

#PERSPECTIVE

In Bengal, there is a flower for every season. From serving as offerings at the altars of deities while the priest chants shlokas for pujas, to styling a beautiful bride on her wedding day, to simply using them to decorate households on opportune occasions — there is a flower befitting every occasion!



## A conversation ON FLOWERS

There is nothing more mesmerising than the look of a Bengali bride with a rose bloom tucked on the sides of her bun, and milky white *beli* garlands hanging by. Nothing more auspicious than the sight of dainty *maloti* gracing the feet of various Hindu deities, nothing more delightful than the sight of *rojonigandha*, neatly arranged in a vase in a family living.

Pijush Kanti Sarkar is an art teacher and designer by profession, and flower aficionado by passion. He says that growing flowers has everything to do with the right soil. The fertile grounds of Bengal suit certain flowers more than others, and thus, they are found in abundance in this region. Although now grown in other parts of the world as well, like in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, most of these blooms can truly be attributed as 'Bengali.'

"Through our poetry, songs and art, to our cultural decoration and veneration, we own these flowers!" exclaimed Sarkar. "There are flowers that one can see the

year round and then there are those that only visit us seasonally."

And he went on to explain, "The *beli* and the jasmine are both flowers of spring. The *dolonchapa* and *nayantara* are mostly seen in monsoon. Marigolds, as we all know, bloom in winter. The *nagalingam* and the *konokchapa*, for instance, grow well in the dry soils of the mountainous regions like the Chittagong Hill Tracks, and then there are other flowers that grow well in moist soils found in the lowlands, like Barishal, for example," he explained passionately.

Certain flowers have flourished in various regions of the country because of people's fondness for them. In Hindu majority areas, due to their preferences and veneration practices, some flowers are grown in the households.

"One may see flowers like *shondha maloti* and *aparajita* around Hindu localities more than in other places. Durga or Lakshmi Puja will be deemed

incomplete without the lotus. There will be no *Kalipuja* without the *roktojoba* (the blood red hibiscus). Some deities are fond of the shade blue, so *aparajitas* and other blue coloured flowers are used in certain Hindu religious ceremonies," he said.

Even culturally, Pijush Kanti Sarkar mentions that it was once common practice to bring in fresh blooms of *palash* or *shimul* every Pahela Baishakh to symbolise freshness, peace, and prosperity for the coming year.

"Although a lost practice now, it was a big part of the Baishakhi celebrations back in our time," he added.

However, it is not only religion and culture that dictates flower cultivation in Bengal. There are other practical reasons for it too. "Flowers such as *nayantara* have a range of health benefits. In fact, the *nayantara* has cancer fighting properties and has also been called a miracle in the prevention of childhood leukaemia. Similarly, the juice from marigold leaves is

thought to stop severe haemorrhage from wounds, and *aparajita* petals are gaining popularity as a drink for boosting memory and relieving anxiety. Full of antioxidants and anti-inflammatory substances, *aparajita* also helps in keeping diabetes in check," added the enthusiast.

Flowers have something in them for everyone. Some get drawn to their beauty and vivacity, some to their freshness and fragrance. Inside Bangladesh and in the wider Bengal, flowers hold symbolism and bring in health benefits for those who take the time to dig deep and learn more about these beautiful ornaments of nature.

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