

The blissful sounds of Puja

Durga Puja, one of the most significant festivals in Bangladesh, is not only a visual spectacle of grand idols and vibrant pandals, but also an auditory experience that accentuates the spiritual and cultural essence of the celebration. While much of the attention during the Puja season is drawn to the artistry of the idols or the grandeur of the festivities, the role of traditional music and instruments remains a deeply rooted, often overlooked aspect. The dhak, shankha, kasor ghanta, and other instruments are not merely background sounds—they form an integral part of invoking the presence of the Hindu goddess Durga and binding communities in devotion and celebration.

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The *dhak* holds a special place among all the instruments associated with Durga Puja. This large, double-sided drum, typically played using wooden sticks, is more than just an instrument—it is the pulse of the festival. The moment a *dhak* starts playing, it stirs an instant connection to Durga Puja in the minds of those who hear it. The deep, rhythmic beats of the *dhak* set the tone for the rituals, marking the different phases of the celebration—from the unveiling of the idol to the final immersion. Traditionally, *dhakis* (*dhak* players) travel from rural Bengal to cities like Dhaka during the Puja season, often passing down their skills from one generation to the next. For them, playing the *dhak* is not merely a livelihood, but an offering to the goddess herself.

The *mridangam*, a two-faced drum played with the hands, is widely used in classical and devotional music, especially in bhajans and kirtans dedicated to Durga. In contrast, the *khol*, which has a similar structure but a more conical shape, produces sharper, higher-pitched tones, adding complexity to the rhythmic patterns in Puja performances. The *dholok*, a smaller two-headed drum, is commonly played, and its portability makes it a popular choice for accompanying informal singing sessions or traditional dance performances during the festival.

The *duggi*, a small hand-played drum, is frequently used to add faster-paced, energetic beats to the Puja atmosphere. It is typically played in tandem with the *tabla* or *mridanga*, giving a sharper, more rhythmic depth to the ensemble. The *khamak*, a tensioned instrument that can create modulated sounds through string manipulation, adds a playful, almost melodic element to the percussion section of Puja performances. The



DESIGN: DOWEL BISWAS

Blowing the *shankha* is believed to purify the environment and call the goddess to manifest her presence. The piercing, resonant sound of the conch serves as a clarion call for the divine, cutting through the noise of daily life to remind people of the sacred moment. Traditionally, blowing the *shankha* requires significant skill. The *shankha* is not merely a decorative object, but a functional instrument with deep religious significance. In many households, it is blown not just during Durga Puja but in daily prayers, symbolising auspicious beginnings and the removal of negative energies. During this festival, the sound of the *shankha* is often accompanied by ululation, a high-pitched sound made by

and other ritual instruments have the power to cleanse the environment and the mind. The continuous, high-pitched ringing of the *kasor ghanta* is believed to dispel negative energy and bring clarity to the proceedings.

Any given discussion of traditional Indian percussions would be incomplete without mentioning the *tabla*. Though not always associated directly with Durga Puja rituals, the *tabla* often finds its place in musical performances and cultural programmes held during the festival. Its rapid, intricate rhythms bring

a sense of classical grandeur to the proceedings. Despite the central role these



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

khamak is known for its quirky, pitch-altering capabilities, and its sound often punctuates the more serious rhythms of other percussion instruments, giving a unique texture to the overall auditory experience.

The *khonjori* is a small frame drum with jingles, played with one hand while the other manipulates the tension of the drum head. Its distinct, sharp sounds accompany folk and devotional songs during Durga Puja, particularly in dance sequences like the *Dhunuchi Naach*. The instrument's light, cheerful timbre contrasts beautifully with the heavier beats of the *dhak* and *mridanga*, creating a balanced and dynamic auditory experience.

The *shankha*, or conch shell, is yet another iconic sound associated with Durga Puja, particularly during the performance of *arti* (Hindu ritual) and other religious rituals.

women to express joy and invoke blessings. Together, these sounds create an immersive experience of spiritual and communal unity, as the sharp tones of the *shankha* and ululation contrast with the deep, resonant beats of the *dhak*.

Another key instrument is the *kasor ghanta* (a type of brass bell), often used during the *pushpanjali* (flower offering) and *arti*. The steady, rhythmic ringing of these bells creates a hypnotic, meditative atmosphere, helping devotees focus on their prayers. In the hands of a skilled pujari (priest), the bell becomes an instrument of synchronisation, setting the rhythm for the offering of flowers, the lighting of lamps, and the chanting of mantras. The significance of these sounds in Hindu rituals is well-documented. According to ancient scriptures, the vibrations produced by bells

traditional instruments play in Durga Puja, there are concerns that their importance is fading in the face of modern musical trends. Increasingly, the soundscapes of Durga Puja pandals are being dominated by film songs, remixed tracks, and high-powered sound systems. While this brings a certain level of entertainment, it also risks diluting the traditional auditory experiences that have defined the festival for centuries.

It is crucial to not only celebrate the visual grandeur of Puja, but also to recognise and honour the auditory traditions that bring Durga Puja to life. Whether you are a devotee, a cultural enthusiast, or simply a curious observer, the next time you hear the rhythmic beats of the *dhak* or the resonating call of the *shankha*, remember that these sounds are more than just noise—they are the heartbeat of the festival, echoing through generations.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
CTRL



iScreen
Chokro



Hoichoi
Kaberi



Amazon Prime
Killer Heat



Disney plus
Rivals



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Monday Open Mic
October 14 | 8pm
The Attention Network



Shorot Shondhay: Gaan Kobita
October 19 | 6pm
Jatra Biroti



Gonojowar concert
October 18 | 4pm
Hatirjheel Amphitheatre



1-MINUTE REVIEW

'CTRL' as a modern cautionary tale of AI and social media

The notion of the recently dropped Netflix film *CTRL*, starring Ananya Panday, is captivating. The story takes place in real time, with everything we witness confined to the screen of Nella Awasthi's (played by Ananya) laptop or phone.

Director Vikramaditya Motwane and screenwriter Avinash Sampath immerse viewers in Nella's digital world, making us feel like we're

logging in, clicking, and typing right alongside her.

In the film, Nella hands over "control of her life and happiness" to artificial intelligence (AI), asking it to "erase her ex from her life," after she is cheated on.

The film taps into what is likely the greatest fear of the modern generation: becoming entirely dependent on AI from dawn to dusk,

allowing social media to dominate our minds, thoughts, vision, and almost every aspect of life.

The first act incisively critiques social media's grip on our lives, addressing issues like privacy invasion and the commercialisation of personal experiences. It also addresses the portrayal of the loneliness that can emerge when social media is absent.

WHAT'S PLAYING

My Body Is Not Mine (Warriors Version)

Aurora's *My Body Is Not Mine (Warriors Version)* is a hauntingly beautiful anthem that delves deep into themes of autonomy and self-awareness. The ethereal vocals, signature to Aurora, float delicately over a backdrop of atmospheric instrumentation, creating a dreamlike yet powerful soundscape.

This version carries a raw, emotional weight, capturing the feeling of struggle and resilience, much like a warrior's journey. The subtle build-up in the arrangement conveys a sense of rising strength amidst vulnerability. Aurora's lyrics—both introspective and universal—speak to the complexities of reclaiming one's body and spirit.

Overall, this song offers a transcendent listening experience, making it a standout track in Aurora's discography.

