



Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore had said that *Durga* was the divine manifestation of *Mother India*. Gurudev wrote in the *Geetanjali*:

*He maro debota, bhore dehopraan
Ki amrito tumi, chaho koribare pan*



*What divine drink would'st thou have my God
From this overflowing cup of my life?*

Sharodotsav | Durga Puja

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SHARODOTSAV or *Durga Puja*, an Autumn Festival, was joyfully celebrated throughout Delhi. Coming before Diwali, it signifies the beginning of the festive season. The best known legend about Durga Maa is that she was sent by the Gods to kill Mahisasur, the buffalo demon who had started ravaging the world. She rides on a lion with a weapon given by the Gods in each of her ten hands to kill the demon. This remains a powerful reminder of the triumph of good over evil as well as the strength of 'Shakti' women power. As the Upanishad states: "*Yatra Narayastu Poojyante, Ramante Tatra Devataha*" i.e. where women are worshipped, there the Gods reside. The tableaux of Durga with her four children Karthik, Ganesha, Saraswati and Laxmi represent respectively the Protector, the Initiator of the Puja, the Symbol of Knowledge and the Provider, which is the complete manifestation of the Goddess herself. It also symbolises the inter-linkage between education, sustainable development and prosperity.

There are some time honoured rituals performed lovingly every year by the community. Some of these include:

Mahalaya The first day of Navaratri, at 5.00 a.m. Bengalis are woken up to chanting of shlokas by late Pankaj Kumar Mallick, rendered beautifully by Birendra Krishna Bhadra to welcome the Goddess.

Rituals These are intricate and lovingly performed every year. They include daily collection of 108 lotus flowers to be placed at the feet of the Goddess, along with red Jaba (*Hibiscus*) flowers, which only bloom in Delhi just before Navaratri.

Evening Aarti This is a must for those who love the sound of drums by drummers who come from Bengal to perform. Ladies tuck in their sarees and perform "*dhumuchi naach*" which means dancing to drum beats in front of the Goddess, carrying earthen pots with burning incense in each hand.

Entertainment On the first day is "*Agamani*" which includes songs to welcome the Goddess to her parent's home.

Food This is last but never the least! It has become one of the most important rituals of the Pujas. It includes traditional *Kobiraji Cutlets*, *Mughlai Parathas*, *Kosha Mangsho* and *Fish Rolls*.