

IF IT'S DUSSEHRA, IT MUST BE MYSORE

BY ANITA RAO-KASHI



and riding a lion. To her left were Saraswati and Karthika and on her right were Lakshmi, Ganesh and his two wives depicted as two banana trunks. There was an image of Shiva above Durga. I was told that this complete frame takes roughly about four months to complete. It is said that the Goddess with her four children visits her maternal home at this time which is the other reason for the celebrations.

My Bengali friends enlightened me about an important tradition called the Chokkhudaan or the painting of the eyes of Goddess Durga. This ritual is done in complete darkness and in the presence of only one sculptor.

These grand idols make it to the pandals that are decorated in various contemporary themes. In fact, I accompanied my friends on their pandal hopping rounds during these four days — it was the best way to soak in the sights and sounds of the Durga Puja festivities. ■

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The mid afternoon sun was blazing down on the main thoroughfares of Mysore. The air was mostly still, but thick with heat. Nothing was moving, not even traffic. An occasional hint of a breeze brought with it whiffs of fried groundnuts, roasted corn cobs, jasmine and a few other unidentified aromas. It also brought with it the combined buzz of thousands of people gathered under shady trees all along the route to witness Jambu Savari, the eclectic parade which marks the end of the 10-day Mysore Dasara festivities on Vijaydashami.

The expectant buzz reached a crescendo as the afternoon progressed and then quietened down all of a sudden as the parade started with a booming 21-gun salute inside the Mysore Palace grounds. The anticipation was replaced by excitement as a column of charming vintage cars rolled along, driven by

their proud owners and families. Once it kicked off, it was a sea of colour and a breathless procession of soldiers in ceremonial clothes, mounted police on their steeds and marching bands.

But once the service corps was done, it was followed in quick succession by a riot of colour. There were traditional dancers and entertainers, performing on the go, which included drummers, giant puppets operated from inside, NCC cadets, scouts and guides, folk dancers and musicians, floats, and a variety of performers who entertained people throughout the route. For nearly an hour, various components of the parade kept arriving and it was a smorgasbord of colour, sound, movement and entertainment.

And then, almost bringing up the rear, was the piece de resistance: a set of elephants bedecked in finery and the foremost symbol of Mysore Dasara. The lead elephant was a veteran since it carried a 750 kg golden ambaari