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RESEARCH ARTICLE

IDOL-MAKING AND SPATIALITY: CONSONANCE OF PLACE-MAKING, IDENTITY AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

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Abstract

Place-making is a multifaceted process that imbues physical spaces with cultural, social, and economic significance, resulting in environments that promote distinct identities. Kumartuli, a historic artisanal neighborhood in Kolkata, exemplifies this process with its unique blend of spatiality, socio-ritual practices, and cultural heritage.Known for its centuries-old idol-making customs, Kumartuli is a vibrant place where innovation and heritage coexist, shaping the identity of its artisanal community and contributing to Kolkata's cultural landscape. This paper examines the congruence of idol-makers' adaptation to place-making processes and visitors', particularly photographers', perceptions of Kumartuli's spatiality.Fieldwork was conducted in September when idol-making activities were at their peak, and included unstructured interactions with ten practicing idol-makers as well as informal discussions with visiting photographers. Thematic data analysis reveals that Kumartuli's dense network of narrow lanes, clustered studios, and riverside accessibility shape artisanal craft while also contributing to the performative and symbolic dimensions of place-making. The findings show how the artisanal fraternity balances tradition and innovation, adapting creatively to spatial constraints while preserving their socio-ritual practices and cultural identities.This study emphasizes Kumartuli's functionality as a site of cultural production and identity negotiation by placing it within theoretical frameworks of place-making, postcolonial urbanism, and informal spatial networks. It adds to conversations about urban informal settlements by highlighting their value as hubs of heritage, creativity, and perseverance in a contextuality of urban neighborhood that is experiencing rapid transformation.

Introduction:-

Place-making is a multifaceted process that creates places supporting a distinct identity by imbuing physical spaces cultural, social, and economic significance. An excellent example of a place where place-making is inextricably linked to the art of idol-making is Kumartuli, a historic artisanal neighborhood in Kolkata. The development of Kumartuli's cultural quarter was significantly influenced by the potters' cluster's location. The acquisition of raw materials and transportation have benefited from the neighborhood's proximity to the river. Numerous social-anthropological studies indicate that the caste-based homogeneity within the close-knit community served as a

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supportive environment for fostering talent and establishing social cohesion, resulting in collective behaviours and orientations (Abraham 2018).With its cluttered studios, riverbank accessibility, and intricate network of winding lanes, Kumartuli's spatial dynamics have influenced not only the local culture but also the identity of its idol-making community at large.

In addition to providing a means of financial support, idol-making, which has its roots in socio-ritual customs, is a performative proclamation of cultural and spiritual identity. Artists engage with the materiality of clay, the sanctity of the craft, and the symbolic significance of their land and community in Kumartuli's lived space, which embodies layers of meaning. Layers of contemporary and traditional ritualized arts are associated to the act of making of idols in the contested spaces of this cluttered bustee (slum neighborhood) of Kumartuli.With underlying ideas of frugal economies and jugaad, a substantial body of literature contends that urban informal settlements are not only seen as places of poverty and deprivation but also as hubs of entrepreneurial behaviour and ingenuity (Birtchnell, 2011;Bhatti, 2013).Postcolonial theorists have talked extensively about urban informal settlements, but not enough about the daily activities and networks that are situated there, their spatial relationships, or about the variables influencing the formation of their multi-layered actor-network positionality. Handful of studies has examined how artisanal communities deal with spatial constraints and cultural production, despite a wealth of research on urban informal settlements. This study fills this gap by investigating how idol-makers adjust to their surroundings and how outsiders, especially photographers and tourists, perceive Kumartuli as a space of cultural production. It draws attention to the intersection of heritage, economy, and spatial identity through qualitative inquiry.Through specific unstructured interactions of qualitative propositions; this paper examines how spatiality and socio-ritual practices aid in the identity formation of the artisanal fraternity in Kumartuli. The goal of this study is to navigate the correlation between the idol makers' adaptation to place-making and the visitors' perceptions of the area's spatiality, which reveals a variety of socio-cultural dynamics.

