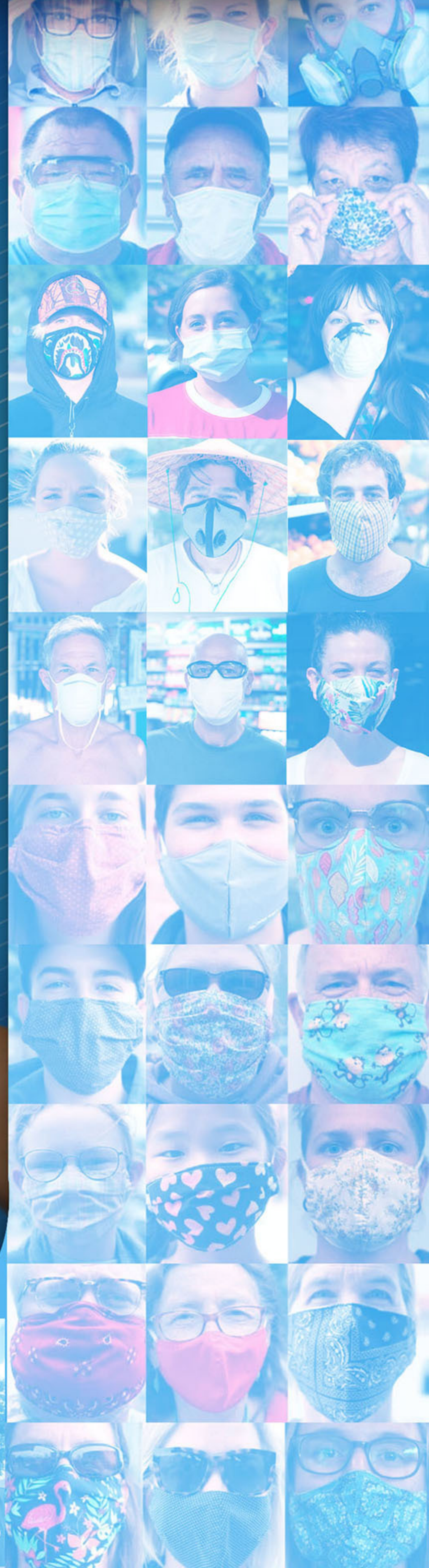




confluence

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Soumyajit Mahapatra
Chairman PRSI, Kolkata Chapter

The covid season has kindled new enthusiasm among the Kolkata PRSI fraternity to seriously go digital. Ensnared in the confines of individual homes, the members have drawn up a fairly elaborate event calendar starting with webinars, e-journals to 'digitainment,' web-based cultural shows and eventually culminating in the Chapter's ambitious year-ending e-Engage spread over several focused webinars. The Kolkata Chapter prides itself as the first professional body to pioneer the concept of a digital summit in the city eight years ago. Since then this signature event has never been missed. The prospect of congregation being distinctly remote this year, a physical summit is not an option. Undeterred and unwavering in its resolve, the Chapter has decided to transform the Summit into a multi-day format. Obviously this format is enabling a different spin over the event making it possible to transcend boundaries and go athwart continents. The year-end event is expected to have a glittering array of speakers from abroad famously known for their credentials in the field of public relations and communication.

The Kolkata Chapter has always been at the forefront of innovative thinking, often ahead of time. Evidently these have paid rich dividends in the long run. Its modest means have hardly deterred the Chapter from thinking big on programmes of contemporary interest and more. While the platform will be digital for some time to come, programmes will dwell beyond traditional PR and communication subjects to launch in to territories not attempted before.

It has been our experience that a vast majority of the members do not respond to the programme charter. What however fills us with optimism is that the programmes attract significant numbers outside the members' fraternity which certainly strengthens our confidence to look beyond traditional subjects. The new session of the Chapter has started anew with fresh faces in the core group. This has infused new vigour in to our efforts and we sincerely hope that the momentum set in the initial months will continue over the year creating value for the Chapter for a long time to come.



