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Shobhabajar Rajbari er “Shobha”-Maa er aabahon..

By Jasmine Ghosh Dastidar

Aswiner sarada prate beje utheche alokomonjir, Dharanir bohirakashir antorhito meghomala; Prakritir antarakashe jagorito jyotirmoyi jaganmatar aagomono-barta, Anandamoyi moha mayar padodhyani; Ashima chande beje uthe roop-lok o raso-lok e aane naba bhabomadhurir sanjeeban, Tai anandita shyamoli matrikar chinmoyi ke mrinmoyi te aabahon.... Durga Pujo is undoubtedly a remarkable and a grand celebration for each and everyone living in and around Bengal. During this time of the year, people of all ages, all communities, all over the country join their hands to celebrate the victory of Ma Durga. Ma Durga's homecoming brings along a bundle full of delight and grandeur. Everyone enjoys this splendor occasion in their unique way, some by pandal hopping, some enjoy by watching cultural programs in their complexes, some take joy in trying out extravagant dishes, some by partying at home with their close ones. I have experienced Pujo in a different way by spending my entire pujo week at my friend's Rajbari i.e, Shobhabajar Rajbari since childhood. My pujo has always been about shabekiaana, Rajbari er andarmahal, adda over history and heritage, dhaak and dhunuchi naach, bhog beetoron, old school traditions. I'm sure everyone living in any part of Bengal knows the tradition and rich heritage of Shobhabajar Rajbari. All through this years, I've seen how people from different parts of Bengal come to steal a glance of Rajbari er "Ek Chala ar Thakur". The craze and devotion towards this particular idol has never gone down but has grown more by passing years. Shobhabajar Rajbari er Pujo has already stepped into its 265th year and is celebrated with extreme enthusiasm and fervour even till today. My pujo at Rajbari begins with Kathamo Pujo(wooden pedestal is worshipped) which is scheduled on the day of Rath-yatra. The making of idol starts then onwards in the precinct of Rajbari. The speciality of Sovabazar rajbari er pujo is the Image of Durga that is used during the puja which is a traditional 'ak chala ar thakur'(under one roof). The painted backdrop or chalachitra tells the story of Devi and her incarnations. The image is decorated with shola or peth finery known as 'Dakar Saj'.

The essence of Pujo for me starts with the idol in the making at Rajbari. I remember how after school hours me and my friends used to run around the courtyards of Rajbari, the lingering smell of wet mud, hay scattered everywhere, the noise of wood cutting made our days better and joyful. Now, after growing up when I visit Rajbari to see how the idol is structured, the craftsman's effort and their talented hands enthrall me. I sit there for hours breathing the smell of mud and wood and silently scream with joy "Pujo Ashche, Ma ashche". Everyday at Rajbari feels festive with the essence of Ma's homecoming. This year Ma ar bodhon(invocation) has started from 19th of September, and every evening the elders of the Rajbari sit with the priest for "chandi path", "Gita path" and "Ramayan path". And finally, on the first day of Pujo (Mahasoshti) the huge gates of Rajbari are wide open for the devotees and visitors to offer their prayers. The Rajbari is all decked with lights, flowers, dhuno, diyas, dhaak er awaj and last but not the least with Maa's presence to welcome the worshippers of Maa. My pujo at Rajbari is all about getting overwhelmed and amazed by the traditions that are still relevant and perfectly performed. The ancient tradition of boli(sacrifice) is still predominant at Rajbari, on saptami there is a ritual to sacrifice sugarcane and chalkumro(white pumpkin). Worshipping rituals are conducted strictly as per an ancient 'puthi' or scripture written on palm leaves. In Sovabazar rajbari, Durga Ma is worshipped as Baishnabi Maa and the lion idol is different from other idol's lion, it is Ghotokmuki Singha, a lion's body with a horse's face. The speciality of Mahanabami is the sacrifice of nine. Singhi maach(catfish) is one of them. Interestingly Sovabazar Rajbari does not have a khichudi bhog or pulao bhog. Rather, 57 types of mithai bhog or sweet dishes are laid before the idol. They include specialities such as Singhara with dal fillings, also known as ghas kochuri, 2-3 types of motichur naaru and so on. Amidst all the fun, celebration, adda, khawa-dawa, naach-gaan, the day arrives where everyone's eyes are filled with tears and we are not ready to bid farewell to Ma. The bishorjon or

immersion ceremony starts after seeing Ma's face in the mirror, the priest welcomes Durga Ma, after that the ritual of "Kanakanjali"(farewell ceremony of Ma from her maternal residence) is performed. Then the idol is carried on shoulder to the Ganga River for immersion. Shobhabajar Rajbari has a tradition of freeing two Neelkantha birds before the immersion of the idol. It is believed that the first Neelkantha bird which is freed carries the message to Lord Shiva that Ma has started her journey towards Kailash. When the idol is immersed in the Ganga, the second Neelkantha is freed to carry the message that Ma Durga has just reached the foot of the Himalayas and is on the way home with her children. For a couple of decades, the practice of releasing the Neelkantha birds has been stopped. To continue with the tradition, Shobhabajar Rajbari

