



Parabtrika

MOSCOW DURGA PUJA 2020



From the Editor's Desk

"Oft hope is born when all is forlorn." — J.R.R. Tolkien

Hope – the most powerful source of reassurance in times of darkness and despair. After months of confinement and battling inner demons amid a raging pandemic, festival season brings a glimmer of excitement and hope. Durga Puja, which celebrates the cycle of life, most poignantly validates that the only constant in life is change. The idol of the Goddess is created with clay from the banks of Ganga, sculpted bit by bit, only to be immersed in the river after the celebrations, for it to return where it belonged. Like the cycle of life, challenging times do not last forever. Dark phases of life are like tunnels – it will end eventually and there will be light once more. Durga Puja, is a reminder of precisely that.

Stories of hope, resilience and inspiration have kept us going during the pandemic –those of young people rising to meet challenges of various kinds. Through the stress and difficulties that the pandemic caused, young volunteers, activists and dedicated campaign workers across the globe generated powerful ideas, with great energy and empathy, impacting lives of millions. It was therefore only fitting then for Aaratrika this year to turn to our young members, asking them to share their stories as they experience and live through these uncertain times. The section "Reflections on a Global Pandemic: Young Voices" is a collection of stories of young people navigating life through the pandemic. The message is loud and clear – Fear will not win, love and hope will!

Governments globally have discouraged big gatherings; thus, celebrations have been muted. Adhering to the guidelines, while staying true to our effort to preserve our culture and heritage in our *vtoraya rodina* (second homeland), the Moscow Durga Puja Committee went ahead with the 31st Durga Puja in Moscow. Though the scale of celebration was smaller, the spirit of joy and togetherness was in no way subdued. Along with the unwavering support of the Moscow

Ramakrishna Society Vedanta Centre, the Committee, its members and our Russian friends helped ensure a well-rounded celebration.

The year 2020 celebrates the 20th anniversary of the signing of Declaration of Strategic Partnership between India and the Russian Federation. This year also marks the 10th anniversary of elevating this unique bond to the level of Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. Numerous events were held throughout the year to commemorate these milestones. In January, Russia participated as theme country at the International Kolkata Book Fair (IKBF-2020). The striking Russian Pavilion called “Read Russia” displayed a wide array of books, including new literary translations of Russian books into Bengali & other Indian languages and vice versa. Leading Russian authors Yevgeny Vodolazkin, Vadim Polonsky, among others, delighted the City of Joy with their riveting lectures and insightful presentations. It was truly a stimulating event that connected people and cultures, while promoting further cooperation in literature. It is the special collaborations in arts and culture that Aaratrika is committed to highlight. Because of our shared human destiny, it is prudent to join forces in times of crisis, to support pandemic-related prevention and mitigation activities. Expanding ties from defence to public health, India and Russia came together to co-manufacture COVID-19 “Sputnik V” vaccine.

As we gear up for the celebrations, we remember those whom we lost this year - doctors, nurses, health-care workers, and the families that lost their loved ones. To all the frontline warriors, we are forever indebted to you for risking your lives to keep us safe. We also remember the victims of Amphan, a cyclone unprecedented in scale that hit West Bengal in May.

Festivals are all about spreading joy and hope. Every cloud has a silver lining. We will eventually win this fight against COVID-19, heal our world, and emerge stronger than before. Many of us may have traumatic personal stories about the pandemic, but it is important that we hold on to the positive stories. Let this Durga Puja be remembered as a Puja with a difference, when we all came together, united by the belief that a time of hope and new beginnings lies ahead of us.

Debasmita Moulick Nair



Strength is the name of Mother Durga

या देवि सर्वभूतेषु शक्तिरूपेण संस्थिता।
नमस्तस्यै, नमस्तस्यै, नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः॥ Sri Sri Chandi:5-32

Salutations again and again to the Devi who abides in all beings in the form of Strength.

