

#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.

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Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

