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Spatial and Economic Frameworks for Analysing Experiential Tourism as a Tool for Sustainable Urban Conservation

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Abstract: *North Kolkata's historical centre is a sophisticated "museum of memories," with its architectural landscape—which includes courtyards, Indo-Saracenic homes, and meandering, narrow streets—being intricately intertwined with its social life. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation's (KMC) traditional conservation efforts are still primarily passive and concentrated on buildings, despite this abundance. This essay explores the shift to a "living heritage" paradigm and places experiential tourism as a major driver of sustainable urban conservation by focusing on spatial concerns and innovative economic frameworks. The research investigates how historic districts' spatial layout—particularly the connection between private domesticity and public street life—can be used to create immersive visitor experiences. Through a comparative analysis of global best practices, the study identifies common strategies where urban heritage has been revived by active integration into the contemporary economy rather than by freezing time. These global models demonstrate how "scattered hospitality" and "heritage corridors" may transform dilapidated residential neighbourhoods into vibrant, self-sufficient ecosystems. By combining these worldwide ideas, the study suggests a localised approach for North Kolkata. It evaluates economic strategies including community-based micro-entrepreneurship and public-private partnerships (PPP), which leverage money from tourism to motivate residents to preserve historic sites. The research also discusses remedies at the legislative level, such as adaptive reuse regulations that prioritise the "intangible" elements of the streetscape, such as traditional handicrafts and cooking techniques, over structural stability alone. The findings show that by formalising the physical and economic links between tourism and conservation, North Kolkata can go beyond the "museumification" of certain properties. As an alternative, it can adopt a sustainable urban strategy that carefully preserves the city's cultural memory and historical character while balancing the demands of rapid modernisation.*

Keywords: *Experiential Tourism, Urban Conservation, North Kolkata, Spatial Factors, Economic Models, Policy Intervention.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Kolkata's urban fabric is a complex patchwork of indigenous and colonial influences, and it has long been acknowledged as India's cultural centre. The Chitpur region of North Kolkata, in particular, is a "museum of memories" where material and immaterial histories coexist together. The region is distinguished by its distinctive Indo-Saracenic mansions (Bonedi Baris), tiny, winding alleys, inward-looking courtyards, and vibrant socio-cultural street activities, such as ancient culinary customs and traditional artisanal clusters [1]. When combined, these architectural and cultural components capture the cosiness and rich history of the "City of Joy." Additionally, the experiential aspects of Kolkata's older neighbourhoods continue to be its main draw as West Bengal remains a top destination for cultural heritage tourism. However, this fragile urban ecosystem is seriously threatened by the quick speed of contemporary real estate development and neoliberal urbanisation. The existing framework for heritage preservation, which is mostly managed by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation's (KMC) Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC), has a largely passive, building-centric approach. Conventional conservation rules frequently fail to maintain the larger socio-cultural settings that give these structures meaning, instead emphasising the structural preservation of particular monuments and forbidding outward changes. This static "museumification" runs the risk of depriving neighbourhoods of their daily life, uprooting local residents, and shattering the city's spatial memory. Modern urban theory promotes a shift to a "living heritage" model in response to the shortcomings of isolated architecture preservation. Sustainable urban conservation acknowledges that historic cities are dynamic ecosystems where human actions and physical places coexist rather than static artefacts. The active, continuous link between the built environment and the community, which guarantees that historical spaces continue to be economically viable and functionally relevant, is the essence

of living heritage [2]. Integrating tangible architecture with intangible cultural assets, like as traditional street businesses and religious customs, is crucial for comprehensive preservation in densely populated metropolitan areas like North Kolkata.

One important strategy for bridging the gap between cultural preservation and economic development is experiential tourism. Experiential tourism, which moves away from mass tourism, makes use of historic neighbourhoods' spatial characteristics to foster immersive, community-integrated encounters. This concept encourages locals to keep their heritage sites while creating sustainable income by redefining traditional courtyards as active public connectors and acknowledging common streetscapes as important cultural assets. By enabling legacy to be actively lived rather than merely viewed, it turns tourism from a destructive force into a driver for neighbourhood-based urban renewal.

To address the pressing need for sustainable strategies in North Kolkata, this paper evaluates the potential of experiential tourism as a tool for urban conservation in Chitpur. Utilizing Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), the research analyses global precedents where experiential tourism has been successfully applied to historic urban cores. By systematically mapping these international strategies against the specific socio-spatial realities of Chitpur, this study aims to propose actionable policy-level interventions. Ultimately, the paper seeks to determine how these integrated approaches can successfully balance the relentless pressures of rapid urbanization with the delicate task of preserving Chitpur's collective memory and dynamic historical character.

A. Aim & Objectives

This paper aims at Comparing different experiential tourism interventions around the world and evaluate conservation, economic and social impacts. Figure 1 shows the path of the entire research prospective. The objectives are as followed:

- 1) To assess the spatial factors related with experiential tourism concepts.
- 2) To compare the economic models related to the experiential tourism practice and finding relevancy with the case selection.
- 3) To analyze different urban conservation strategies as sustainable outcomes.

