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Invoking the goddess Durga



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Durga puja is awaited with bated breath every year and the goddess is given a tearful farewell every year at the end of the puja, and this year won't be any different either. Guwahati's heart throbbed with festive fervour as devotees offered 'anjali' in their 'para pandals' Guwahatians pulsated with the puja spirit indulging in pandal hopping and invoking the goddess with hearts brimming with pious devotion. For once the markets had a forsaken look as the usual customers turned devotees attired in their festive best visited pandals instead of shops luring them with festive discounts.

Strangely Guwahati lacked the usual crowded streets during the puja days for traffic moved easily in the usually packed streets and by lanes except in particular areas where a few traffic snarls were spotted. However, a day later the devotees turned up in large numbers. The puja pandals dazzling with breath taking decorations and lightings drew huge number of people with the celebration of the auspicious mahaastami. The air reverberated with the chanting of mantras and the beats of the dhak.

However, this year puja pandals though crammed with devotees also saw a huge deployment of security personnels as the pandals being sensitive spots and susceptible to terrorist attacks are under the police scanner. The disturbed times today has dampened the spirits of devotees making them extra cautious in their movements. Perhaps this is the reason behind the low turn out of people in the streets.

Traditionally, the five day puja celebrations begin with Mahalaya when one is able to perform any number of shradha ceremonies of one's departed relatives. Then comes the Sandi Paath after which begins the rituals of puja. Legends hold that Lord Rama had offered puja to devi Durga in order to get her blessings in the killing of the evil called Ravana. Chronologically speaking Sashthi is the first day of puja when the goddess is put on a pedestal and the priests invite her to their midst which is followed by Saptami the second day when the proceedings begin by bathing the goddess. Maha Ashtami is a repeat of the previous day where sometimes animal sacrifices are offered to please the goddess, a primitive or rather pagan ritual that needs to be eradicated from our culture as it has no place in our developed society. However after navami finally the last day of puja is Vijaya Dashami when the devotees bid a tearful farewell to the goddess.

Guwahati alone boasts of more than 600 pujas, the oldest being Hari Sabha in Panbazar. Pandals in Beltola, Ganeshguri, Silpukhuri, Uzanbazar, Kumarpara etc witness the maximum rush and today laser shows in certain pandals are a huge crowd puller.

Come let us all invoke the goddess and ask her to grant us the beauty of soul, the taste of sweet success, give us name and fame and destroy the evil forces in us and show everyone the right direction.

“Rupang dehi, jayang dehi, jasho dehi dishu jehi ”

Photo: People throng on the occasion of Maha Navami during Durga puja celebrations in Sivasagar, Assam on 20-10-2007. Picture by Luit Chaliha.



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