

Rotary



Communique

A Bulletin of Rotary Club of Calcutta Metropolitan East

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President: Paramita Biswas

Secretary: Vinayak Lal Pasricha

Editor: Paramita Gupta

From the Editor's Desk

Dear Rotarians



In our second issue of Communique for the Rotary year 2021-22, we cover our Installation-cum-Fellowship meeting which was extremely enjoyable and very well attended. We are also covering some of the Projects held in September and October. With the partial lifting of lockdown restrictions, the city celebrated the festive season this year with a sense of relief and joy, albeit with a lot of caution. Our President Paramitadi spent the Pujas at her ancestral house in Dasghara where Durga Puja is celebrated following all their traditions and practices. An interesting write-up on this is being included in this bulletin.

We are extremely thankful to our energetic band of young Rotarians who actively participated in all the Projects held so far. Let us hope that with the gradual return of normalcy we will be able to resume our regular physical meetings and all of us will be able to join our future Club projects.

Paramita Gupta-
Editor



History of Durga Puja at Dasghara (where a Women's college is being supported by our Club) from our President

Early in the 12th. century, there came to what is now present day Dasghara, Sadananda, the regent of the powerful Odiya King, Ananta Burman Chord Gangadev. Ananta Burman had lately also annexed a large tract of southeast Bengal, stretching from Midnapore to Triveni on Ganges.

Sadananda, Ananta Burman's regent was the first forbearer of the present-day Deb Biswas family, settled in Bengal. Once established in Dasghara, one of his first deeds was to erect a "Nahar" (meaning "palace", in Odiya) on what would presently measure 40 Bighas of land, then colloquially known as "Das-Nahara". The name "Dasghara" is in all likelihood, a corruption of that name. Even today, the ruins of this magnificent palace are evident in the place known as Baro Dwari Porah.

With Sadananda, came from his native Karnapur, Odisha, a sacred urn of the Goddess Chandi, known as the "Chandi Ghaut", which was his family deity. This was placed with great reverence on a "Puncha Mundi Asan", an altar consisting of the skulls of five different animals and housed in a temple on the site of which, stands the 19th. century built "Durga Dalan" of today. The autumnal Durga Puja was then performed with the Ghaut, as is common to most Devi shrines, all over India.

During the 16th. century, the advent and direct influence of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu swayed the entire Deb Biswas clan to embrace Vaishnavism. The Chandi Ghaut worship continued concurrently till about 1752 AD, when Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Jiu was installed as the family deity.

The Chandi Ghaut, the object of veneration for over six centuries, was then shifted and installed at the "Gurukul" in Goswami Malipara, Hooghly, as per the prevailing convention. The temple erected to Lord Gopinath is considered by the cognoscenti to be one of the finest preserved specimens of Bengal terracotta. This has been noted both by the Archaeological Survey of India and the Indian Museum.

About this juncture, after consultations with religious heads, it was decided to conduct only the autumnal Durga Puja in clay idol form. This "Jai Durga" manifestation, is regarded to be of Odiya iconography. This form is worshipped by the family, even today.

Significant departures from the conventional form of Durga, as worshipped in Bengal, are manifold:

a). The Deb Biswas family idol has four arms holding sword, shield, trident and snake, instead of the usual ten arms. This form of Jai Durga confirms the Odiya roots of the Deb Biswas family.

b). Kartik and Ganesh are placed above Lakshmi and Saraswati on the "Chaalchitra" or "Chali", the colourful, semi-circular backdrop, in accordance with the more ancient Bishnupuri style of Durga modelling. The more modern, Krishna Nagari style though, is actually far more prevalent in Bengal. The conformity with the Bishnupuri model is proof of the antiquity of the Deb Biswas puja.

c). Lord Ganesh's image has just two arms, as against the commonly depicted four. He bears no weapons and this manifestation is known as "Chintamani Ganesh" and is absolutely unique to Maharashtra. The connection with Maharashtra here, remains, unknown.

d). From the onset of Nava Ratri or Pratipada, the Chandi Ghaut regarded by the Biswas family to be their original family deity, is placed on the same altar, where the deity used to historically stand, i.e. to the left of the Durga idol.

e). The Ganesh Ghaut is placed on the left of the Debi Ghaut, a significant departure from scriptural stipulations.

f). The ritual of "Chir Kathi", or placing of sacred twigs and thread in order to bind and impart divinity to certain holy vessels for the duration of the Puja, is not followed, as this worship is considered to be in continuance of the original, daily worship of Debi Chandi.

g). The storing of "Naba Patrika" (the branches of various, sacred plants) in the family deity, Lord Gopinath's kitchen, during the night of Maha Sasthi, is rare. From this particular practice, it becomes evident that the concept of Naba Patrika was a subsequent introduction, as it is not a prerequisite in the regular, daily worship of Durga or Chandi.

From the features mentioned above, it becomes clear that the Durga Puja as performed and celebrated in the Biswas family, is considered to be purely an extension of the rituals involving the earlier, daily worship of Chandi Debi, the original family deity.

