

Durga idols of Kumartuli: Surviving Oral Traditions through Changes

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As the torrential rain gushes down the plastic and tarpaulin sheets of the narrow alleys in Kumartuli, covering the half-made clay idols, the smell of wet earth emanates, reverberates, encircles and rises up to announce the arrival of the auspicious occasion— Durga Puja. Finally, as the dawn of *Mahalaya* announces the arrival of the *Devipaksha* and the last ablutions are offered to seek blessings from one's forefathers on the banks of the sacred river Ganga, the artisans of Kumartuli pronounce the occasion through invoking the powers of the female goddess by painting the eyes of the idols of Durga, famously known as *Chokkhudaan* or bestowing of the eyes. A popular and annual sight in the region every year, this relatively small, yet largely famous and well-renowned region of Kumartuli stands tucked within the narrow lanes and by-lanes of Sovabazar area of the northern region of the present city of Kolkata (West Bengal, India) and the relatively recent construction of the underground metro-railway station of the same name. A busy place for idol-makers, the *kumbhars*, their small and narrow workshops, aligned against their crowded tenements, hum with the buzz of activities at most times of the year, especially during the time of the Durga puja. Over the years, the region has experienced a surge and witnessed changes in the style of the clay idols, their expression and depictions, especially the ones made for Durga puja. Carrying forth a string of history within itself, as these depictions represent a strain of continuity of the famous worship of female deities of the region, the changes and alterations in visual depictions of the idols made in Kumartuli also help to reflect new ideas and ideologies in the age of new-media, forming an important part of Visual Anthropology. Based on an extensive fieldwork in the region of Kumartuli and various parts of Kolkata throughout the month of *Aswina* (September-October) between 2011-2012, this paper tries to look into the significant aspects of the representations of the idol-making formats of Kumartuli, their changing presentations and new reflections and how the local history, oral traditions and lores still manifest themselves through these changing representations.

The region of Kumartuli stands as an important landmark of the city of Kolkata. Geographically speaking, the region of Kumartuli is located in Ward No. 9 of Kolkata Municipal Corporation, mostly between Rabindra Sarani (formerly Chitpur Road) and the Hooghly River, the region is, at present, between Ahiritola and Sovabazar. Each year, as the region gets busy with the ensuing preparations for the arrival of the season of *Durgotsav* or Durga Puja in the Indian calendar month of *Aswina* (October-November), it is hardly a time for the artisans in Kumartuli to catch a breather as they burn the midnight lamp to render the last-

minute touches to the idols of Durga and her offspring Kartikeya, Ganesa, Laxmi and Saraswati and the omnipresent idols of Siva—all warmly worshipped for the six days of the month of *Aswina*, starting from the first day of the *Amavasya* or Full moon of the month marking the advent of the *Devipaksha* or the time ascribed to the worship of the female power of the Devi.

Introduction

The occasion of Durga Puja marking the final and the last six days of the period of *Navratri*, following the Indian calendar month of *Aswina*, is an auspicious time marking the celebration of life and the expectations for the blessings of a bountiful harvest in the future and the thought for a better tomorrow. During the *Devipaksha*, *Durgotsav* begins with the first day- referred to as *Sasti*, followed by *Maha Saptami*, *Maha Astami*, *Maha Nabami* and *Vijaya Dasami*. *Devipaksha* ends on the ensuing Full moon day corresponding with the worship of Laxmi on the day of *Kojagori Purnima* (worship of the goddess Laxmi on the full moon night of Kojagori).