Methodology:-

The process of place-making in Kumartuli is examined in this study using a qualitative research methodology, with an emphasis on the interplay among spatiality, socio-ritual practices, and identity formation. The study looks at how the artisanal congregation preserves its creative and cultural legacy while acclimating to fast-paced urban changes(Lefebvre, 1991). It also looks at how tourists, especially photographers, engage with Kumartuli's spatiality and help shape its changing identity as a performative and cultural space (Edensor, 2000).

Fieldwork was done in ward 8 and 9 of Sovabazar metropolitan area in the month of September 2024, when artisans were involved in giving finishing touches to the idols for the Durga Puja festival. A deeper cognition of the socio-ritual practices ingrained in the craft is made possible by the deliberate selection of this time period to observe and record the intricacy involved in the idol-making process (Chatterjee, 2009). For the interviews, ten active idol-makers were specifically chosen using purposive sampling. These craftspeople offered insights into their craft, the socio-cultural networks supporting their work, and on the spatial challenges and adaptations that shape their practices (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). They represented a range of generations and an umbrella of experiences within the community.

Unstructured interactions made it possible for the researcher and participants to have a conversational and natural exchange of ideas while collecting data. This method promoted the development of complex, context-specific insights by enabling the artisans to express their thoughts and experiences without being constrained by a strict interview format. A deeper comprehension of the artisans' lived experiences within the spatial and sociocultural context of Kumartuli was also made possible by the unstructured nature of the interactions (Tuan, 1977).

To find reoccurring patterns, ideas, and themes pertinent to the goals of the research, the transcribed data was then thematically analysed. The analysis revealed themes like visitor perceptions of Kumartuli's spatiality, the socio-ritual significance of idol-making, the negotiation of tradition and innovation, and adaptation to spatial constraints(Creswell &Poth, 2018). The congruence of the artisanal adaptations and the visitors' perceptions was given special attention, highlighting the junction of local customs and external interpretations of the neighborhood (Massey, 1994).

In order to capture Kumartuli's visual and performative essence, the study also takes into account the viewpoints of photographers who visit the area. To find out how the spatiality and performative elements of Kumartuli affect the way visiting photographers engage with the space, informal discussions were held with them(Pink, 2007). To give a

thorough understanding of how external actors experience and interpret Kumartuli's spatial dynamics and cultural practices, their perspectives were incorporated into the analysis.

This approach places the lived experiences and spatial practices of the artisanal fraternity within the larger theoretical frameworks of place-making, postcolonial urbanism, and informal spatial networks, outlining their importance. The study adds to a better understanding of Kumartuli as a site of cultural production, heritage, and identity formation by looking at the adaptation process used by idol-makers and the spatial perceptions of tourists (Rao, 2013).

Findings and Discussion:-

Locational Characteristics of Kumartuli

The patronage of the local Babu families may have made the Kumartulineighborhood the preliminary centre of idol-making in Kolkata, but the neighborhood's advantageous location was crucial in establishing the traditions and interconnection to idol-making in this area. The thatched workshops where craftspeople carve clay models intersect the narrow alleys of Kumartuli, which resemble a neighborhood in the metropolis of Kolkata. This artisans' colony is a vestige from the British colonial era, when the northern areas of Kolkata, labelled as "Black Town," were split up into caste-based settlements for groups of skilled laborers (Heierstad, 2017).

Heierstad mentions, '…The tales of indigenous modernity in Kumartuli, Kolkata, appear to be hidden behind tradition. The story of a contemporary, economically neoliberal India is narrated by the potters who live in the caste-based neighborhood's earth-floored, shanty-like workshops' (Heierstad, 2017).

Along annals of history, Kumartuli has been represented as a caste-homogeneous neighbourhoodwhich saw its transition from a potter's community to an artisanal neighborhood specialised in idol making processes as a result of cultural amalgamation of spatial imperialism imposed by the colonisers on the native artisanal cluster and the community of oil refiners on one hand, and the cultural imprints placed by the aristocrat households and trading clusters of the area on their socio-spatial realities on the other hand(Banerjee, 2020).