In the first day of the starting of worship of Divine Mother Durga the worshipper must repeat this mantra:

रावणस्य वधार्थाय रामस्यानुग्रहाय च, अकाले ब्रह्मणा बोधः देव्यास्त्वयि कृता पुरा।

In order to kill Rāvana, the evil force and to favour Rāma, the embodiment of Truth, O Goddess! In ancient time, You were untimely awakened by Brahmā.

We, in the autumn, also worship You earnestly to awaken in us that strength for conquering all weaknesses – physical, mental, moral and spiritual, by bestowing blessings to Your children and devotees.

‘This is the great fact: Strength is life, weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal. Weakness is constant strain and misery; weakness is death’ – so says Swami Vivekananda.

‘Strength, strength... it is that we need so much in this life, for what we call sin and sorrow, have one cause, and that is our weakness.’ (Sw. Vivekananda)

This is for the whole world to gather strength to face the calamity befalling over humanity all over. We must pray from the depth of our heart to the Divine Mother for all humanity: Mother! Please remove from us all the weaknesses, cowardliness from our mind. O Mother! Please make us all real men...

Swami Jyotirupananda



Greetings from His Excellency D.B. Venkatesh Varma, Ambassador of India to Russian Federation

Dear friends,

Durga Puja is an auspicious occasion, which celebrates the victory of good over evil. This year, the celebration in India and elsewhere will remain muted due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. Public safety should remain the primary focus during the entire duration of the festival.

India is a country of festivals, which are symbols of India's diverse culture. Durga Puja is a celebration of traditional culture and customs, not just in India, but all over the world. Although the festivities will be smaller in scale this year, the enthusiasm to welcome Goddess Durga and mark her triumph over the evil Mahishasura will, as always, remain high.

The Moscow Durga Puja Committee has upheld this unique tradition of worshipping the divine feminine over the last thirty years, by celebrating Durga Puja annually. On this auspicious occasion, I extend my warmest felicitations to the organizers, participants and all Indians in Russia.

India's ties with Russia are time-tested and multi-dimensional, which is also visible in the strong cultural link between the people of the two countries. These ties have strengthened over the years and I am sure, celebration of such events will help in understanding of each other's culture in both countries.

I would also like to thank members of The Moscow Durga Puja Committee as they have kept alive the tradition of celebration of Durga Puja in Russia over the last 30 years. I wish all the readers of the magazine good health and strength and hope that we will collectively defeat the virus and emerge stronger from the pandemic.



Greetings from His Excellency Alexey Idamkin, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Kolkata, India

Durga Puja is one of the grandest and most spectacular of the many festivals celebrated in India throughout the year. It is heart-warming to know that Durga Puja is being celebrated in Moscow for as long as 30 years, and continuing. Traditional festivals and celebrations are at the core of any culture and this is intricately and inexorably woven into the cultural fabric. It is especially important to preserve traditions when one is away from home, in a foreign land. Not only does it help in maintaining a living and dynamic tradition, but also it aids in showcasing cultures across boundaries, in a world that is increasingly becoming a global village. It presents a great opportunity for intercultural exchange and understanding, which leads to enrichment of all.

This year we are faced with the unprecedented challenge that have come our way because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has therefore become even more crucial to stay united during these challenging times to work in a coordinated manner to fight the outbreak. And for that to happen, it is important for us to stay energized and positive, and continue to celebrate our joys in life, albeit with all precautions and safety measures. It is heartening to see the Moscow Durga Puja is aspiring to do exactly that, and I wish them all success.

On the occasion of the 31st Durga Puja in Moscow, I would like to extend my warmest wishes to both readers of this magazine and the organizers of the event. May the festivities of Durga Puja bring grace, joy and positive energy in your lives and inspire new beginnings!



**Infusing Joy and Colour in People's Lives –
The Creations of Artist Udayshankar**



UDAYSHANKAR, Delhi based cartoonist, illustrator and painter sends festive greetings for our young members with a very special artwork. His illustration of Ma Durga was displayed in 20 venues across Delhi during Durga Puja this year, as 20 X 12 feet size posters.

