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The GODDESS Within

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DURGA PUJA

Special and Timeless

Some of my earliest childhood recollections revolve around Durga Puja food. At the household of Ashima Apu, our Hindu neighbour, I tasted some of the most delectable dishes. Ever!

For a six-year-old, the customary puja delights seemed simple compared to the regal festival food that I was accustomed to. Yet, served in the newly polished, sparkling *kasha* plates, the simplest of foods always looked different, and tasted divine.

Of course, at that age, what I loved the most were the snacks, the naroos and the moas. But, still, it is the vegetarian platter that I so fondly remember, and what I miss the most. At our neighbour's household, they had mastered cooking a different version of the same food that we consumed every day. The daal had a punch of its own, as did the niramish. I can easily attribute it to the addition of panch phoron in the mix, but that would be an oversimplification of matters.

Even the simplest of luchies, which I now realise was deep fried in a generous bath of ghee, tasted divine. Despite my relentless attempt to recreate that very flavour, the aroma, and the plating, I have failed to recreate the puja vibe.

Come Puja season, Bangladesh Television would telecast Durga Puja specials. The vivid visuals of the story of how Durga overcame the power of the evil Mahishasura left a deep impact on my young mind, and till this day, serve as a reference to the undying battle between good and evil. And the face of Durga instilled in me an idea of beauty that resonates in my heart after so many decades.

Every day, in the morning and the evenings, a deep, loud sound of the conch shell comes floating in the air, but from a different Hindu household. For some reason, it takes me back to the late 1980s. Life back then was perhaps simpler, but not necessarily better. Ashima Apu left Shantinagar decades ago. We maintained good relations for many decades, but as things are, even the strongest relationships often fade with the test of time.

Life teaches us that things change and not always for the better. "*Agey ki shundor din kataitum*" is a line from a popular song, but it is not a reality for us. We are masters of our own destiny, and we can and should take it upon ourselves to make our own future.

Sharodiyo Shubhechcha!
By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
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Model: Sunerah
Styling & Fashion Direction: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Wardrobe: Kumudini
Jewellery: Shoilee by Tahmina Shaily
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#PERSPECTIVE

In the heart of Dhaka, Durga comes home

In a temple that has stood tall for centuries, amidst economic strain and societal cracks, priests dressed in plain dhotis chant ancient mantras not for power, but for peace. They decorate the Devi not with opulence, but with devotion. They ask not for wealth, but for wisdom. And in doing so, they keep something sacred alive — not just at the Dhakeshwari Temple, but in the country itself.

"The prices have gone up… But so has our spirit"

On a quiet afternoon under the fading September sun, the echo of hammering idols and the scent of incense fuse in the courtyards of the Temple. This is not just another festival. For the priests, for the devotees, and for a country carrying invisible burdens, Durga Puja this year feels both heavier and holier.

Milon Chakraborty folds his hands, his voice unshaken but weary. "The prices of fruits, flowers… everything is higher than last year. And not just a little. A lot." It's not just the economy. "Still," he adds, "we try our best to make sure everything goes smoothly. That everyone who comes here sees beauty, not burden."

His words are simple, yet steeped in resilience. Even in the face of rising costs, the priests do not talk of cutting corners. They speak of adjustments. A five-taka incense stick is smaller now. Even the ten-taka item has shrunk, but it still lights the same flame.

This quiet surrender to the times, without complaint or drama, is perhaps the real puja.

When the Mother comes on an elephant

According to Rajib Chakraborty, Maa's arrival has already begun: "From the 27th, Bodhon will begin. Mother will come riding the elephant this year."

His tone carries both joy and alertness. "But the situation in the country is not like before. People need to be more careful now, especially at night." There's no denial of what's happening in the margins of the celebration. "Idols are being vandalised in some places," he says, almost in a whisper. "We see it in the news. It hurts us. Our puja is not just for ourselves. It is for the well-being of all."

