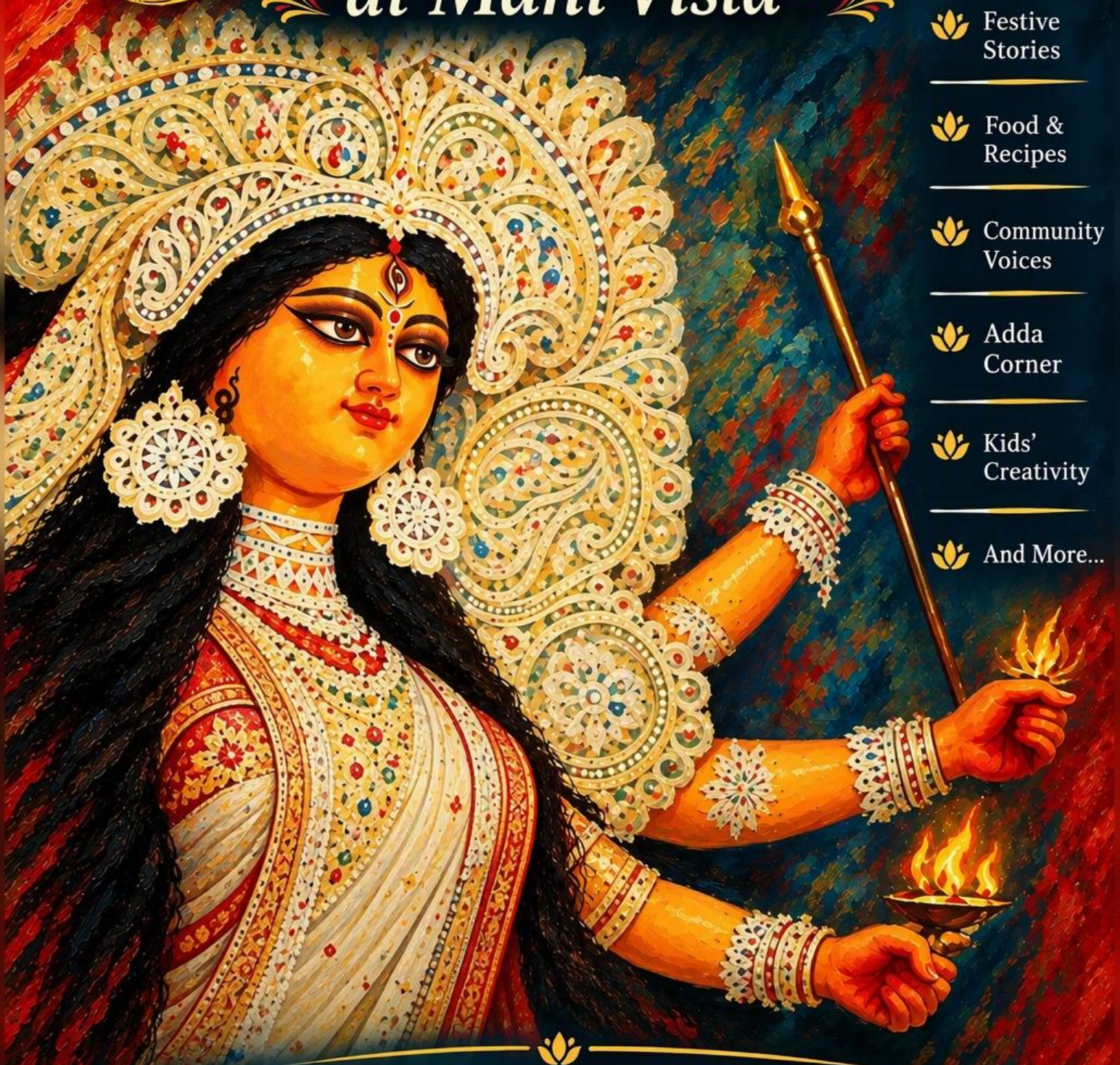
Durga Puja 2026

Sharadiya

at Mani Vista



- Festive Stories
- Food & Recipes
- Community Voices
- Adda Corner
- Kids' Creativity
- And More...

Celebrating Culture, Community and the joy of festivities at Mani Vista

Editor's Desk

Some ideas begin simply and become something much bigger than imagined. This magazine is one of them.

Putting together our very first Pujo magazine as amateurs has been both a joyful and sometimes daunting journey. What has made it truly special, though, is the incredible response from our Mani Vista community.

Stories, poems, photographs, art, memories, recipes and children's creativity have poured in, revealing just how much talent, warmth and wonderful stories exist behind the doors of our building.

This magazine is not about perfection—it is about **participation**. It is a celebration of our people, our memories and the joy of creating something together.

And now, as the pages come together, so does the excitement. The dhak will soon sound, the lights will go up, and Mani Vista will come alive with music, food, laughter and adda.

Most importantly, **Ma Durga is coming home.**

May she bring happiness, health, togetherness and many beautiful memories for all of us.

Thank you to everyone who provided content, encouraged and simply said, *"Count me in."* This magazine belongs to all of us.

Here's to our first **Sharadiya at Mani Vista**.

মা এসো। Let the festivities begin!

[Sayantika Mukherjee, Susmita Chordia, Suranjita Mukherjee, Sanjoy Mukherjee]



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PROSE

মা আসছেন

রীতা দাশগুপ্ত · 20 WC



আয়োজন দেখে মনে হচ্ছে কন্যা আসছেন, বৎসরান্তে শ্বশুরালয় থেকে পিত্রালয়ে কন্যার আগমন। পাঁজি পুঁথি দেখে আসার দিনক্ষণ সব ঠিক হয়েছে, কিন্তু মায়ের মন তর সয়না। কবে কন্যাকে বলবেন, "কেমন করে হরের ঘরে ছিলেম উমা বলমা তাই" তাই মার উদ্বেগের সীমা নাই। গিরিরাজকে পুনঃ পুনঃ তাগিদ দিচ্ছেন "যাও যাও গিরি আনিতে গৌরী, উমা আমার বড় কেঁদেছে ।" গিরিরাজ কিঞ্চিৎ আলস্য প্রকাশ করছেন, তাতে মা মেনকা আবেগ প্রবণ হয়ে উঠছেন, চোখের কোণে অশ্রু ধারা, বলছেন, "সোনার বরণ গৌরী আমার, ভাঙ্গর ভোলা জামাই তোমার ।" মেনকার বিগলিত অশ্রু-ধারায় গিরীরাজও বিগলিত হয়ে অগ্রসর হচ্ছেন। মেনকার ও ভাবা দরকার সংসার ছেড়ে আসব বললেই কি আসা যায়। সংসারের সব দিক সামলে তবে তো বাড়ী থেকে বেরুতে পারবে তা সে যত কম দিনের জন্যই হোক। লোকে জামাইকে যাই বলুক এটা তো মেনে নিতে হবে তপস্যা করেই এই জামাইকে পতিত্বে বরণ করেছে। কৈলাশ ছাড়ার আগে উমারও মনে পড়ছে তার প্রাক বিবাহের দিনগুলি - সেই তপস্যা দিনের পরদিন, অভুক্তা, অপর্ণা। নারদের ছলনায় শিবকে বৃদ্ধ, জটাজুট ব্যাঘ্রচর্ম পরিহিত লোলচর্মে রূপের বর্ণনা শুনে উমা তদ্রূপ শিবকে দেখে তপস্যা ত্যাগ করে ফিরে যাচ্ছেন আর পশ্চাতে ফিরে ফিরে দেখছেন, শিব তখন তাঁর সেই ভুবন ভুলানো রূপ ধীরে ধীরে পরিগ্রহ করছেন। সেরূপ নেহারি উমা আর না পারছেন সম্মুখে এগিয়ে যেতে না পারছেন পশ্চাতে ফিরে যেতে - একই স্থানে থেকে নয়নাভিরাম ধূর্জটিকে স্থিরদৃষ্টিতে অবলোকন করছেন – না পারছেন এগুতে না পারছেন পিছাতে ন যথৌ, ন তস্থৌ। এমনি মনে পড়ছে কত কথা।

কন্যা সপরিবারে পিত্রালয়ে এলেন।

পিত্রালয়ে আয়োজন কি কম। প্রভাতে দন্তধাবণ, জলযোগ, পানীয়। স্নানের কত ঘটা – সপ্তসমুদ্রের জল, সপ্ততীর্থবারি, সহস্রধারা, নিশিজল, গজদন্ত মৃত্তিকা, সুগন্ধজল এমনি হাজারো দ্রব্য সহযোগে স্নান। তারপর সারাদিন ও নিশাকালে বিভিন্ন পানাহারে আপ্যায়ন, - রুধিরেণ আপ্যায়তাম, মাংসেন আপ্যায়তাং – এইরূপে আমিষ নিরামিষ নানা খাদ্য দ্রব্যে কন্যাকে পরিতৃপ্ত করতে পিত্রালয় সদাব্যস্ত, সব যেন শাস্ত্র পঞ্জিকানুযায়ী ঠিক সময়ে ঠিক লগ্নে অনুষ্ঠিত হয়, যাপিত হয় এদিকে খরদৃষ্টি সর্বক্ষণ। পিত্রালয়ে যেন রাজসূয় যজ্ঞ চলছে। আর হবে নাই বা কেন কন্যা যে রাজরাজেশ্বরী, আদর আপ্যায়নে যেন কোন খামতি না থাকে, পান থেকে চুন খসলে চলবে না। এত আয়োজন কি একদিনেই হচ্ছে, গত বার মাস ধরে এসবের প্রস্তুতি চলছে।

এই ভাবে ভোগে রাগে, ঢাকেঢোলে, অশনে বসনে, আমোদে আহ্লাদে চারটি দিন কাটিয়ে উমা কৈলাশে ফিরবেন হরের সংসারে। পিত্রালয়ে এসেছেন এক যানে, ফিরবেন অন্যযানে - আগমন ঘোটকে - ফল ছত্রভঙ্গস্তুরঙ্গমে, যাবেন গজে - ফলং গজচ-জলদা দেবী শস্যপূর্ণা বসুন্ধরা। ওদিকে কৈলাশে কৈলাশপতি চিন্তায় আছেন কখন পরিবার নির্বিঘ্নে ফিরবেন।

বিজয়া হয়ে গেছে, সিঁদুর খেলা শেষ, কন্যা পিত্রালয় ত্যাগ করার পূর্বে তার পছন্দের মত খাদ্য দ্রব্যাদির ব্যবস্থা হয়ে গেছে - সে ও কত বিচিত্র প্রকার হয়ত বা পান্তাভাত, কচুরশাক, শোলমাছ এমনি কতকি।

চিন্তা মগ্ন মহেশ্বরকে নিশ্চিন্ত হওয়ার জন্য নীলকণ্ঠ পাখী উড়িয়ে দেওয়া হল। সে যেন মহেশ্বরকে সংবাদ দেয় পরিবার রওনা দিয়েছে কৈলাশের দিকে।

শেষ বিদায়ের ক্ষণে মা কন্যার মুখে মিষ্টান্ন আর পান দিয়ে কানে কানে কিছু বললেন যা অন্তত কিন্তু কান পেতে সেই অশ্রুত বাক্যটিও আমার শ্রুত "আবার আসছে বছর আসিস মা"।

কন্যা চলেছেন নির্ধারিত যানে সপরিবারে কৈলাশে, ধেয়ান মগ্ন ধূর্জটি অপেক্ষায় আছেন সেখানে -

রাজে মৌনমুক্ত শঙ্করপদে তাপসীর চারু শুভ্রতা

দুর্গা মায়ি কি -

❖

MEMOIR

Pujo at Mani Vista

Pavini Lahoti · 17 EC

To begin with a brief introduction, my name is Pavini Lahoti from Flat NO 17 EC. My story with Durga Puja starts when I was naïve and tender, hanging along with my parents and my brother doing pandal hopping. We used to eat amazing street food and then queueing just to see the theme and the beauty of MAA DURGA. At that time, I never really understood what the architect of the pandal actually wanted to show. My dad would simply adore the beauty of the College street Pandal or the theme of Singhi Park Pandal. My aim was to wear beautiful frocks, drink Paramount's iconic Daab Sherbet and get away from studies for a few days.



Years passed away till I got married and had our children. Never had I thought that I will leave my Charu Chandra place house and come to an apartment or so should I say a society. Last year our Lahoti family had purchased the house, but we hadn't moved in. So, apart from the pandals, it was the very first time that me and children had seen a four-days event of Durga puja in a society. The very First time I had entered the banquet I was simply staring at new faces till we were warmly greeted by Mr D. Roy. He introduced our family to all the people living there. I was no more feeling awkward now. People greeting us, asking question, adoring my children and the Puja programme finally started.

They had created a beautiful Puja Pandal, with a gorgeous Maa Durga Idol. All four days were meticulously organised both in the afternoons and the evenings. The Pandit ji would come say the mantras and everyone would devotedly follow and rejoice with dhaak during aratis for Maa Durga. Some were fasting, kids running about and the chit- chatting going on. What I adored the most were the way everyone dressed for the occasion. All men with their attire and the ladies with the most beautiful sarees added new colours to the festivity.

I had good fun getting all this attention since we were new, but also with me enjoying a chat in Bengali and of course the catering. The lunches and the dinner had fabulous Bengali cuisine with the Rasagollas and the Sandeshes. There was also a live concert every night by artists, where apart from Tollywood and Bollywood songs, we also played antakshari which was really entertaining. The last day always being an emotional one when Maa Durga leaves, I participated in the Sindoor khela which was the first time I had done so.

Finally, the pujas are here again and now residing in the building would be an even a bigger joy to write what I felt this year. ❖

MEMORIES

Memories from days gone by...

Picture Credit: Mani Vista Residents



Memories from days gone by...

