CHAPTER IV

IDOL MAKING IN BARAK VALLEY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Assam, the attractive state of India's North Eastern region is prominent for its tropical beauty and its charming people. Pretty villages with its temple and green paddies present an enjoyable prospect. Here the arts and craft are used to vary with the change of time (Bhavnani, 1993). Like the other portion of Assam, Barak Valley is the southern part of Assam since ancient time and it is the place for different castes and communities. But, with the growing urbanization, it is really become difficult to identify the origin of the certain communities who first came and settled in this valley (Das, 2009). The most outstanding feature of art and craft culture of Barak Valley consist is being synonymous with life of people, their belief, their daily articles social festivals and culture. Culture is considered by a set of views, beliefs, values and attitudes toward things in life. Culture refers to the distinctive behavior patterns and lifestyle shared by a group of people, which distinguish it from others (Tseng, 2003). Ananda Coomaraswamy one of the greatest interpreters of India's cultural practice made an inspiring statement in August 1947. He said India's cultural is of value. Not so much because it is Indian but because it is culture (Jaitly, 1990). Art and craft culture always arise as a manifestation of common people and expression of religion and belief.

Barak Valley is the land of celebrations, cheerfulness all year round. In this valley, every month of a year is being celebrated with a number of festivals. To the people of this region, festivals are regarded as symbols of their cultural, social and religious aspirations. These provide the different characteristic dimensions of this valley. With the help of various communities the arts and crafts of this region have building up with time. Like other parts of the country, artisans of this valley have been randomly practicing their own traditional as well as creative ideas. In craft tradition, idol making is extraordinary out of them. Like the other crafts, idol making also started for the need of human being. There is no such clear evidence about when and how exactly the worshipping of idols started in Barak Valley of South Assam. No such particular books or journal or any research work have been carried out to get a

clear idea in the history of idol making in Barak Valley. So the history and development have been taken only from the active and traditional idol-making artists of this valley.

This history could be treated as the oral history and collected details from the people who are now working as idol makers in Barak Valley. These idol-makers of Barak have different history of their identification, but presently they are known as Kumar Paul and this group is involved in idol-making (Plate 4.1). But few numbers of *Sutradhar* clan currently carrying out the idol-making profession in this Valley whereas *Sutradhar* in West Bengal states are more active in idol-making (Ghosh, 2012). Many scholars believe that potters can be divided into two groups, i.e. one section is engaged in making vessels and the other specialized in idol making. But earlier there was no division in-between the potters and idol-makers. Potters were able to serve the both job instantaneously. Many idol makers were migrated in Barak Valley from Dhaka, Faridpur, Comilla and Sylhet of Bangladesh. Many relatives of idol makers of Barak Valley are still surviving in different places of Bangladesh. In Compare to Cachar and Hailakandi, Karimganj is actively participating in idol-making. The inter migration of this idol makers within the valley is very common phenomena. The two well-known Brahmin idol makers of this valley were Lalit Acharjee from Karimganj and Durga Acharjee from Cachar (Nath, 2012).

In Karimganj town there are eight numbers of idol-making studios exist as well as in Badarpur town around four/five studios are presently working. Bhangha is another place nearby Karimganj, where the studios also exist. In Silchar city ten/twelve numbers of leading studios are available, as well in outside Srikona, Masimpur, Kalain, Panibhora, Udharbond and Borkhala are equally known for idol making. The Hailakandi and its adjoining areas like Lala and Katlicherra are also popular in idol making. It is also seen than some artisans of this region do not have any permanent studio, but they are involved in idol-making practices in open spaces outside of their houses. Pratimashilpaloy of Karimganj is the leading idol making studio and prominent because the artists of this workshop are doing conventional as well as creative idols and carrying out many experiments for the same. The Idol-makers are a small community, but without them any festival and Hindu rituals would not been possible hold a fraction of the glamour it does today. The demands of ritual events in contemporary time are more than the earlier periods. So the practice of idol-

making will exist with the socio-cultural practices of this land. The idol makers usually start making icons in the month of *kartik* of every Bengali year .Even it also seen that many practicing idol-makers of this valley are not traditionally idol-makers, earlier their forefathers were originally goldsmith and later next generation were engaged in this craft work. Some idol-maker in this valley does not actually belong from the idol making background. But no one can believe that today they are considered as the best in idol-making with more artistic sense and perfection. At present, in Barak Valley some of the artists fully trained from art colleges besides being part of these traditional practices. Therefore they are able to visualize the contemporary thoughts and traditional attitudes in their works (Paul, 2010).

There are innumerable creation myths; each religious has its own particular version of how the earth began the origin of the Gods, and the coming of the people (Thompson, 2007). During 7th/8th century, many idols were found in various places of undivided Bengal, these were mainly based on Gods and Goddess and all these images mainly referred to all the iconographical norms (Roy, 2009). Iconography is a way of study of icons, mostly religious in character. In other words it is the science of making idols or divine figures, which deals with the characteristic and attributes of different celestial Gods and Goddess. Thus, the study of iconography enables us to identify the idol or figure on the basis of its characteristics and attributes. In Indian iconography we find almost each and every divinity having some of its particular or specific characteristics and attributes which are found codified in different *silpa* texts or canonical treatises. The principle of iconometry is one of the major parts of the idol making practices of Barak region. It is the study which mainly deals with the grammar of proportionate measurements of different parts of the body of human beings as well as of gods, devils, birds and animals.

Clay is an economical and easily operated material for modeling, with which we have for ages made dolls and images of great beauty of design and execution (Mehta, 1960). The clay is one of the most available and valuable material in Barak Valley and it is attached with its civilization (Plate 4.2). It is not only valuable for its availability but also it is significant for its easy controllability. The art of clay is as old as man himself/ Specimens of clay art have been exposed from all the centers of ancient civilization, Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, Anatolia, Crete, China and many other places. But in India, earth or clay has a special significance, a profound

metaphysical meaning. The attitude in life that the Indians are apt to learn from their infancy is the attitude of accepting the philosophy of the impermanent nature of everything. The clay symbolizes the philosophy of the oriental attitude in life, the cosmic connection between creation and destruction that nothing can be held up permanently in the course of dynamic force of nature (Sinha and Dwivedi, 2005). Clay images are of two kinds in Barak Valley: those made of pure clay and those others made of clay coated on straw. Most of the pure clay images are made by the idol makers are in small size while clay coated on straw are used for making the big idols.

The existence of Gods in nature is not been so easy to find out and this led to the increase of idol adoration of the Gods in symbolic and anthropomorphic form. The art form of the Gods means images which please the religious need of the people and at the same time it evoked the devotional aspects to the mind of the devotees. Normally, a temple is a place of worship it is also called the house of God. However, for a Hindu it is both and yet stills more. It is the entire cosmos in the miniature form. That is why on the walls of a Hindu temple one can see the depictions of men, women, children, animals, birds, pests, insects, reptiles, trees, rivers, flower, seas, mountains, houses, forts, places, villages, huts any other things (Gupta and Asthana, 2002). This kind of concept related to temple is continuing by the Indian architect. Many Hindu rituals or festivals are available in India, which require temporary temple. So, in the case of different idols, these above mentioned morphological attitude are very common factor in Barak Valley. Idol making profession in Barak, mainly *Durga* Idol is popular. The whole concepts of *Durga Puja* are principally depends on idols. On the basis of idols the devotees get the different flavors of *Durga puja* festival. *During puja* the *puja* committee or organizers try to build up temporary temple architecture, which is widely known as *pandall*. But, in case of *pandall* making the organizer always try to bring more creative ideas on the basis of idol making background, visual arts background, interior, and architect background. Even it also seen that some professional *pandall* makers do not have an institutional background. But, they have enough knowledge about *pandall* making with all norms.

Pandall making is such a subject; where the artisans would display the many aspects of nature and society. In Barak Valley, there are very in limited temples which reflect the Hindus concept of universe. So, the *pandalls* base on idol of *Durga* and

other Gods/Goddesses have given the chance to the spectators as well as to do devotees to know the mystery of the world or universe, The basic concept of *pandall* is to safeguard the idols as well as to attract the devotees with the traditional aspects and authentic decoration .The temples made in earlier times were dedicated to various Gods and Goddesses. The same concepts are illuminated by the *pandall* makers in the different parts of Barak valley, during various festivals. The nature is always regarded as an aspect of God; it is belief by the human beings that everything in the universe belongs to God, the supreme power of the whole Universe. This belief of people is keenly depicts by the *pandall* makers during their construction. This endeavored of *pandall* makers to create a discourse between idol, *pandall* and viewer. The supreme concept and the ultimate goal of Hindu religious life is *moksa*, where the art is an attempt to inspire the concept of *moksa* (Dutta, 1990).

4.1.1 The Art of Idol Making in Barak Valley

Culture is the sum total of human behavior, verbal and non-verbal and its products materials and non-materials (Ghosh, 2004).In Barak Valley, the idols are mainly refined and simple and this simplicity, maturity and modernity came through over the past decades. These idol making started in this valley for the purpose of rituals and ceremonies through the ages, most of the idol makers of this valley since ancient times belongs to Brahmins community. They were not inhabitants of this valley, mostly migrated and settled in this valley from Bangladesh. Earlier Brahmins mostly made the idols related with *nava grahas* along with they also made other iconic figures. In the year 1981 a glimpse for idol making practice in Barak Valley was obtained. That decade is considered as valuable in terms of creative production in idol making and *pandall* making by the native artisans (Nath, 2012). The idols of Barak Valley signify serenity, spirituality and bliss as well as idols also imitates the aggressive mood and posture. The mounts which are associated with different God and Goddess of Barak Valley are categorized as follows:

***Hati* (Elephant):** Elephant is the mount of *Vishwakarma*, artisans of Barak Valley believed that *Vishwakarma* had created all the crafts for men. *Vishwakarma* is widely worshiped by the people of this valley.

***Gadha* (Donkey):** Donkey is the mount of *Sitala*. *Sitala Devi* is also popular in Barak Valley.

***Haas* (Swan):** Swan is the mount of *Brahma* as well as *Saraswati*. *Saraswati* puja is celebrated by each and every people of Barak region. *Swan* symbolizes the power to distinguish between good and evil and choose the pure over the impure (Plate 4.3).

***Mayur* (Peacock):** Peacock is the mount of *Kartikeya.* Lord *Kartikeya* is worship by the people of Barak Valley separately as well as *Kartikeya* is also worshiped along with Goddess Durga (Plate 4.4).

***Edur* (Rat):** Mouse is the mount of elephant headed God; *Ganesha puja* and *Ganesh Chaturthi* has very popular in this region. *Ganesh* is also worshiped with *Durga Puja* of Barak Valley. The *Yajurveda* writes how Agni, the fire God was once horrified of *Shivas* rage and metamorphosed himself into a mouse to hide underground. Therefore, the mouse has a fiery quality like the flames; it can yield many benefits if it is in harness, but will wreak havoc if it spins out of control. In another account, a curse had transformed a *Gandharva* (one of a semi-divine race) to a mouse. As it was scampering about in the abode of the sage *Patashar*, *Ganesh* throw a dice at it and brought the restless creature in his grip. This gave the God of prosperity the power to rain in fickle minded fate. The puny creature also makes a virtue of accumulation and storage, another need for commercial achievement (Plate 4.5) (Banerjee, 2006).

***Nandi* (Bull):** Bull is the mount of Siva as well as *Parvati.*

***Singha* (Lion):** Lion is the mount of Goddess *Durga*. Lion is mostly seen with *Mahisasurmardini* and lion is a gift from Himalaya. The lion as power, in the pose in which she is worshipped, the *Durga* has her right foot firmly planted on the lion's back (Plate 4.6).

***Pecha* (Owl):** Owl is the mount of Goddess *Lakshmi* and this Puja is very popular festival in Barak Valley. Owl is a night bird, the choice of such a mount for the Goddess of prosperity sends out the strong message that spiritual achievement is as important as material acquisitions for a person to prosper (Plate 4.7).

