

What Durga Puja means to me as an Indian-American

By Ahaan Goswami

Durga Puja holds a significant place in my heart because it provides me with a connection to my identity as an Indian and a person living in America. As I grow up here, sometimes, Durga Puja, for me, grounds me to the meaning behind those stories, and helps me realize that, although I am distant from India, I am part of something much larger than myself - my culture and my family.

Participating in Durga Puja, I always feel this kind of warmth in that shared space. Families gather in the hall with colorful clothing, we can smell the incense, and we can hear the ringing bells, and the prayers moving through the air, everyone's hands held together with flowers for *anjali* while repeating mantas and chants. While I may not know all of the traditional practices that are happening at that moment, I am aware that something is happening that brings people together and being a part of it is something that fills me with a sense of pride. When I share about this event with my friends, I feel a sense of pride and happiness.

This brings me to one of the things I enjoy best about the festival - the sense of community. Families bring food to share with one another, children get up to perform traditional dance (or song etc.), and families spend time together at the event. I have never experienced Durga Puja in India, but being part of the celebrations in the U.S. helps me feel connected to the celebration happening halfway across the world. Thus in those moments, it feels



like India came to America, and I get to be a part of it.

Another part of Durga Puja that gives me great enjoyment is the yearly sarees and kurtas that my relatives bring from India for me to wear. I go designed in beautiful kurtas, surrounded by others clad in Indian beauty.

There, we enjoy sweets and idols, made dedicated to the holy event. I also routinely help out with rehearsals for performances and even perform myself, showing my love for the tradition and my pride when the children I helped dance and sing for the audience.

Whenever the Durga Puja happens, there is always food. Delightful, aromatic indian food that everyone shares and enjoys, filling their stomachs to the limit with flavorful, handmade delicacies. Sometimes I even help out by serving the food, giving them puris or sweets, or even the holy food that

Durga Maa herself ate.

Ultimately, to me, Durga Puja is not about paying homage to a goddess. It is about celebrating my identity,

learning about who I am, and sharing this notion of identity with the individuals around me. Further, it makes me feel proud to belong to a heritage, and proud to belong to both an Indian identity and an American identity.