From the Editor's Desk

Will Covid be remembered?

We are into the last quarter of 2020. The unwanted flavour of covid continues to affect our palate. While the pandemic shows no signs of abating, the rising anxiety of an economic downturn, job loss and dwindling incomes are impacting lives more than ever before. The economic meltdown experienced at the beginning of the new millennium which began with the bursting of the stock market bubble in the US shattered the peak of business activity across the globe. But the concerns then were different and the world muscled its way out of the crisis in a couple of years. The manmade predicament of 2000 & 2008, however, could pale in to insignificance in the face of the economic disaster unleashed by nature.

In many ways, the present calamity could also be attributed to insensitivity of mankind. The unabashed penchant for development regardless of what it is doing to the environment has without doubt earned us nature's wrath which could outdo the meltdowns causing unending misery to lives on earth. And unless the medical solution to the raging pandemic is found in quick time, the world could slip in to an economic coma for an unpredictably longer period.

The biggest bet perhaps is man's unquenched thirst to innovate and , ironically, often a short memory. The Spanish flu of the early 20th century which decimated more than 50 million lives in three deadly waves between 1918 and 1919 is surprisingly less remembered than the two world wars that admittedly killed many more.

Two years ago science journalist Laura Spinney wrote a book the 'Pale Rider' which explores how the world changed in the aftermath of the Spanish Flu. She wrote the book because she felt alarmed by the way the world thought so little about that deadly virus infection. She observes, "It seemed to me there was this huge hole in our collective memory about the worst disaster of the 20th Century. It's definitely not remembered in the way as the two world wars - there is some different way we remember pandemics." She believes that the death toll could have been higher because there was a big problem of under-reporting at the time. There were no reliable diagnostic tests then.

What Spanish flu did to the world is it advanced the process of healthcare to greater levels in most parts of the world. As aggressive healthcare processes germinated across the globe, the baby boom post First World War slowly erased the impact of the Flu on the death figures. Thereafter, the Second World War which was more severe in terms of loss of human lives and destruction of social infrastructure severed the remnants of the memory of the Flu almost completely.

Will Covid 19 be remembered? It might be too early to tell. But precedents suggest that we probably won't. The 20th century did grapple with two other flu pandemics – the 1957 Asian flu and the Hong Kong flu in 1968. The two flues claimed 2 million and 4 million lives, respectively. These are not remembered too. And Covid is nowhere near to the two as yet. But who knows?

The one reason why we may yet remember Covid for long is because the way it has changed our lives so drastically. It has changed the way we work now and this may go on for longer than we might think because it definitely changes the dynamics of business, where costs are of critical importance. The 'work from home' phenomenon may become a permanent feature for several disciplines of business processes. In effect we may develop a hybrid work culture which could help businesses to bounce back even as the vaccine arrives and the world returns to normalcy.



COVID-19 fall out: Engaging Employees and Driving Business

Unpredictable situations demand unpredictable responses.

The pandemic has virtually erased 2020 off the global calendar and unlikely to go away in a hurry. The global economy is reeling under its impact and India is no different.

For half the year the entire country went into a virtual lockdown, amidst serious disruptions of business functioning across multiple sectors.

Employers are bending backwards to keep their operations alive with many sectors experiencing sizeable job-cuts. Some employers are however working tirelessly with their human resource teams to keep employee morale high in these extremely trying times.

The challenge is to act wisely, maintain business continuity with the existing workforce and come up with initiatives and strategies to engage employees during the period of lockdown and beyond. The reality is Covid-19 could permanently shift working patterns and the situation may never go back exactly to what it was before. So it is imperative that employers show understanding, help re-engineer employee skills and step up efforts to ensure their health and well being.

Keeping employees engaged at work from home during lockdowns is a task cut out. Many HR specialists have designed online training modules and web based sessions extended to one-on-one manager feedbacks, team huddles, coaching sessions, performance discussions and training, etc.

