

# Calcutta CHRONICLE



## Durga Puja in *Babu* Calcutta

### SPOTLIGHT

Circle Of Devotion

PAGE 06

### PARASCAPE

Kumartuli

PAGE 30

### STAGE CRAFT

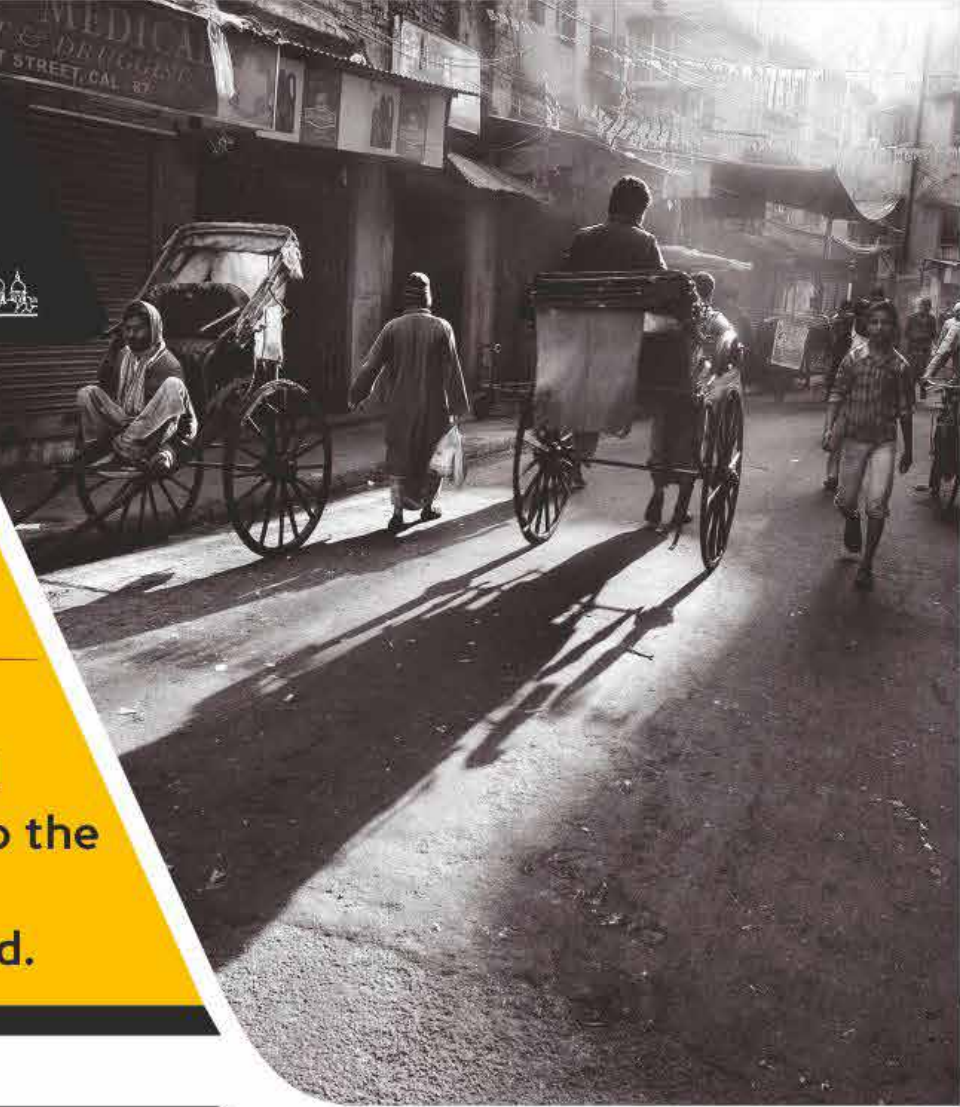
100 Years Of Mahanayak

PAGE 58



## A New Digital Magazine for, by, of, about Calcutta

Calcutta Chronicle is a Monthly English Digital Magazine that caters to the tastes of true blue Calcuttans living abroad.



# 3

## YEARS MEMBERSHIP

Membership Fees  
**ONLY: \$100**

Membership Fees  
**ONLY: AED 350 (UAE)**

Taking a 3-year membership of the magazine comes with benefits which are available at special rates exclusively for members of Calcutta Chronicle



Special Medical  
Care for the elderly

**Deposit Fee  
(Emergency)  
USD 50 / AED 175**



Discounted  
Car Rental Services



Event Management  
Services



Meet and Greet  
Events



Call: 9830370370 / 9830370371  
 [www.calcuttachronicle.co.in](http://www.calcuttachronicle.co.in)

# EDITORIAL

Durga Puja owes its popularity in and around Calcutta to the coming of the British and the advent of Babu Culture in the city. Though it all begun by Laxmikanta Mazumder of Barisha in 1610, however, the opulence associated with the festival was initiated by Maharaj Krishnachandra of Nadia who also simplified the religious practices observed in the course of the Puja. It is said that during the reign of Nawabs the rich were wary of showing off their wealth, apprehensive it would be taken away by their Muslim rulers but there was nothing to fear from their new British masters. In fact Durga Puja became a practice among the new urban mercantile aristocracy in Calcutta, pioneered by Nabakissen Munshi, the patriarch of the Debs of Sovabazar Rajbari, a way of enhancing business interest as well as to mark their rise up the social order. This edition's 'Past Perfect' column is a must read.

In the glittering world of Calcutta's Durga Puja, where every year ushers in dazzling themes and larger-than-life spectacles, there exist celebrations that remain firmly rooted in heritage. These are the traditional Durga Pujas, some of which have crossed more than half a century, quietly carrying forward an unbroken legacy. They do not compete for awards or headlines; instead, they stand as symbols of faith, community, and cultural memory. Read this edition's 'Tradition' column to know more.

**Joydip Sur**  
Editor



September 2025 | Vol 4 | Issue 9

Editor	Joydip Sur
Associate Editors	Rahul Ray Swapna Ray
Editorial Advisor	Tarun Goswami
Overseas Marketing	Swarup Ganguly
Photographers	Pooshan Deb Mallick Ranadip Mandal
Art Direction	Kamil Das
Graphic Design	Bappa Das
Finance	Prasenjit Basak
Circulation	Sayonika Karmakar Sontosh Haldar
Technical Team	Websparks Technologies
Published by	Aruna Ghosh Guide India Publication 19B, Allenby Road Kolkata - 700020 Ph: 9831048220

## For Memberships in the UAE

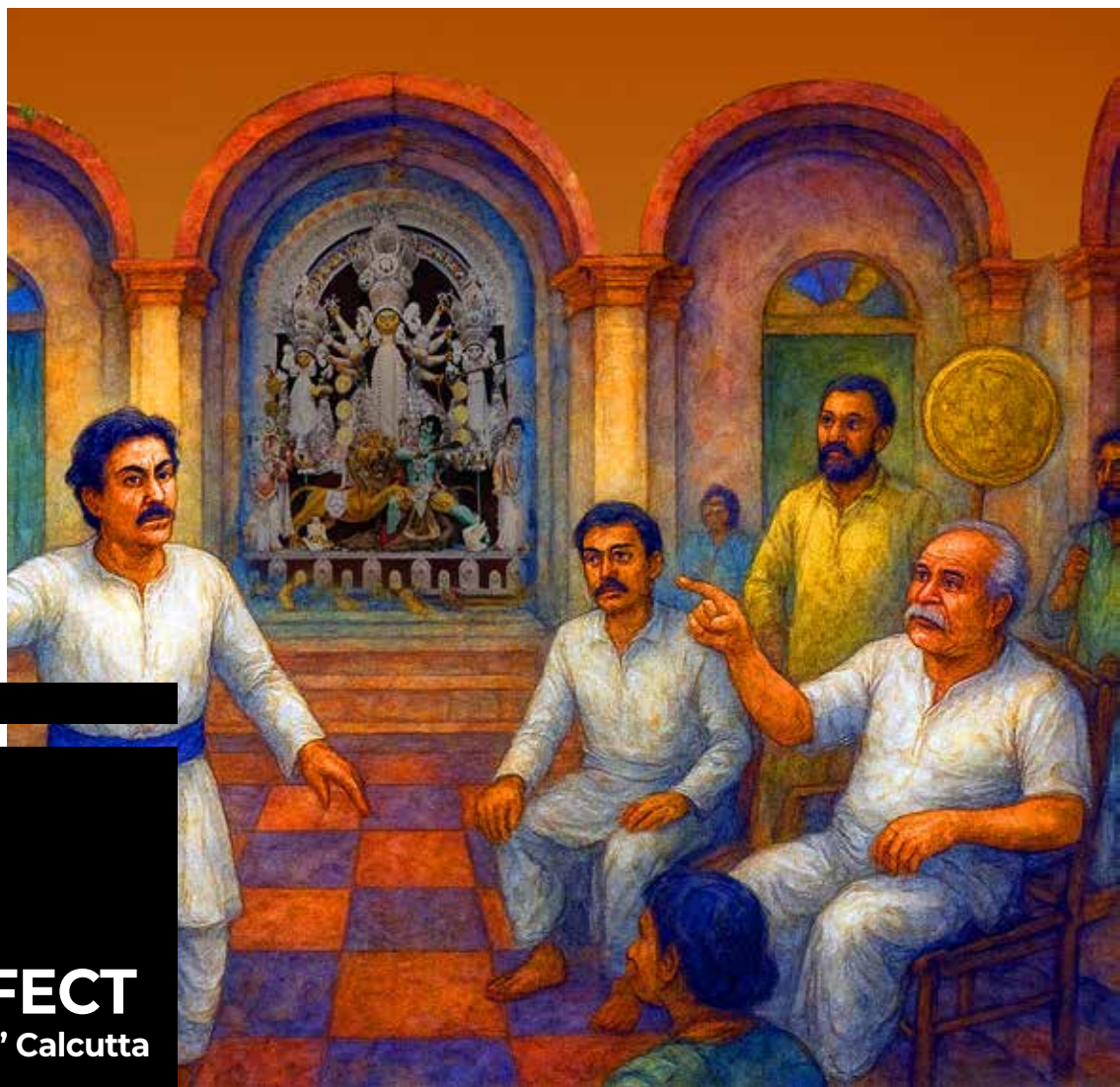
**Sayandeep Mitra**

Burjuman Business Tower

Office No : 2415, 24th Floor, Bur Dubai

Contact: +971 561403882

# Table OF CONTENT



# 14

**PAST PERFECT**  
Durga Puja in 'Babu' Calcutta



## 10 Special Feature

The Timeless Grandeur  
Of Traditional Durga  
Pujas

## 06 | Spotlight

Durga Puja - Circle Of Devotion

## 17 | Changing Face

Change, a captive on the wings  
of time

## 30 | Parascape

Kumartuli



## 33 | Heritage

A Rocking Adda



## 38 | Wellness

When Memories Fade Into Confusion  
- The Truth Behind Dementia

## 51 | Food Pump

Puja Bhog - Eat, Pray and Eat

## 55 | Culture

Durga Puja of Surul Sarkarbari

■ SPOTLIGHT ■

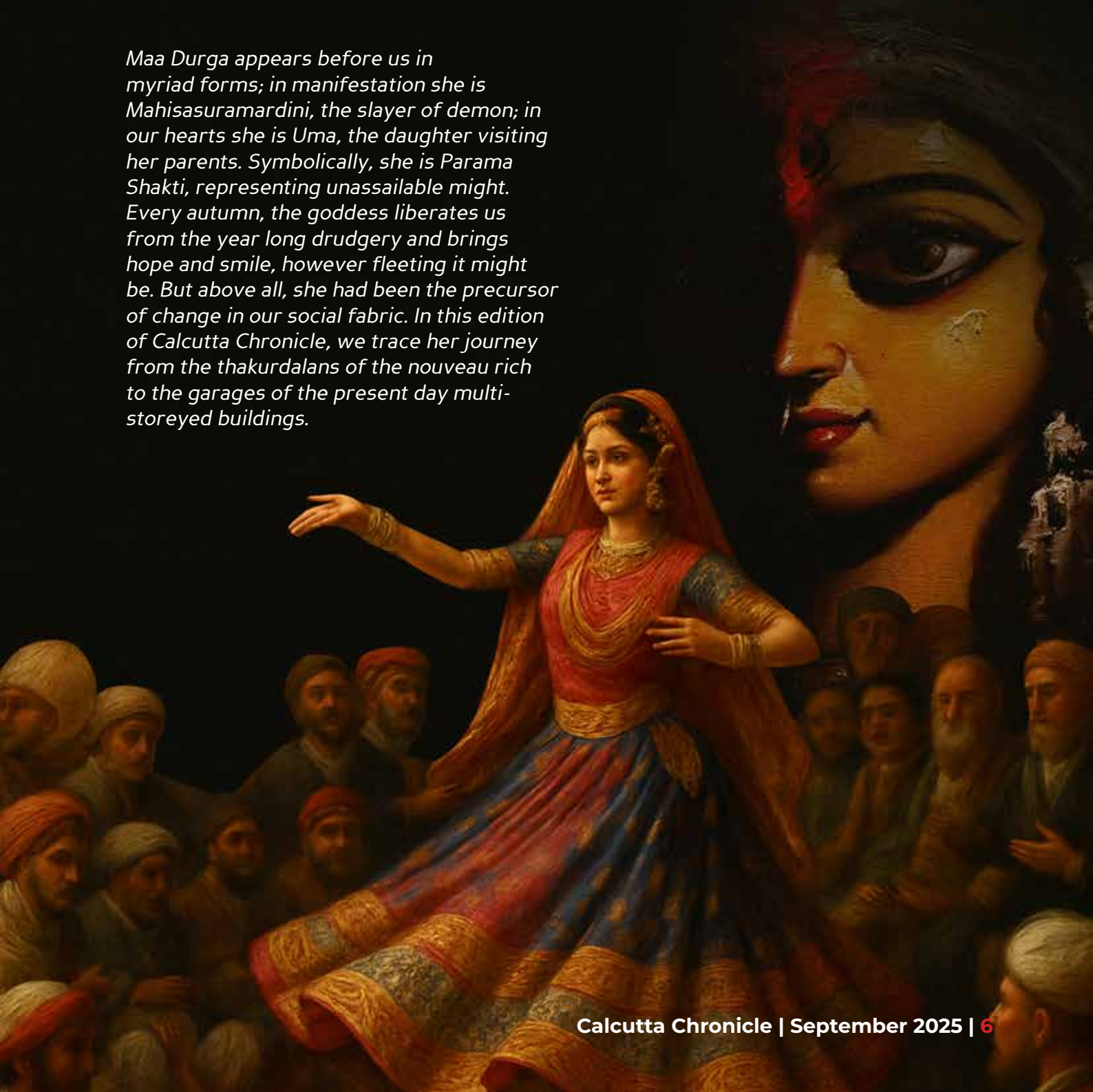
# Durga Puja

## Circle of Devotion



Anindita Mazumder

*Maa Durga appears before us in myriad forms; in manifestation she is Mahisasuramardini, the slayer of demon; in our hearts she is Uma, the daughter visiting her parents. Symbolically, she is Parama Shakti, representing unassailable might. Every autumn, the goddess liberates us from the year long drudgery and brings hope and smile, however fleeting it might be. But above all, she had been the precursor of change in our social fabric. In this edition of Calcutta Chronicle, we trace her journey from the thakurdalans of the nouveau rich to the garages of the present day multi-storeyed buildings.*



## ■ SPOTLIGHT ■

Durga Puja is irrevocably woven with Calcutta's social and political history; for the aatchala where Maa Durga was worshipped for the first time in the city way back in 1610 also doubled up as the venue of signing of the deed, handing over the zamindari rights of three dihis to the British leading to the foundation of Calcutta as a city.

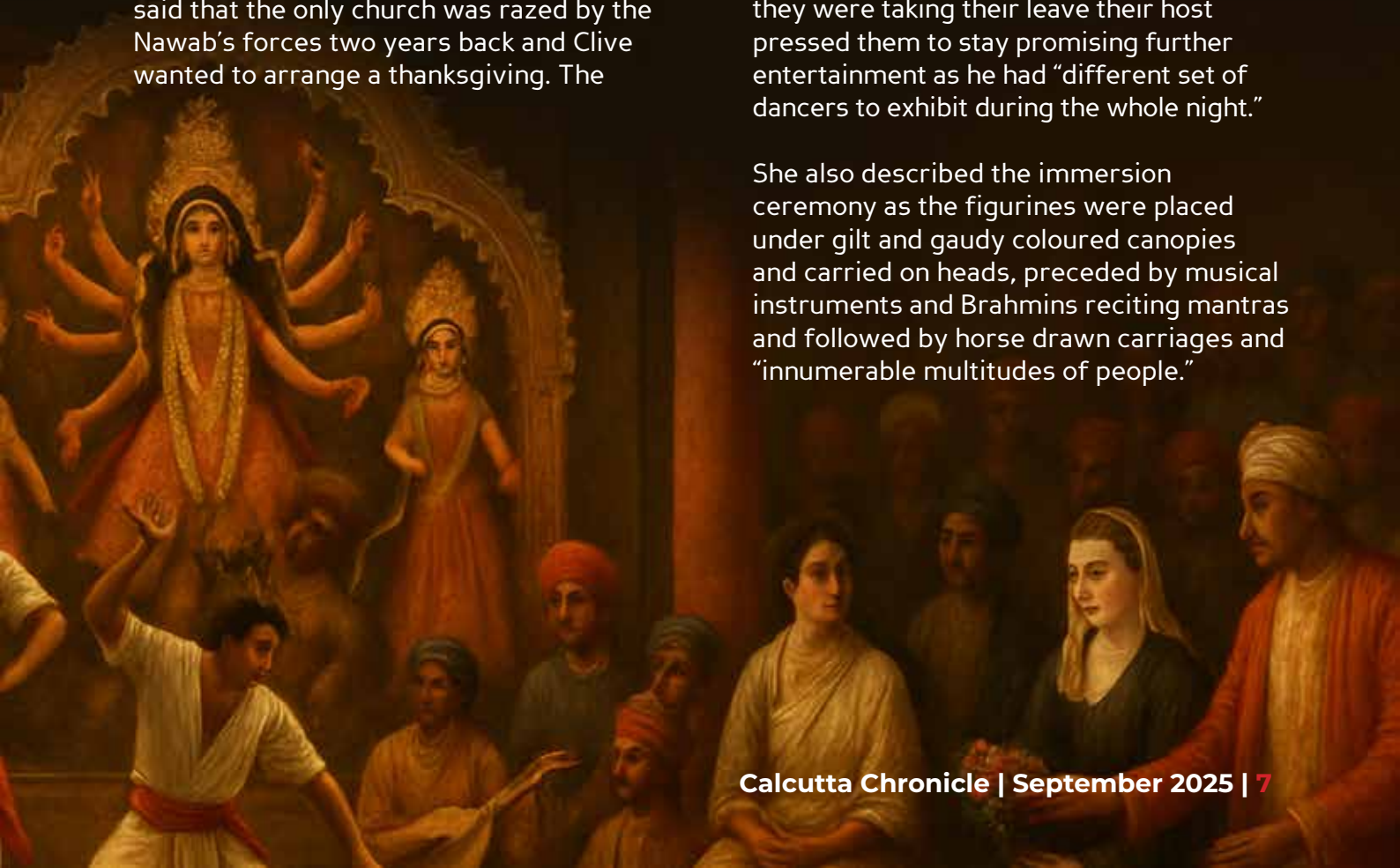
Today, only the red terracotta columns of the aatchala, belonging to the Sabarna Roy Choudhuri family, stands where the earliest Durga Puja was held by Laxmikanta Ray Mazumder, their forefather. The deed for transferring the zamindari rights of the three villages—Gobindapur, Kalikata and Sutanuti to Charles Eyre, the son-in-law and successor of Job Charnock was signed here since the phirangee sahib could not be invited inside the house. The Puja had been strictly a private affair.

