

FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD
KANISHKA CHAKRABORTYExecutive Sous Chef,
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THIS YEAR
When Kolkata's
spirit pauses
for Durga Pujo**

This time around it seems to be easier to write about things we will not do for Pujo.

A bit of background. First, my favourite city, my favourite country went through an incredible upheaval through July and a large part of August. While that dust has mostly settled, it is not all back to normal, if I understand correctly. And I am trying to understand from a distance, through social and traditional media and first-hand accounts of friends.

Then, my city, Kolkata, witnessed a heinous crime in what is supposed to be a safe zone, a hospital. The whole city went into a shock. And then the city exploded with anger, frustration and sorrow. And this continues to the day, casting a pall on Pujo preparations and the festive feeling.

Quite a few things have changed. We will do quite a few things differently this year. Usually, by now, the streets should have been bedecked with banners and decorations which is not the case yet. The streets still look a little bare. And people still wear an empty look, for we are waiting for justice. Justice for the deceased. And hoping for safe workplaces.

There are a few things we will not do this time around. The complex we live in usually has a lot of fun and festivities for Pujo. The whole community comes together to have small events during the day. Small ones, like antakshari, like quizzes, like children doing sit and draw. The evenings are filled with songs and dance. Mornings and evenings are punctuated with community lunch. Fish one day. Vegetarian the next. Biryani another day. And the crowd favourite, mangsho bhaat, on Dashami.

This year we have decided to do without the fun and frolic. And the community lunch. Pujo will be a solemn affair this time around. All we will do is hope feverishly for justice. Hope for this nightmare to end. Hope for better days, safer days. For this is the true spirit of Pujo. Pomp and grandeur can wait for another year.

By Kanishka Chakraborty**SACRED BLOOMS, ETERNAL LOVE**
**Flowers in worship
and puja fashion**

In Hinduism, flowers are essential not only in worship but also in every other aspect of life. Garlands, single flowers, and even petals are used to form a connection between worshippers and the deity being venerated. In the simplicity of floral blooms, devotees find a pure form, expressing their homage to the gods and goddesses; their beauty and scent create an ambience that elevates the entire spiritual experience.

The connection becomes even more evident while performing puja, where culture and religious rites come together. The use of flowers in all aspects of their lives, be it lavish weddings or joyous celebrations like Durga Puja, sets the mood for the occasion.

Hibiscus (jaba) holds a place of distinction during Durga Puja as does the lotus (Padma). Marigolds in their orange and yellow hues are a staple, as are jasmines with their white petals and enchanting fragrance. These contrasts of hues and varied fragrances set an aura befitting the presence of Maa Durga and her celestial children.

While we are more familiar with the selection of flowers



for the puja, many are unaware of the significance numbers (of flowers) play in the rites. The worship of Durga, for instance, can be done through flowers numbering between one and nine. In contrast, the worship of Lord Shiva is done through ten floral blossoms. Devotees offer blossoms at the altar of the gods and goddesses

creating a moment of pure devotion, while chanting mantras and expressing their undivided faith as a gesture of thankfulness.

Flowers take centre stage in fashion, especially during the ten days of Durga puja, as women decked in their best sarees don the freshest blooms to accessorise,

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