

Celebrating unity through festivals

At 3 p.m. on the day of Maharashtra, they all gathered at the Doshapriya Park crossing. Jayanta, Navinder, Shoaib and Saptarshi were looking happy in their navy blue t-shirts but their puja activities differed slightly from thousands of others who hit the road. Their t-shirts had their identity printed on their back - Kolkata Police Volunteers. For the next few days, they celebrated their most active Durga Puja but they barely got the chance to visit any pandals. Around 3.30 a.m. they had a chance to open their food packets. Ichi, aloo dom and mishti tasted more delicious than Biryani to Shoaib after a hard day's work. Navinder offered his mishti to Saptarshi as he could not thank Saptarshi enough for rescuing him during his argument with a Bengali family. They were all sitting on old newspapers as the pavements were too dirty to keep their food packets. Suddenly Venkat stood up, realizing that the newspaper he was sitting on had a photograph of Maha Durga. Jayanta gave him a place to sit. Thousands, if not lakhs passed through the zone that was under their surveillance, stopping their cars to ask for directions, at times asking for medical help and even asking for undue advantages - they had to tackle it all. 12 hours on the road made them realize that festivals are for all. Religion, caste, language - none of them mattered when the gates of the pandals opened. Even the bright puja lights could not differentiate, could not determine the identity of the individuals in the vast sea of people. Amidst that crowd, this small group of volunteers were representatives of the city of joy - of where the true meaning of a festival lies.

On Dashami morning Dr. Basu made his usual morning round at the CCM of a reputed South Kolkata Nursing Home. Fortunately, apart from a critical Mrs. D' Cunha, others were doing fine. Some of the Bengali patients wished Shubho Bijoya to Dr. Basu in their feeble voices. Their Puja was spent in this room on their respective beds but nurse Jamshampa made it a point to keep all the patients updated about the puja days. This pleasantly surprised the RMO. During the mandatory one hour visiting time that day, patients had mixed feelings. Some relatives came to wish and seek blessings whereas a few desperately missed their relatives who might have been busy with their Puja celebrations. Even the usually strong Keralite nurse had teary eyes when Mr. Jain tried hard to wish Shubho Bijoya to Mr. Banerjee, while she was administering relative injection. Mr. Damani will be shifted to a normal bed tomorrow. He had been praying all day to Ma Durga for speedy recovery of his CCM mates who had been fighting together for their lives. Dr. Basu realized, this is probably the best pandal he had visited that year.

Durga Puja had united everyone even in pain and sorrow, even those who might not live to see a tomorrow.

Aishika Nay

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Alia Burman



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A streetlight, the sun and that candle
Swaranya Sarkar

a streetlight

The shadows are long. The coughs after each laugh are long. Yet the laughs are longer. Their wrinkles disappear in the dim light, all are young again on the evening before soptomi.

Perhaps they remember shorter shadows who were here once, when the neighbourhood homes were younger, when blue and white lights were not strung around every lamp post, before the streets had collected too many stories. Then, knees had not ached and they had walked down every hidden alley in Kasba to see the pandals, friends had run over often to yell about the line for phuchkas and smiles had been more free.

Some of the old charm must have been preserved in that particular street, for after a half hour standing there they left to hunt for the phuchka seller again, maybe for the last time together. That patch of flickering yellow under the street light was now for another to claim as their own.

the sun

On ashtami morning, one forgets shadows. Sarees must be pleated perfectly, kurtas must be ironed carefully. Dear dreams may be dug out, dusted and infused with fresh hope.

He sits by the dirty pond he has always lived beside and on ashtami, it seems cleaner. The sky bends down to tell him stories and the birds give him company because they know he needs it. Beams of sunshine rain down on his face. Today his cheeks are dry. He counts the smiles in the pond water. All the same all his mother's. She floats among the fallen shubli, her voice blends with the sound of the dhaak.

Sunlight is kind on ashtami morning. It flickers among the green and yellow leaves, beats down on the roof of their house and finds its way into his heart. In the light, the kaush blooms again, taller, and reaches out toward the sky.

that candle

By dashami night the kaush starts to fade. The sun glows less proudly. The cheap lights that were strung around buildings and across streets begin to be taken down.

October disappears as the dhaak mingles with the sound of madly honking cars and someone steps on the flowers strewn about the streets.

As the city lights start vanishing, one candle flickers to life.

In the light of the candle, one boy leaves a damp patch on his pillow as November arrives. In the light, two women sit in separate empty homes waiting for another year, another October. In the light, thousands across the city hold out hope for more Octobers.

The candle glows. It does not stop glowing, even after the melted wax pools on the floor.