But Nabakissen Munshi had no such qualms about inviting Lord Robert Clive when he began his Puja in 1758 at the newly constructed thakurdalan as a “thanksgiving” for the victory in the Battle of Plassey. It is said that the only church was razed by the Nawab's forces two years back and Clive wanted to arrange a thanksgiving. The

Munshi had assured him and employed a huge labour force to complete the thakurdalan in three months. It was the beginning of the pomp and show of the baroari Puja (in the sense of being open to the public), and the observance of rituals were set aside for a European flavour and almost a vulgar display of wealth.

A fairly detailed account of this Puja held in 1809 was left by Maria Graham who toured India at that time. She had been invited by Maharaj Rajkissen Bahadur for a nautch at his residence at the end of Chitpore Bazar between 5-7 October at 9 pm in the evening. The host had welcomed them with a small bouquet and sprinkled attar and rose scented water from a “gold vase with a golden spoon.” The evening programme comprised male dancers, then some “Cashmerian” singers accompanied by an old man with a sweet toned guitar and a pantomime with men personifying as bears, elephants and monkeys. Unfortunately, Maria Graham was not too impressed with the nautch, although she found the girls pretty and their motions graceful. While they were taking their leave their host pressed them to stay promising further entertainment as he had “different set of dancers to exhibit during the whole night.”

She also described the immersion ceremony as the figurines were placed under gilt and gaudy coloured canopies and carried on heads, preceded by musical instruments and Brahmins reciting mantras and followed by horse drawn carriages and “innumerable multitudes of people.”



In the next hundred years, the wealth of these great families shrunk as British monopolised over trade opportunities but an educated middleclass comprising doctors and lawyers emerged in the society. They too constructed their own thakurdalans, though not as lavish structures as the rich. Gangaprasad Sen, a renowned Ayurved practitioner of 19th century constructed his residence and a thakurdalan at Kumartuli and begun Durga Puja with much fan fare. Puppetry shows, jatra and theatres were also part of the Puja. Rani Rasmoni's Puja at Jaanbazar was similarly held with much fanfare but devoid of any European flavour.

But Durga Puja which already had become Baroari (organised by accepting subscriptions) in the hands of 12 youths at Guptipara who were barred entry in a household Puja became the centre of nationalist fervour with the turn of the century. The Puja organised by Simla Byayam Samity saw martial arts exhibits to whip up national sentiments among the

youths of Bengal. The era of moderates in the Congress was over and extremist nationalism was the order of the day. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose inaugurated the Durga Puja in 1939. For the first time Maa Durga left the preserve of the privilege to forge a sense of pluralism at Sarbojonin Pujas. The caste and ritualistic factor of bonedi barir pujo gave way to a collective spirit.

But the two world wars, partition of the country and the multitudes that were left rootless and stamped as "refugees" wreaked havoc with Bengal's economy. Their wealth shrunk, the bonedi families could not afford the lavish expense and stopped the Pujas. The Durgadalans were converted into rooms or demolished to make way for new constructions or simply left as decrepit, empty shells.

Meantime, "Parar Pujo" gained prominence; so the rich patrons' place was taken away by the clubs. The image was initially worshipped at clubhouses and then shifted to open pandals. The ekchala image went out of vogue and each of the gods and goddesses were placed on separate pedestals. Joint families were breaking up in the economic downturn and more and more women came in the public realm in a bid to supplement the family income. Ray's Mahanagar caught this dilemma sublimely on the silver screen. It is interesting to note that as the woman made way into the public realm, Maa Durga too left the private space and sanctity of thakur dalans to firmly entrench herself for public viewing in the pandals on the open streets.

The community's role in collective organisation of the Puja gained importance as both couples started working and spare time became a premium. Durga Puja also became emblematic of integration as the "refugees" marginalised for a long time merged with the mainstream of city life.



The political turbulence of the 60 and 70s put a cap on the opulence. It was only in mid 80s that sponsorship came in a big way and enabled a number of Pujas in the suburbs to gain prominence. Durga Puja was corporatized and brand positioning and commercial advertising took over. It was also the time for promoters to do a brisk business, often demolishing old structures to construct new multi-storeyed buildings. At Meghmalla, one of the earliest residential flats Durga Puja was started way back in 1979. Housing complexes also came into being.

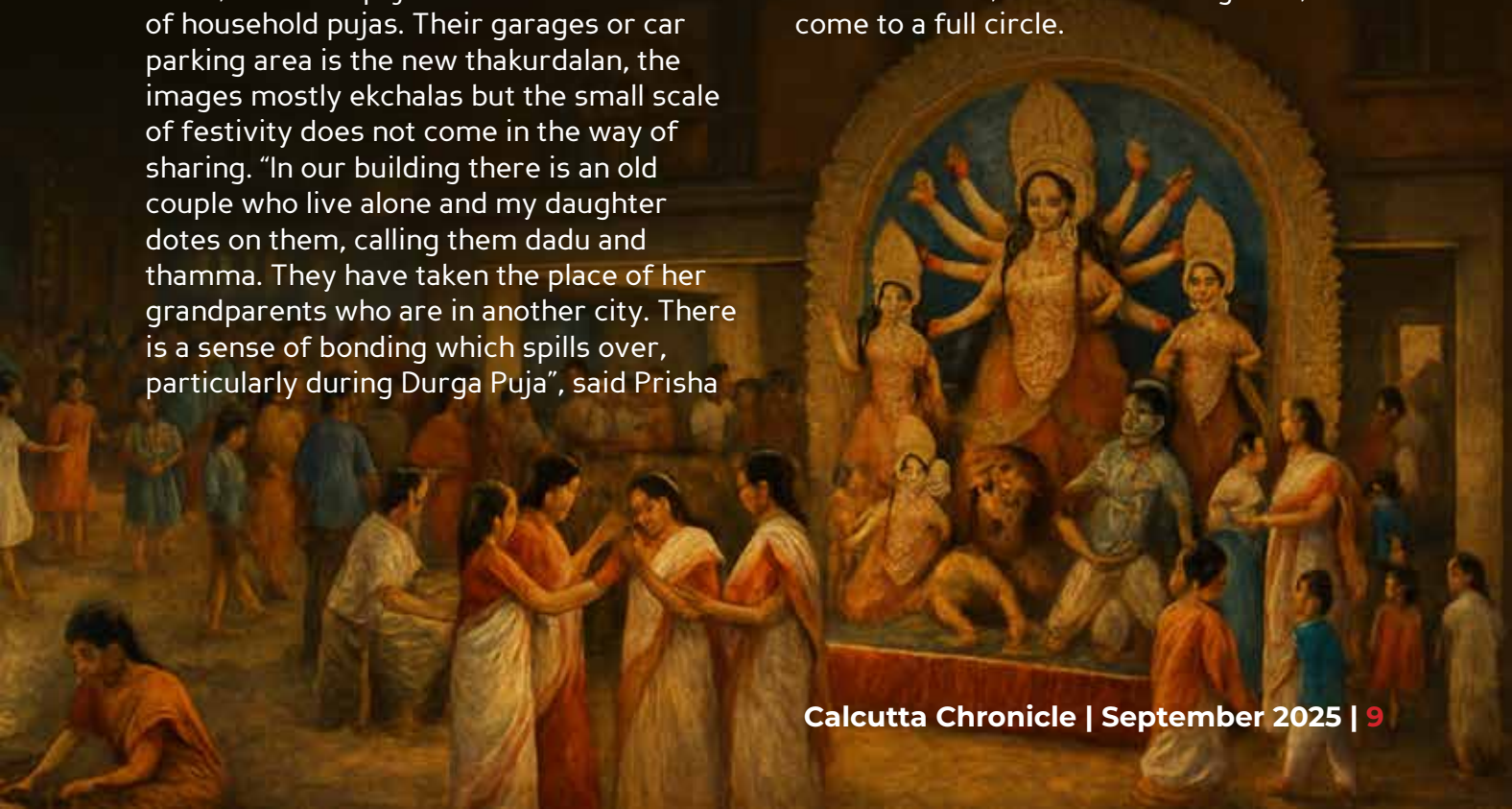
While the big clubs enjoying patronage of the sponsors could concentrate on innovations in pandals, images and illumination a large number of pujas were left out of the corporate net. This was particularly true for Salt Lake where (before FD block reversed the trend with its Titanic theme) Parar Pujo took a whole new meaning. Community lunches were organised on at least two days and the children and women staged cultural programmes in the evening.

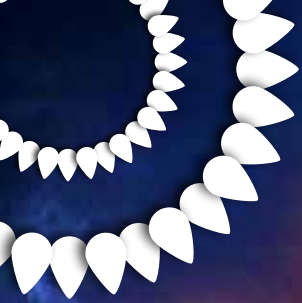
Meanwhile, as old buildings gave way to multi-storeyed buildings, we see a new trend, flat-bari pujo with the same flavour of household pujas. Their garages or car parking area is the new thakurdalan, the images mostly ekchala but the small scale of festivity does not come in the way of sharing. "In our building there is an old couple who live alone and my daughter dotes on them, calling them dadu and thamma. They have taken the place of her grandparents who are in another city. There is a sense of bonding which spills over, particularly during Durga Puja", said Prisha

Sarkar of Golf Garden. The families often go out together for picnics and drives. "We are like a joint family made of a number of nuclear families and the nucleus is of course Durga Puja which binds us together for the whole year," chipped in Probal, her husband.

During Durga Puja, the bonhomie and camaraderie is similar to the household Puja. The women in the buildings make arrangements of the pujas together, cut fruits and cook bhog, offer anjali; lunch and dinners are also organised on these four days. "We do not feel like going anywhere else. A month before we start rehearsing for the cultural programmes. Almost the entire complex lands up at Kumartuli at 11 pm on Chaturthi night to bring the idol. After that it is continuous fun for four days, eating together and staging cultural programmes. On Dashami, there is sindoor khela and then we all go for immersion. Everybody takes part including the Malayali family on the top floor," said Ronita Dutta, who stays at Baishnabghata-Patuli.

Truly, from the aatchala of Sabarna Roy Choudhuris' and the thakurdalan of Hatkhola Dutta bari to the ground floor parking space of the flat-bari, life for Maa Durga too, has come to a full circle.





TRADITION



# *The Timeless Grandeur of* **Traditional Durga Pujas**



Shankha Bhattacharyya

In the glittering world of Calcutta's Durga Puja, where every year ushers in dazzling themes and larger-than-life spectacles, there exist celebrations that remain firmly rooted in heritage. These are the traditional Durga Pujas, some of which have crossed more than half a century, quietly carrying forward an unbroken legacy. They do not compete for awards or headlines; instead, they stand as symbols of faith, community, and cultural memory.

## **A Living Heritage**

Walking into such a puja is like entering a different era. The idol retains its classical ekchala form - Durga and her children in one frame, crafted with clay and adorned

with red-and-white attire that radiates timeless divinity. The artistry lies not in novelty but in preservation, reflecting the Goddess in her eternal form.

This heritage is proudly upheld by pujas such as Entally Sangha (89 years), where nearly nine decades of devotion continue to bind generations, creating a sacred continuity between past and present.

## **Rituals that Bind Generations**

The magic of these pujas lies in their rituals - performed with meticulous care and a sense of reverence. From the sound of the conch at dawn to the

## ■ TRADITION ■

beat of the dhaak at twilight, everything resonates with a sense of déjà vu. At 22 Pally Sarbojanin in Hazra (81 years), the rituals remain the heartbeat of the celebration with the tradition of Palki, dhak reminding the community that the essence of Durga Puja is devotion, not display.

### **Beyond the Spectacle**

Traditional pujas may not build pandals that replicate palaces or monuments, yet their simplicity radiates an intimacy that no grand spectacle can match. The decorations - garlands, alpana, and lamps - highlight the Goddess rather than overshadow her. At Milan Mandir Club in Howrah (60 years), the focus has always been on preserving this spirit of worship, where the puja is for the people and of the people.

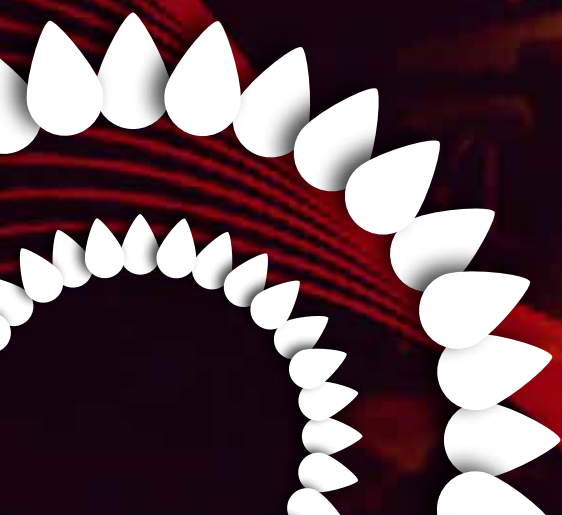
### **Community and Togetherness**

Another hallmark of these traditional pujas is their deep-rooted community spirit. Neighbours join hands, families reunite, and evenings are filled with cultural programs that celebrate joy rather than competition. Meals are

shared, laughter flows freely, and bonds grow stronger with each passing year. These pujas remind us that Durga Puja is as much about para bondhon (community bonding) as it is about rituals.

### **A Celebration of Authenticity**

In today's times, when the race for novelty often overshadows devotion, these heritage pujas stand tall as guardians of authenticity. Their greatest pride is not in awards or visitor's footfall count, but in the continuity of faith. They preserve the Bengal that still beats in the 'dhunuchi naach', the glow of oil lamps, and the joyous rhythm of dhak.



## Entally Sangha

Entally Sangha was founded in the Pre-Independence era. In the year 1937, few eminent stalwarts of the locality started this Durga Puja under the name of Entally Sangha. It also served as a platform to enhance the brotherhood and integrity among the local residents. The first president was Ray Bahadur Dr. Suresh Chandra Sarkar & Ray Saheb Bigyan Chandra Ghosh was one of the vice-presidents. Mr. J.C Mukherjee, the then Chief Executive Officer of Calcutta Municipal Corporation was one of the chief patrons. Many other renowned personalities were involved in the Puja.

They place the idol on a wooden 'jol-chowki' which was made 89 years ago and continues to remain in use since the first year of the puja. Their idol is in ekchala form from the very first year and has remained unchanged. Late Hemanta Kumar Pal of Kumartuli, was their idol maker and after his demise, his daughter

China Pal has taken over the mantle in creation of the idol keeping the tradition of her father alive till this very day.

Shri Biswajit Bhattacharya, the priest who presently performs the puja has been carrying forward his family legacy after his father and grandfather. The dhakis who perform here during the puja have been associated with Entally Sangha from generation to generation.

Entally Sangha have now crossed a long way and will be celebrating their 89th Durga Puja this year. Throughout this long period, they have maintained the essence of purity





## TRADITION

and traditional values. While around them, things have changed rapidly, 'theme pujo' has made its way into most other pujas, but Entally Sangha have remained steadfast in their commitment towards tradition and heritage and is known for their devotion, simplicity and traditional values.

Entally Sangha occupies a special place in the hearts of the local residents and witnesses a footfall of near about 1000 visitors daily during the puja days. The idol is decorated with gold ornaments which were donated by local residents over the years. That is why the Idol is known as "Sonar Goynar Thakur" at the local Police Station. Every year the idol is decorated

with authentic Benarasi sarees from Priyo Gopal Bisoyi and the idol is immerse with the saree. These are the few traditions among many others which are maintained and performed till today.

The organizers of Entally Sangha are proud carrier of traditional Puja while many others neighbouring puja committees have opted for a more odernistic approach. For them 'Durga Puja' is more important than 'Sharod Utsav'. The creators for this year are China Pal (Idol), Sushil Electric (Lighting & Pandal) and A. Sen (Decorators). This year, the pandal is being designed in the style of a 'village house'.

## 22 Pally Sarbojanin Durga Puja Committee

The puja is organised by Hazra Sporting Club and located at Priyanath Mallik Road, near New Horizon School, Hazra, Bhowanipore steps into 81st year since its inception in 1945. The Second World War had just ended, and the entire nation was shaken by the news of Netaji's plane crash. In this historical backdrop, the 22 Pally Sarbojanin Durga Puja began its journey. The pioneers of the very first puja were Nripen Bose, Shankar Bose and Kali Ghosh. Later, the responsibility was taken up by Rabi Bose.

The Puja had a grand Silver Jubilee Year (1969) and the committee became especially known for its strong engagement in theatre under playwright-director Sachin Bhattacharya. The others stalwarts engaged with this puja were Ardhendu Mukhopadhyay, Sushant Bandyopadhyay, Ujjal Bose, Satu Bose Chanchal Guha, Shankar Guha, Natraj Saha and many others.