has come up with a idea of replacing the bird with a phanush (a paper-made hot-air balloon). The phanush is painted with a brightly-coloured image of a Neelkantha, along with other decorations and write-ups. The first phanush is launched from the courtyard of the Sovabazar Rajbari and the second from a boat on the Hooghly River. At the Bagbazar Ghat, the idol is loaded onto a bamboo frame fitted between two boats. The boats make their way to the centre of the river where the bamboo is cut off dropping the idol into the water. Ma's arrival brings joy and positivity and while going back to Kailash she takes away all the negativity along with her. A long wait of a whole year starts hoping a hope of welcoming her next year. With this we bid farewell to Ma with hearts full of mixed emotions and scream "ASHCHE BOCHOR ABAR HOBE."



Pc: Riddhiman Ghose

Bonediyana To Barowari

By Aprajita Roy

While the city is getting ready for maa to arrive and teens are busy matching their dresses there is much more depth and history to the 5 days of pomp and glamour. Debi durga was initially worshipped in the traditional mahishasur mardini form, and gradually the idol became that of durga with her 4 kids or as we say 'sho poribar'. With factual information placing evidence of durga pujo being celebrated from the 1600s, the scholars take a different tone to substantiate that the festival dates far back. The zamindars during colonial rule had their unique style of celebrating pujo and their descendants follow the legacy till date though the extravaganza has toned down. These are now called bonedi pujo or bonedi barir pujo. The charm though lies in the idol again, carefully observing a few you would realise in certain cases the lion would look like a horse (krishnanagar style of idol), the reason to this was that the sculptors

were familiar with how horses looked and not with how lions looked and the art of idol making was passed on from one generation to the other and therefore till date some bonedi bari idols have lions which look like horses. The concept of baro-wari pujo began when 12 local boys collected subscriptions from their locality and organised pujo in hoogly district. As per popular folklore, commoners were denied access to pujo organised by zamindars at their residence, the revenge of the local people was to conduct pujo among themselves by collecting funds and thus gave birth to the 'sarbojonin sharodotsav' or pujo for all. This concept spread to various parts of Bengal like wildfire and took the form of community durga pujo which we celebrate now. Sanatan Dharmotsahini Sabha organized the first truly community puja in Baghbazar in Kolkata with full participation of its members.

SHE CAN BUT SHE CAN'T

Kolkata's Festive Landscape Redefines Performative Roles

By Shivangi Basu

Besides the grandeur and glamour of it all, Durga Puja is a homage to the divine feminine. Maa Durga's victory, as 'Mahishasurmardini', over the buffalo demon Mahishasura, is celebrated with pomp and show every year. The irony? It's about a woman being the savior of the entire cosmos. Yet, today as we worship her through a myriad of rituals and ceremonies, women are often being told that they CANNOT perform certain functions; or aren't supposed to. Patriarchy is intrinsically woven into our cultural fabric. Its presence is so subliminal that subconsciously we subscribe to its norms.

One can easily comprehend this adversity when even a child is subjected to it. On the eighth day [Maha Ashtami], a prepubescent girl child is dressed akin to Maa and is worshiped as Adi Shakti. Had she started menstruating, she wouldn't have been considered 'pure enough'. What makes her a woman in the eyes of society serves as the reason for her

rejection.

Having said that, in the recent years, the City of Joy has witnessed quite a few instances wherein these traditions have been challenged and subverted successfully. Beyond the theme-based pandals and streets filled with exuberant people, Kolkata offers alternatives to bridge the gap between ancestral customs and the 21st century beliefs.

In the year 2021, the Durga Puja at 66 Pally Kalighat was entirely conducted by a four-member team, comprising only women priests. When at home, most of us are used to watching our mothers or any other female relative perform the morning/evening aarti [Hindu ritual]. However, rarely have we come across a priestess in-charge of public, estimable ceremonies. Similarly, throughout we've seen women blowing the conch shell but never play a single beat of the traditional dhak [drum]. At the Rail Vihar Durga Puja pandal near Ruby hospital, a quartet of women dhakis [drummers] were

invited and were able to carve a niche. This bifurcation of responsibilities in the male and female domains, is a societal construct and quite frankly, redundant.