Presently, Kumartuli is shifting from being a neighborhood that is exclusively used for production and commerce.A wave of gentrification that is mostly organic in nature has altered the use of the houses in Kumartuli. A number of older buildings have been redeveloped to create room for workshop spaces. On numerous floors behind the workshops, some living areas have been remodelled to accommodate family homes. Some families were rehoused in the nearby warehouse, which was altered to meet the short-term requirements of the state government's 'Kumartuli rehabilitation project', while others outgrew the spaces and were able to afford better living conditions elsewhere(Sen, 2018).What was formerly a uniform community of potters' families living and working in close proximity is being transformed into a neighborhood primarily utilized for commercial and productive purposes due to the local tourism and cultural economy.

The area's roads are concrete for the narrower ones and black-topped for the wider ones. For the idols to be pulled and distributed smoothly, the state of the roads is crucial. There are potholes in the alleys and drains with broken openings, which worsen the condition of already dirty and congested roads. Both sides of the interior alleys are lined with workshops; some have attached residential units at the back that are accessible through the workshops, while others have separate entrances through comparatively small alleys off the streets. A range of idol-making techniques are also carried out in the streets, including combining clay, cutting straws and bamboos, and even letting clay-covered idols or segments of them dry in the sun.

The locus of the idol-making activities used to be the potters' modest home (kumorer-bari). Amidst the limited spaces within and around the quarters of the idol-makers' in Kolkata, the potters created pots and idols while trying to juggle through their regular family lives. The methods used to create idols have changed over time. Additionally, the locations where these practices are carried out have altered, expanded, and modified. The typical day in a workshop-turned-residence combines the customs of making idols with the routine activities of a Kolkata neighborhood known as the bustee. The streets are an extended area with multiple uses; they are fundamentally a part of the residents' daily routines and occasionally function as an extension of the workshop itself. Residents have little to no privacy since these streets are frequently visited by tourists, photographers, and researchers.To ensure the smooth running of idol-making processes and other pertaining routines throughout Kumartuli during the protracted

monsoon season, awnings, makeshift bamboo sheds, and plastic sheets are erected over the streets and outdoor spaces.

Bean articulates, idol-crafting communities as ‘congregate in neighbourhoods with ready access to clay and room for storing supplies, as well as studio space and local tolerance for work spilling out into the streets during the festival season’(Bean, 2011).

Kumartuli's streets offer a variety of multisensory experiences. The neighborhood's distinctive scents, sights, and sounds are created by the creative uses of clay, bamboo, straw, and other materials in the narrow streets.While walking past a workshop, one may hear the sound of straw being cut into small pieces or the hammering sound of a nail being fixed on a wooden idol frame. When the clay is ready to be applied to the idol, it is generally left on the street, which has a dampsmell.The clay seeps into the streets during the monsoon season, making them muddy. Particularly if one visits the area during the beginning of matri-pokkho, the stench of paints, the stunning sights of glittering clothing and jewellery, or the constant chorus of haggling and the sounds of brushstrokes being applied to the idols for processing final touches may overwhelm one's sensory traits. The visual experiences in Kumartuli are largely dictated by the idol-crafting practices, which distinguishes this place from an ordinary urban neighborhood(Bean, 2011).

In addition to being places for residents' daily activities, the alleyways of Kumartuli are also sites of social-cultural production that are constantly being created and recreated for crafts, sales, and distribution. Additionally, the residents' daily activities produce distinctive scenery, sounds, and odours. These multisensory experiences are crucial to creating meaningful urban spaces because what may seem unpalatable to onlookers may have several meanings for regular users and occupants. In addition to facilitating the formation of these locations, the sound, aroma, and visual imagery also give the seemingly ordinary places of practices an array of extraordinary meanings. Integrally, these sensory experiences, construct and reconstruct the ‘place Kumartuli’ as a unique spatiality determining the realities of the individual idol makers shaping the actor-network relations within and beyond the boundaries of the community cluster.

