

Durga Puja as I Remember It

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"Is this how it's going to be from now on?" I asked myself before making peace with the fact that Puja doesn't feel the same anymore. In a full somersault from denial to acceptance, I have let the inescapable monotony of adulthood set in.

I remember the time when I used to wait for Durga Puja all year around. The lingering rush of picking out outfits and showing them off to the cousins is no longer there. It took so little to be happy back then.

I would spend *Panchami* on a bus, munching on Potato Crackers and the sickly sweet, sticky delicacy known as *til er khaja*, falling asleep on my dad's lap and repeating the same question until he got tired of answering, "Are we in Jashore yet?"

Then a van ride to the village. After about an entire day's journey when we finally reached, I always felt like a celebrity. That was the time before migrating to Dhaka was the norm. Pretty much everyone in the village and their grandma (literally) would be there to greet us.

Puja at my ancestral village was the highlight of my year. It came with promises of things I couldn't enjoy in Dhaka. Everyone would gather around the yard conceding to the darkness of the routine power cut that would last for hours – catching up with



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local politics and relatives drifting around in Bangladesh and India. I could be found in a corner playing *antakshari* with my cousins, my dull city heart enthralled by the occasional sighting of a firefly.

Ashtami came with colossal amounts of *luchi* and *naru*. On *Nobomi* we would do a make-believe sacrifice with a white pump-

kin filled in with red colour. *Bijoya Dashami* was an extravagant affair where everyone would showcase their usual and unusual talents of singing, dancing, Geeta recitation, *Ululudhvani* and everything in between.

The night grew deeper as the melancholy of *bishorjon* would set in with everyone chanting "*Ashche bochhor abar hobe, Ma tumi*

abar esho". The last thing I would do before going to sleep on *dashami* was watch the customary BTV programme about *mahisha-sur vadh*.

Now that my days go by in a strange urgency, I struggle to feel the excitement that made me wait all year. Families being scattered around in the country and the globe make it harder to fill in the hours. With every passing year the ancestral home gets lonelier.

In recent years, I have been guilty of wanting to spend Durga Puja in Dhaka. As wholesome as my childhood experiences were, when I figured out that I had outgrown the time I used to once cherish, the idea of spending it in the city, meeting up with my friends felt like a more tempting option. As years go by, I realise it may never come back to the way it once was. In the race between time and memory, what I now feel is a responsibility to retain the relationships and the keepsakes from home.

If not for the fun of Puja, that seems like a good enough reason to go back once a year to what my passport still lists as "permanent address."

Anupoma Joyeeta Joyee would like to know about your Durga Puja memories of childhood. Email her at anupomajoyee@gmail.com

Not Just a "Product of Its Time"

ABIR HOSSAIN

Authors, writers, poets, and other laureates don't just imagine new worlds, they often shape reality as well. They are, after all, pioneers of cultural change.

However, what appears to be a progressive realm of new ideas and open-minded discussions, is too often filled with the overwhelming domination of exclusively white experiences.

The standards that have been set, the language that people are accustomed to, and the influence it has on individuals have mostly been pre-determined by Eurocentric male figures. The dangers of which plague us to this day.

Origins of racial stereotypes, deeming people of other gender and races as inferior, and misrepresentation are just a few outcomes of many that initially went on to define "the norm." As a result, authors and artists of colour were shunned out.

With their voices silenced, these groups of people did not have a platform. Their cultures and experiences were relegated out of people's reach, and readers were deprived of educating themselves about a whole new world, very different from the ones they know. Although accounts of their heritage and tradition were recorded, it was done by their colonisers. Thus, not only were the records inaccurate but their lifestyles and values were also portrayed in a negative light.

Stereotypes were normalised, which ultimately found their way in pieces of literature and art. Sylvia Plath perpetuates racist stereotypes and even involves a scene where she assaults a person of colour through her

novel *The Bell Jar*. While it may be argued that her writing was merely "a product of the time," the argument fails to render her encouragement of bigoted behaviour as problematic.

To this day, people of certain races, ethnicities, and nationalities are widely misrepresented. Early accounts of derogatory caricatures of African-American people were done with characters such as Jim Crow, and blackface. They were portrayed as gullible, intellectually inferior, and ignorant.