Remember Vidya Balan's Sindoor Khela [ceremony on the last day of Durga Puja- Dashami] scene from the movie Kahaani (2012) after she killed her husband's murderer? Her being a widow didn't matter to the women clad in lal par saree [white saree with red border] who applied sindoor [vermilion] on her face. It didn't matter to us, the audience as we cheered for her. In our opinion, that is exactly the essence of this ritual- the red vermilion dots signify courage and the intent to shield your loved ones from evil. Unfortunately, in conventional terms, this is supposed to be practiced only by married women, thereby excluding a significant fraction consisting of widows, divorcees, acid attack survivors and the transgender community among others. Why is it that a woman's identity is ascribed to her husband and the longevity of

her marriage? FCB Ulka's Sindoor Khela- No Conditions Apply campaign for the Times of India in Kolkata, addressed this issue and invited women, sans any label, to observe this custom as one which forges bonds of sisterhood. Furthermore, in 2018, at the Ahiritola Jubak Brinda Durga Puja, sex workers were welcomed to join this festive affair. This successive display of inclusivity upholds the spirit of celebration and togetherness. These instances corroborate the fact that this occasion transcends all boundaries and ensures that each and every person believes in the all-embracing approach of Durga Puja. When people from all walks of life together chant, "AASCHE BOCHOR ABAR HOBE", there's hope that this intoxicating spirit of festivities live on. There's faith that there will come a day when the young girl won't be told what she can or what she can't do.

The Joyful City's Bright Spirits

By Barkha Mishra

If you could add up all the craze of Diwali in Delhi, Christmas in London, Valentine's Day in Paris and every other festival there is and shove it all into a 5 day long celebration, you still wouldn't know what you are missing if you haven't been in Kolkata during the Durga Puja. It's been precisely 17 years, since I have been in Kolkata. You might have heard stories of those 5 days of Sarodiya every year, or the amazement of pandal hopping, but have you been in Kolkata a month prior to the mahotsav? Well, if you haven't, here is a small attempt to summarise all of the ambience of this Grandeur. From now, you can hear people murmuring amongst themselves (that excitement is unmatched). The Pandal committees in cut throat but healthy competition. People deciding on themes for the year. You will be amazed seeing the creativity of the pandals, the hard work that goes behind it and the sheer joy people work on them with. With their fine art, they will leave you awestruck, as much as you would be while

looking at the Burj Khalifa or any other wonder of the world for the first time.

As Puja days are nearing, from now you can't step your feet out to find your right size sandals in a footwear shop. Bundles of clothes are being stacked by people and are bought in bulk for their entire extended family, as a token of joy, celebration and to express their love for one another, and also, because the little ones back home wait for their uncles and aunties to give them new toys, clothes and other gifts for Puja. You can see the Durga Maa's Idol, dolled up as a bride being brought into the pandals. Megaphones attached to every corner of the city, playing subtle sarod and sitar. Even every dark alley is illuminated by the small tuni lights that are put up to decorate almost every street out there.

Amongst all this, if you end up in a really empty corner of the city, you would witness how you're surrounded by Puja and the puja spirits, as in that silence, there



Night Lights In Kolkata During Pujas

will be the constant humming of the crowd around you, the subtle sitar music in the background, the little lights lighting up your spirits and obviously shiuli flowers, making the whole place smell like home. You can witness roads being decked up with immense traffic. People, no matter what their social status is, all dressed up, walking on the streets, crowding around the snack stalls. It's just a joyous time, it feels as if the city is getting married. College friends making maps and planning to measure the city from North to South, from Shobhabazar to Salt Lake, from Gariahat to Dharmatala. The buses

are packed to the brim, just like the city's spirits of celebration. Finally, It's the first day of puja, people can be seen overjoyed. Not a thought is spent behind queuing for a hotel for 45 minutes, the never ending amount of love people of Kolkata have for Puja, is unmatched. The grandeur of the city of joy goes on for 5 days, as if it's a carnival and everybody is invited and offered rides free of cost. Soon as the last day of puja comes and Maa has to leave us all, with a very heart, bidding goodbye to her, everybody chants - AASCHE BOCHOR ABAR HOBE (Next year, it shall happen again.)

THE DURGA IN HER

By Anwesha Goswami

She was born on a fine autumnal eve,
The father sighed in relief;
With goddess Durga she came
But who cares! It was a shame.
It is a "her", they said
There must be something wrong with how the mother prayed,
If her prayers were right,
She would have been blessed with a boy child.
They could hear the sound of festivities,
But here everyone was silent, mourning the reality
Nobody understood that she was an embodiment
Of the Durga they prayed and preached with adornment;
She is a human, she is power;
She is everything you can desire.
But still they prayed to God with all their might
The next one must be a boy child.