Some basic materials for idol making:

Bamboo: Bamboo is an available material to this land. The entire farmer community cultivates the bamboo for various purposes and mostly it is used for craft practices and it is used in idol making.

String: *Paater dori* is the common string used by the idol maker of this valley, which is produce out of green vegetable known as *paat*. There are many indigenous procedures which are applied on vegetable to create string. This string is very smooth and durable.

Clay: Clay is another basic element for idol making; sometimes idol maker's collects clay in free of cost from their own paddy field.

Straw: Straw has multi-purpose utility in idol making as well as used as supporting medium for packing and many other purposes.

Cotton Cloths: Artisans use the cotton cloth over the entire icon, to protect it from cracks. The cotton cloth they usually collect from the second hand cloth sellers.

Colour: Besides the uses of full clay layers, over all cotton plastered icon and dry the icon in low sunlight and after that they put a white colour coat over all icons, so that the main colours are not get fade. Later idol makers put the distinct colours according to different Gods and Goddesses.

Idol of Goddess Durga and her visual aspects:

From the *Mauryan* period we start getting the glimpses of the mother Goddess through her terracotta images, by the *Kusana* period, we get her certain form to begin with as *Mahishasuramardini*, an image in which she is shown killing the demon *Mahishasura* using-her hands as well as *trisula* or trident. Literally significance of Goddess *Durga* is 'Beyond Reach' impregnable, terrible, invincible, and the destroyer of all difficulties and affections. She created *Kali* and other female Goddess to kill the *Mahishasura* (Gupta and Asthana, 2002). The Goddess Durga is the repository of supreme strength and power in ancient Indian religious lore. *Markandeya Purana* mentioned about the powerful *Asura* named *Mahishasura* (Trivedi and Jairath, 2009). According to the *Bhagabat Purana, Mahishasura* is the son of *Rambha* and *Mahismati* (Plate 4.8) (Banerjee, 2006). He became the king of demons by dint his extraordinary strength. In appearance he resembled a colossal male buffalo *(Mahisha)* and was just as powerful. He was considered invincible because of a boon that no man or weapon would ever be able to kill him. Inevitably, power went to his head and he attacked the Gods themselves. In the ensuing battle he defeated *Indra*, the king of Gods, creating great terror in the kingdom of Gods. The helpless Gods ran to seek help from the higher trinity of *Brahama, Vishnu* and *Mahesh.*

The entire god assembled and discussed, how they can overcome from this problem, finally *Devadi Dev*, *Mahadev* (Shiva) came up with clever plan. Lord Shiva recommended to all Gods to fuse their spiritual powers together and to create a super force which will defeat the demon *Mahishasura* and thus a super-force came out with miraculous personification the Goddess *Durga*. Further all Gods had given their special weapon to Goddess *Durga*, these weapons are-conch shell, bow and arrows, thunderbolt, lotus, *sudarshan- chakra*, sword, trident or *trisul*, shield and goad, the king of mountains *Himalaya* gave lion as her mount (Trivedi and Jairath, 2009) these containing their particularized energies and traits (Zimmer, 1972).

The significance of weapons:

Different weapons of Goddess Durga demonstrate different meaning, which are also offer the probabilities to her devotees to communicates with the different facets of mother Goddess. For instance-

The conch shell in *Durga's* hand symbolizes the *Pranav* or the spiritual word *Om*, which designate her holding on to God in the form of sound.

The bow and arrows represents energy. By holding both the bow and arrows in one hand *Durga* is indicating her control over both aspects of energy potential and kinetic.

The thunderbolt signifies firmness. The devotee of *Durga* must be firm like thunderbolt in one's convictions.

The lotus in *Durga's* hand is not in fully bloomed, it's symbolizing certainty of success but not finality.

The *Sudarshan- Chakra* or beautiful discus, which spins around the index finger of the Goddess, while not touching it, signifies that the entire world is subservient to the will of *Durga* and is at her command.

The sword that *Durga* holds in one of her hands symbolizes knowledge, which has the sharpness of a sword. Knowledge which is free from all doubts is symbolized by the shine of the sword.

Durga's trident or *trisul* is a symbol of three qualities-*Satwa* (inactivity),*Rajas* (activity) and *Tamas* (non-activity) and she is remove of all three types of miseries-physical, mental and spiritual.

Shield, it's generally use for defense during fight. It symbolize that *Durga* is prepared for any attack, which she can defuse easily.

Goad, a pointed stick use for an animal, to move forward .It symbolize that she has all command in her hands.

Snake a long limbless reptile that signifies the skill of twisting motion of Durga.

Finally it is moreover perceptible that the weapons which are not traditional use for attack, these are grip in her left hands as well as those are used for war or attack, which are grip in her right hands (Plate 4.9).

Feature of *mudras*:

In Hindu iconography, *mudras* or body postures maintained by hand poses and gestures generated by fingers and palm. Play is carrying out a significant role to express all the images by the worshipper and to makes a perfect rapport with his or her *Ista-Devata* or the image of the God of his choice to the viewers. These methodologies of mudras are also maintaining by the idol makers; when they are depict the idol of *Durga*. For instance, *Abhaya-mudra,* in it the right hand is raised to the shoulder with palm facing the viewer in a manner of protection. The idea conveyed here is that the deity protects you from all evils. "More fearlessly, I am here to protect you", is the message conveyed by the God.

Sign of hands and eyes of *Durga*:

Durga is portrayed as having eight or ten hands. These represent eight quadrants or ten directions in Hinduism. This symbolize that *Durga* is always ready to defend the devotees from all directions. Like *Shiva,* mother *Durga* is also referred as three eyed Goddess, her left eye represents desire (the moon), the right eyes represents action (the sun) and the central eye knowledge (fire). The lion epitomize power, will and determination. Mother *Durga* riding the lion symbolizes her mastery over all these qualities. This advocates to the devotee that one has to possess all their qualities to get over the demon of ego. Relationship of anthropomorphic to animal figure is a common trait of Indian iconography (Nath, 2014).

According to *Kalika Purana, Mahishasura* had already dreamed that he would one day be killed by *Devi Durga*. Therefore he started to worship *Bhadra Kali,* same aspect of *Devi* as *Mahishasuramardini* and when the Devi appeared to him he asked a

boon of her that even after his death he should never have to leave her feet. *Devi* approved his boon and said that whenever she will be worshiped, *Mahisasur* indirectly receive worship along with her. Idol of Goddess *Durga* is not only made of clay, but depicting *Mahisasurmardini* in many mediums. One of the best is a rock-cut 7th century AD *Pallava* art piece which can be seen at the *Mahishasuramardini Mandapam* at *Mahabalipuram*, Tamil Nadu. The Goddess is shown in a violent aggressive posture, her eight hands holding multiple weapons. The mounted lion is also shown to be very aggressive to attack the *Mahishasura. Mahishasura* is a human body with a buffalo's head. He is holding a club in both hands but sensing defeat seems ready to flee. A beautiful *Mahishasurmardini* painting is on a leaf of a 19th century in Jhansi Museum, which shows the four-armed *Devi* as tried her lion and hitting the many-armed demon *Mahisha* with the animal head and a human body. *Devi's* lion is busy and lifting his paw in attack. *Devi's* face is completely calm even in battle. Besides that another beautiful Rajasthani painting of late 17th century at state Museum, Lucknow, there *Devi's* magnificent tiger is jumping up to attack *Mahishasura* who is coming out of the buffalo in his true form and a multiple armed *Devi* holding a variety of weapons (Trivedi and Jairath, 2009).

Durga as the name of *Mahishasurmardini* with multi hands is being worshiped are available in many places in India, which are made by different dynasties in various periods, in *Kusana* period, *Devi* had shown with two, four or six armed. *Mahishasurmardini* is well-preserved in the Indian Museum at Calcutta, represents the ten-armed Goddess. Even the *Khajuraho* six, eight and twenty armed representations of *Mahishasurmardini* have been observed (Sahai, 1975). Both *Shiva* and *Durga* are presiding deities in *Tantra* sect. Beginning from two hands, *Durga* has eight hands, ten hands and more hands, which are being assumed in *Tantra Shastra* (Padhi, 2009). The existences of *Mahishasurmardini* with her mount lion exists since two thousand years back. Simultaneously *Mahishasurmardini* with lion are found in Bangladesh in large number. Before fourteen century *Mahishasurmardini* with ten hands and her family were not only popular, some other forms of *Mahishasurmardini* were similarly popular (Bhattacharjee, 2013). *Durga,* the vanquisher of buffalo-demon was characterized in the art of India from the classical period (Catalogue, 2013).

The *Sakti* is worshiped to her different aspects, i.e. *Durga, Mahishasurmardini Chamunda* and *Chandi.* The *Markandeya Purana* notes that she took different names after killing different demons. She became *Mahishasurmardini* for killing *Mahishasura, Chamunda* for killing *Sumbha* and *Nisumbha* and *Durga* for *Durgamasura* and so on. Nine forms of *Durga* have been mentioned in the Agamas, which give the details of different aspects of the deity. The different forms of *Sakti* images so far exposed in Assam are *Mahishasurmardini Chamunda and Mahakali* among which the *Mahishasurmardini i* is the commonest form. Aspect of *Durga* has different names, as visualized in the *Matsy Purana* and *Agni Purana* conferring to the number of hands she possesses. According to the text, the ten handed image is called *Ugrachamunda.* Images of *Katyayani* are available in different parts of Assam, for instance, a large figure of *Katyayani* is seen in the idol of the *Hatimuria* Temple in Nagaon. An image of *Katyayani* carved in granite stone is found in front of the *Siddhesvari* Temple at *Sualkuchi* on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. A carved image on a piece of granite boulder of *Katyayani* feature of *Mahishasurmardini* comes up from *Bhoi Parvat* in Nagaon district. *Mahishasurmardini* with ten hands on a rock facing the Brahmaputra below the *Sukresvar* Temple in Guwahati, the lower fragment of an image of the *Katyani* aspect of *Mahishasurmardini* well-preserved in the Assam State Museum, Guwahati. In the collection of the Assam State Museum, six miniature images having third eyes, the style and action of the images are similar to those from Hatimuria and Sualkuchi. A brass image of *Mahishasurmardini* is found at *Tinsukia.* Most of these *Katyanis* figures belong from 9th/10th, 13th/14th, 15th/16th century. A.D. Ugrachanda is very rare in Assam. Only one image of this variety has so far been discovered as carved on a rock in *Uzanbazar* area of Guwahati.

The image belongs to the 10th century A.D. the four handed *Durga* image was discovered at *Deopani,* in the Golaghat district. The image of the Goddess is flanked by the images of *Ganesha* and *Kartikeya* in the right and left sides respectively, the image from 13th century A.D. Another four handed image of *Durga* has been recovered from Dimapur, the capital of the *Kachari* kingdom. A twelve handed image of the Goddess carved on a granite rock is lying at the *Srisurya Pahar* in the Goalpara district. But this image clearly shows a male anatomical representation and it can be compared with a male image placed in the Ashutosh Museum in Calcutta, stylistically it belongs to the 13th century A.D. (Ahmed, 1994).

Across the nation, she is worshipped under numerous names. She is *Amba* or *Amiba* in Kashmir and the Deccan region, *Hingala* or *Rudrani* in Gujarat, *Kalyani* in Karnataka, *Uma* in Mithila, *Bhavani* in Rajasthan, Kanyakumari in the southernmost tip of the country, *Katyani* in Vrindaban, *Haripriya* in Haridwar, *Bheemadevi* in Himachal, *Vaishanadevi* in Jammu, *Vindhyabashini* in Vindhyachal, *Vimala* in Puri, *Kamakhya* in Kamrup, *Jaidurga* in Baidyanath the list goes on (Banerjee, 2006). *Sakti* the aboriginal forces of energy are embodied as a supreme Goddess, who is to be the respiratory of all energy governing the universe. In this aspect, she is said to control over creation, presentation and destruction. She is known under various names and many of these names give indication of the strains and stands that coalesced together in the formation of the concept of *Sakti* as the supreme Divine force. Her most common name is *Durga* or simply *Devi*. The *Puranas* stretch list of her names, the number of which is commonly one hundred and eight (Sinha and Dwivedi, 2004).

