

**The striving profession**

Nothing is ever easy, but perhaps being a professional dhaki is a bit too difficult. It is far from stable. Dhakis who manage to get a booking for smaller festivals and programmes may earn around Tk 1,000-1,500 for a day's work. And it's rare these days to get bookings regularly. As a result, most dhakis need to resort to an alternative source of income to support themselves.

During the days of Durga puja,



for quite some time, its future looks rather bleak. Most dhakis are still carrying on the tradition that was bestowed upon them by their ancestors but this family profession will not last long.

"I have been playing here for about 30-35 years, I guess.

Before me, my father used to play and before that my grandfather. We have been performing here for seven generations," said Tapan Chandra Das, stating that he has been trying to teach his sons to play dhak so that they may carry on the legacy, but he's not so sure whether they are interested.

Sangkar Das has two sons and only one of them has learned to play the dhak. And with the current state of the profession, he has no complaints about his other son not being a part of the family legacy.

Ashit learned the beats from his father. He has two daughters, and he thinks this will be the end of the family heritage. "My father still plays and he goes across districts. I drum locally. But I don't think this profession will last in my family after I am gone," he said thoughtfully.

Some people are still in love with the beats and just can't stay away. There will always be people like that but the number is very limited. Goda Das from Natore belongs to this group of people.

"I started hanging out with the band when I was little because I have always loved festivals. There was a time when you could support your

dhakis stay at the mandap the whole time. Sometimes, they are alone, but mostly, they are accompanied by a band or a few other artistes. Even though most of them are Hindu, they have to stay away from their family during the puja days because of their job, and they have been doing it every year.

While everyone dances to the beat of their drums, which indeed invokes the aura of Durga puja, the dhakis make a silent sacrifice, one that is overwritten by the beats of their drums.

"Puja is the season for us. We can earn a decent amount during these five days. But the rest of the year is not so easy," said Ashit, who drives an auto-rickshaw to support himself and his family.

"There has been a massive decline in bookings since COVID," said Sangkar, who has to resort to farming and agriculture to maintain his family. "Obviously, puja is the time when business blooms but otherwise, business is practically non-existent. There was a time when I used to get bookings for four or five days of the week. Now that's a dream," he added.

**A fading legacy**

While dhak has been around



family in this trade but now, it's no longer possible. Even as part of a band, I can't make ends meet," he said, adding that neither his son nor his daughter is following his footsteps and he doesn't blame them either.

Everyone dances to the divine beat of the drums, but rarely does someone stop to think about the dhaki. Some of these artistes are immensely talented, but there is no one to nurture them. Most of the dhakis are neglected and spend their days as nothing more than another figure behind the instrument. With this declining trend, dhakis will become extinct soon, and an important part of our cultural element will be lost to time unless we do something about it.

**By Ashif Ahmed Rudro & Shahrear Kabir Heemel**

**Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel; Sazzad Ibne Sayed/LS Archive**