So, they continue the rituals. Not because everything is perfect, but because they believe that something sacred must be preserved, no matter how unkind the world feels.

Bodhon: Waking the Goddess, waking ourselves

Priest Dharma Das Chattopadhya recalls the story of Bodhon with a certain gravity. "When the goddess was found asleep beneath the Bel tree, it was not just a moment of myth. It was a metaphor."

He pauses, then leans closer. "Even the gods could not find her in heaven or hell. They found her as a little girl, sleeping under a dusty saree."

And perhaps that's what this puja is about this year — waking up what's hidden within us. The forgotten tenderness. The neglected hope. The inner 'Sur' that must rise to silence the 'Asur'.

He shares that during Sandhi Puja, performed at the juncture of Ashtami and Navami, symbolic sacrifices are made. "But we don't sacrifice goats here. We offer pumpkins, bananas… something softer." It's a telling choice—violence is substituted with nourishment. Conflict is replaced with care.

"We pray for good sense, not gold"

What does a priest ask for in times like these?

"Not gold. Not even a good harvest," says Milon, shaking his head. "We will pray that those with 'Asur' nature are blessed with 'Sur'. That good sense enters their hearts."

His words might sound like poetry, but there is steel in them. "A human being cannot cause harm. A true human is the creator's best creation. But those who spread anarchy, I do not consider them human. Still, we pray for them too."

The puja at Dhakeshwari is not an escape. It is a confrontation with suffering, with injustice, and with hope.

Kashful and the children of the Mother

Barun Chakraborty has served at the temple for 19 years. When asked what gives him strength even when prices soar and hate sometimes spills into their sacred space, he simply says:

"Like the kashful in autumn—white and feathery from afar, but hollow when you look closely—many people appear to be well, but are empty inside."

He doesn't say this with bitterness. It's a gentle observation. "In our prayers, we ask that everyone—empty or not—find joy and success. That their minds fill with peace."

And that is where the heart of this story lies.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Shourav Kabir

#FASHION & BEAUTY

PUJA OUTFITS that balance tradition, trend, and all-day comfort

Durga Puja has always been a canvas of colours, rituals, and reunions. Not only in spirit but also in the wardrobe. Fashion during Puja has steeped in tradition, but each year also invites subtle reinvention; a play of fabric, silhouette, and detail that makes dressing as much a part of the festivities as the rituals themselves.

For women, the quintessential red-and-white saree may forever remain symbolic of Durga Puja, but contemporary wardrobes are opening up to a broader palette. Think jewel tones that echo the richness of the season — emerald, sapphire, deep magenta — or soft pastels that lend a breezy freshness to the daytime look.

Beyond solid hues, this is also the moment for colourful prints and patterns to shine — florals, geometric weaves, and hand-painted motifs that capture the energy of the festivities. These playful yet elegant designs not only break away from monotony but also embody the spirit of joy and celebration that Durga Puja is all about.

The key to keeping it stylish yet practical lies in contrasts. A pastel saree comes alive with a bold, dark blouse. Even accessories can provide striking counterpoints (think oxidised silver against a crimson weave or pearl strands set against emerald green). Contrasts add depth to the look and ensure the outfit feels curated rather than predictable.

Equally important is fabric. Bangladesh's Puja season carries lingering humidity, making breathable weaves non-negotiable. Cotton jamdani, light muslin, and soft silk blends remain favourites for their ability to let the skin breathe, while maintaining elegance. Linen-silk or tissue fabrics add a gentle sheen without weighing down the body. These airy fabrics allow one to move from the puja rituals at dawn to pandal-hopping at night with ease, looking impeccable while staying comfortable.

While women's sarees often draw the spotlight, men's festive wardrobes have also been expanding their vocabulary. The panjabi or kurta remains the backbone, but there's a noticeable shift toward solids in strong, grounded hues: black for gravitas, beige and white for daytime serenity, and maroon or deep green for celebratory evenings. Subtle tonal embroidery, jacquard weaves, or textured fabrics that add depth to them without overwhelming.

