

# DURGOTSAV : kNICK - kNACKs

## Making of the IDOL:



In India, all religions and their rituals are sacred; while some have crystal-clear explanations others exist only because there has been an age-old practice. And, among them is the famous yet unexplained practice of using soil from the land of brothel to prepare Durga Idols in Bengal. While the entire North and West India celebrate the nine holy days prior to Dusshera as Navratris; in East the festivity is observed as Durga Puja.

It is no secret as how some women are subjected towards inhumane treatment, some are shunned from society, a few insulted and ill-treated throughout the year. But, during Navratras they are worshipped and considered auspicious; call it hypocrisy at its peak or whatsoever. The worst affected section of society is of sex-workers, all their lives they are attributed with slangs, but during Navratra, individuals throng at their doorsteps with polite smiles begging for some clay from their land.

According to Hindu rituals, for the preparation of Durga idol, four things are of utmost importance - mud from the banks of the Ganga, cow urine, cow dung and soil from a prostitute's



land or Nishiddho Pallis (forbidden territories). Together the mixture constitutes the sacred idol of Goddess Durga; without the sand from a prostitutes' land, the idol is considered incomplete. This one tradition has been going on for years, but no one knows the exact reason why it started. The procedure of seeking the mud from the land of a sex-worker is holy and dramatic at the same time. It is said, the priest of the temple has to go and beg at the doorstep of brothel for some mud for the Durga Maa idol. While she procures the sand, the priest enchants vedic mantras. It is believed that even if she denies, the priest has to keep begging for the soil.

## Chokkhu Daan - The Day When Eyes of Goddess Durga are Painted for Durga Puja in Kolkata:



Durga Puja in Bengal has its own unique rituals. A week before Navratri begins; the idols of Goddess Durga are being painted and made ready except for the eyes. On the occasion of *Mahalaya*, the Goddess is invited on earth with rituals and so on this day, the eyes are drawn on the idols in an auspicious ritual called **Chokku Daan**. It is believed the Goddess descends to earth at the time of drawing the eyes on the

idols. *Kumartuli* or potter's locality is a famous place in North Kolkata where a majority of the idols are made.

## The Ritual of Pran Pratishtha - Kola Bou Snan:



This is the ritual of invoking the presence of the Goddess in the idol. This takes place on the seventh day, when early in the morning; a small banana plant called Kola Bou is taken to the river to be bathed and dressed in a red-bordered sari and carried back in a procession to be placed near the idol of the Goddess. This is then followed by ritualistic prayers and puja. The same ritual takes place for all the remaining days

of the festival. There are also a lot of cultural activities that take place as part of the celebrations. People come together to dance, sing, perform plays and traditional.

## **Kumari Puja – The Virgin Form:**



The Goddess is worshipped in various forms during her stay here. One of those forms is the "Kumari", the Virgin form.

This mould is the most powerful form of Mahashakti. A girl aged between one to sixteen, symbolising the Kumari form of Devi is worshipped in front of the idol of Goddess Durga. The Kumari form of the Goddess was emphasised as the most dynamic form by the devotees since yester years as Kumari Shakti is the basis of all creations. Our scriptures have emphasised Kumari Puja particularly to evolve the purity and divinity of the women of the society. Diminishing the larger than life stature of the Goddess to someone much nearer and closer is the real reason for this form of worship.

Kumari Puja is held on Ashtami Tithi. In the dawn of Ashtami, the Kumari is bathed in Ganga water and is clad in a red benarasi saari. She is then adorned with flowers and jewelry, alta is applied to her feet and a 'tilak' of sindur on her forehead. The young Kumari fasts the whole day until the puja is over. On a decorated chair she is made to sit before the goddess and a flower from the Devi's hand is placed in her hand. Placed before her are flowers, bel (wood apple) leaves, incense sticks, lamps, 'noibiddo' and other things required for puja. The purohit then chants the mantras and the sound of dhak fill the atmosphere. After the puja the divinity of the Goddess Durga is said to be seen in the girl. It is customary to gift the girl with gold, silver and clothes. To gift the Kumari is considered to be a pious act.