These above stated different forms of *Durga,* definitely amuse the mind of viewers as well as these are visualized in different creative expression of the artists. In Barak Valley, the Goddess *Durga is* symbolized in ten hands with different weapons and lion as her mount. Goddess *Durga;* according to the *Hindu* mythology, is the feminine superpower, the mother of the universe and the power behind the creation, the preservation and the destruction of the universe. The word *Durga* in *Sanskrit* can mean a fort or the one who eliminates suffering. The complete process of creation of the idol from the collection of clay to the ornamentation is a holy practice, supervised by rites and other rituals. On the *Hindu* date of *Akhaya Tritiya* when the *Ratha Yatra* is held, clay for the idols is collected from the banks of a river. An important event is *chakkhu daan*, literally donation of the eyes. The eyes of the idol are painted on *Mahalaya* or the first day of the puja. Before Painting on the eyes, the artisans fast for a day and eat only vegetarian food (Aggarwal, 2010).

On the eve of *Durga puja Mahalaya* has great significant meaning for the Bengali community of Barak Valley and others, the new moon day at the end of the dark fortnight of *Bhadra.* It is called *Mahalaya amavasya*, the entire fortnight is called *Pitripaksha*. Memorizing the ancestors in a variety of ways, by propitiation and offerings, is an integral part of the ritual complex of many Hindu religious rites. It is also believes by the natives of Barak Valley that on this particular day Goddess *Durga* starts her journey from *Kailas* (Sharma, 2008). According to the *Shastra* the idol of

Durga is based upon vertical and horizontal lines. According to the ancient *Chandi Treatise* the Goddess must stand in the middle of the *Kathama*. Earlier idol-makers of Barak Valley construct the *Durga* idol in single slab but now as per the demands they are separating the idols, which is a new innovation in this artistic exercise of this valley (Plate 4.10). The lion, remains under the right foot that bears *Durga* on his back and *Durga* suppress *Mahishasura* by her left foot. *Devi* is *Dasabhuja* (ten heads), *Trinayani* (third eye) and at the side of *Lakshmi,* idol of *Ganesha* and at the side of *Saraswati,* idols of *Kartikeya* are visible by the idol makers, which is a traditional custom. All these idols are assembled together and closed parallel to the horizontal line known as *Bhumi* (Das, 2011). The combat between the Goddess and the demon, being a fight between divine and *Asuric* energies, is primarily seen from the point of view of a victory of positive forces against the disruptive evil. *Durga's* might is also reflects in the expression of her mount-the powerful beast she so calmly controls (Malik, 2010). The idea of *Durga,* in the modern times is a secular art form; the elements uses for the beautifications of *Durga murti* are nowadays available in the markets of Barak valley. Some of the idol makers have collected their decorations articles from Kolkata. Some materials are- sola, foil, *zari*, jute, clay, straw and tin plates. Some of the materials come as raw materials, whereas others like weapons and matted hair or the loin's mane and skin, arrive ready for use. The idol makers of Barak valley know it very well that the beauty of women does not mean only, her physical charm and elegance. They know that the inner concept of beauty is quite different. The artist tries to modify *Devi Durga* outer physical charm with her inner depth.

Chal-chitra **of Goddess** ***Durga:***

Chal-chitra is an essential element regarding idol making of Goddess *Durga* and the *chal-chitra* is one of the major elements along with the idol making practices of this region. *Chal-chitra,* the term *chal* means roof and *chitra* means painting. Hemispherical, decorative *pata-chitras* are called *chal-chitra* and the *Bengali* term *chal-chitra* also known as *paschat pata* in the region of Barak Valley. Earlier *chal-chitra* was the hereditary job of *Grahacharya* (Nath, 2012). The use of *chal-chitra* is not mandatorily to be used with the *Durga* idols only. This practice is commonly seen with the other idols, such as-*Manasa, Lakshmi,* and *Kali.* The only difference lays in the illustration of thirty three crores God and Goddess, which are drawn on the *chali*

of the Goddess *Durga,* this unique feature is absent on the *chali's* of other idols. The *chal-chitra* is a complicatedly designed hemispherical backdrop to the Goddess. Its base is usually blue; the colour of the sky and the border is compactly occupied with sketches of a variety of figures. Bringing the unlimited within limits, showing the universal in the particular- that is what the *chal-chitra* does reminding us of the all pervasiveness of the Goddess. The figures include *Shiva* at the center above *Durga* (Banerjee, 2006), the *Durga* and *Shiva* considered as the sole energy of the universe and then their children's, the two other members of the Trinity Brahma and Vishnu, specially ten incarnation of *Vishnu, Dasha Mahavidya,* other forms of *Durga* specially *Nava Durga* means nine incarnation of Goddess *Durga*, scenes from the *Shumba-Nishumba* myth*, the Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* particularly the *Bhishma's Sara Sajya* (the story of *Mahabharata* where *Bhisma* was laid on the bed of arrow) (Das, 2011) the great churning of the sea, performances of Lord *Krishna*, *Shuk-Shari* the mythical pair of birds and many other themes. The selection of figures differs from house to house and depends on tradition. Logic behind the attachment of the other Gods is that may divine entities descend on earth on these days to witness *Durga puja*. Though they cannot be included in the main frame, their presence is thus acknowledged and they are included in the list of the worshipped. It is also a reminder that *Durga* evolved out of a so many other Gods (Banerjee, 2006). The paintings of thirty three crores God and Goddesses means whole universe, every human races and wild animals are painted by the artisans very nicely. The *chali* denoted universe as a whole. It is very interesting job done by the idol makers as painter, when he is involved himself in *chal-chitra.*

The frame of *chali* is made with bamboo and some common colours are used on *chal-chitra* of this region. A thick cloth is tied with structure of semi-circular shape, which is coated with mud and after this process white colour is painted to make a surface on which a *chal-chitra* is drawn. Commonly the motifs that are mostly used in *Chal-chitra* are originates from nature, for instance, flowers, fruits, creepers, leaves, animals, and birds, but peacock and butterfly are most common motifs. Motifs are used as mark or character used as a conventional representation of an object, function, or process. It is valuable that the meaning of a motif is depending on the concept or ideas and finally knowledge, which are gathered by the idol maker, from

his past experiences. It is a matter of communication, that communication might be interpreted as Meta communication (Plate 4.11) (Das, 2011).

***Durga Puja* and its significance in idol making:**

The discussion of idol of Goddess *Durga* is not finished without showing the glimpses of *Durga puja* of Barak Valley. Worship of *Durga* is referred as *Durgatsab* means the festival of *Durga* is an annual Hindu carnival that celebrates worship of Hindu Goddess *Durga*. It refers to all the six days observed as *Mahalaya*, *Shashthi, Maha Saptami, Maha Ashtami, Maha Nabami* and *Vijoya Dashami*. The dates of *Durga Puja* celebrations are set according the festival is called *Debi Pokho* means fortnight of the fore fathers and is ended on *Kojagori Lokkhi Puja,* the worship of Goddess *Lakshmi* on *Kojagori* full moon night (Aggarwal, 2010). In Barak Valley, no one has written a history of *Durga puja* as such. First of all, puja perhaps were started in the houses of *Zaminders.* But, before that puja had possibly organized in the royal family, regarding this we have seen that the *Durga puja* had started by *Dimasa* king, prior to the capital was shifted to Cachar plains. Perhaps Itkhola *Durga Bari Puja* was the first public *Durga puja* festival in Silchar (Kairi, 2013).

Durga Puja is widely celebrated in Assam, especially in Barak Valley. Today, *Durga puja* in Barak Valley is a socio-cultural occasion that has long transcended religious contours. It is a kind of yearly break from a steady routine for the each and every individual of Barak region. Apart from Assam some other states are also celebrates the *Durga Puja,* these are, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkand, Orissa, and Tripura. *Durga Puja* is most significant socio-cultural event in Bengali society of Barak Valley. Besides from Eastern part of India, *Durga Puja* is also celebrated in Delhi, Maharastra, Gujarat, Punjab, Kashmir, Karnataka and Kerala. *Durga Puja* is also the major festival of Bangladesh and Nepal. Nowadays, many non-residential *Bengali* cultural societies arrange *Durgotsab* in the countries like the United States, Unites Kingdoms, Australia, Germany, France, and Kuwait. In 2006 a glorious *Durga Puja* was held in the Great Court of the British Museum (Aggarwal, 2010).

In Bengali, *Durga Puja* is also called *Akalbodhan, Sharadiya Puja, Sharodotsab,* and *Maha Puja*, *Maayer Puja* as well as commonly mentioned as *Puja* or *Pujo*. In Bangladesh *Durga Puja* used to be celebrated as *Bhagabati Puja*. It is also called *Durga Puja* in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh (Aggarwal,

2010). Barak Valley celebrates *Durga puja* and *Bashanti puja* in every year. In Barak Valley *Durga Puja* is celebrates in the month of *Ashwin* (as per the Bengali calendar). Occasionally however, due to shifts in the lunar cycle relative to the solar months, it may also be held in the following month called *Kartik* (*Bengali* month). In the *Krittibas Ramayana*, *Rama* calls upon Goddess *Durga* seriously for his fight against *Ravana*. This puja is celebrate in *Chaitro* (*Bengali* month)and it is called as *Basanti puja, Durga Puja* is widely celebrate in compare to *Bashanti puja* in Barak Valley. In this festival it is seen that all the community of this region use to participate and celebrate the festival.

In Barak Valley, the mode of *Durga Puja* is started from the day of *Mahalaya* by listen the enchanting voice of late Birendra Krishna Bhadra and late Pankaj Kumar Mullick on All India Radio. During *Durga puja*, the *pandall* is made in Barak Valley as a temporary temple for the purpose of Puja. Most of the *pandalls* are often decorative works of art, there we can observe that historic, current affairs as well as imaginative aspects of the artist (Plates 4.12, 4.13, 4.14, 4.15and 4.16). In this temple they made a platform, where the idol of *Devi Durga* is placed with her mount and family members. Every *puja* ground has a topographic specialty and throws up different challenges every time. Constructing a new structure every year, like a site specific installation (Dasgupta, 2012). Today's *puja* however goes beyond the religion. In fact, nowadays visiting the *pandalls*, one can say that *Durga puja* is the largest outdoor art carnival on earth .Tradition is a history, change signifies the present and *Durga puja* is the mirror that imitates the present face of tradition .The puja has over several years now, becomes a new kind of ritual side, a site for visiting and touring, much like a museum, exhibition and theme-park. The *Durga* image, in status as a worshipped icon and is now being considered as a pure ‘work of art’ as a viewable and preserve able article (Sardesai, 2004).

The last day of *Durga Puja* known as *Vijoya dashami;* the idol of *Maa Durga* is taken out from the *pandalls* and goes for the *Bisharjan* with convoy and each age group used to join in this convoy and with loud voice pronounce that *'Bolo Durga Mai ki jay'* as well as *'Aashehe bochhor Abar hobe'*. The meaning behind these loud chants is-'Glory of mother Durga' and 'it will happen in the coming year'. The convoy is held with the help of truck, Traditional drums as well as the contemporary musical equipment and songs are more preferable in the procession (Plates 4.17 and 4.18).

Finally these all convoy reached on the side of water body and where the idols are immersed in the water. Here, the water is the symbol of departure of Goddess *Durga*. During *vijoya*, married women offer *shidur* means vermilion colour to each other (Plate 4.19). After the *Bisherjon*, it is the trend that the people of this valley used to visit his relative's home with sweets, literally *vijoya* means victory.

