



Cambridge Assessment
International Education

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EDITORIAL

October is the month of festivals and these festivals have the power to bring entire communities, cities and countries together, which is especially comforting in such trying times.

Every year, as soon as the festive season arrives, it seems as though Kolkata is decked in fresh coats of scarlet and crimson. Every year, Durga Puja is eagerly awaited from the second it ends. The true essence of this season is captured by the magnificently painted idols of Durga Maa and the slightly humid atmosphere of October, sprinkled with the fresh smell of dew-filled leaves.

What makes each year's celebrations even more special is waking up hours later than our usual routine, with bleary eyes from the 2 AM pandal-hopping adventures. The first thing on our minds is the mouth-watering traditional breakfast waiting for us, along with the sweets from that morning's puja. We spend the rest of our day with our friends, impatiently waiting to finally visit our cousins and grandparents in the evening for their 'aashirwaad'.

The colours of the spectacularly designed Puja pandals, with Durga Maa's stunning saree embroidered with a powerful shade of scarlet, alongside the striking display of marigold-flowers, creates a glorious wreath that is to be placed on the Goddess's neck, which forms a mighty image of womanhood and strength.

This edition celebrates the beauty and cheer of the festive season. During this time, we put aside our differences and come together to celebrate. Be it shopping for new clothes, visiting extended family, or being captivated by fascinating stories behind the rituals we perform, there is something magical about this time of this year. It is in these times that we learn to cherish and celebrate our heritage and our roots. It is indeed a delight for our class to be working on the much-awaited Durga Puja 'Everything is Red' edition of this newsletter.

-Jiah Karmakar and Vaibhavi Gupta

CURRENT NEWS

The Met Gala 2021

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City holds an annual event, popularly known as the MET Gala, to raise funds for its Costume Institute. Every year a theme is set, which all celebrities interpret in their unique ways to create brilliant and innovative fashion looks.

The theme of the 2021 MET Gala, held on the 13th of September, was 'America - A Lexicon of Fashion'. The concept behind this theme was proposed by Andrew Bolton, the Head Curator of the Costume Institute at the museum. He stated that American designers play integral roles in 'conversations around diversity, inclusivity, sustainability, gender-fluidity, and body positivity'. He also explained how they redefine American fashion, especially in the context of the social and political changes taking place in the country.

This theme was interpreted in several different ways - some took it a little more literally, such as Dee Ocloppo, who wore a dress representing the American Flag. Others decided to use this opportunity to make bold statements.

Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, popularly known as AOC, wore a white gown with the statement 'Tax the Rich' written in bold red letters. She demanded economic justice and that the gap between the wealthy and lower classes be narrowed. This was an especially iconic statement at the MET Gala, in which most attendees are either millionaires or billionaires.

Canadian Actor Daniel Levy wore an outfit inspired by the work of artist David Wojnarowicz, celebrating LGBTQ+ rights in the United States.

New York Representative Carolyn B. Maloney wore a colourful outfit with the statement 'Equal Rights for Women' written all over it, commemorating the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which was passed in 1919 and had granted women the right to vote.

~Ishana Kandhari

Elections around the World



The United Russia party

In the past few weeks, many elections have been held around the world. From California to Russia, people have been voting and electing leaders in a series of elections ranging from local bypolls to federal elections.

On September 14, 2021 a recall gubernatorial election was held in California to elect the state governor. Simply put, a recall election is a special election through which voters can remove an elected official from office before their term ends. Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom had been elected as governor in 2018, and still had a year left in his term. This was the second recall election in California's history to ever actually take place. In order for a recall election to take place, a recall petition must be signed by 12% of the total turnout in the last election. Larry Elder, a Republican, ran against Mr. Newsom and gathered 37% of the vote. Mr. Newsom retained a wide majority and managed to stay on as Governor. However, many Californians are very upset that a recall election was held, especially since it was very expensive and cost taxpayers more than \$276 million.

In Russia, local, regional and federal elections were held between 17-19th September. The United Russia Party led by Putin, won a huge majority and retained control of the parliament. The party has been in control of Russia since 2003. The results released by the government show that United Russia won around 50% of the votes cast. However, many claim that this victory was illegitimate on multiple grounds. Firstly, some of Putin's most vocal critics and many opposition parties were not given the opportunity to contest the election. Moreover, there have been widespread claims of voter fraud with many claiming they witnessed forced voting and ballot stuffing.

Lastly, closer to home, West Bengal by-polls will soon be held. In early September, the Indian Election Commission announced by-polls for 3 seats in West Bengal and 1 seat in Odisha. Perhaps the most widely discussed constituency is Bhawanipur, from where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is contesting. She needs to win this election in order to retain her position as the Chief Minister. The rest of the elections are being held in the Samserjang and Jangipur constituency in West Bengal, and the Pipli region in Odisha. All these elections were held on the 30th of September.

~Vaibhavi Gupta



'ELEMENT' OF SURPRISE

Durga Puja is the largest community festival of its kind in the world. It is also the largest community-created art installation festival where local communities display their ideas with creativity. The fusion of science and art has led to the creation of many eye-catching and stunning pandals.

Over time, the Puja pandals have showcased various themes of general public awareness, including those of science like the Mars Orbiter Mission, Chandrayaan 2, global warming, water scarcity and more. The organizers have embraced scientific practices to reduce pollution and improve safety. Solar energy and LED lights have been used to both minimize the environmental impact and create awareness about pollution.