Spatial Adaptations and Community Identity

The cramped workshops, communal courtyards, and close proximity to the Hooghly River in Kumartuli's physical layout serve as both a limitation and an opportunity. A close-knit community of artisans who depend on one another is fostered by these spatial conditions. For example, efficient use of clay, paint, and other materials is ensured by the division of labor within small congested studios. The community's resilience and interdependence are represented by this physical arrangement, which strengthens their shared identity. The area's spatial characteristics, which serve as markers of the community's adaptability and resourcefulness, are intricately linked to the identity of Kumartuli's idol-makers. The preservation of age-old idol-making methods that have been handed down through the generations is what gives Kumartuli its heritage value.The spatial and cultural dynamics of the area are inextricably linked to the socio-ritual processual of idol-making in Kumartuli. Together, the streets, clay pits, including the workshops create a sanctified space where craftspeople perform and ritualize their identities. In this context, space is a tangible and symbolic entity that supports economic engagements and cultural practices.

The correspondence between heritage, economy, and the identity is further highlighted by the relative notion that land and culture are forms of capital. Their lived experience of Kumartuli emphasizes how crucial location is in forming socio-ritual identity and maintaining cultural continuity. As a result, the performative aspect of idol-making, which is ingrained in ritual and communal practices, reinforces the identity of the artisans and preserves their legacy.

We may find an infusion of two theoretical frameworks that determine the lived experiences of the idol makers in the community when we refer to this congruence socio-ritual contextualization and spatial identity. Émile Durkheim's (1995) concept of "collective effervescence" finds a correlation with Victor Turner's (1969) notion of "liminality," which describes how Kumartuli's idol-making process exemplifies a sense of cohesion where shared rituals reinforce social solidarity. This, in turn, is symbolic of the transition experienced by the idol makers, elevating the artisans' work beyond mere labor, turning raw clay into divine representations of the goddess. Therefore, the mediation between the sacred and the material is symbolized by this act.

In the whole process the spatial dynamics of the area inclusive of congested workshops adjoining residential areas, low lighted rooms filled with incomplete idols, scattered boxes of brushes and paints, constant manoeuvring of raw

materials from go-downs to workshop, extensive interactional processes between clients and idol makers, narrow lanes depicting an ensemble of thatched vis-à-vis PVC extensions of workshop shades with clustered overhead wires and opened drains running along the entrance of the workshops, altogether is instrumental in understandinghow the nature of Kumartuli's location within Kolkata, as well as its cultural branding, adds value to the idols, embedding cultural identity in economic exchange (Harvey,1989).The framework of "thirdspace" developed by Edward Soja (1996) places a strong emphasis on lived experiences and the intersection of social, symbolic, and physical spaces. For the idol makers of Kumartuli, their land is more than just a place of employment; it is a site of ancestral and cultural heritage that is imbued in sacred significance and history.

Sushanta Pal, a middle-aged idol maker, mentions how he along with this father migrated from Krishnanagarto Kolkata for search of better occupational engagement. They initially got a small space on rent at the juncture of Kumartuli Park and the main road leading to Shyambazar, but later they bought a space within the main cluster, which is inclusive of both their place of residence and workshop.He described the layout of his home cum workshop, while occupying an unfinished wooden timber.A raised wooden spread called a 'Khatiya' (bed), which is used for sleeping and was used to store a variety of idol-making supplies at the time, stood opposite him. The room is filled with incomplete or partially completed clay and fibre idols of various sizes, and it resembled the storage area of the workshop.