Notable productions of the puja committee were 'Kalo Manush' and 'Baikunther Khatag' was staged successfully by the performers like Chanchal Bhattacharya, Ardhendu Mukhopadhyay, and Ujjal Bose in the Maharashtra Nibas.

The Honourable Chief Justice of the High

Court, Umesh Bandyopadhyay, was closely associated with the puja. Alongside him were Advocate General Naranarayan Guptoo, artist and president award winner Satyen Ray and the famous badminton player Manoj Guha were actively involved with the Puja.

In later years, Bibhas Guha, Director of Fire Department took over the responsibility of managing the puja, and from then on, its growth and prosperity increased. Supporting him in this journey were Rabi Pradhan, Amitabha Guha, Shobhan Barman, Debdan Haldar, Debnath Halder, Soumen Hudait, Sanjay Hudait, Rina Halder, Anit Halder, Sourav Pradhan, Rina Bhattacharya and many others.

As always, even in this 81st year, the path remains guided by tradition (sabekiana). The creators for this year's 'Sabekianay Mayer Sajjghar' are famous idol artist Nabakumar Pal (Idol), Shibani Electrics (Light), JD Decorators (Pandal) and overall creation by Debashish Majhi. With the cooperation of the neighbours, the festive days will once again be filled with joy, music, bhog and celebration in a traditional way.



## Milan Mandir, Shibpur Howrah

Milan Mandir, Howrah is celebrating the Diamond Jubilee this year. It began with hope-filled hearts and dream-filled eyes back in 1966. The path was not easy - obstacles and financial worries loomed at every step. The biggest question was always: "If there is debt, who will take the responsibility?"

In that moment of uncertainty, one revered soul, Anshu Bose, came forward. He assured, "Organize the Puja, and if there is debt, I will bear it. But let there be no shortcomings in effort." He even pledged to sponsor the idol for two years. With that promise, the first Milan Mandir Sarbojanin Durga Puja was born, led by Anshu Bose as president and Haradhan Ray as joint secretary.

From then on, devotion and dedication became the cornerstones. The rituals were carefully nurtured — Bholanath Ghosh (Chotuda) and later Kalikrishna Biswas meticulously arranged puja essentials until 2000. From 2001 onwards, Debasish Chattopadhyay (Debuda) carried the legacy forward with equal sincerity.

Equally memorable were the contributions of women devotees like Radharani Banerjee, who till her last breath engaged herself in arrangements and cooking offerings for the Goddess, along with Mahamaya Chatterjee, Sushila Chatterjee, Ila Ganguly, and Gita Mukherjee. Their service is remembered with deep gratitude. Since 1998, professional cooks have prepared the bhog, but the warmth of earlier times remains unmatched.

Over the decades, many stalwarts who laid the foundation are no longer with them. Their memory inspires the present generation to carry the tradition forward. With the cooperation of local residents, what began as a small dream grew into a grand festival of unity.

In 1990, Silver Jubilee year Durga Puja was celebrated. During the Silver Jubilee, their



## ■ TRADITION ■

idol artist was Shri Dharmadas Pal from Srirampur. On the auspicious evening of Shubho Panchami, the revered Maharaj of Belur Math unveiled the idol. On the same day, on behalf of the puja committee, clothes and garments were distributed among the underprivileged.

By 2015, the Puja proudly completed 50 glorious years — it's Golden Jubilee. The celebration stood as a testimony to the joint effort of seniors and youth, rooted in community spirit and shared devotion.

The roll of editors who held the mantle over these six decades stands as a living chronicle of dedication - names like Haradhan Ray, Saroj Chatterjee, Bholanath Ghosh, Arun Halder, Manik Ghosh, Rabindranath Banerjee, Piyush Majumdar, Ajit Das, Nimai Palit, Prabhat Das, Nikhilesh Banerjee, Asit Ray, Manimohan Dey, Debasish Chattopadhyay, Kishore Ghosh, Bhaskar Chatterjee, Dipak Ghosh, Riten Das, Amit Ray, Chanchal Ghosh, Siddhartha Singh, Jayanta Ray, Bipul Khatuya, and Kajal Ghosh.

Now, as the Puja steps into its 60th year (Diamond



Jubilee), the journey shines brighter than ever. What started with doubt and hesitation has become an unbroken tradition of faith, togetherness, and cultural pride.

From the inception in 1966 to Diamond Jubilee this year, the Puja has remained a symbol of tradition, unity, and cultural heritage.

The Puja's 60-years journey is not just about worshipping the Goddess, but about celebrating resilience, gratitude, and togetherness — ensuring that this flame of devotion remains eternal and ever-glorious.

This year the creators of Diamond Jubilee are Idol Artist Padmashri awardee sculptor Shri Sanatan Rudra Pal, Pandal Decoration by U. N. Kumar and Illumination by Das Electric

### Why They Matter

Traditional pujas like Entally Sangha (89 years), 22 Pally Sarbojanin (81 years), and Milan Mandir (60 years) are not just annual rituals - they are cultural anchors. They remind us that the true grandeur of Durga Puja lies not in themes or spectacle, but in devotion, heritage, and togetherness. Their legacy is their strength, and their simplicity is their enduring beauty.

Amidst the kaleidoscope of innovations, these pujas whisper a timeless truth: the most powerful celebrations are those that hold fast to their roots.



# Durga Puja

## in 'Babu' Calcutta

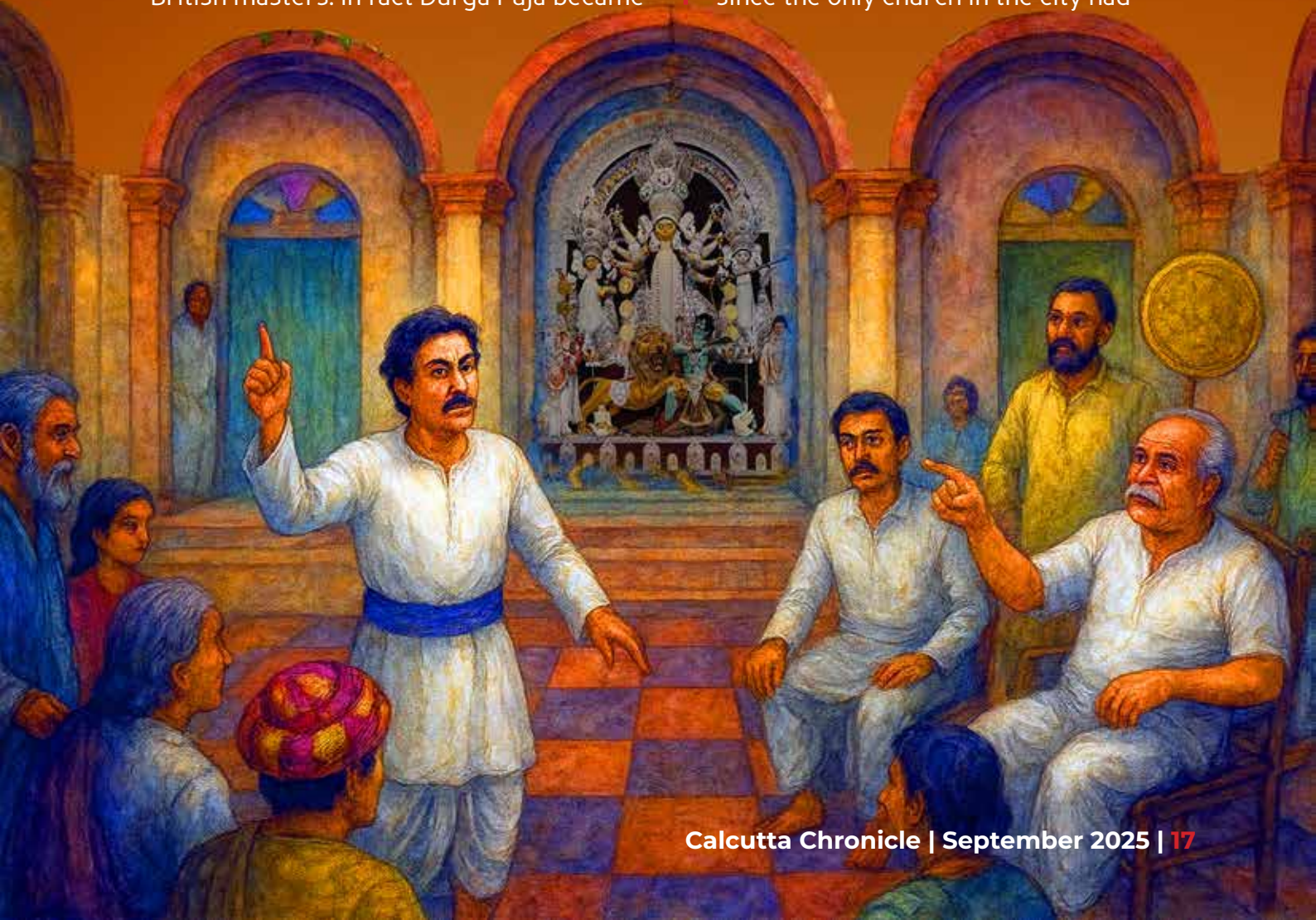



Joydip Sur

Durga Puja owes its popularity in and around Calcutta to the coming of the British and the advent of Babu Culture in the city. Though it all begun by Laxmikanta Mazumder of Barisha in 1610, however, the opulence associated with the festival was initiated by Maharaj Krishnachandra of Nadia who also simplified the religious practices observed in the course of the Puja. It is said that during the reign of Nawabs the rich were wary of showing off their wealth, apprehensive it would be taken away by their Muslim rulers but there was nothing to fear from their new British masters. In fact Durga Puja became

a practice among the new urban mercantile aristocracy in Calcutta, pioneered by Nabakissen Munshi, the patriarch of the Debs of Sovabazar Rajbari, a way of enhancing business interest as well as to mark their rise up the social order.

Calcutta got initiated in the concept of 'business entertainment' when the wily Nabakissen Munshi organised Durga Puja in 1758 at his newly constructed thakurdalan to allow Lord Robert Clive thanksgiving for the victory of Plassey since the only church in the city had





## PAST PERFECT

been razed to the ground by the Nawab's forces. The rituals went for a toss as Lord Clive came and sat in a golden sofa in the open area in front of the thakurdalan, where Maa Durga stood decked in finery and later watched Bai Naachh, performed by Muslim Nautch girls. The Bai Naachh went on to become an essential part of Durga Puja celebrations in almost every zemindar's house in Bengal till the militant nationalism brought in the idea of display of martial arts with lathis. While watching their performances the European guests dined on beef and ham brought from Wilson Hotel, washing down with wine. A happy East India company allowed their Munshi the rare privilege that his family would be the first one to immerse their idol in the water of River Ganges as the clock struck four in the afternoon. However, the Brahmin families refused to accept this and would immerse their idols in the morning. The commencement of the Deb's Puja was announced by firing of canons.

Govindram Mitter, the black deputy also observed Durga Puja with much fan fare spending considerably and so did his son Raghuram Mitter. The

entire image was wrapped in gold and silver leaves and nearly Rs 50,000 were spent on the fortnight long celebrations including feeding of Brahmins. Rogho Mitter's grandson Abhoycharan's revered disposition towards his kulguru earned him name as did his Puja celebrated with much pomp. Dewan Krishtochandra of Shyambazar also earned fame for charity during his Puja. It is said that after the immersion he would return home on foot and on the way if anyone would show him a "purnakalas" (a pot full of water) he would give them a rupee. Nearly 7,000-8,000 people would assemble on that stretch which would be less than a mile long. His descendents also kept up the practice but as their financial situation worsened the amount came down to half a rupee.

The Mullicks of Pathurighata and Chorbagan organised cultural programmes during Durga Puja. In 'Babu Britanta', Loknath Ghosh describes how the celebrations went on for a fortnight which was attended by the laatsahibs and judges of Supreme Court. Neelmoni Mullick, the forefather of Rajendra



Mullick of Marble Palace fame was at the helm of the Puja which was later carried on by brother, Baishnabdas Mullick. The idol was Abhayamurti or Shiv-Durga. On the day of Panchami there used to be a 'mehfil' where all the celebrated musicians participated and also received suitable 'inaams.' Neelmoni was known for promoting 'full akhrai' musical performances - classical music with proper orchestration which was too, a part of the Puja and famous Ramnidhi Gupta (Nidhubabu) had mentioned about Neelmoni in his autobiography.

The Durga Puja at the residence of Gopimohan Tagore was also known to be attended by the top British officials. Lord Wellesley (Duke of Wellington) had also attended it once. An accident had occurred during his visit when a 'pankha' had fallen off and crashed near where the Duke was seated; however, he escaped unhurt. Gopimohan's grandson, Jatindramohon Tagore was bestowed the title of Rai Bahadur by Lord Mayo, the then Viceroy

and Governor General. The 12 days-long public holiday which Bengalis had been traditionally enjoying during Durga Pujas was only due to his efforts; the Bengal Chamber of Commerce had recommended to Lord Lytton that it should be reduced to a mere four days. However, Jatindramohon impressed upon Lytton to continue this practice since it was not only the Bengalis but other communities too which enjoyed this break, utilised by most for either visiting their relatives and kin or resolving property related issues.

In the 'Sketches by Hutom' by Kaliprasanna Sinha of Jorasanko we get a good description of Durga Puja in 'Babu Culture'. The decorations of images were cheap imitation of the West. The idols were huge; there were embellishments all around comprising horse riding Scot Highlanders, fairies, birds and flowers and lotuses made of pith and in the middle stood the image of Maa Durga. The lion was gilded with silver. The face of the idol was modelled on the Armenians or Jewish

## PAST PERFECT

Bibis. On the top of the backdrop there were small gown-clad fairies playing the trumpet, bearing flags and insignias and Queen's unicorn and the royal crest were also on display. The silver foils used for decorations were even imported through post.

The image of the goddess at Shivkrishna Dawn's residence was known for its decorations. A well-known saying went this way: "Maa Durga after her arrival to this the earthly world dresses up and wear ornaments at the house of Shivkrishna Dawn, eat the lavish spread at Abhoycharan Mitter of Kumortuli and keep awake throughout the night watching Bai Naachh at Sovabazar Rajbari.

Kaliprasanna gave a vivid description on the prevailing culture observing at the very outset that earlier only the kings and the aristocrats held Durga Pujas but now even Punte Teli (in the sense of every Tom, Dick

and Harry) was bringing an image of the goddess at home. Khelat Chandra Ghosh of Pathuriaghata and Shivkrishna Dawn in particular were at the receiving end of Hutom's satire. Khelat Chandra had constructed a new mansion and obviously his Puja that year assumed additional lavishness. Kaliprasanna described the Babu sitting on a thick mattress, clad in a dhoti of tussar and distributing cash, clothes and ornaments among the Brahmins and Pandits. His house is full of those seeking his generosity on the eve of Pujas.

He describes initially the shopping



spree among the residents on the eve of Puja; the mahajans with Dhakai and Santipuri sarees visited houses, agents of Yatra groups looked for bookings, servants sold gilded ornaments, bangles and false pearls. With the advent of Sasthi the streets of Calcutta were exceptionally crowded, the residences of rich men are full of servants and kins wearing new starched clothes and shoes; there was a great din coupled with drum beats, roshan chauki and shehenai. There is great procession on the occasion of bathing the 'kalabou' in the water of Hooghly with Babu leading the way, a huge silver umbrella held over his head by servants.

Hutom also provided a delightful insight into the Pujas conducted by the members of Young Bengal; instead of feeding the Brahmins they treat their friends with a fare of meat and alcohol. While among conservative Hindus, the small change given as pronami to the goddess is taken away by the Brahmins conducting the rituals in case of Young Bengalis it finds its way into the account of the householder. At the thakurdalans they are liberal enough to allow wearing of shoes and the image

is decorated with the embellishment brought from foreign shores. Maa Durga wore a bonnet instead of her traditional crown, the spread in front of her includes sandwich and the kalabou is bathed in water warmed in a kettle instead of water from Ganges (Gangajal). The water is then used to prepare the tea and coffee for breakfast of the householder.

On Saptami, there were goat sacrifices later offered to the goddess. It was marked by a huge racket because it was believed that with the head should be severed at one stroke. By evening a large number of people began visiting the houses where the Pujas were being held. Hutom criticised the lack of hospitality of the Babus who seldom came out to meet those invited. Hence most people send their sons and other kinsmen and since Hutom did not have any, he planned to send the money by post and even through registered post to some of his relatives to ensure 'safe arrival'.

In some of the well-known households, the Babu would sit in the middle at the chandimandap wearing a dhoti of Benarasi

## ■ PAST PERFECT ■

Silk and showing off his gold and silvers by displaying the hookahs studded with costly gems like diamonds, emeralds and pearls. After 9 pm, the Bai Naachh would begin and the Babu would come out dressed in zaris and gold ornaments and ended up looking like an 'Egyptian Mummy'. At some places Yatras were being held or pantomimes, the more crude ones watching khamta. In the resultant din the goddess in the thakurdalan trembled in fear, her lion left the demon and instead looked for an escape route. On Nabami sacrifices were at an even more grand scale, some had promised twin buffaloes or ninety goats; the Vaishnavs opted for pumpkin, sugarcane, betelnut, and even fish. The Babu under the influence of alcohol and friends smeared themselves with clay and the oozing blood of the sacrificial goat and sang songs replete with abusive words. Since this was part of

the rituals some of these kheurs were also copied down.

Finally, the images were taken out in large processions and public were given an opportunity to compare the idols, their embellishments and pomp and gaiety of the various families. Some of the Babus would sail in various kinds of fancy boats with their friends and sycophants watch the immersion. Finally, the Neelkantha birds were set free to carry the good news to Shiva of the imminent return of the goddess to their abode at Kailash and the Babus too, would return home and embrace each other on the occasion of Bijoya. The festival would end with having siddhi on Bijoya and the city which had seen witnessed fortnight-long-hullabalos suddenly seemed empty and silent. Not much has changed over the centuries, isn't it so?

