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Welcome Address from the Joint Convenors

Dear Friends

After another year of wait, the time has come to greet you all and to welcome you to the worship of Goddess Durga. Regardless of religion let us we all prey to her divine power to give us the strength to overcome evils and to ensure peace, happiness and tranquillity for all throughout the world.

We are now stepping into 28th years of celebration and get-together. Achievement of this number of year of festivities is significant and has been made possible by every member's support, planning, contribution and advice throughout the year. We thank you all for your continuing support and help and appreciate in addition the contribution from the sponsors, advertisers, members of the Milton Hall Group and Elsecar Heritage Centre over the years.

We are grateful to the Mayor and the Mayoress of Barnsley for their attendance of our celebration and encouragement.

Wish you all the best

Dr Arup Kumar Rana **Dr Subhasis Duttagupta**

On behalf of Sheffield & District Durgotsab and Cultural Committee

Editor's Note:

Every year, during 'Sharat Kaal' or autumn, Bengali communities from all over the world come together to celebrate Durga Puja – an occasion associated with blue skies and puff-ball clouds, kash phool, dhak and dhuno that gives a familiar tug to every Bengali heart, and brings home the nostalgia of those wonderful childhood memories of Durga Puja back at home.

On this auspicious occasion we are immensely proud to present the first edition of our brochure 'Kash phool', the publication of which has been made possible with the help and support of all our well-wishers and contributors.

We apologise in advance for any errors made unknowingly and sincerely hope that our members and well-wishers continue to support us in the years to come.

Adwaita Ghosh

Arnab Kundu

Puja Schedule

<u>Friday</u> <u>7 October 2016</u> Durga Puja Maha Shasthi	Shasthi puja, Puspanjali, Arati & Prasad	6.00pm
<u>Saturday</u> <u>8 October 2016</u> Maha Saptami	Puja, Anjali & Prosad Sandhya Aroti & Prosad	12 noon 6.30 pm
<u>Sunday</u> <u>9 October 2016</u> Maha Ashtami	Puja, Anjali, & Prosad Sandhi Puja, Aroti & Prosad	12 noon 6.30 pm
<u>Monday</u> <u>10 October 2016</u> Maha Nabami	Puja, Anjali, Balidan & Prosad Sandhya Aroti & Prosad	12 noon 6.30pm
<u>Tuesday</u> <u>11 October 2016</u> Bijoya Dashami	Dashami Puja, Bisarjan Sindur Khela & Prasad	1:00 pm
<u>Saturday</u> <u>15 October 2016</u> Lakshmi Puja	Puja, Puspanjali & Prasad	6:00 pm
<u>Saturday</u> <u>29 October 2016</u> Kali Puja	Puja, Puspanjali Arati, Bisarjan & Prasad	5:00 pm
<u>Saturday</u> <u>4 February 2017</u> Saraswati Puja	Puja, Puspanjali Arati, Bisarjan & Prasad	12:30 pm
<u>Saturday</u> <u>22 April 2017</u> Nababarsha	Nababarsha, variety entertainment & dinner	6:00pm
<u>Sunday</u> <u>14 May 2017</u> AGM	Meeting and election of office bearers	3:00 pm

WORKING COMMITTEE FOR PUJA & CULTURAL PROGRAMME 2016 – 2017

Joint Convenors

Dr S. Duttagupta & Dr A. Rana

Joint General Secretaries

Dr K. Raychaudhuri & Dr M. DebBarman

Joint Cultural Secretaries

Mrs S. Samanta & Mrs M. Datta

Joint IT & Communication Secretaries

Mr S. Basu & Mrs A. Pradhan

Advisors

Mrs R. Rana, Dr S. Mitra, Mr S. Samanta &
Mr M. Bhadra

Priests

Mr A. Bhadhuri, Mr M. Roy & Dr A. Banerjee

Joint Public Relations Secretaries

Mr I. Datta & Mr P. Chongder

Joint Treasurers

Dr P. Datta & Dr A. Das

Joint Health & Safety Secretaries

Dr S. Chatterjee & Mrs D. Dutta

Accountant

Mr S. Sen

Joint Brochure Secretaries

Dr A. Ghosh & Mr A. Kundu

Puja Management

Mrs P. Garai, Mrs M. Mukherjee, Mrs E.
Pramanik, Mrs P. Roy, Mrs D. Dutta

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE 2016 – 2017

Dr Arun & Mrs Karabi Banerjee

01482 657189

Dr Amit & Mrs Sangeeta Banerjee

01734 348572

Dr Nilajan & Mrs Julia Basu

01226 202808

Mrs Shanta Basu

01522 512902

Mr Samujjwal & Mrs Sinjini Basu

01709 327681

Dr Manotosh & Dr (Mrs) Sipra Bhadra

01724 856567

Mr Amit & Mrs Sarojini Bhadhuri

01302 320573

Dr Kamal & Mrs Swapna Chakraborty

01623 515378

Dr Ranjit & Dr (Mrs) Bijoyalakshmi Chatterjee

01325 468847

Dr Shyamal & Dr (Mrs) Sunanda Chatterjee

01623 792467

Mr Pradip & Mrs Saswati Chongder

01142 453502

Dr Abhay & Dr (Mrs) Lopa Das

0113 2380311

Dr Arun & Mrs Jayashree Das

01709 360712

Mr Rajarshi & Mrs Sudipa Das

01226 419788

Dr Prabal & Mrs Moushumi Datta

01924 200374

Dr Dipak & Mrs Jaba Datta

01142 366973

Dr Manas DebBarman & Dr (Mrs) Anindita
Biswas

01924 362077

Dr Ahin and Mrs Dipali Dutta

01709 892575

Dr Ashish & Dr (Mrs) Tapati Dutta

01482 655138

Mr Indranil Dutta & Mrs Gurleen Popli

01142 295302

Dr Subhasis & Mrs Sutopa Duttagupta

01302 300335

Dr Prosenjit & Mrs Anuradha Giri

01909 970661

Dr Chinmoy and Dr Kabita Chaudhuri	01909 485213
Dr Subrata & Dr (Mrs) Anuradha Ghosh	01724 344953
Dr Ajit & Mrs Priti Garai	01724 874957
Dr Panchajanya & Mrs Baishali Ghatak	01522 685991
Dr Sanjay & Mrs Indrila Ghoshal	01302 833277
Dr Hirok & Dr (Mrs) Gita Haldar	0208 3687680
Mr Arnab Kundu & Mrs Amrita Pradhan	01142 473091
Dr Anil & Mrs Sumitra Mandal	01924 252016
Dr Satyendu & Mrs Reena Mitra	01226 240620
Dr Shibopriyo & Dr (Mrs) Manjushree Mukherjee	01623 624824
Dr Tapan and Mrs Rani Mukherjee	01709 365296
Dr Victor & Dr Sushmita Palit	01422 359327