Natural materials have replaced synthetic and harmful materials in the pandals. The government uses drones and real-time surveillance for crowd control. This year the physical pandal-hopping will be replaced by virtual online viewing to



Pandals using eco-friendly LED lights

to control the spread of the pandemic.

As environmental sustainability becomes more prominent across the globe, Durga Puja pandals have started contributing to the cause, from pronouncing pandals as plastic-free zones to utilizing eco-friendly materials like bamboo, husk and jute to make idols.

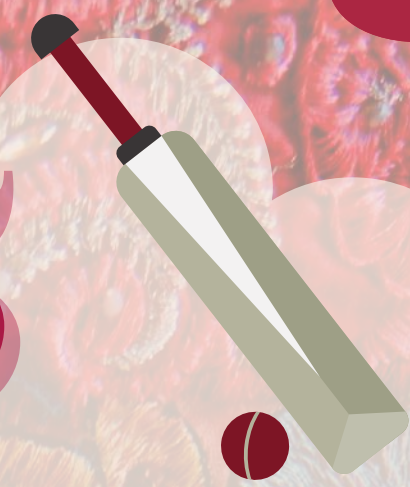
Every year, when the Puja celebrations end, the water bodies become contaminated, especially with toxic paints and undissolved Plaster of Paris. However, in a move away from the usual custom, a few areas are choosing to say farewell to Durga Puja in a more sustainable manner. Last year, The occupants dug two pits in their local parks and covered it with a canvas to hold water. They brought down the biodegradable symbols of Durga and her children in these pits. After the symbols broke down, the bamboo outline left behind was handed back to the craftsmen to be reused later.

While we celebrate the festivities with joy and exhilaration, it is important to keep in mind the impact they have on our environment and how we can minimize it.

~ Sanvee Sharda and Ananya Mishra



SPORTS



In the sports arena, contentions and spirits are rising gradually, exciting fans all over the world, and providing for new experiences all around!

The UEFA Champions League, an internet sensation and an international uproar, has been one of the most anticipated events of the year. The Union of European Football Associations is the organizer of the UCL and witnesses the contention between top-division European clubs. The UCL is organised using a round-robin group stage, from which winners advance to a double-legged knockout format, culminating in a single-leg final. One of the most prestigious tournaments of the world, the 2021-22 UEFA Champions League, running from 22nd June, 2021, to the 28th of May, 2022, promises interesting twists and exciting games. According to the drawn schedule, the UCL has already charted out the qualifying round, and is currently in the group stage. The most awaited final is set to take place on the 28th of May, in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Among other precedents, the return of Cristiano Ronaldo to Manchester United has turned the tables in the tournament, thrilling fans all over the world and sparking the spirit of competition!



Another major sporting event which will keep the audience enraptured is the 14th season of the Indian Premier League scheduled from 19th September to 10th October 2021 in the UAE.

It had earlier been suspended this year in May due to a sudden rise in covid cases in the biobubbles of the teams; but now the tournament has resumed and all spectators are exuberant, with their eyes set on the leaderboard! Ten doubleheaders, seven single headers, and four playoffs were used to divide the cricket matches. The remaining 31 matches out of 60 will now be played with high spirits among the determined eight teams, to clear the way for the ICC T20 World Cup 2021. The IPL recommenced with a competitive match between Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians, in Dubai, triumphed by CSK. It would be exciting to see if the Mumbai Indians can continue their winning streak and conquer the title for the third time or if some miraculous turn around can take the viewers by surprise!

~ Priyal Binani and Yashvi Sarda



BUSY WITH BUSINESS

Durga Puja is a season packed together with the littlest of joys. Every year, it brings along an exhibition of artistry and this annual tradition is owed to the local passion displayed in various forms, as jewellery, sculptures, paintings, pandals and more.

Small businesses making these depictions exist mainly on roadsides with the artists painting and finishing clay idols of Ganesha, Lakshmi etc, repeatedly throughout the day. Sculptures like these usually take weeks to complete as they take a lot of time to dry. Unfortunately, even after putting in all this hard work the artists hardly gain much profit from their sellings. The idols are generally priced between Rs. 100 to Rs. 5000, and that too is bargained heavily by the buyers. These roadside artists are hardly able to cope and aim to sell about two of their idols everyday. This is fruitful in the festive season but in normal times they may be unsuccessful in selling even one.



Artists making Durga sculpture

The main attraction of these festive evenings is the pandals that are built every year in a fashion that is representative of the state's creativity. In 2019, the festival had profited transactions worth Rs 4,500 crores in Kolkata only and Rs 15,000 crores across the state of West Bengal, according to Kajal Sarkar, President of the Forum for Durgotsab.

There are about 100,000 job opportunities that are made available with the commencement of community Pujas. There are also other temporary employment opportunities that are created through tourism and these contribute to roughly 10,000 households annually. These threads of artistic accomplishment pull together a fete of colours and happiness, adorning the skillfully woven festivities of Durga Puja. The relentless passion and skill put up by small businesses and craftspeople is an integral part of this celebration and thus, we acknowledge their contribution and honour them for filling the festival with the life it is so renowned for.