*Not much has changed over  
the centuries, isn't it so?*



# Change, a captive on the wings of time



Team Chronicle



Yaa Devi Sarvabhooteshu  
Srishti Roopena Sansthita  
Namas Tasyayi Namas Tasyayi  
Namas Tasyayi Namoh  
Namaha...

As these chants fill up the thakurdalan of Shovabazaar Rajbari, and the priest uses the pancha-pradeep with rhythmic dexterity to offer prayers to the goddess, one is pleasantly led back in time to remember the historical moments when this Durga Puja had been witnessed by stalwarts like Lord Clive, Warren Hastings, Lord and Lady Bentinck, Lord and Lady Canning, Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar and the Maharajas of Burdwan and Natore.

Bengalis never understood when, and how, a deity became a part of their family. Many families of Calcutta, who had started

## ■ CHANGING FACE ■

worshipping the Durga either in her Chamunda or in her Dashapraharana Dharini form, have continued to do so even after centuries of its initiation.

Be it the Sabarno Choudhury family, the Deb family of Shovabazaar, the Haatkholā Dutta Bari, the Laha Bari or even the Mallik family, all the families have been celebrating the Durga Puja with grandeur and sanctity in their own house styles from the 17th and 18th centuries. Nothing seems to have changed for them with respect to norms, other than the restrictions imposed by the government and the inevitable effects caused by the economic meltdown.

Durga Puja in the Sabarno Roy Choudhury household dates back to 1610 when it was started by Ray Lakshmikanta Gangopadhyay Mazumdar Choudhury and his wife Bhagabati Debi in Barisha. Though the puja was performed on a single chalcitra, it did have three divisions within the chal and this form has been maintained till date. Eight pujas are performed in the family in eight separate houses (Aath Chala Bari, Boro Bari, Mejo Bari, Majher Bari, Benaki Bari, Kalikinkar Bari, Birati Bari and Nimta Bari) in the Durga Bhakti Tarangini Tantra way. Known for its devotional fervour, this family boasts of not going overboard in its celebrations.

They always believed in sharing the stage with their subjects and still continue that tradition with pride. Sacrificing animals i.e. 13 goats and 1 buffalo along with offerings like chalkumro and sugarcane formed an integral part of the festive rituals. But for the past few years three houses had stopped sacrificing animals and this year will not see animal sacrifice in any of the eight houses. Masho bhokto bali is

another interesting ritual of the family. A mixture of rice, banana, cloves and ghee is prepared and offered to the goddess in human skulls. Though the entire puja is performed according to the Tridhara form of worshipping the goddess, where on her left stands Lord Shiva and on her right we see Lord Rama, there are certain rituals that distinctly differentiate the eight pujas between the Vaishnava and Shaiva styles. Kumari puja is performed on Navami in accordance to the Vaishnava style in Boro Bari and Barisha Bari. Due to the Vaishnava style again, Durga's lion in horse faced in Boro Bari and Mejo Bari and Nimta Bari offers vegetarian bhog. All other houses offer non-vegetarian bhog as Shaiva style of worshipping believes in animal sacrifice. The fact that the Durga Puja in the Sabarno Roy Choudhury family has been celebrated as it had started since the early 17th century is really commendable.

Where on the one hand the Choudhury family is bereft of any show-off, there on the other hand, the Deb family of Shovabazaar plans an elaborate Durga Puja. Started by Raja Nabakrishna Deb in 1757,



## ■ CHANGING FACE ■

the festive mood has remained intact. They are staunch followers of tradition and even the slightest shift from the age-old norms is not allowed. This is the 7th generation of the Deb family who are celebrating the Durga Puja and so are the idol makers who make the Durga idol inside the Rajbari premises. The ek chala of the goddess is decorated with silver finery called 'Daker saaj.'

An interesting history lies behind the name 'daker saaj.' The silver foils which were imported from Germany came through post meaning 'dak' and thus the decoration came to be known as 'daker saaj'. But today the German silver foils have been replaced by local synthetic material. The idol is adorned in gold. Earlier the Debs fired canons during Sandhi Puja. But today, canons have been replaced by guns that are fired by members of the Deb family. Adding to the "Babu" culture was yet another ritual of Kanakanjali where the eldest married woman, mother of a child would stand with her anchal spread and the priest would throw gold coins dating to the time of Akbar on behalf of Durga. But

even this ritual underwent change due to dispute over age and gold coins becoming scarce.

Even today the Debs have the coins but only as memento as silver replaced gold coins in 1957. The family still observes the cheek or purdah system but in a modern way. Just as today's women are independent and venture out of the house in spite of being the 'aabroo' of the family, so too the goddess who was earlier guarded by a veil called 'jogjoga' has been made visible to all her worshippers with mica strips hanging from her chalchitra only to add to her beauty.

## ■ CHANGING FACE ■

The freeing of 'nilkontho' during the immersion of the goddess has also been restricted owing to the official norms for conservation of wildlife. Now one can only see two nilkontho birds, but that made of clay. Entertainment was a major part of the Debs and enactment of Alibaba exists till date. Dancers were invited from Lucknow to regale the audience with their skills. "Those days will never come back. I remember when one whole night passed by with Marjeena dancing in Alibaba, only because our eldest grandfather wanted a repeat performance, enthralled by the



dancer's skill," reminisces Mr Alok Krishna Deb, the 7th generation of Raja Naba Krishna Deb's family. Today's India does not have a Raja; but who can wipe out those memories of Gauhar Jaan dancing and creating magic with her feet or the Scotch Highlander band playing during the bisarjan ceremony.

Many myths surround the Durga Puja and the reason for its initiation just like that of Laha Bari. It is said that the Laha Bari Durga Puja, started some 180 years ago. Some say it was Ishwar Pran Krishna Laha performed Durga Puja for the first time but another view point states that it was Sri Rajiblochan Loha, Pran Krishna's father, who started it nearly 200 years ago. Spiritually inclined Rajiblochan Loha, was said to have been visited in his dreams by his family goddess who asked him to perform Durga Puja. The puja has been performed with fervour and devotion till date.

The Mullick Bari Durga puja started from the time of Nawab Hussein Shah of Bengal nearly around 15th century AD. Suratha at Srikhanda pioneered the puja. In the 19th century, the puja was shifted to the Masjid Bari Street of Calcutta by Ishwar Chandra Mullick. Later the Mullicks shifted to Gupti Para and finally settled in Bhowanipur. Since 1925 Durga puja is held at the Bhowanipur residence.



## ■ CHANGING FACE ■

The idol is worshipped in ekchala form. There are two different locations in Mullick bari where the puja rituals are performed. They are 'Annapurna dalan' and the other 'Durga dalan.' Mullicks are basically Vaishnavas and practice no rituals of animal or vegetable sacrifice.

Over the years it has been one long tradition for the patuas of Bhowanipur to make the Durga idol for the Mullicks. The family takes vegetarian food from Sasthi to Nabami and it's only after the immersion of the idol on Dashami they prepare non-veg food. After immersion, according to custom of the house, the eldest family member serve 'siddhi' to the rest of the family and bless them with 'astadurba' or eight varieties of grasses.

With time everything changes and a lot has changed in these houses too. The old

veneer is gone and so are some of the age old customs, either limited by government regulations or due to financial constraints. But the Durga pujas of the bonedi bari still ooze an aura of an age gone by as the families try to maintain the sanctity of their offerings during the four days of festivity.

No matter which family or which style of puja, the part that draws attention is the sincerity with which the tradition has lived till date. There have been hurdles, there have been changes; but the tradition has made its way through all this and lived with head held high. Where all around us rules are being broken, relations are being strained and old beliefs are crumbling, there these families are trying might and mane to preserve what their ancestors left behind for them - a culture that they all cherish and want to keep alive braving all gusts of change.



# Kotnis Mass Theatre stages *PRATYAKHYAN*



Shankha Bhattacharyya

The play Pratyakhyan (Refusal), based on Rabindranath Tagore's Karna-Kunti Sangbad, revolves around the ideological conflict between mother and son, which gives rise to a profound dilemma. Here, the strength of truth and righteousness succumbs to the weakness of affection. The mother comes forward to embrace her affection-deprived son, but Karna keeps himself forever deprived for the sake of others. Kunti tried to persuade Karna with her claim of motherhood, yet Karna

remained unwavering in his principles and ideals. Neither fame in battle nor the desire for Kshatriya victory inspired him. Even values such as truth and loyalty in friendship failed to sway him. Karna appears solitary, desire less, and nihilistic - an embodiment of the radiant force of Kshatriya dharma.

On the evening of August 6, 2025, Kotnis Mass Theatre successfully staged Pratyakhyan at Tapan Theatre, with adaptation and direction by Bedanta Bandyopadhyay.



## ■ STAGE CRAFT ■

To be rejected is easy, but to reject is difficult. In the Mahabharata, Kunti's son, the great donor Karna, proved his moral strength to be unshakable. In present times, one finds countless examples where even the slightest temptation diverts people from their principles, ideals, and values. Yet Karna, in response to his mother Kunti's appeal, refused to abandon the Kauravas. He proved that no matter how wrong or unrighteous his side might be, he would not change it.

Through Pratyakhyan, Kotnis Mass Theatre has sought to convey that while changing camps may be easy, remaining steadfast in one's principles and ideals is the truest form of integrity.

Pratyakhyan stood out as a production of taut teamwork. In the role of Karna, Bedanta Bandyopadhyay delivered an outstanding performance. His direction and acting beautifully brought to life the image of Karna - solitary, affection-denied, yet unyielding in his adherence to truth, righteousness, and ideals. He merged

seamlessly into the character. In the role of Kunti, Bonhishikha Bandyopadhyay gave a performance equally compelling, creating a remarkable duo on stage. The character of Duryodhana, newly added by the director, was dignifiedly portrayed by Soujato Bandyopadhyay. In makeup and styling, Gaur Kole introduced refreshing innovations.

Under the skilled adaptation and direction of Bedanta Bandyopadhyay, Pratyakhyan, based on Rabindranath Tagore's Karna-Kunti Sangbad, will remain marked as one of Kotnis Mass Theatre's most enviable productions.



# Kumartuli

Kumartuli is the oldest neighbourhood of artisans in Calcutta which has survived the onslaught of time and change. Demographically, it has seen the least change as it is still largely a Hindu neighbourhood, dominated by Kumbhakars, easily identified by their surname, Pal.

According to HEA Cotton, the new fort was built at the centre of the “populous flourishing village” of Govindpore. A portion of the “restitution money” was spent in compensating the inhabitants to settle in other parts of the town notably, Toltollah, Coomartolly and Sobhabazar. Holwell, the company’s agent, allotted separate districts to the company’s

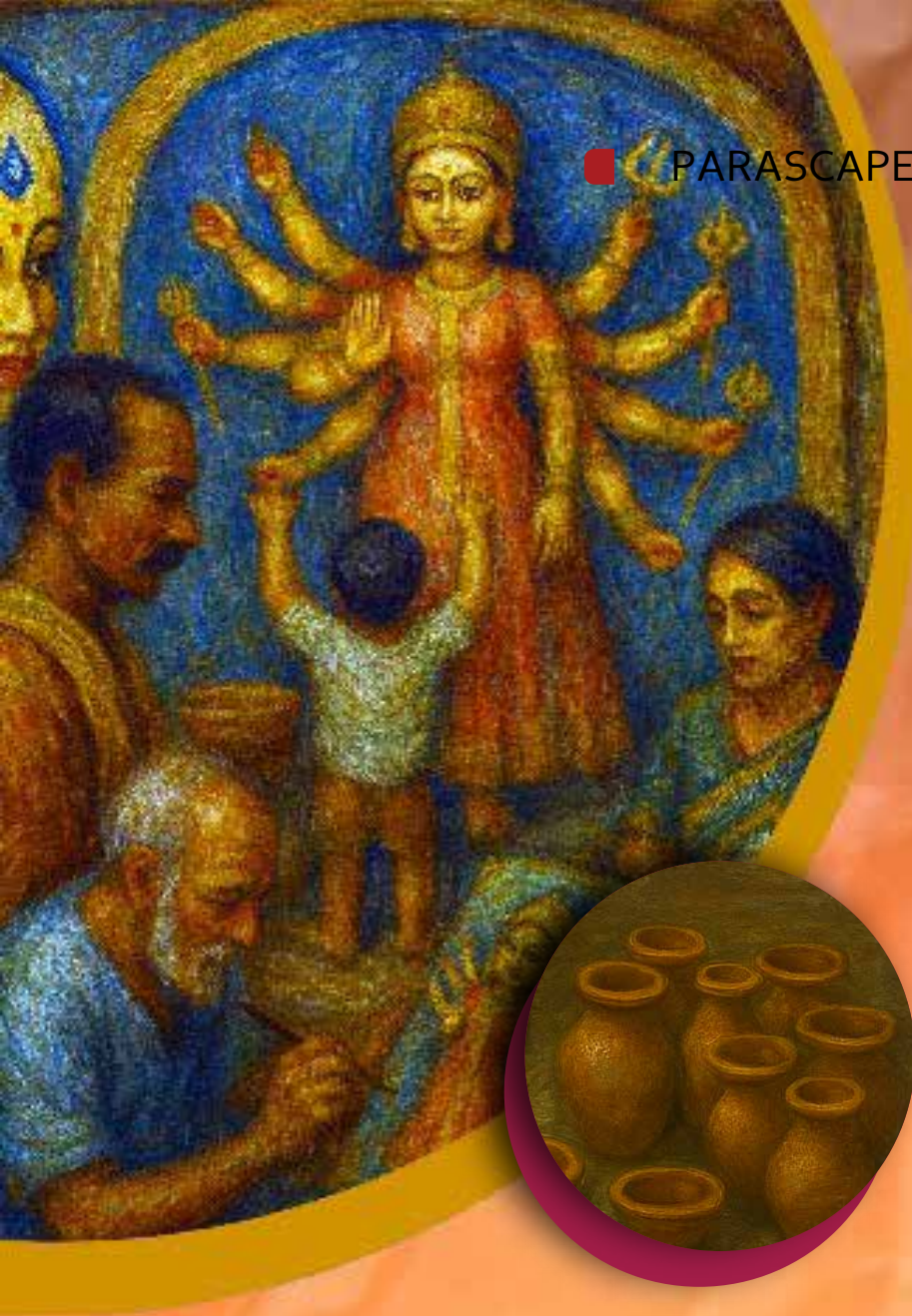


Anindita Mazumder

workmen including Suriparah (place of wine-sellers), Maidaputty (flour market), Colootollah (oil-sellers), Chuttarparah (for carpenters), Chunam Gully (lime lane), Molunga (place of salt works), Aheeritollah (cowherd’s quarters) and Coomartolly (potter’s quarters).

It may be noted that tola referred to para or locality while tuli meant a minor one. Kumartuli, located at the western part of Bagbazar, was actually a tiny part of it. Old maps show Kumartuli as a triangular-





## PARASCAPE

their patrons. The elite who had congregated at Bagbazar and Sovabazar – required the skills of the kumors who made clay images according to the scriptures; but round the year they also made pots, utensils, tiles and dolls.

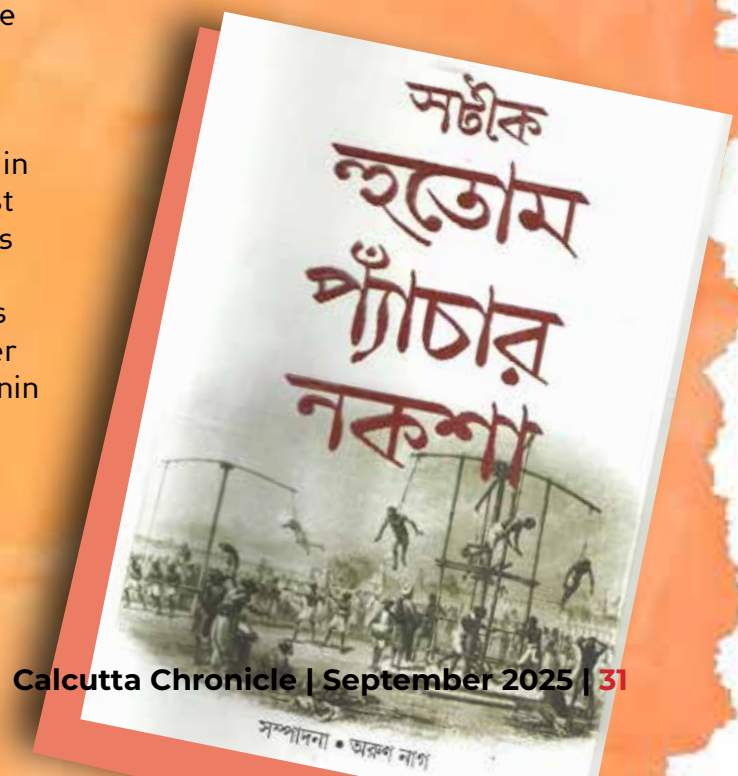
Subsequently, the artisans wanted settle down and were granted a piece of land either by Govindram Mitra or by Gokul Mitra, whose house and Madanmohan temple stand at the entrance of Kumartuli, on Upper Chitpore Road.