The idols are frequently made from non-biodegradable materials such as plastic, cement and plaster of paris and painted with toxic dyes. Environmentalists state that such materials do not dissolve easily. It reduces the oxygen level, i.e. Biochemical oxygen demand of the water, resulting in the death of fish and other aquatic organisms. The paints which are used contain heavy metals such as mercury, chromium, and lead which are carcinogenic. These can adversely affect drinking water. These above mentioned statements is true in the idol making practices in many places of India, but still the artisans of Barak region are much concerned about these non-biodegradable materials and the artisans are more comfortable with the traditional mediums.

Idol of Goddess *Saraswati* and her pictorial characteristics:

Saraswati idol is very popular among every community, who are living in Barak Valley. Goddess *Saraswati* symbolize different state of knowledge, such as art, music, dance and literature. *Saraswati puja* is celebrated during the *Basant Panchami*, *Basant* means spring and *Panchami* suggests the time the fifth day of the waxing moon in the month of *Magh* (February) of the Hindu calendar, when the white clay idol of *Devi Saraswati* is worshipped by students, scholars and academicians. In Barak Valley, the different sizes of *Saraswati* idol are made by the idol markers (Vasudev, 2007). Besides Goddess of knowledge, *Devi Saraswati* is also mentioned as river in the Vedas, exclusively in the *Rig Veda* (Banerjee, 2006). According to *Bangiya* tradition *Saraswati* is the daughter of *Durga* and the sister of Goddess *Lakshmi.* There is no evidence about the existence of *Saraswati* during Pre-*Vaidic* period, but in *Rig Veda* she was explained as river. The bank of river *Saraswati* was the place where all *Vaidic Rishis carried out a number of* activities related to education and gradually that river *Saraswati* known as the Goddess of learning. It is remarkable to see that in Barak valley there is no such *mandir* where Goddess *Saraswati* is being worshiped. In ancient time, Goddess like *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati* was known as secular Goddess (Dasgupta, 2000). The *Devi* playing a *vina* and is seated in

lalitasana on a lotus while her left foot is placed across on the right thigh. She touches a full bloomed lotus by her right foot. Nowadays large sized idols of Goddess *Saraswati* are very rare a maximum of three to four feet height idols have been made in the Barak region (Chakraborti, 2001).

Among all the Gods and Goddesses, *Saraswati* is more popular, all students as well as their parent's belief that Goddess *Saraswati* can lucid their knowledge. It is also believed that the students will be more laborious and intelligent if they worship *Devi Saraswati* commonly. *Saraswati puja* is celebrated ones in a year almost in every house. Now a day *Saraswati puja is* celebrated as a festival in Barak region. *Devi Saraswati* is also known with different names in many places, like *Vach, Vagdevi, Vagisvari, Vani, Sarada, Bharati* and *Vinapani.* The Goddess is believed in high regard all over the country by the Hindus, the Buddhist and the Jains. In Barak Valley, an idol maker represents *Saraswati* with a swan as her mount. But, the bird is not her only mount, in some others, like in south India, the Goddess is given a peacock. Lamb is also found as *Saraswati's* mount. The idol of *Saraswati* made by the idol makers of Barak Valley is closely associated with the images made by the idol makers of Tripura and West Bengal. The characteristics which are usually seen in the idol of *Saraswati* in Barak Valley are use of colours like white, pink, golden, and cream .Four armed *Saraswati* is common among the devotees of this region. The materials which are commonly observed in the hands of *Saraswati* are *vina*, manuscript, rosary and lotus. Simultaneously white, pink, golden, silver and cream colour saris also signifies the purity of Goddess *Saraswati.* The manuscript is symbolized Goddess with learning; the musical instrument *vina* signifies *Devi's* intimate devotion in fine arts, and the rosary and lotus signifies her connotation with Brahma as a wife (Sahai, 1975). The *Saraswati* idol of Barak Valley may be divided in two categories; the standing *Saraswati* and another seated idol of *Devi Saraswati* (Plates 4.20 and 4.21).

Idol of Goddess *Lakshmi* and her pictorial characteristics:

Barak Valley is regarded as a mixture of communities and among all the communities the idol of Goddess *Lakshmi* is popular as the Goddess of wealth. Hindus, Buddhists and Jains considered *Lakshmi* as the Goddess of beauty, fortune and prosperity. According to *Nayasamgraha, Devi Lakshmi* use to have lotus in her hand, a lotus garland, and elephants who are bathing her. In *Matsya Purana* it is also

notes that Gaja *Lakshmi* bathed by two elephants and *Devi* should have *Sri-phala* and lotus in her hands. She is seated on a lotus with her golden colour body. According to the *Visnudharmottara*, when accompanied by *Hari,* she is used to carry beautiful lotus flowers in her both hands. But when she is represented separately, she should have four arms, seated upon a lotus holding a lotus with a long stalk in her right hand and a nectar pot in the left, with a conch and a *bilva*-fruit in the remaining ones. On the either side is an elephant emptying water on her head from pots presented by attendant celestial maidens. The *Silpasastra* also defines the Goddess of two or four armed figure accompanying *Visnu* should have *bilva*-fruit in the right and lotus in the left hands, whereas the four armed Goddess may have the same objects in her hands as recounted in the *Visnudharmottra* or lotus in two of her hands and the remaining ones exhibiting *varada* and *abhaya* postures.

These above mentioned *Lakshmi's* aspects are not same in Barak Valley. But, in some cases the elements and poses have some similar approaches with the idol of this region. *Lakshmi* idol of Barak has different significance, as the left hand holds the *kalasa* and paddy and with the right hand holds a pink lotus. The Goddess with two hands and four hands are very popular in Barak region. The seated *Lakshmi* and the standing *Lakshmi* both are made by the idol maker of this valley; in most of the cases the seated *Lakshmi* on pink lotus is popular among the devotees of Barak region. Sometime the idol makers visualize Goddesses' garments through the effect of colour. As well as they also use readymade sari this is commonly available in the local market. Owl is the mount of *Lakshmi* idol of Barak Valley. Goddess *Lakshmi* has been popular since ancient time, she had not only represented as sculpture, but also the image of *Lakshmi* had depicted by the artisans in different mediums, such as, *The Abilcka or Gajalaksmi* type of the Goddess seems to be very popular for it occurs not only on the coins but also constantly on the seals, in the terracotta and in the reliefs at Bharhut, Bodhgaya and Sanchi (Sahai, 1975). *Lakshmi* was very popularly associated with Indian coins (Dasgupta, 2000). Maximum height of *Lakshmi* made by the idol-makers of Barak Valley is four/ five feets as well as minimum height of *Lakshmi* is one feet only (Plate 4.22).

Lakshmi puja and its *alpona* is the metaphor of idol making practices of Goddess Lakshmi:

Three different descriptions based on the *Puranas* to explain the origin of *Lakshmi puja* festival. One is that, on this day Lord *Vishnu* rescued Goddess *Lakshmi* from king Bali, the second is that, *Lakshmi* emerged from the milk ocean (*Krishna Sagar*) and the third is that, *Sri Rama* returned to *Ayodhya* after vanishing *Ravana* (Sharma, 2008). Each of these events is considered to be great and sacred and fit enough for commemoration and to make *Lakshmi* idols for celebration. It is one of the happiest occasions for Barak Valley. During the day of *Lakshmi* puja women are used to make *alpona* on the floor of the house with the fine sketches of lotus, leafs, creepers, footsteps of Goddess *Lakshmi and* paddy. In every *alpona* women provides new ideas and new feelings and perhaps *alpona* is a kind of cosmic representations of a particular woman. In the towns and cities of Barak Valley today itself, even among sophisticated middle class /lower middle class women's have the ability to paint good *alpona* (Tagore, 2012).

Idol of Lord *Kartikeya* and his charming appearances:

Kartikeya is usually known as the son of *Siva* and *Parbati*. In the *Ramayana*, he is identified as the son of *Agni* from *Ganga.* In the *Mahabharata* too, he is signified as the son of *Agni* but born from his wife *Svaha.* There are so many descriptions concerning *Karttikeya* as found in many references. In the *Brhatsamhita, Karttikeya* is described as being youthful in appearance, having a spear in his hand and a peacock as his main object of cognizance. The earliest iconographic types of *Karttikeya* are to be seen on some of the tribal coins of ancient India. A number of stone sculptures of *Karttikeya* belonging to the Gupta period also exhibit features much akin to those noticed in the representation of the God on the gold coins of Kumar Gupta-I (Sahai, 1975). In Barak Valley *Karttikeya* is one of the popular Gods, idol makers always represent *Karttikeya* as young and charming, with very normal standing position and sometime shows, he is sited on his mount, locally known as *Mayur* (peacock). Lord *Karttikeya* is worshiped individually in this region as well as worshiped with Goddess *Durga*, during *Durga Puja* (Plate 4.23).

Idol of Lord *Ganesh* and his gorgeous forms:

According to *Shiva Purana, Ganesh* came as a result of a domestic squabble between Shiva and Parvati. The story was that *Parvati,* in order to have her bath in privacy, shaped an idol out of her own body, breathed life into it and set it up outside with strict orders. When *Shankar* came stepping up to their abode in the Himalaya, the obedient idol refused to let him in. This made *Shankar* very angry and he beheaded the new borne baby boy. *Parvati* convinced *Shankar* that the new borne baby is their child and eagerly requested to fix a new head on the dead body of the child. The *Shankar* ordered *Gan,* to go and bring immediately the head of any first creature that he would find in his search and bring him the head of the first creature that he would see. *Gan* hurried off, saw an elephant, he immediately cut off its head and presented before Lord *Shankar*. Then *Shankar* joined the elephant's head to the dead child and brought back the life. Therefore in the Hindu pantheon, the birth of the elephant God .Shankar then proceeded to make further amends, he formed his son *Gan,* meaning 'army' and ish or Lord; *Ganesha,* the Lord of Army (Vasudev, 2007). There are many believes and myths are available in various *Puranas*. There is a myth, associated with Ganesh, related in *Brahmabaibarta Purana* (Banerjee, 2006).

Ganesha is also worshipped in Barak Valley as the God of auspicious beginnings. This belief emanates again from an incident when all the Gods went to pay homage to Lord *Shiva* and *Parvati* at the *Himalaya*. They were offered *modak* made of divine nectar. Their two sons *Ganesha* and his brother *Kartikeya* also wanted to have the *modak.* But there was only one, whoever circles the Earth fast he will get the *modak. Kartikeya* set off punctually but *Ganesha* took a circle round his parents, touched their feet and sat down when *Kartikeya* came back, he was told that he was the loser as *Ganesha* had understood that the whole world could be found on the underneath of his parents i.e., *Shiva* and *Parvati*. So the *modak* went to *Ganesha*. Father *Shiva* gave him the blessing that before any new undertaking, the image of elephant God *Ganesha* will be adored by the people for seeking good and prosperous blessings. *Ganesha* is not only a temple God; he is also worshiped in the homes and in the offices (Vasudev, 2007). *Ganesha* is considered as one of the most widespread and benevolent Gods in India. By the time of the *Gputa* Empire, the separate sect of *Ganesha* came into existence, which rapidly developed during the subsequent period. From the Kusana times onwards thousands of his images of different type's seated,

standing and dancing were created (Srivastava, 2011). The images of *Ganesha* find their textual instruction in the *Brihat Samhita, Matsya Purana, Vaikhanasa gama, Vishnudharmottara, Amsudbhedagama, Uttaraka-mikagama and Rupamandana.*

The idol of *Ganesha* is not only popular deity in Barak Valley as well as it is equally popular in entire Assam. There are so many images are available in different places of Assam, which shows it's significant in this state. For instance, an image of *Ganesha* dancing upon his mount is lying at the gate wall of the *Kamakhya* temple, a dancing image of *Ganesha* made of sandstone is placed in the Assam state museum and other images are also available in state museum with different mediums, six hundred dancing images of *Ganesha* were found from Tezpur (Ahmed, 1994). In the ancient images of lord *Ganesha,* the existence of his mount rat was absent, but since 8th/9th century the mount rat was came in existence with the image of Lord *Ganesha* (Dasgupta, 2000). *Ganesh Chaturthi* is widely celebrates in Barak Valley. It is celebrated in this valley on the fourth day of the bright half of *Bhadra*. The small or large clay idol of *Ganesha* is worshipped in every shop on that particular day, but in most of the cases small sizes of *Ganesha* are preferred by the devotees, which is around one/two feet's only, whereas large sizes of *Ganesha* are very rare in this region, which are around four to five feet only can be found only in big *Puja Pandalls*. The colours are mostly used by the idol makers are-golden and pink. This *Ganesh Chaturthi* is equally celebrated in India with great enthusiasm. In the state of Maharastra, however this festival has assumed an almost national importance. In the Uttar Pradesh, *Ganesh* is worshiped in the month of *Magha*. In Orissa, *Ganesha* as the remover of obstacles seems to have been accepted by the students as their patron deity. In Madras state images of *Ganesh* made of unbaked clay (Sharma, 2008). Idol of *Ganesh* made in Barak region is also unbaked and this elephant headed God is propitiated by the Hindus of Barak Valley for achievement of success (Plates 4.24, 4.25 and 4.26).