For formal settings such as family invitations or cultural programmes, pairing kurtas with churidar pyjamas or dhotis maintains a polished, traditional aesthetic.

Casual pandal-hopping, however, allows more experimentation: kurtas styled with slim-fit trousers, straight-cut pants, or even denim for the bold.

Comfort remains key. Puja days are long, with rituals in the morning, gatherings in the afternoon, and celebrations in the evening. Breathable cottons and linens are perfect for the daytime, while silk blends or richly dyed fabrics lend sophistication after sundown.

Couples often coordinate their wardrobes, not in identical colours, but in complementary shades: a white saree with emerald borders paired with a green kurta, or a maroon Benarasi offset by a black kurta. It's a subtle way of telling a shared story.

Festive dressing is always about striking a balance between looking the part and feeling at ease. What stands out in today's Puja wardrobes is the emphasis on individuality. Some lean into heritage by choosing handwoven sarees or artisanal kurtas. Others bring in cosmopolitan twists like pairing a Benarasi with contemporary jewellery or styling a kurta with a blazer for a fusion look.

In the end, the true style statement of Puja lies not in how elaborate an outfit is, but in how confidently it is worn. Fashion during these five days is not about following rules, but about celebrating identity: personal, cultural, and timeless!

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By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: G M Sujan
Models: Mousumi Hamid, Nilanjona Nila, TM Jamil, Mehedee Hasan
Design Concept & Art direction: Biplob Saha
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BLESSED flowers *for* PUJA *days!*

Every year, Maa Durga's arrivalat her mortal abode brings happiness, prosperity, and boundless blessings to all her children. They await the auspicious arrival, and as Durga finally descends on earth, it is a cause for celebrations. According to Hindu belief, the goddess Durga's victory over the demon Mahishasura saved the universe, and mankind bows before her in reverence for her courage. No stone is left unturned in this cause, and needless to say, the spirit is infectious.

For days, sacred rituals and ceremonies are performed, bringing spiritual renewal. Amongst all the pomp and circumstance, devotion for Maa Durga is absolute as her devotees offer special prayers that reflect deep reverence, respect, and honour for their goddess.

Flowers are a crucial element of these prayers, for every bloom used in ceremonies holds special significance. In preparation for these special occasions, Hindu women plan months in advance. And why not? One must appear before their beloved goddess in their best possible appearance!

Pujaseason means traditional dressing is the order of the day. What could be a better ornament than flowers to adorn one's hair and body for the blessed occasion.

For those sacred days of Durga Puja, most begin with hibiscus, blood red in colour and symbolic of Maa's essence — fierce and fearless. On Maha Shashthi and Maha Saptami, devotees offer prayers using white flowers of all kinds, divine and sacred, just like the deities. Sheuli — fragrant and dainty — symbolises the goddess's return to earth and looks absolutely divine when worn in the hair and as jewellery. White jasmine gajras and garlands beautifully complement white cotton sarees, complete with alta on the feet!

For Ashtami, wearing a pink or white lotus in the hair looks simply spectacular as one channels Maa's grace and valour. Women cover their khopas with pink lotuses and wear garlands on their hands to truly capture the emotions.

Navami, the ninth and most important part when final prayers are offered, is a heady occasion. To reflect that spirit of joy, vibrant flowers such as marigolds and chanpa are offered for their positive energy and joyful aura. Women of the household wear long garlands of marigolds to match their bright red saree or around their wrists and necks as precious jewels, for they are no less.

And along comes Dashami. The perfect finale to commemorate Maa's departure. Red roses, hibiscus, and oleander are favoured for their strength, vitality, and beauty, and pair the "*laal paar shada saree*" beautifully. And thus, devotees channel the divine spirit of Maa Durga and carry it forward for yet another year.