POEM

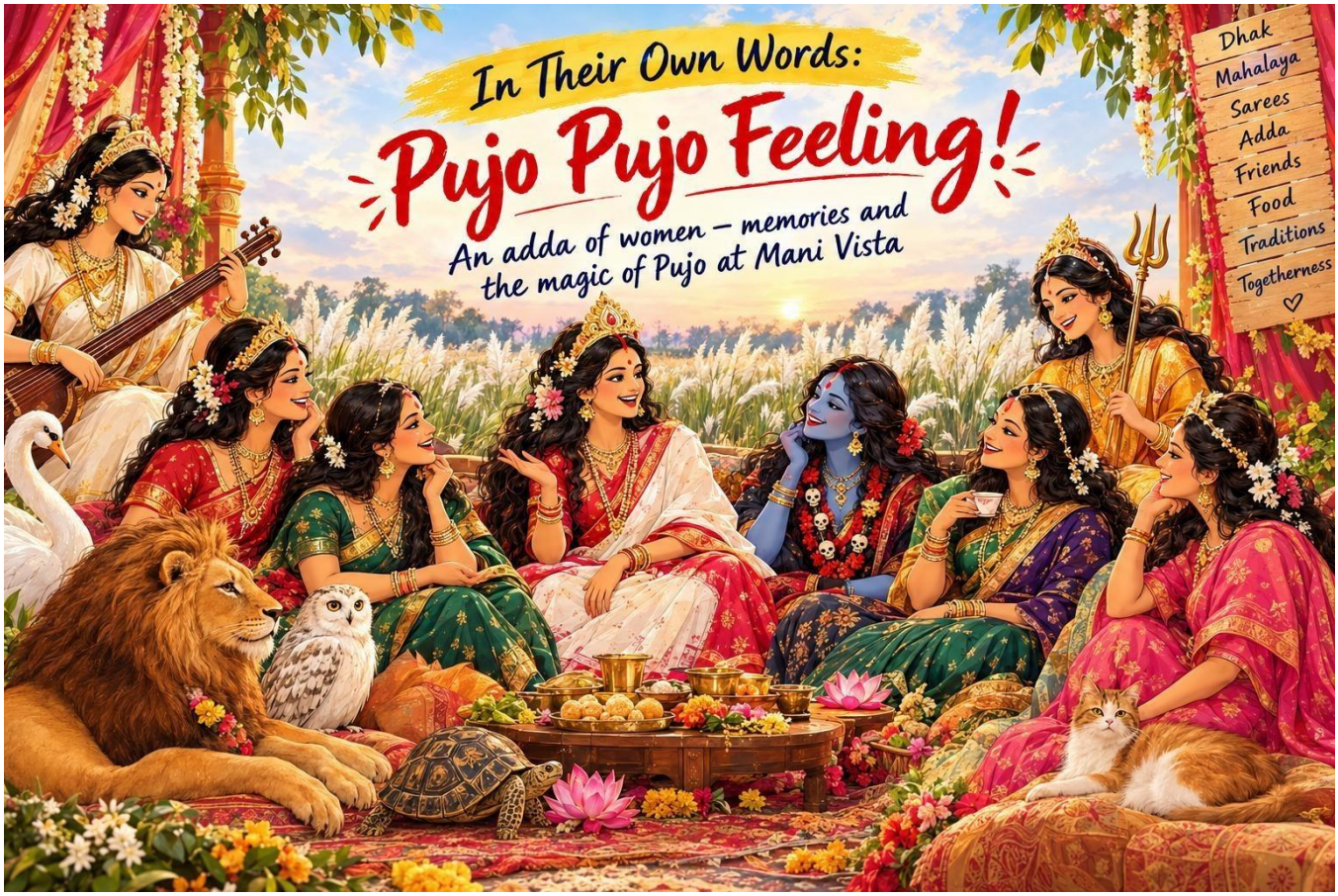
Precisely Life

Haimanti Mukherjee · 4 EB



Most of the flowers have thorns in their stems but who wants to let it go?
Whether at last we fail or succeed there is no harm in trying to and fro !
This should be the motto of our life to try till our last breath of life,
Then only there could be at least a chance for all of us to thrive.
Without any attempts no one could be sure of their failure,
After hard efforts only one can achieve true grandeur!

COMMUNITY VOICES



Mani Vista Residents

THERE ARE FESTIVALS, and then there is Durga Puja. For Kolkata, Pujo is not simply a few days on the calendar. It is a feeling that begins long before the first beats of the dhak. It lives in the clear blue autumn sky, the white clouds drifting overhead, the first glimpse of kash phool, the familiar sounds of Mahalaya, new clothes, old friendships, crowded streets, endless food and conversations that never seem to end.

And perhaps most beautifully, Durga Puja belongs to everyone who finds happiness, nostalgia, faith and togetherness in it, regardless of language, community or generation. At Mani Vista, that feeling has its own story.

Ask the women of our community what they love about Pujo, and the answers unfold like an evening of adda — one voice picking up where another leaves off.

For Amrita Sengupta (Flat 26 EB), it begins with the unmistakable sound of the dhak.

"The sound of Dhak is exhilarating during the Durga Puja. You delve into the sound and it takes you to a world where there is only purity and happiness."

The dhak needs no translation. It speaks directly to the excitement and anticipation of a season that holds a special place in our hearts. Amrita also admires a quality she sees in those around her:

"I see a common trend where the more knowledgeable a person is, the more is their humility."

Deepa Agarwal (Flat 11 WC) brings a mischievous perspective to community life.

What does she look forward to during Pujo?

"Dress up, meet all friends, and have fun."

And what does she appreciate most about Mani Vista residents?

"Fighting."

A pause, perhaps a laugh. Because we don't always agree — and perhaps we shouldn't. The real test of a community is what happens after the disagreements.

For Lila Mukherjee (Flat 11 WA), the beauty of Mani Vista lies precisely in that balance.

"We come from different walks of life and aren't afraid to challenge each other when it matters — but when it's time to celebrate, or when someone needs support, we come together."

She adds:

"We may disagree, but no fight is permanent. There is an invisible thread that connects us all, and that sense of community is something I truly cherish."

For Lila, the season is also about reconnecting with something deeper:

"More than anything, it is the feeling of reconnecting with the divine, our traditions and the roots that make us who we are."

For Sharmistha Roy (Flat 13 EC), the festive season brings two irresistible pleasures — friends and new sarees.

"During the festive season I eagerly look forward to meeting all my friends for adda sessions and wearing the new sarees I had absolutely no excuse to buy!"

And the warmth goes beyond friendships:

"We have all become like a family and everyone participates wholeheartedly in all the festive activities."

She knows Pujo is approaching when nature itself seems to announce its arrival:

"The sky becomes clear blue, the fields are full of kaash phool and the air vibrates with eager anticipation!"

For Mamta Panjani (Flat 28 EA), it is about being part of every moment.

"The one thing that I look forward to during the festive season is being a part of the festivity from the inception till the end of it and enjoying every moment with family and friends."

At Mani Vista, she believes that festive spirit transcends everything else:

"Come what may, we are one in times of festivity and celebration."

For Mamta, even watching the pandal structures rise and cultural rehearsals begin is enough to bring the excitement of Pujo alive.

For Haimanti Mukherjee (Flat 4 EB), the essence of Pujo is summed up in one word: adda.

"Meeting friends and relatives and never-ending Addas."

She cherishes the cultural evenings and Ashtami Anjali, when everyone gathers in traditional attire. Her memories of Kolkata are a riot of colour and activity — kash flowers, bustling shops, streets illuminated with festive lights, Bengali and Hindi songs, and hawkers serving phuchka and candyfloss around the pandals.

That is Kolkata during Pujo: brighter, louder, hungrier and somehow happier.

For Pavini Lahoti (Flat 17 EC), the magic of Pujo lies in stepping back in time.

While many look forward to pandal hopping, Pavini is drawn to the grandeur and traditions of Kolkata's Bonedi Bari pujas.

Among her favourites are the Bonedi Bari Heritage Puja, celebrated for around 300 years, Laltubabu and Chhatubabu Bari Puja, and the Mallik Baari Puja at Shobhabazar.

"I like heritage to be part of my pandal hopping."

There is something special about standing in the courtyards of these old Kolkata homes, where generations have gathered to welcome Maa Durga. Yet, for Pavini, the spirit of Pujo is just as much about the present as the past:

"We celebrate as a family, all contributing in whichever way possible for Goddess Durga."

The sound of the dhak, autumn flowers and the voice of Sri Birendra Krishna Bhadra complete her picture of the season.

For Jasmine Mehta (Flat 32 EB), the heart of Pujo is the strength and spirit of the community.

She hopes to see everyone celebrate together with "eternal love and harmony." She also appreciates how residents work through everyday challenges:

"I have seen them stay united by fixing meetings, talking and listening to all, and trying to help and solve problems of the building. So togetherness shows in MV."

For Jasmine, Durga Puja is also a celebration of feminine strength and the triumph of good over evil.

"Durga Puja is the festival of Maa Durga, whom we all welcome wholeheartedly."

The dhaak, pandal hopping, discovering different forms of Maa Durga and enjoying delicious food all add to the magic. And the holiday spirit brings its own comfort:

"That holiday and relaxing mood makes you feel that Maa can take away all your problems and bless you throughout your life."

For Sumita Basu (Flat 21 WC), the essence is beautifully simple:

"Association."

And then:

"Enthusiasm."

Two words that capture the energy needed to bring a community to life.

For Anika Vombatkere (Flat 16 WA), Pujo is a reminder that traditions can cross every boundary.

"The one thing that I have always looked forward to during festive season is the culmination of people from different walks of life. The exchange of love and traditions, which keeps all of us bonded."

Anika grew up in Jamshedpur, is Punjabi and married to a Konkani — yet Durga Puja holds a special place in her heart. You don't have to be Bengali to feel the magic.

She knows it is Pujo when she sees:

"People in lovely traditional dresses. Lot of hustle and bustle and of course good food."

And one detail particularly fascinates her:

"The most fascinating part for me is the big red bindis and Sindoor worn by the ladies."

For Krishnaja Saseendran (Flat 19 WC), this year brings a particularly special experience.

Usually away during Pujo, she has decided to stay in Kolkata for the celebrations for the very first time.

"This year, I'm looking forward to experiencing Durga Pujo in Kolkata for the very first time! We usually travel during Pujo, but this time, thanks to our lovely neighbours, we decided to prepone our trip so we could be here for the celebrations."

She describes her fellow residents as:

"Effortlessly welcoming and helpful."

The warmth of her neighbours and their efforts to include others helped make staying for Pujo an easy decision. And the signal that the season has begun?

"When the Mahalaya song plays in the early morning."

For Sukanya Ray (Flat 28 WC), Pujo is about reunions — especially friends returning home just for the festival.

Despite our differences, she believes there is something that draws everyone together:

"We have our differences but Durga Pujo brings all together."

Her own Pujo moment is wonderfully nostalgic:

"You know it's Pujo when I hear 'Ashwin-er Shwarodoprate' in my old Murphy radio."

That familiar voice can transport us straight back to childhood, to early mornings filled with anticipation and the promise of the festivities ahead.

For Dr Sonia Gon (Flat 7 EC), the magic of Pujo lies in the joy of togetherness.

"The magic of Durga Pujo—which brings together family and friends spreading joy of togetherness."

She cherishes the wonderful sense of community at Mani Vista, where fellow homemates come together to celebrate and share happiness.

And how does she know it is Pujo?

"You know it's Durga Pujo when…"

…the sound of the dhaak fills the air.

…the fragrance of shiuli flowers brings a smile to your face.

…happiness and Pujo vibes fill the surroundings.

…every corner of the city glows with festive lights.

…and the heart knows that Ma Durga is coming home.

Perhaps that last line captures it all. Pujo is not just something we see or hear; it is something we feel.

So, when do we know it is Pujo?

When kash phool appears and the sky turns an impossible blue. When Mahalaya fills the early morning air and the dhak begins to beat. When pandals rise, rehearsals start, shops fill with excited shoppers and the city dresses up for its favourite guest.

When old friends return, children can barely contain their excitement, and every outing becomes an excuse to meet someone. When the fragrance of shiuli mingles with the festive air, and the sound of Birendra Krishna Bhadra brings a familiar lump to the throat.

For some, it is heritage and tradition. For others, it is new sarees, good food, cultural evenings or endless adda. For many, it is the simple joy of being together.

And at Mani Vista, it is also about people who may disagree in everyday life but stand beside one another when it matters.

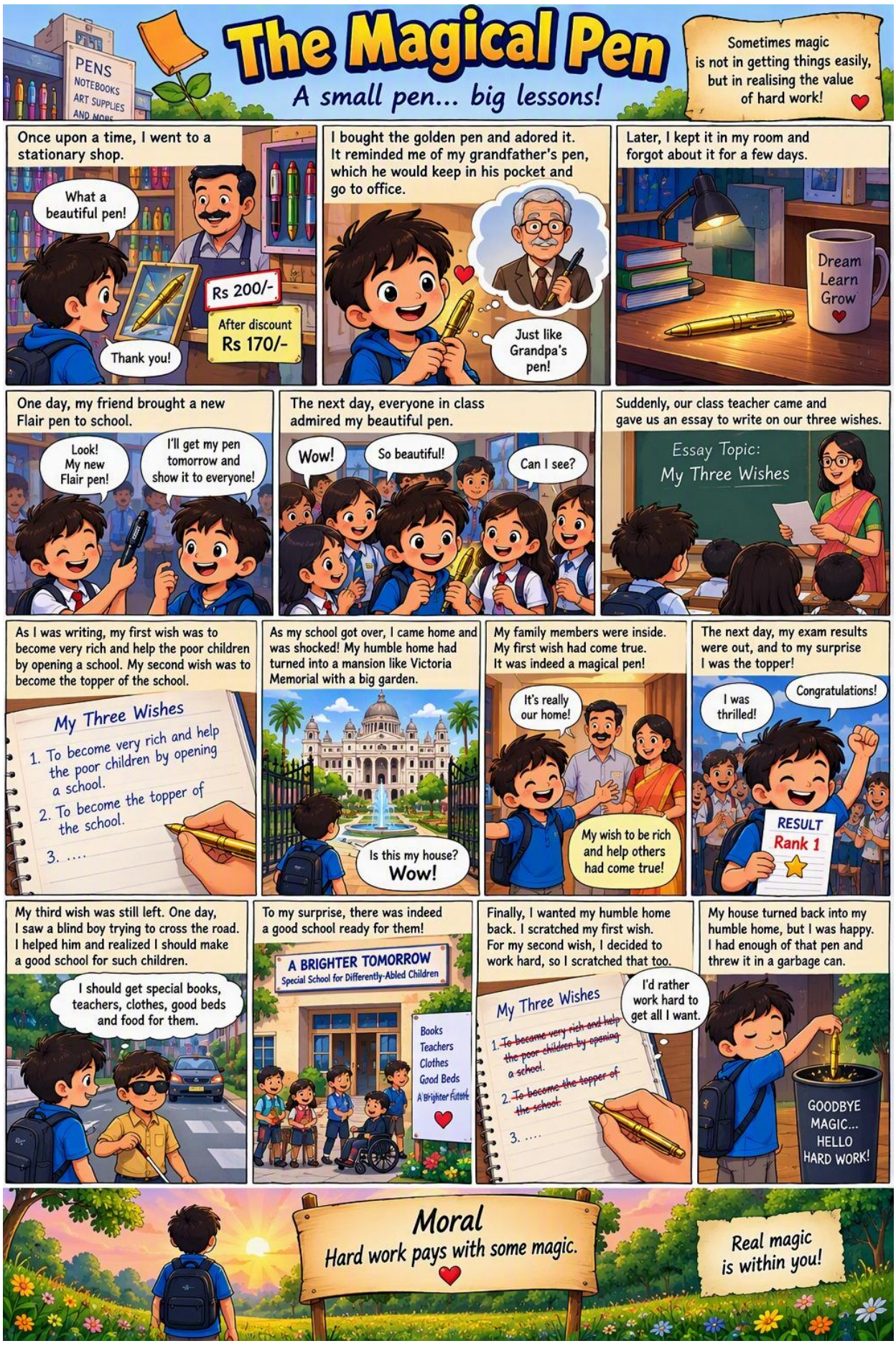
Perhaps that is what Durga Puja really means to Kolkata and to everyone who carries a little bit of Kolkata in their hearts. It is not about everyone being the same. It is about making room for different voices, traditions and perspectives — and finding joy in celebrating together.