Idol of Goddess *Kali* and her magnificent arrangements:

Kali, the Goddess of ever-passing time as aspect of *Mahamaya*, the Symbol of the creative forces of nature and destroyer of evil is controlled by her husband *Mahakal,* commonly known as *Shiva,* time eternal, by placing himself on her path of destruction between good and evil. She stops in consternation with a foot on the chest of her husband and brings out her tongue in shame (Sen, 1994). With her third eye,

she sees the past and the future as well. *Shyama-kali* is normally with four hands and her tongue is strongly visualized by the artisans of Barak region. The idol maker always decorated Kali with expensive ornaments, she holds in her left hands a *khadga* and the served head of the demon while right hands gesturing *abhaya* signifies protection and the other *varada* means boon giving poses. Sometime the artisans depict the fox or some *Dakini or Jogini* nearby the figure of Shiva (Chakraborti, 2001). The idol makers use the colours like, black, *Krishna barno* and *meghobarna* as well as *Shyama-Kali* is represents as seminude in this valley; the concepts of nudity in idol making represents fertility and in Indian nude Goddesses are considered as the Goddesses of fertility (Mehta, 1960). The modeling, painting and dressing of clay figures proceed primarily from the preparation of idols. It is in consequence essentially a Hindu art (Plates 4.27 and 4.28) (Watts and Brown, 1979).

Beside *Shyama-Kali*, there is another form of Kali known as *Rokkha-Kali* is also made by the idol makers of Barak region. It is worshiped in different places of India as well as in Bangladesh, such as Tripura, West Bengal, Bikrampur, Sylhet, Dhaka, and many other places of these countries. The *Rokkha-Kali* of Sreehatta is commonly represents with six hands, three heads, and nine eyes. Under the right leg Shiva and below the left leg *Jom.* The colour such as white is used on Shiva whereas the colour of *Jom* is black. The body colour of *Rokkha-Kali* is white and sari in red colour, there idol-makers do not visualize her tongue and *Rokkha-Kali* wears the garland of demons heads. The *Rokkha-Kali* of Dhaka and Bikrampur is different, because there artisan's use lion as the mount of *Rokkha-Kali* and it is placed below the right leg and under the left leg of Shiva. The idol makers visualize *Rokkha-Kali* with four hands and wear the skin of tiger without being fully nude. She wears the garland of fifty one demon's heads as well as wears another garland of fifty one demon's heads nearby her four head and the artisans visualize the tongue of *Rokkha-Kali* in their composition .The snake is placed on her left shoulder .The short heighted *Krishna barna*, *Rokkha-Kali* is mostly preferable. In West Bengal *Rokkha-Kali* is different as the Goddess represents two hands and normally stands on Shiva with two legs. Simultaneously tongue is commonly shown by the artisan. *Rokkha- Kali* made in Barak region with four hands same as *Shyama-Kali*, but *Rokkha-Kali* is painted in light colurs. These above mentioned *Shyama-Kali* as well as *Rokkha-Kali* is now more or less made by the idol makers all over the places because the migrations of the idol makers from one

place to another, creates this diversification. The eyes of Kali are always made with red colour (Agnihotri, 2007).

Idol of Goddess *Manasa* and her altered forms:

Manasa occupies a special discourse in the minds of devotees since the very ancient period, because the attractive and the colourful beauty of *Devi Manasa*, which is usually not seen into the other folk Goddesses (Plate 4.29). Goddess *Manasa* is worshiped on the last day of Bengali month, locally known as *Sraban* (mid-August) (Akand, 2013). *Manasa* is also known as *Padmabati* and *Gageshri* she was very popular in undivided Bengal, besides stone and metal sculptures she is also worshipped in the form of *ghat as well as in pot. Manasa* is known as snake Goddess and in India snake is found everywhere (Kairi, 2010). The Sanskrit meaning of pot is cloth (Chakraborti and Mitra 1999) earlier *Manasa* was part and parcel of *pata-chitra,* besides her iconic forms of idol. Since 11th century, there are many idols were found of Goddess *Manasa* in undivided Bengal. Therefore, consequently that century was the beginning period of *Manasa* idols in undivided Bengal (Dasgupta, 2000). The tremendous variety of *Manasa* idols are available in Barak Valley, which could not possible to find out in the other parts of India. The verities of *Manasa* Goddess are as follows:

Karandi Manasa:

Karandi Manasa of this valley is unique, because this idol reflects the two dimensional as well as three dimensional aspects in its composition. The paintings are done on a frame made of *shoal* (sponge wood), bamboo stems and paper and these paintings are stuck on the four sheets and these sheets are joined in such a manner, that produced the three dimensional effect. The paintings are commonly depicts on Goddess *Manasa, Behula-Lakhinder,* simultaneously images of *Behula's* brothers and their wives, meditating sage, *goda,* fishermen, snake charmers, drummers, *Chand Sawadagar* and his wife. Once the puja rituals are over, they are set a float in rivers (Plate 4.30) (Akand, 2013).

Netaa- Padda:

The face of *Netaa* is traced in the middle of a *ghat* with two eyes and a lotus is placed above the face, the *ghat* is filled up with many ingredients. The idol of *Padda* is made separately in the form of *padmashan* and it is placed on the top of a *ghat.* The

two snakes are placed to the both sides and the four snakes are engaged to the hands. Another two snakes are set on the shoulders of Devi and the two more big snakes are positioned to the both sides of Neeta's face. This is the comprehensive character of *Netaa Padda* (Plate 4.31).

Ghat Bishahari:

Ghat Bishahaari is worshipped as a popular deity in Barak Valley and *Ghat Bishahari* is another form of Goddess *Manasa* and it is made with four platforms, for instance-*Botni, Ghat, Pushball and Pot*. In the place of *pushball* the two eyes of *Padda* are placed as well as the flower is engaged in the *ghat* and the beautiful snake is emphasized in the mot. The overall arrangement is decorated with beautiful colours by the idol makers. The uses of eight snakes are very common in this composition (Plate 4.32).

Dorai Manasa:

Dorai Manasa is another form of Goddess *Manasa.* This form of idol making and its worship is almost finished in this valley. The adoration of this idol is completely distinguished then the others. In the process of worship the participation of male members are totally restricted, but interestingly the idols are made by the male artists. The form of *Dorai Manasa* is fully nude; but some major body parts are covered by the snakes. More interestingly tortoise is the mount of *Dorai Manasa* and the Goddess is seated on *padmashan* on the tortoise. The entire idol is painted by the yellow colour. *Dorai Manasa* mainly worshiped by the fishermen's and it also seen that the devotion of Goddess is not only done by the Hindus, but also worshiped by the Muslim fishermen's as well (Plate 4.33).

Paat-Bishahari:

Paat-Bishahari is very common form of Goddess *Manasa* to this region. The artisan shows the placement of *Paat-Bishahari* on lotus and her left leg is placed above the right leg. The two big snakes are placed to the both sides of Devi and her mount duck is placed very close to her feet's. Occasionally it also seen that the Goddess is placed on the duck. Four snakes are usually shown in to the four hands, but in few cases a snake is placed on Devi's head. As well as the *Kaal Nag* is emphasized on the chest of Devi. As an alternative of these two snakes, sometimes it

also seen that two small snakes are also placed above the shoulders. Total eight numbers of snakes are shown by the idol makers for *Paat-Bishahari* (Plate 4.34).

The idol of Goddess *Manasa* and its significance in *Nauka puja*:

Nauka puja is a popular festival in Barak Valley. In Cachar District Gazeteer *Nauka Puja* is defined; a distinctive form of religious ritual is known as the *Noaka* or boat puja and is performed by a wealthy man in satisfaction of vow, who generally spends from Rs. 300 to Rs. 500/- on the ceremony. A shed is built, at the end of which is a boat painted and gilt, from which rise, tier upon tier, the images of various Gods, amongst who *Bishahari* is usually the most prominent. The *Nauka puja* is connected with the *Manasamangal Kavya,* a medieval poetic narrative of Eastern India. It is believed that *Bishahari* or *Manasa* and all the Gods and Goddesses assembled in the *Deva Sobha* at the time of the dance of *Behula* are to be placed in the boat minimum 14 hands long and then worshipped. In fact, it is a glorious *Bishahari* (a snake deity) worship. As the principal deity *Bishahari* and other Gods and Goddess are kept in a boat (*nauka*) hence the worship is known as *nauka* or boat *puja*. It needs mentioning that even the boat man and other officials of *Chand Sadagar*, the merchant leader and the hero of *Manasamangal Kavya* are also worshiped with equal rank. The *Puja* starts on the *Sukla Panchami* (fifth day of the bright half) in the month of *Magha or Falguna* (Bhattacharjee, 2014).

This *Nauka puja* is more expensive and time taking. There are two types of arrangements are common in case of form, for instance -*Paach-siri* and *Saat-siri*. The existence of different Gods and Goddesses are seen along with *Devi Manasa,* for instance, *Durga, Ganga, Kailash of Shiva, Radha and Krishna* with eight friends, *Dashavatar of Narayan* and *Dasamahavidya* of Kali. More than hundred different idols are required for this puja. In the ground the uses of different figures related to *Ramanaya* and *Mahabharata, Chaityana leela* and *Krishna leela* are installed by the idol maker. The total hundred idols are placed in the different steps; these steps are like different galleries. This entire concept of *Nauka puja* is more vibrant than the *Durga puja*. In the middle part of lower step artist visualize the Goddess *Manasa* with *Joya and Bijoya*. They also represents *Devi* is in *padmashan* with eight snakes on lotus, which is also popularly known as *Rang-Bishahari,* artist's commonly shows four hands of Goddess *Manasa.* In the right side, *Durga* with her family and the idol makers use *chal-chitra* behind them and in the left side the *Ganga*. In second steps,

Radha Krishna and the *Gopis*, third steps the *Dasamahavidya* of *Kali*, fourth steps *Dashavatara* of *Vishnu*, in fifth steps *Nabagraha,* in the sixth steps, idol makers visualize Lord *Shiva* with *Taal* and *Betaal* and in the Seventh steps six brothers of Lakhindar. In the boat the idol-makers engaged the two boat men and they are also popularly known as *Dhulai and Kulai.* The figures of *Chand Sadagar* and *Sonoka* are used in the ground, besides these figures, some few figures related to *Manasamangal* are also placed by the artisan. The total seven or five days are required for this festival.