Pc: Priyanka Sengupta

Memories of The Lane

By Pritha Bera

The auspicious occasion of Durga Puja is not just a festival but a celebration of life. Beyond the religious context, the pomp and the glitz, the unique expression of art, and the unlimited fun and party, if I have to choose one word to describe what Durga Puja is to Bengalis, it would be this-A Homecoming. Mahalaya, which is ten days before Durga Puja, marks the beginning of Devi Paksha. It is the day it's believed that our ancestors leave their abode and come down to take offerings from their descendants. I remember going to the shores of Ganga with Baba, where he would do "Tarpan". Our ancestors are believed to stay with us for a fortnight, and that period is called "Mahalaya Paksha". For every Bengali, Mahalaya holds an extraordinary place, starting with Chandi Path when dawn breaks. Pujo memories for me began with the mornings when our mothers and aunts donned crisp cotton sarees. They cook delicious food-"Bhog"-which would be served to goddess Maa Durga and later to the devotees. The "Bhog" menu consists of rice, khichuri, curries made with an eclectic mix of vegetables, rice pudding with jaggery, thick tomato chutney flavoured with raisins, ginger, and dried mango. Pujo means the poetic blues of the Sharadiya skies, the whites of the wild "Kash Phool". The celebration of the goddess Maa Durga starts with 'dhaak', 'dhuno' (frankincense), and 'dhaan' (unhusked rice). The laal paar saris have a gustatory counterpart in mutton biryani, chicken cheap, and dimer (egg) devil, which adds the flavour of Bengal to the four

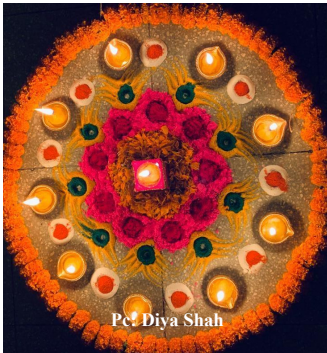
days of Durga Puja-Saptami, Ashtami, Nabami and Panchami. Its everyday manifestation is the Bengali "Pet Pujo" (or belly worship) for five days. From the roadside Biryani stalls to elaborate menus in the city's top hotels and restaurants, this showcases Bengal's love for food and the choicest selections on a platter. Each of us has our puja memories. Some of my favourites include the anticipation in the days leading up to the first day of the Puja, characterized by the rush of clothes shopping, rehearsing dances for a show to be staged on one of the evenings, and the first sound of the "Dhaak". The sudden, unexpected moments in those five days when we felt spiritual and shut our eyes to say a stolen prayer for peace or success in our next big school/ college test. Lastly, Vijaya Dashami, it's time we bid adieu to Ma with teary eyes and a promise to welcome her again next year with the same love and devotion. Since she visits us as the daughter, we do "boron" (aarti), apply aalta (red colouring on her feet)-sindoor to her and feed her sweets, just like how we would do when a married girl is leaving her parents' home. We quietly whisper in her ears, "next year will come soon". The connection with Ma Durga is so intense for us Bengalis that this is the moment when most people quietly wipe tears off of their eyes. I do it too. This part of Durga Puja was always very fascinating, and I would always make my mother take me for "Sindoor Khela". It has been five days since the world outside the pandal comes to a standstill, and life inside goes on to the beat of the "Dhaak"

Durga Maa: My Saviour

By Paroma Dey Sarkar

Pujo, beyond lots of shopping and pandal hopping, is about nostalgia. The cottony white clouds floating amidst the vivid blue sky and the sweet scent of shiuli and chhaateem filling up the air are all reminiscent of the tales by Tagore (and more) my mother read to me back in my childhood days - stories about joy and grief, bonding and homecoming! It makes me visualize the wide kaash fields in the countryside, the distant lands - lands I've never been to but have read about - lands across which two young siblings run barefoot, celebrating their simple and carefree lives to the fullest, in each other's company. And to me, that's exactly what pujo is all about - letting go of all 'fret and care' in the company of loved ones. Adulthood often makes one involuntarily be part of a futile rat race and forget the simple joys of life. Last year around this time, I was going through a rough phase: career, relationships, family, personal issues and what not! I

could feel my life going downhill with no ray of hope. I had locked myself up in one room. That's when my best friend whom I hadn't met for months, offered to catch up for pandal hopping. I with a lot of courage stepped out of my house. The twinkling lights all over the streets, the lingering smell of dhuno, the rhythm of Dhaak, the autumn mist, the vibrance of the colors around, a long walk and a little chat with her would actually bring me back to life - something even antidepressants were failing to do. Durga Ma with her homecoming brought a light of hope and zeal to overcome all the obstacles in me. Durga ma brought us two bestfriends together and a hour long chat with her took all the negativity around me. Ya Devi sarva bhuteshu Shakti-rupena samstitha ; Namastasye Namastasye Namastasye Namaha. (The Devi is present and manifest as energy within all beings)