## **Sandhi Puja - The Devotional Zeal:**

One of the most important ritual of Durga Puja is the Sandhi Puja which is performed at a very important period. It is done at the exact juncture when the Asthami tithi ends and Navami tithi begins. The last 24 minutes of Ashthami and first 24 minutes of Navami is regarded as the Sandhikkhan. This is the exact time at which Devi Durga slayed the notorious pair Chando and Munda. There is an interesting legend behind this timing.



Thus the arrangements for Sandhi Puja are usually grand. You need 108 lotuses and 108 earthen oil lamps to begin with. A single whole fruit (preferably red), hibiscus flowers, saree, uncooked rice grains, jewellery if you are offering any and bel leaves or a garland of 108 bel leaves. Every family or community has its own unique way of offering these ingredients to the Goddess but the 108 lamps and lotuses and bel leaves remain constant in every household.

## **Sindur Khela - To bid Farewell:**



It is only towards the end of Navami, it hits that Goddess Durga has to depart soon after, on Vijayadashami. A tinge of sadness fills the air. But then also bengalis know to enjoy every single moment till Maa is present, till her departure. They bid MAA Farewell in a grand way. A few rituals take place to bid her a proper farewell and good luck. Sindoor Khela is one such ritual. Sindur khela is basically a celebration of the fact that Maa Durga is a married woman or

suhagaan. Since in Hinduism, sindoor or vermillion represents the status of a married woman this red powder is used to celebrate Maa Durga's married status.

The rituals for this day begins with Maha Arati, where a shitala bhog is offered to the Goddess. The priest then proceeds towards conducting the final Visarjan Puja. The puja is followed by a fun ritual of Prasasthi Vandana. A mirror is placed right in front of the deity, and devotees then stare into the mirror trying to get a glimpse of Goddess Durga's feet. Those who manage to catch a glimpse are said to have a prosperous future in the coming year.

Next comes the Devi Boron, where married women form queues to bid their final goodbye personally. Their Boron thali contains betel leaves, betel nuts, sindoor, alta, incense sticks and sweets. They draw out a betel leaf in both their hands and wipe the deity's face. This is done to make sure she doesn't depart with tearful eyes. Next they put sindoor on the deity's forehead and her shakha and pola (bangles worn by married women). After this, the idol is offered sweets and paan (betel leaf). After the ritual is over, women apply this auspicious sindoor on their forehead and smear it on other married women and pray for their happy marital life. The ritual is quiet vibrant, colourful and fascinating site to behold. Sindoor khela is an indelible part of the great celebration of DURGA PUJA.

### **The Bhashan – Visarjan – Immersion:**



Durga Puja in Bengal is unique, indeed one of its kind in the world. A year of preparations, months of hard work to create the beautiful pandals and idols, five days of celebrations coupled with an insane energy that pulsates through the people of the state, sleeplessness and an orgy of street food it all came to a grand end on Red Road on the Tenth Day when the West Bengal

government's immersion carnival captured imaginations world-wide.

Imagine Disneyworld and the Rio carnival, add elements of Mardi Gras and the celebrations at Tenerife with unique artistic and creative Maa Durga idols on massive floats, each decorated with themes pertaining to today's reality - education, Indian diversity and communal harmony among others; laal paar shada saree (traditional white sarees with red borders) draped quintessential Bengali women; intricately-designed kurta-wearing and dhunuchi-bearing gentlemen; children performing traditional Indian dances and skits – does that give you a glimpse of the celebrations that erupted on the final day of the revelry? It's that time of the year when one must visit Kolkata to witness the celebrations first hand. Words don't do justice to the feeling that underlies it all.

### **To Conclude:**

Tradition contributes a sense of comfort and belonging to us. It brings families together and enables people to reconnect with their roots. We should value our faith and tradition which inspire truth, honour, loyalty and commitment and are firmly defined by educational experience that draws from the past and points to the future. More importantly, traditions and rituals provide a psychological and philosophical foundation that continues to shape our thinking routines as well as the future.

Learning new things does not stop with the assimilation by indoctrination of a tradition; it merely begins there. Paradoxically, it is our commitment to what the tradition offers us – our faith and trust in it, our willingness to be nurtured and to develop within it – which liberates us ultimately to step out beyond simple dependence into a mature engagement with the reality of which it speaks.

Lastly, Tradition offers an excellent context for meaningful pause and reflection.

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