Dr Adwaita & Mrs Sudipta Ghosh	01246 812177
Dr Pradip & Mrs Eshita Pramanik	01405 817885
Dr Arup & Mrs Rama Rana	01405 764075
Dr Kaustabh & Dr (Mrs) Dina Raychaudhuri	01226 383990
Mr Mritunjoy & Mrs Purnima Roy	01142 309188
Mr Arghya Sadhukhan	
Mr Priyolal & Mrs Rani Saha	01246 568351
Dr Sisir & Mrs Dipa Saha	01302 537719
Mr Sandip & Mrs Sudipta Samanta	01709 301956
Mr Subir Sen & Dr (Mrs) Sangeeta Ray	01142 455158
Dr Asoke & Mrs Archana Seth	01405 812636
Dr Rajpal and Mrs V.Singh	01226 245100

The puja committee acknowledges following members who kindly sponsored one of the puja days and miscellaneous contribution last year.

- ❖ Drs Ranjeet & Bijoylakhsmi Chatterjee for sponsoring Ashtami Puja
- ❖ Dr Pradip & Mrs. Eshita Pramanik for sponsoring Kali Puja
- ❖ Drs Subrata & Anuradha Ghosh for sponsoring Nabami Puja
- ❖ Drs Shiboproyo & Manjushree Mukhopadhyay for sponsoring Kali Puja
- ❖ Mrs Rangajaba Dutta for sponsoring flowers during Puja
- ❖ Dr Prosenjit & Mrs Anuradha Giri for sponsoring Kali Puja

The committee thanks Mr Saptarshi Mukherjee from Lincoln currently not an executive committee member for arranging the advertisement from Bank Of Baroda, UK, on page 2.

Minutes of AGM of Sheffield & District Durgotsab & Cultural Committee

Date: 15th May 2016

Venue: Milton Hall, Elsecar Heritage Centre, Barnsley

Attended By: Dr. Prabal Datta (PD), Dr. Satyendu Mitra (SM), Mrs. Reena Mitra, Dr. Kaustabh Raychaudhuri (KR), Dr. Manash DebBarman (MD), Dr. Ahin Dutta (AD), Mrs. Dipali Dutta, Dr. Arup Kr. Rana (AR), Mrs. Rama Rana (RR), Dr. Asoke Sett (AS), Mrs. Archana Sett, Dr. Subhashish Dutttagupta (SD), Mrs. Sutopa Dutttagupta, Dr. Shyamal Chatterjee (SC), Dr. Abhay K. Das (AKD), Dr. Pradip Pramanik (PP), Mrs. Esita Pramanik, Mrs. Sudipta Samanta (SS), Mr. Amit Bhadhuri (AB), Mrs. Sarojini Bhadhuri, Mr. Indranil Dutta (ID), Mr. Samujjwal Basu (SB), Mr. Subir Sen (SUS), Mr. Pradip Chongder.

Apologies received: Dr. Nilanjan & Mrs. Julia Basu, Dr. Ajit & Mrs. Priti Garai, Dr. Shibopriyo & Dr. (Mrs.) Manjushree Mukherjee, Dr. Anil & Mrs. Sumitra Mandal, Dr. Arnab Kundu & Mrs. Amrita Pradhan, Mr. Mrityunjoy & Mrs. Purnima Roy, Mr. Sandip Samanta, Dr. Anindita Biswas, Dr. Arun & Mrs. Karabi Banerjee, Dr. Adwaita Ghosh, Dr. Amit Banerjee.

Minutes recorded by: Dr. Manash DebBarman

Convener's address: The meeting was opened by RR, who welcomed all committee members and thanked them for attending the AGM. Several veteran committee members have suffered ill health in the last year and RR joined all committee members, to wish them a speedy recovery and healthy future. RR then invited AR to chair the meeting.

Chairman's address: AR thanked all committee members for their kind co-operation in organising the various puja related events in the last year. The following **new paid members** were welcomed formally into the committee: Mr. Indranil Dutta/Mrs. Gurleen Popli, Dr. Arnab Kundu/ Mrs. Amrita Pradhan, Mr. Subir Sen/ Mrs. Sangita Ray, Mr. Amit Bhadhuri/ Mrs. Sarojini Bhadhuri, Mr. Victor Palit/ Mrs. Sushmita Palit, Mr. Arghya Sadhukhan, Mr. Pradip Chongder/ Mrs. Saswati Chongder, Dr. Amit Banerjee/ Mrs. Sangeeta Banerjee, Dr. Panchajanya Ghatak/ Mrs. Baishali Ghatak, Dr. Sanjay Ghoshal/ Mrs. Indrila Ghoshal, Mr. Rajarshi Das/ Mrs. Sudipa Das. AR then invited Treasurers to submit their report.

Treasurer's address: The Treasurers' report was submitted before the committee by Joint Treasurers SM and PD. Members welcomed the fact that after several years of running a deficit, last year we finally recorded a surplus in the funds after accounting for income against expenditure. Members acknowledged the kind contribution of certified accountant SUS, who has offered his accounting services but declined to accept any remuneration in return. Members went on to reflect on the accounted results and explored ways of making further savings on annual costs. The reduced income from non-members has been partly offset by shortening the puja by one day and a modest reduction of hall rent.