As Uma arrives at her *Baap-er Baari*, all we need to do is open our doors, pull up a chair, share good food, listen to one another and celebrate. And when Dashami arrives, we can share those inevitable tears as Maa prepares to leave.

Because you know it's Pujo when, for a few beautiful days, everyone feels a little more at home.

Dugga Dugga! ❖





COMIC · My Three Magical Wishes with My Magic Pen — Trishaan Lahoti (Age 9) · 17 EC

PUJO DIARY

Pandal Hopping, Brishti and a Very Wet Pujo

Sayantika Mukherjee · 11 WA



IT WAS MAHASHTAMI, AND like every proper Bangali, we had a plan. A very ambitious plan.

New clothes, new shoes, perfectly done hair, just the right amount of make-up — everything was ready. The target for the evening was simple: as many pandals as humanly possible.

"Cholo, aaj at least doshta pandal dekhei phirbo!"

We had barely finished admiring the Mudiali Club pandal when the sky suddenly turned dark.

"Looks like it might rain."

"Arre, kichhu hobe na! Five minutes-e theme jabe."

That famous Bangali confidence. Five minutes. How dangerous those two words can be!

Within minutes, the heavens opened.

And when I say it rained, I mean it rained as if Ma Durga herself had decided that everyone needed an emergency shower before darshan.

Umbrellas appeared around us from nowhere. Sarees were tucked in higher to jump over puddles. Phones were desperately put away into handbags. New shoes were covered in pyach-pyache kaadaa.

One gentleman in a pristine white panjabi suddenly found himself staring anxiously at his clothes, wondering how long it would take for "white" to become "almost transparent".

We found a giant kawla-paataa to hold over our heads and ran. Eventually squeezed ourselves under the tiny awning of a shop, looking less like a group of glamorous pandal hoppers and more like a bunch of drowned rats.

Hair? Gone

Make-up? Gone

Perfectly ironed Pujo clothes? History.

But the adda of course jom-jomat.

Someone finally said, "Cholo, bari phire jai."

There was a moment of silence.

Then came the inevitable response:

"Eto dur eshe? Shib Mandir Sharbojonin ta dekhbo na!"

Because this is Pujo. You can be soaking wet, freezing cold and completely exhausted, but somehow going home before seeing "just one more pandal" feels like a personal failure.

By now, the rain was coming down even harder.

"Kintu amra to puro bhije gechi!"

The reply was immediate: "Tate ki? Ekhon to aar bhije jaowar kichhu baki nei!"

And so, we carried on.

We didn't manage ten pandals that evening. We didn't even manage five.

But somehow, those few pandals, the rain, the laughter, the soggy phuchka, the smudged kajol and the desperate attempts to save our phones became one of our favourite Pujo memories.

Because Pujo is not just about looking perfect in new clothes or taking the perfect selfie in front of a beautiful pandal.

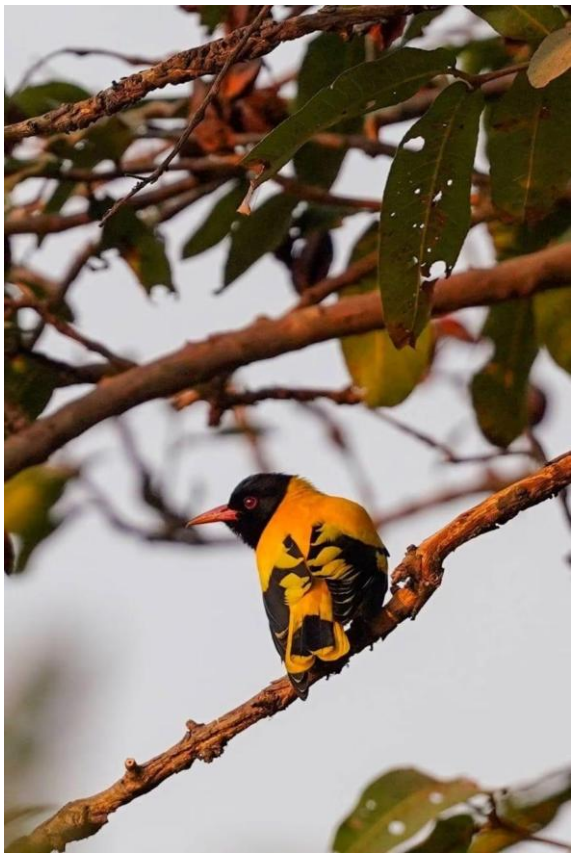
It is about the brishti, the bhijey jawa, the adda, the khawa-dawa, the laughter — and that very Bangali ability to turn even a complete disaster into a golpo that gets told for years.

And, of course, by the end of the evening, someone had already said: "Next year, koto gulo chhata niye berobo!" - but most likely we would forget... ❖

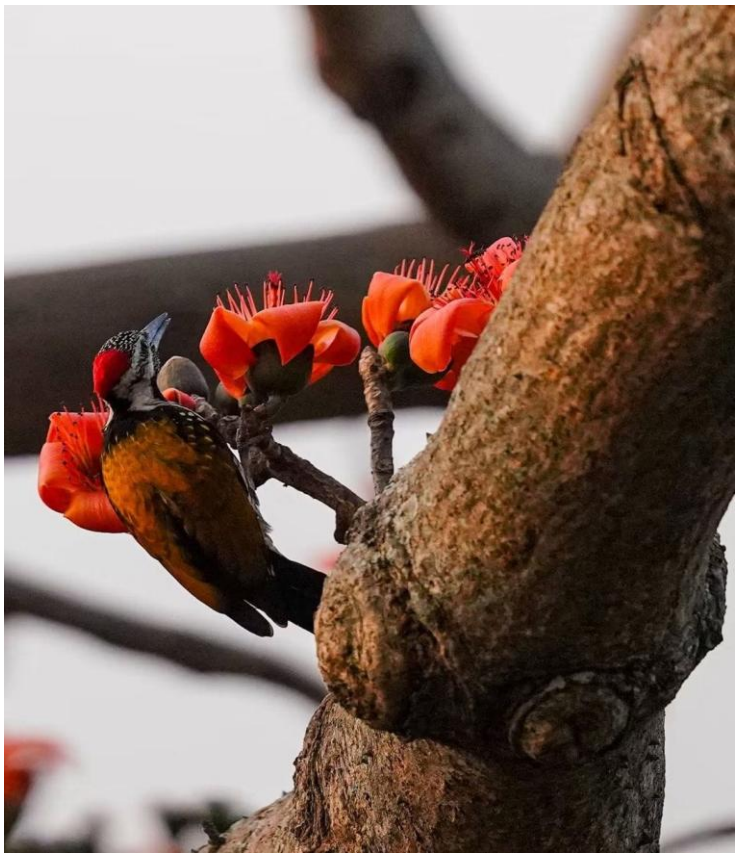
PHOTO FEATURE

Photographs by Dr Saurabh Mukhopadhyay

Birds seen from his balcony at 4 EB



Black Hooded Oriole



Lesser Flameback Woodpecker



Blue-Throated Barbet

And a few photographs from his Puja Parikrama in 2025



Chetla Agrani - 2025



Shivmandir 2025



66-Palli - 2025

INTERVIEW

Adda Corner with Paushali Sahu

Editor

Your Journey

1. What first drew you to music, and when did you realise that singing could become your life's journey?

Mum says I didn't waste any time. I started humming even before I could talk or walk. Ours was a musical home, with Mum's harmonium, tabla, and a wall lined with LP records. I grew up surrounded by music and found my way to singing very early.



Paushali Sahu · 20 EB

I always knew music would be with me till my last breath. What I never imagined was that, one day, I'd make it my profession.

2. Looking back, what has been the biggest turning point in your musical journey?

Taking up music professionally was a leap of faith – leaving behind a successful marketing career in BFSI. It was definitely the biggest turning point of my life.

3. What has been the most memorable moment of your career so far—the one that still gives you goosebumps?

Being in a studio with Sonu Nigam ji, singing a duet with him, recording it, and then hearing our voices together in the music video playing through speakers everywhere - it truly felt like a dream. One of those goosebumps moments you quietly hold on to.

And the little girl in me couldn't stop jumping up and down when I saw the very first social media post from Sonu Nigam ji's page, where he mentioned me and shared our song, Sajna.

4. Is there a performance or song that holds a particularly special place in your heart? Why?

I had the privilege of singing a reprise of Geeta Dutt's "Meri Jaan Mujhe Jaan Na Kaho" from the film Anubhav. It was her last recorded song, and she left us soon after, at the young age of 41. As an ardent admirer of the legendary singer, recording this song was an deeply emotional experience for me.

The music video was released by Saregama, and the song received an overwhelming amount of love from listeners. It remains very close to my heart, and I'm sure you will love it too, if you're a retro music fan.

5. What has music taught you about yourself over the years?

About myself? Well, music taught me how to be happy, and made me realise what a blessing it is to be able to share that happiness with others through my songs.

The Music You Love

6. If you could sing only one song for the rest of your life, which one would you choose?

Rahein na rahein hum, mehka karenge.

7. Which song do you find yourself humming or singing when nobody is listening?

Ei meghla diney ekla, ghawre thaake na toh mon (Hemanta Mukherjee)

8. Who is your favourite singer—Bengali or otherwise—and what do you admire most about them?

Geeta Dutt, Lata Mangeshkar, Kishore Kumar, Hemanta Mukherjee, Md. Rafi, Mukesh. I adore their gayaki – the distinctive personalities that they brought into the songs that they sang.

9. Is there a song you wish you had recorded or performed yourself?

Recently, I received quite a few calls from friends and acquaintances after they watched Main Vapas Aunga. When the song "Tere Paas Main" came on the big screen, they thought it was my voice.

It's an AR Rahman composition, and honestly, hearing a voice that sounds so remarkably similar to mine made me feel, for a fleeting moment, that it could have actually been me singing it.

10. What kind of music do you turn to when you simply want to relax and switch off?

It might sound strange but instead of music, I hear stories when I want to relax and switch off. There are many YouTube channels like 'Sunday Suspense', and I love listening to their Bangla audio stories of Satyajit Ray, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Leela Majumdar, and more.

Pujo & Kolkata

11. What is your earliest or most treasured Durga Pujo memory?

Pandal-hopping with dad as a little girl. One of those simple childhood memories that has stayed with me, and one of my most treasured memories of Pujo. 🩶

12. What does Pujo in Kolkata mean to you—music, food, adda, pandal-hopping, family, friends… or a bit of everything?

Pujo for me means being with family, and everything else follows.

13. What is your must-have Pujo food? And is there a dish you simply cannot resist?

Fuchka. Irresistable.

14. Which Pujo song instantly transports you back to your childhood?

Pujor gondho esheche. (Antara Choudhury)

15. If you had one completely free day during Pujo, how would you spend it in Kolkata?

Adda at home, in the midst of family and friends.

Life at Mani Vista

16. What do you love most about living at Mani Vista?

I haven't lived in Kolkata since my adult years, so this is my first-ever home of my own in the city. I absolutely love the open spaces, the greenery, and the overall warmth and vibe of the place. More than anything, I feel emotionally settled and calm knowing I'm surrounded by such kind and helpful people. It truly is a beautiful community, and I'm deeply grateful for all the love, warmth, and appreciation I've received here.

17. What is your favourite memory of Pujo or a celebration at Mani Vista?

2025 was my first year at Mani Vista, and I loved every bit of the Pujo celebrations. Having our very own Pujo felt incredibly intimate and special, and, in many ways, deeply emotional.

Rapid fire

Kash flowers or dhak beats?

Dhaak beats

Saree or jeans for Saptami?

Saree

Roll or biryani?

I'll skip both and vote for fuchka. 😂

Morning adda or late-night adda?

Late night.

One Kolkata place you could never get tired of visiting?

Rabindra Sarobar Lake

One person you would love to sing a duet with?

AR Rahman

One word that captures Pujo for you?

Euphoria ❖



Early Detection Saves Lives



It's not just a woman's issue

Breast cancer can affect anyone – women and men.

Know the signs. Check regularly.
Take charge of your health.

It's **everyone's health.**

For Women

Know what to look for and how to check.

Look for changes in your breasts

Check for lumps, changes in size or shape, skin dimpling, nipple changes or unusual discharge.

How to do a breast self-check

1 In the mirror

Look for changes in shape, size, skin or nipples (with arms at your sides, then raised).



2 In the shower

Use the pads of your fingers to gently feel each breast in a circular motion, covering the whole breast and armpit.