Several companies have adopted WFA (Work from Anywhere) strategy to make digital platforms accessible to all and from anywhere. Reports are being automated requiring no manual intervention.

Other pivotal adjustments made for essentially employee driven organizations, are quick initiation and expansion of flexible working arrangements and other policies allowing people to work remotely and safely during this crisis situation.

No matter how smooth the transition is, employees still require support and thoughtful leadership, more than ever. There is an ongoing communication with employees regarding the need for a remote work culture and insights at the organizational level.



A K Goswami

“Business continuity is important and at the same time the health of the employees cannot be overlooked,” says a senior HR executive of India Power, a Kolkata-based power distribution company. “Also, we are committed to providing access to technology to all who do not have them in their remote locations,” he says. “Clearly value creation for employees is key,” he adds. The leadership team plays a significant role. Finding ways to re-imagine a business-as-usual environment with minimal business disruptions and making possible arrangements for managing critical workforce are key initiatives. “Our Company’s employee support training programme helped up-skill them, retain motivation and productivity despite working from remote locations. The programme also makes employees feel valued and aimed at hand holding them to return to regular schedules once normalcy returns and people report to office,” he said.

Trainings on digital platforms have been introduced to engage the leadership in the new and alternative business models and quality intensification in organizations with total employee involvement.

Policies, handbooks and circulars related to employees are being revised in keeping with alternative tasking pattern of remote digital way of working. Even as people work from home, HR managers are keeping their eyes on talent acquisition. Management teams are constantly ensuring that the backfills or requirement for manpower in the new roles is accommodated.

Recent studies suggest a new satisfaction level - balancing work and family time - among employees has enhanced their productivity and made them aspire for greater excellence as well as self-learning and development.

Questions that WFH will ask

The COVID-19 crisis has certainly accelerated the transition from work in office spaces to working remotely. Our country has very rapidly embraced virtual workspaces. HR leaders are beginning to believe that work from home (WFH) is here to stay even after the resolution of the pandemic.

This arrangement does appear to make people happy in the short run. But conflicts between the employer and employee will arise eventually as there are no laws in India governing WFH.

Some countries around the globe have specific laws that support WFH. India is still some distance away from legally endorsing this so called 'New Normal'. But slowly and surely questions have begun creeping in to the minds of people. Examinations of the grey areas created by remote work vis-à-vis the employer-employee relationship that determine whether legislative intervention is required have started.

An important question being asked is whether the employer is still liable to ensure health and safety of workers at home. This triggers an obvious logical conundrum, if the employee is not in a space managed by the employer then how can their safety be the latter's prerogative.

Some countries have established that duty of care extends to anywhere work is performed. This means that if you are working from home, it is your employer's responsibility to ensure that it does not pose a risk to your health and safety, which can be accomplished by providing the necessary resources. There are no regulations in India yet. So are the employers listening?

It is often being queried if employers are liable to provide employees facilities required to remote work. Once again, there is no legislation as yet. But certainly homes cannot provide the comfort of an office ambience. Construction companies and builders are talking about future designs which would accommodate office environments within homes. Since internet connectivity is of paramount importance, changes will be necessary to ensure seamless working conditions. Now, employees may either request companies to provide the required facilities or request compensation for bearing the cost of these facilities.

From the point of view of employers, it may be pertinent to know if employees are actually completing their daily tasks. As of now there are no

central or state laws governing remote work/telecommuting in India. Hence a framework to establish a proper work culture from home may be required.

Confidentiality is also a concern on the part of employers. How does an employer ensure that sensitive information is safe? The furious pace with which WFH has got implemented creates certain concerns about data security processes being compromised

While the country and businesses grapple with legal, security and ethical issues, the cushy work environs of home can lead to social isolation, mental stress as well as physical risks. In countries like America, workers are getting lonelier and jeopardizing their health as more join the gig economy or skip the commute to an office. It's hard enough to hold productive in-person meetings to coordinate different team members' efforts to remain aligned. When everyone works from home, it becomes all the harder to stay on the same page.