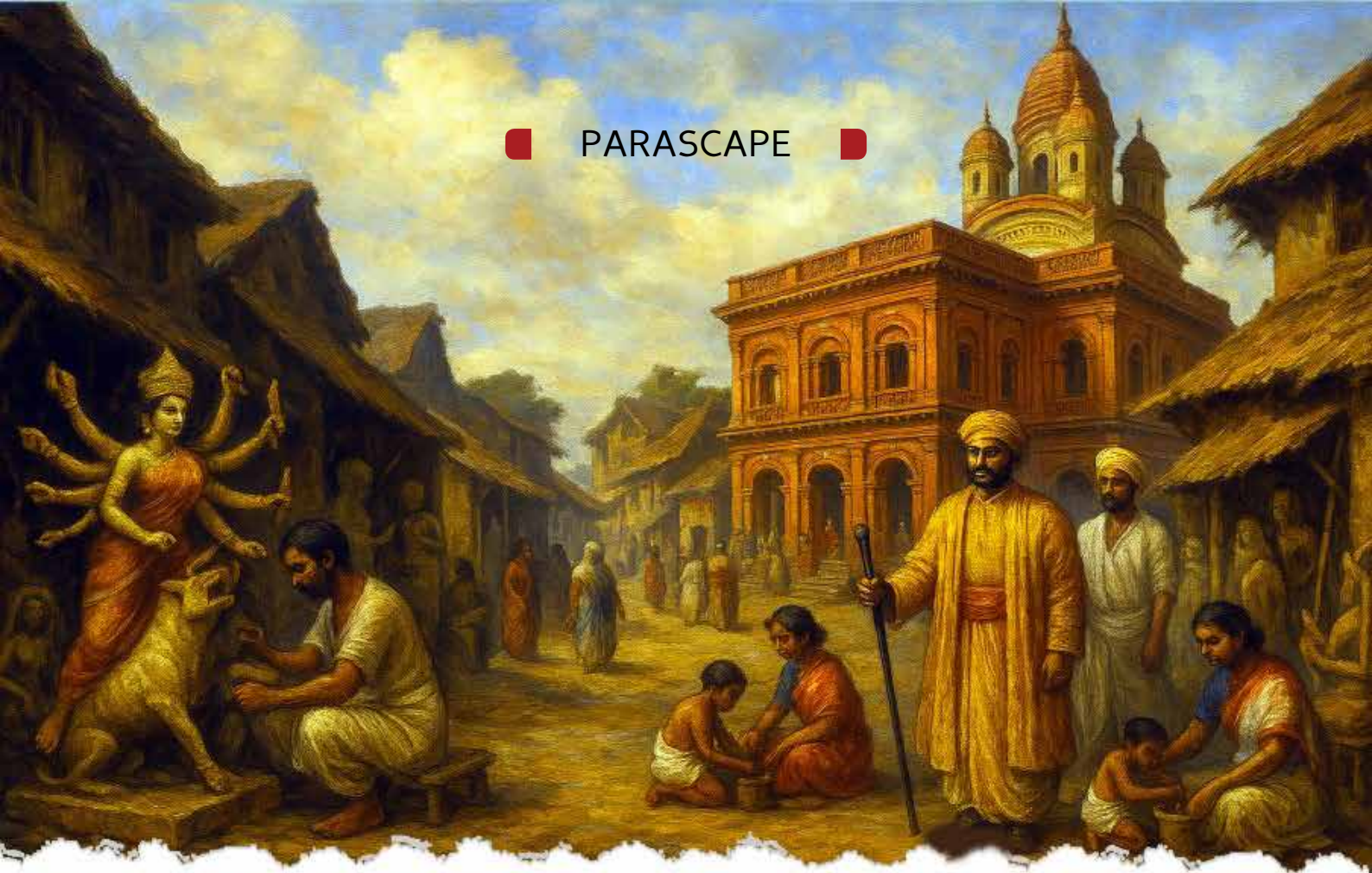
Kaliprasanna Singha in Hutom Pyanchar Naksha gave a detailed description of the clay modellers of Krishnangar who would come and settle at Kumortuli and neighbouring Siddheswaritola on the eve of Durga Puja. The entire area would witness a hub of activities; jute fibres being dyed and dried to fashion out the hair, imitation jewellery and sparkling brocade and tinselled cloth pieces and arms made of tin and brass- required to decorate the image - being sold in the open.

shaped neighbourhood nestled between Chitpore Road, Sovabazar Street and the Ganges. There was locational advantage too since different varieties of clay came from the river bank while bamboo and straw was supplied by the boats plying up and down the river.

Kumartuli was one of the 31 thanas of Calcutta in 1785. Demographically, till 1911 it had the highest concentration of Hindus. Significantly, whereas Shakhariolla or Darjipara lost their identity, Kumartuli certainly retained its distinctiveness driven by economics of the market, due to ever growing number of Pujas, particularly sarbojonin ones.

The first kumors or potters certainly hailed from Krishnanagar and Ghurni, Nadia. Initially, they made the idols at the thakurdalans of





Kumartuli had its share of the rich and the famous residents including Banamali Sarkar, Govindram Mitra and Kaviraj Gangaprasad Sen who had treated Rani Rasmoni and Ramkrishna Paramhansa. Both Banamali Sarkar and Govindram Mitra were immortalised by the proverb:

**'Banamali Sarkarer bari**

**Govindaram Mitrar chhari '**

Banamali Sarkar, the first dewan to the Resident of Patna built his magnificent mansion at Kumartuli between 1740 and 1750. A long winding street in Kumartuli still bears his name. Govindaram Mitra was infamous for his "chhari" or stick, symbolising the immense power he wielded as the "black" or Indian deputy to the British zamindar of Calcutta. Amassing huge wealth he went on to build a "nabaratra" temple on Chitpore Road which was destroyed due to natural calamity in 1737. His residence was

built on 50 bighas of land at Kumartuli. Ramnidhi Gupta, more popularly known as Nidhubabu was also a resident of Kumartuli. Despite such magnificent mansions, Kumartuli by and large resembles a network of alley and slum quarters, where place of work and residence are often the same.

Each workshop has a hierarchical workforce, headed by a puro karigar, karighar, adha karigar and jogale (helper). Women of the family are involved in modelling. Since sarbojonin puja committees preferred their idols armed and decorated at Kumartuli it has become a beehive of ancillary crafts.

Kumartuli's own puja was started in 1933; its most famous son, Gopeshwar Pal revolutionised idol making by rejecting the ekchala form and adopted the posture where Mahisashurmardini is depicted in action while killing the evil asura.

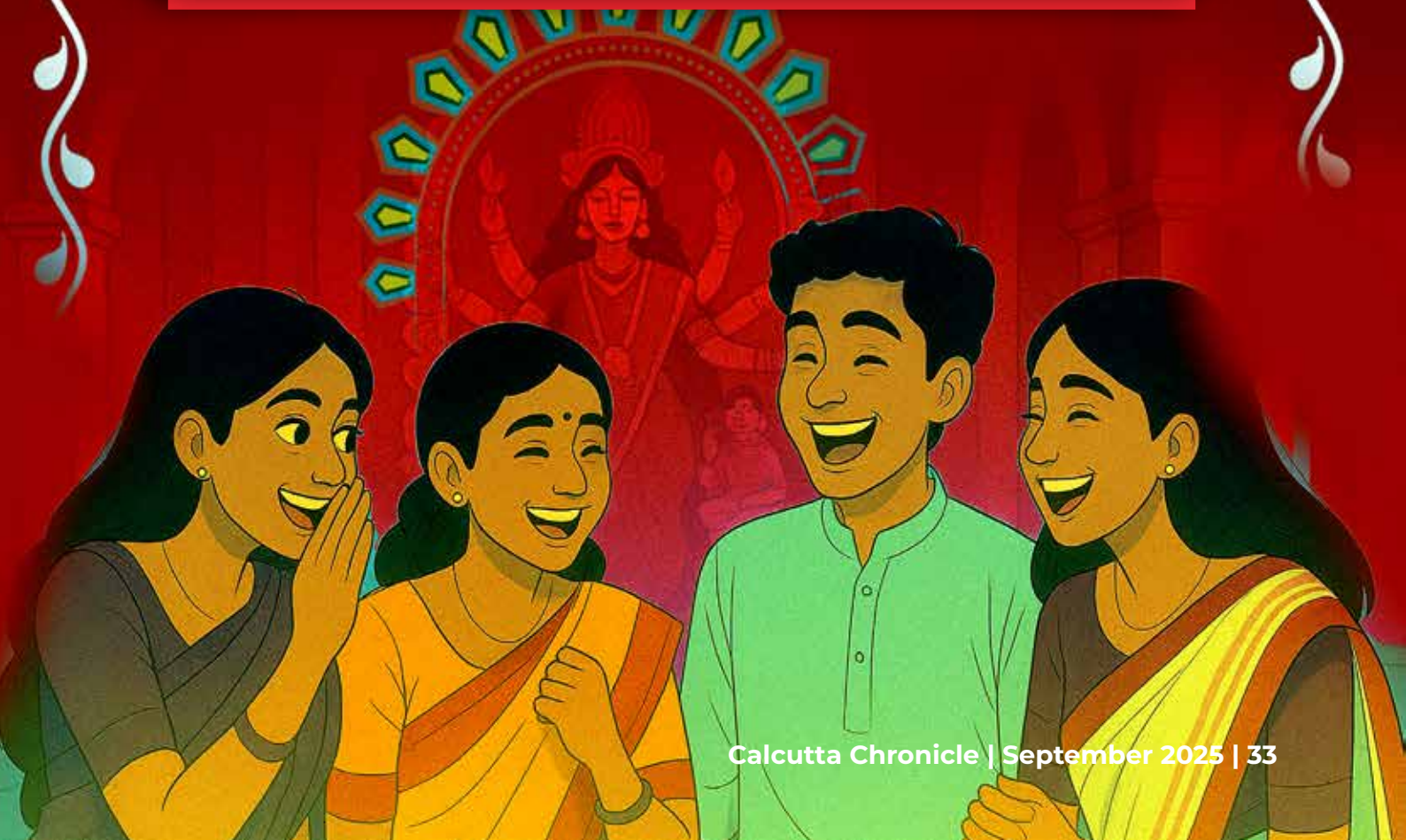
■ HERITAGE ■

# A ROCKING ADDA



Tarun Goswami

*Noted British philosopher Bertrand Russell had once described social gossip as comprising “two or three people, usually like minded, discussing anything under the sun and completely ignorant of time, cause and effect.” What Russell had meant by “social gossip” is very close to the favourite past time of the Bengalees, namely adda. In fact this inimitable trait among Bengalees to participate in addas has often been the target of criticism. Many believe that this trait has made Bengalees, a lazy community. Calcutta’s adda has been made memorable in many Bengali films such as Ray’s Agantuk or songs like “coffee house er sei adda ta aaj ar nei”. Social gathering and festivals like Durga Puja in Calcutta are incomplete without adda.*





The Durga Puja held by the Sarkar family in Beliaghata has achieved fame; because of the celebrations as well as the adda spreading over all the five days. Bidhubhusan Sarkar was a landed aristocrat and a close friend of Bidhan Chandra Roy. He owned bheris that covered hundreds of acres in south 24 parganas. His descendent, Pradip Sarkar, a professor in Political Science was a councilor of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation between 1985 and 1990. Clad in spotless dhoti and punjabi he was the perfect Bengali bhadroluk and had invited me to his house during the Durga Puja. It was really a pleasure to participate in the adda sessions.

Generally, all the family members even those who stayed abroad or elsewhere in India made it a point to be present during the festival. Both men and women formed small groups comprising their contemporaries and took part in the sessions that began after lunch. Antakshari and reminiscing the past were

two favourite topics at these sessions. Those who won in Antakshari had to treat others. Short stories, essays and novels published in the Bengali annual numbers during the Autumn Festival were discussed and debated upon. Though the family was deeply involved in Congress politics anything related to political issues and backbiting was a strict no-no. The sessions were really refreshing. During the session cold drinks and sherbets were served at regular intervals to keep the adda going.

The adda sessions of Ghosh Family on Vivekananda Road were also quite interesting. This particular adda hovered around music. Alok Ghosh, their elder brother who died a few years ago was a singer whose domain was pre-Rabindranath Bramho songs composed by Satyendranath, Jyotirindranath and Hemendranath - the three elder brothers of Rabindranath. The younger brother is a celebrated Rabindrasangeet exponent who sings Tagore songs in Sanskrit. Girish Chandra Ghosh, the founder of the family

## HERITAGE

was a trader during the time of the East India Company. Their Durga Puja is more than 200 year old.

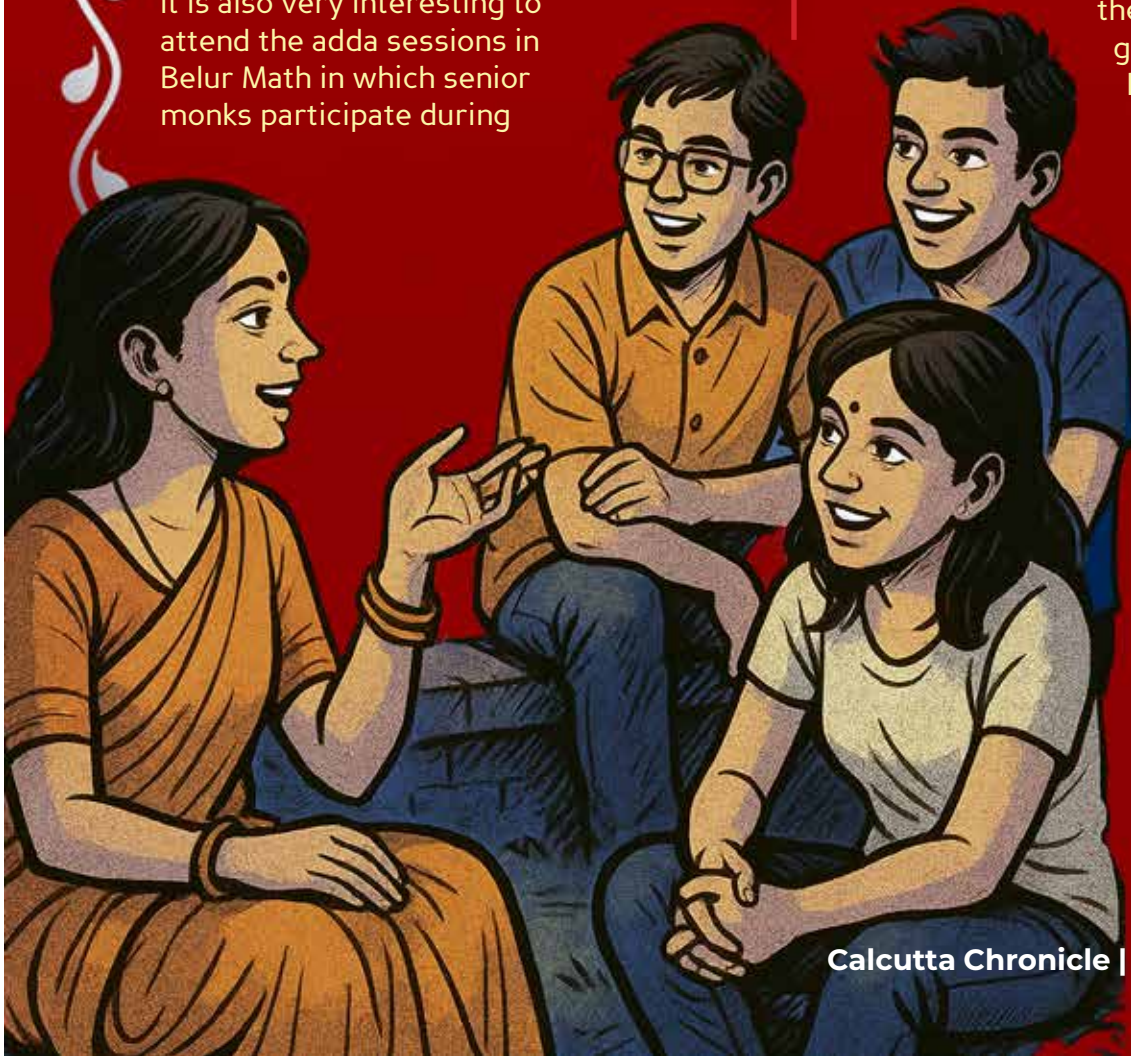
The adda session in the house of the Roychowdhury's in Bakulbagan is again unique. Here too, the groups are chosen according to the age. Their forefather, Sarat Roy Chowdhury was close to CR Das and his son Dr PK Roychowdhry was the mayor. Nakshtra Roy Chowdhury was a well known teacher and his son Somak is a famous astro physicist. Nakshatra's cousin Pradip Roychowdhury was a famous art collector and many well known people including Satyajit Ray used to come to meet him. The adda sessions revolved around varied topics including politics, games, music and culture. A small booklet containing poems, short stories written by the family members was published on the occasion. The sessions continued late in the evening before the cultural shows began. A drama was staged by family members.

It is also very interesting to attend the adda sessions in Belur Math in which senior monks participate during

the Pujas. As the Ramakrishna Mission (RKM) centres are closed during the pujas monks from all over the country come to the Math to attend the festival. Many monks with serious demeanor who rarely smiles are seen cracking jokes and gossiping in lighter spirit. Swami Nityaswarupananda, founder of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark was a disciple of Maa Sarada. He used to go to the room of Swami Abhayananda popularly known as Bharat Maharaj and they talked for hours on contemporary politics and even short stories or novels by some contemporary litterateur. From topics of mundane life they began discussing Advaita philosophy. Also they spoke on the early history of RKM or the city at their time.

Any write-up on the city's adda will be incomplete without a reference to the adda sessions that take place in Maddox Square in south Calcutta during the five days of pujas. The adda sessions go on till the wee hours. People of different ages form small

groups and chat throughout the night. Young boys and girls from distant areas like Salt Lake and beyond come to Maddox Square just to participate in these thrilling addas. The sessions that used to be held in every locality - "rok er adda" in Bengali parlance - is a matter of the past because of the busy schedule of the people, particularly the youth. Hopefully addas sessions during the Durga Puja will continue for many ages to come for what is Puja in Calcutta sans adda?



'Prince Charming' Pays Tribute To Mahanayak

# Uttam Kumar

On His Pre-Centenary Birth Anniversary



Shankha Bhattacharyya

With deep emotion and sincerity, members of the legendary Uttam Kumar's family joined the pre-centenary celebration of the Mahanayak. The event was organised by the Uttam Kumar Memorial Committee at Uttam Udyan in Bhawanipur on September 3, 2025. The occasion also coincided with the celebration of the Mahanayak's birthday across the city, making this tribute all the more special.

The family members of the Mahanayak staged a Shrutinatak (audio play) titled 'Prince Charming', directed by Sharmistha

Banerjee with script by Ranu Bhattacharya. Through dance, music, acting, and narration, the Chattopadhyay family unveiled lesser-known facets of Uttam Kumar.

"The discussion turned to which facet of Uttam Kumar resonates more with audiences — the timeless romantic hero, or the versatile actor who dared to portray complex negative roles."

The discussion highlighted that Uttam Kumar in comedy films was particularly charming. Accordingly, in the



## STAGE CRAFT

shrutinatak written by Ranu Bhattacharya, scenes from comedy classics like Mouchak, Bhrantibilash, and Chhadmabeshi were included.