The Colour of Our Lives: Festivals

Thinking about festivals makes me exuberant and gives me instant happiness. Festivals are like the refreshing burst of yellow-blue and red colours in our greyscale life and no

matter which festival is upcoming everyone in India feels the same amount of joy and excitement. Waiting for a festival is the most exciting part and although people may disagree with me the

wait makes the festival even more enjoyable, it's like a sweet at the end of a long wait. Festivals light up our lives every year with the customs and rituals involved. People get together during festivals and enjoy their time together chatting over delicious food and drinks.

Even the darkest corners of Kolkata are lighted up with colourful lights and extravagant decorations, everyone feels lighthearted and euphoric with the colours and the age old traditions draped around them like a blanket of warm nostalgic memories.

Diwali, the Festival of Lights is famous for diyas, Lakshmi Ganesh Puja and Kali Puja as well.

Each a different aspect of Diwali but all these Pujas bind to form one beautiful harmonious atmosphere of celebration and a sense of peacefulness and comfort is felt all throughout the country. Diyas light up our houses and all our deepest, most neglected dreams and desires.

Lakshmi Ganesh Puja brings prosperity to our families but it also brings a myriad of new opportunities to view the world in a different light. Kali Puja is the celebration of power, destruction of evil and beauty of the night this puja is a complete contrast to the ideals

of Diwali which represent light but still it weaves serenely into one of the core beliefs of people that the celebration of darkness is as important as the celebration of lights because there

is no light without darkness. A deeper symbolic meaning being that life and death should be

celebrated because a person ascends to a realm of higher ideals when he leaves the world. These festivals and many more bind us, Indians together. It is unity in diversity. We are prone to celebrating all festivals because they are periods of bliss and elation where everyone explores the light in their lives and the light in their hearts.





Navratri Das 110

Joy of Festivals

Festivals are events of joy and celebration. We rejoice in our happiness and form many special memories. Our everyday life is filled with stress, anxiety and busy schedules. Festivals allow us to forget all that stress and complexity. Festivals encourage us to stay connected to our culture, our roots and our heritage. People all over the country, old and young, rich and poor, go back home to enjoy these special occasions with their loved ones and celebrate the joys of life. We take this time to thank the Almighty for His blessings. We also use this opportunity to give something back to society. During festivals like Diwali and Durga Puja, we distribute sweets and clothes among underprivileged people. We help those who are less fortunate than us so that they too, can enjoy the festivities with exhilaration. At the end of the day, everybody looks forward to specific festivals throughout the year to unwind and enjoy the special moments that they have to offer.

Rudrani Basu



Believe

I

The skies erupted with a rainbow of shimmering stars. A pair of dark eyes gazed at the heavens, tantalized by the booming joy and ecstasy which seemed to waft along with the aroma of sweets. She moved along with the cacophony and the crowds, with a surreal gaze in her eyes. They were teeming multitudes moved only by a devotion emanating from self-centered motives: wealth, love, power and restoration.



II

The man moved along with the crowds, towards the temple. A riotous congregation of youths hollered and jostled before him; the infernal din of the cymbals and drumrolls assisted the bedlam. He resented taking the decision of finally obeying his priest. He was due for his meeting in forty-five minutes he

was not a man who entertained the excuse of festivals for corporate holidays.

III

She measured her heartbeats with the cadence of the drums. She was aware of every breath she took, every step she conquered. Her mother treaded beside her as her staff, the only one she had and would ever need during her lifetime. The heavenly joy moulded by so many souls in unison seemed to penetrate her senses as she finally approached the towering idol.



IV

His phone threatened to leap out of his pocket as the phone calls began. He had reached the podium of the goddess. Heaving a sigh of relief, he approached the puny man clad in genna. Handing over the packet of boxes, he turned with his hands folded.

V

The air seemed to be veiled with vermillion as she beheld Her. She gazed at the tranquil, omniscient visage and she knew. She stood there, embraced by a glory she had never known to exist. It had been a week since she had been informed. So what if her days were numbered? The only constant was the ever-throwing cycle which nourished, destroyed, and restored. Intoxicated by the divine incense, she finally bowed.

VI

He could barely spare a couple of minutes before he prepared to leave. As he turned, he chanced upon a young girl. How brittle and frail was her countenance! Even as she prayed, a feverish tremor seemed to seize her joined hands. Her head was bowed in prayer while a lady stood upright behind her.

Something had shimmered and had just fallen down her cheeks.

The man barely heard the din of celebration as he moved against the crowd. He gazed upward, and the skies erupted with a rainbow of shimmering stars. The calls kept coming he received none. Silently, he approached his car. He paused for a moment and standing there, he bowed his head in a silence which spoke volumes to the onlookers.

One by one, the lamps lit up the boundless firmament.

Raceka Senqupta

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