RR suggested that the membership subscription should be increased. Several senior members supported this view. SD remembered membership fees have remained £100 per family per annum since at least 2007, when he had become a member. This point was debated again after discussing other matters. SM and PP were against increasing members' subscription. Finally, it was agreed on basis of majority opinion, that **annual membership subscription will be increased from this year to £111 per family pa.**

AB suggested **non-members should be urged to contribute more money.** KR, PD, MD favoured making non-members pay at least £20 per family to attend all durga puja days. ID opposed the idea of forcing non-members to pay. He felt non-members often don't know what amount is expected from them when they pay. MD and PD agreed this situation is not uncommonly encountered. SUS suggested adopting a system of coupons for non-members. AR was told by some non-members in the past that they can't afford to pay £20, as they go 'puja hopping' in different venues on different days, and thus end

up with a substantial expenditure. AKD and SM were aware of several non-members had already contributed £70 -80 for their entire family by attending various puja events. Such families should be strongly encouraged to become paid members to enjoy the full benefits of membership. MD informed members of his attempts to use carefully drafted email invites this year, where guests were encouraged to contribute generously. MD also suggested senior members could use public address system in puja hall to solicit contributions from reluctant guests. PD took on the idea of ID and proposed the idea of segregating members from non-members at the gate, which might make it easier to collect minimum £20 from non-members. The website and social media platforms could also be used to encourage non-members to pay more. SB highlighted that many people don't carry much cash on their persons, because of the ever increasing use and convenience of payment cards. As there are no cash machines in the vicinity of Milton Hall, it becomes difficult to urge people to return with cash, if they turn up at the gate just carrying their cards. **SB and SUS have agreed to jointly explore the possibility of tapping into alternative payment methods like 'Paypal' and card readers.**

The car parking arrangements and the resulting expenditure was the subject of another lengthy debate. AKD felt, in line with other puja organisers, our puja committee should also take no responsibility for cars parked by attendees. Several members however felt that ladies felt insecure while walking to and from their parked cars. AKD suggested people could drop off ladies and children at the puja hall door step before going on to park their cars. SD and SM clarified that if we do not pay for parking, the Elsecar car park will not remain accessible after 5pm, the light will remain switched off and the security guard will not be present. It was finally agreed on consensus that the committee will continue to pay for car parking arrangements, but with the following reductions: Parking will be made available only for Durga puja and Kali puja, between 8pm to 11pm on these days. Laxmi puja attracts a limited number of attendees only, most of whom will be able to park in close proximity to Milton Hall. Saraswati puja and Nabobarsha celebrations are held during daylight hours mostly.

PD highlighted the **overall reduction in expenditure** in organising the puja this year. Members acknowledged the efforts made by MD, SD, KR and PD in accounting for our stocks and ordering supplies judiciously. It was agreed not to 'bulk buy' and store spices and condiments, as these have been subject to significant wastage due to duplication and expiry dates. From this year, cooking teams will determine their requirement of spices along with perishable items and buy them *ad hoc*. The bulk stocks of edible oil, rice, pulses along with disposable cups, plates, etc will be maintained as before. Cultural secretary SS was given credit for securing external artists for cultural events at reduced expenses. Members thanked AKD for arranging food for Nabobarsha event at a total cost of £485 only, for feeding an unprecedentedly high turnout of 193 guests. SD and SM acknowledged that the food was probably not sufficient in quantity, but it was managed by serving out to guests in the most efficient way possible. It was agreed that sweets will be purchased in a way which allows for variety on different days. Also large pieces of sweets will be cut into suitable sizes before serving.

Although the **Nabobarsha event** was free of cost for guests this year, members unanimously agreed that keeping this event free will not be sustainable from next year. Following a debate, it was decided

that in 2017 Nabobarsha event will be free entry, but those **non-members** who wish **to have food will have to purchase coupons @ £5 per adult above 16y age**. SD highlighted that during the estimation of headcount for cultural events, external drama and dance group members will need to be accounted for purposes of catering. MD made an observation that during Nabobarsha, there was no regulation over the amount of tea being served. Guests ended up helping themselves to unlimited amount of tea throughout the afternoon and evening. In future, tea service may have to be limited to designated tea breaks/ interval. A system of coupons for tea was considered, but not deemed suitable for our set up. Considering the obvious success of external catering during Nabobarsha, SUS asked why external catering should not replace the tedious process of preparing food in-house during puja celebrations too.

KR replied that the type of food prepared during puja can only be made in-house. Members acknowledged that a lot of fun during puja events is in the process of preparing the food collectively. SM closed the debate on treasurers' report by thanking MD, PD, SD, AKD and SS for collectively contributing to the financial savings this year.

Cultural secretary's address: SS reported, as Dr. Manotosh Bhadra was absent. SS thanked everyone for their participation in making the cultural events successful. Although in-house drama in previous year helped by keeping costs down, external drama group turned out to be very popular this year. In response to a debate on whether any external hired help for labour is required during Nabobarsha and similar cultural evenings, SS confirmed that the external help was vital and she was certain that the nature of the tasks meant that our members would not be able to do them. However, it was agreed that such help would be restricted to one person only.

Brochure secretary's report: AKD and PD reported, in absence of Sandip Samanta. The brochure has become smaller in volume because of lack of suitable and timely contributions. Members need to forward their articles ideally by the end of June. AKD stated that for submissions in Bengali, contributors should try to type scripts in Bengali font and submit in PDF format, to reduce the burden on the brochure editors. PD highlighted that although the cost of printing the brochure goes up with the increase in volume, with targeted efforts to attract more adverts by the new dedicated public relations team this year, we should be able to accommodate all suitable article submissions.

Secretary's address: SD thanked members for their hard work through the year to make all the events successful. He went on to explain the circumstances which led Mr. Martyn Hall (Administrator for Elsecar centre) to get confused about the puja dates, which resulted in Milton Hall becoming unavailable for all the required dates for our Puja celebrations. Mr. Hall was profoundly apologetic about this situation and tried to help us by offering an alternative venue (Rockingham Community Centre). Unfortunately, as this alternative option did not meet our requirements to host the Durga puja, the puja committee had no choice but to stick to Milton Hall, change the dates and reduce the durga puja celebrations by one day. Members acknowledged that this was indeed an exceptional situation resulted from miscommunication, and were satisfied after Mr. Hall reassured the committee that this situation should not occur again in future. Although dates for 2016-17 puja calendar were obtained from the internet and forwarded to Mr. Hall well in advance, it was noted that the dates for Lakshmi puja, Saraswati puja and Nabobarsha decided in the AGM today were different. SD will contact Mr. Hall without delay and confirm availability of Milton Hall for the new dates.

Dates for 2016-17 events: The dates for puja were agreed by members at the AGM.

SM informed the members that Mr. Mrityunjoy Roy has expressed his inability to perform the puja this year, on account of his poor health. Members acknowledged the valuable contribution made by Mr. Roy by continuing to perform our puja in spite of his declining health, and wished him a speedy recovery. AB very kindly agreed to become our priest for all puja events this year. Members thanked AB for stepping in to help us during this crisis.