**The performances were enriched by a wide range of contributions:**

- Arindam Mukhopadhyay played Tarun Kumar, while Rayan Dutta portrayed Gautam Chatterjee.
- Uttam Kumar's iconic roles were voiced by Shibapada Banerjee, Ashish Ghosh, and Joydeep Banerjee.
- Multiple beloved characters such as Jahar, Bhanu, Chinmay, and Rabi were brought alive by Pradosh Mitra.
- The female characters were dramatized with great charm by Koyel Banerjee, Tinku Banerjee, Moumita Chatterjee, Nabamita Chatterjee, Piya-li Aich, and Moonmoon Chatterjee.

Dance performances added vibrancy to the event, with Pratyusha, Debosmita Ghosh, Moumita Chatterjee, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Sancharini Mukherjee, and Remo taking part.

Uttam Kumar's grand-daughters, Nabamita and Moumita, shone in their performances through acting, dance, and song. His great-grandson, Anurag Dutta, recited a self-composed poem dedicated to the Mahanayak, while choreography and dance presentation were led by Uttam Kumar's granddaughter-in-law, renowned Bengali actress Debolina Kumar.



## *When Memories Fade Into Confusion, The Truth Behind*

# *DEMENTIA*

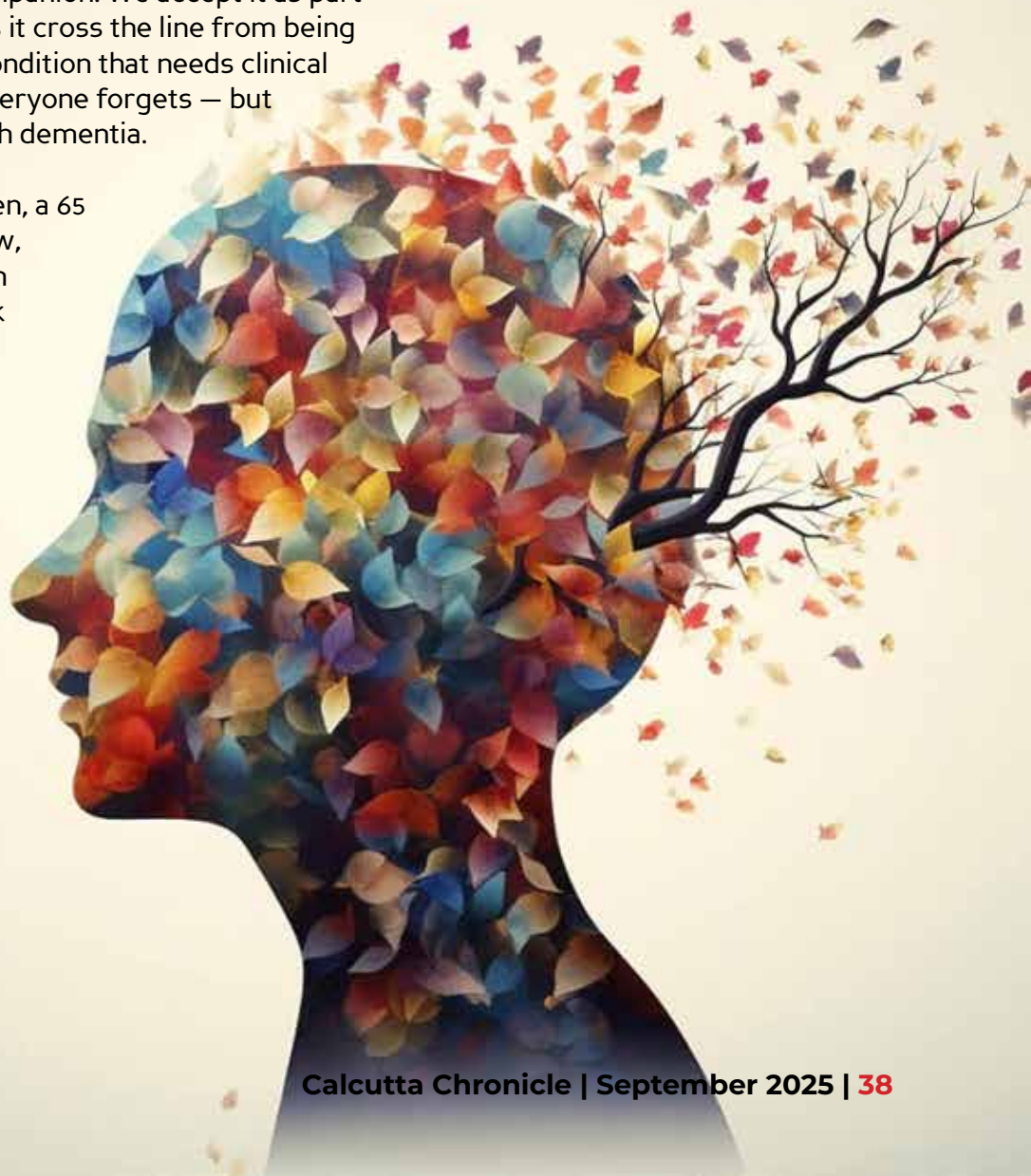
What does it mean when the past feels more real than the present, when familiar faces become strangers, or when everyday life turns into a puzzle? For millions across the world, this is the lived reality of dementia. As we grow older, forgetfulness often feels like a natural companion. We accept it as part of our age. When does it cross the line from being ordinary lapses to a condition that needs clinical attention? After all, everyone forgets — but not everyone lives with dementia.



**Snehasree Neogy**

Consultant Clinical Psychologist

Every evening, Mrs. Sen, a 65 year-old Bengali widow, insists she must “catch the 7 o’clock tram back to her father’s house in Shyambazar.” When her daughter gently reminds her that the tram no longer runs there, she grows irritable, pacing the room and muttering. At night she often becomes restless, wandering from room to room, convinced someone is calling her name. Sometimes she accuses the maid of stealing her sarees, hiding them herself and later forgetting. Yet, on rare mornings, she hums a Rabindra



Sangeet, her eyes softening as if she is briefly at peace. Such is the scene in many homes that remain spoken only in hushed tones.

Dementia is a progressive condition that affects memory, thinking, behavior, and emotions. Understanding it is the first step toward compassion and care. When we talk about dementia, many people imagine it as just “losing memory.” However, it is actually an umbrella term — a collection of conditions that slowly affect the brain, leading to changes in mood, language, and daily functioning.

The most common type is Alzheimer’s disease, often starting with memory lapses and gradually affecting reasoning and independence. Then there’s vascular dementia, which can follow strokes or reduced blood flow to the brain, often showing up as slowed thinking or planning difficulties. Lewy body dementia may bring vivid hallucinations, sleep disturbances, and movement problems. Frontotemporal dementia, on the other hand, tends to affect behavior, personality, and language earlier than memory. Each type looks a little different, but they all remind us of one thing: dementia is not just “old age.”

If you or a loved one starts noticing early signs, the first step is not to panic. Forgetfulness can happen for many reasons, but it’s important to rule out dementia early. The best thing you can do is reach out for help. A clinical psychologist can assess your memory and thinking skills through detailed tests. If dementia is suspected, a psychiatrist or neurologist specialised in

memory disorders can guide treatment, medications, and ongoing care. Together, they form a team to help you and your family understand what is happening and how to manage it.

As we mark World Alzheimer’s Day on September 21, let us remember that this global movement is not just about awareness— it’s about breaking the silence and stigma around Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. The 2025 theme, “Ask about Dementia, Ask about Alzheimer’s”, reminds us that every question sparks understanding and every conversation opens doors. By talking openly, every act of awareness brings us closer to early diagnosis and better care.



# Durga Puja

## A Living Narrative



Sandip Banerjee

As autumn sets in, the whole environ in Bengal puts on a garb of festivity. Gentle breeze whispers in the ears of the flowers and white clouds flit across the azure of heaven. Amidst this image of nature, arrives Goddess Durga who is not just a deity to us, but someone, related close to our heart, whose arrival we patiently await and whose return moves us to grief. The land of Bengal (in undivided India) has a long and variegated history associated with the celebration of Durga Puja. After Independence and partition of India, West Bengal continues that aura of tradition

Historically speaking, the festival arising out of the victory of the British in the Battle of Plassey (1757) consequently became the national festival of the

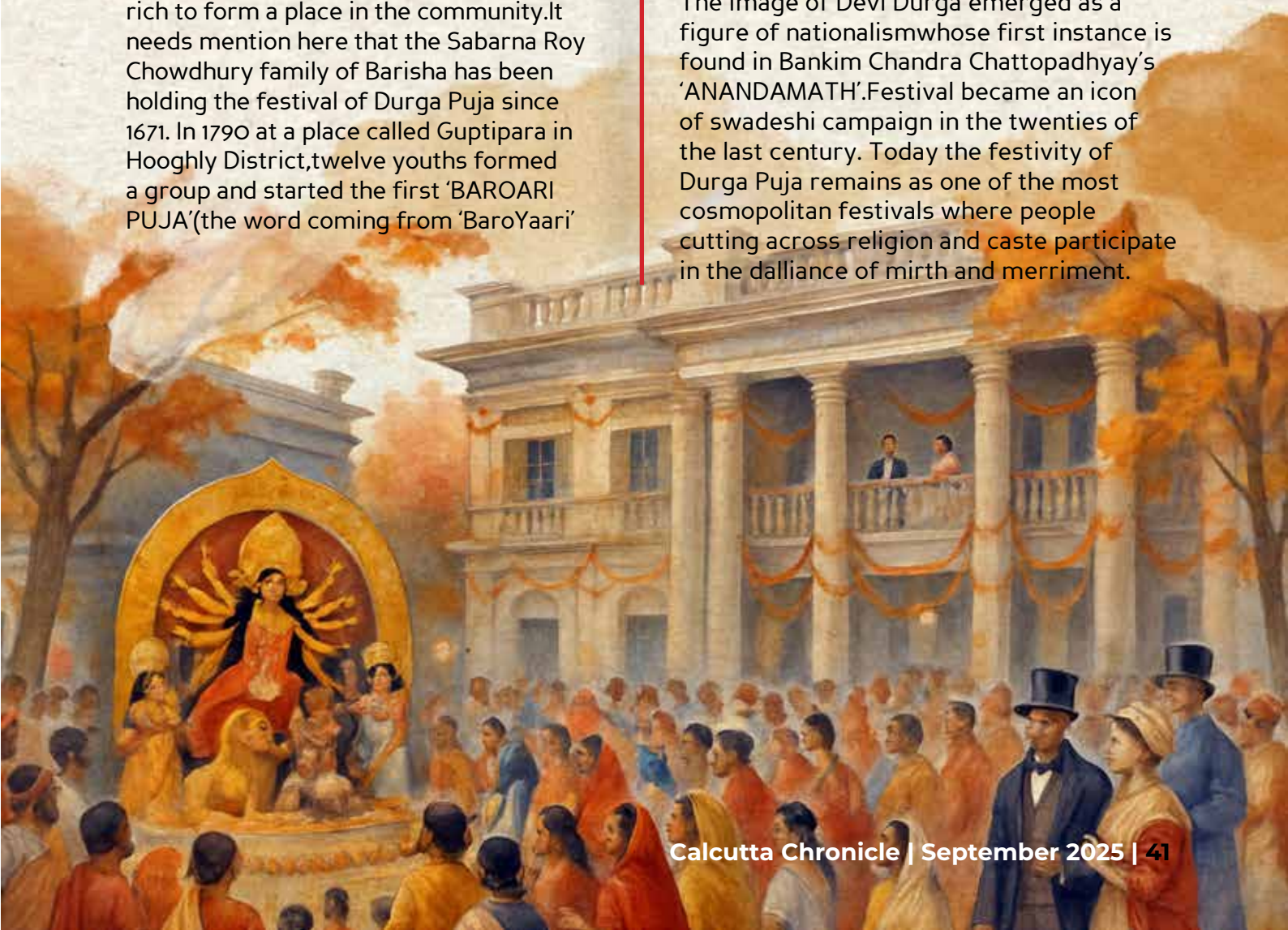
Bengali race. The two, who had supreme satisfaction at the victory of the British in the battle of Plassey, namely Raja Krishna Chandra Roy and Raja Nabakrishna Deb started Durga Puja in Krishnanagar and in Calcutta in the year 1757. It needs mention here that initially Devi Durga was worshipped in the form of Mahishasur Mardini but the image of the Deity was cast in the shape of a family image in Krishnanagar, for the first time. Henceforth that image became popular and we figure the image of Durga as a mother who has come to her paternal home along with her children. Both Raja Krishnachandra and Raja Nabakrishnadeb came under the shrewdness of Robert Clive and felt that the victory of English East Company was actually a victory of Hinduism and so it should be observed

## ■ SPECIAL FEATURE ■

with luxury and riches. Hence the original time-frame of Durga Puja got changed from spring to autumn. Initially Durga Puja was held during spring and the observation of Nabapatrika was done in autumn. But eventually Durga puja merged with Nabapatrika and started to be celebrated in Autumn. Primarily Durga Puja was a domestic affair and the Wealthy class of Calcutta was involved in it. The occasion was also the scope for entertaining the Company Sahibs with wine and women. It is heard that Robert Clive, along with his band, attended Raja Nabakrishna Deb's place and paid homage to the deity in the form of Rs.100 at that time. According to Sukanta Chowdhury, in his noted work "CALCUTTA THE LIVING CITY" (VOL-1), the East India Company offered a thanksgiving puja in 1765, as a polite act to appease its Hindu subjects on obtaining the Diwani of Bengal. Gradually, Durga Puja crossed the threshold of the rich to form a place in the community. It needs mention here that the Sabarna Roy Chowdhury family of Barisha has been holding the festival of Durga Puja since 1671. In 1790 at a place called Guptipara in Hooghly District, twelve youths formed a group and started the first 'BAROARI PUJA' (the word coming from 'BaroYaari'

or twelve friends) in Bengal. In Calcutta we note the first 'BAROARI PUJA' in the form of Bhowanipore Sanatan Sabha in 1909, where Sri Aurobindo published his famous 'Durgastotra'. Swami Vivekananda opened the gates of Durga Puja before all at Belur Math in 1901. Eventually, the concept of 'SARBOJANIN PUJA' where the general community started participating, had its origin in the shape of BAGBAZAR SARBOJANIN, started in 1919. This was followed by Simla Byayam Samity in 1926, though strictly speaking Simla Byayam Samity was the first declared 'SARBOJANIN DURGOTSAB' of Calcutta. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was associated with this Puja.

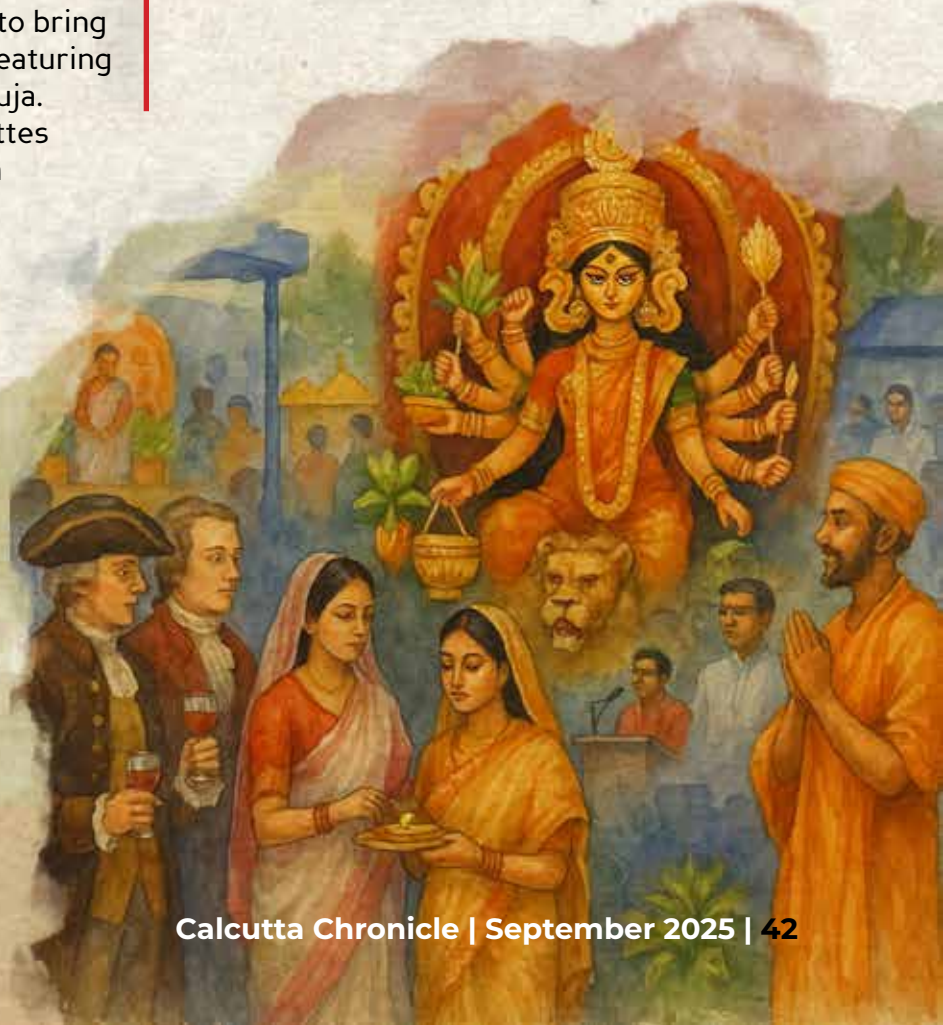
The Durga Puja in Calcutta has also undergone experiments in decoration of the deity. Beaten Silver was used to embellish the deity. This had to be brought from Germany by post. Hence this became popular by the name of 'DAKER SAAJ'. The image of Devi Durga emerged as a figure of nationalism whose first instance is found in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's 'ANANDAMATH'. Festival became an icon of swadeshi campaign in the twenties of the last century. Today the festivity of Durga Puja remains as one of the most cosmopolitan festivals where people cutting across religion and caste participate in the dalliance of mirth and merriment.



