

**FOLK ART AND THE URBAN SOCIAL SPACE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION
OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE 'CREATORS OF DIVINITY'**

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the ethnographic study conducted on the 'Potua' sub-caste who forms the indigenous artists of Bengal. They primarily work with clay, hence are called 'mritshilpis' in Bengali. Some are scroll-painters, narrating stories about life picking up elements on from their social environment while others have become idol-makers. This paper will focus on the Potuas' role in Durga Puja celebrations in Bengal and their ritual functions in this colossal event, the reason for which they and their art has not become redundant despite of facing tremendous competition from the institutionally trained artists who are not a part of their community.

Thus, this paper will also look at the way in which their art still survives and also the challenges some of these artisan communities established in certain geographical spaces by forming colonies. How their folk art has negotiated with the modern socio-economic structure, and how their fragmented economy interacts with the larger structure when it deals with its clientele in the urban social structure. It will also highlight how symbiotic relations have given rise to relations of competition. Amid all these conditions what is it that has helped them sustain and how by looking at what the material form of their creation (also could be called their produce) we can trace the way in which the product itself symbolizes and encapsulates all the very changes to which it was subjected to. Thus, finally it will bring out how the various forms which have come up owing to the interferences that it has had with the various socio-economic variables indicates to an evolutionary process and that kind of problematizes the popular notions pertaining to what is 'traditional' and what is 'contemporary'.

INTRODUCTION

Departing from the simplistic idea that the celebration of the festival of Durga Puja is just another cultural occasion which finds its mention in the auspicious Hindu calendar, this ethnographic project is an attempt to establish insightful details and probe into its nuances not merely from the perspective of the celebration, in the way it appears but rather on its making which I would prefer to call as the 'making of the divine'. The event has now become a pan Indian affair all owing to the heavy-duty commercialization and the involvement of national and multi-national corporate houses in the making of the puja, but Durga puja is known to be associated with the Bengali community both in West Bengal and outside it, nationally located as well as internationally. Therefore to be precise this project will be focusing on the deity, which in its symbolic form encapsulates all the changes that the subject in concern has undergone, entailing firstly the way in which traditions respond to modernity and secondly how traditions negotiate with the social structures and the ongoing social processes, very much associated with the idea of modernity.

Therefore, to elaborate on why this project has taken up the deity to be somewhat the material link between that which is traditional and the traditional in the gamut of modern society, I will briefly state a couple of assumptions that I have regarding it. Primarily, the deity is an embodiment of the rituals which are constructed in accordance to a strong social institution such as, religion. Secondly, the celebrations are built around the deity, concerning the deity. And the material, tangible face is the totemic idol itself which entails the rituals, and towards which the celebrations are directed. Next assumption would be to do with the imagination, both historical and popular, of the way in which the deity is and should be. This is what helps people to still distinguish between that what they think is traditional and that which is contemporary and such decisions are not subjective to some extent but primarily a very social assumption. Imagination is to be precise a construct, established and affirmed through discourses. The way in which an imagination also gets built is when

certain ideas supersede the others. And, ultimately legitimized through important social institutions, for instance religion. Sometimes, as one could argue that the distinction between that which is believed to be traditional and that which is modern becomes confusing and even overlapping. Thus, dealing with the form, the idol per se, these gaps in perceptions will become evident in the ethnography. Hence, it will be interesting to bring out on one hand definitions about the 'traditional' and the 'modern, which gets shaped up and at the same time understand how there is often a failure to establish the logical underpinnings of such assumptions. The overlap between these styles is often seen as an experiment but amid this one often fails to realize that such objectified representations, imprint of a particular idea gives rise to a new set of imaginations and expands its scope. This is somewhat an attempt to analyze the history of the evolution of the deity and social institutions, processes and even people operating within such social structures at a given point in time do not replicate but contribute to the evolution of even the material which is essentially an embodiment of imaginations.