SD offered to create a 'Google Group' to include committee members, in the hope of improving communication. MD advised that in the process of creating the database of contact details of members, the groundwork for this process has already been done. Members had no objection to a Google group, but it was felt that the task of exploring ways to improve communication, both within and outside the committee, should be a remit of the newly created IT, Communications & Brochure team, and therefore left to them.

PD highlighted two key areas of our operations which have traditionally remained deficient over the years, and have now assumed critical importance in maintaining our sustainability. Firstly, external

sponsorship funds have been dwindling year on year, mainly due to the changed administrative and commercial landscape of the pharmaceutical industry, which was traditionally able to help us with generous donations in the past. Secondly, the lack of a good website has adversely affected the dissemination of information as well as loss of opportunity to attract revenue from web based adverts, in line with modern methods of communication. RR confirmed that a basic website was set up by her with help from her son back in 1996. However, due to limitation of her own IT skills, combined with the difficulty faced by her son to maintain the website from distant Aberdeenshire; RR has expressed her inability to take responsibility for operating the website from now on. The fees for hosting the current website were last paid in 2014, to cover for charges up to 2017. RR has suggested that once a new modern website fit for our purpose has been created, she will arrange the old website to digitally point to the new website, until the old one eventually closes down when its subscription ends. In line with this, to improve our image and attract adverts, the idea of a **logo for the committee** has been mooted. PD put up a logo for members to see and said that the AGM can decide to accept this logo or someone else can add to the logo or design a new logo. After some suggestions were made to change certain things in the logo, it was accepted that everything could not be fitted and the logo presented by PD was accepted as the final one.

To tackle these two problems highlighted above, **members have agreed to create two new posts**, with their own secretariat, within the committee:

1. **Public Relations secretary** – with a remit to actively solicit external sponsorship, attract web based advertising revenue and explore innovative ways of increasing our funds.
2. **IT, Communications & Brochure secretary** – whose remit will be to create and maintain a fit for purpose modern website, establish our presence in social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, take responsibility for editing and publishing the annual puja brochure and printed invitations. The responsibilities will be shared by two separate teams – one predominantly looking after digital and IT matters, the other team for the printed material.

Both the above post holders will act with close co-operation with each other to maximise efficiency, and keep the secretaries informed about problems and progress.

Election of new office bearers followed. The new post holders were all elected unanimously.

Any other business: SD and AR drew attention to the heavy duty gas burners used for cooking meals during puja, which apparently need professional servicing. SM has kindly agreed to check if a well known shop in the local area is still in business, and explore the practicalities of the burners getting serviced. The members were informed that there is very likely going to be a substantial 'call-out charge' for this process.

PD suggested that the minutes of AGM should be circulated as soon as possible for members to comment rather than leaving it to be published in the brochure only without members getting a chance to correct any factual mistakes.

As there was no further matter pending for discussion, AR declared the AGM closed.

P.S. – Due to demand from several senior members and patrons of our puja, following the AGM, the Puja Committee has extended the Durga Puja from the proposed 4 days to full 5 days, to coincide with the original dates in the Hindu calendar. The final dates have been circulated to all members and will be listed correctly in the printed brochure, invitations and website. This has also resulted in minor changes to the lead cooking teams, which have been communicated to committee members subsequently.

Who am I?

Diyotima Datta

I stand alone, desolate and bare for days, weeks and months on end. An occasional event results in high amplitude voices of children, shouting gaily or the shuffling of shoes on the wooden floor. Nothing compared to what the future beholds. Outside, the sound of beer glasses clinking and heels scraping along the graveled pavement penetrate the stillness. Minus these exceptions, there is nothing. All until an average October's day- when sunlight dapples the bronzed foliage and crisp air conjures a blanket of frost. The sun casts shadows and highlights ubiquitous plantains that contribute to the unique Yorkshire landscape. Time is ushered along by a calm, prevailing wind that gently rustles leaves, causing them to fall with the grace of a ballerina performing in Swan Lake.

A creak followed by a slam, breaks the quietness and an old door is swung open; the cracks where it has been repainted protrude like the veins on arms of the frail elderly. How many times have I witnessed this? Enough to safely say that déjà vu no longer comes rushing to me like it did before. Faded brown boxes are pushed across the floor, leaving a sandy trail in their wake. Two men are the force behind the boxes. This is the arrival of Frank and Gilbert with their indefatigable hard work accompanying them. Their undying perseverance has never faltered over the years that I have witnessed them and for this, all should be incredibly grateful- their effort is a vast contribution to the running of the function. Again, I see the beautiful red drapes adorn the blackwashed back wall and various posters being tacked onto the adjacent wall.

Midday brings the arrival of an Indian group, who chatter animatedly in Bengali. A few head off to concoct delightful aromas and of course- to brew the chai. The remaining wheel out stacks of chairs and arrange them into rows of ten. The previously brought in boxes are unpacked and one by one, striking idols are shifted to their rightful place. The intricate work remains shiny after all this years and there is a play of light as it is reflected by the polished surfaces. I oversee the departure of families who are going to get ready and the arrival of those familiar faces, already prepared to get the event swinging, donned in an assortment of saris and Panjabis. The barren pit within me slowly begins to fill as the small crowd of people transforms into a fully extended family- a cross-linked network of predominantly Indians. Talking, children screaming and the occasional piercing blow of the shaak result in a friendly hubbub that one can't help but appreciate.

The priest mutters incantations then the community comes together to worship, holding an assortment of coloured flowers. Water is sprinkled as a blessing and this is illustrative of the transformation from autumn to a raining winter, which is overpowered by the vivacious ambience. Different age groups are congregated in their respective areas and the teenager's parade round ever so often. Still, the whole atmosphere is deficit of something substantial.

Food, of course! Let's face it; the majority of Indians are foodies- if not all. Who would pass up the opportunity to wolf down daal bhaat or khichuri? Aluminium dhekchis are brought out and steam billows from the contents. A long thin snake suddenly materializes: the food queue, without this the day would not be complete. Events continue in a similar fashion for the next four days- people mill around keeping a perpetual stream of ephemeral energy ebbing through me.

Alas, all good things aren't eternal and the life that reawakened slowly dies away. The nearly November air has cast its spell; freezing the warmth in me. My vibrant hues are snatched from me, leaving behind the faded pastel colours. An age appears to pass and once again, life returns however, only for one day. One may think that the sheer knowledge of it being a one-day function might

undermine the spirit. On the contrary, it is cherished more. A chill is embedded in me as the last person exits, the laughter dies away and the musty smells that were vanquished invade my senses and I am left to ponder over my own thoughts until after New Year.