All of this ties into the importance of branching out and enjoying art from other cultures. Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* is a gripping portrayal of the corruption that runs rampant in the life of a Nigerian government official. Toni Morrison's works delve into the experiences of being a slave, Ocean Vuong talks about his Vietnamese roots and his experiences as an immigrant. These are just a few names out of many that should be explored. In addition, translations of books written in foreign languages are a great way of exploring a wide variety of new reading material.

The family ties, unique practices, and untold stories can only truly be captured by the artist experiencing them. It is an authentic portrayal of what it is like to be in their shoes and witness the wonders of their cultures. So, the next time any of us are at a bookstore, perhaps we could do our due diligence and pick up a book to delve into an unfiltered rendition of an unfamiliar culture.

Abir Hossain is a failed SoundCloud rapper. Tell him you too can't find anything to rhyme oranges with at fb/abir.hossain.19

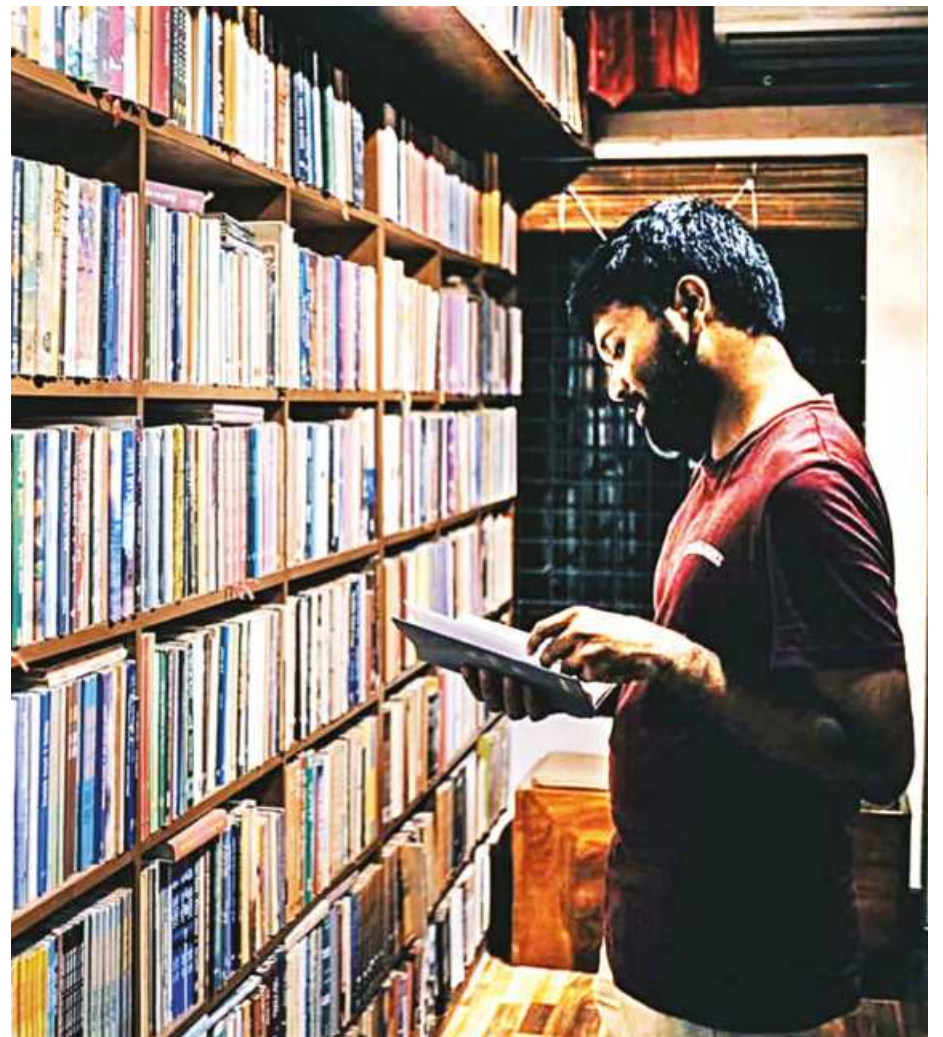


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