- A Correspondent



No 'Koruna' for Corona this Year!

It may not be the buffalo this year. The origin of evil could well be the Bat! (not the cricket bat)

For the famed Kumartuli artisans of Kolkata, this year's deity, Ma Durga appears preoccupied with destroying the "Coronasura" for a change.

The year 2020 is so different from other years! And so the Mother's favourite adversary, "Mahisasura" could be the lesser evil this year. Bengal's most trusted daughter and epitome of women power, Ma Durga has her task cut out.

The raging pandemic, the growing number of infections and no vaccine in sight yet, man has again fallen at the feet of the Almighty. And who else will rescue mankind, but Ma Durga?

Time is opportune. The Kumartuli artisans have seized the moment with both hands. What remains to be seen is her weaponry. Would it be the 'Trishul' that decimates the dreaded 'Corona' or something wildly imaginative will roll out from these phenomenally talented men of art, it remains to be seen.

The idea that Mahishasura in the form of Coronasura is going to be defeated by Durga is in itself creating a sheer sense of positivism. Life experiences are never a bed full of roses. Yet one can still start from the scratch and try building a bed half filled with roses. Rebuilding confidence and the will power to fight, being optimistic about the battle is what is required. The idea for 'Coronasur' originated after just one of the 80 artisans, who got tested, came out positive for Covid last month. The one who tested positive is a Kumartuli artisan, but does not live there. The remaining 79 live in the colony which thereby gives the confidence to not stop trying until they succeed.

Thomas Alva Edison, who invented the electric bulb had said, life is one per cent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration. So the best bet is to work hard, some luck could follow. The 99 percent we give is actually proportional to that rest one percent. But this one percent we cannot aspire for if we do not give our best. Therefore, effort is the ultimate elevator to eventual success. - Pravaboti Paul



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Roy Chowdhury Family

Among the traditional family Pujas, the Aatchala Durga Puja is considered the oldest one in Kolkata. It was started in the year 1608 by Lakshmikanta Roy Chowdhury, a 'Zamindar' and his wife Bhagawati, in Barisha Area of southern Kolkata district. The USP of this puja is the long traditional history behind it and they don't pursue any kind of grand marquee, theme, or illumination.

The idols are designed in traditional "Motichuri" style and the structure of the Durga idol that was first built during the time of Lakshmikanta Roy Chowdhury is preserved and it is still used today while preparing the idol. Along with worshipping Goddess Durga, Lord Shiva and Lord Rama are also worshipped alongside. It also serves one of the most elaborate bhog spread and in Dashami, they serve "paanta bhaat" (soaked, fermented rice dish). Other idols of the area start the procession to immerse their idols only after that of Roy Chowdhury's.

Sovabazar Raj Bari

It was in the year 1757 after the Battle of Plassey, the first Durga Puja at the Shobha Bazar Choto Rajbari at 33 Raja Nabakrishna Road was initiated. Lord Clive and Warren Hastings were invited to the Durga Puja. Eminent personalities like Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda and Rabin-dranath Tagore had visited the Rajbari on numerous occasions.

Durga Puja celebration takes place in the two palaces of the Sovabazar royal family of Raja Nabakrishna Deb, founder of the Shovabazar Rajbari. It was said that Goddess Durga comes here to listen to music. Thus an all night music programme continues to be traditionally organized at the famous Nach-Ghar (dancing room) much of which has now collapsed.

Raja Nabakrishna Deb Family

The Durga Puja here is celebrated for 263 years and it is known for its Grand Shabeki Durga Puja. The Rajbari puja was started by Raja Nabakrishna Deb, a prominent aristocrat. It was celebrated for the first time in 1757 to commemorate the victory of the British Government over Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah of Murshidabad.

The members of the Rajbari. The Choto Rajbari in front of the main Rajbari also hosts the iconic Durga Puja which is now 231 years old.