That is the magic of Durga Puja. However, now I would like you all to draw out the question that has been hovering subconsciously, at the back of your mind- 'Who am I?' I am: who watches a spectacle so grand; it is difficult to express it in words. I oversee the transformation of babies into adolescents and experiences a certain honour at the fact that I am a first hand eyewitness of all this. I hear: conversations of all kind, drums beating, gongs clanging and smell rich Indian culture directly. I am an inanimate thing only personified in those special days of each year.

Ladies and gentleman, presented to you today by Treya, I am none other than Milton Hall.



Photograph of a carving of Ma Durga, taken at the main temple of Pattadakal
Photo taken by Dr Subhasis Duttagupta

আমার ছোট বেলার দুর্গা পূজা

শ্যামল চৌধুরী

এই লেখাটা ঠিক হল শ্রীযুক্ত বাবু প্রদীপ ঘোষ দস্তিদার মহাশয় বরিশাল ও কলকাতার সুশস্তান এবং ওনার সুযোগ্যা সহধর্মিনী মাননীয়া শ্রীমতী বনু ঘোষ দস্তিদার মহাশয়ের সঙ্গে কথোপকথনের পরে।

ঠিক হল যে আমি আমার ছোট বেলার পূজোর কথা লিখবো।

সে তো অনেক দিন আগেকার কথা। তবে এই ১৯৪৪ সাল থেকে একটু একটু মনে আছে।

সেই সময় আমরা মানিকতলার কাছে থাক তাম। চারিদিকে আমাদের অনেক আত্মীয় সজন ছিল।

এর মধ্যে আমার পিসীমার Bengal Chemical এর বাড়ী ও আহিরিটোলার দাদুর বাড়ীতে অনেক সময় কাটাতাম।

এ ছাড়া মামার বাড়ী ছিল মিথিলাতে। এটা এখন উত্তর বিহারে পড়ে।

আমার পূজোর পটভূমিকা হবে কলকাতা, বেনারস, গয়া, পাটনা, এলাহাবাদ, মোগলসরাই, দারভাঙ্গা, মজ্জফরপুর, ধুলি, সমস্তিপুর, এই সব জায়গার স্মৃতিতে।

সব যায়গাতেই আমাদের কেউ না কেউ থাকতেন। যে সব যায়গাতে বেশি যেতাম সে গুলো হল বেনারস, গয়া, পাটনা আর কলকাতা তো আছেই।

বেনারসের কথা বলি, যেখানে আমার এক দিদিমা যাঁকে রাস্তা দিদিমা বলতাম, তিনি অনেক বৃদ্ধাবস্থাতেও অতি সুন্দরী ছিলেন। তাঁর দুখে আলতা রং ও মুখের হাসি মনে আছে। ভীষণ ধর্মপ্রান ছিলেন। উনি বিশ্বনাথের গলির খুব কাছে থাকতেন।

সে আমোলের UP, বিহার, উড়িষ্যা, দিল্লি, বম্বে, পুনাতে

অনেক বাঙ্গালি থাকতেন। বড়, মাঝারী ও ছোট অফিসার ভরতি ছিলো। উচ্চশিক্ষার সুযোগে বাঙ্গালিরা সব যায়গাতেই ছিলেন। এছারা উকিল, মোক্তার, জজ ডাক্তার, কলেজ প্রফেসার, হেডমাস্টার বেশি ভাগ বাঙ্গালি ছিলেন। ফলে বাংলা সংস্কৃতি সব যায়গাতেই ছড়িয়ে পড়েছিল। সব শহরেই দুর্গাবাড়ী বা কালিবাড়ী থাকতো। তা ছাড়া তখনকার দিনের East Indian Railway (EIR) এবং অন্য Railway তেও প্রচুর Anglo Indian ও বাঙ্গালিরা নানা রকম post এ কাজ করতেন। প্রত্যেকটি Junction এ একটি করে Railway Institute থাকতো সিনেমা হল মাপ এর।

বিহারে আমার এক কাকা থাকতেন স্বর্গীয় কানাইলাল মুখার্জি। ওনার বড় ছেলে বেনারসি শাড়ি খুঁটির মত পরে পূজতে নানা রকম কাজ করতেন।

এবার আমি প্রবাসী বাঙ্গালিদের পূজর কথা বলব। কলকাতা বা বাংলার সঙ্গে যে তফাত ছিল সেটা হল বাংলার পূজ অনেক বড় হত আর খুব ভিড় হত। কারণ একটি, জনসংখ্যা। বাংলার বাইরে ভীষণ ধূম ধাম করে পূজ হত যদিও বেনারস, পাটনা এইরকম আরো বড় পূজ হত প্রায় বাংলার মত। বাংলা ও বাইরে একি নিয়মে পূজ হত অঞ্জলি, খাওয়া দাওয়া, সন্দের আরতি এক রকম ছিল। বাংলার বাইরে Loudspeaker এর উতপাত ছিল না।

বড় ছোট মহিলারা সকলেই সেজে গুজে আসতেন। বেনারসি শাড়ি বেশি দেখা যেত। নানা রঙের শাড়ি ও ব্লাউস দেখা যেত। ছোট ছেলেরা নানা রঙের half pant (তাই বলা হত) আর মেয়েদের পোষাক ছিল frock। তারা একটু বড় হলেই শাড়ি পড়ার চেষ্টা করত।

রাব্রে Theatre হত। কিছু গান বাজনা হত। তবে এখনকার মত শুধু রবিন্দ্রসঙ্গীত হত না।

যুবকেরা নাটকে পুরুষ ও মহিলাদের অভিনয় করতো।
মেয়েরা পারত পক্ষে অভিনয় করতো না। করলেও বিরল।
অনেক জায়গাতে magic দেখান হত। PC Sarkar এর মত
পাগড়ি ও উর্দি পরে magic দেখাতেন magician রা।
রাঁচিতে আমার এক জ্যাঠা থাকতেন। ওনার কাছে ওখানকার
পূজর গল্প শুনতাম। সেখানে অনেক বাঙ্গালি থাকার জন্য বেশ
বড় পূজ হত।