~Akshita Poddar, Devikaa Sureka, Yamuna Seth

Vivid Verses

RED



~Artwork by Ananya Mishra

Red
In the swirling grace of her saree
Poised with love
Tinged with the power of creation
Extending its tendrils
To the core of energy

Red
As her eyes glance up
With a fire unseen and unheard
A passion blazing forth
Extending to that goal
Which she can't yet see

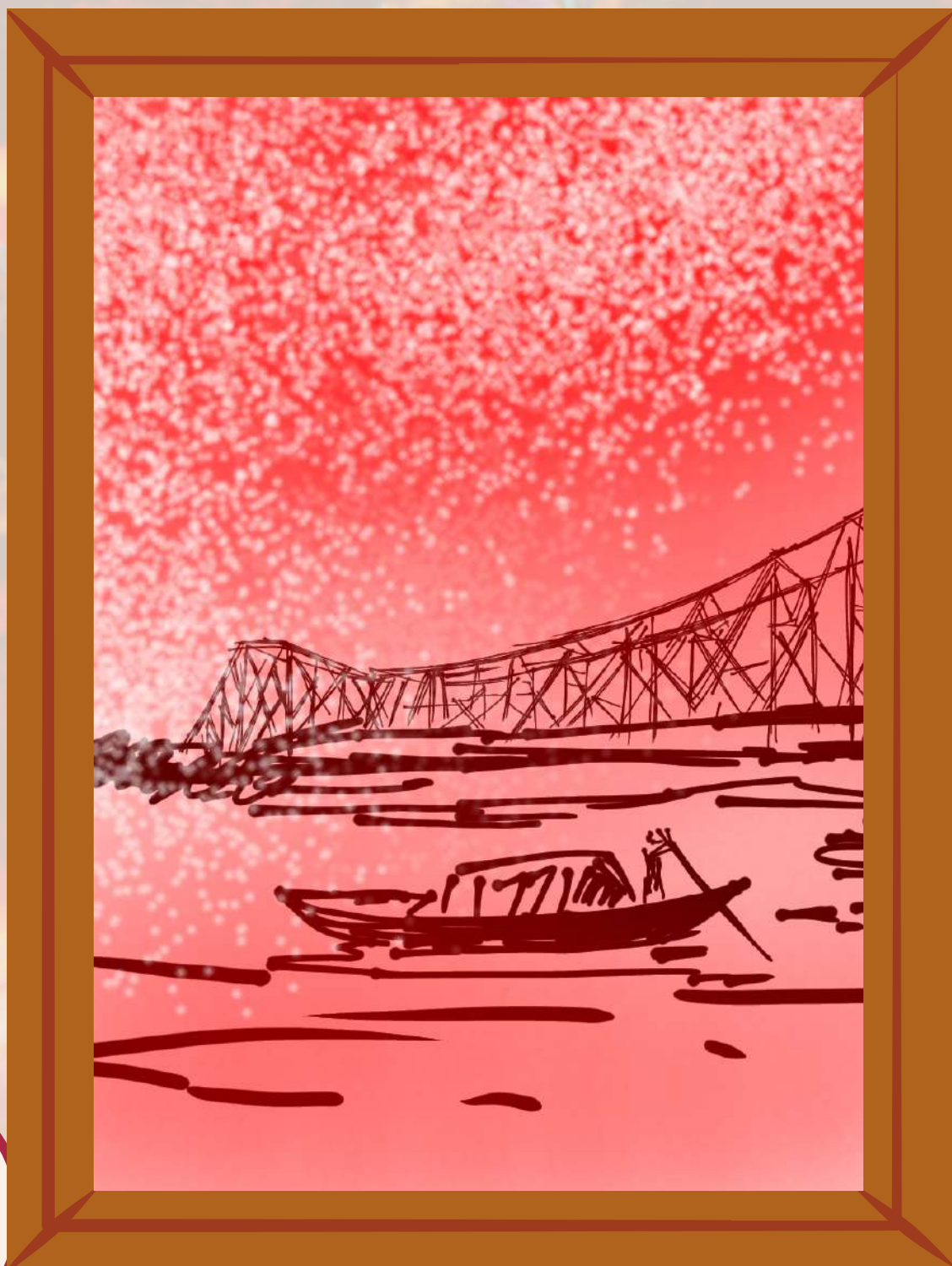


Red
A mere colour
But an abstract of the world
An insignificant value in a spectrum
Only a long wavelength
Only a word with one syllable?

Red
Stronger than the pain of millions
Brighter against that darkness of oppression
A long standing symbol of nari shakti
Red, a colour
But so incredibly more.

~Priyal Binani

Red
Mere Rang Hai
Jaise Koi Rang
Meri Shakti Hai
Jaise Koi Shakti
Tumhe Jaise Koi
Rang Hai Uske Rang



~Artwork by Urvi Jain

Everything is Red

Stood on a rooftop, watching the play by of a fair
Sweet-scented air of memories combing through my hair
A red sky at night, childlike delight
A day that's past, dancing out of sight

