



For anyone who has lived in Kolkata for long, Durga Puja is more than just a religious affair. Preparations for the coming year begin almost as soon as the current Pujo is over and hence, Durga Puja is a way of life for the people of Kolkata. The five days pof celebrations are a heady mix of food, love, culture and a good dose of lively chaos.

&ldquoMost festivals in India share and support a single concept. They might be multi-lingual or multi-cultural but they all have one unique common quality i.e. binding communities. It&rsquo&s an opportunity for communal bonding, and Durga Puja is one such festival,&rdquo says well-known radio jockey Mir Afsar Ali, who is also a television anchor and actor.

There are pseveral small aspects that give Durga Puja its present identity - from the actual Pujo, the *adda* sessions to the food of course You cannot miss Kolkata's food, especially during Pujas, if you consider yourself a serious foodie.

The day of an average Bengali during this period begins with several bhars pof tea, at least two different newspapers, a few *radhaballabhis* (yes, those deep fried stuffed beauties) with *cholar dal* (Bengal style gram lentil, sweetened like the average Kolkata population). It&rsquo&s hard work for the local or para sweet shops but during Pujo, they tend to get the combination ready as early as 7am (sometimes even earlier) so people can fill themselves up after a long night of pandal-hopping.