I am delighted to learn Moscow is celebrating its 31st Durga Puja! The Moscow Durga Puja Committee's relentless efforts in keeping our traditions alive for so many years is truly admirable, and I am delighted to be able to connect with the Indian community of Moscow during this festive occasion.

I live in Delhi, and I am a cartoonist, illustrator, and painter by profession – having been doing this since earning my degrees from Calcutta University and the Indian College of Arts, Kolkata. Be it cartoons or portraits – I find that the most fulfilling part of my job is being able to transmit the joy I get from doing my work to others.

This year, with celebrations being held differently due to the ongoing pandemic, one of the key highlights for me personally has been my painting depicting Maa Durga slaying the Corona virus being printed as posters 20 feet long X 12 feet wide, and displayed in 20 venues across Delhi during Durga Puja. The idea was to depict hope, and provide reassurance that good will prevail over evil like it always has. Other posters I created were put up as a friendly reminder to maintain physical distancing, while staying true to the celebratory spirit of the occasion!

I would like to send my festive greetings to you all, especially the young readers of your wonderful magazine Aaratrika, by means of my special artwork.

Sharodshuvaccha and stay safe!

Reflections on a Global Pandemic: Young Voices

The global COVID-19 pandemic has come as a huge shock to all of us. These are uncertain times. In a short period of time, the Pandemic has challenged our attitudes and behaviours radically. It has impacted lives of millions of people in unimaginable ways, and the changes have been taking place so quickly that most of the world's population has been caught off guard. We have been trying to adapt to this new reality hoping that the pandemic will end soon. However, it is impossible to predict how long it will last and what consequences it will have for all. Hence we thought it will be great to get insights from our young members, about their experiences and feelings during the lockdown period in Moscow. This will not only allow our young readers to explore and express their own thoughts and feeling, but will also give adults an opportunity to access their minds, for they represent the future.

The range of responses we received was amazing. While some articulated their thoughts and views at length, exploring various dimensions, others wrote briefly, but with powerful impact. A few words were used to say a lot. We therefore thought it best to leave the overall length of the responses as they were, while making minor edits.

We hope you will enjoy reading these pieces, as much as we did, reviewing, curating and editing these.

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Andrei Garzon

During the rather difficult quarantine period, which is over now, I had quite a few eventful weeks, as much as I had some routine normal days. My most vivid experience during the lock down period has been meeting friends online. For me it was a completely unique and novel way of meeting people. Moreover, these were not just the usual Skype or Zoom calls where we discuss about life in general, or activities or events. We went on to spend several virtual birthdays together, played games, had contests, and even sang and exchanged gifts online. My friend was so inspired by this whole idea that he even started a project based on this theme, which is slowly developing now.

However, once the lock down measures were lifted and we returned to meeting each other face-to-face meetings, I think our virtual meetings and celebrations will reduce. This is not a surprise, because as human beings, personal one to one interactions and human touch is important to us, and can never be replaced fully through virtual means. At the same time, not being able to meet face to face will no longer be an impediment to being in touch and sharing our lives. The lockdown period had its share of unusual and interesting developments for me personally. During this period I successfully managed to work as a translator (what more, I was translator for a series), a lecturer and even a doctor's assistant. Well, the essence, or the bottom line is I spent the lockdown usefully and cheerfully, although the disadvantages caused by the lock down were highly undesirable.



Aanisha Garzon

Hello everyone! One of the happiest and most vivid moments during the time of the lockdown was the moment when it was announced that our exams stood cancelled. I was talking to my best friend, when one of our classmates wrote on our class chat, asking whether our exams were going to be held or not. We were surprised by the question. Our class teacher Svetlana Anatolyevna replied that exams had been canceled. We were stunned! My friends and I screamed in joy and everyone in the house got very scared. My aunt, who was at home that time, got very scared and came up to me. She thought something bad had happened to me. But No! Those were screams and tears of happiness. We were very happy. After this, when the lockdown period was over, whenever my best friends and I went for walks, we would talk and reminisce about this funny situation with a sense of amusement and nostalgia.