পূজর শেষে সেই বিজয়া দশমী। ছোট ছেলে দের পোয়া বার
ছিল। বাড়ী বাড়ী গিয়ে মিষ্টি খেত। তার দু এক দিন পর একটু
মন খারাপ হত কারণ পূজ শেষ হয়ে গেল। লক্ষী পূজ পর্যন্ত
জের টানত। তারপরেই তো আবার ইস্কুল খুলে যেত। আবার
পড়াশোনা।

আমাদের গ্রামে নিজেদের পূজ হত। আমি কোনদিন যেতে
পারি নি। তা ছাড়া গ্রামের মানুষ চৌধুরী দের হাত থেকে পূজ
নিয়ে নিয়েছিল। এই social change টি তেভাগা ও কৃষক
আন্দোলনের ফল।

কলকাতার পূজ এখন কার মত এত বেশি হত না। বিখ্যাত
পূজ গুনো বাগবাজার, কুমরটুলি, কলেজ স্কোয়ার এবং
মহাম্মদ আলি পার্কে হত। অবশ্যই কলকাতার সব যায়গাতেই
পূজ হত। গরিয়াহাটের পর বিশেষ কিছুই ছিল না। তবে দেশ
ভাগের পর সব পালটে যায়। কলকাতা হু হু করে বারতে
থাকে।

আর বেশি লিখছি না, এখানেই শেষ করছি।

পূজোর শাড়ী

লোপা দাস

পূজোতো আবার এসে গেলো
নতুন শাড়ী কেনা হলো ?
তোমরা সবাই দোকানে গেলে ?
না on-line এ order দিলে ?
এখন তাহলে ঠিক করি
কোন শাড়ীটা কবে পরি ?
ষষ্ঠীতে ছাপা শাড়ী
সবাই মিলে পরতে পারি ?
রঙ্গীন তাঁত, চওড়া পাড়,
সপ্তমীতে পরবো আবারা
অষ্টমীর সকালবেলা,
পূষ্পাঞ্জলি দেবার পালা।
সিন্ধু শাড়ী পরে সবাই,
সন্ধিক্ষনের পূজোতে যাই?
সন্ধ্যাবেলা designer শাড়ী,
চুমকী, stone, সাথে জরি
নবমীতে traditional
বালুচরী নয়তো গাদোয়াল ?
দশমীতে সিঁদুরখেলায়
সাদা শাড়ী পরবে সবাই?
এই কটা দিন কাটবে বেশ
তারপরে তো পূজো শেষা
তাহলে কথা রইল ওই
মিলবো সবাই পূজোতেই।

The Puja committee gratefully acknowledge last year's sponsorship of the following organisations:

- ❖ Aagrah
- ❖ Ashvin Travels
- ❖ MPS (Medical Protection Society)
- ❖ Wesleyan

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Picturesque Puglia

Dr Ricky Ghosh Dastidar

Puglia is the region of Southern Italy that forms the heel part of the country's boot-like shape. It is a land dominated by millennia-old olive groves, unspoilt coastlines and warm sunshine.

Although it is primarily a holiday destination for Italian natives, low-cost flights to Bari and Brindisi airports have recently made the region more popular for British tourists.

Polignano A Mare

One of the gems of Puglia is the small coastal town of Polignano A Mare. Perched on the edge of limestone cliffs, this charming town offers stunning views of the Adriatic coastline, and a good variety of hotels and bed and breakfasts to unwind in. I stayed at the small but cosy family-run Malu B&B, situated in the centre of town. Over the years, Polignano A Mare has gained international fame as one of the hosts of the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series. During this event, huge crowds gather to watch divers plunge 27 metres into the sea from a roof-top terrace situated over the town's most famous cliff. Access to this unique take-off point is gained via a private living room, making it an iconic spot in the international high-diving scene.

Polignano a Mare is also well known for being the birthplace of Italian singer Domenico Modugno, known internationally for the hit song "Volare". There is a large statue of him by the sea and all around town you can hear his famous song being played.

Ostuni

Ostuni, known as the "the white city" is an important part of Puglia and well worth visiting. Situated just 8 km from the coast with a population of around 32,000, the city is considered an architectural jewel and its baroque-style churches and monuments are partly the reason for this. The main reason however, is its "old town", consisting of a citadel built on top of a hill still fortified by ancient walls. The white walls and white-painted buildings make the city truly memorable and the largest buildings to be found here are the cathedral and the Bishop's Palace. On a clear day, don't miss the opportunity to see for miles across the surrounding region from the top of the citadel.

Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Puglia is synonymous with extra virgin olive oil and this is because it is Italy's primary producer of it. Some of the olive groves in the region date back to over 500 BC and still continue to provide a good annual yield. Whilst in Puglia, be sure to visit a local oil-mill, where they will teach you how the olives are harvested, crushed, and utilized to produce the unique Apulian extra-virgin olive oil. Other culinary delights to be enjoyed in this part of Italy include orechiette (pasta formed in the shape of little ears), focaccia bread, panzerotti (small deep-fried folded pizzas) and traditional local liqueurs. For more active food enthusiasts, the autumn months offer activities such as grape harvesting and olive picking. All the necessary equipment is provided on the farms and you can even order a bottle of wine or olive oil produced by a specific tree to be sent directly back to your home.

Masserie

One of the best ways to experience Puglia is by staying in a local masseria. Masserie are country estates originally owned by noblemen that date all the way back to the 15th century. They started out as farms and can include anything from stables, warehouses, manor houses, oil mills and even churches.

The estates became the social hub of the community as they would often offer a place for locals to pray or a communal oven for them to bake their bread. Nowadays, many of them have been transformed into charming and comfortable accommodation spots and provide an ideal setting for soaking up the local culture. The majority of the masserie are located in the Itria Valley, between Bari and Brindisi, and Lecce, in the southernmost part of the region.

Two of the masserie that I visited were Masseria Il Frantoio and Masseria Asciano.

Located 10 km from the Adriatic Coast, Masseria Il Frantoio is spread over 150 acres and consists of numerous buildings, ancient olive groves and an underground olive mill. The highlights of my visit were the warm hospitality of the hosts and the high quality of food that was served; all organically produced and cooked on the estate by the owner's wife. It was this personal touch that set the masseria apart and genuinely left you feeling a like a member of the family.

www.masserialfrantoio.it

Masseria Asciano on the other hand, is equally as appealing, but known principally for its extra-virgin olive production, incorporating the 17,000 olive trees found on its estate. The olives are pressed using a combination of traditional and modern methods and the owners were kind enough to give me a tour of the production site. The finished product comes in 3 flavours; fruity sweet, fruity sweetish and fruity bitter. I found the fruity-sweetish variety to be the best and was also impressed by the range of cosmetics produced by the masseria using its own extra-virgin olive oil as an ingredient.

www.agriturismoasciano.it

Puglia is a land rich in natural beauty and this is evident all across the region. To fully appreciate this, there are 3 conservation areas I would recommend visiting. These are: The Natural Park of Coastal Dunes, The Natural Park of Monumental Olive Groves and the Natural Reserve of Torre Guaceto. The sites all serve to highlight the incredible diversity of the flora and fauna found in the region and all three are a must-see.

