

# KOLKATA

INDIA

CULTURE

MOBILITY

CONSUMPTION

COMMUNITY

## QUANTUM CITYSCAPE

We explore the impact of Covid-19 on urban spaces through the critical lens of semiotic inquiry, shedding light on the overlooked and the unfamiliar

*Click on the pins to explore further*

## Introduction

The Lockdown has impacted daily habits and caused several shifts and rearrangements in our lives.

Not only do we bear witness to changing rituals within the home, but also to an urban environment renegotiating with its epidemiology.

This map explores the evolving context of cities and how public spaces are responding to stressors, and what this means for its residents.



## Kolkata – The City of Joy.

We investigate how Covid - 19 has altered life in Kolkata through the following lenses

1. Culture
2. Community
3. Consumption
4. Mobility



# #1 CULTURE

Kolkata reflects its former status as the nation's capital through its architecture. British colonial buildings weave through organically with Indian influences. This confluence of styles and forms, both indigenous and imported, shape the city's values and the everyday.







Kolkata is steadfastly devoted to its traditions and gives immense importance to maintaining communal ceremonies – be that goddess worship during Durga Puja or Basant Panchami celebrations to celebrate the onset of spring.





The city follows a principle of *syncretism* - blending aspects of different cultures to craft something new and unique. For example, a Hogwarts themed *Durga Puja Pandal* or celebrating Christmas in Park Street. Within both these example lies a hybridizing principle that gives new meaning to tradition by enveloping it in modernity.



Pandal in Braille



Still Life – Inspired by Picasso



Science Themed Pandal



Manhattan Themed Pandal

# #2. COMMUNITY

Kolkata, especially known for its unique and exquisite puja pandals, garners attention from not just residents, but also from travellers from across West Bengal who descend on the city.



During the 10-day carnival celebrations, festival-goers will 'pandal-hop' – trying out local delicacies, street food, festival games and seek blessings from the goddess.



The festival showcases the rich history and culture of the city through themed pandals and unique street decorations.

At this juncture, we might ask, what is lost when residents are unable to partake in these celebrations? What are the new ways to **celebrate, commune and experience?**



2020 sports a new theme: Covid - 19.

Covid themed Pandals with goddess Durga as the Doctor, injection as her weapon and Mahishasura (Demon) as the Coronavirus.



In 2020, the festival looks different...

- Restricted entry for visitors when asking for blessings from the goddess; barricades and social distancing circles outside pandals.
- Stalls disallowing people indoors; they must view it from the outside through a transparent window.
- Pandals showing the plight on migrant workers owing to Covid.



Pandal hopping was also given a virtual makeover through livestreaming & VR.



**Mahashtami Puja & others - 23.10.20 (Sri Sri Durga Puja...)**  
 Ramakrishna Math Lucknow  
 130 watching  
[LIVE NOW](#)



**Sri Sri Durga Puja Dhantoli Nagpur Live Stream**  
 Sri Sri Durga Puja Dhantoli Nagpur  
 48 watching  
[LIVE NOW](#)



**Sri Sri Durga Puja Ashtami (Kumari Puja) 23.10.2020**  
 Ramakrishna Mission Khar  
 594 watching  
[LIVE NOW](#)

## Welcome to ThePujaApp 8.0...

ThePuja.App is an *Interactive Virtual Web-based Application* that lets you enjoy 360-degree **Ultra HD quality VR Ready** Digital Walkthroughs of the best installation art (pandals) of Kolkata's Durga Puja, Using the Power of Virtual reality.