Widely celebrated across India the festival of *Navratri* marks an important segment in the festivities of India. However, the celebration and the worship of the goddess as Durga are predominantly prominent in the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Tripura and some parts of other north-eastern states of India. Being the most significant festival of Bengalis, *Durgotsav* is also observed in other Indian states, especially by the Bengali communities, with ardent participation by people from various other communities, castes and creeds, including Delhi, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala. Similarly, outside India too, the festival of Durga puja is often observed with enthusiasm through various Bengali Communities scattered all across the globe, including, Nepal, Bangladesh,



Mauritius with a large number of Indian population as well as USA, UK, Australia, Sharjah, Kuwait, Germany, France, Netherlands, Indonesia, Thailand, to name just

a few amidst several other places. Interestingly enough, the popularity, its associated history and colourful reflections of the celebration even inspired a celebration of the festival in the Great Court of the British Museum in 2006.

As the annual festival in Bengal and other parts of India as well as the globe readies itself with renewed enthusiasm each year, the lanes and bylanes of Kumartuli busies itself with renewed vigour to complement the celebration by contributing with the quintessentially significant element for the worship of the deity—the idols.

Durga worship in Bengal- The concept behind the inception

The prominence of the worship of Durga dates back to a time in history that can best be described as the hoary past often considered to be similar in nature to the gradual development of mother and nature worship across the globe. With various examples of the worship of mother goddess as available through various excavations across India, including the sites of Indus Valley Civilisation, often one is led to seek answer for the belief that led to the initiation and final growth and development of the worship of mother goddesses in the form of fertility deities and deities representing the regenerative and reproductive powers of nature itself. Such a basic ideology could have well inspired the ideals for the worship of the first female deity in Indian civilisation as well; Aditi as mentioned in the Rgveda is considered to be the mother of all deities, as well as other associated female deities who all rose to prominence, including Vak, Saraswati, amidst others. In due course of time, the representation of the female power gradually assumed more varied forms to represent the various facets of life and its different reflections, emotions and activities and the Vedas is a witness and a reflection of this.

Although various Goddesses were mentioned in the Vedas, their role remained quite diminished in comparison with other male deities of the time or they were often referred to as mere consorts of a certain and specific male deity. Such examples are plenty in the later Vedas, the Upanishads and the Puranas. On the other hand, the basic role and importance of the female deities remained of supreme importance across rudimentary societies, represented in modern times through the various tribal cultures across India, who continued to worship the female power as the supreme deity. Thus, it is quite unfortunate that to corroborate several such facts pertaining to female deities of tribal communities in India, one has to mostly rely on ethnographic fieldwork in recent times, as printed literature or evidences in archaeology and history are otherwise rare and hard to find, excepting few and a large dependency does come from lores, stories, poems, fables and stories of various ethnic communities at various places of India. On the other hand, the supreme status, ascribed to the goddess of the higher order took a little longer in Indian history and by the time of the Puranas, the supreme goddess had earned its rightful place in the hierarchy of Gods of the higher social order and the deity came to be regarded variously as the protector, the bestower of blessings,

the benevolent force, the force that is on one hand associated with the regeneration of life and on the other is also associated with the ending and termination of life as well, resulting from calamities or severe illnesses. The popularity of female deities also resulted in several of them being accepted in various forms within the many folds of the religion of the higher order as well and in Bengal region of India, such examples can be cited in the worship of Manasa, Sitala, Kali, Candi,¹ as well as the powers associated with the worship of the omnipresent deity, Durga of Bengal.

Gradually, through various socio-political upheavals, the goddess came to represent the power of sustenance. This helped to provide the courage to strive through various skirmishes of society plagued by various diseases on one hand and a turmoil of political situation arising out of the attacks and invasions of various foreign powers, including Islam and much later the British and Christianity over the last thousand years in the history of Bengal. The worship of the supreme *Sakti* (power) resulted in placating the anxieties, agonies and fear arising out of the socio-cultural and political roughness in Bengal and thus, the rise of the *Sakti* cult gradually flourished and gave shape to various forms of the same female deity, Durga- including-*Mahisasurmardini*, *Jagotgouri*, *Jagotdhatri*, *Kali*, *Chhinnamasta*, *Chandi*, amidst others.

