession. The procession concluded after brief speeches by the dignitaries present and after completing necessary formalities within the shortest period of time. Everybody was inspired by the grandeur of this delightful procession.