

East India Worships Lakshmi Today Jawhar Sircar

Today is Lakshmi Puja in Bengal and the East comprising of Assam, Odisha and Tripura. It is popularly known as the Kojagori Purnima and the East insists on invoking Lakshmi on the full moon day of the lunar month of Ashwin, while the North and West worship Lakshmi Puja a little later, on the darkest moon night, Amavasya, as Diwali — filling the whole world with lamps. The South has a tradition of worshipping Lakshmi during 3 of the 9 nights of Navaratri, a few days before. This is how diversity thrives amidst unity in India, for several millennia.

The community Lakshmi Puja of Bengal and the East is held in the same massive pandal in which the Durga Pujas and Vijaya Dashami have just been celebrated, in grand pomp. Gone are the lights and dazzle and Lakshmi looks somewhat lonely and forlorn as she occupies only a fraction of the great stage meant for the Durga Parivar and she does appear a bit too small.

But Bengalis and Easterners are quite devoted to her when it comes to their own households. The fervour at home is more intense than the worship at the pandals. The ladies of the household draw footprints in white or red — pairs of little feet, often along with a wavy pattern bearing curlicues — so that Lakshmi can find the path to their homes. It is believed that the goddess visits every household at night and enters the rooms where the footsteps are drawn. Hence we find the footsteps drawn all over the house, even the staircase is not spared.

This Alpana art of floral designs with a chalk-like khori mati or white paste made of powdered rice is both an auspicious tradition and an artistic exercise among women in Bengal — just as kolam, rangoli aripana and mandna are elsewhere. Interestingly, in modern times, the alpana has been slowly taken out of its ritualistic context and given a more secular feel, especially as street art. We find elaborate alpanas being drawn during the seasonal festivals at Viswa Bharati campus, the university built by Rabindranath Tagore. Nowadays, huge and imaginative alpanas are created on the streets and thoroughfares during festivals. Alpanas were invariably white in colour, but in modern times, this art has been strongly influenced by the colourful rangoli. Hence use of modern paint and paint brushes have crept in.

Bengal's Lakshmi is seated on a lotus, with her pot of wealth on her lap and her owl at her feet. She is not in standing position being bathed by two elephants— as in other parts of India. On Lakshmi Puja day, two mangalik Kalash or pitchers are covered with coconuts on top are placed at the entrance of the home as an auspicious Hindu tradition. Women and men bathe early to welcome Lakshmi to their houses and seek her divine blessings. Small sheafs of ripened paddy in husks with stalks are strung up as symbols of prosperity. In the past, families would gather round the mother to listen to Lakshmi Panchali — the prayer songs of the goddess — but these rituals are fading away nowadays.

In many places, a sweet pudding is made and placed under the bright moonlight as a holy offering, before it is shared with all family members the following day. Special vegetarian Khichuri and simple fried vegetables are prepared along with dry sweets like taaler bora (of palm sugar), balls of coconut and gur (nadu) and others made of puffed rice (sweet moa) and chirey (flattened rice). These are offered to goddess along with fresh fruits and then partaken.

Though Lakshmi is taken quite seriously in the East, the goddess is yet to reciprocate.

<https://asthabangla.com/kojagari-lakshmi-is-worshipped-from-house-to-house-today-in-east-india/>