Besides these above mentioned *Manasa* idols, there are many other forms are also available, for instance- *Bishnag,* and *Bishghat.* In case of *Bishnag,* a single *nag* is attached with *ghat* and that is known as *Bishnag.* Here *bish* means position and nag means snake. Simultaneously, in case of *Bishghat,* there twenty numbers of snakes are placed around the top portion of the *ghat.* These types of forms are very symbolic as well as very much abstract in nature. *Manasa ghat* mainly signifies the womb of mother as well as the symbolic representation of the fertility. Simultaneously snake is the symbolic form of fertility cult.

Apart from the above mentioned definitions of different form of Goddess *Manasa,* some very common forms of *Manasa* are equally worshiped in Barak valley, for instance, *Biyalishnag, Astonag* and *Nabonag*. In these arrangements the symbolic forms is more significant than the physical form of Goddess *Manasa* (Plates 4.35 and 4.36).

Idol of Goddess *Shitala* and her attractive form:

Shitala is also much popular in this valley. The maximum five or six feet's idol of Goddess *Shitala* is made by the artisans of Barak region, but very commonly made 1½ and 2 feet's. Earlier the *Shitala* idol of Bangladesh is made without any cloths where the Goddess holds a *kalas* in the left hand, a *kula* and *ghat* are placed on the head as well as hand fan is used in the right hand and donkey as the mount of Goddess *Shitala.* Presently in Barak the artists are using sari, which commonly seen in the West Bengal. The white colour is used as the body colour of Goddess *Shitala* (Plate 4.37).

Idol of Lord *Vishwakarma:*

The *Viswakarma puja* is widely celebrated in every places of Barak valley. Every 17th September considered as a common day for this puja. He is believed to be the principal architect of the universe. Ever year a large numbers of Idols are made by the idol makers in this region, mostly medium as well as small size images are preferable for devotees. The idol makers of this region mostly visualize the Lord *Vishwakarma* in setting as well as in standing position with his mount elephant. He is also called the divine carpenter. The *Vishwakarma puja* is usually celebrate in many states of India, such as Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orrisa and Tripura. The grey colour mounted elephant with radish pink colour body of *Vishwakarma* is made by the idol makers of this region to usually visualize *Vishwakarma* as very young God of Architect (Plates 4.38 and 4.39).

Idol of Goddess *Bipadnashini:*

The very few number of *Bipadnashini* images are made by the idol makers of this region and mostly made in small sizes. The idol makers made *Bipadnashini* on her mount in setting position, commonly tiger is visualized as her mount and the colour used on the body of Goddess *Bipadnashini* is yellow. The Goddess *Bipadnashini* is widely worshiped in every places of Barak region, but usually worshiped in photos as well as in *ghats*. Therefore the uses of image are very rare. The *Bipadnashini puja* is also celebrated in other places of Assam as well as worshiped in other states of India, such as, Orrisa, Jharkhand and West Bengal. She is also widely worshiped in many places of Bangladesh. Mainly this ritual is devoted to Goddess *Shakti* who helps in overcoming all difficulties. Here *Bipad* means trouble and *Nashini* means one who helps to overcoming it. Each year the women of this valley performed this ritual and this ritual is observed on the fifth day of *shukla paksha* (Plate 4.40).

4.2 FESTIVALS: A SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD OF IDOL MAKERS

Man works for others to earn his livelihood. So the idol maker has to work according to the will of devotees. He cannot do any work after his own heart, during the course of employment and this phenomenon is the part and parcel of idol making practices of Barak Valley. But when an idol maker does some work from his own thinking the work is called art with divine quality. Religion has its influence on the

people and their life for centuries, in the belief that the religious rites would guide them along the right path and help them to realize the God (Padhi, 2009). Different festivals are made the pave for idol makers to fulfill their livelihood and also the religious need of the society. Festival in the *"Dictionary of Anthropology"*, i.e., collective rituals, frequently focusing on magical practices of festivals may also be a period which is especially for public religious observations. Festivals probably spring from the early communal feast; festival is social in nature and symbolizes the feeling of a whole community (Bhattacharjee et al., 2002).

All the culture and tradition mainly depends on religion, and festivals are the part and parcel of all the religion. Therefore the art of Idol making of Barak Valley is a part of religious culture. The man, who articulates himself as the most powerful in the creation of the Almighty is living systematically with religion. The existence of human is not possible by leaving it. Only the religion executes all the path of the life. Religion is the sole guide of human being and life will be meaningless in absence of it. Most of the *Shastras, Puranas* and holy books have defined the definition of the religion in various ways and means. The saints, wise persons and others are analyzing the number of aspects of religion as per their own accord. The rules, regulations, facts relating to religion are found in *Shastras* and *Puranas*. Regarding the religious culture, festivals which are attached with this culture are the process of live hood of idol makers and many others. These strongly reflect in different states of India as well as in the Barak Valley of Assam state is one of the greatest examples of this culture (Padhi, 2009).

The cultural identity of the land of Barak Valley has grown over time, moving around the different festivals of this region. The substance of the festivals are threaded to the socio-cultural, historical as well as the ritualistic aspects of the land and its people, thus creating a living discourse between the past and present, the spiritual and the ordinary, the real and surreal. The land of the Barak Valley, thus poses as an arena of countless and layered discourses. The numerous festivals are celebrated in Barak Valley. Festival images, however are mainly associated with the annual cycle of festivals observed by the Hindu are based on their age old folk lore and rituals. Some basic arrangements are common for every idols made by the idols maker. For instance, a platform is made of strips of wood and bamboo and a minimum structure of a background is built on it (Plate 4.41). Attached to the background, the general

form of the image is built up with rice straw, almost to the required value of modeling (Plates 4.42 and 4.43). On this straw form, two or three sun-dried coats of clay are expertly applied, bringing the idol to its intended full volume and form (Plate 4.44). The clay used for the coating is a mixture of plastic clay. For the final coats, with details of fingers, toes, ears and ornaments semi-plastic fine clay is used. The head is separately moulded or cast hollow from ready moulds (Plate 4.45). The head is fused on the neck by a bandage of cloths dipped in clay (Sen, 1994). Each idol-makers of Barak valley have their own face patterns of idols which are not similar to others. Therefore, if any devotees will minutely observe the face, so she or he can easily identify the art of particular idol-maker. Each year, all the images which are part and parcel of festivals are made expressive each year. After certain days of adoration, they are either immersed in the different rivers of Barak Valley as well as occupied in the ponds. Simultaneously, some idols are not permitted to immerse in water as many devotees have a strong belief that this will make the Gods and Goddesses angry. They are kept either inside the home or outside, especially in the open-air, where they melt away to rejoin the elements of which they were made. The festivals sequence of this valley mostly started with the carnival of *Durga Puja* and then gradually moves on with the other pujas like, *Lakshmi*, Goddess of prosperity, *Kali*, destroyer of evil, the female aspect of ever-passing time, *Saraswati* Goddess of learning and Vishwakarma, the celestial architect and the God of all workmen. There are some other pujas of folk Goddesses, for instance, *Manasa*, Goddess who protect against snakes and *Shitala*, for protection against small-pox.

The participation of *Chitrakar* is not required in the idol making practices of Barak Valley. Because all the works are done by the idol makers, for instance, image making, decoration of image, legendary stories as a background of Goddess *Durga* and the other related works are made by the team of *idol makers* (Plate 4.46). *Pujas* have progressively changed over the years and they are now socio-religious events. While many of today's crafts people are allowed much wider scope for self-expression in the activities related to idol making and festivals Human resources are one of the most vital resources of a country (Devi, 1998). The importance and significance of various aspects of development, such as, social, political, cultural, and economic are mainly based on human resource. Endeavour in any work is will be not the sufficient, if that work is not supported by human beings, or human resource. This

fundamental concept of development is more appropriate and valid for the idol making practices in Barak Valley. The existing idol making tradition of this valley is rich, only because of the dedicated involvements of each idol makers.

Worship of mother in India has a long and continuous tradition. One of the strengths of Indian culture is the adoration of female energy in the form of mother, is an important sect of Hinduism. *Shakti* is the primo dial energy and the source of all cosmic and diving origin. The agrarian society admired the earth as mother. The significance of mother to a child is a unique quality of faith. Our ancestors believed the position given to a woman in a society gives a true picture of a civilization. The artists have epitomized mother's love in its naturalistic form since the time of Indus civilization (Nandagopal, 2006). This kind of believes still surviving within the artistic practices in every corner of India and this concept of mother worships are continuing by the idol-makers of Barak Valley in the form of pujas and which is largely mirrors in *Durga puja.* The *Durga puja* festival consists of programmes of religious, *Durga Puja* is one of the most important events in the Bengali societies of Barak Valley. The *Durga puja* in Barak Valley, over time has become the occasion of new releases of literacy annuals, music cassettes, CDs and other social factors, which lunched by the different organization. The Indian contemporary artists also extend their creativity and depicting the works based on *Durga*. In these contexts, it is organic that idol-making is such a craft activity which is providing variety of chance to the people in the society to yearn livelihood and happiness in various manners. Recently all idols are made by idol makers which reflect the present attitude of contemporary social life of India, which is now the part and parcel of pop culture (Sardesai, 2012).

Social changes are happening everywhere, Barak Valley is also the part of those changes. Religious festivals of any region reflect its present social attitudes. The festivals are powerful mirror of the changing sociology and topography of today's Barak Valley. The festivals of Barak Valley are representing the conjugations of pop culture and traditional culture. Festival visualizes the shifting tradition since ancient to contemporary. Over some years now, the focus of the organizing committee has shifted to the *pandalls.* Now *pandalls* of festival of Barak are like the set designs of film and television program. These new creative aspects of festivals are providing the

source of livelihood to idol makers and many other people of this region; those are attached with this profession (Plates 4.47 and 4.48).

The present form of festivals in Barak Valley is now the part of communication. Communication is a social need and communication resources in order to involve in the sharing of experiences. Communication involves active interaction with our environments- physical, biological and social (Kumar, 1998). In the contexts of festivals in Barak Valley, there the communication is one of the fundamental concepts behind these all the events, and these communicative agendas, which are fused with the glamour of idol makings, and thus enhancing artistic activities and the source of livelihood. These natures of communications are now part and parcel of contemporary festivals, festivals are now is a kind of manifesto of a particular *gali, mohalla,* club and the town. In every year, the idol-makers made variety of idols related to different festivals (Agnihotri, 2007). The whole phenomenon related to festivals is now becoming the part of group communication. Festive communications also provides many news and issues which also source of livelihood of many media persons. Idol makings and festivals of Barak Valley are documented and digitalized by the many organizations and these photographs are later used in the exhibitions as well as for the publications. So in this regard Cultural Affairs and Heritage Department must be open up to this valley immediately, so that they will document all the events in proper manner and it will provide large livelihood opportunities to the people of this region along with the present livelihood opportunity. In Sikkim, the photo collection project was initiated by the *Namgyal Institute of Tibetology*, which is provided many benefits to the Sikkim state (Bhargava, 2008).

4.3 OLD METHODOLOGIES AND NEW INSPIRATIONS IN IDOL MAKING

The days are moving very fast; professional artists from different institutions have also been engaged in creating images along with traditional ones and this has given ample opportunities for large groups of people to get acquainted with the art of creation. It is indeed an important for us to keep in mind that art has got a universal appeal of its own. Experiments made by the artists are also multifarious (Plates 4.49 and 4.50). Artists of today do not only draw's paintings or create sculptures as well as they express their artistic ideas through various mediums. Therefore today's artists get themselves associated with the idol makings and festivals (Dasgupta. 2012). The

perception and notion behind the idols and festivals are also changed, the common people of Barak Valley, not only visit the *puja* to worship the God and Goddess, but also try to fulfill their visual pleasure through the creative idols and *pandalls* made by the idol makers and other creative fellows. Each viewer have its own inner eyes thus visualizing by eyes give interactive scope to connect, the world of visual arts by the devotees. Contemporary idols and *pandalls* are such a type of global medium, which display the recent as well as historical perspectives of the society at a time.