He also owns a room just in front of this one, which his brother and his wife share. Sushantas's wife was doing household chores in the hallway that connected these two rooms. The other hanging extension which is carved out of the wall with the help of cement base and ply finishing is his bedroom cum dining room.He mentions when his father was alive this space of two and a half room was home for seven people, currently five of them occupies this space. On being questioned about the insufficiency of space and aspects to privacy, he sarcastically answered 'amramatirmoto, ekjaegaethaklemishe jai….ashubidhahoyena', we are just like clay, and we can get moulded and mixed in any space. On one of the walls of hanging extension of the space, I found the photo of his father along with pictorials of gods and goddesses adorned with garlands, he mentions it was because of his father and forefather's ascribed identity, that he learned the craft of idol making which not only helps him sustain his family today but also determines his access to the critical spaces of the community. He mentions how they have adapted to the clustered nature of the neighbourhoodcharacterised by congested spaces, blurred boundaries between private and public realms, make-shift nature of workshops and a sense of continued dialect between competition and cohesion within the caste structure.According to him, it is these characteristics that provide them with the thrill of idol making; he acknowledges that they are in desperate need of resources, more space, and infrastructure; however, he cannot deny that once resources and infrastructure are made available, they will no longer have the distinct character that sets them apart from other artists' colonies worldwide. They undoubtedly feel that they belong in this mess, in this soil, and that they won't be able to regain their familiar surrounding if something disrupts it. In this case, the loss is not just monetary; it also refers to the loss of one's identity and the essence of an artist's life, which is their longing for space. This proposition of messiness and haphazard environmental character connects them to the soil where they mould the set clay into the divine, imparting a sense of belief that divinity comes from these aspects of land, space, and soil, offering the idol makers with a sense of connection to their iconographic processes. Thus, space, with all of its tangible and intangible characteristics and socio-cultural exchanges, serves as a mediator between the materials and sacred, determining the idol makers' lived realities.Kumartuli'snarrow alleys and disorganised workshops create a performative space in which artisans sculpt in public, blending the sacred and the mundane. This duality reinforces their socio-ritual identity, and the act of idol making becomes a sacred performance rooted in spatial dynamics**,** where the spatial cluster of Kumartuli gets transformed into a form of capital.

Land as a form of capital:

In Kumartuli, land and culture serve as forms of capital that support the socio-ritual economy. The locality's spatial capital stems from its historic-cultural significance as an artisanal hub. Bourdieu's (1986) theory is useful for understanding how land and culture function as forms of capital in Kumartuli. Kumartuli's physical land serves as a source of economic and cultural capital, providing artisans with both production and symbolic prestige.

The socio-ritual practices of idol making in Kumartuli are inextricably linked to the community's cultural and spatial dynamics. The workshops, streets, and clay pits form a sacred landscape in which artisans express their identities through performance and ritual. In this context, space refers to both a physical and symbolic entity that supports cultural practices and economic exchanges.

Kumartuli's spatial analysis relies heavily on Lefebvre's (1991) concept of how space is socially produced. Kumartuli's spatial practices, such as the division of labor, workshop layout, and seasonal influx of activities, demonstrate how the community actively creates a space that reflects its collective identity. The concept of land and culture as forms of capital emphasizes the relationship between heritage, economy, and identity. Their lived experience with Kumartuli emphasizes the role of place in shaping socio-ritual identity and cultural continuity.

However, these dynamics are not static. Urban redevelopment, commercialization, and globalization pose significant challenges for Kumartuli's artisanal fraternity. The area's spatial constraints necessitate innovative processes. Artisans have adapted to constrained studio spaces by creating modular idol designs that appeal to both local festivals and global markets. The commodification of this cultural capital in general frequently results in conflicts between traditional practices and modern economic imperatives.

Referring to the context of rehabilitation plan that was implemented by the state government rendered a fear of displacement among the inhabitant idol makers.The fear of the proposed restructuring project was outweighed in Kumartuli by the fear of losing one's identity, home, and, most importantly, one's repetitive behaviours. Narratives expressed how people articulated their deepest ties to the land. Some talked about the 'character' of the place more than the land's exchange value. Parallel to Kumartuli's spatial realities, they promoted a location where economic, social, physical, and intangible components will coexist (Molotch, 2000).They were unable to consider a place with expansive boulevards, glittering art galleries, and shining state-of-the-art buildings as a replacement of the labyrinth of lanes and by-lanes, the small house for a large family, the dimly lit workshop, the shaky bamboo scaffolding, and the smell of riverine clay. All of these factors were reminiscent of an identical character that the idol makers could identify with in terms of their roots.

A sense of "belongingness" was embodied by the artisans' opposition to gentrification and redevelopment plans that aimed to modernize the neighborhood at the expense of its heritage. The land of Kumartuli, according to artisans, is a repository of ancestors' wisdom, collective memory, and spiritual practice in addition to being a physical location. The spatial character of Kumartuli loudly declares that the labyrinth of lanes and tottering huts are where Kumartuli finds its essence.