Uditangshu Aurangabadkar

The covid-19 pandemic has changed the world in multiple ways. Masks, gloves and anti-septic spray have become staple. This was during the initial period of the lockdown. Like everyone else, I too succumbed to panic and started hoarding essential goods including food items. Naturally, I went to a hypermarket and found myself stuck at the long queue at the entrance. Only a handful were wearing masks, and among them hardly anyone was wearing gloves. Now most people usually wear surgical masks, others tend to buy masks made of cloth. The thing that I remember from that moment, amid of the mayhem of buying canned goods, was a person wearing a military grade face mask. Today I must admit that was probably the most effective ways to avoid getting infected in that chaotic situation!



Manas Kumar

The lockdown that happened in Russia brought a hard time on all of us. It was an unusual event that occurred all of a sudden. However, to get through it I was fortunate enough to have my family with me during those times, and I also had my friends who I played video games with online. However, my brightest memory of lockdown was my family and I getting together every evening to play a game of ludo (a board game). We played this every evening without missing a day. It usually used to be after the tea time we started having regularly every day. This brought all of us closer to each other, as this was not something we used to do before lockdown. These special moments enjoyed together with the family played a huge role in getting all of us through lockdown.



**Manwi Singh, King's College London
Biomedical Sciences, Year One**

When we celebrated the eve of 2020, I remember being very anxious and yet excited about the end of the decade. Moreover, 2020 was, or I should say is, supposed to be a landmark in our lives. Finishing our schooling, we were moving on from a steady and largely organized aspect of our lives that lasted for 12 long years. I recall being extremely nervous about exams, but I kept telling myself that so many people have gone through the same end of school transition in the past, and they have come out of it unscathed, and so would we. So I started diligently preparing for my exams, joking around with my friends about having a case of 'seniorities' (for those of you who are unaware of this slang, it refers to people in their final years of school or college who experience lack of motivation and laziness amongst other things) and procrastinating on making a study regime for revisions. Soon enough, I begin to hear my Asian friends' rant about some guy on the internet eating a raw bat and starting an epidemic? Interesting, huh? Well, it does not really concern me; I am thousands of miles away! It just going to be one of those stories you hear about on the news, dwell on it for a while and then focus on more individually pressing matters (like exams). It is a bittersweet feeling now, but we also were seriously planning trips to places we could go during the buffer period after exams and before our colleges begin in the fall.

Few months fast-forward and we are suddenly having our teachers propose online alternatives to classroom activities and indicate a complete closure of the school campus. There is a whole pandemic going on, but you will still have your exams, good luck! All the teachers are leaving for their home countries so that in case they get infected, they have access to trusted healthcare; however you, class of 2020, get to stay and wait to write your exams good luck! We will not be able to cover the whole syllabus in time and do practice but good luck! Honestly, the situation was so absurd that I was not even angry. Ah so this is how we are doing things now? Okay!

Lockdown was an interesting time at first. We were all scrambling to find a routine in our new normal and it was working out differently for everyone. I am certain that if I had to sit my exams after two months of quarantine, I would have been a huge disappointment. But viola, no exams. No

exams meant I had an enormous amount of time on my hands that I did not know what to with, so I am catching up on some (a lot) of sleep now. Not having exams was something I had not even considered, and our school representative emphasized how this has happened for the first time in IB's (International Baccalaureate's) history. Constantly being reassured that the IB had ways to ensure that we were graded accurately, my peers and I were in a state of restless peace. We were now the infamous class of 2020, with various celebrities addressing us and news channels covering our situation. This just escalated when the results came out. Major educational boards really did not handle the grading part well and a lot of students were affected. Amongst us there was a massive hysteria leading to spamming emails to both universities and our teachers. Grades given to us based on an algorithm, reflecting an exam that we did not even sit- was going to dictate whether we were to get into our dream universities or not. This was the next level of 'a number shouldn't represent a student'.