Pc: Diya Shah



Pc: Harshita Shukla

Fusion of Culture

By Diya Shah

When the skies are pink with hints of yellow, there is the lovely fragrance of kash phool in the air, it starts to get a little chilly, streets become very busy, homes are being adorned with lights, and pandals are being constructed, that's exactly when you know durga puja is round the corner. My hometown is well-known for its garba and dandiya. Dhokla, thepla, khaandvi, and shrikhand are a few of the foods that are relished pretty much all over the world. We are deeply rooted in tradition and have a strong entrepreneurial spirit. Yes, you guessed it right, I am a Gujarati. A non-Bengali born in Kolkata who grew up in a Bengali neighborhood with a strong culture. The only holiday I look forward to all year is Pujo. It's my favourite, and I believe that my heart's essence is a lovely fusion of the two cultures. There are five main days for Durga puja: panchami, shashti, saptami, Ashtami, navami, and

dashami. Navratri is also observed during this time, but it only begins four days earlier and lasts for a total of nine days. The mandir at my home is being cleaned and decorated during these days. For "Ambaaji" (Maa Durga), we have this special prasada prepared. The most well-liked dishes are sheera, kheer, paak, and sukhdhi, which are all traditional Gujarati dishes. After the Maha aarti of Navratri, performed on the first day comes the dandiya/Garba round. People dance their hearts out and play daandiya to the famous "sanedo" beats. Our homes are beautified with torans, and Bel pattas are hung outside on the top of the main door. There are numerous well known joints for the same. Trophies, medals, or cash prizes are awarded to the winners. Typically, this occurs at night. Additionally, candles are lit throughout and rangolis are prepared. Durga Puja encourages traditional

saree wear with backless designer blouses, heavy jhumkas, white flowers in your hair, deep black kajal and dark, bold lip colour and so does Navaratri. As the days pass by, no one is prepared for the holiday season to come to an end after all; they have been anxiously awaiting this occasion, Durga Puja or Navaratri. Burning the ten headed king, Ravana with firecrackers and the Lord's Visarjan are used to commemorate Dussehra and Durga Puja. This symbolizes the triumph of good over evil. Before the idol is submerged, you can see her being transported on large trucks and people doing the bhaashan dance. She offers us enormous power as she departs. Because I tend to see beauty in even the simplest things, the entire holiday season makes me feel like a poet. I long for this time of the year to come around again, soon. It has a hint of holiness about it that makes everything divine.

NINE NIGHTS NINE BLESSINGS!

By Ashanya Amef

No matter how much evil you hide it's never hidden, and so is the divine light of our most remembered festival of the Hindu calendar- NAVRATRI. It is one of the most important and biggest festivals celebrated across India and even other parts of the world. A human can fight, he can win, he can conquer, he can run but the most important thing that a human being can do is to learn! So this great auspicious festival Navratri is dedicated to Sharda Devi, the goddess of learning. Nava means NINE and Ratri means NIGHT, the night where one rests and becomes rejuvenated, refreshed and free from all afflictions to start the year afresh. We adore THE DIVINE MOTHER, who is worshiped in all her forms and gives us the nine major blessings which is also said as the blessing of each month a child gets from the womb of her mother. This day is dedicated to the incarnation of goddess Durga's nine avatars soulfully. The devotees keep fast and stay on fruits and water. This is not to please the devi but to experience

the sense of life. Just drinking water and not eating anything for a few days will make you feel the energy and through meditation. The veneration of Devi every evening with the groups of women is nothing less than salvation and wholehearted devotion. This holy time of festivities of music and dance full of excitement, where the family and friends come together and celebrate. People dance their heart out during NIGHTS OF DANDIYA, which is a beautiful way of re-creating the battle that took place between the Devi and the demon. It signifies the defeat of evil over good. The colourful sticks used during Dandiya represent the sword of Goddess Durga, that is why this dance form is also known as 'The Sword Dance'. The victory is not only of goddess Durga over the buffalo demon mahishasur but of every person free from sins and praying for good! May the nine days and nine nights of Navratri bring your good health and fortune.



Promenades of Kumartulli

"In the midst of Ashwin, the bell rose, the time of worship has come."

- An excerpt from Pujar Saj by Rabindranath Tagore

Interviewers: Rhythm Sengupta & Rudrani Sengupta

By Anwesha Sengupta & Rajanya Goswami

As the city of joy gets filled with the sweet aroma emanating from the blackboard tree, the streets of Kumartuli find themselves filled with a crowd, as a thousand sculptures await to be painted vibrantly. But amidst all the joy, there are people who sculpt our Gods and Goddesses with perfection, stuck in the chaos, with little space to move around and no one to make sure they're comfortable. In one such lane of Kumartuli, we met Bhavesh Ranjan Pal, a skilled senior artist for the past 37 years, to get an insight into the lives of artists and their families during the festive season.

RS: May we know your Name?

BP: My name is Bhavesh Ranjan Pal. My father's name is Dhananjay Rudra Pal.

RS: When did you decide to be in this line of work?

BP: Probably, 37 years ago.

RS: This shop must've been here for a long time then?

BP: Yes, it was my father's - this shop. In fact, it is named after him.

RS: How old is the shop?

BP: About 75, no, 76 years old, I think.

RS: How did the pandemic affect you?

BP: It affected me in the same way as everyone else you see here. There was no demand for these sculptures you're awestruck by, today. There was no business in the market. We almost went bankrupt. The last two years have been especially critical for us. Not so much this year.

