

A man with dark hair, wearing a light blue and white striped short-sleeved shirt, is focused on working on a clay sculpture of a human face. He is using a small, thin tool to refine the features of the sculpture. The scene is dimly lit, with a bright light source from the upper left creating a strong highlight on the man's hair and the sculpture's forehead. The background is dark and out of focus.

KUMARTULI

HISTORY OF KUMARTULI IDOL MAKERS

Most of the artisans living in the North Kolkata, West Bengal neighborhoods dwindled in numbers or even vanished, as they were pushed out of the area in the late nineteenth century by the invasion from Burrabazar. In addition, Marwari businessmen virtually flushed out others from many North Kolkata localities. The potters of Kumortuli, who fashioned the clay from the river beside their home into pots to be sold at Sutanuti Bazaar (later Burrabazar), managed to survive in the area. Gradually they took to making the images of gods and goddesses, worshipped in large numbers in the mansions all around and later at community pujas in the city and beyond.



LOCATION

Kumortuli is located in Ward No. 8 of Kolkata Municipal Corporation, mostly between Rabindra Sarani (formerly Chitpur Road) and the Hooghly River. It is between Beniatola (Ahiritola) and Shobhabazar.



After every Rath Yatra (Chariot Festival), Kolkata gets ready to welcome Goddess Durga. It is that time of year when the city celebrates the spirit of love, laughter and life. Thousands of people throng the streets both from within as well as outside Kolkata to visit different pandals and view idols of Durga. However, Durga Puja is not just about celebrating the goddess but also the different forms of art, craft and traditions associated with it. One such community without whom the Durga Puja celebrations are incomplete is the potters of Kumartuli. They work day and night to create the clay idols to be worshipped during the Durga Puja. Kumar meaning potter and tuli refers to easily walk able localities within a quarter or half a mile, hence the name Kumartuli.

The Craftsmen

The process of idol making demands a multitude of skilled and unskilled labours. The wages of the laborers can range from Rs 500 to Rs 10,000 depending on the work and the working hours of the laborer. The active period for workers is July to January or February, and the busiest is August to October, the main festive season of Kolkata. These studios also provide informal lessons to budding artists and sculptors. College students who wish to learn this art form visit the studios and watch the skilled workers sculpt.

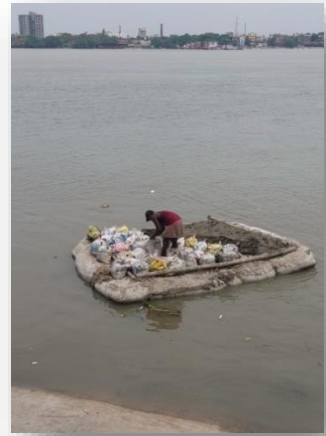
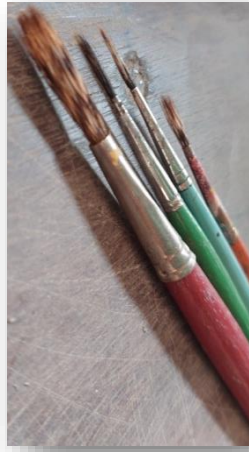


Many craftsmen still believe that women should stay at home and only indirectly assist their male counterparts by cooking for them during their work hours. This thinking is also guided by the belief that “Meyere maayer jaat” (women are akin to goddesses)

and should not engage in any form of business that requires them to step out and toil to earn money. However, the situation is changing and, today many women are carrying forward their father's or husband's business just like Mala Pal.