Bishnu Pal owner of a standalone workshop exclaims, Kumartuli as his motherland. He says 'amiekhanejonmechi…..kharaphokbhalohok…..eta amarjaega' he was born here, be it good or bad, it's his place and they owe the identity to this particular spatial construct.

The majority of the day is spent in the workshops by the artists and seasonal employees. The artists sometimes work overnight or eat and rest in the workshops during the busiest times of the year. The majority of artists with a standalone workshop live within walking distance of their independent workshops, which are not attached to dwellings. It's interesting to note that this workshop has a tiny room in the corner. When not in use, the room stays locked for the majority of the day.The space, which has a desk and a few chairs, is usually used as an office by the main artist. The room's wall is adorned with images of chronological idols, a calendar, and a small wooden shrine that holds figurines of commonly worshipped deities. A few papers and stationery, an incandescent light hanging from the ceiling, and a fan complete the room's inventory. The wooden partition used to build the wall is a later addition, as evidenced by the age of the building. The office is significant because it shows that client meetings and documentation are essential for a professional practice, in addition to the fact that family-based idol-making activities have shifted from the home to independent workshops, in-turn underscoring the process of adjusting to different professional approaches while still inhabiting a space that embodies the essence the of the community's reality and commitment to experiential rootedness.

In reference to the redevelopment program the kuchha structures versus the pukka structures debatearised, on which Sanjay Pal an artisan specialising in traditional iconography, mentions that they are better with tin shades (kuchha structures) which allows proper ventilation. He says their main enemy is rain, but they need sunlight, which is the main source of their energy and important for the clay modules to dry. He also adds that the people who got concrete shades, might have their idols saved from rain, but they have to bear huge expenses for electricity since the conditions indoor are dampen and they have to employ mechanised techniques to keep the idols dry.

Another middle-aged artisan, SudhirRudrapal, stated that their representation in the external world would change as a result of the forced development processes that are sweeping through the area. He claimed that they are unique

because of their struggles, hardships, cultural aesthetics, and darkness in their lives. Following the community's modernization, no photographer would go up to them to admire their work or discuss the idol-making process over a cup of tea. The commodification of the unique realities that the area's spatiality preserved will ultimately result in the loss of their art.

Primarily, most of the idol makers migrated from Krishnanagar or Bangaldesh in the area and had to experience an elongated process of settlement in relation to the establishment of their style of iconography and gaining a clientele base through the same within the cluster. This whole scenario created a process of 'flux in their identity', enforcing them to persuade themselves with the image of rootedness instead of actual aspects of rootedness. It was a lengthened process for them to settle down in the cluster and to identify their sense of 'identity' that was derived from the spatial reality of the area. Then the announcement of the rehabilitation plan of the previous state government and revamping of the same by the current government triggered their sense threat to identity which enkindled their protest to safeguard the land which they treated as a form of capital. While these tensions enable artisans to adjust to changing circumstances, they also force them to rethink their cultural identity as they strike a balance between innovation and heritage preservation, which calls for greater social cohesion among the individual idol makers in order to re-intensify the process of preserving the socio-cultural capital that is coherent with the community's spatial fabric.

Structural intrusions and Cultural Exchange

Kumartuli's place-making has taken on new dimensions as a result of media exposure and the state government's portrayal of the area as a tourist hotspot. The neighborhood's guided tours have transformed the once-private art of idol-making into a public event. As a result, areas have been redesigned to make room for guests, including the addition of viewing and exhibition areas (Hannerz, 2003). Here thus it becomes imperative to recognise the presence of the visitors whose spatial reality gets entangled with the spatial belonging of the idol makers even though they are intruders in the spaces that originally belong to the artisans.

The idol makers, make certain spatial adjustments to incorporate the individual biographies of the visitors within the realm of cultural-aesthetics of the community cluster which they treat as a form of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986). This constant negotiations between the beholders of the space and the intruders creates an unique array of interactional-ritual exchanges which is determined by the structure-agency duality where the agency of the dominant characters gets sublimed under the multiple realities of the intruders, borrowing from the unique gamut of biographies projected on the spaces of Kumartuli representing the socio-spatial dynamics of the community as a 'shared venture' (Giddens, 1979).