The idol of Devi Durga along with her Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesh and Kartik is presented in an "Ek Chala" or single standing platform. One of the specialties of this puja is Mithaai Bhog or Prasadam. During the puja, Rajbari practices the sacrificing ritual of Singi Fish (Asian Catfish). Another distinctive feature of this puja is that the lion has the face of a horse. In 1757, it was the first time a non-Hindu, Robert Clive, and other officials were allowed and invited to a Hindu household during the celebration. However, this year due to the devastating pandemic, there will be less pomp in celebration and only the people of the family would be allowed to attend the puja.



Bonedi Bytes

Madan Mohan Dutta Bari

The roots of Madan Mohan Dutta bari starts from Dutta Chaudhury family of Andul. The two brothers Gobindasharan Dutta Chaudhury and his elder brother Ram Sharan Dutta Chaudhury had constant arguments and quarrels over their ancestral zamindari property. Finally in 1580, Gobindasharan Dutta Chaudhury left Andul and began to live in sothern Calcutta. Within four years Gobindasharan Dutta Chaudhury got appointed as Inland Revenue collector under Raja Todar Mal. Raja Todar Mal was Secretary of the Treasury under Emperor Akbar's newly created province combining Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Subsequently, Gobindasharan become so trusted that he was appointed as the Governor of the province in 1594.

Madan Mohan Dutta was his grandson. He became a merchant and amassed enough wealth. He was very religious too. Due to his fame, his house began to known as the 'Hathkhola Dutta Bari' and his descendants as the Duttas of Hathkhola. The tradition of celebrating the Durga Puja was started here. For its grandeur, this is known as the new Hathkhola Dutta Bari. At present, this house is also known by the name of 'Madan Mohan Dutta Bari'

Behala Jagat Mukherjee family

Jagat Ram Mukherji originally hailed from Barrackpore. He married for the second time in to the Haldar Family and settled in Behala in 1740. He had one daughter and four sons from this marriage. According to a story, his daughter and his nephews had visited the Durga Puja of his maternal uncle house – the Haldar Family, where she was insulted. After returning home, she related her experience to her father and also requested him to celebrate a puja of their own. It was Navami, the penultimate day of Durga Puja, so instead of worshipping an idol, symbolic Ghat Puja was done. From then onwards, the Mukherjee family started their own Puja and this carried on with the worship of a clay idol till 1867. In 1868, Jyotinath Mukherjee – great grand son of Jagat Ram made Durga idol of gold, which is being worshiped till date.

Baghbazar Haldibari

The Haldarbari Durga Puja was started 447 years ago. Unlike many other traditional homes the deity is a Mahishashurmardini idol made of Kusthipathar (Touchstone). Members of Haldar family say that one of their ancestors was a Zaminder of Nawpara at Chandannagar. On a leisure trip to a place named Sahebpur alias Rahanpur at Balasore, Odisha, he dreamt about the idol. Later, the idol was discovered after digging 14 feet deep through the floor of a Muslim fisherman's house. The year of discovery is stated to be 1560. This exquisite idol is of two feet in height. The weight of the idol is around 25 to 30 kg. As an art form this idol is unparalleled. The deity is bejeweled with several ornaments. She has ten arms holding a variety of weapons. Her right foot rests on the back of a lion and the left foot is on the demon Mahishashura. Just above the Goddess is a statue of Mahakal. On each side of her forehead, there are two angels. On the lower side of Goddess, there are two small statues of women holding weapons. These looks like Jaya and Bijoya, although traditionally they do not brandish arms. The entire idol rests on a lotus.

After being worshipped in various places, the present residing place of the idol for last 200 years is in the Haldar residence at Baghbazar. It may be mentioned here that the idol is worshipped here on daily basis.



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Rani Rashmoni family

Founder of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple and a pillar of strength in the male dominated society, Rani Rashmoni started Durga Puja at her S.N. Banerjee Road residence. After her death in 1861, his sons-in-law and daughters continued Durga Puja celebrations in their respective premises. In the S.N. Banerjee Road house the festival is celebrated by two families while at Rani Rashmoni Road house, Puja is celebrated by one family.