By Sabrina N Bhuiyan
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#PERSPECTIVE

CELEBRATING DURGA PUJA

The people working behind the scenes

The grandeur of Durga Puja unfolds before the public eye with dazzling lights, rhythmic chants, and lines of devotees dressed in their finest. However, well before the first dhak is struck or the first flower is offered, the festival begins quietly – offstage, in alleyways and courtyards, where those who remain unnamed put it all together. Their work does not make it to the television screens. Their voices don't reach the podium. But their labour shapes the very body, breath, and soul of the celebration.

Take the dhakis, for example. "We're only three of us this year," one of them, wishing to remain anonymous, says. "But we'll make sure the sound feels like thirty."

For a dhaki, the drumbeat is not just music — it is a call to the goddess. Their rhythm marks the shifting energy of each ritual: slow and reverent during the morning offerings, thunderous and urgent during Sandhi Puja. "We don't just play," he adds, "We speak to Ma Durga through the beat. She listens in silence. We answer in sound."

Unlike other performers, the dhakis are not part of the formal priestly circle. They sleep on mats nearby, eat whatever is offered, and play until their arms cramp. But ask them why they do it, and they will say what their fathers said before them: "It is our dharma. This is how we serve."

Along the footpath beside the temple, incense sticks lean in bunches against baskets of flowers. Their sellers work in dust and sunlight from dawn till midnight. "This week is our only hope," the seller shrugs, gesturing to the sticks. "After this, sales go back to almost nothing."

For vendors like her, Durga Puja is a miracle and a lifeline. Their profits are not massive, but the rush of customers and the shared joy in the air make it worth the long days. "Sometimes people don't even buy. They just come, ask the price, smile, and leave," he says. "I don't mind. Everyone has a right to feel festive."

She picks up a packet of incense, its label smudged. "Last year, this cost Tk 180. This year, it's still the same, but they've made it smaller. We all adjust."

And then, there are those whose hands have shaped the goddess herself, working silently for months in scattered corners of the city. The clay that binds her limbs, the straw that forms her spine, the paints that turn her gaze alive – all of it comes together through rituals older than memory.

No plaque or banner declares who built the idol. Their names are not announced when the crowd bows in reverence. Their presence lingers only in the way her fingers are shaped, the calm curve of her smile, the stance of her lion mid-roar. And once the celebrations are over, their work dissolves into the river.

These are the people who don't wear new clothes for the festival. They often miss the main moments of worship, busy adjusting lights, sweeping corners or fixing a fallen garland. But their devotion is different – it's built into the scaffolding, woven into the scent, beating beneath the drums. Without them, the goddess may still arrive, but she would be voiceless, formless, incomplete.

Durga Puja, in all its public glory, rests on invisible shoulders. It is held up not just by priests and organisers, but by those who do not ask to be seen. And perhaps that is the purest form of worship — to give, not for reward or recognition, but because something inside insists on it.

So, when you walk through the temple gates, drawn by the sound of the dhak or the shimmer of the idol, pause for a moment. Listen beyond the chants. Look behind the curtain. That's where the festival truly lives.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Shourav Kabir

#PERSPECTIVE

Heartbeat beyond the pandal

PUJA EVENINGS AT THE STALLS

The evenings of Durga Puja have a rhythm of their own. Long after the day's rituals end, streets around the pandals come alive with fairy lights, laughter, and the irresistible pull of makeshift stalls. Here, the festival finds its second home in the crisp bite of nimki, the fragrance of beli flowers, the sparkle of glass bangles, and the chatter of families weaving through the crowd.

Food has always been the soul of these gatherings, and no Puja feels complete without a nibble or two from the stalls. Pitha, murali and puri are staples, almost as ritualistic as the pushpanjali itself. Their crunch and warmth carry a nostalgia that links generations, reminding visitors of the same taste they savoured as children.

Beside them, the hot favourites, chotpoti and fuchka, pull in queues of people balancing paper plates. Two new favourites have joined the lineup in recent years: the bhel puri (Bengali style) and the chhoto fuchka, with spice levels that pack just as much punch. Given the heat, fresh lemon and sugarcane juice have their own fan-following.