RS: What does Pujo mean to you today? How does Pujo today differ from how you experienced it in your childhood?

BP: To speak of difference, I can only recall how carefree we were back then. I am 60 now, and the world seems to have become so mechanical and materialistic. There is no peace left. There's no time to feel the true essence of Pujo. It is all about glitter and glamour. Now, what about the people who can't afford to invest in this lifestyle? What about people like us? What about all the crises we'd have to face in order to follow along in their



Bhavesh Ranjan Pal

path at their pace? We're barely thinking, It's all mechanical.

RS: In the last few years, we have gradually shifted from an era of traditional Pujo to theme based Pujo. To you, is that a good thing?

BP: I do not like it. In fact, I barely understand what theme really means. Generally, it is a form of imitation, incorporated into the festival. But for that, one does not need to distort the manner in which Ma (Durga) has been presented to us for more than half of our lifetime. I cannot bring myself to feel devotion, amidst the crookedness of the pandals, distorting Ma's image, to fit their so-called theme. I do not like themes at all, in that sense. I am not against the idea of showcasing one's artistic ability, but at the same time, that can be done in the form of a display at one corner. I know a handful of school and college students who instill these ideas in people and then leave. But I personally would never recommend people to fiddle with anything on the mandap (stage) where Ma is, let alone the ornaments or the sculpture of Ma herself.

RS: If you could change one thing about Pujo in today's world, what would it be?

BP: Who am I to change anything? My beliefs might sound old school. I do not like it when people try to change the appearance of our Goddess or any of her features. They give her more than ten hands, they change the way her eyes look, and they change everything about her. The contrast between the Ma we were always told about and the way today's youth know her is really striking.

RS: Before Pujo, thousands of people visit Kumartuli to post something or the other on social media. Does this hamper the way you carry out your regular activities? What would you say?

BP: As long as they're keeping it to themselves it's okay but, you know we too are normal people at the end of the day. This locality is not just filled with artists or sculptors. We have families. They cannot eat, bathe or even get dressed without being stripped of their privacy. We don't mind if people photograph the sculptures. In fact, we feel appreciated when people do that. But entering our houses to get pictures is highly disturbing. Then there are people who do a whole makeover to make themselves look like Ma but in the very next moment, you'll catch them smoking a pack of cigarettes. Just imagine how it feels to witness a sight like that. We have asked them not to continue this behavior but they never listen. It's been around ten years since this started. They know they can capture different types of pictures in Kumartuli and so they dress up and crowd here. But I believe this should stop, it is so disturbing that some of us are very openly against this.

RHS: Although Durga Pujo has always been known for its inclusivity with regards to other religions, do you think it is becoming politically influenced?

BP: I believe that everyone can be a part of this festival. It is true that it is majorly a Bengali festival, and most of the elements are a part of Hinduism, I still believe that anyone can celebrate it. After all, Bengal is a part of

India itself. Therefore, if all of us can enjoy ourselves together for a few days, what's the harm in it? Political parties might have attempted to present this festival in a very biased manner and I don't think that is the right thing to do. This might in fact give rise to even more differences among people. There will be more hatred among people.

RHS: You have been doing this for so many years. Have you ever thought of pursuing a different line of work?

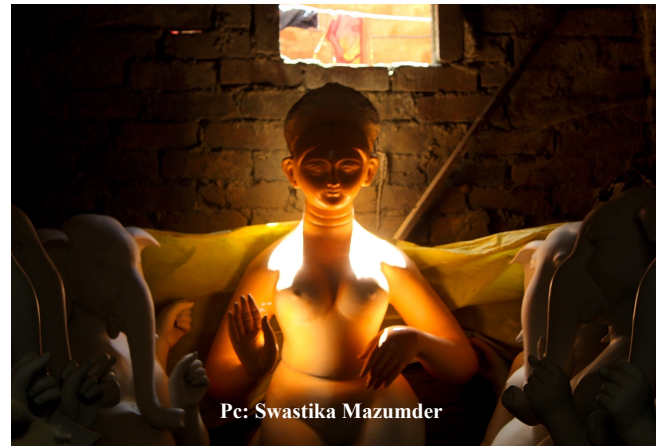
BP: I don't believe that art can ever have an end to it. But the thing is, I have a family. My family members might not want to follow in my footsteps, they want to pursue something better. You know, artists require a minimum amount of respect for the work they produce. But unfortunately, it is practically absent from my line of work. I myself am an artist. But once a celebrity arrives, I'll instantly lose my importance. And I'm speaking from my experience. I wouldn't say there's no demand for my work, but at the end of the day, they'll still say "he's just a pattua, a kumhar (potter)"; But there is no real recognition as such. Although I would say a few Pujo committees do highlight our hard work, that does count as recognition to me.