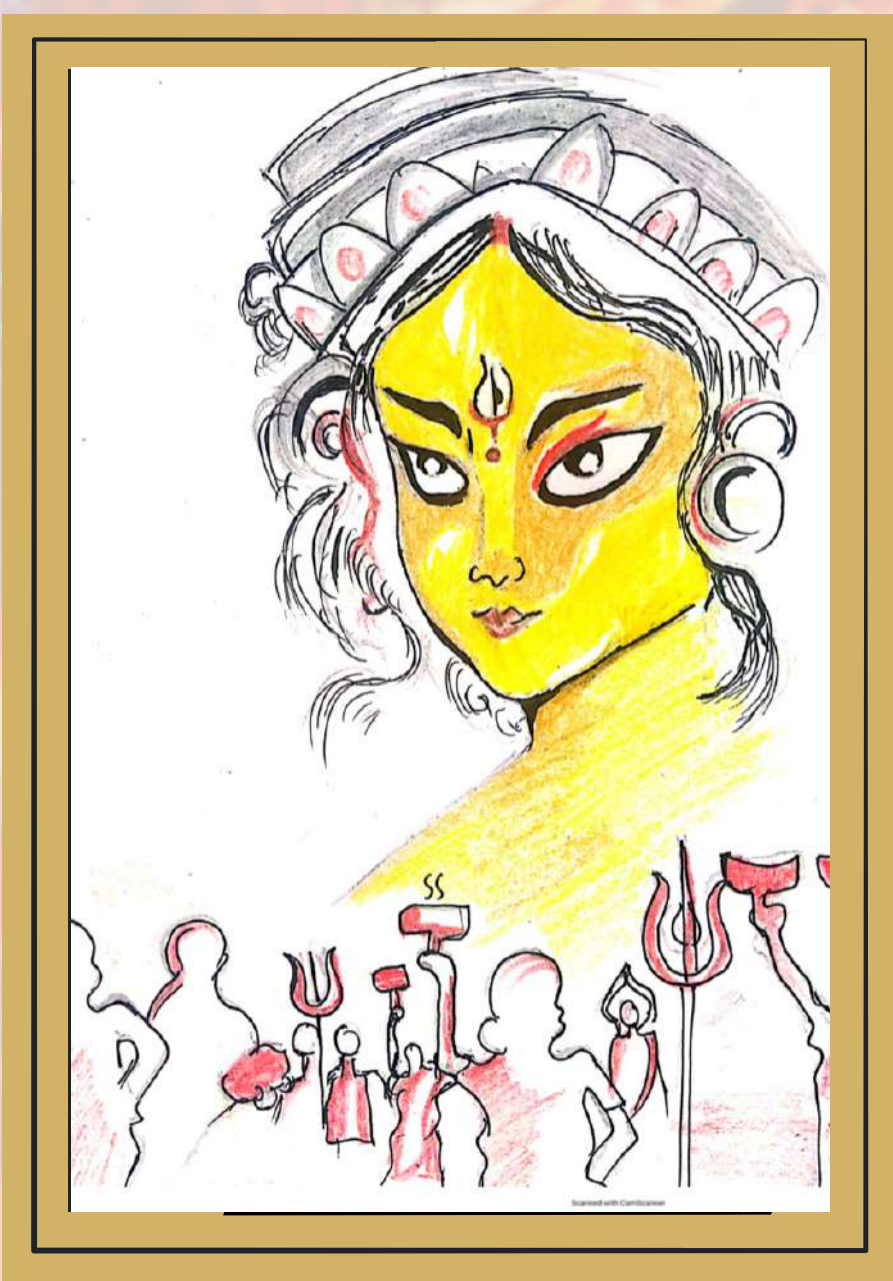
Colour me a picture, capture the crisp breeze
Rhythmic tapping, giving into the ease.
The leaves and the laughs paint the town red
A little kid with glasses finds a leap in his tread

Wrinkled hands knotting a poppy against the grey,
Toothless smile so sprightly in its own way.
Cascading ecstasy down carnival routes
Started by a little giggle as joy breaks loose

Revered sculpture, sat in a castle of bangles there
Children running the red to reach their divine lair.
Delicate little tapestry, woven by the roadside
The seraphic shades held captive in my eyes

The day comes to an end, but the music plays on
Chained to the silence, waiting on the next song
A red sky at night, artless in stead
Look from a height and everything is red.

~Yamuna Seth.



~Artwork by Priyal Binani



~Artwork by Soumyaa Mall

FESTIVAL OF JOY



RIGHT THERE WHERE WE STOOD WAS HOLY GROUND



A STATE OF GRACE



SOMETHING ABOUT IT FELT LIKE HOME, SOMEHOW



BUSY STREETS, BUSY LIVES



THE GOLDEN AGE OF SOMETHING GOOD



OH MY, WHAT A MARVELOUS TUNE!

FESTIVAL OF JOY



LIKE THE COLORS IN AUTUMN, SO BRIGHT



LOOKING OUT INTO THE CITY



A BEAUTIFUL MAGIC LOVE



WE'RE MADE OF STARLIGHT



ALL ROADS, THEY LEAD ME HERE



MAKE IT LOOK LIKE A DREAM

The Pujas always seem to remind us of the color red. Keeping the festivity intact, we have chosen each of these captions to be song lyrics from the globally acclaimed album "Red" by Taylor Swift.

~Vaishnavi Jalan

The Essence of Pujo

One of India's grandest festivals, Durga Puja is usually celebrated towards the days of late September or early October, just in time for a pause from the busy few months towards the beginning of the year. Durga Puja is the time of the year when people finally have a chance to dress up in their best clothes, meet family from afar, enjoy time with neighbours, and most importantly, spend hours late into the night, going pandal hopping with friends and enjoying Kolkata's beloved street food.