But the stalls are not just about food. They are about adornment, about the festival spilling onto skin, hair, and wrists. Stacks of bangles catch the glow of fairy lights, rows of earrings dangle like tiny treasures, and clay jewellery — delicate and earthy — finds its seasonal spotlight.

Flowers, too, play their quiet but significant role. The scent of beli drifts through the crowd, carried in strings of gajra wound into hair or worn at the wrist. What was once a tradition of simple floral adornment has now evolved. Stalls selling flower crowns draw teenagers and adults alike. After all, can we really resist the urge to feel a little whimsical?

If the stalls sell objects, they also trade in memories.

Families walk in clusters, children tugging at balloons while parents choose nimki to store up. Couples stop for fuchka dates, their laughter carrying above the buzz. Friends drift from stall to stall, turning shopping into an excuse for togetherness.

People from all walks of life — Hindu, Muslim, Christian, young, old, working-class, professional — pass through the same glowing rows, proving how celebrations always stretch beyond religion into something larger: a shared celebration of community.

That is perhaps the real magic of these temporary small stalls. They are not polished, not curated, not high-fashion boutiques. They are fragile, fleeting in their own charming way. They embody the essence of Puja as a festival that is lived in the streets, open to anyone who passes by.

And just as the goddess Durga is immersed at the end, the stalls too vanish overnight. By the time the city wakes from its five-day reverie, the bright multi-coloured lights are gone, the flower crowns wilted, the plates of fuchka only a memory.

Yet, it is these moments that stay imprinted — the sound of laughter over spilt lassi, the fragrance of jasmine woven into hair, the sight of children clinging to waving their wooden toys in the air despite having Hot Wheels at home.

Durga Puja may be celebrated in the grandeur of the pandals, but its spirit is much more than that. Which often lies just outside them, in the rows of stalls where food, flowers, and friendship weave together to create a festival that belongs to everyone.

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

#FOOD & RECIPES

7 recipes that celebrate the spirit of DURGA PUJA

In this collection of seven recipes, we celebrate the spirit of Durga Puja through the flavours that unite households, generations, and memories. Each dish is more than food; it is a piece of the festival itself, carrying the essence of one of Bengal's grandest celebrations to every table.

DOI POTOL

With its creamy yoghurt-based gravy and tender pointed gourds, doi potol, reflects the subtle elegance of Puja meals. Unlike heavier festive dishes, this one offers a balance of richness and lightness, making it a favourite during Navami feasts when the heart longs for variety but the stomach seeks comfort.

Ingredients

½ cup yoghurt
1 tsp sugar
½ tbsp gram flour (besan)
6-8 black peppercorns
500g pointed gourd
½ tbsp ginger paste
3-4 green chillies
1 bay leaf
3 cloves
2-inch cinnamon stick
1 tsp turmeric powder
1 tsp red chilli powder
1 tsp cumin powder
1 tsp coriander powder
½ tsp garam masala powder
1 pinch of cardamom powder
Salt to taste
½ cup of water, for gravy
Oil for cooking

Method

For the sauce —

Add ½ cup yoghurt in a blender. Add sugar (it helps to cut the sourness of yoghurt). Add gram flour and black peppercorns. Whisk for 30 seconds until smooth. Set aside.

For the curry —

Cut both edges of all the pointed gourds. Peel the skin. Split the vegetable slightly with the help of a knife, from the sides (it should not get cut into pieces). Wash the pointed gourds and set them aside.

Heat a pan and make it completely dry. Now, add oil and wait until it gets hot. Add bay leaf, cloves, and cinnamon sticks, and let them crackle. Add the pointed gourds and cook them on medium-high flame for 2 minutes. Flip the pointed gourds and fry the other side for another 2 minutes. Add salt, and turmeric powder, and give a nice mix. Add the ginger paste.