A remarkable feature for a Vaishnav family, which eschews violence and blood-letting, the Biswas Bari Durga Puja rituals, do involve animal sacrifice. This is offered on Maha Saptami, Sandhi Puja and Maha Navami. This in itself, is a clear pointer to the family's pre-Vaishnavite, Shakta heritage, when animal sacrifice was the norm. However, with conversion to Vaishnavism, the convention of

the family members partaking of this "Maha Prasad" has entirely stopped.

This may well be, about the only instance of blood sacrifice in a family where an avatar of Vishnu is installed and worshipped every day. It is worth mentioning here, that Sri Sri Radha Gopinath are laid down to sleep before the blood sacrifices, but only after plugging Their ears with cotton wool, so that They may not have to endure the sights and sounds of such violence.

Interestingly, during Navaratri, animal sacrifice also takes place in Bimala Mandir, located inside the Jagannath Temple complex in Puri, Odisha.

Just prior to immersion, the Mukut, or crown of Durga is removed from the idol, for despatch later, to Terol. There, it would adorn the famed Kali image, on the night of Kali Puja. The story goes, that many, many years ago, a beautiful little girl, professing to be a daughter of the Biswas family of Dasghara, appeared before the sage who established the Mandir and bid him to conduct Kali puja. After the services, no trace was ever found of the girl, except for her tiara, which was found perched on Ma Kali's head.

All these, are the rather unusual features of the Durga Puja conducted by the Biswases of Dasghara. Worth remembering, would be the fact that the puja has been extant since early 12th. century, even though the introduction and worship in clay form commenced sometime in the 18th. century

Text: Subhojit Sur

**Our President at the Dasghara
Durga Puja**



Installation and Fellowship meeting on August 29, 2021



Projects undertaken by Rotary Club of Calcutta Metropolitan East – September to October 2021

1-Project: Distribution of sarees in the Kalighat red light district of Kolkata on 9th October 2021.

Area of Focus- Community Service (Non-Medical)

The Rotary Club of Calcutta Metropolitan East donated 30 sarees worth Rs. 9,000 to the women sex-workers in Kalighat's red light district for the Durga Puja festival as part of a long-term ongoing welfare development project by social workers.

Total project cost - ₹9,000.



2 – Nutrition and Virangana Project

Area of Focus – Maternal & Child Health

On 23rd and 24th October, 2021, our Club conducted a joint project with Rotary Club of Calcutta Sun City and Rotary Club of Calcutta Majestic where we provided a specially designed egg white powder to girls from backward areas. This powder contains maximum protein required by women for good health, better nutrition and to maintain overall growth.



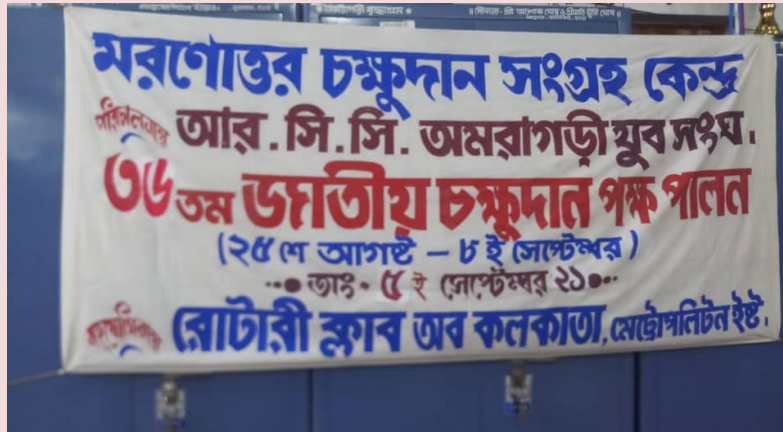
3 – Project: Organ Donation Awareness Camp organized by our RCC Amoragori Juba Sangha.

Area of Focus- Community Service (Non-Medical)

Each year our Club's RCC – Amoragori Juba Sangha conducts an organ donation camp where members of the RCC go around neighboring villages & areas spreading awareness about and the necessity for organ donation. The local community is then addressed by doctors and other important personalities, where they are educated on benefits of organ donation.

An awareness project was held at the RCC hall where the audience took a pledge to donate their organs. Our Club lent a humanitarian hand by donating a sum of Rs. 10,000 for this worthy project. The Camp was held between 25th August and 8th September.

Total project cost - ₹10,000.



4 - Project – Puja Parikrama with Senior Citizens.

A small project with the residents of the Senior Citizen's home – Ananda Ashram of Navodyay Association for Promotion of Indian Heritage was held on Saptami, October 12, 2021. Every year, barring the last, the boarders are taken out for a Puja Parikrama – a visit to the city puja pandals in hired cars. They witness the decorations and the Durga Puja rituals. It gives them a sense of belonging with our biggest festival and makes them truly happy. The cost for 2 hired cars and some food packets and refreshments came to Rs. 5,000. The cars were draped with our Club banners.