Even the prospect of going to college seemed like a dicey situation till then end. Some are staying behind to attend online classes whilst others have already begun their studies on campus. The pandemic is far from over and still there is heavy uncertainty amongst the students. Countries like the UK have invited thousands of students into their borders but now are shutting down campuses. Some say this has been a strategic move to boost the economy, but who really can tell for sure.

Although this seems like a bleak overview of the situation, it really forces us to reflect on the structure of our society and how we have allowed for this virus to force us into a new way of living. There has been massive debate on how things should have been handled and are to be handled, but I hope that we are able to walk away from this situation with lessons that we can mutually agree on.

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Akanksha Kumari
Queen's Mary University, London
Law with Business

Early on in the year 2020 the world was shaken with the news of the arising pandemic. And no one would have imagined that it would have led us to a totally different way of living. For a final year high school student whose future seemed to be unclear, the situation was quite stressful.

My prep exams were being held and every new day brought chaotic news. For a while I had no idea how the situation could affect me in the long term. But soon when my final Board exams were going to be held, there was news striking for a future lockdown in the city. I was trying to focus on studies but everything seemed to be vague in my mind. As my exams were approaching the only goal I could set my mind was that I should give my best now, never mind whatever the future holds for me. Half past my exam month, news came on the cancellation of the papers that couldn't be taken before the lockdown. And soon the lockdown was also imposed in the city. At this point I had many questions pouring into my mind: what if I don't meet my required offer for university? What if my scores are affected by the exams I was not able to write? And so on.

During the lockdown the only one thing that kept me happy was my family. They were the ones who kept on cheering me and saying that everything will be ok and just like all the students in the world you will also get through this. After 2 months came the D-DAY for me that was the results day. The night before I hardly got any sleep and soon as the news came in to check our results my mind was literally filled with all sorts of thoughts about whether I will make it or not. The moment when my results came out I poured my eyes out as I had met all my requirements and my hard work seemed to pay off despite the odds that I faced this year.

After the school results, when my university acceptance came in, I finally realized that I had made it through the toughest times of this year. But soon the university sent an email confirming that the first semester of the course will be online due to the rising pandemic. Things were slowly getting on track but again it was all for a short time.

2020 for me was supposed to be a special year as I was excited to enter into a new phase and that was my "uni life". But nothing seemed to go in a planned way. Even at this point I cannot even think of my future as my present itself is pretty unclear. My university has started and I am trying my best to adjust in this new education pattern. I do hope that somehow the situation will soon get back normal and that the whole world will come back on track.

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Aarushi Chatterjee

When the WHO (World Health Organization) declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic, schools all over the world started to close their doors to students.

The coronavirus impacted my life because many travel plans had to get cancelled. This year was my last year in Moscow, and the campus had to close 3 months early. I felt sad, and let down because I really wanted to have the full experience of this year especially since it was my last. I am, however, glad that I had two last days to be able to say goodbye to all my friends, classmates, and teachers. COVID-19 did however bring me closer to some other people. I was not going to school, so I had a lot of time to walk around my compound. I started to walk with my mom every morning. I think that really helped me calm down and brought structure to my life. I was so used to having a schedule for what I need to do at school, so when the pandemic shut everything down I felt lost and isolated. The morning walks helped me see other people and gave me a sort of reassurance because I could see that I wasn't alone.

Now I have moved to Vienna, Austria and we will not be able to celebrate Durga Puja here due to the Coronavirus restrictions. I hope that the Moscow Durga Puja will be livestreamed so I can tune in with my family and feel a part of the community even if we aren't near.



**Ayushi Das, Class 12,
Embassy of India School, Moscow**

LIFE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Who would have thought that a little virus can impact the world in such a way? The COVID-19 pandemic turned out to be an entirely unexpected episode in human history. And it affected our lives greatly. But let's take a step back and talk about the initial days of its being.

The corona virus was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. However, the outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) only in January 2020, and was recognized as a pandemic in March 2020. So we can say that it took us a while to understand the destruction that the virus could cause. On a more scientific note, corona virus is a retrovirus of the SARS family. It is highly contagious and spreads through droplets from cough, sneeze or simple talking by the infected person. Since its symptoms are rather similar to normal common flu, it becomes quite difficult to distinguish it.