Amidst the season of festivity ,as we all gear up for our Durga Puja , the festival of our hearts, we welcome Mother Durga ,not with the invocation to a deity but with the warm reception for a daughter coming to her paternal home after a year. In this reception ,music is an indispensable component .The celebration of Durga Puja is incomplete without songs and musical performances. The radio programme , “Mahishasurmardini” ,so dear to all of us and which heralds the advent of Durga Puja is a glorious example of musically orchestrated rendition of Sanskrit hymns. The songs and the back-drop music along with the chanting of the hymns have immortalized this performance. Truly speaking the image of Durga with her sons and daughters is a happy family frame and when she comes ,what better way ,other than music, can we think of, to rejoice. The loving, lilting melodies reverberate the plethora of joy in our hearts. Hence Bengali songs and Durga Puja have a long cherished historical association.

There was a time when H.M.V used to bring out a manual called ‘Sarad Arghya’ featuring the songs recorded for the Durga Puja. People use to purchase audio cassettes or gramophone discs. This has been a long journey of nostalgia for many of us, as generations have witnessed the transformation from Gramophone to Radiogram and then to cassette player and DVD player; from 78 RPM ,45 RPM or long playing discs to audio cassettes and then to modern day CDs and DVDs. One thing has been common and that is ‘Pujor Gaan’. Some of the most popular Bengali songs that are still played today have been released during this festival season. Right from famous Hemanta Mukherjee-Salil Chowdhury combination ‘Path harabo bolei ebar pathe nemechi’ and then ‘Amay

prosno kore nil dhruba tara’ to the Lata Mangeshkar number ‘Sath bhai champa’ –all contributed to puja release. All the leading vocalists who sang Bengali songs like Hemanta Mukherjee. Manna Dey , Sandhya Mukherjee, Lata Mangeshkar, Kishore Kumar ,Shyamal Mitra, Asha Bonsle, Arati Mukherjee Dhananjay Bhattacharya, Tarun Bandyopadhyay, Pratima Bandyopadhyay, Manabendra Mukhopadhyay and many others enamoured the ears of the listeners through ‘pujor gaan’. Who can forget the Manna Dey number ‘Lolita go oke aj chole jete bollna’ or the Kishore Kumar one, ‘Akadin pakhi ure jabe je akashe’. Even today as we hop from one pandal to the other we find these songs being played over and over as if they are identified with our celebration itself. There was a time when outlets like ‘Melody’ and ‘Symphony’ would be crowded with foot-fall of buyers trying to latch on to the latest album. Along with the musical release for puja there used to be live musical performance or ‘Jalsa’ where all the renowned artists





enthralled the minds of the audience. These performances ranged from Durga Puja to Kali Puja. They have been so popular that such performances used to be held even in abroad or in other parts of India.

Along with musical release, films whose songs were no less melodious used to release during festival time. Some big names in this category include the likes of 'Nayak', 'Anthony Firingee', 'Deya Neya', 'Saptapadi', 'Indrani'. People used to throng the movie theatres as an essential part of celebrating Durga Puja. The musical carnival of Durga Puja continues. May be technological development has offered more diversified ways of entertainment but even today Bengalis across the globe turn on their keen ears towards songs while celebrating Durga Puja. It is like both reminiscing and reliving time. Durga Puja in itself is a melting pot of communities; their joy and celebration and this passion is amplified by the age-old association of music with it.

There are so many stories heard about Durga Puja in the days of Baboo Culture in Calcutta. It was a time when pomp and splendor rose to zenith and the festival became a signature of that galore. A popular saying of the by-gone days states that Mother Durga would change her attire in the house of Shib Chandra Dawn; She would have her meal at the residence of Abhay Charan Mitra and lastly She would experience the spectacle of Dance at Shovabazaar Rajbari. Now there was certainly a reason for it. Myth as it goes family members of Shib Chandra Dawn used to change their clothing in frequent intervals in a day. Abhay Charan Mitra used to have at least hundred items cooked in his place and a special kind of Jalebi was prepared which had the size of a Chariot Wheel. At Shovabazaar Rajbari, nautch girls meant for dancing were hired from as far as Burma to entertain the Sahibs and Baboos. Legend as it says that the famous Zamindar, Pradyunna Mallick wanted the commoners to see the deity. It was not so easy during those

## ■ SPECIAL FEATURE ■

days for till then the mob was not allowed inside the compounds of the aristocrats. Pradyunna Mallick had a different idea. He ordered his Rolls Royce car in a design to accommodate the image of the deity specially ordered from London and made of Crystal. This Rolls Royce car carrying the Crystal image of Durga travelled across the length and breadth of the city so that everyone could view the Deity.

The arrival of Goddess Durga resonates our hearts with glee. It is the fulfillment of a year long wait. At the end of four days we are moved to grief that lingers in our hearts for some time as festive hangover. We are all emotively bound with the festival. Durga Puja is truly a cosmopolitan affair. In 2021, Durga Puja in Kolkata has been inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This recognition vindicates that Durga Puja has transcended the confines of community, religion or race. To UNESCO this Festival has become a Cultural and Secular event. To quote UNESCO Statement – 'Durga Puja is seen as the best instance of public performance of religion and art, and as a thriving ground for collaborative artists and designers'. Nothing can be more true as during the

event, the divides of class, religion and ethnicities collapse as crowds of spectators walk around to admire the installations. What UNESCO has officially endorsed is what we witness every year. The crowd that sways in a jocund mood does not need to have any communal identity, neither they are interested in it. Group of friends having representations from different communities gladly enjoy a bite over a half-hot egg roll. Durga Puja, through ages have defined a sense of euphoria. Its gradual expansion from domestic to public arena has been a testament to its pluralism and inclusiveness. That is why most of the embellishments that decorate the Goddess are prepared by Muslim artisans. The puja sites including theme –puja portray multicultural disposition. It sometimes Princess Diana, sometimes Saddam Hussain and sometimes Mahismati Palace or Burz khalifa. This is one of the best examples of Psycho-social harmony. It is the assimilative nature of the Festival that makes all passions converge; it unfurls the love of life, the warmth of being together. It is a kind of cultural fusion whose essence emanates a fragrance of oneness. Durga Puja is not just about worship; it is going beyond religion to draw inspiration from everything else.





# iraas boutique

by  
Sagarika Das


Collection of  
Sarees & Handmade Jewellery

Contact:  
Sagarika - +91 9830370371

Email: [iraasboutique@gmail.com](mailto:iraasboutique@gmail.com)

# Kathashruti's

presents 'Megh Badaler Rupkatha' at  
Jibanananda Sabhaghar

 Chanchal Bhattacharya

Kathashruti began its journey on September 21, 2015. Through continuous practice and dedication, the organisation has grown steadily, performing on various government and private stages in Calcutta, while also being invited to present collective performances across different districts of West Bengal.

The group primarily focuses on audio drama, occasionally engaging in recitation and poetry as well. Over the past eight years, Kathashruti has become a familiar and cherished name among its audience and friends.

On the auspicious day of Ganesh Chaturthi, August 26, 2025, Kathashruti presented its special program 'Megh Badaler Rupkatha' (The Fairy Tale of Clouds and Rain) at Jibanananda Sabhaghar. The evening turned out to be a memorable celebration -

almost like a dream fulfilled - arriving just a month ahead of Kathashruti's anniversary.

Though there was no rain outside, and despite the challenges of traffic, the rush of a weekday, and other



## STAGE CRAFT

uncertainties, the program was marked by warmth, sincerity, and dedication. The gathering became a delightful expression of love, care, and creativity.

The event offered a vibrant blend of music, solo recitations, and voice plays. While the audience turnout was moderate, the presence of respected artists and close friends made the evening truly special. The gracious presence of few eminent recitation artists and playwrights Chandan Majumdar, Anirban Mukhopadhyay, and Mainak Sengupta enriched the occasion.

**The invited guest artists added brilliance to the stage with their powerful performances:**

- Shri Satyapriya Sarkar's outstanding solo recitation
- Anupam Bhattacharya and Monika Chakraborty beautiful solo songs
- Souvik Sen's distinctive solo reading
- Ena Sengupta's captivating performance
- Kajal Gupta's graceful solo
- 'Sharad Kathanjali', a duet by Soma Aich and Pradip Kumar Bhattacharya



## ■ STAGE CRAFT ■

- “O Behula”, a poetry collage created and directed by Aparajita, performed by Aparajita, Priyanka, Sudipta, and Shreyashi

- “Khunsuti”, a voice play by Sukalpa, written by Leena Ghosal and directed by Shankha Bhattacharyya, performed by Arindam Mukhopadhyay and Pamelí Sengupta

**Kathashruti’s own productions were also staged and received warm appreciation from the audience:**

- Bibaha Barshiki – written by Dhananjay Ghoshal, voice acted by Mrinal Bandopadhyay and Chhanda Banerjee

- A Time to Die – written by Salil Chattopadhyay, adapted by Biplab Bandopadhyay, voice acted by Sandip Bhattacharya and Sutapa Sengupta

- Kala Lipstick – written by Banani Mukhopadhyay, voice acted by

Kalyani, Prakriti, and Sudipta Choudhury.

The evening was gracefully anchored by Kalyani Biswas, whose presence ensured a seamless flow of the program. The ambience was further enhanced by Sunny, whose tireless efforts added vibrancy and energy to the event.

As the program drew to a close, Kathashruti expressed heartfelt gratitude and love to all participants, guest artists, and well-wishers. The evening ended with a promise—to continue weaving new fairy tales of togetherness and art in the days to come. With determination, discipline, emotion, and love, Kathashruti looks ahead with hope, moving step by step along the creative path of elocution art.



# Skål International Kolkata & Skål International Jammu & Kashmir Twinning Ceremony



Joydip Sur

In a landmark development for Skål International India, history was created with the first-ever club twinning ceremony within the country. Skål International Kolkata, one of the oldest and most established clubs in India, formally twinned with the newly launched Skål International Jammu & Kashmir, which came into existence on May 31, 2025.

The ceremony took place against the breathtaking backdrop of Kashmir, more popular as the “Paradise on Earth.” A delegation from Skål International Kolkata, led by President Amin Asghar, visited Srinagar, Pahalgam, and Gulmarg in August, combining the twinning ceremony with an immersive experience of Jammu & Kashmir’s vibrant tourism landscape.

The signing of the MoU by President Amin Asghar and President Abdul Wahid Malik marked not only the twinning of two clubs but also the twinning of two regions — Kolkata and Kashmir — opening doors to fresh opportunities for collaboration. The initiative, aptly dubbed “K2K” (Kolkata to Kashmir), was designed to foster B2B business opportunities between travel agents, hoteliers, and tourism stakeholders from both regions, promoting West Bengal and Jammu & Kashmir side by side.

The visit included a lively B2B meet in Srinagar, where the Kolkata delegation interacted with hoteliers, houseboat owners, and destination management companies. Discussions were marked by warmth, energy, and optimism, with



## ■ TRAVEL ■

participants reaffirming their commitment to deliver world-class service and hospitality to visitors. The engagement highlighted the shared mission of both clubs: to build stronger networks, boost domestic tourism, and present a united voice for Indian tourism.

Reflecting on the moment, Amin Asghar, President of Skål International Kolkata, said: "This twinning is a bridge between two great destinations — Kolkata and Kashmir. Together, we will create new opportunities, promote tourism, and strengthen the spirit of Skål. It is a proud moment to partner with Skål International Jammu & Kashmir so soon after their launch, and we are

confident this collaboration will inspire many more initiatives across India."

Echoing the sentiment, Abdul Wahid Malik, President of Skål International Jammu & Kashmir, remarked: "Our young club is honored to twin with one of the most respected Skål clubs in India. This partnership symbolizes friendship, trust, and shared purpose. Through K2K, we hope to showcase the best of Kashmir while learning from the legacy and leadership of Skål International Kolkata."

The historic twinning is being hailed as a defining step for Skål International India, proving how friendship and business can come together to promote destinations, empower members, and strengthen the tourism fraternity across the country.



# Puja Bhog

## Eat, Pray & Eat

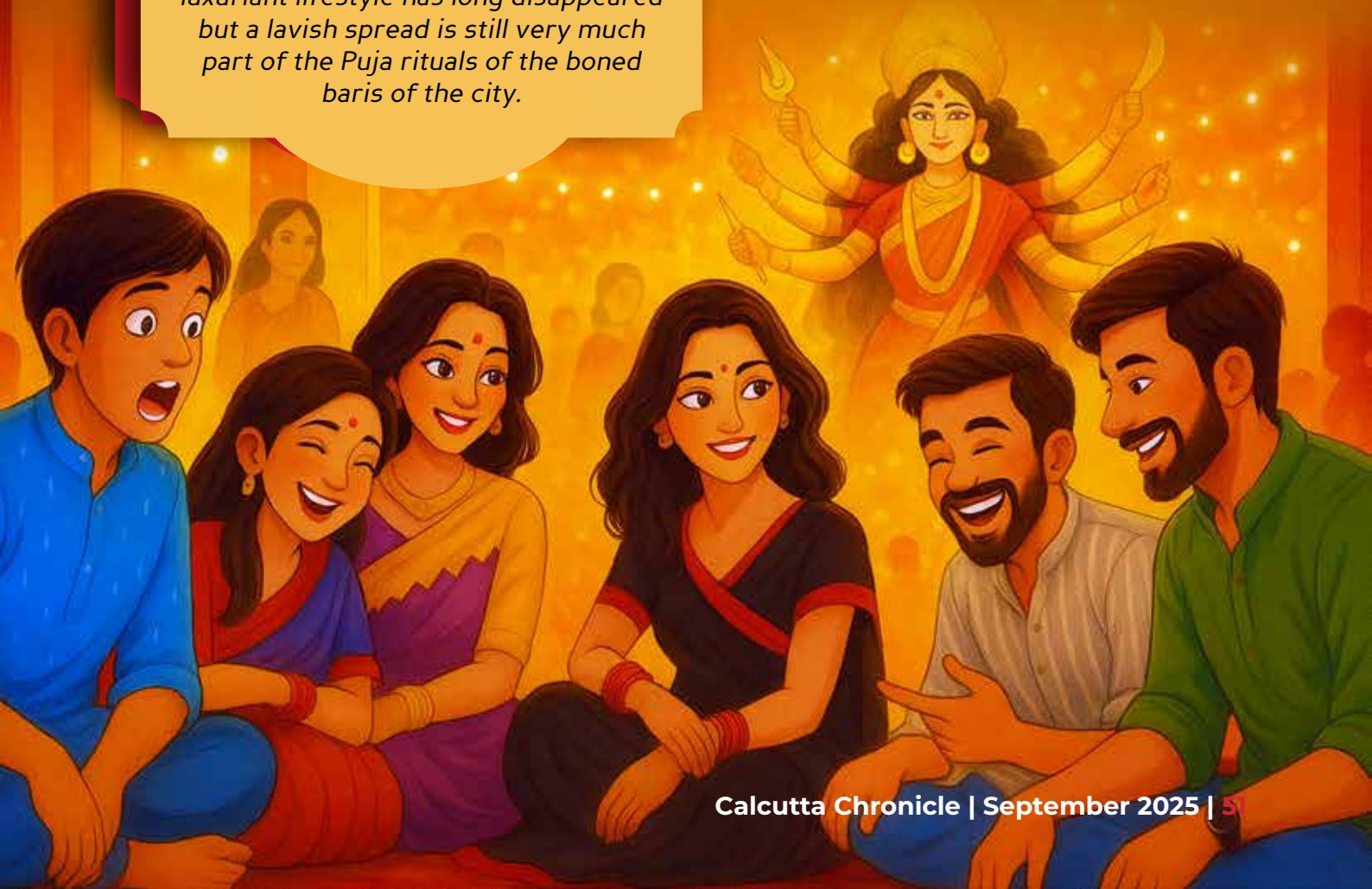


Team Chronicle

*The city's babu culture had once spawned a popular Bengali saying; according to which Maa Durga, during her stay preferred to have her lunch at the house of Shibkrishna Dawn then visited Abhaycharan Mitter for a change of clothes and finally proceeded to Sovabazar Rajbari to watch bai nautch. The Dawn family prepared no less than 52 dishes as part of Puja Bhog and thus spread their fame. The babus and their luxuriant lifestyle has long disappeared but a lavish spread is still very much part of the Puja rituals of the boned baris of the city.*

In our childhood days, we had a favourite past time, teasing our old family retainer about what was being offered as bhog to Maa Durga; and as he rattled off the menu we would burst into peals of laughter imagining Maa Durga calling a ceasefire during her fight with Mahisasur and tucking in a sumptuous meal in between.

Jokes apart, Durga Puja also offers a culinary feast with both vegetarian and non



vegetarian fare offset by interludes of fasting. The delectable Puja bhog is a gastronomical enigma considering the simple ingredients used yet gratifying your taste buds to no end.

Generally, bhog in popular conception denote khichudi, prepared with sona moong dal (lentils) and atop chal (a fine variety of rice), apart from vegetables. This is also one of the best kept secrets since bhoger khichudi has an altogether distinct flavor, different from the khichudis we are served all round the year including the monsoon despite the frugal use of spices. Khichudi is an essential part of the spread offered to the goddess on ashtami and served even at community pujas. In addition the two main stay of bhog are luchi and pulao (a foreign preparation).

The ingredients and recipes of different dishes have also evolved over the centuries proved by the fact that potato, a foreign vegetable, which thanks to the Portuguese, arrived to our country only in 1600, has also been adopted as a significant ingredient with considerable adoration.

Each bonedi family also has its own distinct rituals and custom made bhog. Apart from the usual fare of cholar dal, bandhakopir ghonto or dalna, my personal favourite is the labra, using an array of vegetables and cooked over slow fire, with little water. It is unmatched in taste yet very nutritious and fulfilling; each vegetable retains its own flavour in the medium spice mix.

While the 'poto' or 'begun bhaja' (fried aubergine - also a foreign origin vegetable) are favourites, chicken considered to be nishiddho pakkhi (banned meat) and prawn are not even allowed



to cross the threshold of the kitchen. Rather the pride of place goes to mutton and mutton liver.

Grand old families like the one of Chhatu babu- Latu babu family offer bhog comprising luchi with vegetarian side dishes along with sweets, monda and kheer which the guests also get to taste. A special vegetarian pulao cooked in a broth of exotic spices including ginger, cinnamon, garam masala, jeera, marich, bay leaves, cardamoms and mace for a unique flavor is also offered. I have also tried dhokar dalna (lentils ground in a paste, steamed and then cut into pieces to be fried and cooked in a curry) and chanar dal with nuts and raisins and found them a little overrated.