**IF shopping can be done online, why not pandal hopping!!!**

Just Try it!!!! It's FREE!!! No need to DOWNLOAD app... Works on all Modern browsers in all Smart devices. **Coverage 2020 has started.**

[Browse](#)

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### Watch: Virtual tour of Kolkata's Durga Puja pandals



- ♥ 1
- 👁 Watch Later
- 📄 Share
- 🐦 Twitter
- 📧 Whatsapp
- ✉ Email
- 💬 Comment

As India slowly unlocks itself, a Durga Puja pandal in Kolkata, West Bengal, depicts the struggle of India's migrant workforce in its new theme. In its theme, the artists also paid tribute to actor Sonu Sood for providing aid to migrant workers while the nation was combating the pitfalls of coronavirus lockdown. For more, watch the full video.

October 22, 2020



CLOSED

## ThePujaApp:InteractiveVirtual DurgaPuja Experience

SHOWCASING & PRESERVING art & craftsmanship of Durga Puja Pandals across Kolkata through 360 and VR

**Navin Soni**  
 1 Campaign | Kolkata, India

₹9,209 INR

2 backers

2% of ₹368,378 Flexible Goal

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# #3. CONSUMPTION

## Highly Sanitized

Café culture refuses to forego personalism at the expense of sanitation.

The visitor must ring the bell to alert the server – upon which they will be greeted by the guard, who checks mask and temperature, mandatory upon arrival.

While visitors are extended the courtesy of mandatory checks, food delivery drivers are no longer allowed inside cafes as they are considered high risk.



## Payment Digitization

QR codes are now mainstream, with both the menu and payment offering a seamlessly 'non – human' experience within cafes and restaurants.

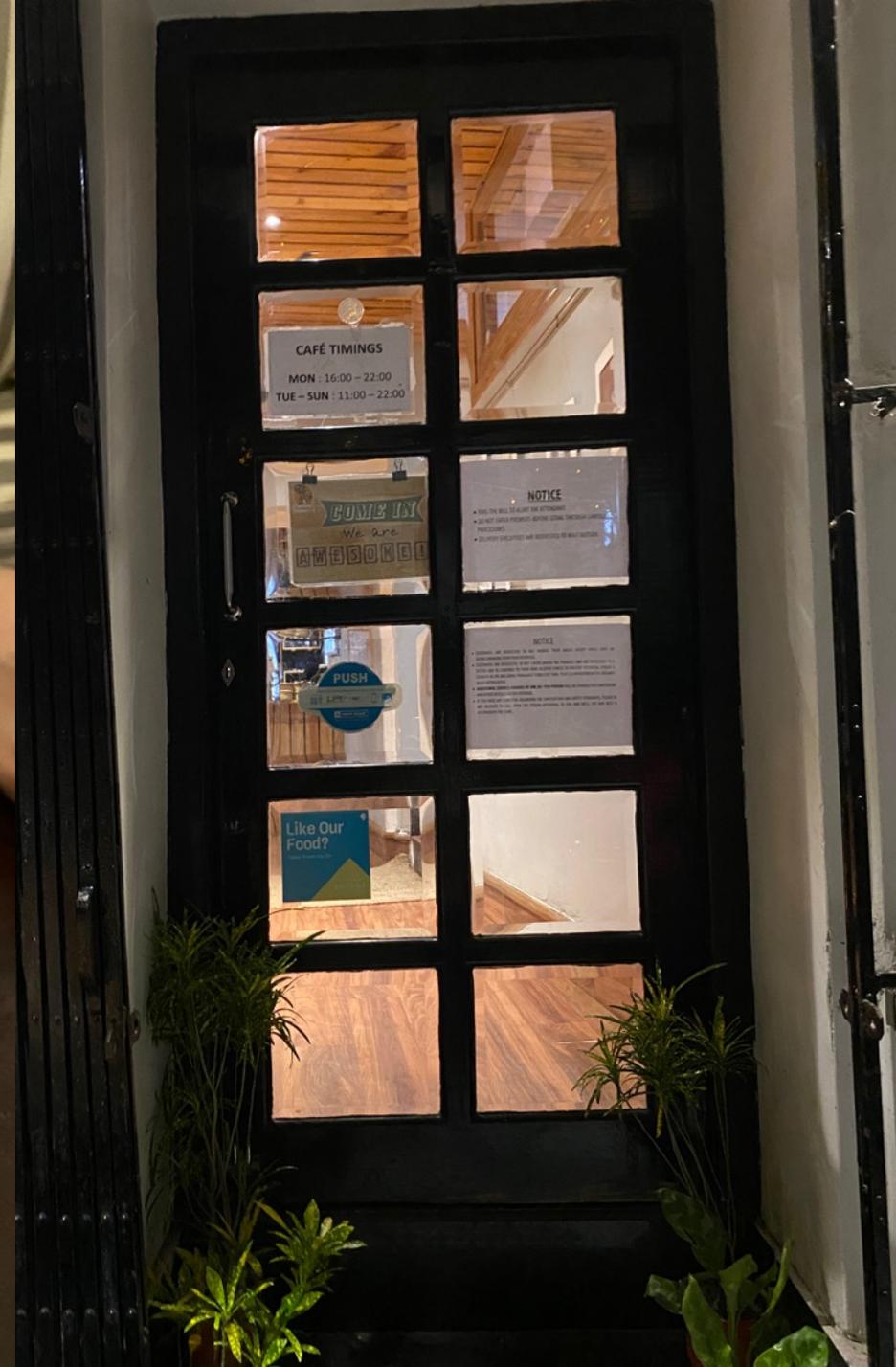
While diners were more liberal with cash tips in the past, there seems to be a layer of caution with a new medium.