Searching for "Kumartuli" online yields hundreds of pictures or visual motifs that show the community from its northern reaches and then along the river to some of its central areas. These include images of idol makers engaged in the idol-making process, close-ups of partially completed idols, unfinished torsos, congested spaces, and dimly lit workshops that are characterized by the aesthetics of "surreality."Clusters of online content and the other that are likely to arise even from a cursory survey of these sites include images treat Kumartuli as a stand-alone location to be visited and photographed as part of professional training or amateur interest, encourages a visit as part of an introduction to the city's historical heritage. The unifying theme that integrates both is the deliberate visual and discursive framing of Kumartuli as the art and museum neighborhood of Kolkata—a uniquely rich place for unique cultural experiences.

Kumartuli's growing popularity as a heritage and cultural tourism site attracts a large number of photographers during peak seasons like Durga Puja. These photographers work within the framework of tourism and cultural commodification, viewing Kumartuli as a "performative" space to capture its essence. A random internet search for 'photo-walks in Kumartuli' renders a wealth of visual material. However, there is little on any of the applications or portals that can provide us with a sense of the history of the photo walks, and it appears that much of the material relates to the age of the Internet and social media, catering solely to the participant's 'organic experience' (Agnihotri, 2001).

The number of workers, the different kinds of clay models made, and the exotic creativity that defines the busiest time of year are all frequently described by a variety of photographers and writers using Kumartuli as a spatial trope that symbolizes wonder and awe. Consequently, "visual surrealist imagery" is suggested as the most accurate

depiction of reality to symbolize the essence of the community cluster propositioned by the sense 'rootedness'.(Sen, 2015).A trope such as ….

'To create works of art that are so vibrant, stylized, and grand that they inspire awe for a lifetime, a whole army of sculptors, potters, frame decorators, and dressers collaborate with piles of straw, clay, inexpensive gold foils, bamboo, beads, and everyday objects', or '#Kumartuli''#Mahalaya', or 'aesthetics of Kumartuli', '#SubhoMahalaya' or '#matripokkheragamon',inextricably lure the individuals from varied regions with distinctive biographies to visit the place during the periods prior to Durga Puja where visiting Kumartuli and capturing the socio-cultural aesthetics through visual imagery is directly linked to the process of ritualization relating to the occasion ofMahalaya.

While an interaction with two photographers during the field visit, one of them who were a student of an art school mentioned the reason of extended surge in number of photographers visiting the area during pre-DurgaPujoperiods.SinceKumartuli gave photographers plenty of opportunity to learn about "different formations, patterns, and light conditions," she notes that both amateur and professional photographers prefer the "five acre pocket."She continues to state that clay models allowed photographers to examine lines and patterns they had studied in their theoretical visual art classes. In the end, the unfinished models and the artistry that is put into creating them, produces surrealistic images that draw the viewer's attention.

Another photographer mentions, how he always looks for the point of origin in his aspectual of photography, in context to Kumartuli he says 'maajekhanetoirihoyeamisheisutro ta dekhte chai prottek bar' he looks for the origin where the goddess is created.

At the heart of these short narrative assemblages are clusters of images of narrow lanes, dilapidated workshops, rows and rows of incomplete idols in awkward naked and incomplete states, bamboo and straw armatures, unpainted bodies and headless torsos displayed in their grey dreariness, bits of hair, jewelleries, and general workshop clutter. An incomplete idol that is on display at the lane's entrance invokes in the visitors, a wired sense of thrill.

We witness the talented Kumars, the modest craftspeople, working on their masterpieces in a workshop or simply on the thresholds. While the photographers and visitors never stop trying to get their best shots or capture their best moments, they either acknowledge the presence of individual visitors or simply carry on with their work. Their spare living quarters are located in between the small alcoves they refer to as their workshops and this is both their home and a public area. By negotiating their space and craft against the frequently obtrusive presence of photographers, the idol makers frequently exhibit their agency which was initially sublimed.Some craftspeople welcome the attention as a way to promote their work, but others object to the intrusion because they see it as an infringement to their privacy and work. In order to redefine the terms of engagement and exert control over the interaction, artisans occasionally take advantage of the presence of photographers by charging for photo shoots.