Cook in a low flame until the raw smell goes away. Add green chillies and give a nice mix. Cover the pan and cook on low flame for another 5 minutes or until they become tender. Stir occasionally in between.

Add cumin powder, and coriander powder and give a nice mix. Cook the masala on low flame for a minute. Add the yoghurt sauce to the pan and mix it properly. Cook for a minute on low flame. Add water and give a nice stir. Cover the pan and put the flame on high until the gravy simmers. Switch off the flame and add garam masala powder and cardamom powder into the curry. Stir the masala into the curry evenly. Doi potol is ready.

MOCHAR GHONTO (BANANA FLOWER CURRY)

Cooked with patience and precision, mochar ghonto carries with it the earthy aroma of ghee and garam masala, pairing perfectly with plain rice. During Puja days, when vegetarian meals take centre stage, this

dish symbolises an offering of love that feels deeply rooted in the soil of Bengal.

Ingredients

1 medium mocha
½ cup chopped coconut
2 bay leaves
6-8 dry red chillies
½ tsp cumin seeds
2-3 clove
1-inch cinnamon stick
1 tsp turmeric powder
2 tsp red chilli powder
½ tsp cumin powder
½ tsp coriander powder
½ tsp garam masala powder
2 tbsp ghee, Salt to taste
Sugar to taste

Method

Clean and chop the mocha. Be careful while you are cleaning. Remove the leaves and tiny black stick inside the flowers. Wash and cook the flower in a pan with pinch of turmeric powder, salt, clove, cinnamon and 1 cup of water. Once flowers become tender, drain the water and keep the flower aside. Temper the hot oil with dry red chillies, bay leaves and cumin seeds. Don't forget to add a little sugar in the smoking hot oil. It will give the dish a nice caramelised colour. When they start to crackle, add pre-cooked banana flowers and mix well. Sprinkle turmeric powder, red chilli powder, cumin powder, coriander powder and give it a good stir. After 2 minutes add coconut and continue mixing. Now add garam masala powder and ghee. Mix well. Mochar Ghonto is ready to be served with steaming-hot plain rice.

DAAL

No Puja spread is truly complete without daal, as it ties together the many flavours on the plate, offering both comfort and balance. During Puja, when bhog is shared among friends, family, and strangers alike, daal becomes more than food. It is a symbol of community and togetherness.

Ingredients

¼ cup maskalai daal
¼ cup cholar daal
¼ cup moong daal
¼ cup masoor daal
¼ cup arhar daal
¼ cup chopped onion
1 tbsp ginger-garlic paste
½ tsp turmeric powdered
1 tsp coriander powder
1 tsp cumin seed
3 pieces green chilli
2 pieces large tomatoes
2 tbsp ghee
2 tbsp coriander leaves
A pinch of asafoetida powder (hing)
Salt to taste

Method
Mix, pick,
rinse several times
and soak the lentils in
water for 2 hours. In a deep pan add mixed lentils, salt, turmeric powder and water, cover the pan and cook for 30-40 minutes. Stir the daal occasionally. Add some more water if needed. In a separate pan, pour ghee and let it heat up. Carefully add a pinch of *hing* and cumin seeds. When cumin is brown, add ginger-garlic paste, sauté well; then add onions and sauté again till brown in colour.

Now add tomatoes, green chillies, coriander powder and cook well till oil separates from the mixture. Now just whisk the *daal* slightly and pour it in the pan. Mix well, add some water if needed and cook on low heat for 15 minutes. Adjust the consistency of the daal to a creamy texture. When it is done remove the pan. Garnish with coriander leaves and serve it with rice or *roti*.

CHINGRI MALAI CURRY

Chingri malai curry, with its luxurious blend of coconut milk and prawns, is a crown jewel of Puja feasting. It is the kind of curry that makes conversations linger, plates refill, and memories last well beyond Puja. Its richness embodies the indulgent spirit of the season, a time when joy is best measured in abundance.

