

With pomp and splendour, a divine farewell



Plus: Upeendra Naik

Married women applying vermilion to each other at the Sindur Utsav held on Dusshera; (below) venerating Maa Durga



THERE WERE MORE THAN A HUNDRED PEOPLE IN THE PROCESSION AND SOME JOINED IN LATER AT THE BEACH... WE DON'T IMMERSIVE THE IDOL ENTIRELY, WE JUST DIP THE IDOL INTO WATER AND IMMEDIATELY REMOVE IT OUT AND DISPOSED IT OFF IN AN ECO-FRIENDLY MANNER

— Anirudh Das

Janice Rodrigues

The Bengalis sure know how to keep their traditions and culture alive, even if they are on the other side of the country, in Goa. The Bengali Cultural Association in Panaji gathered together at the Gomant Maratha Samaj Hall to celebrate the Durga Puja on the four days culminating in the celebration of Goddess Durga's victory over Mahishasura, on Dusshera.

On Tuesday morning, to mark Vijaya Dashmi and before the immersion of the idol in the evening, there was aarti and puja, after which the women began venerating the goddess with vermilion, betel leaves and offering prasad. The married women then began to observe the sindoor utsav, with many in traditional Bengali saris smearing vermilion on each other's foreheads and faces after the final puja. The vibe, energy and spirit of the revellers exuded positivity and cheer with the sound of the dhol and the lulu dhvani — or ululation — filling the room and raising the energy levels of the revellers.

Following this rituals, the revellers later went out in a procession across the city with the idol of the goddess to perform the immersion in Miramar. "There were more than a hundred people in the procession and some joined in later at the beach, we reached the beach at about 8 pm. Keeping in mind the ecology we don't immerse the idol entirely, we just dip the idol into water and immediately remove it out and then the idol is disposed off in an eco-friendly manner. Additionally we have tried to stay away from plastic," Anirudh Das, president of the association.

From Saptami to Dashami, Bengalis observed all the rituals. On the day of Ashtami, devotees gathered to pay their respects to the Goddess with Sandhi Puja. The puja also saw the crowd lighting 108 lamps and offering 108 lotuses to commemorate Lord Rama's offering to Durga before he went into battle with Ravan.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



When the Goddess came to town

Photo: Upendra Nalik



The revellers bid adieu to Maa Durga at Miranar



...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"In the earlier days people would mark this time with animal sacrifice, now that doesn't happen," adds Anirudh. The pujas are conducted by the priest who comes especially from Bengal every year. "I have been coming here for the past 18 years and it always feels nice to be here for the people really take part in the rituals with a lot of energy and reverence for the diety," says Kali Krishna Ganguli, the priest who is assisted by Jayanta Banerjee. The rituals were followed by the Dhunuchi dance with earthen pots and incense that saw a lot of people participating and showcasing their skills in balance and agility.

Anirudh adds that though there are other celebrations, the one in Panaji is one of the oldest and it has a very homely feel. "the first one was held in Vasco," he says. Going deeper into history, Mritunjoy Chokroborty tells us that first puja in Goa was held in Vasco in 1967. "People from across

Goa used to visit, crossing the Zuari in boats and they would stay there for all the days of the festival," he says. It was only in 1981 when people around Panaji began to celebrate the festival now in its 39th year. Now there are several other celebrations happening across Goa.

Every year after the rituals, the evenings are dedicated to cultural celebrations in keeping with the Bengalis' love for culture and the arts. "This year we had an Ananda Mela, a kind of fair of delicacies made by the women in their homes," says Anirudh. The cultural programme had a lot more to offer from songs to dances and poetry recitations. There was also a dance drama performed by the students of the BITS Pilani Goa campus on the play Chitrangada, another play by the members of the association, and to pay a tribute to cultural integration, a *dandiya* night with fusion music.



A lady performs the Dhunuchi dance; (below) the cultural programmes that were held in the evening were an ode to the rich Indian culture