Pathuriaghata Khelat Ghosh

The Thakurdalan of Khelatchandra Ghosh's House is one of the largest such structure in Kolkata, if not the Largest. Apart from having a 85 feet long corridor of Marble, this premises showcases a grand dancing hall, which has been converted into Khelat Ghosh Memorial Hall. The premises was planned and designed was made by German architecture company, Martin & Burn. Apart from being a Diwan in Warren Hastings Court, Khelat Chandra Ghosh was known for his philanthropic and cultural activities. The Durga Puja is celebrated with much pomp and grandeur.



Jorashanko Dawn House

A successful businessman Gokul Chandra Dawn of Satgachia came to reside at Jorasanko. Here he adopted Shibkrishna Dutta, a relative's son. On this occasion, Gokul Chandra Dawn celebrated Durga Puja in 1840. From then the tradition has been carried on by Shibkrishna Dawn and later his descendents till date. Shibkrishna Dawn built up a Coalliary and had major contribution in building up Rail Lines. The Thakurdalan and the courtyard is huge and has been shooting venue of many a films. It is said that Goddess Durga comes to wear her ornaments at the Jorasanko Dawn House. The family home houses a rich variety of gold, diamond jewelry and emeralds from Europe which are used to decorate the idol.

Dutta Bari, Balaram Dey Street. (Also Known as Ghosh Bari Pujo)
Initiated by Shyamal Dhon Dutta, a Solicitor of High Court with roots in Hath Khola Dutta Bari in the year 1882, the Puja is at present is being carried on by 6th descendents of the family. The house is known for following many ancient rituals including carrying idols atop bamboo rakes like old days. Sandhi Puja and Baran on Dasami of this house are a delight to watch.

Baishnabdas Mallick family

The Durga Puja of Baishnab Das Mallick's house is 235 years old. Originating from Chinsurah, Baishnab Das Mallick was Gold Merchant and later went into Real Estate too. The Durga Puja was started by him in 1785 after he saw the Goddess in his dream. The huge Mallick Residence has a large courtyard.

Goddess Durga is seated here on the lap of Shiva in the form of Hara Gouri. The Lakshmi and Saraswati Idol here are not only taller than Kartick and Ganesh idols and but they are taller than the Durga Idol too 'Dhuno Porano' rituals are observed in this house by several women, although it remains mainly a private affair. In this ritual married women hold burning Malsas on their palms and heads, praying for the prosperity of their children as well as families.

Bonedi

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Kali Mohan Ghosh Ray family

Family member Pradip Mohan Ray states the origin of this family Durga Puja to 1829 at Narrottampur Of Barishal District, which now is in Bangladesh. After partition, the Puja celebration was located at Pratapaditya Place at Kolkata in 1947 and finally to its present location in 1977. Here the idol is painted in blue. The reason for this is said to be a ‘swapnadesh’ or divine instruction to Saradamayi Ghosh Ray wife of zamindar Kali Mohan Ghosh Ray. In her dream she was instructed to worship Goddess Durga in the form of Goddess Kali. Since then the face of Goddess adorns the blue colour.

Bhawanipur Mitra family

At the Mitra residence at Bhowanipore. the Durga Puja dates back to 1757. The Durga Idol appears to be Dwibhuja (two handed) at first sight but actually has two natural hands and the rest of the eight hands are short and on the shoulders. After the idol is dressed up, you cannot see the rest of the eight small hands. Laxmi and Saraswati have no ‘vahan’ and are seen on the lotus. The Lion’s head has a close resemblance to a horse and is painted white with moustache in black.

