

# CONNECTIONS

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JAYDEEP MUKHERJEE PHOTOS

A child in Calcutta is doing her part to conquer COVID-19 with crayon art.

## COVID-19 and Crayons

Calcutta children work to 'kill the demon' with art and the help of Mother Durga

**DOMINICK A. MERLE**

CALCUTTA, INDIA — While top scientists throughout the world continue to work nonstop in search of a cure for Covid-19, young children in the slums and red light district of Calcutta are lending a hand with an item that costs less than a dime. An old-fashioned crayon.

"We will kill the demon," vowed 10-year-old Ashok, "with the powers of Mother Durga."

Each day Ashok and his friends render their versions of the kill with simple drawings, which are being sold to the general public and the proceeds used to provide the slum dwellers and children of prostitutes with much needed food and supplies.

"It breaks our hearts," said Jaydeep Mukherjee, a Calcutta travel agent who has put together the program. "They truly believe in what they are doing, and who knows, it may take a mythical goddess to destroy an invisible monster."

"At the very least, it is helping them survive."



Children in Calcutta are making drawings of "killing the demon" — COVID-19 — which are sold to provide slum dwellers with food and other supplies.

And just who is the all-powerful Mother Durga? For starters, she's a 10-armed Hindu goddess. Back in the 16th century, legend has it, many male gods tried and failed to rid the earth of a monster demon known as "Mahisasur."

Someone finally asked, "Why

not send a woman?"

Enter the multi-armed Goddess Durga. The deal was she had to kill the monster without shedding a single drop of blood, as it was feared that each drop would produce another demon. This she did with the aid of a pitchfork-type instrument, managing

somehow to drink all the blood without spilling a drop.

The legend gave birth to a 10-day festival known as Durga Puja held annually throughout India, the largest of which takes place in Calcutta each fall with attendance upwards of 40-million.

Jaydeep Mukherjee, who operates Meghdutam Travel Agencies in both Calcutta and Montreal, is one of the chief promoters of the Durga Puja festival. Working with other "Puja Clubs" in the Calcutta region, he organized the distribution of food and supplies to those most in need, many who were literally starving.

"The children wanted to do their part as well," Mukherjee said, "and I suggested that maybe they could call on Mother Durga for help." So began the "crayons conquer covid" project.

"We've reached more than 5,000 families alone in the Songachi (red light) district," Mukherjee said, "and will continue until the lockdown is over."

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