The form of Durga that gradually came to be accepted and worshipped during the festival is *Mahisasurmardini*. Often argued by scholars, the representation of the deity, showing the killing of the ruthless and tyrant *Asura*, *Mahisasura*, the deity is also the protector of harvest and the killing of the *Mahisrupena Mahisasura* (*Mahisasura* in the form of a water buffalo), actually symbolises the representation of the buffalo, which often runs amok through rice and paddy fields across Bengal, especially during the time of harvesting, destroying the crops in the process. Such a situation, especially during the time of harvesting poses real threats for concern for all farmers across Bengal. Thus, the deity, representing life and the forces of nature, is also a representation of the protector of life on the other hand.

The prominence of Durga puja gradually increased during the British rule in the region with often the Hindu reformists identifying Durga with India/the nation or Motherland. Similar concepts came to be reflected through literature of the time as well, e.g. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath*² which had the song dedicated to Motherland- *Vande Mataram*. This song, though often facing flaks for its religious intonations, nevertheless did help to inspire several freedom fighters during the first and second quarters of early 20th century India and almost became a rallying symbol of power, valour and courage inspiring the fighters to strive ahead inspite of all odds. The community efforts and participation gradually began to be reflected through the popular celebration of *Durgotsav* through *Baroyari* or Community pujas starting around the first quarter of 20th century in Bengal. The tradition continued and strives till date, and has mushroomed several times in size and it is being represented through more than 4000 Durga pujas in and around the region of Kolkata alone. This also includes the pompous worship of

Durga's consort- Siva and her offsprings Kartikeya, Ganesa, Laxmi and Saraswati and the main worship of the deity through mother nature which is represented through the worship of nine types of plants or *Nabapatrika*³- representing nine divine forms of the goddess as well as her worship through the symbols of fertility- the clay pot, also called as *ghat*.

With variants in the depiction of the worship of the supreme deity absorbing forces of nature worship, the depiction of the idols too, started taking shapes and forms to represent changing socio-cultural circumstance through generations. Thus, modern traditions in and around Kolkata has come to depict and display the idol through variously decorated *pandals* or temporary structures with podiums to house the deity during the period of the puja. These variously decorated *pandals* are also complemented with the varied and artistically depicted idols of Devi Durga the result of the ardent works of the *patuas* or *kumbhars* of Kumartuli.

Kumartuli- lores and idol-making

The initiation of idol-making at Kumartuli follows a certain lore which is even popular amidst the artisans as well as the retailers who specialise in selling ornaments of pith (referred to in Bengali as *shola*), *zari* or golden and silver threads or *rangta* as is referred to in Bengali (beaten silver) and embellishments and sequins. A lore ascribes the significance of the development of the *kumbhar* community in the present region. According to the lore, the first *kumbhar* was brought over to the region from Krisnanagar (Nadia district in Bengal) by Raja Nabakrisna Deb to build a Durga idol to commemorate the worship of the deity in honour of the victory of the British at the Battle of Plassey against the Muslim power of Siraj-ud-Daullah in 1757. Eventually, inspired by the example, several other rich families of the region started giving similar orders to the *kumbhar* to build clay idols for their respective families. As gradually the demand started increasing, the *kumbhar* found it a daunting task to travel to and from Krisnanagar to build the idols and requested for a place of residence along with the artisans and other artists to assist in the process of idol making. Thus, as the wishes of the *kumbhars* were granted, Kumartuli came into existence as a centre for clay art in Kolkata. Behind the patronage of the *kumbhars* of Kumartuli, stands the financial help of several erstwhile wealthy families of 18th century, which is even mentioned through a couplet by a *kumbhar* (below is the English translation)

Jagatseth's money

Umichand's beard

Banamali Sarkar's house

Govinda Mitra's walking stick

This refers to the mention of “Jagatseth as an influential banker” with “the road called Banamali Sarkar street [which] runs out of Kumartuli into the Chitpur Road on which is situated the temple of the Mitra family.” Govinda Mitra was known as

the 'Black Zamindar' who spent large sums on temple building and the performance of magnificent puja celebrations. He was probably one of the earliest to determine the social behaviour of the elite groups of Bengalis living in Calcutta at the time.⁴