## FOOD PUMP

The Darjipara Mitra family specialise in pickles and daal cooked with exotic ingredients like poppy seeds, coriander and tomatoes. The Deb family of the Sovabazar Rajbari has two branches (the two sons of the founder Nabakrishna Deb) which sacrifice vegetables but on 'Navami', sacrifice a fish. Their specialty is the famed mete chocchori, a special mutton liver dish cooked with vegetables. This dish is also a favourite of the Mullick family of Bhawanipore. In fact on Nabami quite a few families also offer meat to the goddess following old traditions although animal sacrifice no longer takes place.

Connoisseurs tell me that mete chocchori comes out best when cooked with liver of a fattened goat. Only then will the vegetables imbibe the flavours of the liver yet stay firm, while the liver itself will be tender inside but slightly stringy outside. Cooking on a low fire is crucial.

An excellent snack on the same lines is 'mangshor ghugni' (Bengal gram curry flavoured with chunks of lean, boneless mutton). Another famous family, the Shaws of north Kolkata, have a signature 'payesh' (rice in sweetened milk) which is thickened so that it is served like a cake.

The Saborno Roychoudhury family, the oldest of these bonedi families who owned the three villages prior to the setting up of trading post by East India Company, have a special sweet which includes 'potol' stuffed with 'kheer' (sweet condensed milk) and nuts. Mishti Doi one of the rare Bengali specialties is also offered along with homemade sweets like patishapta or puli pitha.

In other words Durga Puja can be an exciting culinary journey from morning to night for every food connoisseur and so enjoy this Puja with a new motto: eat, pray and eat.



# SWARALIPI

► a Rabindra Sangeet Academy of music in Wayland, Massachusetts ◀



Swaralipi Academy is a singing school that was founded in 2005 by Swapna Ray. Swapna is the disciple of Sm. Suchitra Mitra (doyen of Rabindra Sangeet) and Sm. Sumitra Chatterjee. Swapna is carrying on the tradition of Rabindra Sangeet as an academic and cultural practice in the United States and has graduated numerous students who have attained mastery of the style. The school also helps to connect American-born and immigrant Bengalis to their mother culture.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

[swapnaray2000@yahoo.com](mailto:swapnaray2000@yahoo.com)

(+1) | 774 | 270 | 0955

# Durga Puja

## of Surul Sarkarbari



Kinjal Bose

Durga Puja is celebrated in a grand way in the homes of many 'bonedi' families with deep roots in West Bengal. Surul Sarkarbari or Surul Rajbari, which is roughly 5 kilometres from Bolpur railway station in Birbhum, is home to two family lineages, namely, Baro Taraf and Choto Taraf. Here Durga Puja is held with much pomp and grandeur.

The road leading to this house is usually crowded with people, many from Kolkata, and parked cars. A number of temporary shops selling various items are also set up in front of Surul Sarkarbari, giving it a look of a fair.



On entering Surul Sarkarbari (Baro Taraf), one will come across a large courtyard with a Natmandir in the middle. A large chandelier hangs from the top. A number of other lamps, made of Belgian glass also hang hanging from the ceiling. These lamps are lit with castor oil. In the evening, these lamps in the large courtyard (thakur dalan) and the Natmandir provide a deep feeling of nostalgia.

According to family sources, this nearly 290 years old Puja is held following the shakta rituals. Like other bonedi houses, the protima (deity) is made in this dalan after performing the

kathamo puja on the auspicious day of Rathayatra.

There is a pancharatna (five pinnaced) terracotta temple dedicated to Lakshmi Janardan and two Deul shaped temples dedicated to Lord Shiva outside the courtyard. Two terracotta panels of Goddess Durga, one in the Pancharatna temple and another in the Deul are placed close to each other. After completion of the puja of Lakshmi Janardan, the salagram sila is taken to another place, followed by animal sacrifice on Mahastami. Scarifice is also conducted on Saptami and Nabami. On Saptami, chalkumro (a vegetable) and on Nabami both chalkumro and sugarcane are also ceremonially sacrificed outside the Natmandir. Seasonal fruits and eighteen different

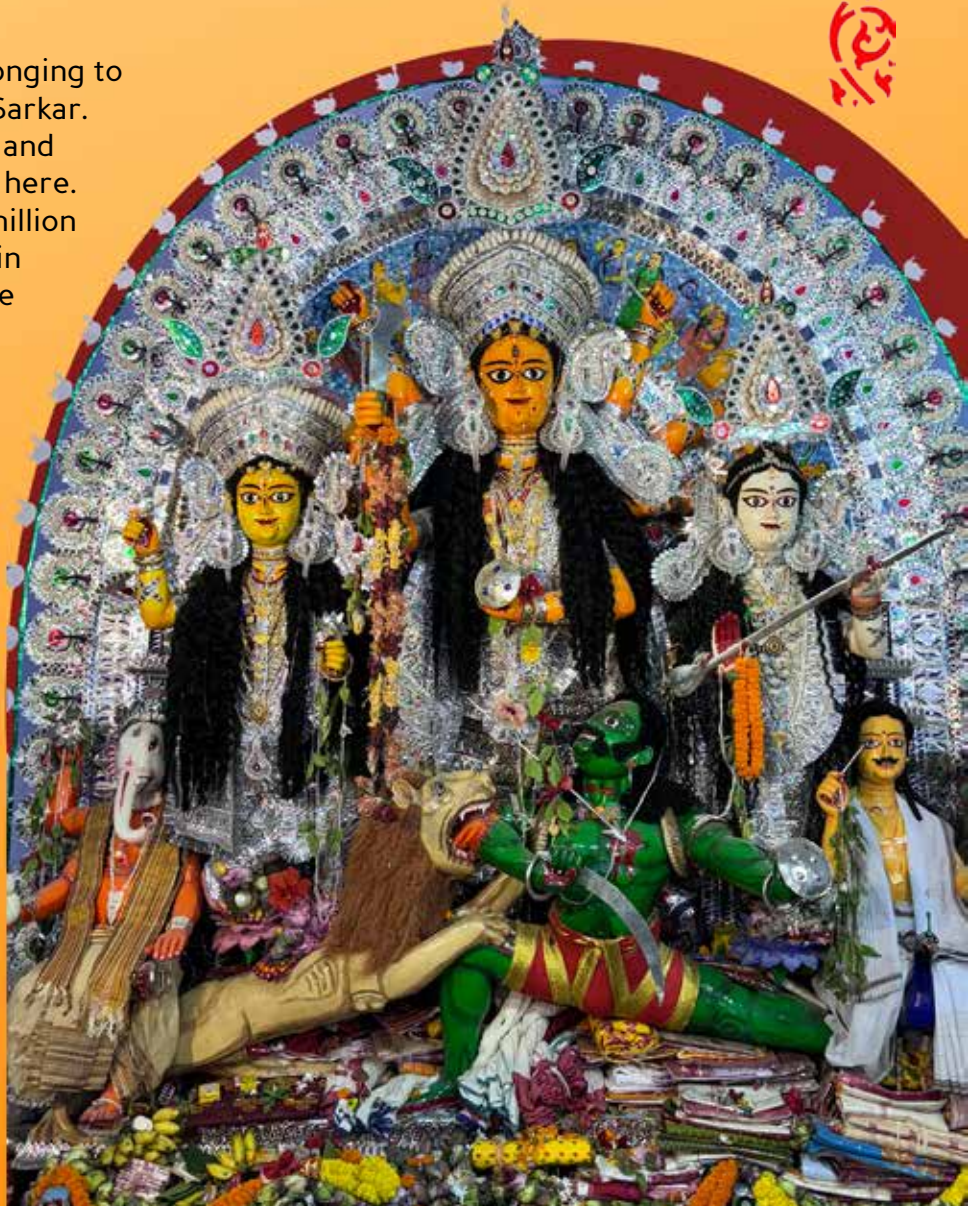


types of sweets, all prepared in the household are offered to Devi Durga from Tritiya, the third day of celebration.

The stucco work in the Dalan belonging to Baro Taraf was built by Srinibas Sarkar. It is noteworthy that Kumari puja and dhuno porano are not performed here. Additionally, Sindur khela or vermillion play, which is a common feature in barowari and household pujas, are not performed here.

The puja of Sarkar Bari (Choto Taraf) is held in a separate dalan just behind Lakshmi Janardan Temple. The Nabapatrika is carried on a palanquin by four Brahmins. Like Baro Taraf, the Protima is prepared in thakur dalan following the Kathamo puja. According to a family member of Choto Taraf, earlier there was a single puja. However, today both the Protimas are prepared by the same artisan.

All the rituals and practices of the Boro Taraf puja are conducted here at Chhoto Taraf Puja, except that chandeliers at Natmandir are lighted by electricity.



# 100 Years of Mahanayak

## *If the World Were a Land of Dreams*



Chanchal Bhattacharya

His real name was Arun Kumar Chattopadhyay, but the world knows as Uttam Kumar – the matinee idol. He was born on September 3, 1926, at his maternal uncle's house in Ahiritola. His father's name was Satkari Chattopadhyay.

In his early life, Uttam Kumar was interested in theatre. In Bhowanipore, there were two clubs named Kristi and Srishti. It is there, he performed the play 'Aajkal' alongside Sabitri Chattopadhyay. At Baishakhi Natya Sanstha, he acted in the play 'Shahjahan' in the role of Dildar, with his younger brother Tarun Kumar as co-actor.

At their own house, there was a yatra troupe named 'Suhrid Samaj'. Their uncle Mangal Chattopadhyay trained both Uttam Kumar and Tarun Kumar in acting.

When Uttam Kumar had just begun to taste success in films, he joined Star Theatre in 1953. His performance as Anil opposite Sabitri Chattopadhyay in the play 'Shyamali', created a stir in the theatre world. He performed in that play for 26 consecutive months (400 shows). This was his first and last performance in professional theatre.

He was one of three brothers - Arun, Barun, and Tarun. They had one sister, who died prematurely. His father, Satkari Chattopadhyay, was a projection



## ■ STAGE CRAFT ■

operator at Metro Cinema. His mother's name was Chapala Devi.

After completing his matriculation from South Suburban Main School, he enrolled in evening college for his Intermediate Arts studies. However, due to family responsibilities, he joined as a Lower Division Clerk at the Kolkata Port Commissioners and discontinued his studies. His wife was Gauri Devi, and they had one son, Gautam Chattopadhyay. His grandson, Gaurav Chattopadhyay, is a regular television actor.

It was through the help of Dhiren Dutta, owner of The New Studio Supply, that Uttam Kumar got his first break in films. For this, he respected Dhiren Dutta all his life.

Uttam Kumar was also a good football player. Their club was called Lunar. However, this legendary superstar initially faced setbacks. Between 1948 and 1952, he

acted in seven films—all of which flopped. In Tollygunge, he came to be known as the "Flop Master General."

In 1952, with the success of *Basu Paribar*, produced by M.P. and directed by Nirmal Dey, Uttam Kumar's journey of triumph began.

After the passing of the great hero on July 24, 1980, the revered Satyajit Ray said: "Of the nearly 250 films Uttam Kumar acted in, at least 200 will sink into oblivion—there is no doubt about that. In a country where there are so few who know how to make proper use of a sincere actor, this is inevitable. But an artist is always judged by his best work."

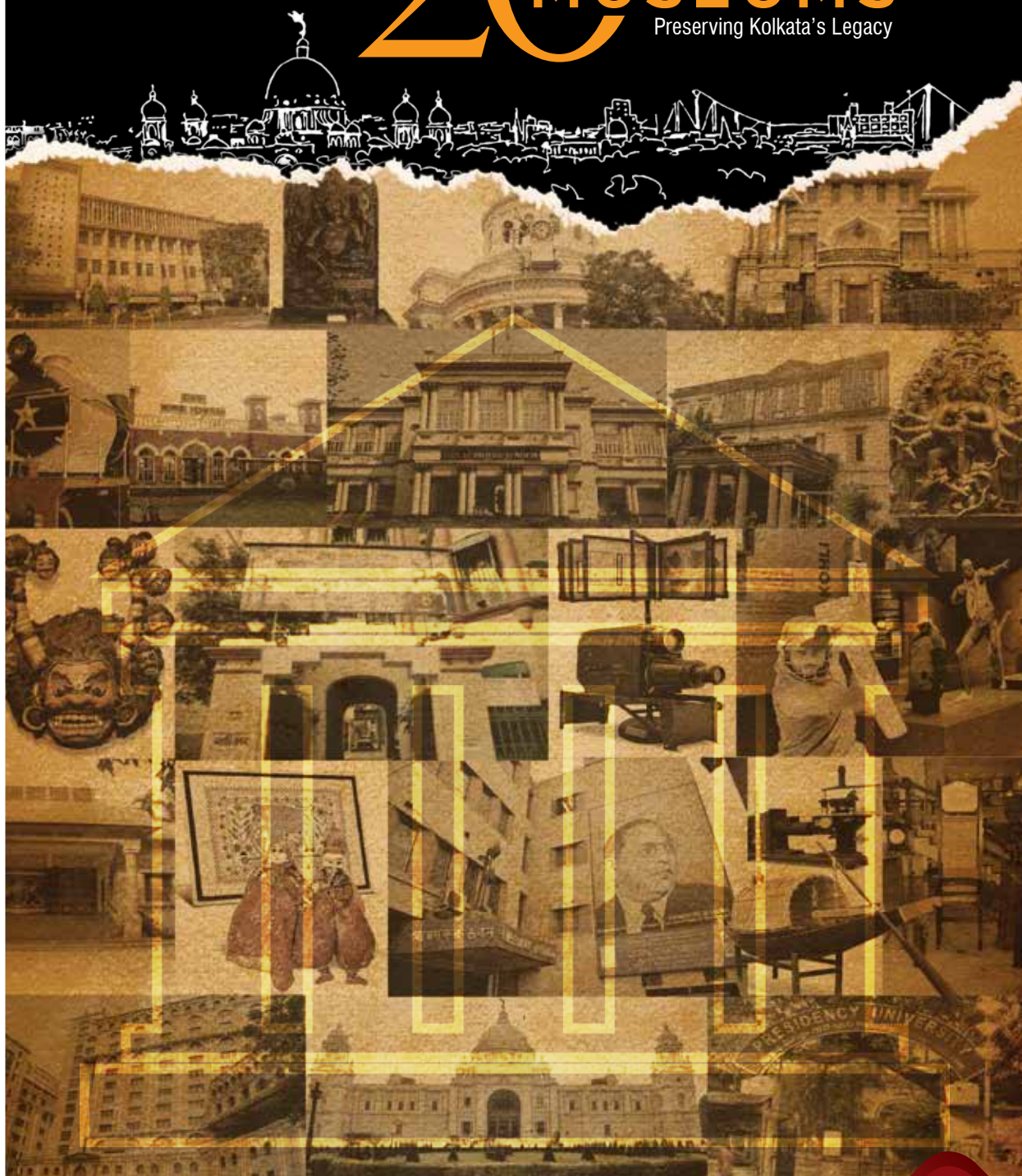
Uttam's range was not very vast. Yet within his own domain, the dedication and power he displayed consistently for thirty years is unmatched. Where today can one find an actor who could fill his absence?"



₹250

# 20 INCREDIBLE MUSEUMS

Preserving Kolkata's Legacy



**Add this handbook to your personal library. Book your copy today.**

**BEST  
PRICE**

**₹250**  
ONLY

**Shipping Charges Extra\***

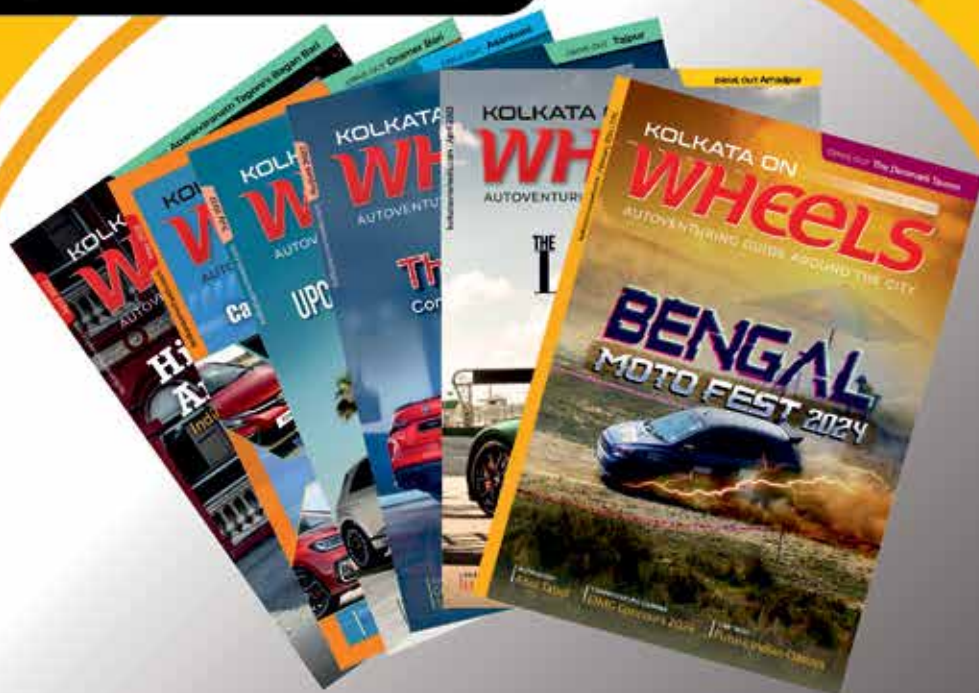
**For more details Call / Whatsapp**



**9830370371**

# WE ARE BACK

with our **PRINT** edition!



On repeated requests from our readers,  
**Kolkata on WHEELS** is now available in  
both **PRINT** and **DIGITAL** editions.

## SUBSCRIPTION TARIFF

Term	No. of Issues	Tariff
3 months	3	INR 500
6 Months	6	INR 950
1 year	12	INR 1800
1 year (DIGITAL)	12	INR 500

For booking  
your copies call:

**9830370371**