

Empowering Bonds and Continuing Traditions :  
Rakhi Bandhan celebration and Khuti Puja

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## **Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee celebrated Rakhi Bandhan and organized Khuti Puja**

### **Introduction:**

Durga Puja, one of the most celebrated festivals in West Bengal, holds immense cultural and religious significance. It symbolizes the triumph of good over evil and the empowerment of the goddess Durga. In every place, this puja starts with Khuti Puja, a customary ritual before putting up pandal to initiate Durga Puja. With this initiative on the special occasion of Rakhi Bandhan, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee organized their Khuti Puja for the 11<sup>th</sup> year of Durga Puja and Rakhi Bandhan in a display of inclusivity by highlighting the significance and impact it had on the community and society at large. The sex worker community of Sonagachi has long faced stigmatization and social exclusion. Despite these challenges, they have strived to create a sense of community empowerment and development on their own. The idea of organizing their own festival emerged as a means to foster unity, cultural identity and acceptance within society and especially addressing their movement for rights.

The inauguration ceremony of Khuti Puja and Rakhi Bandhan took place at Sonagachi and was attended by various dignitaries as well as enthusiastic crowd of both community members and supporters. The program commenced with traditional Bengali rituals, including the chanting of mantras and the lighting of lamps.

### **Objectives:**

- To celebrate Rakhi Bandhan, and inaugurate Khuti Puja as one of the most significant rituals before Durga Puja festivals in Bengal, with devotion and grandeur.
- To raise awareness about the rights and well-being of sex workers
- To emphasize the cultural heritage and traditions of the sex workers' community.
- To break social barriers and stigmas associated with sex work profession and promote inclusivity.
- To strengthen bonds within the community and with the wider society.

### **Present special dignitaries:**

Dr. Sashi Panja, Minister-Of-State, (IC), Child Development and Women Development & Social Welfare Department, GoWB

Mr. Madan Mitra, MLA, Kamarhati

Dr. Dipanwita Hazari

Ms. Sunanda Sarkar, Councillor, 18 no Ward

Dr. Amitabha Chakraborty

Mr. Gautam Mukherjee

Dr. D.N. Chatterjee

Khuti Pujo marks the beginning of the Durga Puja celebrations, where a ceremonial banana plant or Khuti is worshipped. It is the symbolic installation of the goddess's idol. Durbar with sex worker community in Sonagachi initiated this ceremony with enthusiasm and zeal. This year, Khuti Pujo ceremony attracted attention as it was inaugurated in a special manner by our honourable Minister Dr. Sashi Panja. After inaugurating the Khuti of Durga Puja, she also unveiled the banner which is going to be displayed all over Kolkata city.

“আমাদের পূজো আমরাই মুখ্য”

a bengali quote is written there on this banner which means we are the face of our own puja. This statement suggests that sex workers are an essential part of the Durga Puja festivities. They don't need any celebrity face to represent their puja because their own faces are enough and they are proudly



Dr. Sashi Panja inaugurating Khuti of Durga Puja

representing their community in this celebrations of Durga Puja. Through this message, community people are deeply exploring the concept of inclusivity, representation, breaking stereotypes and reclaiming their own dignity from the mainstream population.

Dr. Sashi Panja, Minister of Child Development and Women Development & Social Welfare Department delivered a heartfelt and motivational speech during the program. She acknowledged the hardships faced by the Sex Workers Community and emphasized the importance of respecting their rights and dignity as fellow citizens. Also shared her experience regarding working with Durbar, she also assured that she will be always there with community people in any situation. In the context of Durga Puja, she stressed that festivals like Durga Puja should serve as a platform for social inclusion and breaking down the barriers of discrimination.

Mr. Madan Mitra, MLA as well as the President of Durbar Durga Puja Committee highlighted the role of women in society, particularly the courage and resilience displayed by all the Didis in the Community. Regarding Rakhi Bandhan he also stated, "The essence of Rakhi Bandhan lies in the bonds of love and protection that we share with our siblings and today, I see the



Mr. Madan Mitra addressing the community people

same love and unity within this community, and it's truly inspiring." He also emphasized the need for equal opportunities and protection of their rights. His line "Durbar's Khuti Puja is the auspicious beginning of Durga Puja in Bengal" was the picked one that we all remembered. His words resonated deeply with the community members, instilling a sense of hope and validation.

The heart of today's program was the Rakhi tying ceremony, where members of the sex workers' community tied Rakhis on the wrists of guests, symbolizing the bonds of friendship,



Community people tying Rakhi

protection, and respect. This gesture emphasized that everyone deserves love and acceptance, regardless of their religion, caste, creed, sex, race, or profession.

All of the dignitaries were thanked by Ms. Bishakha Laskar, secretary of Durbar, for their attendance and for sharing their insightful views. She also requested support for this year's puja. Additionally, she asked every guest to stand with every sex worker in any circumstance.



This Rakhi Bandhan celebration organized by Durbar held immense significance. It brought attention to the importance of recognizing and supporting sex worker community people. The program sends a powerful message that everyone, regardless of their background, deserves respect, acceptance, and the opportunity to celebrate their cultural heritage.

**Conclusion:**

Khuti Puja organized by Durbar is a statement about the sex worker's resilience, creativity, and determination to overcome societal barriers. It not only celebrates a religious festival but also stands as a symbol of their rights, unity, empowerment, and social change. Rakhi Bandhan celebration by the Sex Workers' Community was a heart-warming event that showcased the power of unity, love, and social inclusion. The event not only celebrated a cherished tradition but also highlighted the strength and resilience of the sex workers' community in the face of adversity.

As this tradition continues to gain momentum, it is hoped that society will become more inclusive and understanding, leading to positive changes in the lives of sex workers communities in general. The Khuti Puja serves as a beacon of hope and a model for social transformation through the celebration of culture and community.