The only time of the year when Kolkata is awake at such late hours is undoubtedly during Puja's, the streets of city filled with merriment and everyone enjoying the street food late at night, knowing very well that they might regret the overconsumption the next day, however it is all part of the full Puja experience. Durga Puja, is a much needed break from our strenuous everyday routines and is a great way to enlighten oneself and others of Indian roots and heritage.



*The scarlet aesthetic
of the Pujas*



Dhunuchi dance- a Durga Puja custom

The festival honours the victory of the Goddess Durga, over the evil demon Mahishasura. This festival is thought of as very auspicious among the local people because it symbolises the victory of good over evil. The tale inspires a feminist outlook and highlights the empowerment of women.

The breathtaking and meticulously detailed idols of the Goddess Durga, crafted to perfection, make them the ideal sculpture to bring out aesthetic scarlet themes. Alongside this, the beautifully dressed people in clothes of different variations of red create a picturesque look of Durga Puja. Many pandals also have stages nearby, so people can display their talents like singing, dancing, acting and much more. Nothing makes the performer happier than the excitement in the eyes of the viewer, and the cheers from the crowd and the support of their friends and family, a togetherness we have grown to lack in our everyday lives. Durga Puja is a much awaited time of the year.

~Jiah Karmakar and Arshia Tewari

A Divine Celebration of Art



Aztec inspired pandal

Over the years, Durga Puja in Kolkata has transformed from a religious event, to a community celebrated carnival that emphasizes art, culture and music. The form of Goddess Durga is itself an epitome of beauty and mysticism, bejeweled with magnificence. Her warrior-like stature is in striking contrast with her motherly, affectionate qualities. This leaves everyone awe-struck and creates the perfect ground for art and expressions. Puja pandals are actually giant art installations. Many artists, craftsmen and workers are involved, mainly being the idol makers, the illuminators, the pandal makers and the shola artists.

It is a showcase of Bengal's artistic might and a fusion of both contemporary and folk art. This festival is dynamic enough to absorb new elements every year, in the form of relevant social messages, novel art forms and recreation of important concepts. The pandals are usually theme based and weave a story around them. Creativity along with artistic expressions and talents are needed to design the pandals.



Artistic representation of Durga

Every aspect of the puja pandal is planned intricately by the artists, keeping in mind the aesthetics, social messages and recently even environmental sensitivity. Some pandals choose to highlight age-old traditional art forms like Patachitra, Chhau dance, Warli paintings and more, while some choose to explore contemporary themes with the help of technology and artificial intelligence. The theme ideas are as varied as HIV awareness to the Mars Orbiter Mission, the migrant crisis and gender equality.

The message and the beauty is so candid that it can even be perceived by the common person lingering with them, irrespective of age, education etc. Over a million people take part in this week-long festival, but it has yet to gain any prominence on the international stage. With proper publicity, it is sure to become a major tourist attraction and a festival loved by everyone across the world.



~Sanvee Sharda

A Magical Evening



Dear Diary,

The wafting smell of Puchkas and Chaat filled my lungs as I stepped out of my house in the fun-filled yet overly crowded street.

We walked to the brightly lit and noisy Mela held annually at Taltalla Maat. As we stopped for ice cream on our way to the Ferris wheel, my heart started beating very fast. Seeing how fast the wheel was spinning was scaring me, but I tried not to think about it. My ice cream started melting in my hand which I immediately wiped before gulping down the remains. My friend and I entered one of the cabins. As soon as we got to the top, we knew what came next. The wheel started spinning very fast and we had a mischievous mouse running around in our stomachs. We went on a number of rides like the teacups, a small dragon roller coaster and an exciting ride called the Christopher Columbus, where there was a giant boat which swung from side to side.

As the golden orb in the sky started to set, we headed to the pandal. I looked forward to coming back here, and to reliving this beautiful experience again next year.

We headed to the pandal and saw security guards leading people inside and constantly scolding people who tried to touch the display of Durga Maa in her moment of glory - killing the Demon Mahishasur.

The pandals in Kolkata every year are each unique in their own way.

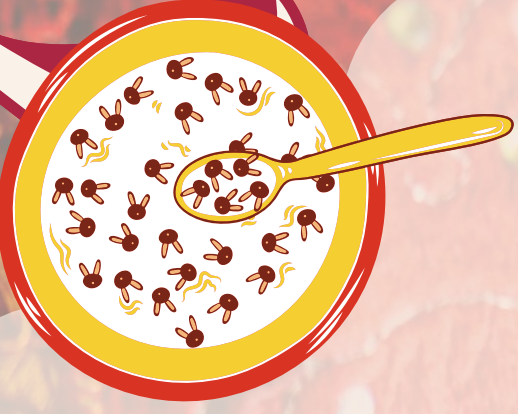
This pandal was made purely from newspaper and soda cans. It was both wonderful to look at and its message of recycling was well received. We were still in awe of the amazing statue of Durga Maa as we left the pandal, still excited to see the unique features of the many pandals we would visit that night.