The issue about experimenting with the style or the form of the deity only becomes valid when the scale of the celebration is taken into consideration. Primarily, it is only when the celebration of the festival is widespread and is important culturally that variability in terms of individual efforts of organizing the event becomes noticeably evident. With respect to the Durga Puja the making of the deity is central and of much ritual importance. The stylizing of the goddess became important owing to a number of historical factors such that the initial practice of the worship of the totemic form of this particular goddess is no longer of any or much relevance. Without harping much on the way in which the totemic goddess gave rise to the idol-representation it is more relevant to talk about the two other trends which I have found important in the context of this project. Firstly, the way in which the goddess Durga became a part of the elite culture in medieval Bengal and how over the years it has experienced a backward trend of becoming a festival of the masses, or popularly called '*baroari pujo*', community festival. The festival legitimately became an affair of the elites when the Raja of Krishnanagar brought six artists from Bangladesh to craft the deity as a part of the

annual royal endeavor. Thus the artisan community began to settle in Krishnanagar, entering into a *jajmani* relation with their patrons, the royal family of Krishnanagar. The celebration became popularized in the then Calcutta, under the British Raj when the *zamindars* of Shobhabazar got some of the artists from Krishnanagar, to establish a similar artist colony in the vicinity of their royal establishment, to celebrate the Durga puja with grandeur to appease the British officials. This began to be emulated by other such Zamindari households in Calcutta and thus the festival was an affair which involved the participation of the subjects but could only be organized by the rich babus. Various visual ethnographical materials in the form of photographs show the form of the idol which was distinct to the zamindari household pujas, through my fieldwork it became quite evident that the popular imagination of the 'traditional' is often associated with idols or imageries of this sort. It often has a particular way of making the eyes, the specific ways of making the jewellery or even the way in which the goddess along with the accompanying god who are her children, that is, Lakshmi, Karthik, Ganesh and Saraswati, along with the demon god, Mahisasura are arranged. So, questions tend to emerge as to whether what has been perceived as traditional, hence more divine as I was often told during the course my fieldwork, is an imagination, the seeds of which has been planted by the elite class of the then Bengal, given a form by the artists who served them. The politics of the form becomes clear when one looks at the way in which individual Zamindar families tried to outdo the other to exhibit their class excellence, in a way it was always a clash of forms, while the factor that inhibited extreme variation was due to artisans, who worked on it, came from the same school of creative thought.

Next, I would deal with the reverse trend when the festival from an elite affair started becoming a community, 'baroari' affair. The basic assumptions that one can have regarding the community pujo is that in such cases a lot of rituals can be compromised. What becomes important in a household celebration is that it has to be as pious as possible, considering the fact that worship as Weber (1920) says is a purposive act. To compromise on the worship or on rituals would be to displease the goddess which could defeat to a great extent the very

purpose of the worship. Thus, rituals were maintained as piously as possible. But with the advent of community puja rituals, even the ones which are associated with the making of the idol are no longer a priority. This is due to the fact the community pujas are not organized by any particular family but a group of families, often living in a neighbourhood even sometimes not knowing each other well. No one really shoulders the responsibility of organizing it entirely, but done collectively. In these cases the festive aspect is of prior importance than the worship of the goddess. Hence, in this regard there can be wide-scale experimentation with the form. Also, in the course of events the, no sooner the festival of Durga puja in Bengal especially in Kolkata became subjected to commercialization the scale of the festival attained a different course altogether. This is another interesting trend to look at the way in which the idol is no longer a totemic representation or a symbolic form of hindu entity, or a symbol of exhibition of class status among the elites, but now it can be equated to a great extent to a manufactured product, and with it governing the 'labour-relations', now using the word labour interchangeably with artisans. With the change in the nature of the event, if one would speak from a macroscopic point of view, the nature of work involved in the making of the puja from the craftsman point of view has changed, so the symbiotic relation within this caste-community and also seen in the patron client relation gave rise to relations of competition. Therefore the external effects the internal and the following ethnographic details would bring this out vividly.

From creation to production: the form as a transient idea.

