Festivals in Frames

Stories, Traditions and Celebrations across India



Chapter 2:

Durga Puja



Ten Arms, One Mighty Goddess!

As autumn arrives, Bengal bursts into colour as ***dhak*** beats fill the air, streets come alive, and magnificent pandals rise to welcome ***Maa Durga.***

According to the ***Devi Mahatmya***, when the demon ***Mahishasura*** threatened the heavens, the gods united their divine powers to create *Maa Durga*. Her ten arms carry divine weapons like the *chakra*, conch, bow, sword, javelin, *trishula*, shield, mace, pink lotus flower, and noose, symbolising strength, courage, and protection.

She defeated the demon, symbolising the victory of good over evil. This legend lies at the heart of **Durga Puja**, celebrated with special grandeur across **West Bengal.**



A Goddess Comes Home

In the Bengali tradition, *Maa Durga* is more than a mighty warrior. She is also a beloved daughter, and her return from Mount Kailash to her maternal home on Earth ***(agomoni)***, where her parents, ***King Himavant*** and ***Queen Menaka***, await her.

She arrives with her four children, ***Ganesha*** and ***Kartikeya***, her sons, and ***Lakshmi*** and ***Saraswati***, depicted as her daughters in Bengali iconography, turning this divine visit into a heartwarming celebration of family and togetherness.



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The Festivities Begin

After the much-awaited *Agomoni*, the grand festivities begin on ***Maha Shashthi.***

The ritual of ***Bodhan*** ceremonially awakens *Maa Durga*, welcoming her into the celebrations.

Across Bengal, dazzling pandals open their doors, magnificent idols draw crowds, and the thunderous beats of the *dhak* announce that the most-awaited days have begun!



Nine Plants and a Bride

What do nine plants have to do with Durga Puja?

On ***Maha Saptami***, devotees perform ***Nabapatrika Snan***, the ceremonial bathing of nine plants, **banana, taro, turmeric, jayanti, bel, pomegranate, ashoka, arum,** and **paddy** tied together.

The banana plant, dressed in a sari like a bride, is its most recognisable feature, earning it the name ***Kola Bou*** or **"banana bride"**!

This fascinating ritual celebrates nature by honouring the life-giving power of the natural world.



Flowers, Faith and Dhunuchi

Maha Ashtami is among Bengal's most sacred days of Durga Puja. Devotees gather for ***Pushpanjali***, offering flowers to Maa Durga. Young girls are honoured as a manifestation of the goddess during the ***Kumari Puja***.

At the sacred juncture between *Ashtami* and *Navami* comes ***Sandhi Puja***, marking the moment *Maa Durga*, in her fierce form as ***Chamunda***, defeated the demons ***Chanda*** and ***Munda***. Traditionally, devotees offer 108 lotuses and light 108 lamps.

As the *dhak* beats thunder, dancers perform ***Dhunuchi Naach***, swirling incense burners in a mesmerising dance of devotion.





Ashche Bochhor Abar Hobe!

After days of joyous celebration, ***Bijoyadashami*** brings an emotional farewell to *Maa Durga*.

Sindoor Khela sees married women offer vermilion to the goddess and share it with each other.

Then, amid *dhak* beats, singing, and grand processions, the idols make their way for ***Visarjan***.

As *Maa Durga* departs, one sentiment echoes through the crowds:

"Ashche bochhor abar hobe!"

— She'll return next year!

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Bengal's Heritage, Celebrated Worldwide

From neighbourhood gatherings to breathtaking artistic pandals, Durga Puja has grown into a spectacular celebration of devotion, creativity, and community.

Across Eastern and Northeastern India, states like **Odisha, Assam, Tripura, Jharkhand,** among others celebrate Durga Puja, each adding its own regional traditions.

In 2021, Kolkata's Durga Puja earned a place on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. As artists dream up new designs and greener celebrations take shape, one thing remains unchanged:

Every autumn, **Bengal eagerly awaits Maa Durga's return.**