3 Lying down

Feel for any lumps or thickening, using the same circular motion.



Start from age 20, and check your breasts regularly, ideally once a month.

If you notice any changes, don't ignore them. See a doctor, even if you're unsure.

For Men

Breast cancer can happen to you too.

Look for changes in your chest

Check for lumps, swelling, skin changes, nipple changes or discharge.

How to check

1 Look

Stand in front of a mirror with your arms at your sides and then raised. Check for any visible changes in shape, size, skin or nipples.



2 Feel

Use the pads of your fingers to gently feel each breast and underarm area, looking for lumps, thickening or unusual changes.



3 Be aware

Also check for changes in your nipples, like inversion or discharge, and swelling in the underarm area.



Breast cancer is rare in men, but it can happen. **Early detection** leads to **better outcomes.**

Know your body | **Talk to your family** | **See a doctor if you notice any changes** | **Regular check-ups save lives**

Best wishes from

Mani Vista Sports & Cultural Association

INFOGRAPHIC · Early Detection Saves Lives — Mani Vista Sports & Cultural Association

FEATURE

Festival of Durga Puja – A Journey through FMCG – Indian vs Foreign Brands

Subhas Mukherjee · 16 WC



DURGA PUJA, THE FESTIVAL recognised by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage remains a major driver for growth in Bengal's economy. Buoyant corporate sponsorships, healthy footfalls in malls, rising spending on consumer goods and a positive sentiment among people are major contributors to this growth. To understand this economy, it is interesting to note how FMCG plays a major role during this biggest festival of Bengal – Durga Puja.

Our day-to-day life is constantly impacted by a number of FMCG products. Who wouldn't need items like tooth paste, tooth brush, soaps, shampoos, detergents, shaving cream, skin care lotions, packaged foods and beverages – even bottled drinking water?

FMCG or Fast Moving Consumer Goods are those consumer goods which are packaged, sold quickly in the market, relatively low cost items and replaced on a regular basis. These are 'non-durable' in nature, meaning they have limited life span. Goods that fall under this category are packaged and processed foods products, beverages, dairy products, toiletries, health-care products, garments, over-the-counter drugs, and so on.

There is another category of FMCG which is 'durable' in nature. These consumer durables include home appliances, electric or electronic items, furniture, jewellery, sports equipment, automobiles and so on. The life span of these 'consumer durables' is much higher than the first category of FMCG, which are 'non-durable' consumer goods.

Now let us see who are the top players in the FMCG sector that thrive for visual publicity and promotion through sponsorships during the Durga Puja – the biggest cultural festival of Bengal. In India, FMCG is one of the largest sectors in the economy. The Indian FMCG sector has a strong MNC presence. The top FMCG players are ITC Ltd, Hindustan Unilever (HUL), Nestle India, Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation – popularly known as Amul, Dabur India, Asian Paints, Cadbury India, Britannia Industries, Procter & Gamble, Marico Industries, Tata Consumer Products and many more.

It is interesting to note that most of the top brands in India are owned by MNCs. Hindustan Unilever in India itself owns more than 50 brands. By the word 'MNC', we mean companies which are foreign or overseas. For example, Hindustan Unilever is a British-Dutch company which has over 400 brands across the globe; Procter & Gamble is an American company which has about 30 brands in its portfolio; Nestle is headquartered in Switzerland which has over 2000 brands across the world; Colgate Palmolive is again an American company which has around 20 major brands. Apart from these companies, there are foreign brands in the consumer durable category – like Samsung from South Korea, Sony and Toyota from Japan, Vodafone from Britain or Apple from the United States.

Today, there has been a revolutionary growth in FMCG brands, developed and owned by Indian companies. In terms of quality, credibility and value, Amul, Emami, Dabur, Marico and ITC are some of the well- known Indian companies that produce consumer goods of international standard. Let us now see how these companies are

creating successful and trusted Indian brands and touching the lives of millions of Indians over the years.

Established in 1946, in Gujrat's Anand, Amul is a popular household name in dairy products. It produces high quality dairy items such as milk, butter, ghee, cheese, paneer, yoghurt, chocolate, beverages and many other items. Run and managed by a cooperative comprising 36 lakhs milk producers.

Founded in 1884 by Dr S K Burman, a physician in West Bengal, Dabur is now India's largest producer of about 20 well-known brands such as ayurvedic medicines and related products like Chayanprash, Honey, Hajmola, Pudin Hara, Vatika, Dabur Amla, Odomos and many other products.

Marico has over 25 well-known brands in its portfolio in hair care, edible oil, body lotion, and health foods categories. Some of its brands are Parachute, Saffola, Nihar, Livon etc. Marico is regarded as one of the most innovative Indian companies. This 35-year old company sells its products in 25 countries across the globe.

Another company that needs a mention here is ITC Ltd. Established in Kolkata in 1910, this company has entered into FMCG segment in a big way only 25 years back. In this short span, ITC has established itself as a leading Indian FMCG company in the areas of branded packaged Foods such as Aashirvaad atta, spices and ready-to-eat foods, YiPPee noodles and pasta, Bingo range of finger snacks, Sunfeast range of cookies and biscuits, B-Natural range of juices, Candyman confectionery are some of the well-known brands in the market. Personal Care products are soaps, shower jells, deodorant under the brands of Fiama ,Vivel, Engage, Savlon, Nimyle etc.; Education & Stationery business has 'Classmate' notebooks, 'Paper Kraft' stationery. Under the Agarbattis & Saftey Matches – 'Mangaldeep' continues to be the fastest growing agarbatti brand in India while 'Aim' is the largest safety matches in the country. ITC's FMCG has a vibrant portfolio of around 25 major brands

Let us now come to the Apparel industry which marks a striking growth during the Durga Puja festival - its Indian vs foreign brands. International clothing brands such as Puma, Wrangler, Levis and others have already reached some level of maturity in developed countries. In order to continuously grow and adapt to the global market, they have expanded into other countries like India. India has the highest margins in the apparel sector. The growth is prominent. People in the urban regions of the country are significantly more brand conscious than before.

Are these foreign apparel brands only ones who want to capitalise the potential of the Indian market? Certainly not. Indian brands such as Raymonds, Aditya Birla Group's Van Heusen, Louis Philippe, Allen Solly, Peter England, Pantaloons, Park Avenue of Raymonds Ltd and others are well known to capture a decent chunk of the market. Ironically, they do not sound Indian. Indian brands, for those who know they are Indian, have an emotional value in some regions of India. The average Indian consumer will pick the foreign brand for luxury apparel.

The secret behind every successful FMCG company or its brands, is ultimately customers' satisfaction. Now finally, to conclude this discussion, let us ourselves ask a question. Can Indian companies create successful world class brands? The answer is 'yes'. But the problem lies in our system and understanding. We, Indians, are skeptical of our own products. Due to prejudices against Indian brands, some Indian companies stick to foreign-sounding brand names like LaOpala, MonteCarlo, Vivel and many others as mentioned above.

If we can overcome these drawbacks, India can surely build World Class brands which will be a perpetual source of value creation for the Indian economy, and will save substantial 'Royalty' payments we pay, unknowingly, while patronising foreign brands or technology. Days are not far when Indian brands of global standard will be a badge of honour for India and Indians. ❖

FESTIVE BEAUTY

The Ultimate Festive Beauty Survival Guide

Madhushree Dwivedi · 29 EB

"Beauty is not about heavy makeup. It is about looking fresh, confident and festive."

From Durga Puja and Bijoya gatherings to late-night tash parties and Diwali celebrations, India's festive season is a marathon, not a sprint. For many, that means five days of pandal hopping, endless photos, family visits, card games that stretch into the early hours and a constant rotation of sarees and festive outfits.

According to beauty expert Mrs Dwivedi, the secret to surviving the season looking radiant isn't piling on more makeup. It's preparing your skin and hair before the festivities begin and letting your natural beauty shine through. "थोड़ा facial करा लीजिए, skin fresh हो जाएगा।" she advises.



A few days before Puja is the perfect time for a Hydrafacial, Gold Facial, brightening treatment or hair spa. Popular treatments such as keratin and nanoplastia can also help tame frizz and keep hair manageable throughout the celebrations. "চুলটা আগে strong করে নিন, তারপর Puja enjoy করুন।"

One of the biggest mistakes she sees every year is women investing in skincare treatments only to cover their glow with layers of foundation. "बहुत लोग सबसे बड़ी गलती यह करते हैं कि facial कराने के बाद भी बहुत ज़्यादा foundation लगा लेते हैं।"

Her advice is simple: if your skin is healthy and hydrated, let it show. During the day, stick to a light base, soft blush and a flattering lipstick. Reserve more dramatic looks for evening gatherings and festive dinners.

The classic Bengali Puja look remains a favourite. Nothing captures the spirit of the season quite like a white saree with a red border, traditional jewellery, alta and a bold red lip. "সাদা শাড়ি, লাল পাড়, আলতা আর traditional jewellery – এটাই Puja।"

For nails, she recommends gel polish over regular nail colour, favouring reds, maroons and wine shades for younger women and softer pinks or shimmery neutrals for mature women. "এটা তো লাল-গোলাপির festival!"

Good grooming extends beyond the face. A manicure, pedicure or foot spa before Puja can make a big difference, especially when you're constantly on your feet.

Men are just as invested in festive grooming these days. "अब लड़के भी पीछे नहीं हैं!" she laughs, noting that many men now opt for facials, de-tan treatments, beard shaping and fresh haircuts before the festive season begins.

As Puja transitions into Bijoya visits, house parties and Diwali celebrations, another beloved tradition takes centre stage: taash/ playing cards. What starts as a casual game of cards often turns into hours of laughter, gossip and friendly competition. "हम लोग भी पूजा के बाद दोस्तों के साथ ताश खेलते हैं। कभी-कभी रात दो बजे तक, कभी सुबह तक!"

For house parties, she recommends swapping elaborate outfits for comfortable festive wear. After a full day of dressing up, lighter makeup and easy-to-manage hair are often a better choice. "You'll be sitting on cushions, laughing and playing cards for hours. Comfort becomes more important than glamour."

What should every woman carry during the festive season? Her answer is surprisingly practical: lipstick, a comb or brush and a favourite perfume. "ঘেমে গেলে fresh perfume use করুন।"

The most important beauty advice comes after the celebrations end. Once Puja and Diwali are over, give your skin a chance to recover. Remove makeup thoroughly, moisturise, sleep well and resist the temptation to overload your skin with more products. "Skin-কে একটু rest দিন।"

A simple homemade cleanser of milk and a few drops of coconut oil can help remove stubborn makeup gently. Follow with a light moisturiser and, most importantly, plenty of sleep.

After all, as she reminds us:
"মন ভালো থাকলে মুখেও তার ছাপ পড়ে।"

And perhaps that's the real festive beauty secret. Not the perfect lipstick. Not the most expensive facial. Not even the most elegant saree.

"খুশি থাকুন, ভালো করে খান, Puja enjoy করুন, Diwali enjoy করুন। এটাই সবচেয়ে বড় beauty secret।"

Mrs Dwivedi is the proud owner of Style Salon (14/147 Golf Club Road, Vishwakarma Building - near Bangur Hospital Kolkata - 33 | Mobile: 8961004942/ 9432583749

STORY

The Cafe that Remembers

Sukanya Ray · 28 WC

THE CAFÉ HAD NO name on the outside, only a wooden board faded by years of mountain mist. Locals simply called it "the place where time slows down." No one quite remembered who had first given it that name.

Every morning, before the sun fully climbed over the hills, the old owner, Hari da, would unlock the door. The wooden floor would creak in quiet greeting, as if it too had been waiting all night. He would switch on the single hanging lamp above the counter, and its warm amber glow would spread across the room, touching the jars of coffee beans, the chalkboard stories, and the small table by the window.



That table was special.

It faced the mountains…green in summer, silver in winter, and swallowed by clouds during the rains. Travellers came and went, but almost everyone chose that seat at least once. Some wrote letters they never sent. Some stared out in silence, letting the mountains answer questions they couldn't voice.

But the locals rarely sat there.

If anyone asked why, Hari da would simply smile and say, "Some seats are better left for those who are waiting."

Years ago, a young woman had sat there every evening. She would arrive just before sunset, order the same thing…a cup of strong coffee and open a small notebook.

Hari da never asked what she wrote. But he noticed how her eyes often wandered towards the hills, as if she were waiting for someone who never arrived.

One evening, the mist descended unusually early.

The woman sat at her usual table long after the other customers had left. When Hari da told her he was closing, she looked towards the mountains and quietly said, "He'll come tonight."

Hari da never asked who she meant.

The next evening, she didn't come.

Nor the evening after that.

Days became weeks. Weeks became seasons.

The notebook she had once forgotten remained in a drawer beneath the counter. Hari da never opened it. Some stories, he believed, deserved to remain unfinished.

Then, strange things began to happen.

On certain nights, after Hari da locked the café, he would hear the faint scrape of a chair against the wooden floor.

Always the chair by the window.

Sometimes, when he opened the café in the morning, he would find a faint circular stain on that table as though a hot cup of coffee had been placed there only moments before.

Once, during a winter storm, the hanging lamp began to flicker.

Hari da looked towards the window.

Through the reflection in the glass, he saw a woman sitting at the table behind him.

Head lowered.

Writing.

He turned around.

The chair was empty.

But the notebook drawer beneath the counter was slightly open.

Hari da never spoke about that night.

Now, the café still stands unchanged, as if time itself has forgotten it. The coffee still steams, the chalkboard still tells old tales, and the mountains still whisper to those who listen.

And sometimes, on quiet afternoons when the mist rolls down from the hills and the light falls just right upon that little table, customers notice something strange.

A woman's reflection appears faintly in the window.

Sitting.

Writing.

Waiting.

Most assume it is only the mist playing tricks on the glass.

But Hari da knows better.

Because on those evenings, just before he closes the café, two cups of coffee leave faint rings on the table.

And somewhere beyond the window, from deep within the mist-covered hills, footsteps can be heard slowly coming closer. ❖

POEM

একা

ভাস্কর রায় · 14 EA



মনে আমার ভয় ঢুকেছে, ভয় করে আজও শুধু,
একলা হয়ে যাচ্ছি না তো ? জীবন মরক মূ মূ !