I personally first understood the dangers of COVID-19 when our final exams got cancelled and were taken online. I didn't realize at that time that it would be such a long adventure. Soon, complete lockdown was declared and all of us were stuck in the safety of our homes. It was alright for the first couple of weeks but the boredom started to really hit after that.

There was nothing left to do! So I decided to take this opportunity to learn new things, starting with cooking. To be honest, I did not know how to make anything before. My sister and I made so many different dishes- pasta from scratch, pizza, donuts, cakes, mushroom stir fry and so much more! Since I had so much time on my hands, I decided to take up an online course. After a little research I found a course from Harvard University about importance of community health workers. There were many other courses but I took this particular one as it was a little longer and a bit more challenging. At the end of this course I got a certificate which was very rewarding. This course was very helpful and interactive. I learnt many new things and also got the opportunity to know the perspectives of different health workers in Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Liberia. I also tried to renew my creative side and practiced a lot of sketches and doodling. This lockdown also gave all of us an

opportunity to spend more time with our families and have some good quality time. I also tried to cut my dad's hair, which didn't go as bad as I thought!

Hygiene and sanitation also played a very important role. Boosting immunity became the ultimate goal. The effect of corona virus can be minimized only when our body is ready to fight it. The immune system needs to be quick and precise in its action and this can only be improved when we have the proper nutrients. So our diets changed drastically. Ginger water with lemon was the replacement of cold drinks and juice. Mom's traditional ayurvedic recipes came into play. Yoga and regular exercise became one of the ways to kill time.

However, because of the pandemic schools had been shut down and online classes started. This meant that we couldn't meet our friends from school. But surprisingly, the online way of teaching was very effective. It was more productive as the teachers didn't have to deal with our mischief. The online way of schooling was more comfortable. Being able to attend all your classes in your pajamas is certainly a plus point. During this pandemic new trends also evolved. We all know what dolgona coffee is and I'm sure all of us have tried making it. We also have played online ludo with our friends. We all know what zoom is and it has become probably the most used app by all of us. All this was fine, but we also needed more human interaction- socializing. Thank god we live in the times of the internet and video calls; otherwise this quarantine period would've been a disaster.

Now lockdown has ended and we are starting to move about outside. The first day we went out felt magical, even though it was just the park outside my house. Now, thanks to this pandemic, our lifestyles have changed. Instead of carrying lipsticks and perfume in our bags, we carry sanitizers, gloves and masks. Instead of coming home tired and jumping into our beds, we wash our hands for 20 seconds and immediately go to take a shower.

All in all, the pandemic taught us the importance of family, time and nurturing new hobbies. It taught us life skills, which we weren't able to practice because of our busy schedules. It taught us the importance of hygiene and self-care. It taught us that even though we are apart, we can be together in oneness.

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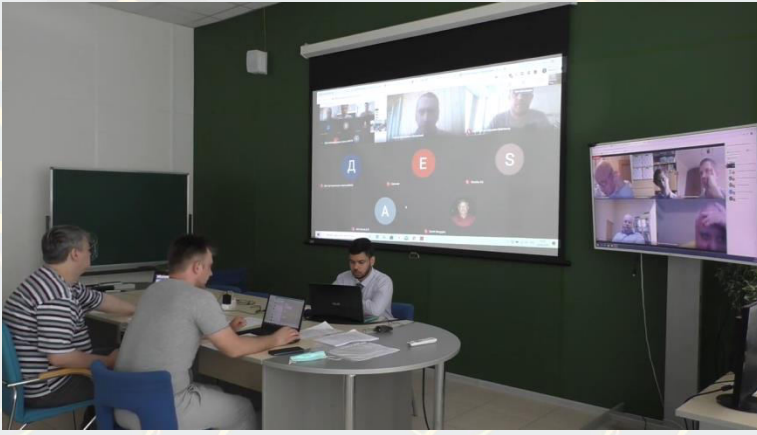
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Richick Sengupta