As various oral traditions encapsulate the history of development of the region of Kumartuli, several others also relate to the development and significance of the worship of Devi Durga in the region, a fact that is also associated with the political upheaval of the region. According to *Maharashtra Purana* of Gangaram, the region of Bengal faced serious threats from the onslaughts of Maratha invaders, known as *bargees* between 1740-1750 damaging much areas of the present state of Orissa, and various districts of West Bengal, including Mednipur, Nadia and parts of Murshidabad as well. The poem of Gangarama describes a confrontation between the forces of Bengal under Nawab Alivardi Khan and the Maratha general-Bhaskara. The poem also paints a lore of the time that speaks of the initial beginning and importance of the worship of Durga in the region. The poem mentions, as Bhaskara desired to win the battle, he wished to perform a puja of the deity and summoned the local zamindars to help him, who then invited several *kumbhars* to make an idol of the deity for Bhaskara. However, Bhaskara had to flee before the puja could be completed being beaten at the hands of the Nawabi forces, he could only manage to complete till the seventh and eighth day of the puja- *Saptami* and *Astami* and fled in the month of *Aswina*, only to return two months later in *Caitra*. Though he ordered a shoot-at-sight, yet, as the Devi was displeased with him as he could not complete the puja, he was defeated in the battle that ensued with the Nawabi forces. The former is killed in the battle and the latter emerges victorious.

The story is significant as it not only relates to the association of the worship of the deity to the political turmoil of the region, but also relates to the already prevalent popularity of the deity amidst affluent families of zamindars of the region during the month of *Aswina*, with various scholars offering different references regarding who made the pujas popular during the month of *Aswina*, including Raja Kamsanarayana of Tahirpur, or the Raja Danujamardana or Raja Krishnanchandra of Nadia, or even a zamindar from Baduriya. Other lore of the region also ascribes the initial worship of clay images of Durga to the late 1500 century AD with the initial attempts coming from the landlords and zamindars of Dinajpur and Malda. Bhabananda Mazumdar of Nadiya is also ascribed to have first started the *Saradiyo* or autumn Durga puja in Bengal in 1606.

This also goes to establish, that by last quarter of 18th century and the first quarter of 19th century- clay idols were being widely made in Bengal for the purpose of worship- mostly under the patronage of the local zamindars and other affluent families of the region. Thus, as is mentioned in the oral traditions, Kumartuli paints a picture of significant historical importance down the ages. Regarding the true nature of the worship of Durga during the month of *Aswina*- often also referred as *Akal-bodhan* (out-of-season worship) one is again reminded of another

lore relating to the worship of the Devi by Lord Rama of Ayodhya to seek her help to assist in his fight against the evil king Ravana of Lanka. As the lore from the mythology goes, the Devi is worshipped with 108 lotus flowers, but Rama could only manage to gather 107 lotuses. As a true devotee, as Rama was almost about to pluck his eye to donate it as a flower with his arrow, the Devi appeared in front of him and blessed him. Thus armoured, Rama proceeded to slay Ravana and throughout the 10 days of *Devipaksha* which ensues from the day of *Mahalaya*, the celebration also signifies the severe battle that took place between Rama and Ravana in the latter's capital Lanka. Finally, on the 10th day, Ravana is defeated, which is often celebrated through various folk tales and performances and plays across India, including burning effigy of puppets denoting the demise of the evil king Ravana. Thus, the worship in the month of *Aswina*, follows the traditions of this *Akal-bodhan* according to lore and the true worship of the deity takes place in the month of *Caitra* (March-April) of the Indian calendar month- towards the end of spring season.