Perhaps typing out the numbers reflexively indicates wasteful/non – essential spend.



  
**ROASTERY**  
Coffee House

SCAN FOR DIGITAL MENU & PAYMENT  
OR  
<https://bit.ly/2BCq8xm>



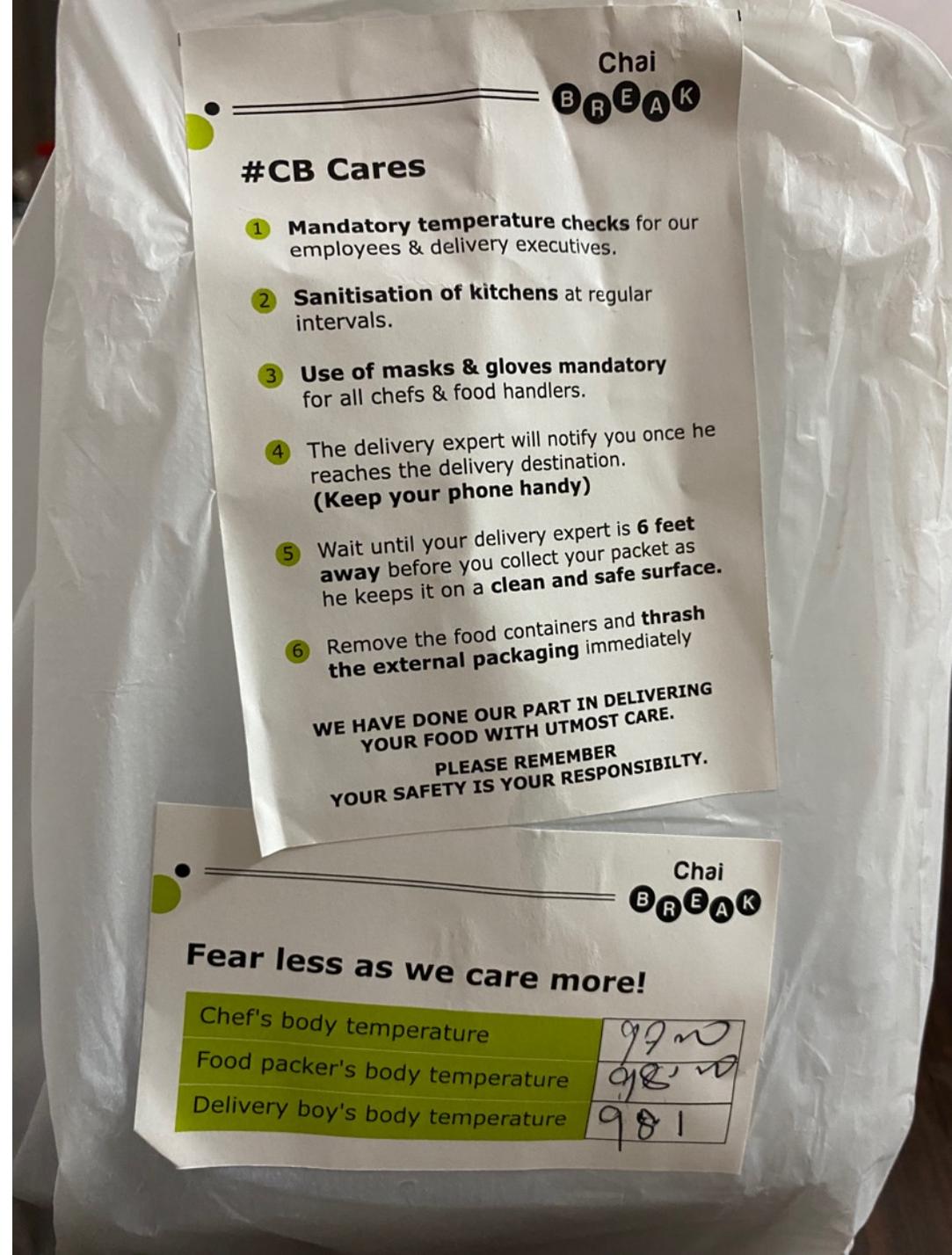
# New Food Delivery Norms

Covid - 19 has altered the food delivery process.

Home delivery arrives with a label certifying the body temperature of the Chef, food packer & delivery rider.

The label also lists all precautions being taken in the restaurant such as kitchen sanitisation, mandatory masks & gloves & food container handling protocol.

Such details build trust and credibility for the food provider – a sense that the provider cares.





## Street Food Sanitization

While everyone loves street food, its hygiene has always been in question. Residents of the city have always yearned for street food that is both hygienic and safe. Covid-19 has accelerated that transition towards an openly accessible, delicious and hygienic street-food system.



Before



After



## Abandoned Food Stalls

With Covid - 19, many street food stalls (sugarcane juice stall, street food etc.) now lie abandoned.

Migrant owners have returned to their villages.

While these stalls still lay on the streets, the city gradually loses its unique flavour.

# #4. MOBILITY



Covid-19 has altered the sound of the City.  
The City of Joy which is usually bustling with the sounds of buses and car horns goes mute during the lockdown days.  
When the roads go silent and the city breathes.

## Abandoned Rickshaws

Among the great cities of the world, **Kolkata** retains a large fleet of hand-pulled rickshaws.

While this used to be a common sight, Covid-19 has brought about some changes.

Reverse migration means that rickshaw pullers haven't returned to the city yet and Covid -19 has disrupted the use of hand rickshaws, which have formed a part of the city since the early 1800s.



Before



After

## The New Urban Cyclist

Pre-Pandemic cycling was reserved for blue collar workers (newspaper sellers, milk delivery men, etc.).

But now, we see a new segment emerging in the city – *The lifestyle cyclist*.

They cycle to avoid public transport, ride bikes with their friends to remain fit and healthy.

The new cyclist is young, college educated, and love to show off their stylish bikes.