No matter how and in what way the nature of celebrating the festival of Durga Puja changes, yet the role of the artisans, belonging to the 'potua' sub-caste is still relevant. This is due to the fact that this community still has a very important ritual role in the making of the idol. The idol that needs to be worshipped has to be crafted by them. This becomes an interesting subject of observation because with the advent of this new wave of celebration there are a lot of trained artists who have taken to idol-making. They come up with designer

idols which is usually distinctively different from the idols made by these 'potua' artists. Also their experimentation with the form has somehow deviated from the conventional imagination of the idol of the goddess. The ideas such as 'shaktirupini' where the goddess becomes the epitome of prowess slaying the demon god 'mahisasura' is now seen to be represented as a robot, or maybe sometimes seen to be represented as Mother Teresa or maybe a simple tribal woman. The idol of the goddess is already seen in a humanized form anyway, yet represented as divine by giving it ten-arms and exuding a certain kind supra-human energy portrayed by the way in which the eyes are made. Yet with the blending and experimentation with the style the representation of that which is divine has somewhat changed. Thus, these two competing styles of that which is replicated and reproduced by the 'potua' artists and that which is now brought into fashion by the artist trained in art colleges and institutions exhibit some sort of blend, admixture or even at times depart from the conventional imagination of the goddess. This therefore brings about variability of the form and shift from the conventional idea of the deity. Hence this study will bring out the way in these artists have been negotiating with such instances of change, undergoing a significant transformation within their economic organization. And, as a result how such responses to these external structural changes the material form of the deity has been in a state of forever transience. Also, the individual social histories of these artists living and thriving in separate geographical spaces have made them respond to these changes differently, their adherence to specific forms and deviation from it has been characterized by way in which its economy a fragment of the larger social structure has been influence by the external economic factors. These, trends will be hence brought out in the later course of the paper.

Comparing and contextualizing the styles associated with the three artisan colonies

The artisan colonies of Krishnanagore, Kumartully and Potuapada got situated in different geographical and cultural spaces owing to separate historical factors or rather trends. Focusing on Krishnanagore one could reiterate that once

patronised by the Krishnanagore royal family, these artisans have permanent settlements here and it is more like a household economy where each house is again divided among the kins, as claimants of the ancestral property. Some of the households have a joint enterprise while others have partitioned the household and own individual enterprises. But more or less, such household economies seem self sufficient entities where every member of the family including the children works. They carry with them a certain kind of historical style and how they have negotiated with the style has to do with the way in which its economy is linked with city space. Geographically Krishnanagore is situated 100kms away from the city and its economy is hence externally connected to that of the city space. It is owing to such geo-spatial factors the art form of Krishnanagore stands out from that of Potuapada and Kumartully. Its geographical position has impacted on the nature of its studios, size and maintenance of the style of the idol and also on the nature of their business, determining the extent to which it has become commercial. All these factors directly and indirectly have an impact on the form of the idol, their material produce. It is due to the uniqueness of the Krishnanagore style and the 'traditional-ness' of their crafts that the artists are completely in demand. Though contrary to that the crafts made in the site itself is not much of a demand due to its location. It has its own clientele accordingly.

The potua artists of Kalighat are the once who until the colonial and post-colonial period remained scroll-painters. During the colonial period, nineteenth century, when the urban space of Kolkata got divided into the black town housing the Indians and the white town which included the colonizers. The Bengali *babus* refused to be the patrons of these artists. The Black town was characterised by markets, "the Indian dwellings of the rich were set up near the markets or the 'great bazaars' and the rich consisted of the 'banias', also, conditions forced these artists to take up their art in terms of business. From contemporary issues soon the subject of the 'patas', the scrolls, shifted to popular images of Gods of the Hindu pantheon. "To the city dwellers this became a continuation of their rural tradition", says Chatterjee (1990). These paintings became popular among the rural folks who came to visit the Kalighat temple. This, the clients of the rich zamindars transformed to business oriented folklore arts. Thus, Potuapada, is situated in south Kolkata where presently land value is much higher than that of north Kolkata. On one end it has the huge flyover separating it from the famous Kalighat temple area, and joining the two is a huge marketplace, disjointed by a road and the flyover. The potters lane is a long stretch which has a sparse number of workshops, old Kolkata building being broken down to