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I think I was the busiest person during lockdown (laughs). On 25th June I defended my Mathematic PhD thesis at the Central Economic Mathematical Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, an economic research institute in Moscow. My thesis was titled “Study of properties of fixed points and minima of functionals in (q_1, q_2) - quasimetric spaces”. Gearing for thesis defence, the two prior months I was completely occupied collecting documents from different institutes, a rather painstaking process. Since movements were restricted and most institutes were closed, I had to use courier service actively. So almost every day I would be waiting to greet the courier guys to collect some document or the other. It was like a daily ritual! I had to liaise with institutes of other cities like Tambov and Voronezh. As my defend date neared, I even had to go out myself to organize things.

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**Avishi Das, Class- IX,
Embassy of India School, Moscow**

How Will We Remember the Coronavirus Pandemic?

Year 2020. Just hearing this just brings so many thoughts to our mind, some not so joyful but still we can think of quite a few good things. Today I am going to share my experience during the Corona Virus pandemic.

With the beginning of the year 2020, I made various plans, resolutions and promises to myself. But then the lockdown started due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and it felt like the entire universe turned upside down. Every single channel I flipped through on my television was showing this news that most parts of the globe are going into strict. Many of us thought that this is going to be a small thing and would end within a week or so, but little did we know, this would become a major historical event.

As this started, I took the time to do activities that I had never done before. Everyday staying at home didn't just mean getting bored all day. I managed to find loads of new things that I could try. The very first thing I was interested in trying was cooking. I did my fair share of research before messing up my mom's kitchen. Learning how to bake cookies was first on my list, I looked up various websites and tutorials, and had a lot of failed batches but eventually on my third attempt I managed to make some finger-licking cookies, and then after this I tried many more dishes like pizza and pasta from scratch. Now every Friday has turned into pizza night at my house.

Besides cooking I also had a chance to use this time to draw and paint. I came across this very beautiful way of art which are doodles, zentangles and mandalas, which I also tried making.

Another interesting new thing I participated in was a digital MUN (Model United Nations) Conference. MUN or Model United Nations is an educational activity in which students can learn about diplomacy, international relations, and the United Nations. It is meant to engage students and allow them to develop deeper understanding into current world issues. Due to the current

situation this year, the conference took place digitally through zoom. I was selected to represent the country Italy in the committee of United Nations Women, in which we discussed major issues like gender discrimination, women empowerment etc. This was definitely the best experience I had during this period because I had never participated in anything like this before. During this interaction, I made lots of new friends across the globe and this made me realize how blessed we are to be able to use technology in the comfort of our homes.

During these devastating times, technology has been something that is being used by the entire world because it was our only means of staying connected with our near and dear ones. Applications like zoom and google meets became something that we would open every morning for school or talking with friends. Online school was also a quite fun experience, but after 4 months of it, I wouldn't mind going back to our normal routine and meeting with my friends because I missed them a lot. Use of technology for birthday and anniversary parties also became a new way of celebrations.

After the lockdown restrictions had been relaxed, going outside with full protection and precaution was a must. Masks, gloves and sanitizer were something we could never forget. During this period, watching the news helped me gain a lot of information about proper methods of hygiene, sanitation and I also learnt a lot about our immune system. Boosting our immunity was the best recommendation given by all the experts to ensure safety against the virus. Yoga, pranayama and haldidoodh were the three key factors, our family had to obey!

This year we will truly miss our Durga Puja celebrations. From Shasti to Dashmi to all the programs we performed, we will miss it all. Attending the arti in the evening, wearing new clothes from our wardrobe, meeting our friends at the venue is something we look forward to every year.

Hearing the number of cases are rising day by day and possibilities of going into another lockdown created a sense of fear in all our minds. But this taught us all that health is our top most priority, other things like work, school, travelling could all press a pause but not our health, it can never be compromised.

On the auspicious occasion of Navratri, I hope Maa Durga blesses all of us with good health!