যতই ভাবি দিনে রাতে, 'ঈশ্বর' তো আছেন সাথে,
'একা' তবে কেমন করে হবো ?
রক্তে এখন কমেছে জোয়ার, সুজনগুলি ছিটকে তোর,
কোথায় গিয়ে প্রাণের কথা ক'বো ?

অকারণে বকাঝকা করি, তবু তাদের খুঁজে মরি,
যারা আমায় চেনে, জানে, ভাবে ।
আসলে তো লুকিয়ে রাখি, অনুরাগের তোতা পাখি,
তারা আমায়, ছেড়ে চলে যাবে !

মন খোঁজে তার চোখ রাঙানো, আদর করে রাগ ভাঙানো,
রাত্রি দিনে কথার পিঠে কথা !
হাতের মুঠোফোনে তুলি, অতিশয়ে 'রঙিন তুলি'
সে আঁকনে, শুধুই থাকে ব্যথা ।

হয় শিখিনি কোনো ভাবে, 'একা থাকা' কেমন হবে,
ছেলে মেয়ে জগৎ গড়ছে ভিন্ন ।
প্রতিষ্ঠিত, চাহিদা সরেছে, যোগাযোগ ক্ষীণ হয়েছে,
দেখি, বাঁধন বুঝি ছিন্ন !

নিজের স্বপ্নে নিজে বন্দী, একা থাকার এই ফন্দী,
ভাল 'বাসা' বুঝি গড়তে হয়
মুক্ত আকাশ সংগোপনে, আসে, ডাকে রোজ স্বপনে
ভাল্লাগে না এ অভিনয়

❖



INFOGRAPHIC · A World Without Mobile Phones — Agastya Lahoti (Age: 9) · 17 EC

STORY

Pocket

Bhaskar Roy · 14 EA



FOR TWELVE YEARS I have worked in the morgue. Rummaging through dead people's pockets is part of my job.

The day that man's body came in, I opened his wallet and found my own photo inside.

The photo lay as still as the lifeless body beside it. My hands were shaking.

My name is Ramjan Ali. On paper my designation is Morgue Assistant. People say, the man from the autopsy room. It's an outsourced job. Even after twelve years, I haven't become permanent. The salary comes through the contractor's hands. By the time it reaches me, the 4th or 5th of every month is already over.

At the time of marriage, my in-laws were told I work in a hospital. It wasn't a lie. I just didn't tell them the whole truth. Last year, the mother of a boy in my daughter's class somehow found out. My daughter came home from school that day and didn't eat her rice. In this city, people are not afraid of the dead. They are afraid of the man who handles the dead.

There is only one rule in this job. Don't look at the face. If you look, the person becomes yours. For twelve years I have followed that rule. I only look at hands, feet, clothes.

In twelve years I have seen many pockets. What a man carries with him at the very end when he leaves — no one in this city knows better than me.

Bus tickets. Half a strip of medicine. A prescription folded from three years ago. A child's passport-size photo. A torn page from a shop's due ledger. A mobile number written on paper, with only one letter in place of the name. Once, in a rickshaw puller's pocket, I found his daughter's school admission form. Filled out. Never submitted.

And what I find the most is loose change. People spend the big notes. The small change remains.

This happened last Wednesday.

At nine in the morning, the police brought the body down. The accident happened near Shyamoli crossing in the early morning — a collision between a bus and a motorcycle. The man used to do ride-sharing. Age under forty. The cracked helmet came with it, packed in polythene. On his left hand, a cheap watch, its glass broken. The hands stopped at 6:40.

The SI sat down to write the inquest report. He said, Ramjan, empty the pockets.

In the right pocket, a mobile phone, screen shattered. In the left pocket, a wallet. Inside, three hundred and forty

rupees, an NID card, a driving licence. And behind the money compartment, a folded photo. Printed from a computer shop. He didn't have money to laminate it, so it was wrapped in transparent scotch tape. So it wouldn't melt from sweat.

In the photo, four people. Wearing white PPE. Kneeling beside a grave. It's raining.

One person's hood is pushed back. Face uncovered.

That face is mine.

I turned the photo over. On the back, a date written with a ballpoint pen. Below it, three words: *searching for this man.*

Subal Da from beside me said, what happened, feeling sick?

I said, no.

In twelve years of service, that was my biggest lie.

Let me tell you about the year 2021. The year when hospitals ran out of oxygen and graveyards ran out of space.

At that time, we became the most important people in the city. Those who handle corpses all year round, the job fell on their shoulders. The hospital said, you have to join the burial team. Salary didn't increase by a single taka. We just got two PPEs and one extra mask.

I remember that day distinctly.

It was the month of Ashar. The man's name was Abdul Wahab. Sixty-eight years old. News was sent from the ward to his home. The home was locked. His wife had died long before. One son, lives in Saudi Arabia. His kafeel didn't give leave. And at that time ticket prices were sky-high. No one from the neighbourhood came to claim the body. At that time people were afraid to even touch their own father. I don't blame them. The fear was not in people's hands.

The boy made a video call on Imo. The nurse sister handed me the phone and said, Ramjan, hold this for a moment.

I uncovered the face of the shrouded body and lowered the phone.

On the other side of the screen, a bare-bodied boy. Behind him, an iron cot, a mess room. He didn't scream. He didn't cry either. He just said, Brother, please turn my father a little to the right. My father slept on his right side all his life.

I turned him.

He kept staring for a long time. Then he said, Brother, what is your name?

Just then a call came from behind. The body had to be loaded onto the van. I returned the phone. I didn't get to answer.

In the afternoon it rained heavily at Rayerbazar graveyard. There were four of us at the janaza. The Imam stood at a distance and led the prayer. While giving the earth, my eyes were burning from sweat rolling down, so I had pushed my hood back. On a bamboo stake I wrote the name with a marker, Abdul Wahab.

A newspaper photographer was taking pictures from a distance. The next day the photo was printed on an inside page. It also circulated on Facebook for a few days. Some people wrote that these are the real heroes. After three days everyone forgot. Forgetting is natural. People's responsibility to remember is decreasing.

By then the SI had taken the NID card in his hand. Writing in the ledger. Name, Md. Shahjahan. Father's name, Md. Abdul Wahab.

The name is common. But the photo that was inside that wallet, there is only one of it in this country.

In twelve years, I have never been afraid. That day my fingers went cold inside the gloves.

In the afternoon the girl came. Around thirty years old. A child in her lap, about two years old. She identified the body. Gave a thumbprint on paper. Then while handing over the belongings, she opened the wallet.

That's when the photo came out.

She stared at it for a long time. Then said to herself, without finding this man, the man died.

I asked, Sister, why did he keep this photo with him?

The girl said, His father died of corona. He was in Saudi at that time. Couldn't come. After returning to the country, he printed this photo and kept it in his wallet. Every year on his father's death anniversary he would come to the hospital. Stand at the gate. Show people the photo.

She paused for a moment.

Last year he posted this photo on Facebook once too. He wrote, does anyone know this brother? It got two thousand likes. No one could identify him.

The hospital people also couldn't identify him. Some said the man quit the job, some said the company changed. He would say, I had asked that man one question, what is your name. I didn't get the answer. I wasn't there when my father was lowered into the grave. There was a stranger. I haven't been able to thank that man till today.

I am a man who has remained silent for twelve years. In my job, I don't have to talk. Dead people don't ask questions. That day something got stuck in my throat.

Then I said, Sister, the man in this photo is me.

The girl didn't understand at first. She looked at the photo. Then at my face. It takes time to find the resemblance between a face covered in PPE and a face standing in front of the morgue.

The child was crying then. She lifted the child onto her shoulder and while patting his back said, Four years. For four years...

She couldn't say the rest.

I said, Sister, shall I hold the stretcher?

She just nodded.

When loading the body into the ambulance, I held the front side. I have never done this work in twelve years. We deliver the body up to the gate. The family does the work after that.

Before leaving, the girl gave me the photo. She said, you keep this. He was searching for you to show you this.

After the ambulance left, I stood at the gate for a long time.

For four years that man stood at this very gate. And every day I entered through this gate, every day I exited through this gate. Perhaps I even brushed past him on some day. How many times a person walks past the one he is searching for. To recognise him, you need a name. That much was missing.

At night, returning home, I called my daughter. I said, come, let me show you a photo.

The girl stared at the photo for a long time. Then asked, Father, is this you?

I said, Yes.

She said, You look like a hero.

For the first time in twelve years, I was able to tell my daughter the name of my job.

In twelve years, I have rummaged through a thousand pockets. I have learned, in the end people don't keep money in their pockets. They keep an unfinished task. In someone's pocket there is an unsent letter. In someone's pocket, an unpaid debt.

In that man's pocket there was an unsaid thank you. And inside that thank you, I was tangled.

For four years I was in an unknown man's pocket. I didn't even know.

The photo is now in my pocket. One day someone will rummage through my pocket too. That's our job. No one is spared. He will take out that photo. He will see a few men in white PPE, rain, a grave. He won't understand what it is.

I know. That is the answer to a question. Given five years late.

Brother, what is your name?

My name is Ramjan Ali. The man from the autopsy room. I had laid your father down on his right side. ❖

POEM

Prisoners

Dr Nupur Mukherjee · 16 EB

Prisoners of our past,
Convicts of our present.
Fugitives of the future.
Exalted expectations from
Grains of sand and gravel
Of time.
Pouring myself into bottomless cups,
Yet surfacing again and again.
Exalting in deep self love and admiration
And plunging deep again into an abyss
With a lamp held in my steady hand
To show the way for others to follow.

❖



OPINION

Many Streams, One Civilisation

Subir Dutta · 31 EA

Our world is 4.6 billion (460 crore) years old. But, 50,000 years ago, none of our ancestors lived in original Bharatbarsha that's today's India + Pakistan + Afghanistan + Bangladesh.

During the last 50,000 years, the ancestors of around 190 crore people of these 4 constituents of original Bharatbarsha, named after the son of Dushyant and Shakuntala, came from different corners of planet Earth, in different streams.



History / Literature, beginning from **Rigveda**, during the last 3,000 years, after arrival of fair skinned, long limbed, horse riding, wheels using, cattle breeding, not cultivating, pagan, speaking a variant of **Indo-European Language** (Hindi-Slav, according to Rahul Sankrityan, the writer of *Volga to Ganga*, from which **Sanskrit** evolved), warrior tribesmen (also women) from the landmass spanning from **Black Sea** in the West to **Caspian Sea** in the East, not far beyond in the north, because what are present day Russia and Kazakhstan, were then dark impregnable forest, entered undivided **Bharatbarsha** through Khyber Pass, were written from the perspective of those people, who called themselves the Aryans, the Noble People, the so-called Devtas / Devis.

The Aryans castigated the people, who came before them in two streams, one from Africa around 50,000 years ago, the Hunters / Gatherers and another from Iran, the Peasants / Cultivators around 10,000 years ago, as Sudra, Dasa, Dasyu, Asur, Rakkhas, Banara etc.

By cross breeding between those two dark complexioned groups, evolved the **Dravidians**, who built urbanised Sindhu Sabhyata (Indus Valley Civilisation) around 5,500 to 6,000 years ago.

They faced wrath of the nature in the form of less rainfall, between **2,350 BCE - 950 BCE**.

During these 1,400 years' drought period, the Dravidians were constrained to move towards:

- South Gujarat
- Eastern Uttar Pradesh
- Bihar
- Undivided Bengal
- South of Vindhyas, that's Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu & Undivided Andhra Pradesh

But the dark skinned advanced Dravidians were no match for invading **Aryans**, because, Dravidians could not ride horses and Aryans were proficient in horse riding, the only People among the then 15 Crore Peoples of the World.

The advanced Dravidians were either killed like **Bali** and **Shambuk** of Ramayana or driven to Jungles (today known as **Adivasis**, the Scheduled Tribes), after leaving the Fertile Banks of Ganga and Yamuna.

As travelling on horseback from Russian Steppes, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan to Bharatbarsha was extremely tiring for women, who had to bear children also, they died in large numbers, consequently depleting the womenfolk.

Hence, Aryans were constrained to marry / cohabit with indigenous women like:

- Dushyant - Shakuntala
- Parashar - Matsyagandha aka Satyabati

These marriages / cohabitation with indigenous women enabled the Aryans to win over various Local Tribes.

But, Aryans divided themselves into three groups namely:

- **Brahmans** (intellectuals)
- **Kshatriyas** (rulers and warriors)
- **Vaishyas** (traders and those associated with animal husbandry)

and denied the Indigenous People the right to education, arms training, even meditation and castigated them as Sudra, Dasa, Dasyu, Asur, Rakkhas, Banara that is not Nara, as **Bali, Sugrib, Angad & Tara** were called.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with this interpretation of history, it presents Bharatbarsha as a land shaped by multiple migrations, cultural interactions, conflicts, adaptations and social transformations over thousands of years. From hunters and gatherers to cultivators, from the builders of Sindhu Sabhyata to later arrivals through the north-western frontiers, each stream contributed to the making of a complex and diverse civilisation.

The story of Bharat is therefore not merely a story of one people, one culture or one origin, but a continuing journey of many communities whose interactions, exchanges and shared experiences helped shape the social, cultural and intellectual landscape of the subcontinent that we know today. ❖

ESSAY

Definition of Home

Swarnamayee Chatterjee · Guest Writer, 11 WA



IN ANCIENT TIMES ARCHITECTURE and Philosophy in practice was considered to be twin sisters, complimented each other. Materially, 'HOME' replicates shelter, safety, comfort and place of belonging. Spiritually, it is the soul's ultimate place to unite with Divine (Brahman, Bhagavan, Shiva, Vishnu, Maa Durga etc.)

ঘর synonyms গৃহ, গেহ, পুর, ধাম, আলয়, সদন, ভবন, মন্দির, নিলয়, নিকেতন, আগার, কলায় (for birds) i.e. HOME. Philosophically আগার means where someone has been caged. Greek philosopher Socrates and Indian philosophy has same concept of ঘর — which arrests (খাঁচাবন্দী) স্বাধীনভাবে বাসা বাঁধাতেও বন্ধন কথাটি আছে।

Coming back to আগার — redefined as কারাগার + the cage — spiritually it's our body, as we see in our Hindu Scriptures, from the perspective of Bhakti (devotion), the meaning of home becomes even more intimate, দেবকী হলেন ভক্তি, বাসুদেব হলেন জ্ঞান, যখন ভক্তি আর জ্ঞান একত্রিত হয় তখন কারাগারের (badly home) ভেতরেই কৃষ্ণ অর্থাৎ আনন্দ জন্ম নেয়। বাউল লালন শাহর " খাঁচার ভিতর অচিন পাখি কেমনে আসে যায়..." its philosophical interpretation is খাঁচা, the cage = the human body,

- অচিন পাখি, the unknown bird — the soul, consciousness, Divine presence.
- যাতায়াত (comes & goes) — movement of life, breath, awareness, birth & death.