Yours only,

Arshia



~Arshia Tewari



RECIPES

GURER PAYESH

(DATE PALM JAGGERY RICE PUDDING)

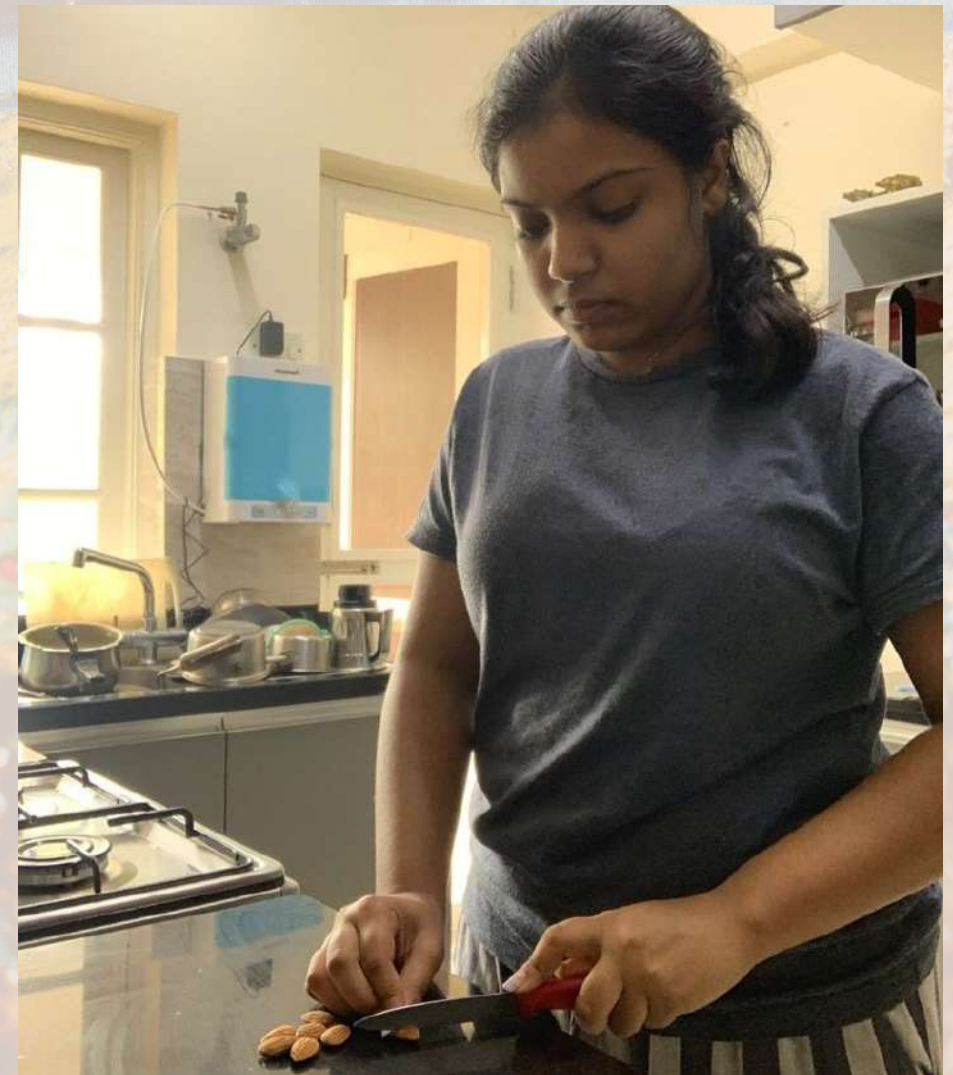
The Pujo is here and what can be a better way to begin the celebrations than a nice, comforting bowl of fresh payesh cooked with the season's first nolen gur! This dessert is bound to leave you asking for more! The traditional flavorful dish makes for the perfect comfort food.

INGREDIENTS -

- Basmati Rice: ¼ cup
- Milk: 1 litre
- Date Palm Jaggery: 1 cup (solid)
- Cardamom: 3-4 pieces
- Bay-leaf: 1
- Salt: tiny pinch
- Raisins: 1 tbsp

METHOD -

1. Place a saucepan with the milk on high heat and bring to a simmer.
2. As the milk starts to boil, add in the cardamom and bay-leaf and allow the milk to absorb the flavour and fragrance.
3. After a few minutes, turn the flame down to low and let the milk simmer for a few mins.
4. Drain the rice that had been soaking for half an hour. Place in a strainer and break the grains to make them smaller.
5. Add them into the milk and keep stirring for 15 minutes at a low flame.
6. Once the milk has reduced a little, take out the bay-leaf and add the raisins, salt and melted jaggery.
7. Give it a nice stir and let it simmer to thicken.
8. When thick and consistent, garnish with your favorite dry fruits and serve to all your loved ones!



