



Puja Preparation

Durga puja, the festival of Bengal is one of the most important festivals of Bangalis. The city of Calcutta enlivens during

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the four days of Durga Puja, starting from the day of Bodhon on Maha-Shashti and ending up with the immersion of clay idols in the river Ganges on the evening of Dashami. Sharat brings a wisp of freshness in the air to welcome the advent of the mother Goddess. The wide blue sky, the mild fragrance of shiuli, glimpses of swaying Kash in the fields, and the chanting of Shakti mantras fill up the atmosphere.

MAKING OF IDOLS:

Bengal specializes in preserving the age old tradition of making clay idols. Such unmatched skills come in the limelight during the festive occasion of Durga Puja. Months before the Puja clay artisans start to breathe in life in the images of Durga. Bamboo sticks cut in various shapes and sizes are required to make the basic structure of the idols of Goddess Durga and the platform on which the colossal statue stands.



Durga's figure is then imparted shape with straw tied with jute strings. Creating fascinating figurines of Hindu Gods and Goddesses has been an age old tradition for the Pals (the clay artisans). Making of Durga idols is a lengthy and a back breaking process. This is done diligently and methodically by the artisans to create the most exquisite pieces of artistry. Such is the perfection of idol making, that the skeleton structure of bamboo and straw are done by one group of artisans while the clay mixing and applications are done by another group and finally the head, palms and feet are done by the highest graded artisans or Pals.

The second stage of idol making is applying the layers of clay. This is done in three steps. The straw figurine of Goddess is applied with the first coat of clay solution where the percentage of water is high. This application helps to fill the crevices left by the straw structure. The second layer is applied with great caution as it is the most important layer giving prominence to the figure. The clay mixed in this step is very fine without any impurities. Palms, head and feet which are separately made are attached with the main torso at this stage.



The heads, palms and feet are made of clay. Lot of skill goes in making the head of the idols of Goddess Durga. It is generally done by the highest graded Pals. The artisans make the head of the Goddess with fine clay creating each feature with great care and skill.

This piece of art when completed is dried. Liquid plaster of Paris is poured over it to create a mould. On drying, the mould is then separated from the clay head. This mould being hollow is then used to create innumerable clay heads for the idols of Goddess Durga. Finally pieces of cloth soaked in fine clay from the river bed of Ganges is applied on the joints of the figure which develops cracks after drying.



This thin coat of clay is applied to strengthen the joints. On completing the clay structure the figure is painted with white earth colour. Finally the whole statue is painted with pink or yellow earth colours. The last earth colour applied is the blood colour. The eyes are then painted and other detailing are done by the main artist. The idols of Durga are then varnished. Hair made of jute is glued and then the idol is dressed and then ornamented.

PANDAL MAKING

Pandal making has taken a form of art. It is the abode of Goddess Durga for the four days of Durga Puja. Since the days of landed aristocracy, there used to be "Barwari Puja" or community Puja financed by the local zamindars. The mandaps were generally an extended hall of their residence. But today puja pandals are seen in numbers at every street corner. These pandals are built according to well made plans. Bamboo poles, planks of wood and meters of cloth are needed to construct such amazing mammoth structures.



Skill and creative ideas are used to make the most exquisite and intricate designs which leave the viewers awe-struck. Built in such an elaborate and grand manner



they appear stunning often depicting famous architectural splendors. These pandals are later decorated with galaxies of twinkling lights. The lighting works attract huge crowds which depicts stories and legends of Durga Puja.

BENGALI'S PREPARATION

Bengalis get busy preparing for its the time for welcoming friends and relatives, time to give away gifts and to prepare good food. The homemakers give a new look to their homes, purchase clothes to replenish their wardrobes and chalk out plans for the four days to come. Durga Puja is not only a religious festival but it has derived a new form of the greatest social festival. Durga Puja is a major event which sets the pace high for every Bengali. Every Bangali is busy setting up agendas for the four days of Durga Puja. This is the time when Bengalis socialize in a great way.



The festive occasion calls for the latest trends in fashion wear, designer clothes and the trendiest footwear. Marking Bengalis most popular festival there is a boom in the sales, discounts and free gifts offered by sellers in a manner which tends to out smart each other. Bengalis go for a unthinkable spree for shopping, buying the best and offering the best to friends and relatives. The atmosphere remains surcharged with fun and gaiety.

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