Thus, as the initial attempts of the clay images for the worship started taking shape, representing significant political developments in the region, the lores associated with them further helped in rendering a degree of certainty towards understanding the need for placating the socio-cultural anxieties and fear arising out of political instability in the region often leading to financial uncertainty. As mentioned earlier, with the gradual development of Durga puja worshippers towards the beginning of 20th century, also raised the community worship of the deity reflected through *Baroyari puja*. However, as the local lore suggests, the initiation of the procedure dates back to few centuries earlier with the very first *Baroyari puja* performed by 12 friends of Guptipara in Hooghly district of West Bengal in 1790 who collected contributions from locals to perform the first pujas by *baro-yari* or 12 friends. This *Baroyari puja* was brought to Kolkata in 1832 by Raja Harinath of Cossimbazar to perform the puja at his ancestral home in Murshidabad from 1824 to 1831⁵. Interesting enough, this tradition of *Baroyari puja* also gave rise to the Sarbajanin or Community puja- starting from the Bagbazaar region of Kolkata with full public contribution, participation and control.

It is also important to note specific observations about the institution of 'festival' that centres around Durga puja and its references by modern scholars. Mentioned M. D. Muthukumaraswamy and Molly Kaushal in *Folklore, Public Sphere, and Civil Society* the dominant mode of Bengali Durga Puja is the 'public' version." The institution of the community Durga Puja in the 18th and the 19th century Bengal contributed vigorously to the development of Hindu Bengali culture as well. According to historical records and popular lore, it is also interesting to note the few instances of popular participation by British officials, albeit to appease their Hindu subjects however, the participation also weaved its own cultural fabric. Mentions Sukanta Chaudhuri, it was not uncommon to witness "high level British officials regularly attending Durga Pujas organised by influential Bengalis and have British soldiers to actually participate in the pujas, have *prasad* (partaking the food offerings), and even salute the deity," but "the most amazing act of worship was

performed by the East India Company itself: in 1765 it offered a thanksgiving Puja, no doubt as a politic act to appease its Hindu subjects, on obtaining the Diwani of Bengal.”⁶ And “it is reported that even the Company auditor-general John Chips organised Durga Puja at his Birbhum office. In fact, the full official participation of the British in the Durga Puja continued till 1840, when a law was promulgated by the government banning such participation.”^z

Process of idol-making- Evolving expressions

The traditional icon of the deity worshipped is in line with the representation of the goddess and her iconography in the scriptures where Durga is mentioned to have been created by the Gods with ten arms and is bestowed with a lethal weapon for each arm. As mentioned earlier, the tableau of Durga is worshipped with her four children Kartikeya, Ganesa, Laxmi and Saraswati and the clay image that represents all the four children, along with Durga, atop her *vahana* or carrier the lion and the slain *asura* Mahisasura near her left foot, under one structure is known as *ek-chala*. With reference to the embellishments, the field work revealed the information about traditionally two types being used- *sholar saaj* or pith (made from the core of the pith plant which grows in marshes referred to in Bengali as *shola*⁸) and *daker saaj* (beaten silver decorations- made from silver which was traditionally delivered from Germany through post or *daak* the Bengali word for post). The latter grew in demand as the devotees grew in financial strength and prosperity. However, in recent times, a further addition to this imagery is rendered through the decoration of the idols with heavily ordained cloth to be worn as a *saree* sometimes as expensive as Rs 100 to 200/ metre. At several places, the favourable cloth designs are also ordained and inscribed on the clay images themselves- giving it a feel and look of a cloth *saree* when the actual cloth is not used- the sketches and strokes of the brushes follow closely the patterns of the cloths to imitate the material as closely as possible in colour and in pattern.

