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## Celebrating Vaikuntha in Vrindavan – Bramhotsava begins

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Vrindavan, February 23rd: Ten days long Brahmsavam began in the Goda Haridev Divya Desh Mandir. This is an annual festival celebrated for ten days in this temple. It attracts the devotees from the near by villages of Vrindavan. The Brahmsava festival is the most important and auspicious function in all the temples of the world which belong to Ramanuja Sampradaya.

The religious activities of the festival include the daily yajnas and processions for the utsava murti (movable deities) on different vahanas (vehicles) which are made of gold, silver, sandal wood etc. The Utsava deities are decorated with different ornaments.

On the first day of the festival Lord Vaikunthanath mounted on 'Purna Kothli' and the procession passed through different markets of the town where the devotees welcomed the God by offering bhog and performing arati. People made rangolis on the street through which the procession passed. The procession finally reached Gyan Gudri and stationed for an hour at the "Uddhav Gopi samvad sthal". The Lord gave darshan to the devotees and then went back to the temple. The Lord mounts different vehicles on these ten days and gives darshan to his devotees.

Popular stories trace the origin of this celebration to Brahma, the creator God, who first conducted this festival to Sri Balaji at Tirupati. Brahma worshiped Sri Balaji on the banks of the holy Pushkarini in Tirupati as a way to give thanks for the Lord's protection of mankind. Hence, this utsava bears his name as "Brahmsavam," which means the festival of Brahma. Every temple which has the Dravyadesha has a water body (Pushkarini) and a garden.

There are two temples of Vrindavan where the Brahmsavam is celebrated. The most famous Brahmsava festival of Vrindavan is celebrated in the Ranganath Mandir. The Ranganath Mandir's Brahmsava celebration is as old as 155 years, which will begin from 9th March. The British Collector F.S. Growse has mentioned it in his memoir.

The Goda Hardev Mandir was built ten years back and it also celebrates the Brahmsavam every year. It began on 22nd February in the Haridev Mandir. The temple president Tridandi Swami Devnarayan Acharya informed that the festival will continue for ten days and the utsava deity of Shri Vaikunthanath will come out of the temple twice in a day in different chariots. Priests and Vedpathis have been called from South India to conduct the rituals.

On the evening prior to the start of the first day, the rite of Ankurarpna is performed along with a festival for Sri vishaksena (the leader of Narayana's retinue who removes obstacles and protects worship).

On the first day the main activity is the "Dhvajaorhana" the hoisting of the Garuda flag, which signifies the commencement of the Brahmsava. It is believed that Garuda goes to Devalokam and invites the Devas to attend the festival.

The celebration officially concludes with "Dhvjavarohanam," the lowering of the Garuda flag. The priests pay respect to Gods and sages with the chanting of Vedic hymns and see them off on their return to Devaloka.

Acharya Naresh Narayan a scholar from the Ramanuja Sampradaya said, "The Brahmsavam celebration provides a unique opportunity for all devotees to participate in the festivity and utsavas and experience Vaikuntha in Vrindavan. Every year, thousands of devotees witness the processions, celebrations during the Annual Brahmsavam of Shri Goda – Haridev ji. Everyday of the Brahmsavam there is a feast for all the devotees.

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