TOOLS USED

- a. **Clay** - Clay from Uluberia Village, Diamond harbor, Hooghly river, and from other Kolkata regions are brought. Entel Mati and bele mati are most widely used clays.
- b. **Rice Husk** - It is generally mixed with the clay from Bengaluru for stiffness purposes.
- c. **Hay** - It is mixed with the clay in giving the final details to the sculptures.
- d. **Sticks and ropes** - Handmade sticks of bamboo and others are preferred in making of the frame structure for the sculpture.
- e. **Plank of wood** - It is used to spread the parts of the idol made in clay.
- f. **Jute Fibre** - It is mixed with clay to get grip in making idols and also it is fixed as hair for the deities and lion figures.
- g. **Nails** - It is used to fix the cloth material to the portions wherever it is required.
- h. **Maida paste** - It is used to stick the hair and golden papers on the idol. It is mixed with *Tetul seeds* (Tamarind seeds)
- i. **Poster and Acrylic colours** - It is used generally to paint the idols.
- j. **Moulds** - To make the exact and proportionate faces, hands, legs of the deities.



The Stages of Idol Making

The idol making process can be categorized broadly into three stages. The first stage is making the *kathamo* (bamboo and wooden frame) for the idol, the second is preparing the mud and applying the clay, and the third is colouring and decorating the idol.

- **The First Stage**

In making the *kathamo*, the kumars buys wood and bamboo from the

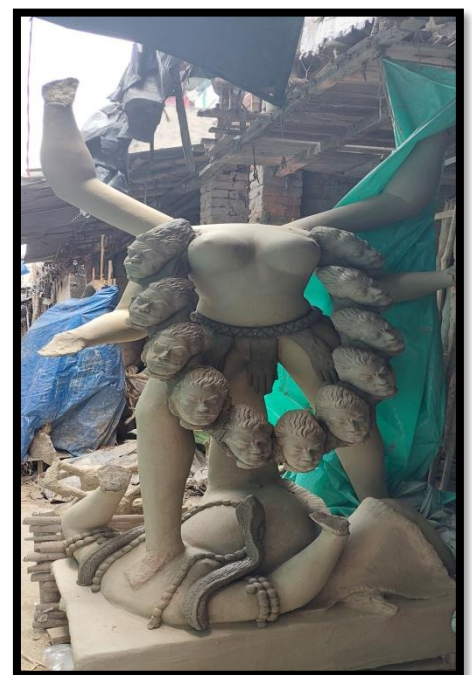


market, cuts and joins them with pins and ties them together with ropes to build the skeleton structure of the idols. Before the sculpting begins, the *kathamo* is worshipped and a few rituals are performed by those who take the idols back to their pandals. Once the *kathamo* is complete, it is tied with straw (hay) to give it a rough shape of the idol.

- **The Second Stage**

The kumars apply mud to the

straw framework of the idol. The mud used is a mixture of clay (brought from the riverside in **Uluberia** village, West Bengal because the sand content is lower than in the banks of Hooghly) and water. The craftsmen stomp on the mud with their feet to remove impurities. Two types of mud, with differing uses, go into sculpting the idols—*entel mati* (sticky clay) and *bele mati* (crisp clay). *Entel mati* is





mixed with *tush* (husk of rice), which is applied on the straw framework of the idol and left to dry for three to four days.

The bele mati is then applied on the layer of entel mati and left to dry for five to six days. If

visible cracks are found on the dried idol structures, they are repaired with cotton clothes and mud.



• The Third Stage

Consequently when the body of the idol is ready, the face, palms and fingers, which are separately made, are put together. Owing to the huge demand for idols, these parts are made from moulds as they reduce the time spent in making shapes over and over again. The face is made with bele mati and rubbed with sand paper to give it a polished finish. The idols are then coloured and decorated.

SHYAMAL PAL – THE IDOL MAKER

Just as any other Potters of Kumartuli Shyamal Pal also called Bhola Pal, is a well known potter of the area. He is in this profession from a very young age. Its been 45 years of proficiency which he has gained from his ancestors. A very humble and generous man, working for a living, making and selling idols of the Gods and Goddesses whom he worships. He taught me every single thing about the clay work in



which he was indulged in. Right from where the clay comes, till the fully decorated idol which is ready for sale. Every single thing he told me is of utter value and knowledge.





- ANN MARIYA JACOB
21135002
BDES.FAD