Bhawanipur Mallick family

Durga puja of Mallick Family dates back to 15th Century. The founder of Mallick family Radha Gobinda Mallick settled in Bhowanipur in 1860. His place of origin was the village of Srikhanda, from where they shifted to Guptipara. From 1925, Durga Puja shifted from native village to Kolkata. Puja rituals are performed at the Mallick residence at two locations , namely “Annapurna Dalan” and the other “Durga Dalan”. Mallick Family are Vaisnavas and prepare vegetarian food from Sasthi to Nabami. After immersion on Dasami, they prepare Non Veg food. No rice is offered to the goddess, only wheat preparations are offered. Popular Bengali filmstar Ranjit Mallick and his daughter – successful actor Koel Mallick belong to this family.



Contributed by Srijita Roy, Shinjini Mahato & Pravaboti Paul



“Any initiative should not only raise awareness but also spread goodness in the society,” says BetheBee’s COO Mr. Banibrata Goswami. East India’s advertisement agency BetheBee has achieved its mark in the industry for its continuous good work. They released a digital film Maa Ke Sath Maa Ka Darshan last year during Durga Puja for an Indian conglomerate Amrit Cement. The film, based on the subject of homecoming during festivals, has won a Gold and Silver award in the Afaqs Foxglove Awards 2020!

The film won the hearts of netizens instantly and became viral. It touched the sensitive topic of elders being left alone during the festival time while youngsters plan out their festivities with friends. It is often overlooked that they are the ones who have devoted their lives in bringing up their children, but in return they do not receive any gratitude in the form of company, not even during celebrations which evokes so much happiness among all.

The aim of making the film was to strike the right chord which made the film memorable.

This year, the Durga Puja may not be able to bring out too many on the roads. So let us hope the elders will get their fair share of attention!

On National Duty - Past Activities



Cancer Awareness

Late last year, the national body of public relations professionals embarked on a plan to spread cancer awareness among the masses.

Cancer as a disease is not unknown. One of the biggest killers in India, people in all strata of society is well aware of the perils of cancer and its impact on human longevity once it strikes.

The point then is not awareness of the disease that needs to be the focal point of any substantive communication effort. The awareness needs to be built around how best to avoid it, if possible.

You might say can we save ourselves from a disease which can strike any time and without notice? This is true. "But we can guard against it," said Dr Arnab Gupta, Director, Saroj Gupta Cancer Center & Research Institute (SGCCRI). Dr Gupta was speaking at a Cancer Awareness Programme initiated by Public Relations Society of India, Kolkata Chapter on December 21st last year. It was part of a campaign undertaken by the National body of communication professionals.

PRSI Kolkata in association with SGCCRI held an elaborate discussion in presence of people afflicted with the disease as well as their friends and relatives at the hospital premises. More than 300 persons attended the presentation made by Dr Gupta, who unraveled the mystery of cancer and insisted that one should not fear it but fight it, because many were being cured today. "It is important to have the right attitude and intervene in the right time," he said.

Dr Gupta stressed on healthy habits as one of the important criteria to prevent the disease from overpowering us. Also it was important to consciously keep ourselves tension free because, "our mind is the breeding ground for serious ailments."



Environment and Tree Planting

Early this year on February 21st, 2020, PRSI Kolkata prime moved a tree plantation programme in New Town Rajarhat. In association with Green for Life Foundation, a civil society group in Kolkata, an elaborate tree planting programme was undertaken where PRSI planted 50 saplings of the evergreen varieties. The programme was inaugurated by Mr Debashish Sen, IAS, Chairman, HIDCO in the presence of a glittering array of environmentalists and students dedicated to protecting the environment. The plot of lands belongs to the state government and part of the declared green zone. Mr Sen complimented PRSI Kolkata chapter for encouraging such initiatives and hoped that more such programmes would be taken up to create awareness about environment protection among the people of the city. "Let us leave a city worth living for our children and the generations to come," he said.

The plot of land which measures around three acres, now house nearly 10,000 plants. Mr Sen also assured PRSI Kolkata and Green for Life Foundation that he would make available more such land for similar plantation programmes.



Conceptualised and edited by **Subhash Mohanti**,
Vice Chairman, PRSI, Kolkata Chapter.

Visualisation and Design - **Kaushik Das**