apartments and most interesting the lane ends at the Chief Minister's personal residence. It has pronounced pavements on each side of the lane and one can distinctly mark out the workshop zone from the pavement. The geographical location of Potuapada has made it subjected to urban encroachment. Also, city planning and the issue of maintaining urban aesthetics have led to the depletion of its spatial establishment. Also, it is due to such factors Potuapada artists are often victims of urban violence in the form of local goons and 'dadas' threatening to ransack their workshops and even their produce if they dare to occupy the footpath meant for the newly high-rise buildings. Thus, potuapada which has a unique style of its own, ideally being scroll painters who brought about a different style in the field of idol making is almost or practically being lost. Hardly, a few continue with their profession while most others work under organisers, who get professional artist, to put up a theme and here these indigenous artist have nothing to implement on their own. Rather, they work not on the site of their own workshop but in the workshop of these artists or temporary workshop sites put by individual puja organisers and replicate designs made by these professional artists without much creative involvement or bringing in their own creative agency. The general inclination of the artisans of Potuapada as perceived in the course of my fieldwork is towards working with the large band of artists of Art colleges who now has taken keen interest in idol-making and theme-oriented Pujas. Also, because as they perceive that in reality the future of their business in gasping and is soon in the verge of fading. They have also engaged themselves in pandal making activities where since ideally they were scroll-painters their artistic skills are still in a away in demand. They are often hired by artist who ask them to replicate enlarged version of the blueprints given to them where they often say is "mindless", yet they get decent wage but "we often have to do a lot of overtime..we only get paid when the artist draws his money from the Puja organiser, it is worth working there than risk-taking in our own business for which we don't even get loans".

As I began my fieldwork at Kumartully the most striking feature that surprised me at the very outset was its position. Its brilliant location situated barely 15 minutes walk from the metro station of Shovabazar in that part of the city from where Calcutta grew and over the years took the form that it has assumed today. While walking from the metro station to Kumartully all I saw were building reflecting colonial architecture, wide streets, dingy 'gullies', criss-crossed with the snail-trails which was nothing but the north Kolkata tram lines which frequently showed signs of a slow-moving tram ringing the bell to clear it path.

The confused map of urbanisation would typically reveal features that pertain to an archaic city. A bustling street that ended into the bazaar of the Banamali Sarker street selling hardware items, vegetable '*mandis*', crockery, earthen and metal pots and pans all around a temple which housed Lord Shiva. Immediately after one crosses the temple and looks left one could notice a meandering street which has a couple of shops selling artificial garlands and other such decorative items used on to dress idols of popular gods and goddesses. Thus, leading to the famous potters' colony of what we know as "Kumartully".

Recounting the history of 'Kumartully', that grew out of the three villages- Gobindapur, Kalikutta and Sutanooti way back in 1690. The history of Kumartuli potters can be traced back to Krishnanagar in South Bengal. This version says that potters came from Krishnanagar to Gobindapore, a prosperous village on the banks of Bhagirathi river (now Hooghly), around the middle of the 17th century in search of a better livelihood by making earthenware pots, toys and cooking utensils for household use. When the East India Company took over the land to build Fort William at Gobindapore, the inhabitants migrated further up the river to Sutanooti to their new destination and colonised a vast area there and named it Kumartuli. The tradition of clay idol-making began during the 18th century. The artisans claim to be descendants of those artisans who worked in the court of Raja Krishanchandra, the royal family of Krishnanagore, and came to Kumartully in the 18th century after the battle of Plassey in 1757. Raja Nabakrishna Deb of the Shobhabajar rajbari, the zamindars of Calcutta brought these idol-makers from Krishnanagore when they decided to celebrate the victory of the colonisers in the battle by organising the grand Durga Puja. When their permanent residence was established in it came to be known as Kumartully.