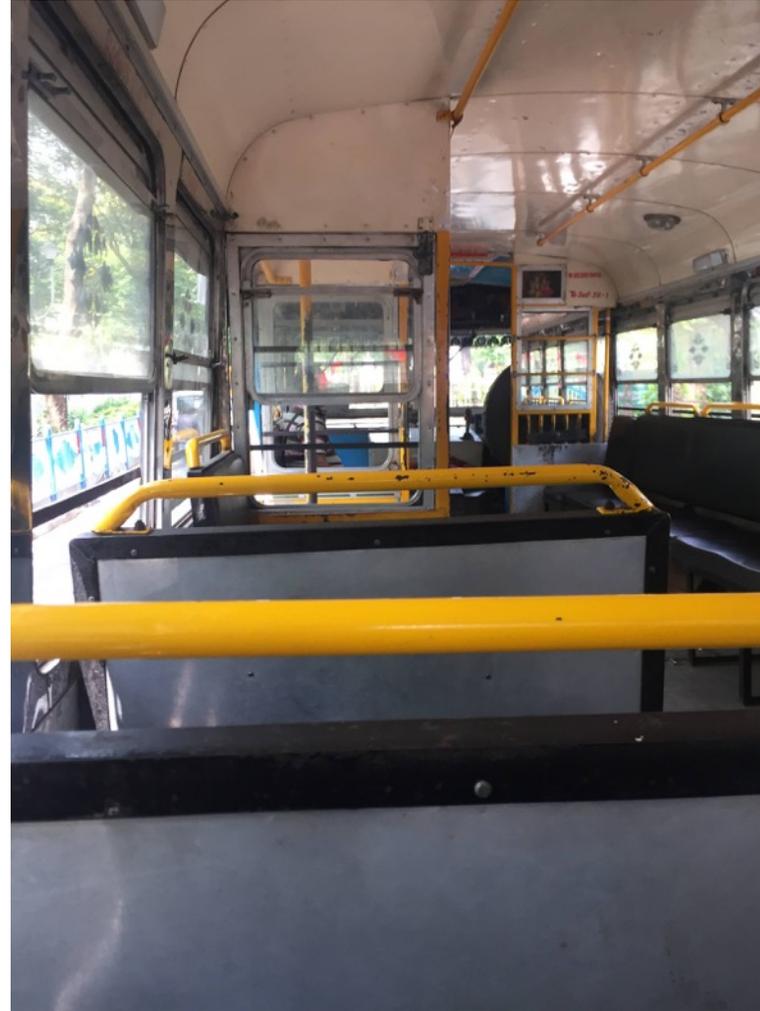
## Mask License

Public transport has always been affordable and accessible.

Public buses that were empty during the lockdown witnessed a surge as restrictions were lifted.

While people wearing masks rarely face any discrimination, it is the people without masks that are looked at with suspicion and discouraged to use public transport.

Masks give the commuters the license to move freely in the city, without being discriminated or challenged.



Before



After

## Street Marks

Covid - 19 has left its mark on streets of Calcutta.

Foot paths still contain the social distancing circles.

These markings helped maintaining social distancing during the lockdown.

Now they now act as a symbolic reminder of the danger that roams freely on the streets.

These street marks are hard to ignore as they make the viewers reminisce and instil feelings of fear and guilt (of stepping out of the house).



With Covid -19, we see a city, deeply rooted in tradition, experience the dilemma of dealing with the pandemic.

They resolve this dilemma by resorting to syncretism, i.e., by celebrating festivals over virtual platforms, adapting to new ways of eating out, without losing the essence of the ritual and retaining the soul of the city.

While its roots are still intact, we see that Covid-19 has created some long run shifts within the city's culture. Through Covid - 19, we see the city slowly transitioning and changing for the better.

Covid has transformed Kolkata into a city that is more environment friendly (*shifts from cars to cycles, paper menu/bills to digital ones*), more hygienic (*street food vendors wearing masks and gloves*), more understanding and even empathetic (*pandals dedicated to migrants*). We see the City of Joy that loves celebrating its joy and culture outdoors through community celebrations and *chai/puchka/adda* sessions slowly shift to virtual platforms, without compromising on joy.

While outdoor activities may increase once the pandemic ends, we believe all the long run shifts that Covid - 19 has brought to the city are here to stay – for good!