The transformation of skill and talent from one group to another is a very common phenomenon. Therefore knowledge system is transmitted from generation to generation. The whole system contributed to a great tradition or heritage of cultural pattern. A scientific expansion of knowledge has been definitely resulted in this process of transmission of skill and talent. If it is not happened, it would be much difficult to reproduce or regenerate this skill through the subsequent generations (Sathyapal, 2011). The contemporary trends of idol making discourses are vague in terms of transformation of skill and talent, because knowledge of idol making is not getting by the artisans from single sources in all times as well as they are perceiving knowledge from many mediums, for instance- dance, drama, theatre, film as well as uses different sources of knowledge to enrich their skills and talent, which are providing more sophisticated knowledge to the idol makers along with their hereditary knowledge. Moreover it is observed that artisans those are associated with the idol making are more or less influenced by the global cultures, which is broken down the barriers between the local and mass culture and shows the amalgamations of both. This attitude of idol makers of Barak region is somehow similar with the attitudes of pop artists. There artists wanted to reflect the urban life which so many people led, to keep up with the times and to make art the same as life. Pop art was full of the 'Super real' things that better our vision every day and though it should have broken down barriers between life and art (Lambert, 1981). It is fascinating to observe that the tendency of pop art in idol making has started in Barak Valley and it is almost in every year the idol makers as well as *pandall* makers are performing the concept of pop art (Plate 4.51). So, the idol making of Barak Valley is not only the part of traditional practice but also the part of contemporary visual art practices, because the idol makers are synthesizing the new ideas, attitudes and attendances in their works and these synchronizing attitudes of idol makers are helping to build a new

topographic identity of Barak Valley. The image of any god and Goddess are always represents region, state and the nation. Because these images show the cultural pattern of a particular society from where it is belongs. Idol made by an artist, but it is fact that idol never represent the artist, it always represent as a part of public culture. Indian form of god and Goddess not only popular in the field of idol making only, but also the famous subjects among the Indian painters, for instance, K.G Subramanyan, Jogen Chowdhury, Arpita Singh, Tyeb Mehta and so many other artists, those are actually romanticizing the Indian concept of God and Goddess in different manner in their paintings. Therefore the idol makers and painters are influencing by each other and the result is that today so many contemporary painters as well as sculptors are now involved in idol making profession along with the traditional artisans, and thus making Barak valley as a part and parcel of that experience.

There are two types of idols and *pandalls* are generally seen in festivals of Barak region, for instance, idol and *pandall* with simple concepts and creative idols and *pandalls.* The simple idols and *pandalls* are those, there the idols are made with very simple and it is placed in the *pandalls* without any decoration. But, in case of creative idols and *pandalls,* there the idol makers and *pandall* makers not only represent idol alone as well as they also represent narrative and decorative themes along with idols and *pandalls*, for instance, The religious/mythological, historical, political, social, national, international, entertainment and other special themes and these all melodies expressly entertain all communities of this valley (Plate 4.52) During festival space is always an important aspect for idol makers and *pandall* makers. Because, space always refresh the old space into a new forms. On the basis of idol-making and festival the social, political, economic, and historical changes are happening within the society. Festivals are kind of social as well as ethnic exhibition for any places; here the devotees as part of exhibition as well as the viewer of the exhibition (Mitra, 2013). The whole concept of festivals which are related with idol making now reflects the mixture of different mediums, such as, architecture, sculpture as well as different creative experiments (Plate 4.53).

In twenty-first century, all the technical inventions are more or less available for everyone in human society, though it is fact that maximum human beings are losing their capacity of imagination as well as deprives from the natural process of works. But in case of idol makings of Barak Valley, the artisans are entertaining the

new innovations as well as they are amusing their physical and creative impulse. Perhaps they are very much aware about the real fact of technology, because they know men are dependent on the new technical devices, which are providing by the modern technologies, though these technologies are invented by human beings. But it also fact that throughout the world today a struggle is going on over the direction in which civilized man is to evolve (Hils, 1960). These above factors are the key activities of the idol makers of this Valley; therefore the old methodologies and the new inspirations equally exist in idol making practices of this valley.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Barak Valley is the place of various castes and communities. In present century it is hard to identify certain communities who first came and settled in this valley. The art and craft of Barak Valley involves with the life of people and especially with their social festivals, rituals and beliefs. This Valley is a land of celebrations, cheerfulness and humor all year round. This valley presents a cycle of festivals and hardly a month permits without a festival. To the people of this province festivals are symbols of their cultural, social and religious aspirations. The history of Barak Valley in idol-making is not much evident in any books, journals or any research work done on it. This history could be treated as the oral history and composed from the individuals who are now working as idol-makers to this Valley.

Many idol makers were moved in the existing Barak Valley from the prominent places of Bangladesh, such as, Dhaka, Faridpur and Comilla. Compare to the three districts of Barak Valley region, Karimganj is doing central rule concerning in idol-making. The Idol-maker is a small community, without them any *puja* would not even hold a fraction of the glamour it does today. Some idol-maker in this valley does not belong from the idol making family. But at present-day they are doing their level best in idol-making with more imaginative sense and excellence. Now in Barak Valley some of the artists are completely qualified from art colleges besides being part of these traditional practices.

In this valley *Durga* idol is more popular than the other idols. The entire notions of *Durga puja* are profoundly depend on idols. On the basis of idol the enthusiasts get the different essences of *Durga puja* festival. In Barak Valley, the idols which we used to see are mostly distinguished and simple. But this simplicity,

maturity and modernity came through over the past decades. However, these idol making started in this valley for the purpose of rituals and ceremonies through the ages. Earlier most of the idol makers of this valley were Brahmins and they were not the natives of this valley had come and settled in this valley from Bangladesh.

Many forms of *Shakti* images so far exposed in Assam are *Mahishasurmardini, Chamunda* and *Mahakali* among which the *Mahishasurmardini* is the most common form. The Characteristics of *Devi Durga* have diverse names, as imagined in the *Matsy Purana* and *Agni Purana* according to the number of hands she possess. According to the text, the ten handed image is called *Ugrachamunda.* In Barak Valley, the Goddess *Durga* represents in ten hands with different weapons and lion as her mount. Idol-makers of Barak Valley earlier had tendency to build the *Durga* idol in single slab but now as per the demands they are separating the idols which is an innovative in this artistic practice of this valley. The idea of *Durga,* in the modern times is a secular art form and the idol makers of Barak valley know it very well that the beauty of women does not mean the physical attraction and sophistication. The inner concept of beauty is quite different and the artist tried to modify her outer physical charm with her inner beauty and strength. The use of *chal-chitra* is not necessary be used with the *Durga* idols only. This practice is usually seen with the other idols, such as, *Manasa, Lakshmi,* and *Kali.* The only difference lays in the illustration of thirty three crore God and Goddess, which are drawn on the *chali* of the Goddess *Durga*, this unique feature is absent on the *chali's* of other ideals. The *chali* denoted universe as a whole and it is very interesting work done by the idol makers as a painter, when they involved in *chal-chitra.*

The discourse of Goddess *Durga* is not determined without presenting the hints of *Durga puja* in Barak Valley. Actually, no one has written a history of *Durga puja* as such in Barak Valley. *Durga Puja* is extensively celebrates in Assam, especially in Barak Valley. Today, *Durga puja* in Barak Valley is a socio-cultural occasion that has long transcended religious contours. It is a kind of annual break from a steady routine for the each and every individual of Barak region. Every *puja* ground has a topographic specialty and throws up newer challenges every time and creating a new structure every year, something likes a site specific installation.

Saraswati idol is very popular amongst every community as well as it is incredible to see that in Barak valley there is no such *mandir* belongs to Goddess

Saraswati. In ancient time, like Goddess *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati* was recognized as secular Goddess. Among all Gods and Goddesses, *Saraswati* is more popular in Barak Valley. In Barak Valley idol makers symbolize *Saraswati* with a swan as her mount, but it is true that non other birds and animals are represent by idol makers of this region, as mount of Goddess Saraswati. Goddess *Lakshmi* is popular as the Goddess of wealth in this region. The seated *Lakshmi* and the standing *Lakshmi* both are practiced by the idol makers of this valley, in most of the cases the seated *Lakshmi* on pink lotus in widespread amongst the devotees of Barak region. During the day of *puja* the women of Barak region decorate their floor with the *alpona,* which signifies different meaning related to Goddess *Lakshmi.*

Lord *Karttikeya* is popular in Barak Valley and idol maker represent *Karttikeya* as young with normal standing position or sometime visualize that he is sited on his mount, locally known as *Mayur* (peacock). *Karttikeya* is worshiped separately in this region as well as he is always being worshiped with Goddess *Durga,* during *Durga Puja.* The idol of *Ganesha* is not only popular in Barak Valley as well as it is similarly popular in entire Assam. There are so many images are available in different places of Assam, which shows its importance in this state. In the ancient images of lord *Ganesha,* there the existence of his mount rat was absent, but since 8th/9th century the mount rat has been existing with the image of lord *Ganesha. Ganesh* fourth day is widely celebrates in Barak Valley. It is celebrated in this valley on the fourth day of the bright half of *Bhadra*. The small or large clay idol of *Ganesha* is worshipped in every shop, but in most of the cases small sizes of *Ganesha* is also chosen by the devotees.

Shyama-kali is normally made with four hands and her tongue is strongly visualized by the artisans of Barak region. The idol maker always decorated *Kali* with expensive jewelries. Beside *Shyama-Kali,* there is another form of *Kali* known as *Rokkha-Kali* is also made by the idol maker of Barak region. *Manasa ghat* is worshipped as a popular deity in Barak Valley and this *Manasa* is also known as *Ghat-Bishahari* in this region. The tremendous variety of *Manasa* idols are available in Barak Valley, which could not be possible to find out in the other parts of India. *Karandi Manasa* of this valley is unique. *Dorai Manasa* is another form of Goddess *Manasa,* this form of idol making and its worship is almost finished in this valley. The devotion of this form is totally distinguished than others. In the process of

worship the participation of male members is totally restricted, but the idol is made by the male artists. *Netaa-Padda Paat-Bishahari* is very common form of Goddess *Manasa* in this valley. Besides these above mentioned *Manasa* idols, there are many other forms are also available, for instance-*Bishnag, Bishghat, Biyalishnag*, *Astonag* and *Nabonag*. *Nauka puja* is a very popular festival of rural Barak Valley. This *Nauka puja* is more exclusive and time taking. There are two types of arrangements are common in case of Nauka Puja, for instance, *Paach-siri* and *Saat-siri*. *Shitala* is also much popular folk deity in Barak Valley. The maximum five/six feet's idols of Goddess *Shitala* are made by the artisans of Barak region.

The *Vishwakarma puja* is widely celebrates in every places of Barak valley. In every 17th September is the common day for this puja. *Vishwakarma* is believed to be the principal architect of the universe. The idol makers of this region mostly visualize *Vishwakarma* in setting as well as standing position with his mount elephant. A very few number of *Bipadnashini* images are made by the idol makers of this region and mostly made in small sizes. The idol makers made *Bipadnashini* on her mount in setting position, commonly tiger is visualize as her mount and the colour used on the body of Goddess *Bipadnashini* is yellow. The Goddess *Bipadnashini* is widely worshiped in Barak region in photos as well as in *ghats*.

Different festivals made the pave for idol makers to fulfill their employment. All the culture and tradition mostly depends on religion, and festivals are the part and parcel of all the religion. Therefore the art of idol making of Barak Valley is a part of religious culture. The numerous festivals are celebrates in Barak Valley and festival images however are mainly associated with the annual cycle of festivals observed by the Hindu are based on their age old folk lore and rituals. Some basic arrangements are common for every idols made by the idols makers. After adoration all the images are either immersed in the different rivers of Barak as well as occupied in the ponds and those are not permitted to immerse, they are kept either inside the home or outside. The *Durga puja* in Barak Valley is the occasion of new releases of literacy annuals, music cassettes, CDs and other social factors, which lunched by the different organization. Recently idol of *Durga* made by idol makers also reflects, the present attitude of contemporary social life of India, which is now the part and parcel of pop culture.