Lalon asks, "What is the mysterious presence that animates the body? The moment life departs, the body remains, but the 'bird' is gone."

This connects beautifully with Tagore's "মন চলো নিজ নিকেতনে", the mind is urged to return to its true abode. Here the question is 'Where is my true home?'. The other song quests "Who is the one living within this temporary home?". Together they become the soul's conversation with the Divine "Who am I?", "Come home and know."

As the Upanishadic prayer says;

"असतो मा सद्गमय
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय":

Lead me from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to light, from mortality to immortality.

Perhaps that is the same call that Tagore heard as "নিজ নিকেতন", and Lalon heard as the cry of the "অচিন পাখি", so the bird is a mystery. The Home is a mystery, Spiritual life is the journey between the two.

Disclaimer — I've kept both English, Bengali and Sanskrit in my write-up to maintain the essence of authenticity of the words. So I would request the staunch literati to overlook this. ❖



INFOGRAPHIC · Think F.A.S.T. – Save a Life — Mani Vista Sports & Cultural Association

PROSE

নিঃসঙ্গতা

Haimanti Mukherjee · 4 EB

সেদিন সকাল থেকে ঘুম ভাঙার পর থেকেই খুব আলসেমি লাগছিলো ডালিয়ার। কিছুতেই বুঝে উঠতে পারছিলো না যে কেন এরকম বোধ হচ্ছে ওর। গতকাল অব্দি তো ঠিকই ছিল। মনে করার চেষ্টা করলো গতকাল কলেজএ পড়িয়েছেও ঠিকঠাক। তখন কিন্তু কিছুই বুঝতে পারেনি শরীর খারাপ বলে। আজ যেন বিছানা থেকে ওকে টেনে তুলে এনে বারান্দার চেয়ার এ বসিয়ে দিতে হয়েছে নিজেকে জোর করে। হাত পা কেমন ঠান্ডা, মাথাটাও ঝিম ধরে আছে। অথচ গতকাল কোনো রকম নেশাও করেনি ও, তাহলে এতো দুর্বল লাগছে কেন ? আজ দু তিন মাস হলো ওর মাসিক বন্ধ। তাহলে কি সেইজন্যই ওর এইরকম দুর্বল লাগছে, নাকি কোনো অসুখ ওকে চেপে ধরলো? মনটা আজ খুব ব্যাকুল, খুব ছটফট করছে আজ মনটা। ভয় লাগছে ওর, অজানা কোনো ভয়। বুঝতে পারেনা ডালিয়া। ডাক্তার সেন ওদের ফ্যামিলি ফিজিসিয়ান। মনে মনে ভাবছে ফোন করবে কিনা একবার ডাক্তার সেনকে কিন্তু অস্বস্তি হচ্ছে একটা। কি বলবে? ও আগেরবার যখন ঘন ঘন জ্বরে আক্রান্ত হচ্ছিলো তখন ওকে হেমোগ্লোবিন পরীক্ষা করতে বলেছিলো ডাক্তার সেন। তখন কথা শোনা হয়নি, বলা ভালো সময় করে উঠতে পারেনি ও। বারবার মনে হয়েছে জ্বরই তো ঠিক যখন হয়ে গেছে তাহলে ঠান্ডা গরম থেকে বা আবহাওয়া বদলই হয়তো কারণ। কলেজ কামাই খুব একটা তো হয়নি ওর কোনোদিন। তারপর মেয়েদের পরীক্ষা , খাতা দেখা , টিউশনি এইসব নানা কাজে ব্যস্ত হয়ে পড়েছিল ডালিয়া তখন। কিন্তু আজ যেটা হচ্ছে সেটা ওর আগে কখনো হয়নি, অদ্ভুৎ ভয় করছে ওর। মা – বাবা চলে যাওয়ার পর থেকে ও একাই থাকে। ওর সবসময়ের সাথী – ওই মালা মাসি। ছোট থেকে সেই এম এ পড়ার সময় থেকেই মালা মাসি ওদের সঙ্গী। বিয়ে করা হয়ে ওঠেনি ডালিয়ার। ডালিয়া বসু একটা নামকরা মেয়েদের কলেজ এ অধ্যাপনা করেন আর সেই কাজে বেশ নাম ডাকও আছে তার। মেয়েরা তো বটেই ওর সহকর্মীরাও ওকে খুবই সমীহ করে চলেন। মুখে একটা অদ্ভুৎ ব্যাক্তিত্বও আছে ডালিয়ার। চলা ফেরা, পোশাক, আচার –আচরণ সব কিছুতেই যেন আভিজাত্যের ছোঁয়া। পড়াশোনা করার সময় কোনো সহপাঠী ছেলেরা ওর সাথে কথা বলতেই একটু ভয় পেত যেন। যারা ভেবেছিলো প্রেম নিবেদন করবে তারাও পিছিয়ে যেত ডালিয়ার অদ্ভুৎ গম্ভীর স্বভাবের আস্তরণ দেখে। অথচ ও দাম্ভিক কিংবা ইন্ট্রোভার্ট কোনোকালেই ছিলোনা। ছোট থেকেই কো– এডুকেশনে পড়াশোনা করে ছেলেদের সাথে খেলাধুলা করেই বড় হয়েছে ডালিয়া। যখন ডালিয়া কোনো সহপাঠিনীর কাছে কোনো দুর্বল প্রেমিকের ওকে প্রেম নিবেদনে ব্যার্থতার কথা শুনতো তখন যেন ও উপভোগ করতো এই ভেবে যে ওর এই গাম্ভীর্যকে এতজন সমীহ করে চলে!

কিন্তু আজ মধ্যবয়সে দাঁড়িয়ে কেন জানেনা বড় একা অনুভব করে ডালিয়া নিজেকে। বিশেষ করে যবে থেকে ও ওর মা–বাবাকে হারিয়েছে তখন থেকে গোপা, মিতা যারা ওর খুব কাছের দুজন বন্ধু তারাও যেন সঙ্গে থাকলে ও নিঃসঙ্গতা অনুভব করে। সিনেমা, থিয়েটার, পার্ক, রেস্টুরেন্ট, গেটটুগেদার সব কিছুতেই যাচ্ছে ডালিয়া সেই গোপা আর মিতার সাথে তবে কেন এই নিঃসঙ্গতা ওর? যখন গোপা নিজের সতেরো বছরের ছেলেকে আর মিতা নিজের উনিশ বছরের মেয়েকে আদর করে বা ওদের গল্প করে ডালিয়ার কাছে, তখন ভালোই লাগে ডালিয়ার, কিন্তু কোথায় যেন একটা ফাঁকা ফাঁকা লাগে ডালিয়ার। গোপা বা মিতাকে সেই কথা বলা যায়না তাই কখনো বলেনি ডালিয়া। প্রতিবার জন্মদিনের পার্টিতে যখনই গোপার ছেলে সূর্য আর মিতার মেয়ে সাক্ষী ওদের ডালিয়া মাসিকে ডেকেছে তখনই একবুক আদর আর উপহার নিয়ে পৌঁছে গেছে ডালিয়া ওদের ফ্ল্যাটে। কেক কাটার সময়, রিটার্ন গিফটটি দেওয়ার সময় ডালিয়া ওদের পাশে সর্বদা প্রস্তুত। তাহলে কিছুদিন ধরে এই শূন্যতা কেন গ্রাস করছে ডালিয়ার শান্তি? যদি এটা পাগলামোও হয় তবে কেন সেটা ওর ওপর চেপে বসছে?

অনেক ভেবে চিনতে থরো থরো হাতে কাঁপতে কাঁপতে মোবাইল তুলে নেয় ডালিয়া আর রিং করে ডাক্তার সেনকে। হাতের আঙ্গুল গুলোও কাঁপছে ওর। সব কথা বুঝিয়ে বলে ডক্টরকে আর এটাও জানায় যে ওর মনে হচ্ছে ওর নিঃশাস আঁটকে যাচ্ছে আর বুকের ওপর একটা শক্ত পাথর যেন কেউ চাপিয়ে দিয়েছে, সেটাও ও সমানে অনুভব করছে নির্ভুলভাবে। কিছুক্ষন বাদে ডাক্তার সেন ওকে একটা সিডেটিভ খেয়ে ঘুমোতে এডভাইস করেন। কাঁপা হাতে ফোন রেখে দেয় পাশের ছোট্ট টেবিলে ডালিয়া। সকালের চা পাশে পড়ে থেকে থেকে জুড়িয়ে গেছে কারণ আজ ও কোনোরকম খিদেই অনুভব করছে না। মালা মাসি এসে ওকে ধরে ধরে ঘরে নিয়ে যায়। পাশের ওষুধের দোকান থেকে ডক্টরের দেওয়া ওষুধ নিয়ে এসে ওকে খাইয়ে দেয়। ওষুধ খেয়েও অনেক্ষনেক্ষন তা প্রায় এক– দেড় ঘন্টা এপাশ, ওপাশ করে ডালিয়া। কিছুতেই ঘুম আসছেনা ওর, একটা অজানা ভয় ওকে তাড়া করে বেড়াচ্ছে যেন। কলেজে ফোন করে জানিয়ে দিয়েছে ডালিয়া যে আজ ও ছুটি নেবে কারণ ওর শরীর ভালো নেই। চোখ বন্ধ করলেও সূর্য আর সাক্ষীর মিষ্টি

মুখগুলো খালি খালি ভেসে উঠছে যেন চোখের সামনে। দুজনে মিলে যেন ডালিয়াকে প্রশ্ন করছে,' আচ্ছা ডালিয়া মাসি, তোমার বাচ্চা কই ? ও কেন মেশেনা আমাদের সাথে? ওর জন্মদিনে তো আমাদের ডাকোনা তুমি একবারও।'

কখন যেন অবেলায় চোখ লেগে গিয়েছিলো ডালিয়ার। শরীর খারাপ খবর পেয়ে ওর দুই পরম বন্ধু আজ তাড়াতাড়ি ওদের বুটিক বন্ধ করে ছুটে এসেছে ওর কাছে। ওদের দেখে আরো বেশী অস্বস্তিতে পড়লো ডালিয়া। কি বলবে ওদের বুঝে পেলো না। ওরাই কি তবে ডালিয়ার ভয়ের আসল কারণ! একসাথে স্কুল আর কলেজে পড়েছে ওরা তিনজন। তারপর ডালিয়া ইউনিভার্সিটি পাস করে এম ফিল করে নেট পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ হয়েছে দারুন নম্বর নিয়ে আর ডালিয়ার সেইসময় মনে হয়েছে যে ও সব্বার ঈর্ষার কারণ। কলেজ পাশ করেই গোপা আর মিতা বিয়ে করে নিয়েছিল সহপাঠী দীপক ও কৃশানুকে। গোপার বর দীপক মেডিকেল রিপ্রেসেন্টেটিভ আর মিতার বর কৃশানু ওদের পরিবারের রেস্টুরেন্টের ব্যবসা দেখে। দুই পরিবারই তখন খুবই সচ্ছল ছিল। নিজেদের ব্যস্ত রাখতে শাড়ির ব্যবসা শুরু করে গোপা আর মিতা। সেই শাড়ির ব্যবসাই আজ ফুলে ফেঁপে বুটিকএ পরিণত হয়েছে এতদিনে।

গোপা আর মিতা কিন্তু সত্যিই ডালিয়ার জন্য খুবই চিন্তিত, তারপর ডালিয়া খাওয়াদাওয়া করছেনা মালা মাসির কাছে শুনে সুইগি থেকে চিকেন সূপ অর্ডার করে দিয়েছে ওরা তৎক্ষণাৎ। সেগুলো শুনে আরো মাথা ধরে যায় ডালিয়ার। হাত পা যেন ভয়ে সেঁধিয়ে গেছে ওর, বুক ঢিপঢিপ করছে, জীভ শুকিয়ে কাঠ, নিঃশ্বাস নিতে কষ্ট হচ্ছে ডালিয়ার। ডাক্তার সেনকে আবার কল করলো গোপা। ডাক্তার সেন আসলেন এবং সব শুনলেন, প্রেসার,পালস চেক করে ডালিয়াকে কতগুলো টেস্ট করতে বললেন আর স্ট্রেস থেকে হচ্ছে বলে সন্দেহ প্রকাশ করে চলে গেলেন। গোপা আর মিতা তো এসবের মাথা মুণ্ড কিছুই বুঝতে পারছিলোনা। কলেজে ফোন করে আরো দিনকতক ছুটি চেয়ে নিলো ডালিয়া কারণ ওর এখন যা শরীরের অবস্থা তাতে ও এখন কিছুতেই কলেজ যেতে পারবেনা। ওর বিছানা থেকে উঠলেই মাথা ঘুরছে আর এত দুর্বল ওর লাগছে যে যখন ওর কভিড হয়েছিল তখনও অনুভব করেনি ও। সেদিন দীপক আর কৃশাণুকে ফোন করে জানিয়ে দিলো গোপা আর মিতা যে রাতে ওরা ফিরবে না কারণ এঅবস্থায় ডালিয়াকে একা ছেড়ে ওরা বাড়ি ফিরতে নারাজ। দীপক আর কৃশানু দুজনেই যথেষ্ট বুঝদার মানুষ আর ওরা এই তিন বান্ধবীর মনের মিলের কথা জানে তাই কোনো সমস্যাও হলোনা। কিন্তু সমস্যা যা হওয়ার হলো ডালিয়ারই। ও যেন আজ কোনোভাবেই এই দুজনের অস্তিত্বটা মেনে নিতে পারছেনা। ওকে যারা এতদিন ধরে ঈর্ষা করতো আজ তাদের দেখেই যে ওর এতো কষ্ট হচ্ছে সেটা মানতেও কষ্টটা কমার জায়গায় রাত বাড়ার সাথে সাথে আরো বাড়তে লাগল। শেষে ডালিয়া প্রায় নিস্তেজ হয়ে পড়লো, নিঃশ্বাস নিতে পারছেনা , বমি করার চেষ্টা করলো কিন্তু জল আর পিত্তি ছাড়া আর কিছুই উঠলোনা দেখে ওর বন্ধুরা ওকে নিয়ে পাশের প্রাইভেট হসপিটালে ছুটলো গাড়ি বার করে। ডাক্তার সেনকেও খবর দিয়ে দিলো ওরাই।

হসপিটালে পৌঁছে সমস্ত টেস্ট হয়ে গেলো দুদিনের ভেতরেই। রক্ত থেকে শুরু করে সব রিপোর্টই নরমাল এসেছে আর মেনোপজের কারণে হরমোনাল প্রব্লেম কিছু ধরা পড়লো কিন্তু সেটাও যৎসামান্য। লো প্রেসার ছাড়া আর কোনো সমস্যাই পাওয়া গেলোনা দেখে ওখানকার ডাক্তার ডালিয়াকে একজন ভালো সাইক্রিয়াট্রিস্টকে দেখাতে পরামর্শ দিলেন। হয়তো কোনো স্ট্রেস থেকেই হোক বা কোনো বাল্যকালীন ঘটনা ওর মনের ভেতরে বাসা বেঁধে ছিল সেটাই মাথাচাড়া দিয়ে উঠেছে এতদিনে এমনি ভাবছেন ডাক্তাররা নাহলে এমন বিভৎস্য প্যানিক এটাকই বা ওর হবে কেন?