At first I walked right across the street to figure out its extent and strangely at the mouth of the street which opened to the main road there were no workshops but shops selling those typical decorative items and small, probably a palm-length size idols of deities like Laxmi and Ganesh, the most popular of the household Gods, the bringers of richness, wealth and good-fortune. The location and position of these shops sort of made me feel that perhaps there position more aptly blended with the specific arrangement of the market amid which the Kumartully neighbourhood is located. In place of it there could not have been workshops working with clay and straw suddenly breaking the continuity that we expect to see within a market arrangement. In this respect somehow aesthetics and economics seem to be related. Shop selling neat items of display is visually

more appealing than dirty workshops in an open street; also these shops are somehow in a transitional position, between a production neighbourhood and a consumption neighbourhood. And somehow it caters to both the cultures, the culture of selling that goes with our idea of market and they also the very act of selling involves those products which the neighbourhood produces. So, it does not completely break-free from either. Thus, reflecting on the history of the establishment of Kumartully and understanding its present landscape indicates at two things. Firstly, although the colony is situated amid the urban social space yet it exists as distinct commercial hub. Secondly, its position in North Kolkata where most of it has heritage buildings and old colonial building does not leave space for much of newer constructions. Thus, it is left to perform in its own natural habitat supplying much of the cities idols. The commercial viability of the space has made it impacted on the internal arrangement of the workshops within the neighbourhood and production such as these depends largely on the size of production space. Due to the large number of orders the time devoted towards the production of one idol cannot be much. A particular idol cannot stay in the workshop for a large span of time. At the same time it has to maintain a particular size maintain certain creative standards. Thus, largely the production in Kumartully is more or less standardized very clearly indicating to the maintenance of a certain form which departs from the so-called traditional idol in the sense that the body of the deity is made in clay which the embellishments and the décor are externally applied on it.

It was interesting to understand the arrangements of different objects within the studio which in the case of Kumartully, always seemed to have space crunch. These arrangements were somehow similar in all the studios, although keeping in mind the shape and size of it. Not all studios were similar in this respect the arrangement of the structures within the studio somewhat reflected on the nature of their business. This on the other hand, is correlated to the size of the idol, the nature of labour hired and the other forms of investment made by the individual firm on its production process.

If one enters the Kumartully street stands facing a side of it, one can see a row of studios arranged one after the other with no separation but maybe thin serpentine lanes and behind each of the studios are rows of studios arranged along those by-lanes. Firstly, the arrangement of idols inside the studio, in Gorachand Pal's studio for instance, situated along the main street the distance between two rows of idols is the least possible, probably enough for one person

to stand and work. The impact by the virtue of its position was on the number of orders, size and the nature of orders it gets. The numbers of orders they get are numerically much more than the studios positioned in the interior. Their focus is mainly on the Durga idol and not any festival which happens all over the year. The size of their idols are much larger, 10-12 feet in height and since they have to accommodate 30-40 idols at a time in that small space their space management in that case reflects much more efficiency. Usually, the studios that were situated on the outer part of the street somewhat were bigger in terms of its dimensions than the ones that were situated towards the interior where a tiny, say a feet wide lane separated the studios that were placed facing each other. To start with the studios that were located interior one of the most common feature to all were the fact that the organisation of space was not as skilful as the ones which were located in the exteriors. The height of the idol also ranged between six to seven feet and rarely an eight feet idol could be visible. On an average they sell twenty idols of this nature in a single Puja season, ranging from 15,000 to 20,000 INR. Their main revenue came from small, four to five feet idols which were used in very small *Pujas* or even in households. Samir Pal, one of my respondent, aged late fifties reconciles to the fact that “..this has always been this way, ..probably since the last 15-16 years. Why should big budget *puja* organisers come to us and neither will it ever happen”. Thus, small-scale and large-scale artisans are determined largely by the location and secondly since they have reputedly established contacts with their buyers it is difficult for any other enterprise to take the other persons business whatsoever, unless the buyers themselves decide to curtail down on the budget and make rational choice of shifting their attention towards smaller firms or unless there is a major tiff due to some reason between the firm and buyer.