It is intimidating for visitors or photographers to avoid the sights and smells of domesticity in the middle of the chaos and filth. Among the symphony of sounds that make up the "essence of Kumartuli" are the faint smell of wet clay, the blare of hammering, the crackling of spices and chillies in frying pans, the gas stoves and chullahs awkwardly placed between the disarray or unfinished idols, and the rising fumes from bowls of boiling rice. This is simultaneously a place of residence, a studio, a place of survival, and a place of consumption. The space's poetic embedding in the city's soul adds the finishing touches to Kumartuli's historic, aesthetic, and emotional appeal.

To put it another way, Kumartuli is a photographer's dream come true, where one can hone their skills and produce an aesthetically striking story for the larger populace to enjoy. A certain sense of aesthetic engagement is required to evoke the surreal spatial imagery created by the dense collections of images of narrow streets, dimly lit shacks, bamboo and straw armatures, incomplete clay torsos, tarpaulin sheets, hair fragments, and accessories, as well as artisans in various poses, some working, others relaxing.

However the primary focus of visual artists is to capture singular images which is surreal in nature and determines the aesthetics of the situated reality of Kumartuli, but somehow they ignore the 'fluid nature of the spatiality' of Kumartuli which extends beyond the physical boundaries of the cluster to construct a 'visual metamorphosis' (Guhathakurata, 2015) bringing the whole city under one quilt of symbolism determined by congruence of believe,

rituals and socio-cultural realities that constructs and reconstructs individual identities of both the idol makers and the visitors creating an unique actor-network relation projected on the wider socio-spatial landscape of Kolkata.

Conclusion:-

Kumartuli'sperformative spatiality is closely linked to place-making. This neighborhood's lanes, workshops, and courtyards are dynamic spaces where artisans use their craft to bring the symbols of community, culture, and faith to life. Idol-making is an activity that extends beyond the workshops into the streets, appealing to the senses of both locals and tourists. The immersive experience created by these performative elements—where the rhythm of hands moulding clay, the conversation of craftspeople, and the colourful festivals—defines Kumartuli as a site of memory and meaning.

Kumartuli is a prime example of how place-making creates and maintains a sense of community. The neighborhood's spatial dynamics and the cultural practices of the artisans combine to produce a distinctive sense of place that has an impact on people locally and internationally (Heierstad, 2017). The idol-makers of Kumartuli continue to define their identity by balancing tradition and innovation within their physical limitations, adding to the region's reputation as a hub of creativity and legacy. It is clear from comprehending Kumartuli's place-making that spatiality actively participates in the processes of cultural production and identity formation rather than serving as a backdrop.

Through their performative practices, place-making endeavours, and strategic adjustments to external influences, the artisans maintain the locality's identity as a heritage site (Ghosh, 2000). Both the economic and symbolic value of Kumartuli is significantly shaped by land and culture, which are manifestations of capital. Through their craft, Kumartuli's artisans continue to assert their identity and heritage in spite of obstacles like commercialization and urban redevelopment. Kumartuli offers an engaging case study of cultural innovation and preservation catering to their lived experience of space, which highlights the adaptability of socio-ritual frameworks in the face of change. Therefore, Kumartuli is more than just a physical location where it is represented as a vibrant cultural and economic hub where identity, place-making, and performance all come at a same parlance.

In essence, Kumartuli is more than just its geographical boundaries or its role as an idol production centre. It is about the stories it tells, the experiences it fosters, and the identity it preserves for Kolkata. It is a living, breathing entity that demonstrates the power of place-making in fostering a sense of belonging, continuity, and shared heritage in the ever-changing urban environment.

Kumartuli's association with the ups and downs of Kolkata's history, as well as the surreal appeal of its present, establishes it as a critical node in the city's cultural and spatial narratives. Kumartuli is more than just a neighborhood; it embodies Kolkata's living heritage, serving as a link between the past and the present through vibrant idol-making practices, artistic traditions, and community life (Ray, 2017). Kumartuli thus represents an example of place-making, in which the physical, social, and cultural dimensions all working together to create a space that reflects both local identity and broader historical significance.

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