Vani preparing the ingredients



The Gur Payesh

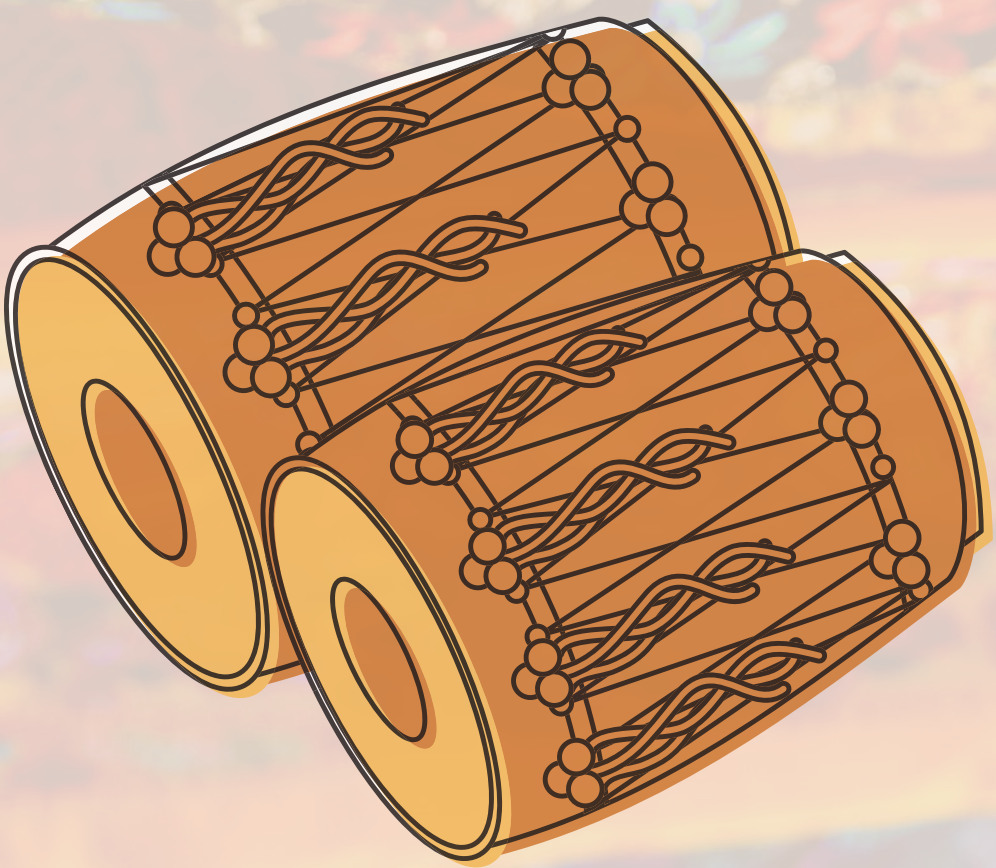
We hope you enjoy cooking and eating this comforting treat as much as we did. Make sure you relish your Payesh while curled up in bed!

~ Soumyaa Mall and Vani Saraf

KIND THOUGHTS

The greatness of a culture can be
found in its festivals
~Siddharth Katragadda

Festivals are occasions to empower
ourselves in the course of humanity -
they are the occasions to rekindle the
promise of humanity in our heart"
~Abhijit Naskar



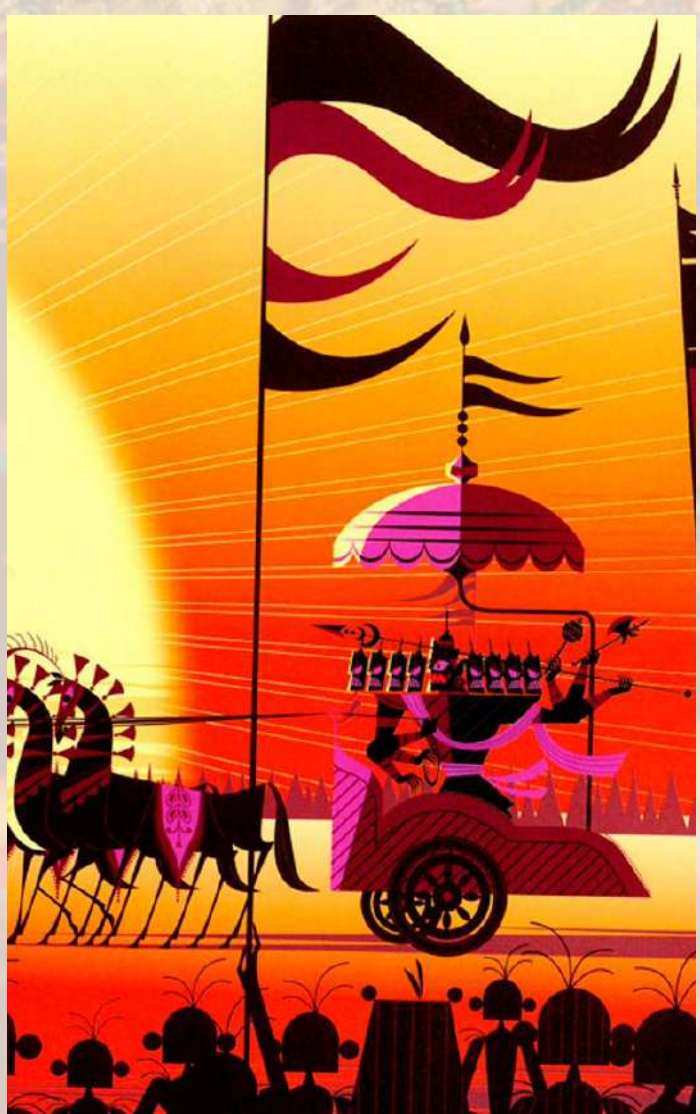
~Jahnavaa Yaduvanshi

BOOKS

For this edition, we thought of recommending books on different Indian festivals and Indian mythology. These are all must-reads for people seeking to learn more about their roots and Indian culture.

Durga Puja by Sudeshna Banerjee -

As the name suggests, this book is an introduction to Durga Puja, the largest festival in Eastern India that celebrates the victory of good over evil. It gives great insight into the rich culture of East India. This book keeps the dying culture of The Pujos alive and amusing. This is a wonderful read if you want to learn more about the history of the festival and the rich cultural history of West Bengal.