The perception and notion behind the idol and festivals are also changed; the common people of Barak Valley not only visit the *puja* to worship the Gods and Goddesses, but also try to fulfill their visual desire through the creative idols and *pandalls* made by the idol makers and other creative companions. Contemporary trends of idol making discourses are vague in terms of transformation of skill and talent, because knowledge of idol making is not getting by the artisans from single sources in all times as well as they are perceiving knowledge from many mediums, for instance, dance, drama, theatre, film as well as uses different sources of knowledge to enrich their skill and talent, which are providing more refined knowledge to the idol makers along with their genetic knowledge. Festivals are kind of social as well as ethnic exhibition for any places; here the devotees act as a part of exhibition as well as the viewer of the exhibition. Environmentalists are greatly concerned with the use of raw materials for making of idols as a non-biodegradable materials such as plastic, cement, plaster of paris and toxic dyes which are destroying the ecosystem of water bodies as well as human health. But, the artists of Barak Valley are much more concerned about the proper use of biodegradable materials. Thus, the artists are more comfortable to use traditional mediums to make different Idols of Gods and Goddesses.

Plate 4.1: Idol maker's studio

Plate 4.2: Preparation of clay

Plate 4.3: *Haas* (Swan)

Plate 4.4: *Mayur* (Peacock)

Plate 4.5: *Edur* (Rat)

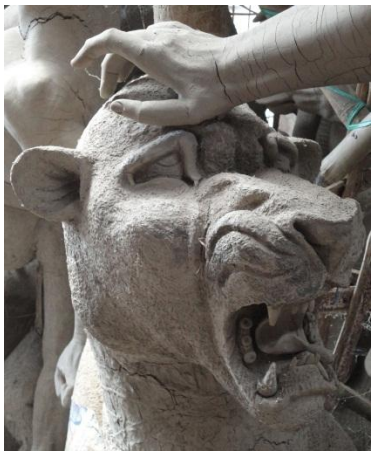

Plate 4.6: *Singha* (Lion)

Plate 4.7: *Pecha* (Owl)

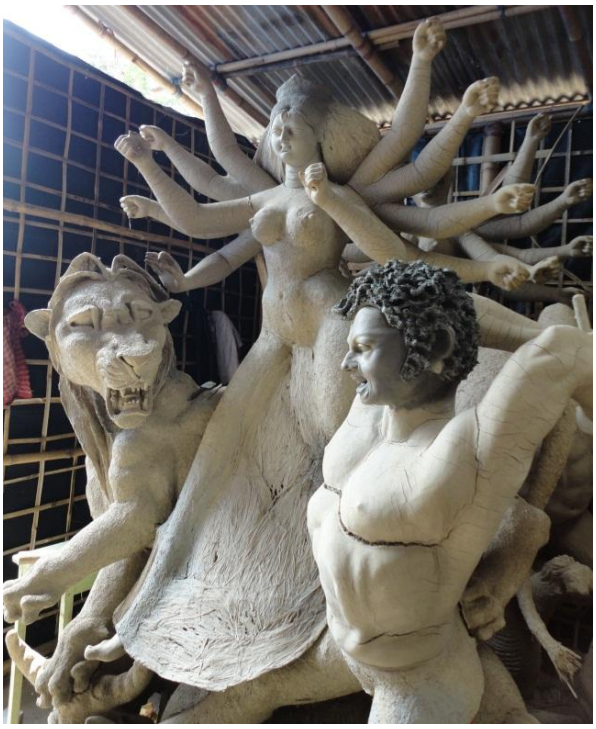

Plate 4.8: *Mahishasura* with *Devi Durga*

Plate 4.9: Goddess *Durga* with weapons

Plate 4.10: Traditional and contemporary aspects of Gods and Goddesses

Plate 4.11: Contemporary *chal-chitra* of Goddess *Durga*

Plate 4.12: ***Durga Puja pandall*** **(I)**

Plate 4.13: ***Durga Puja pandall*** **(II)**

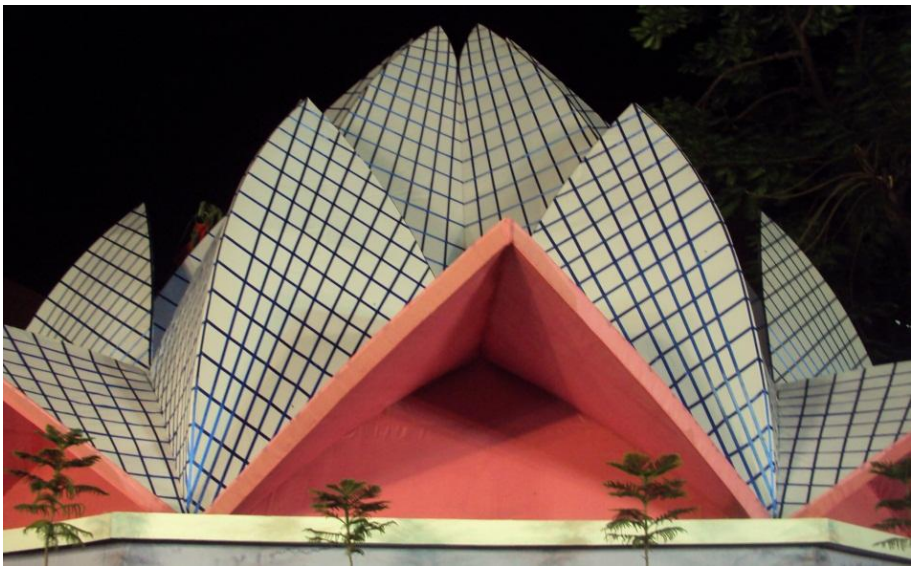

Plate 4.14: *Durga Puja pandall* (III)

Plate 4.15: *Durga Puja pandall* (IV)

Plate 4.16: *Durga Puja pandall* (V)

Plate 4.17: Musicians with drums

Plate 4.18: *Vijoya dashami* procession

Plate 4.19: Women celebrates *vijoya dashami*

Plate 4.20: ***Devi Saraswati***

Plate 4.21: ***Saraswati Puja***

Plate 4.22: Goddess *Lakshmi*

Plate 4.23: Lord *Kartikeya*

Plates 4.24: Basic structure of Lord *Ganesh*

Plate 4.25: Lord *Ganesh* (I)

Plate 4.26: Lord *Ganesh* (II)

Plate 4.27: *Shyama-kali* (I)

Plate 4.28: *Shyama-kali* (II)

Plate 4.29: Idol maker is doing colours on Goddess *Manasa*

Plate 4.30: ***Karandi Manasa***

Plate 4.31: ***Netaa- Padda***

Plate 4.32: ***Ghat Bishahari***

Plate 4.33: ***Dorai Manasa***

Plate 4.34: ***Paat-Bishahari***

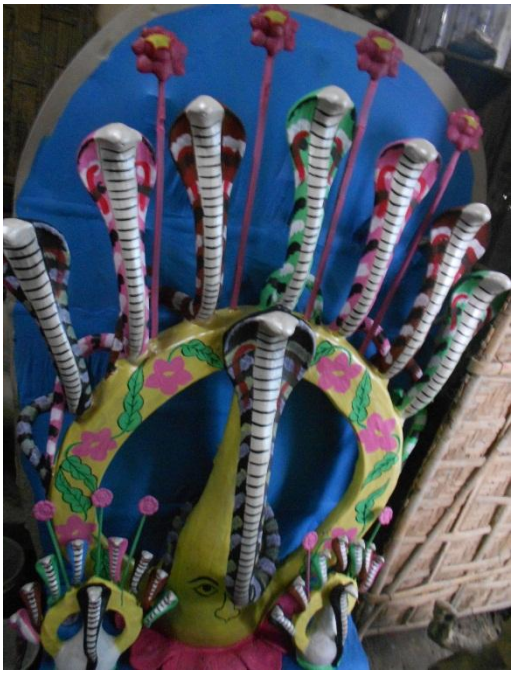

Plate 4.35: ***Astonag***

Plate 4.36: ***Nabonag***

Plate 4.37: Goddess ***Shitala***

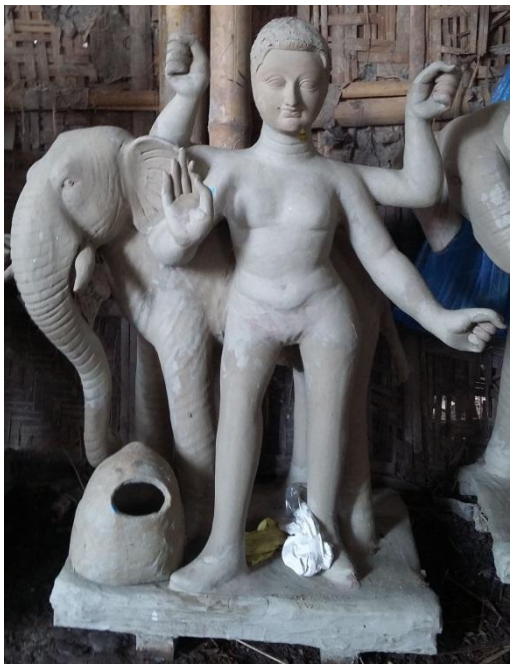

Plate 4.38: Basic structure of Lord *Vishwakarma*

Plate 4.39: Lord *Vishwakarma*

Plate 4.40: Goddess *Bipadnashini*

Plate 4.41: Bamboo structures for idol making

Plate 4.42: Basic straw structure of Goddess *Durga*

Plate 4.43: Basic straw structure of Goddess *Manasa*

Plate 4.44: Clay coats used on idol

Plate 4.45: Readymade moulds

Plate 4.46: The finishing touch of Idol maker

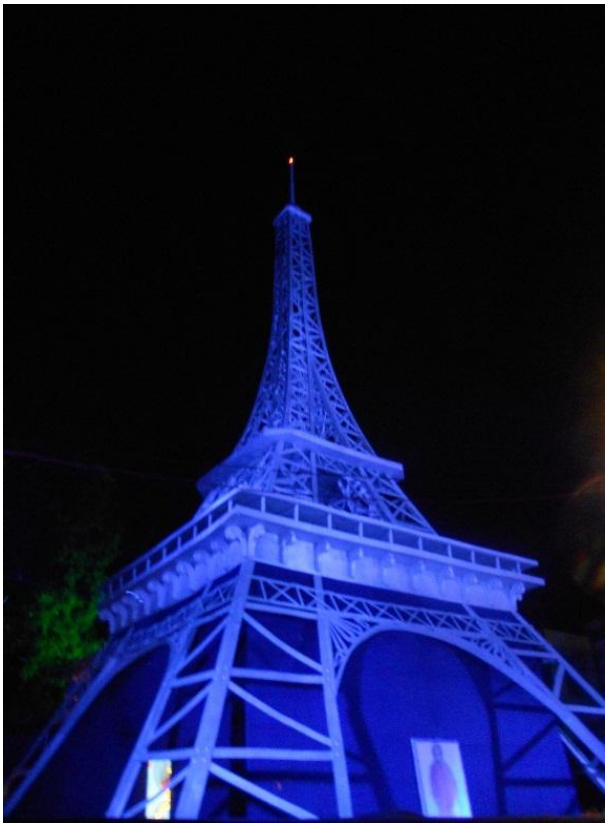

Plate 4.47: Replica of Eiffel tower at *Durga Puja* in Barak Valley

Plate 4.48: Replica of Sanchi at *Durga Puja* in Barak Valley

Plate 4.49: Contemporary experimental idols (I)

Plate 4.50: Contemporary experimental idols (II)

Plate 4.51: Experimental image of *Debi Durga*

Plate 4.52: Mythological theme in *Kali Puja*

Plate 4.53: Experimental image of Goddess *Kali*