Ingredients
10 large size prawn/galda chingri (medium-sized shrimps can also be used)
2 whole cinnamons
2 tsp green chilli paste
8 green cardamoms
500ml liquid milk
5-6 cloves
300g onion paste
1 tsp ginger paste
1 tsp garlic paste
1 tsp garam masala powder
1 tsp turmeric powder
½ tsp red chilli powder
1 tsp ghee
1 tsp salt
200ml mustard oil
Masala paste —
1 tsp mustard seed (black)
1 tsp moury
10 cashew nuts
200 ml yoghurt
For the gravy —
300g grated coconut
500ml hot water

Method
Masala paste —
Take a blender. Add mustard seed, moury, nuts, and yoghurt. Make a smooth paste.

For the gravy —

Add coconut and hot water in a blender and whisk for a couple of minutes. Pour the contents into a bowl with a fine strainer, to extract the milk. Press with a spoon on the coconut shreds so that all the milk is strained.

The curry —

Prawns with shells work best for chingri malai curry. Wash them thoroughly and devein each and every prawn before cooking. Now, rub some salt, chilli powder and turmeric powder and leave those for 5 minutes.

Heat oil in a deep vessel. Fry prawns one by one without tempering the shell on medium flame until the prawns turn pink in colour. After straining the prawns from the hot oil, add half of the ghee. Temper the ghee-oil mixture with cinnamon, green cardamoms, and cloves. Add onion paste. Cook for 3-4 minutes or until the paste is cooked properly and turned pinkish-brown in colour. Add garlic-ginger paste and green chilli paste. Cook for 2-3 minutes.

Now, add turmeric powder, sugar, salt, red chilli powder, and masala paste into the mixture. Cook for 5-7 minutes on low flame until oil separates from the mixture. If required add 1 tsp water in between. Add Coconut Milk to the mixture and mix properly. Add liquid milk and bring it to a boil. Finally, add fried prawns to the gravy.

Cover the pan with a lid and cook for 5-6 minutes on low flame until the gravy thickens to a medium consistency. Add garam masala powder and ghee to chingri malai curry and mix properly.

STEAMED HILSHA WITH BOTTLE GOURD LEAVES (LAU PATAE BHAPA ILISH)

Ingredients
6 pcs bottle gourd leaves (whole)
6 pcs fish fillets (hilsha)
1 tbsp mustard seeds
5 green chillies
¼ cup mustard oil
½ tsp turmeric powder
2 tbsp coconut paste (optional)
Salt to taste

Method
Grind mustard seeds and green chillies into a paste. Marinate the fish fillets with mustard paste, salt, turmeric powder, coconut paste, and a dash of mustard oil. Place the marinated fish on a bottle gourd leaf and wrap it securely. Steam the wrapped fish in a steamer or pressure cooker for 10-15 minutes. Serve the fish in the leaf parcel with steamed rice.

KHEERSHA PULI

No Puja is complete without sweets, and kheersha puli carries with it the warmth of homemade indulgence. Crispy on the outside with a molten heart of kheersha, these little pockets are often made in batches, their aroma filling the kitchen with festive cheer.

Ingredients
1 cup rice flour
1 cup jaggery
1½ cup water
1 cup kheersha
1/8 tsp salt
Oil for deep fry

Method
Boil water and add jaggery and salt to it. Add rice flour to boiling water and keep stirring with wooden spoon to form a firm but soft and not sticky dough. Adjust accordingly. Kneed well for about 3-4 minutes. Take a portion of the dough and roll it out as thick tortilla. Cut out circles with a cookie cutter. Place a small amount of kheersha on each circle. Repeat the process with the remaining dough. Brush the edges with water and seal tightly to form a semi-circle. Heat oil in a pan. Fry the kheersha puli in medium heat until the dough is cooked through and golden. Serve warm or at room temperature

PERA SONDESH

Simple yet elegant, this is the quintessential sweet that embodies Puja hospitality. Whether offered to guests dropping in after pandal-hopping or served to children waiting eagerly after anjali, its melt-in-the-mouth texture makes it a universal favourite.