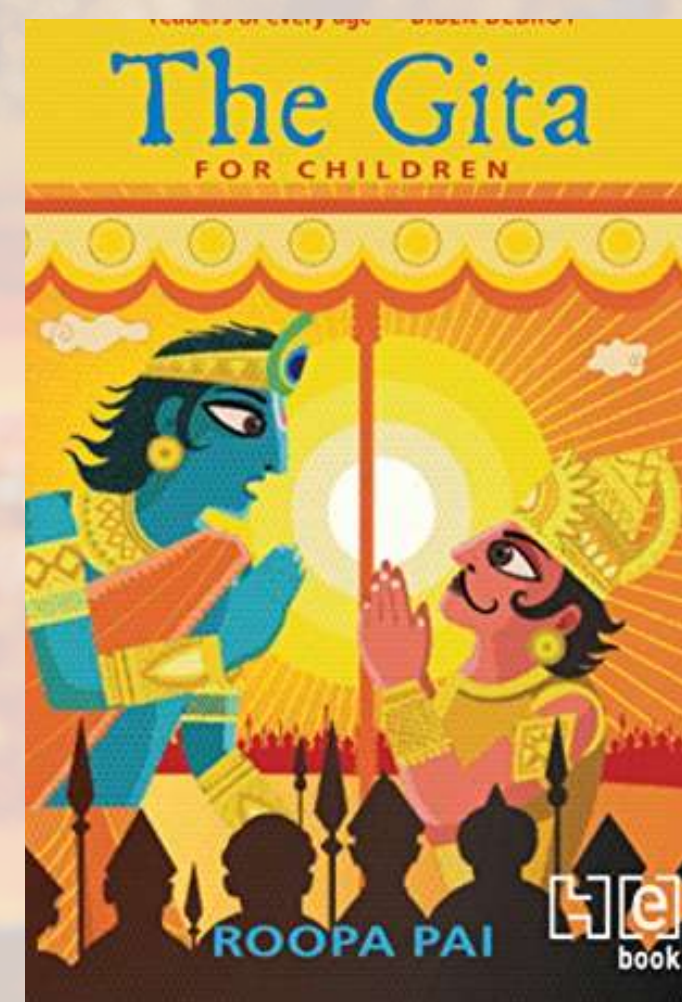


Ramayana: Divine Loophole by Sanjay Patel -

A 2500 - year - old story from Hindu mythology retold in an easy-to-understand manner makes it a fun read for slightly younger children. Pixar's veteran animator Sanjay Patel presents the Ramayana in a whimsical and interesting way too young readers. Today's children often refuse to read old historical books, even though they are deeply engraved in our culture. This book encourages children to learn about the Ramayana in an amusing and entertaining manner. Given a 4.5/5 rating by Goodreads, this is a must-read for kids looking to understand one of the most famous epics of Indian history.

The Geeta: For children by Roopa Pai-

The Gita is one of the oldest books ever written but many people find it difficult to read and usually give up after a few attempts. With its complicated language and monotonous tone, many people tend to distance themselves from reading long historical texts. This book for children aged between ages 9-16 is a great way to learn about Indian culture in an engaging manner and foster their interest in the country's history.



~ Arshia Tewari

THE STORY OF MAA DURGA

India's stories and customs are well-known all over the world. One of the most famous of these is the story of Maa Durga. It is an ancient tale that involves the death of the vicious demon 'Mahishasura' and the birth of 'Adi Shakti'. Let us revisit this wonderful pastime.

Once upon a time, there lived a tyrant named 'Mahishasura'. He was half-demon and half-buffalo. Mahishasura had a strong desire to be immortal. He decided to appease Lord Brahma by undergoing deep meditation. After a thousand years, Lord Brahma finally paid heed to his prayer and came down to Earth to grant him one wish. The arrogant Mahishasura was overjoyed. He begged Lord Brahma to grant him the blessing of no man nor god being able to kill him. Despite being aware of Mahishasura's intentions, Lord Brahma gave him this power. He had discovered a massive flaw in the demon's plan.

Mahishasura was on top of the moon! He immediately began to harass all of humanity and expel the demigods from heaven. He caused so much havoc that Lord Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu decided to end his reign. When the demigods prayed for help, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva presented a light from which a beautiful ten-handed goddess named Durga - the embodiment of Adi Shakti - was created.

Each demigod gave her a weapon. Lord Vishnu bestowed the Sudarshan Chakra upon her. Lord Brahma presented her with a pitcher. Lord Varuna conferred a quiver of arrows. Lord Yama, the Lord of Death, gave her a powerful sceptre, while Lord Indra gifted her a thunderbolt worthy of shattering the Earth. Lord Vishwakarma gave her an axe, and Kaal, a sharp sword. Lord Shiva bestowed a trident upon her, and the mighty Himalayas gifted Maa Durga a strong and fearsome lion.

After obtaining these ten weapons, Lord Durga was ready to fight Mahishasura. The fierce, raging battle continued for ten days. On the tenth day, she used the trident that Shiva had presented to her to chop off Mahishasura's head.

Since then, Durga Puja has been celebrated every year to commemorate Maa Durga's victory. It is a ten-day celebration that is observed by nearly every Bengali household.



Goddess Durga and Mahishasura

~ Jahnavaa Yaduvanshi

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