Thus, the beginning of the process of idol-making in Kumartuli involves three basic processes and interestingly enough, these are not made of terracotta or baked clay, but of sun-dried clay which is not baked and is also referred to as terracruda. Layers of wet lumps of clay are used over the basic framework of bamboo and straw which gives the initial shape and form of the idol. Through several such layers of clay, interspersed with layers of cloths which are smoothed to hold the clay in place and give shape to the form are used till the final shape is rendered. Over this, the initial white paint is applied- made up of natural colours made by the artisans and on this basic colour, the final colours are applied—all of which are made from natural colours by the artisans including the paint brushes. In recent times however, readily available paints and brushes from the markets are making fast inroads into the huts of the artisans who make the utmost use of the bottles of colours to deliver finishing touches to as many images as possible in the rush of the festival season. Following the layers of paints, many of which is also applied with spray paint bottles and dried with bunsen burners in case the humid

and hot weather or sudden rain and thundershowers make it difficult for the clay to dry quickly, the embellishments, decorations, sequins and dresses are attached to the body of the clay idols with a type of home-made glue- made from the powder of *siris* tree (mixed with water and boiled to get a certain thick consistency). However, it is also not uncommon, to spot and witness plastic bottles and tubes of PVC glues adorning the shelves and hands of the artists for a quick re-touch job. Over and above, a brief look into the idol-making process involves three main stages-

- Making the framework out of bamboo and dried straw- entwining them to render the basic shape of the structure.
- Making of the clay images and putting the paints in the process mentioned above.
- Decorating the clay images.

As the three main stages give rise to the main structure ready to be painted and decorated, it once again brings to mind a quintessentially important part of human culture, communication. With identity, love, fertility and nature forming the four major corners of human concern, folklore attempts to communicate a significant aspect of traditions (Bhattacharya, D. K, 2005:6-7). And the idols of Durga at Kumartuli follow a similar reflection.

As they evolve through space and time, growing to reflect the transmitting values and traditions on one hand as well as the socio-cultural anxieties and agonies, fear and veneration on the other, the representations of images changes Thus, the images of the idols of *Mahisasur* is represented through bulging biceps and triceps and often looking like any recent villain characters from various popular Hindi movies of India. The idols of the sons and daughters of Durga also reflect modernity, with Kartikeya sporting recent hair-cuts resembling any modern and recent Hindi films or a Laxmi and Saraswati are often adorned with the latest in gizmos and gadgets, including piggy-banks as money banks for household usages, Ganesa, also helps to represent a person with poise and grace befitting a 'modern intellectual scholar'- which is reflected through the relaxed body posture of the deity of Ganesa- often found reclining against pillows and upholsters. And finally, one of the most remarkable changes can be perceived through the development and representations in Durga alone in the region. From closer observation, the face of Durga, often takes after the features of recently released popular Hindi films, including the style of her forehead, pattern of hair, the colour of her clothes, as well as her posture, atop her lion.

These are important reflections in a fast-changing global environment, which is also immensely under the influence of media. It also ensues a pull towards one's traditional roots to identify amidst the pool of cultural admixtures resulting out of

cultural dialogues across countries and nations of the world. With the growing popularity of India in the world economic zone since 2000, the genre of Hindi films has risen as an important force to reckon with. This also reflects a changing India amidst a global environment and clay images of Kumartuli echoes a similar theme. Styles of clothes, attires and hair changes over a period of time and each helps to associate with the prevalent notion of being a part of the 'bigger and suave crowd'- which is also an important aspect in the lifestyle of the recent global world. Thus, as Durga's offspring dress and hairdos represent recent 'styles and fashions', the artists of Kumartuli take the clay images one step closer to relate them to the modern generation. The ideas also help to reflect the basic theme- deities are reflections of the social mind. Thus, in colonial times, images would reflect a different tradition, as compared to the modern global world, when Durga poses as more vivacious with multiple poses and exquisite colours and embellishments.

