

Celebrating the epic

While Ramlila may be more popular in North India, Mumbai too celebrates it with gusto. Here are five of the popular Ramlila performances in the city



SHREE ADARSH RAMLILA SAMITI

For the last 54 years, Ramlila has been staged at Girgaum Chowpatty — and this year, it's no different. The all-male 35-member group of artistes are a part of Shree Anant Ramlila Mandal from Mathura. "From students to businessmen, we have a variety of people who come together to perform the Ramlila. They take leave from their offices and colleges for this occasion. They do it for the love of the culture and consider it as a service to God," says said Rajiv Chaturvedi, the Mandal's director and manager. Chaturvedi played Ram himself for almost 10 years in his youth. The Ramayana that is staged here is "based on Tulsidas's Ram Charita Manas". Dubai-based Rajiv Kumar Chaturvedi — who has been associated with this Ramlila for over two decades — shares, "I take a month-long holiday every year to take part in the festivities. As and when required, I play a character in the Ramlila. I'm still waiting to know which character I'll play today," says 38-year-old Rajiv with a smile. The troupe will also be performing at Cotton Green from Oct 3 to 12, though the venue at Chowpatty garners own audience of more than 1,000 people everyday during the 10-day-long festivities. They have also installed projection screens for people on the beach to enjoy the performances. Girgaum Chowpatty, Charni Road. Ongoing till Sept 30, 7pm to 10 pm.



SHRI RAMLILA PRACHAR SAMITI

In a sea of mostly all-male Ramlila troupes, Shree Ram Manas Manch stands apart. The troupe, which involves both men and women, is now celebrating their 36th year of producing Ramlila shows. "It doesn't look genuine if a man is playing a female character. These artistes come from Moradabad and all of them are highly educated," says Devikinaradan Jindal, founding member of Shri Ramlila Prachar Samiti. Rajesh Rastogi, is the head of Shree Ram Manas Manch and apart from directing the Ramlila, will be enacting the role of Dasharath as well. "This group was formed in 1981. And, I have performed here ever since then. We have 65 member group, which includes 14 women. You'll only see devotion and bhakti in our performances," says Rastogi. Shahaji Raju Kridangan, Shivaji Chowk, Haji Zakaria Road, Mankodarwad, Malad (W). Ongoing till Sept 30, 7.30 pm to 10.30 pm.



MAHARASHTRA RAMLEELA MANDAL

Pandit Shobhnath Mishra, after whom a road in Churchgate is named, is recognised for presenting the first Ramlila in the city — it was held on Goa Street in 1952. Later, Mishra founded the Maharashtra Ramleela Mandal in 1977. This year marks their 40th anniversary celebrations at Azad Maidan. "We have a 40-member group from Ayodhya's Avadh Adarsh Mandal performing this year," says Suresh Mishra, the general secretary of the Mandal. "Initially local artistes, such as taxi drivers and paanwalas, used to perform. They would do it for the love of it," shares Mishra. For this Ramlila production, a narrator sings chaupais (four-line quatrains) in Awadhi dialect, which is the original dialect of the Ramayana written by Tulsidas. Then, the characters translate the dialogues in pure Hindi. Azad Maidan (entry opposite Metro Cinema), Mahapalika Marg, Fort. Ongoing till Sept 30, 7 pm to 10 pm.

SAHITYA KALA MANCH

Also held in Azad Maidan, the Ramlila festivities here has now reached its 37th year. "The present troupe (Brij Vrindavan Ram Krishna Leela Mandal) is from Vrindavan, and they have been coming to perform here for the last six to seven years," says Sahil Vyas, the president of Sahitya Kala Manch. The troupe — comprising 25 members — is led by Paradi Lekh Ram Sharma. Vyas is confident that on Astami, Navami and Dashami, they will run successful shows. The grand finale on Dussehra will conclude with burning an approximately 60-foot-tall effigy of Ravana. Azad Maidan (entry opposite BMC headquarters near CST station), Mahapalika Marg, Fort. Ongoing till Sept 28, 7pm to 10 pm. On Sept 30, the programme starts from 4 pm and goes on till 7 pm.



RAMLEELA: A DRAMATISED PERFORMANCE WITH PUPPETS

While Ramayana might be an elaborate tale of good vs evil, this Ramlila is designed for your children. Organized by Growing Babies, the production presents the saga through puppetry, making it easier (and more fun) for children to understand. The mastermind behind this show

are puppeteer and academician Sahita Bhandula and puppeteer and storyteller Dr Pooja Jain. "You have to scale down the performance to the level that children who are between two to five years of age understand. We also make the performance interactive," says Bhandula, has handcrafted the 10

puppets that are involved in the play. To carry on the tradition of burning Ravana on Dussehra, they have created a balloon Ravana to burst. Ramleela: A Dramatized Performance With Puppets will be performed on Oct 7 in Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Byculla. Entry: Rs 200. Log: www.bookmyshow.com.