আজকাল সাইকিয়াট্রিস্টের কাছে লোকজন প্রায়শই যাচ্ছে আর এখন ঘরে ঘরে মানসিক সমস্যা বাড়ছে নানান কারণে কাজেই সেই নিয়ে খুব একটা ভাববার কারণ খুঁজে পেলোনা ওর বন্ধুরা। আকচারই এ্যনসাইটি, ডিপ্রেশনের শিকার হচ্ছে প্রচুর লোকজন ঘরে ঘরে। সত্যি বলতে ডালিয়ার সাইক্রিয়াট্রিস্টের কাছে যাওয়া নিয়ে সমস্যা নেই কারণ ও অত্যন্ত আধুনিক। কিন্তু শিক্ষিতা, অধ্যাপিকা আর ফেমিনিজম নিয়ে গর্ব করার মতন মহিলার বাঁধা বা অস্বস্তি তো অন্য জায়গায় যা ও কারুর কাছে ব্যক্ত করতে পারবেনা। ওর পরম প্রিয় হিতাকাঙ্খী দুই বান্ধবীর কাছে তো নয়ই। তার একটাই কারণ – যাদের জন্য ওর এই অসুখ সেই গোপা আর মিতাই তো যাবে ওকে নিয়ে সেই সাইক্রিয়াট্রিস্টের কাছে চিকিৎসা করাতে। তাহলে কি করে সুস্থ হবে ডালিয়া? এই অতিরিক্ত আন্তরিক, বন্ধনহীন বন্ধুত্বই যে আজ ডালিয়াকে ওর বন্ধুদের কাছে ছোট প্রমাণ করে দিচ্ছে। গোপা আর মিতার নিঃস্বার্থ বন্ধুত্বই তো ডালিয়ার মনকে আরো অনেক বেশি দুর্বল, ব্যর্থ, সংসারহীন- নিঃসন্তান, অসম্পূর্ণা আর নিঃসঙ্গ করে তুলছে বারবার।।

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GALLERY

Young Artists



Ganpati sketch – created independently during art class

Sria Ghoshal · Age: 9 · 16 EC



A Glance Back – Pencil Sketch

Rinisha Mukherjee · Age: 9 · 11 WA



Durga Maa in Space

Ansh Chordia · Age: 8 · 5 EC

YOUNG VOICES

Roots and Wings: What Durga Pujo Means to Our Children

Mani Vista Residents

IN TODAY'S MULTICULTURAL WORLD, many children grow up carrying more than one identity. They are global citizens and local community members, modern children surrounded by technology yet deeply connected to traditions passed down through generations. For many parents raising children today, there is a common hope: that our children grow proud of their roots while remaining open to the wider world around them.

Listening to the words of our youngest residents *Agastya, Deshna, Rinisha, Srishankh and Trishaan,* one thing becomes clear: culture is not something children simply inherit. It comes alive through friendships, family stories, festivals like Durga Pujo, food and the memories they create together.

Pride in Belonging

FOR SRISHANKH MUKHERJEE (AGE 10, 4EB), being Bengali became deeply meaningful during a difficult experience at school.



Srishankh Mukherjee

In his diary, he describes being bullied because he was Bengali. Hurt and confused, he returned home in tears.

"I cried a lot on that day and felt slightly ashamed of being a Bengali." What happened next became a lesson he would never forget.

"My mother hugged me tightly and kissed my forehead. She told me that I should be proud of being a Bengali."

Her words helped him understand something much bigger than his own experience.

"I could understand the importance of Unity on that day."

For children growing up in multicultural communities, identity can sometimes feel complicated. Srishankh's story reminds us that cultural pride and inclusivity go hand in hand. We do not celebrate our heritage by excluding others. We celebrate it by sharing it.

Pujo Abroad

FOR RINISHA MUKHERJEE (AGE 9, 11WA), Durga Pujo is pure excitement.



Rinisha Mukherjee

Living in the UK, she eagerly looks forward to rehearsals, performances and time spent with family.

"Durga Pujo in the UK is always so much fun! There are lots of rehearsals before the big performance, and this year I'm dancing in a special tribute to Satyajit Ray."

Like many British Bengali children, she experiences Pujo as a bridge between cultures. At school she proudly introduces her classmates to Indian traditions.

"Last term, we learnt about India at school, and I loved telling my teachers and friends all about Durga Puja and its colourful celebrations."

She dreams of one day experiencing Pujo in Kolkata, hearing stories from her parents about pandal hopping and festive adventures. Yet for Rinisha, the heart of Pujo remains beautifully simple:

"Wherever I celebrate Pujo, it's all about family, fun, food and making happy memories."

The Magic of First Experiences

FOR DESHNA GON (AGE 9, 7EC), this year's Durga Puja holds special significance.



Deshna Gon

It is her first Durga Puja celebration at Mani Vista, and like countless children across Bengal, the excitement began long before the festival itself.

"Every day, I watch the beautiful pandal being built slowly and steadily."

She eagerly awaits her performances.

"I will be dancing to the beats of the Bollywood song 'Zubi Dubi'. I will also be singing two Bengali songs, 'Dugga Elo' and 'Dhak Baja Kasher Baja'."

When asked what she loves most about the festive season, her answers capture childhood perfectly:

"Dancing and singing during puja celebrations."

"My friend's kindness."

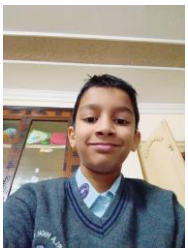
"When I see the pandals being built and the Kolkata city being decorated with lights."

Adults often focus on traditions and rituals. Children often notice the friendships, excitement and wonder.

Festivals Beyond Labels

THE STORY OF MULTICULTURALISM isn't only about Bengalis celebrating Bengali traditions. It is also about embracing and learning from the celebrations around us.

For Trishaan Lahoti (Age 9, 17EC), festivity means togetherness.



Trishaan Lahoti

"Festivity means to celebrate with others, to enjoy and talk to people. Wear new clothes, eat delicious food and do pandal hopping in my area."

Although he enjoys Durga Puja, his favourite festival is Holi.

His enthusiasm leaps off the page as he describes colourful water fights, pichkaris from his grandmother, snacks, music and rain showers.

"In Mani Vista, Holi was very colourful, enjoyable."

His understanding of celebration is universal. Whether it is Pujo, Holi or another festival, what matters most is being together.

When asked what event he would organise for children, his answer reflects the imagination that connects children everywhere:

"A bonfire at night where all children would tell horror stories to each other and hot pizza and Maggie live counter would be there."

And perhaps his dream wish says everything about childhood freedom:

"If Mani Vista would grant me a wish I would ask the whole building to be empty for one night and all kids can run about playing hide and seek in all 35 floors."

A Place for Every Story

FOR AGASTYA LAHOTI (AGE 9, 17EC), festivals are moments of family, storytelling and community.



Agastya Lahoti

His favourite celebration is Diwali, and the reason is heartfelt.

"I love Lord Hanuman."

He enjoys listening to stories of Lord Ram's return to Ayodhya and remembers his first Diwali celebration at Mani Vista with special fondness.

"Lots of ladies were dancing on traditional songs, games and lucky draw was played and children were interviewed on funny questions."

His memories are not about ceremonies or formalities. They are about shared experiences.

"Then I danced a lot to DJ music and my grandfather was taking my snaps and videos."

Like many children, his dream festival is simple and joyful.

"If I could plan a fun event it would be a pool party for the kids."

His biggest wish?

"That I win all the lucky draws that are there during festivals and enjoy."

What Durga Pujo Teaches Our Children

WHETHER THEY ARE BENGALI or not, living in Kolkata or London, these children reveal something powerful.

In a multicultural society, our children are growing up with what previous generations often did not have: daily exposure to different cultures, languages and traditions. Through Rinisha's pride, Srishankh's lesson in unity, Deshna's excitement, Trishaan's love of togetherness and Agastya's joy in storytelling, we see the future taking shape.

A future where children celebrate Durga Pujo with the same enthusiasm that they celebrate Holi, Diwali, Christmas or any festival shared by their friends - A future where identity is not about division but connection.

And perhaps that is Maa Durga's greatest lesson for the next generation: that strength lies not only in knowing who we are, but also in embracing one another with kindness, curiosity and joy.

Shubho Durga Pujo. May our children always carry strong roots, open hearts and wings to explore the world.

POEM

শুদ্ধিকরণ

নূপুর মুখার্জি · 16 EB



খুলে ফেলো অলংকার মা গো !
অস্ত্র ধর শক্ত হাতে করি ।
অঞ্চল ধ্বজাটি উড়াও
কেশপুঞ্জে ধিক্কার ভরি ।
কেন নাও অর্চন তুমি ?
এই তাপিত শূণ্য ধরায় ?
কেন তব ত্রিনয়ন কভু
জ্বলে ওঠে না বন্‌হিশিখায় ?
তবে কি তুমি মৃন্ময়ী শুধু?
নির্বাক মাতৃদশভুজা ?

প্রতিবাদ না যদি করো
কেন করি বলো তব পূজা ?
আমার তো নেই গো মা কিছু—
যা দিয়াছো সবই তব দান ,
তবু কেন নিরন্তর তুমি
সহ্য করোএত অপমান ?
পারো যদি বাহন কর মোরে
আগ্নেয়াশ্‌ত্র দাও চক্ষে ভরি ।
দৃষ্টিকল্পে ধরাধামে আজ
বন্‌হিশিখায় শুদ্ধরক্ষা করি।



YOUNG VOICES

My Sporting Journey

Sria Ghoshal - Age: 9 · 16 EC

My introduction:

My name is Ms Sria Ghoshal. I am the granddaughter of Mr Sachin Pal and Mrs Mahamaya Paul. I love playing sports and have been taking part in different sports for the last 4 years.

How it all started:

I first became interested in sports when I was 5 years old. The first sport I tried was Athletics, and I remember I enjoyed the sport, the sports ground atmosphere and my friends.



Over the years, I have enjoyed playing Athletics, Football, Skating, Swimming & Chess. I enjoy playing different sports because every sport develops different muscles in our body, enhances my team spirit and imbibes sportsmanship in me. Playing different sports has also made me the Sports Captain in Primary Division of my school in Mumbai.

My favourite sport:

Although I enjoy many sports, my favourite is Athletics. I love it because it's engaging & fun. We do different drills, sprinting, high jump and broad jump and it makes me happy and fit.

When I am practising/training, I especially enjoy endurance training and high jump. The most challenging part is recovering from injury and getting back to fitness but I keep going because sports teaches us to bounce back and train harder.

My proudest sporting moment

One of my most memorable moments so far has been standing 4th in Maharashtra State Athletics Championship in 50m & 100m category.

Before the event, I was feeling anxious but high in spirit and I decided to give my best and not think of the results. When I found out that I had come 4th in the Maharashtra State Athletics Championship in the 50m and 100m, I felt happy & proud and also determined to make Podium Finish in my next State Championship.

The people who supported and encouraged me were my family and coaches. They said " YOU CAN DO IT. YOU ARE THE BEST. STAY CALM ! "

What sport has taught me

Sport has taught me:

A) To respect & applaud fellow sportsmen and participants.

B) Discipline, nutritious food and good sleep help us to become good sportsman.

C) Failures teach us important lessons on improving our techniques and skills. We should not be demotivated if we lose.

D) Success teaches us to stay humble, focused and reach higher benchmarks with more hard work.

When I lose or don't do as well as I hoped, I analyse my mistakes and try to improve my game.

My sporting dream:

One day, I would love to play for my country India and bring accolades and medals.

My biggest sporting dream is to represent India at Olympics.

If I could give one piece of advice to another child who wants to play sport, I would say , " Eat well and play multi sports."

My favourite thing about sport is it teaches discipline, develops our body & mind, teaches 'Never give up' attitude.