Thus, though the goddess is still mostly represented through sublime features- that most befits the image representing symbols of 'typical' Bengali married women, other features tell a different story. The traditional beauty is represented through vermilion near the forehead as well as on the parting of the hair, wearing of the traditional bangles ascribed to marriage in Bengal, represented through typical red and white bangles, where the red bangle is made of lac and the white of conch-shell. Similarly, other parts of several clay images also often reflect traditional Bengali natural features of the face, body and limbs, which have, down the ages been accepted and associated to as 'traditional Bengali beauty', including, pronounced curvatures around hips and breasts, long and wavy black hair, well-formed and slightly plump features of limbs, accompanying a fair complexion and wide kohl-lined eyes and red lips. Conservative though it may sound, but these features have come to dominate and represent women and their beauty in Bengal, especially over the last 100 years, referring especially to those, who are considered to be 'healthy and from financially well-to-do families'. This representation is still maintained through the traditional images which are worshipped at many Durga pujas of traditional families across Kolkata, where the deity is also represented through a traditional white *saree* with a red border.

Though the marks of globalisation can also be seen in the change of uniforms into more vibrant shades of *saree*, or in the expressions of a warrior-goddess, yet the basic essence remains the same, the celebration of the sacrosanct power of the life-giving forces of the deity and thereby Nature herself.

Thus, various images and their representations down the ages, also add to the explorations of different anxieties in society through history. This is best reflected in the images which often resemble colonial figurines, as the deity is even represented through several sizes and shapes of image made up of pith (*shola* in Bengali). This not only reminds one of the days of yore and the times of colonial rule in Bengal as the deity, her children and *Mahisasur* stand dressed in traditional Bengali clothes and attires from Bengal of at least a 100 years ago, but it also

represents the anxieties of the cognitive thought processes of the mind of common man, who stood against a testing time of foreign administration on one hand and changing zamindari or landlord and police systems on the other.

Representations vary and so does the use of colour and embellishments through changing times, which all reflect the thought processes of time and has a story of its own to narrate. However, as busy streets of Kumartuli busies itself each year with renewed vigour to rediscover, reintroduce and refurbish various changes, customs and traditions, the underlined image evolves with the same dexterity- as it narrates the age-old story of man and his essence to live and fight for a better tomorrow. Durga images from Kumartuli, though represents various many other themes and images in modern time thus, also adheres to the quintessential tradition that led to its birth in the first place- the need to placate mental agonies and seek blessings for a better tomorrow. Thus, at the onset of the six days of Durga puja in Kolkata as the artists get busy to render the final touches of paint and colour to the clay images of the deity and the occasional heavy downpour has the water gushing in torrents through the narrow lanes of Kumartuli, the wet smell of the earth once again reaches out to the sky to announce the arrival of a custom and an institution that has made its mark as an important part of human existence through time. In the process, reminding above all changes exist, but traditions continue.

Notes

¹ An influence of Tantric Buddhism on some of the local deities is also significant.

² *Anandamath*- novel written in Bengali by famous Bengali novelist- Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and is set in the backdrop of the freedom struggle of India, which even speaks of the horrible famine of 1774 of Bengal

³ Popularly known as Lord Ganesa's wife in Bengal, *Kolabou* or *Nabapatrika* in reality has no relationship with Ganesa. She is referred as *Nabapatrika* as she represents a popular ritual performed by the peasants for prosperous harvest from very ancient times. With various primeval forces often worshipping different forms of nature, this too represented the worship of Mother nature during the autumn (*Sharat* season of Indian agricultural calendar) - which is the time for reaping the summer crops, which is also called the *Amon dhan*. In later times, the popularity of idol worship absorbed the worship of the forces of nature, along with all the rituals

(source- <http://www.bangalinet.com/kolabou.htm>)

⁴ (source <http://clayimage.co.uk/kumhist.html>)

⁵ Somendra Chandra Nandy in 'Durga Puja: A Rational Approach' published in *The Statesman Festival*, 1991.

⁶ Sukanta Chaudhuri, ed. *Calcutta: the Living City, Vol. 1: The Past*

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ Shola's scientific name is *Aeschynomene Aspera*, a herbaceous plant which grows in marshland

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