RHS: UNESCO has recently brought Durga Pujo to the limelight by recognizing it as an 'intangible heritage' in front of a global audience. Has this impacted you in any way?

BP: No, not really. It is surely great that this has been appreciated on a global scale but it didn't necessarily do me any good. I have made sculptures for international clients in the past too. This recognition seems a little political to me. While it is true that we have been asked to join protests to ask for the betterment of our living standards, we haven't significantly been beneficial in any way. Worldwide recognition is not a matter of joke but neither has it made the entire world celebrate the festival nor has it raised our pay. In fact, the work pressure has increased way too much. Now we know that everyone will crowd here even before Mahalaya, so we have to finish our sculptures way before that.



Pc: Niyukta Agarwal



Pc: Swastika Mazumder



Pc: Someshwari Sengupta



Pc: Swastika Mazumder



Pc: Niyukta Agarwal



Pc: Pratosh Sardar



Pc: Harshita Shukla

Happenings of September

PANEL DISCUSSION

Students from the Department of Mass Communication under the guidance of Professor Dr Somak Sen organised and successfully pulled off a panel discussion on "India's Performance in Commonwealth Games 2022", which is soon going to be streamed on the department's YouTube channel. It was held on 8th September in Fr. Gaston Roberge Studio of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata. A panel of 5 speakers from MA Mass Communication Sem 1 participated in the discussion and gave elaborated views on India's achievements as well as improvement in Birmingham

Games. Aparajita Mandal embraced the role of a moderator as well as a panellist of the session. Along with Aparajita, the other panellists were Riddhiman Sarkar, Haimosree Chakrabarti, Ankita Pal Chowdhury and Farheen Halder. Sports like Women's cricket, Badminton, Table Tennis, Hockey, Lawn bowls, Squash, Athletics, Boxing, Wrestling, and Weightlifting were taken up for discussion by the respective speakers. Each of the panellists adequately emphasized the concerned sports and further the significant progress that India has accomplished in 2022.



Clicked at Xphoria 2.0



Clicked at Xphoria 2.0



Members of Panel Discussion



Clicked at Xaykala'22

XAVKALA'22

XAVKALA'22 organized by the XUCAS event society, under the supervision of Miss Paramita Barman Sen and Dr. Srenwantee Bhattacharjee, on the 17th of September 2022, in the St. Xavier's University campus itself, was an exuberant event, filled with exciting performances by the college pupil, with and against each other. Pupils formed teams and competed amongst themselves leading to a really passionate and competitive ambience which was surely enjoyed and thrived by all. Some events were namely, Fashion Show, where pupils got

to portray their inner fashionistas in a presentable manner, Stand-up comedy, which tickled all our funny bones and left us grasping for air, Singing and dancing which was a treat to the ears and eyes. The surprise element to the whole event was the Band Performance, which did leave everyone thrilled and mesmerized and turned out to be the perfect end to a perfectly executed event. The whole event was wrapped up sharp at 7pm. Moreover, the event surely turned out to be one worth going down the books.

XPHORIA 2.0

Students from the Department of Mass Communication under the guidance of Professor Dr Reshmi Naskar organised and successfully pulled off mini-freshers "Xphoria 2.0" for the students of MA Semester I and BA Semester I of Mass Communication. It was held on 26th September in Albert Huart Hall of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata. The event started with an Agomoni song by

Ishani. A panel discussion was held by the students of MA Mass Communication all semesters, one from each batch. Soon the professors and Dean sir joined the event. A talent show was held namely "1 minute to fame" where the participants had one minute to perform their best. This event was a stage to familiarize the newly joined students with their respective seniors.