During this Durga Puja festival, may Ma Durga bless us all and I would request my age kids to utilise Durga Puja Holidays in learning new sports, art or any new skill to improve yourself. ❖

FOOD

कलकत्ता का स्ट्रीट फूड

पावनी लाहोटी · 17 EC

भारत में ऐसे तो चार महानगर हैं—मुंबई, दिल्ली, चेन्नई और कलकत्ता। लेकिन खाने के मामले में अगर फूड ब्लॉगर्स से भी पूछा जाए, तो सभी निःसंदेह कलकत्ता को ही अपना राजा मानेंगे।



इस शहर के पानी में ही कुछ ऐसी मिठास है कि जो इस शहर का खाना या स्ट्रीट फूड एक बार खा ले, वह उसका दीवाना हो जाता है। ऐसा स्वाद और खाने से जुड़ी कहानियाँ हमें और कहीं नहीं मिलेंगी। आज मैं आपको उत्तर कलकत्ता के शाकाहारी खाने की जगहों के बारे में अपने टॉप पाँच पसंदीदा नाम बताने वाली हूँ। आने वाली दुर्गा पूजा में आप अवश्य यहाँ जाकर खाइएगा।

सबसे पहले उत्तर कलकत्ता में बड़ा बाज़ार, शोभाबाज़ार और गिरीश पार्क जैसे खाने के स्थान बताती हूँ:

नंबर १ - मित्रा कैफ़े: सन् १९१० में इस स्थान पर श्री सुशील रॉय ने एक कैफ़े खोला था, जो शोभाबाज़ार में स्थित है। शाकाहारी बंगाली खाना अगर आपको पसंद है, तो यहाँ की थाली ज़रूर खाइएगा। इस कैफ़े की कॉफ़ी अंग्रेज़ों के समय से बहुत प्रसिद्ध है। यह आपको पुराने कलकत्ता के दिनों की याद ताज़ा करवाएगा। यहाँ तक कि अगर आप रॉय जी के वंशजों से मिलें, तो इस कैफ़े का इतिहास और कहानियाँ भी उनसे सुन सकते हैं।

नंबर २ - लक्ष्मी नारायण शा एंड सन्स: यह शोभाबाज़ार और हाथीबागान के आस-पास है। यहाँ के गर्म-गर्म, कुरकुरे तेले भाजा और विभिन्न प्रकार के वेजिटेबल पकौड़े बहुत प्रसिद्ध हैं।

नंबर ३ - गुजराती बासा रेस्टोरेंट

इसे मैं तीसरे स्थान पर मैं रखूँगी ।यह एस्प्लेनेड और बड़ा बज़ार के पास स्थित है, जहाँ बहुत स्वादिष्ट और असीमित खाना मिलता है। बड़ा बज़ार में जब भी कोई ख़रीदारी करने आता है, तो यहाँ का खाना अवश्य खाता है।

नंबर ४ - निरंजन आगार, गिरीश पार्क:

कलकत्ता के गिरीश पार्क मेट्रो के पास स्थित यह जगह अपने कुछ बंगाली शाकाहारी व्यंजन जैसे वेजिटेबल चॉप और सवेरे की कचौड़ी-आलू दम के लिए बहुत प्रसिद्ध हैं।

नंबर ५ - बड़ा बज़ार

बड़ा बज़ार की रोटी, कचौड़ी, जलेबी और घूघनी खाने के लिए तो लोग दीवाने हैं। सुबह की सैर के बाद नाश्ते में बड़ा बाज़ार वाकई में सुपरस्टार है। चाहे तरह-तरह के जूस हों, या फिर विभिन्न प्रकार के सैंडविच हों, या फुचका और चाट का लुत्फ़ उठाना हो—सबमें बड़ा बाज़ार नंबर १ है। अगर मिठाइयों की बात करें, तो सवेरे-सवेरे गर्मा-गर्म जलेबी, कालीगोदाम की बूंदी और भुजिया की तो बात ही न्यारी है।

तो इस बार उत्तर कलकत्ता जाकर सपरिवार वहाँ के स्वादिष्ट व्यंजनों का मज़ा लीजिए और पूजा में अपनी ख़ुशियों को दोगुना कीजिए।

धन्यवाद।

सौजन्य: Wikipedia

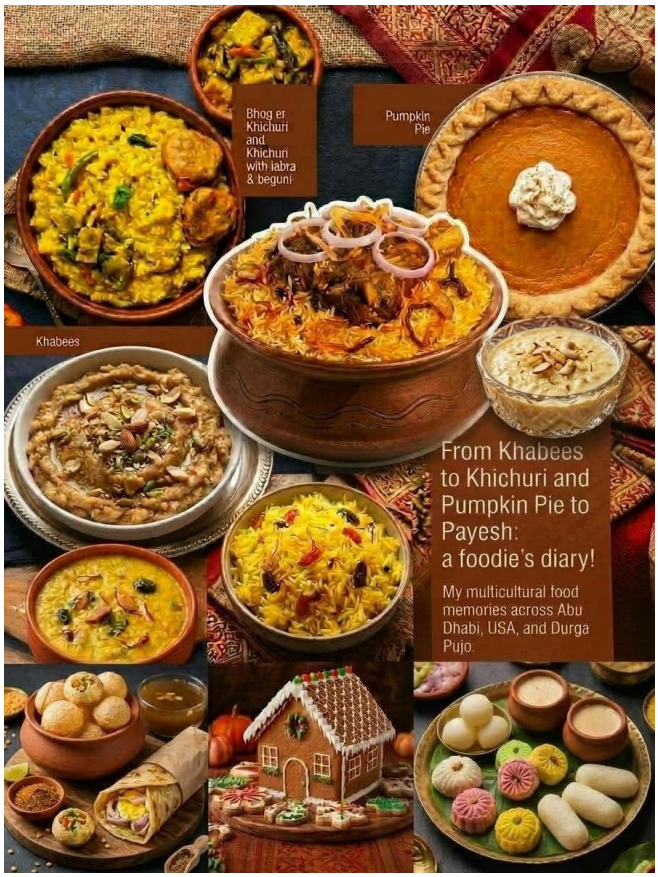


FOOD

From Khabees to Khichuri and Pumpkin Pie to Payesh: a foodie's diary!

Deeksha Chaudhuri · 33 WA

I WAS ASKED WHAT is the one thing you look forward to most during the festive season?



Quite simply—good food! My mother calls me a foodie, and she is absolutely right. Food has always been one of my greatest weaknesses, and festive occasions make it even harder to resist.

I grew up in Abu Dhabi, a wonderfully multicultural city, and now live on the East Coast of the United States. Perhaps that is why I have always loved experiencing different festivals through their food and flavours.

One of my fondest memories is celebrating Eid Al Fitr at my friend Afsheen's home. Her mother would prepare a spectacular feast blending Awadhi and Emirati flavours. Along with the biryani, I can still remember the delicious Khabees, Luqaimat, fragrant Majboos and the magnificent Lamb Ouzi. Each dish was an experience in itself.

Now that I live in the US, Thanksgiving has become another favourite. I am often invited to my friend Max's home in Chicago, where we are given free rein in the kitchen. Making gingerbread houses and festive cookies together is as much fun as eating them! And, of course, no Thanksgiving table is complete without pumpkin, pecan or warm apple pie.

But nothing quite compares to the food of Durga Pujo.

For the Bengali community in Abu Dhabi, Pujo food was much more than a meal—it was a celebration of our culture and togetherness. We could move seamlessly from the sacred simplicity of Bhog er Khichuri to the indulgence of Kosha Mangsho and Basanti Pulao , crispy fish fry with kasundi and, of course, chingri malai curry—my all-time favourite.

My fondest memories include Ashima Aunty's legendary niramish khichuri, served with labra, alur dom and crispy beguni. Then there were the community breakfasts of luchi and cholar dal—simple, comforting and utterly delicious.

And for a Bengali, no celebration is complete without sweets. Mishti doi and nolen gurer payesh remain close to my heart. They are not merely desserts; they are emotions, memories and a delicious link to home.

So, if my readers have not already guessed it, I am indeed a hopeless foodie. And my love affair with everything delicious, decadent and comforting—especially during the festive season—continues unabated! ❖



RECIPE CORNER

Khow-Swei

Anika Vombatkere · 16 WA

(Burmese Mutton Curry with Boiled Noodles)
(Serves 2 or 3)

- 1/2 kg meat (mutton / chicken) — boil with salt
- Milk of 01 coconut

Masala (grind fine):

- 03 nos. onion
- 1" pc. ginger
- 6 cloves garlic
- 08 nos. red chilli

Method

- 02 onions minced & browned.
- Add masala & brown further.
- Add haldi (turmeric). Add cooked (boiled) meat.
- Make paste of 03 tbsp besan, add to above & cook.
- (Add thin coconut milk while cooking above).
- After raw*ness* of besan has gone, add thick (coco) milk & bring to boil — remove from fire.
- NO FURTHER COOKING.

Serve with Noodles & Following Garnishes:

- Finely chopped green chilli
- —"—— coriander
- —"—— onion
- —"—— garlic
- —"—— garlic
- Sliced & fried onion
- Coarse chilli pdr. (like for pizzas) ❖



RECIPE CORNER

Kashmiri Gustaba

Krishnaja Saseendran · 19 WC

Ingredients (For Gustaba / To Marinate Meat)

- Minced chicken: 500 gms
- Vinegar: 2 tsp
- Garlic paste: 2 tsp
- Moglai / Shahi garam masala powder: 1/2 tsp
- Chilli powder: 1/2 tsp
- Salt: 1/2 tsp

Ingredients (For Gravy)

- Chopped onion: 2 big
- Garlic paste: 2 tsp
- Ginger paste: 1 tsp
- Poppy seed paste: 2 tsp
- Cashewnut paste: 1 tsp
- Raisin paste: 1 tsp
- Kashmiri chilli powder: 1 1/2 tsp
- Coriander powder: 1 tsp
- Moglai garam masala powder: 1/2 tsp
- Salt: 1/2 tsp
- Sugar: 1 tsp
- Sour curd: 1 tsp
- Fresh cream: 100 gms
- Oil: 100 gms

Method

- **Marinate the Meat:** Marinate the minced chicken with all the ingredients listed for the gustaba for one hour.
- **Boil the Chicken Balls:** Heat 1 litre of water. When the water starts to boil, shape the marinated chicken into 5-6 chicken balls and boil for 4-5 minutes. Remove the balls from the water and store the water for the gravy.
- **Prepare the Base:** Heat oil and fry the chopped onion with salt and sugar on a low heat until light brown.
- **Add Spices and Curd:** Add the garlic paste, ginger paste, cashewnut-poppy seed and raisin paste, Kashmiri chilli powder, and coriander powder. Fry on a low heat while adding the sour curd until the oil separates and comes out.
- **Simmer the Gravy:** Add the reserved chicken stock. When the gravy becomes semi-thick, add the chicken balls and boil until the gravy becomes thick.
- **Finish:** Add the fresh cream and moglai garam masala powder. Mix well and remove from the fire.

Note: Gustaba may also be made using minced mutton. If using mutton, marinate the mutton with all the ingredients of the chicken gustaba and add 2 tsp of green papaya paste. ❖



RECIPE CORNER

Kashmiri Pulao

Priya Chanda · 21 EC

Based on 1 cup / approx. 200–250g of Basmati rice

Ingredients

Rice & Liquids:

- Basmati Rice: 1 cup (approx. 200g–250g), washed thoroughly and soaked in water for 20 to 30 minutes, then drained
- Milk: 1/2 cup (infused with a generous pinch of saffron strands)
- Water: 1.5 to 2 cups (adjust depending on your pot/cooker; enough to cook the rice alongside the saffron milk)
- Ghee: 4 to 6 tablespoons (divided for frying nuts, onions, and cooking the rice)

Whole & Ground Spices:

- Whole Warm Spices: 1 cinnamon stick, 3–4 green cardamoms, 1–2 black cardamoms, 3–4 cloves, 1–2 bay leaves, and cumin seeds (or shahi jeera)
- Nutmeg / "Netmeg" Powder: A pinch of freshly grated nutmeg or nutmeg powder
- Dry Ginger Powder: 1/2 teaspoon
- Fennel Powder (Saunf): 1 teaspoon
- Salt: To taste (the cooking liquid should taste slightly salty)

Garnish & Toppings:

- Onion: 1 medium-sized onion, thinly sliced and fried until golden brown and crispy
- Nuts & Dried Fruit: Cashews, almonds, and raisins (shallow-fried lightly in ghee)
- Fresh Fruit: Fresh pomegranate arils (and optionally diced apples or pineapple) added just before serving

Step-by-Step Instructions

Prep the Rice and Saffron:

- Wash the basmati rice until the water runs clear of starch, then soak it in water for 20–30 minutes before draining completely.
- Warm the milk slightly and soak the saffron strands in it to release their colour and aroma.

Fry the Garnishes:

- Heat a little ghee in a pan and shallow-fry the cashews, almonds, and raisins until golden and plump. Remove and set aside.
- In the same pan, fry the thinly sliced onions in ghee until nicely browned and caramelised. Remove and set aside on a paper towel.

Sauté the Rice and Spices:

- In a deep pot or pressure cooker, heat remaining ghee and add all the whole warm spices (cinnamon, cardamoms, cloves, bay leaves, and cumin).
- Stir in the drained basmati rice, a pinch of nutmeg powder, dry ginger powder, and fennel powder, gently tossing and roasting everything in the ghee for a couple of minutes.

Cook the Pulao:

- Pour in the saffron-infused milk and the measured water. Season with salt until the liquid tastes slightly savoury/salty.
- Cover tightly and cook on medium-low heat until the water is fully absorbed and the rice grains are tender and fluffy.

Assemble and Garnish:

- Once cooked, turn off the heat and gently fluff the rice with a fork.
- Gently fold in or top the rice with the fried nuts, raisins, caramelised onions, an extra dust of nutmeg powder, and fresh pomegranate arils (and/or fruit like apples/pineapple) just before serving. ❖

PHOTO FEATURE

Welcoming Durga Maa in 2026



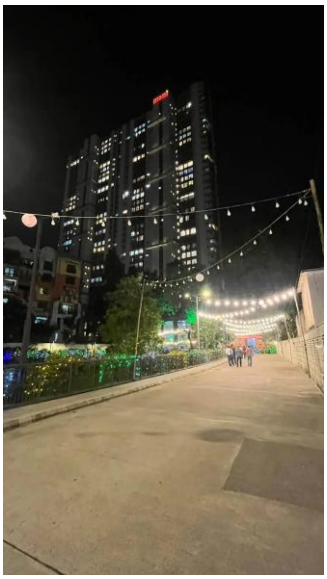


ঢাকের কাঠি আওয়াজ তোলে, আকাশ জুড়ে মেঘের ভেলা,
শিউলি ফুলের গন্ধে মাতাল, শুরু হলো পূজার মেলা।
সিংহ পিঠে মা আসছেন, আলোয় আলো চারিপাশ,
আনন্দেতে মেতে উঠুক, সবার মনে সুখের বাস।












Picture credit: Abhijit Basu · 18 WA


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