More information about this idyllic part of Italy can be found on the following websites:

www.discoverypuglia.com

www.italia.it/en.

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“আমার মেয়েবেলার পূজোর স্মৃতি”....

সুদীপ্তা সামন্ত

ছোটবেলার পূজো মানেই নতুন জামার বারে বারে ভাঁজ খোলা আর গন্ধ নেওয়া। বিনা কারনে রঙিন প্রজাপতির মত মনের উড়ে উড়ে যাওয়া। একটুতেই বুক কেঁপে ওঠা আর মন দিয়ে মন ছুঁয়ে যাওয়া।

আমার ছোটবেলার পূজোও কিন্তু তার ব্যতিক্রমী নয়। বাড়ির কাছে দুটো পূজো হতো, একটা পাশের বাড়ির সাবেকী পূজো আর অন্যটা পাড়ার সার্বজনীন। শানু পিসিদের পূজোতে আমার আর দিদিভাই এর আনাগোনা ছিল সবচেয়ে বেশী। চতুর্থী পনচমী থেকে শুরু হত ঠাকুর সাজানোর কাজ। ঠাকুরের সাজানোর পর যে পুঁতি, চুমকি বেশী হতো সেগুলো যত্ন করে কুড়িয়ে আনতাম।

ষষ্ঠী তে ঢাকের শব্দে ঘুম ভাঙা, নতুন জামা পরে নরম আলোয় ছুটেছুটি, রান্না ঘরে মায়ের ব্যস্ততা উপোস ভাঙার পর, পূজোর ছোঁয়ার শুরু। সপ্তমী তে পাড়ার ঠাকুরের সাথে ঘট ডোবাতে যেতাম। খালি পায়ের বেশ মজা লাগত। সন্কেবেলা শানুপিসিদের বাড়ী আসত মেহেবুব ব্যান্ড, তার সাথে নাচের আসর। রক্তে কি শিহরণ জাগত সে গান আর নাচের আসরে। পৃথিবীটা রঙিন শেলোফেন এ মোড়া মনে হত।

অষ্টমীর সকাল শুরু স্নান করে, তারপর নতুন জামা পরে পূজো দেবার আর অনজলীর আয়োজন। নতুন, পুরোনো মুখের ভিড়ে বড়দের হাসিঠাট্টা, বাক্যলাপ, আর ছোটদের নতুন কেনা হিলতোলা জুতো পরে লুকোচুরি খেলার মাঝে হঠাৎ হোঁচট খাওয়া। অনজলী শেষে বুভুক্ষু

পেটে গরম গরম লুচি, হালুয়া আর কুমড়োর ছক্কা। দাদা দিদিদের বন্ধু-বান্ধব দেব হঠাৎ হঠাৎ করে বাড়ী আসা আর প্রশংসনীয় চোখে তাকান। সারা সন্কেবেলা ঠাকুর দেখে দেখে পা ব্যথা নিয়ে ঘুমের দেশে পাড়ি দেওয়া।

নবমী টা আমার কাছে ছিল সবচেয়ে আনন্দের কারণ মামাবাড়ী যাব। আমার মামাবাড়ী গ্রামে। দিদা বলত আমরা গেলে, "আজ আমার ঘরে ষষ্ঠী হল"। মা ছিল এক মেয়ে তাই মামাবাড়ী তে আমরা গেলে চাঁদের হাট বসত। মামাবাড়ীর শরিকের পূজো, ফীরের নাড়ু থেকে কেঁট যাত্রাপালা দেখার অনাবিল আনন্দ আজও আমাকে বিষন্ন করে। মামাতো ভাই বোনদের সাথে কতরকমের খেলা, বড়দের হ্যাজাক এর আলোয় রাত জেগে জেগে তাস খেলা।

দশমীতে রাবণ পোড়া আর দলবেঁধে মেলা দেখার কোনো পরিপূরক পাইনা আজও। রাত তিনটে তে উঠে ঠাকুর ভাসান দেখতে দেখতে মনটা কাঁদত গুমরেগুমরে, আবার এক বছরের সুদীর্ঘ অপেক্ষা.... লক্ষীপূজো অবধি মেয়াদ ছিল থাকার, তারপর বাড়ী ফেরার পালা। ফেরার সময় মা এর দু চোখ টলটল, সবার মন ভারী।

দিদার শূন্য চোখের দৃষ্টি কারোর চোখ এড়াতো না

উমা কি আমাদের সবার মাঝে লুকিয়ে নেই? আছে, তাইতো তাঁর আগমনে আমরা নতুন করে খুঁজে পাই আমাদের মেয়েবেলা।

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Transformation

Dr Panchajanya Ghatak

Our family was never remotely linked with any Indian royalty. We were never zamindars or talukdars. But still, we have been celebrating Durga Puja in our family for past 8 generations. It is generally held that one generation spans over 30 years. Considering that, our family Durga Puja is at least 240-250 years old. Over these years, our family, along with countless other Bengali families, went through very difficult times like Bengal Famine of 1943 and Partition of India (and erstwhile Bengal). But our middle class family continued with their Durga Puja without stopping for a single year. This Puja was embedded within countless other struggles of a middle class family.

After Partition of 1947, my grandfather relocated to erstwhile West Bengal with a huge family. The different branches of our family started settling down in and around Kolkata. My grandfather settled down at Shantinagar – a semi-urban area near Bally. He was able to buy considerable land and built a modest house on it. There were ponds and gardens in the house which largely resembled their 'Desh Bari' from East Bengal. An uprooted family started their quest for new roots.

The family traditional Durga Puja started with new energy. The locality had many other uprooted families from East Bengal. There was no Barwari Puja in that locality in those early days. Our family Puja helped in healing the deep trauma of Partition for a number of Bengalis. The friends and families who had settled in Kolkata, used to visit our Puja – thus reliving the nostalgia of a homeland they were forced to leave.