Sahithya Mahadevan

The brightest memory from the lockdown has been the times my family and I just got to sit down and have tea at 5pm every day. It sounds pretty mundane, but I think it's helped us get to know each so much better and has strengthened our bond.



Sanchari Mukhopadhyay

This lockdown has taught me to appreciate the little things in life such as spending time with my family, talking to my friends and more. From fighting in monopoly to cheating in Ludo there's nothing I could do better. I have really loved this lockdown as it has also reminded me to stay hygienic and to stay positive.

This Durga Puja even if we are not able to meet where we usually do, I assure you that it will still be a memorable puja. COVID can't stop Durga Ma from visiting us! COVID can't stop us from celebrating! This Durga Puja I can't wait to join zoom calls and YouTube lives to see people celebrating from their homes safely. I can't wait for the celebrations to begin!



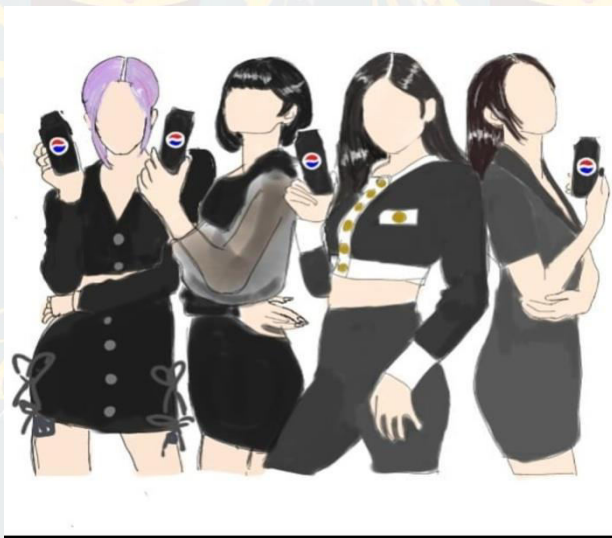
Prarthana Mukhopadhyay

Among other lovely memories of the lockdown period, my most precious one was spending time with my family. Especially my dad as he is an incredibly busy man. Some of the other things we did during this time was starting our own little kitchen garden. This lockdown gave me a wonderful opportunity to create unforgettable memories like playing board games, watching movies and learning how to cook and appreciate yummy food cooked by master chefs like my parents and Nani before heading off to university. I must not forget to mention my little sister Sanchari, who made sure to keep a smile on our faces and made us laugh every single day. This year puja will be celebrated a little differently, I will definitely miss the Moscow Durga Puja but I'd still love to wear new clothes and catch a glimpse of MaDurga in different pandals all over the world through social media platforms.



Hriddika Baruri

Her's Digital Art



In order to cope with the boredom during the lockdown period, I did two things regularly. For a whiff of fresh air, I used to go for a walk with my friends to a nearby park. The greenery of the park and the company of my friends was soothing. I also revived my practice of digital art, which I immensely enjoy. Often I used to sketch my favourite musicians and artists.



Arnav Kumar

The pandemic is an unprecedented crisis that shook us up to the core. The streets were completely empty during lockdown, without a single car passing by. It was kind of scary. We had to get used to online learning which was not easy. Our teachers tried their best to adapt to the new ways of teaching, updating their technical infrastructure as best as they could. Even then we missed the face to face interaction, the bonding and warmth associated with it.

There was one event in particular which I thoroughly enjoyed. I participated in an International speech contest hosted by India's International Movement to Unite Nations (I.I.M.U.N.) which is the world's largest youth-run organisation that aims to bring the world closer and empowers the youth by enabling them to solve global problems at an individual level. It was an amazing experience to participate in a group of 156 candidates from ten different countries. I had to represent Iran and speak about the current political situation. There was stimulating exchange of ideas regarding different ways of dealing with the ongoing crisis. It was a great learning experience!

Moscow Durga Puja Celebrations 2020





Aratrika
MOSCOW DURG PUJA 2020



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MOSCOW DURG PUJA 2020



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