Dance performance at Xaykala'22

From Malls to Market : The Lingering Pujo's essence

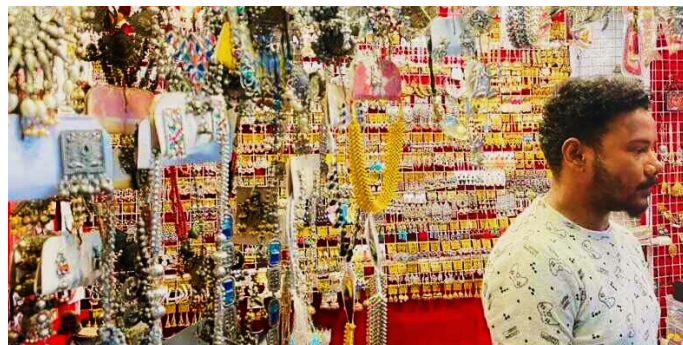


Indian culture is avowed as the most hospitable and celebrative culture amongst all. We have the highest spirits when it comes to festive jollification. Not a second thought is put behind spending money on new clothes, home decor, food, anything. Amongst all the other festivals we celebrate, Durga Pujo in Bengal is the colossal highlight. If you take a walk along the narrow lanes of Bengal during pujo, the lingering fragrance of the dhoop bati coming from the innumerable pujo pandals, the euphonious melody of the dhak, the giggling of the kids, chitter chatter of all the kakus and kakima's adda, will subdue you and you would find yourself deluged in the spirit of the Indian culture. As Rina, Jyoti and I were on our pujo shopping spree, at 5pm we reached New Market. Kolkata's oldest market, where your intentions to not buy something dissipate and you return home with a bright smile, a little hit on your wallet and something you did not need to buy. This is something you will never feel in a fancy mall, although a sea of people have become a common sight at all of Kolkata's shopping destinations, but to me and I'm sure most of us, New Market holds a soft corner. Owing to pujo, the crowd was inordinate. My feet struggled to stay on the ground without being stepped on by someone else's. The loud roar of thousands of people, shop vendors calling

out to them, Phuchka and chaat walas, wakes up the spirit in you. The fragrance of the shiuli flowers mesmerizing in the air gave me pujo vibes and anywhere my eyes went, alluring decorations in the shade of red, glimmering bright lights, huge posters of the famous pujo pandals, everything looked ever so exuberant. As we somehow made our way to a vendor selling earrings, my inquisitive, talkative self couldn't resist having a chat with him. I went on to ask,

Nameera: "How does the pujo market feel kaka?"

Vendor: "Maa's blessings are showered all year long, but especially during this time of year, it's great"



New Market, Kolkata

Nameera: "And how long do you keep your stall open during pujo?"

Vendor: "Whenever the customers stop coming in. Closing

the stall before that feels like rejecting maa Lakshmi and I like to keep her pleased"

Nameera: "Good lord! Do people come late at night as well?"

Vendor: "Customers keep coming in till midnight, in fact even on the days of pujo there is heavy footfall. Pujo's shopping never ends didibhai. (sister) something or the other is always left."

Nameera: "That's so true kaka. But don't you miss out on your own share of celebration this way?"

Vendor: "This is my celebration. I celebrate with you all. You are all a part of it, I give you things to wear, you put it

against your ears, you see it, you smile, you get excited. Festivals are all about spreading happiness, that is what I do. Isn't it?"

Nameera: "That is such a beautiful thing to say kaka, you're so kind"

Vendor: "Oh! No didibhai, nothing like that. Maa aschen (is going to arrive) and she brings happiness to us all. I am just her medium of spreading it." We 3 bought 9 Pairs of earrings in all and as we were walking away, kaka slipped in one extra pair as a gift and said, "When I give you people happiness, you do the same for me. Here, keep it. Happy Pujo." A poor man's pockets might be empty but his heart is the biggest and generous of all.

That's the spirit of Pujo, here in Bengal and all around the world. Anyway, after the tiring necessity to shop, and a refreshing snack of the tastiest phuchka, it was time to go back home. Like I mentioned earlier, to go on the other side of the road we had to cross a number of other roads, make a circle around the whole area and then finally reach our spot, where let alone waiting for a cab, there was no scope of standing. You don't walk to where you want to go during pujo traffic rush, you are pushed to wherever the crowd is headed. The day ended on a great note and as the night set in, the last session of the dhaks slowly faded away in the same chitter chatter of the kakus and kakima's adda, and another day's wait for pujo was gone.

By Nameera Aman

The Evolution of Durga Puja

By Ronit Kumar Saha

Regardless of their faith, background, or status, everyone in India celebrate and take part in this significant celebration. People from West Bengal and Odisha are particularly fond of this occasion. Dance and cultural programmes are the festival's most important components. At this occasion, people also eat a variety of delectable traditional foods. The city of Kolkata is adorned with businesses and food stands. Because of this, many people—both Bengalis and visitors—enjoy delectable dishes and treats. Durga Puja symbolises the triumph of good over evil.

According to the iconography outlined in the scriptures, the traditional representation of the goddess worshipped at the Durga Puja is accurate. The Gods combined their abilities to create Durga, a stunning goddess with ten arms that each bear their deadliest weapon. The four offspring of Durga—Kartikeya, Ganesha, Saraswati, and Lakshmi—are also depicted in the tab-

leau. The term “ek-chala” (from the Sanskrit words “ek” for one and “chala” for cover) refers to the traditional clay picture of Durga, also known as Pratima, that unites all five deities.

Sholar saaj and daker saaj are the two types of embellishments that are applied to clay. The white core of shola reed, which grows in marshes, is usually used to embellish the pratima in the first case. The use of beaten silver (rangta) increased as the devotees' riches did. Previously, the silver was shipped via mail from Germany as an import (dak). Daker Saaj was thus named.

The enormous temporary canopies that house the symbols are known as “pandals,” and they are supported by a bamboo pole framework and covered in vibrant fabric. The many people who go “pandal-hopping” during the four days of Durga Puja will enjoy a visual spectacle thanks to the inventive, artistic, and decorative modern pandals.

Pc: Priyanka Sengupta

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