Ingredients
2 cups of milk powder
½ cup milk
½ cup sugar
2 tbsp ghee
¼ tsp cardamom powder
Pistachios for garnish

Method
Heat milk in a pan. Add sugar and mix until dissolved. Stir in milk powder. Mix and mash on low flame. Add ghee and cardamom powder. Turn off the heat and mix well until smooth and soft. Let it cool. Create round balls with the mix, press down in the centre with your thumb, and place a pistachio in the centre before serving. Enjoy.

— **LS Desk**
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

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#FASHION & BEAUTY

Why women still choose gold and golden colour over everything else

Gone are the days when gold was considered flashy or tacky. The younger generations that dictate the contemporary fashion scene seem to have taken the tired, yellow metal and breathed new verve and vitality into it. Their audacious use of gold in modern lookbooks has made it a whole vibe of new-age self-expression and fashion — one that holds strong to their roots, yet is fresh, bold and unapologetic.

A recent study has shown that, given a choice, two-thirds of all women will choose gold or gold coloured jewellery over silver or other contemporary jewellery colours and metals. Some of the reasons for this preference have their roots in tradition, while others are simply a result of modern calculations and practicality.

Over centuries, gold has symbolised wealth and luxury. Studies prove that wearing the metal or the colour makes women feel powerful, beautiful, and most importantly, valued.

"It really makes me feel like I am worth my weight in gold," said Samarah Hasib, a young MBA student. "I can't think of any other metal that makes me feel so much like a million bucks!"

A metal that is as much of an investment as an adornment, gold is prioritised by women for purposes other than simple decoration.

"I never liked wearing yellow gold much when I was young," confided Reema Ajmain, a school teacher. "I started buying and collecting gold pieces as an investment more than anything else."

Reema mentioned that over time, the metal grew on her, and before she knew it, she was looking forward to choosing and wearing gold for herself!

The benefit of the golden colour is that it goes well with a range of skin tones, from dusky to fair, and this makes it one of the top picks for women.

"Gold may not be affordable in all circumstances," shares Karishma Alam, a pre-school teacher at a renowned English medium school. "But does that deter me from wearing my favourite colour – gold tinted? Of course not. The trinkets available today are equally amazing and would in no circumstance look any less than real gold. So, hail to golden coloured metallic jewelry. Life Savers!"

The golden colour goes well with a semi-casual look, too. Think blue jeans, a white shirt, and a simple geometric pendant resting on the neck. Throw on some chunky gold bracelets or ditch the necklace for statement gold earrings. Feel free to switch up the look as you wish — the unique colour makes you shine anyway!

"I pick up a gold or a golden accessory each time I wear something with a V-neck," declared Rubina Majid, a homemaker. "Small, delicate jewellery on my neck is a pick-me-up for my OOTD that just never fails."

For the quintessential Indian subcontinental woman, however, gold jewellery is particularly important when it comes in traditional designs or as heirloom pieces. Contemporary jewellery has its charm, but nothing beats a gold and pearl sitahar or hathphool on a bride. Gold bangles still hold a special place in a Bangali girl's heart and the appeal of a classic gold jhapta remains unparalleled.

"I feel like we have reimagined jewellery in so many different ways that we can even make traditional gold look fresh and in vogue," mentions Nadia Hassan, a stylist for a soon-to-be-launched fashion start-up. "Sentimental value is no doubt a factor in why we love heirloom jewellery but I truly think that if styled well, even loud, yellow gold can look bold, rather than in-your-face ostentatious."

Gold is far more than a glittering adornment; it is tradition, investment, sentiment, and style woven into one. From heirloom pieces to bold modern statements, the metal continues to evolve with each generation, proving that its timeless charm. But, just in case it's not affordable – no needs to worry – there's always the gold tinted alternatives.

By Munira Fidai
Jewellery: Shoilee by Tahmina Shaily