**NWest crowd throngs at Mersey to celebrate Ganesh immersion**

**Over 2000 Hindu worshippers converged on the river Mersey last Saturday to celebrate the climax of an annual 10 days festival..reports Asian Lite .**

Coach loads of devotees from Ashton, Manchester, Derby, Bolton, Oldham, Blackburn Leicester, West Bromwich and other towns and cities came to the region for the spectacular Festival of Immersion ceremony where the statues of Ganesh, a Hindu god with elephant's head were immersed into the famous river Mersey.

‘’The immersion of the statues of Ganesh in water symbolises the god's return to his origins and washing away of his followers' sins,’’ said Manhar Tailor one of the Executive Comm member at Ashton’s **Shree Bharatiya Mandal, Indian Association Tameside & Shree Ambaji Mandir**

From the temple it was on the ferry terminal at Seacombe, where the atmosphere was electric. A large crowd with many of them wearing colourful scarves and head bands had gathered. Amidst beating drums and loud chants, the heaving mass of people poured into the terminal building and down the long slope to the waiting ferry.

On board the exuberant celebrations continued, as many of the passengers danced, sang and chanted. The ferry made its way out to the middle of the river, where the excitement mounted as the statue was carefully carried to the side of the boat and slowly lowered into the water. The crowd cheered, many of them leaning over the ferry's rail to get a better view.

On the return journey the passion of the devotees did not abate, the noise of their celebrations reaching an exultant crescendo as the ferry docked. On the quayside another group of Hindus Leicester were waiting to repeat the ceremony with their own statue of Ganesh.

As the members of the Ashton Hindu community disembarked, there was general agreement that it had been a memorable and joyous occasion. The day was also a great success for Mersey ferries, as Ronnie Fogg (team leader at Seacombe Terminal) explained. “We've organised five special ferry trips during the day, with four to five hundred people on board for each trip. This is the seventh year we've been involved and it's always a great day. The Hindu organisations are wonderful to work with and very appreciative of our efforts, Many of our staff specially ask to work on the Festival day because they enjoy it so much. Some of them really get into the spirit of it, with staff wearing special headbands and guards wearing scarves."

Andrea Ward, who was event coordinator, was equally enthusiastic. "The day has such an over-whelming positive vibe, I have never seen anything like it in my life. And everyone's so lovely it's literally brought tears to my eyes."

This is the seventh year that the specially chartered cruises have offered devotees from the North West and the Midlands the opportunity to pay their respects to Ganesh with the lively and colourful celebration of the festival starting with Ganesh Chathurthi.

Manilal Mistry MBE, President of Shree Bharatiya Mandal Indain Association Tameside at the Indian Community Centre in Ashton-under-Lyne said:

“We are delighted to celebrate the auspicious occasion of Ganesh Visarjan at River Mersey and thank Mersey Ferries for the service. Thanks also to the Hindu devotees for enriching our lives and maintaining our culture”.