To detail a little on the arrangements which the artisans of Kumartully has made in order to organise their economy is through unionisation and by implementing loan system which is very unique as compared to the other to sites. Basically Kumartully has three associations, the Kumartully Mritshilpi samiti, the Sanskriti Samity and the Karigar (workers’) Samity. During my entire period of fieldwork there I could never come across any sessions, the ‘malik’ association remained temporarily resolved due to internal conflicts. The shramik union room on the other hand had people playing cards and indoor games and gossiping over issues after 8PM, before that hardly people came there. But talking to the workers at large I realised that there were hardly instances where the worker was denied their wage because probably after that the malik would be cornered

eventually and no one would want to work with him. There is no strict unionisation but the purpose of the union is served by these informal arrangements made within the neighbourhood itself. One understands the importance of such arrangements when it is compared with the situations of Potuapada and Krishnanagar. Due to the lack of collective bargaining these places there is a huge difference in terms of the socio-economic conditions between the marginal owners and the wealthier artisans. Even in terms of the prices of the idol there is a whooping gap. Thus, the creative agency of small-scale artists remains highly restricted due to lack of capital or low-level of income. Situations or more precisely the creative environment for these artists are more relaxed and can bring or train workers according to their necessity or feasibility. While art to the small scale artists become simply a medium of basic income.

Also, with loans in Kumartully which are offered at twelve and a half percent interest are also necessary step towards economic emancipation. Some artists in Kumartully can also sell their idols abroad to Non-resident Bengali clients marketing through their websites. Thus, without loans in Potuapada and Krishnanagore production is really of a much lower scale than that of Kumartully when seen at a comparative basis.

Conclusive perspectives: socio-economic variables and the form

The fieldwork conducted in Krishnanagore, Kumartully and Potuapada gave a very close insight into the way in which a particular caste society functions its ritual role in a particular religious event, such that its economy, especially in the contemporary context is practically shaped by its dependence on the production of the divine which can be called as the 'divine industry'. Also, befitting these fragmented economies into the larger socio-economic context reveals the way in which their economic and social organisation gets formulated in its attempt to negotiate its position in the modern social structure. And ultimately the material existence of all such interactions between structures and forces operating implicitly and explicitly is the product, or rather the 'divine' object that these artists create. The product here is the form that is given to the deity and the process of conceptualising it germinates from the idea as to how the deity is imagined. The imagination is derived from the firstly the purpose of

the deity itself, the function and the role it is expected to perform, secondly to humanise the deity in a certain way in order to make it relatable to mankind. At the same time draw a distinction between it and the mortal kingdom by projecting a certain idea of divinity, and conferring it with certain kind of powers which are assumed to be beyond the scope of mankind. In this respect the idea of 'mahisasurmardini', the slayer of the demon god is given a form and represented through an idol which becomes its symbolic form. Through the entire study what came across was the fact that representations of forms are not replication of historic-traditional ideas but rather recreated as society evolves in congruence with the ongoing process most importantly the socio-economic situations. Also, there is a certain kind of politics involved by the virtue of which certain imaginations assume a form while the others are discarded or maybe remain at the level of ideas. Apart from some documented literature it is difficult and beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on the way in which the goddess Durga, in my interaction with the potua artisans I could conclusively say that the popular reflections on the idea of the traditional is derived from the iconic representation of the goddess in medieval era, during the zamindari period, when Durga puja in Bengal started becoming a popular event. By the virtue of it being celebrated by the elites, that particular form of the idol which was worshipped then and created by the 'potua' artists at that time, fits now into the imagination of what is called the 'traditional'. Till today descriptions about what is traditional refer heavily on that form. The clash between traditional form and the modern draws from these ideas and the clientele is thus classified. Some preferences are inclined towards the traditional forms believed to be delivered by the potua artists, while the professional art college trained artists or ones who could be categorized loosely as the non-potuas, who have 'learnt' the art of idol making not by the virtue of their caste but through institutional training are the ones who become the deliverers of the contemporary form of idol. Deviating from the ideal-typical model to bricolages or in some cases concoction of themes picked up from the society, these creations do not have much ritual maintenance; instead try to redefine their individual notions of divinity, just that such notions remain fragmented and dispersed.