Gradually my father and other uncles completed their education and shifted to different parts of Bengal and India for their jobs. But the whole family used to assemble in our family house to celebrate the Pujas. They forgot their everyday struggle during those Puja days. The gaping trauma of the Partition was healing fast – by early '70s – most of the Bengalis had found their new roots in West Bengal. By then Partition was largely some nostalgic feelings and the rivalry of East Bengal and Mohan Bagan.

At that time, I was growing up with a number of cousins of mine. The house reverberated with lots of people during the Pujas. We had about 200 invitees every day, of which the extended family alone consisted about 40 members. Palmashai created the beautiful Durga Pratima in our Mandap Ghar. On a good day, he would let us colour the flowers of the Chala. He was not the most chatty person we knew – we wished we had a Palmashai like the one in Joy Baba Felunath – churning out stories as he worked.

We got up before sunrise during the Puja days – to collect the dew from the leaves. Dew was needed for Durga Snan. We competed amongst ourselves about who could collect the most amount of dew. As the day went by – we had fewer things to do. We crowded around the Dhaki – with hopes that he would let us clang the Kashor at some point. We waited for Anjali to be over – as it meant Prasad time for us. After few years, we started serving the invitees during Bhog. Bhog was cooked by the ladies of the family, with the help of Para's aunties. Every day there was Hilsa Bhog for Maa Durga. Things gradually started changing – professional cooks were employed to cook for the invitees. Now, caterers provide the food – Bhog is still cooked separately by the ladies of the family – but in small amounts.

The evenings were filled with fun. We wore new clothes and went to see the local Pujas. Later in the evening, we staged songs, dances, quiz, short plays for the family. And there were Dhunchi Naach, Sakh Bajano Competition, etc. Years flowed by -- we grew up, our nephews and nieces were growing up as well – but the tradition went on, albeit with some changes. By then our family was financially much stronger. Our Durga Puja became more gorgeous and glamorous – the once uprooted family recovered

the confidence which it had lost during Partition.

About 20 years back, we arrived at the United Kingdom. A phase of adjustment started – adapting in a new country – with its new ways. We realised the major emotional adjustment was during the Pujas. It was not easy to be accepted in the inner circles of Bengali Pujas. While exploring different Pujas, we hardly could think anything apart from our family Puja. We could feel the sweet smell of dhup-dhuno, Bhog filling our senses from thousands of miles.

When we shifted to Lincoln, we started attending the Sheffield Durga Puja at the Elsecar Heritage Centre, Barnsley. We felt this Puja provided the warmth which we were seeking for some years. We were made very welcome by the organisers. It feels lovely to share Bhog with everyone. For the last few years, I always take leave during the Pujas. This helps us to soak up the flavour of our friendly Puja fully. One day, we realised that we are now a part of a Barwari Puja, and we are fully enjoying this. We get the pictures of our family Puja through various social media and we send them our Puja pictures. This is how life transforms -- ‘old order changeth....’

Obituary



Dr Shankar Biswas (1948 - 2016)

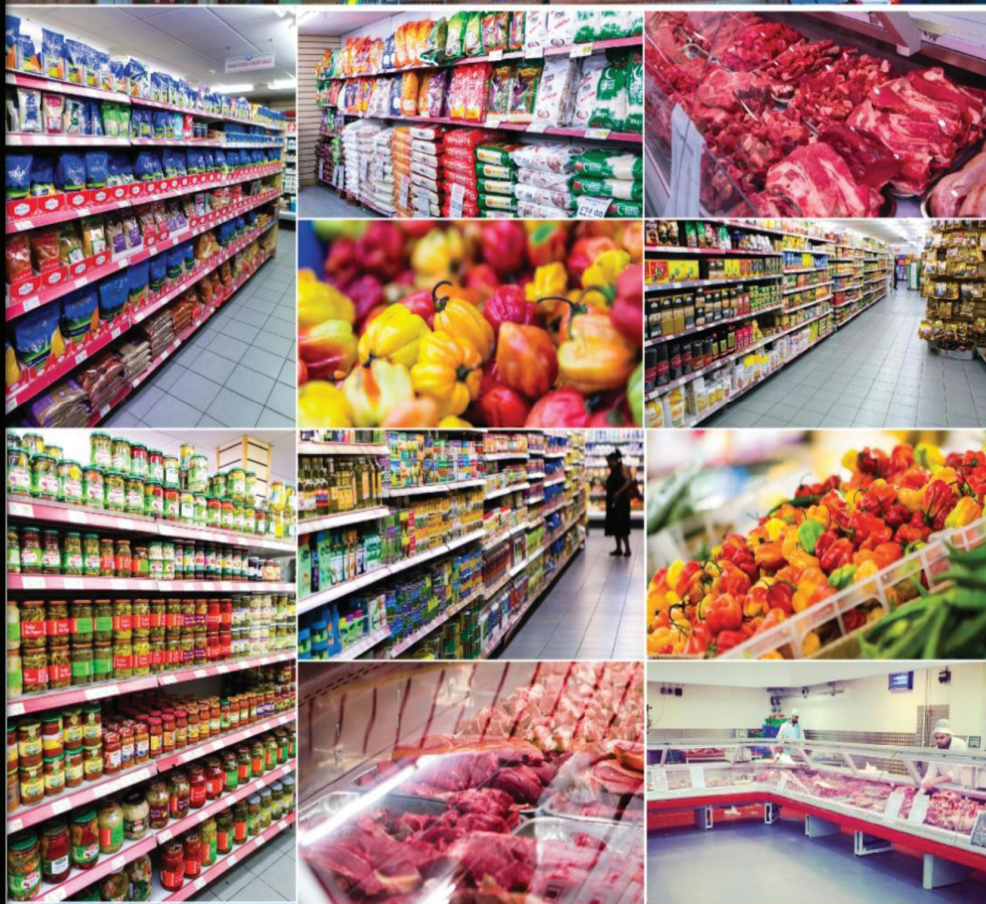
We are deeply saddened by the loss of our beloved ‘Sankar-da’ on 6th August 2016. Dr Sankar Biswas passed away in Manila while on an assignment for the Home Office. He is survived by his wife, Dr Sabita Biswas and two sons, Jason and Simon. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all of Sankar Da’s contributions to our Durga Puja, the most recent one being his active part in bringing our protima from Kolkata.



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