The project also tried to bring out how these ideas of traditional and contemporary that are built in popular discourses fails to acknowledge that how economic and other social forces nullifies the very existence of these water-tight, compartmentalized ideas and how these categories blend with each other and give rise to forms which are distinct from any of them. To focus on the more generalizable forms the most feasible approach would be to look at the indigenous artists who are no longer simple members of a particular caste society rather have organised themselves to economic enterprises as a responses to the external factors that have conditioned their work within which they are left with no choice but to function. The response and the level of organisation of these artisan colonies depend as we see largely on its spatial position and connection with the city economy, here Kolkata because that is the site of their business. Also, the way in which they have been able to commercialize itself in accordance to the change in the scale of the celebration is again by the position within the city or away from the city. The reason due to which Kumartully has been the most organised commercial site is due the fact that it is located in north and not on the south of Kolkata. Thus its landscape arrangements and business strategies are also such that their level of commercialisation is reflected through it and also designed to maintain and foster it. The product, in this regard being the deity, is also such that it fits into the notion of the traditional and at the same time incorporates certain specific kinds of production techniques. Individual labour working within work on individual parts of the product which is later made into an ensemble which includes the deity along with its accompanying deities and also the décor which is in the form of its clothes and other embellishments. Thus kumartully has a form of its own though varying in terms of its size and nuances within its decoration which are different for different firms, also depending upon the price of the idol, largely. My respondents kept harping on the fact that the basic rituals are maintained though it is impossible to work anymore on those lines due to the large demands that workshops in Kumartully have to meet. The mould on which the face of the idol is done is handed down to them by their forefathers and hence the face of the idol has not really undergone much transformation though new moulds that is not exactly a copy of the old ones but

to a great extent a replication of the previous ones. In that way that face of the idol has a 'traditional' touch explains some of my respondents. The Kumartully style also has somehow blended with the Krishnanagore form as a large part of the workforce are migrant labourers from there. Krishnanagore differs in terms of Kumartully in the sense that the idol, the décor on the idol is done entirely with clay and each idol is unique in nature and not really identical to the other. While those techniques cannot be used in Kumartully due to its time-consuming nature yet there is always a preference to employ artists from Krishnanagore due to their artistic excellence which cannot be expected from any other form of labour my respondents claim.

On the other hand Potuapada artists are ones who took to idol making much later, they were scroll-painters and remained so until scroll-painting almost died in Kalighat. Now even idol-making by these artists are almost in the verge of extinction due to its geographical position in the city. The soaring land prices in south Kolkata has compelled many of these artisans to sell their land and take to other forms of unskilled or sometimes other employment opportunities. Also, urban development programs have made an encroachment into their place of existence. Their crafting activities have to be restricted within the small dimensions of their workshops and cannot spill into the footpath or the main road. Thus working under such conditions is practically impossible. Also, due to lack of loans, or capital their investments are also low, hence the situation of a dearth of efficient labourers who would not prefer to migrate and settle in Potuapada, arises. Thus, Potuapada artists are now only working for small scale household pujas where fancy idols are not required. Their budget is obviously low and hence targets this market. Some do not even make enough profit and have marginal living conditions. Thus one could conclude that Potuapada artists have least agency in terms of creativity.

Krishnanagore artists cater to two different clients. Firstly, the idols which are made in Krishnanagore itself are bought only by very small scale organizers around the Krishnanagore town depending upon the size; usually such idols are small with less elaborate designs. While some of the artists who have

been liberally working with the usual Krishnagore style find big budget organizers from Kolkata and other parts of the country as their client. This forms the second category of clients who lavishly spurge these idols and thus uncompromisingly exhibit the krishnanagore style which are idols of grand sizes, built in one large frame and has intricate design made in clay, bold colours are used for painting it and does not have any external décor on it. At one instance one of my respondents had forty different styles of face-moulds which have been made as replication of the pre-existing moulds and even with newer innovations. But of late to extend upon their design some artists come down to Kolkata during the festival to take photographs of award-winning idols in order to incorporate the design in theirs in the following year. Thus, awards as we can understand have also created hegemony of certain forms and promote certain styles which blend and interferes into existing art forms. It leads to the creation certain concoctions which makes it deviate from its original state.

Thus, it can be concluded that styles are not pure forms but entail a certain kind of evolutionary trend which gets established and re-established through popular discourses. Also, the projection through visual media can popularize styles and when that interacts with existing ones it gives rise to newer ones, this system is a process which continues and reproduces itself over time.

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