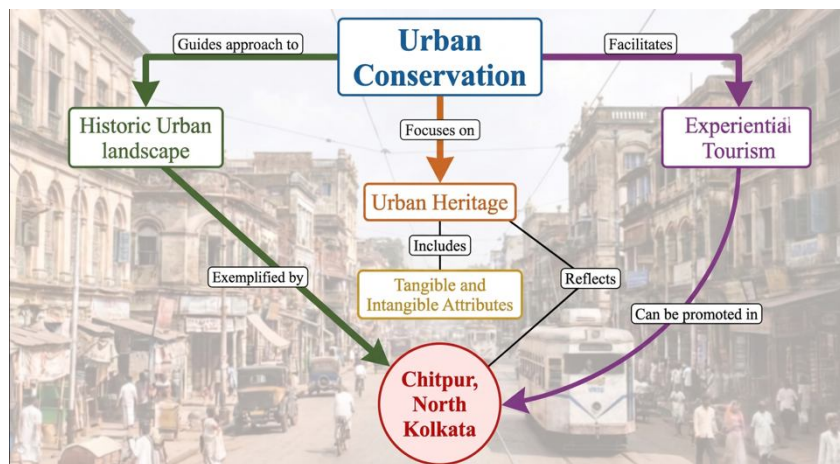


Fig. 1 Outline of the Research

II. LITERATURE STUDY

A. Heritage Legacy of North Kolkata

When North Kolkata is addressed for its cultural heritage as a legacy, it explains architectural marvels & historic urban fabric, intellectual & artistic traditions, living traditions, festivals & social life, and culinary heritage & iconic flavours. Cultural heritage ties us to our historical roots and is essential to our way of life. The following mixed approach variables provide obstacles to the protection of cultural assets [3].

B. Experiential Tourism & Urban Conservation

As coined in 1976 UNESCO General conference, every historic site and its surroundings should be seen as a coherent whole, with a distinct character and balance established by the interaction of the various components that comprise the region, including human activity in addition to the buildings, the space's layout, and the surrounding environment [4].

Urban conservation is an increasingly diverse field of study that looks at people, biodiversity, and their interrelationships [5]. Urban conservation is seen as a key driver of urban revitalisation; it helps develop new methodological tools and shows its relevance and relevance in the context of current urban issues [6]. The region boundary's environmental carrying capacity, historical significance, cultural and traditional elements, urban context, aesthetics, and infrastructure must all be considered in an educated management decision. Additionally, it establishes where new development should be permitted and how much of the current should be protected [7].

Beyond the typical tourist sites, a surge of new trends that are currently sweeping the subcontinent are changing travel to and experiences of this fascinating country. Modern technology, ecological principles, and the resuscitation of lost history are driving the industry to new heights [8]. Since cities' "symbolic economies" have been strengthened by the rise in cultural consumption (of art, fashion, music, history, etc.) and the venues that service it, cultural tourism can play a significant role in shaping the unchecked trend of globalisation to suit the demands of the tourism sector. In terms of tourism, locations can be revitalised or deteriorating attractions can be brought back to life to attract new visitors [9][10]. In order to differentiate itself in a crowded global market, the tourism offering is becoming increasingly dependent on culture. Concurrently, tourism provides an important means of enhancing culture and making money, supporting creativity, artistic expression, and cultural heritage. For our cities, both now and in the future, urban heritage is crucial. Both tangible and intangible urban heritage contribute to variety, foster social cohesion, and stimulate innovation, creativity, and urban renewal [11]. When the historic urban landscape (HUL) approach is properly implemented, urban heritage will serve as a catalyst for socioeconomic development through increased land and property values, tourism, and commercial use. This will generate the funds needed for upkeep, restoration, and rehabilitation.

C. Present Status of the Heritage Rule offered by Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC)

The Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) categorizes heritage structures into grades to determine the level of protection and allowable construction. Table 1 describes the grade specification and intervention rules. General rules allow 'Maintenance' where heritage building owners are legally obligated to maintain, restore, and preserve these structures; 'Change of Use' where it is guaranteed that it doesn't damage the heritage fabric, changing the building's use (for example, from residential to commercial) requires special clearance; and 'Transfer of Rights' where owners who maintain historic buildings may be awarded "Award of Heritage Floor Area" or development rights (TDR), which encourages conservation. All permissions for repair, restoration, or development of heritage properties must be approved by the KMC Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC).

TABLE I
Summary of Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) Heritage Rule

Heritage Grade	Significance	Conservation Status	Allowable Interventions
GRADE I	National or Historic Importance Buildings of excellence in architectural style, design, technology, or historical relevance.	Strict Preservation No external changes allowed.	Restoration: rigorous maintenance only. Change of Use: Allowed if compatible, but no physical alteration. NO new construction or external addition.
GRADE II-A	Regional or Local Importance Possesses special architectural or aesthetic merit.	High Preservation Building must be preserved largely as is.	Open Land Construction: New construction may be allowed in open land within the premises (if available), subject to compatibility. NO external addition/alteration to the heritage building itself.

<p>GRADE II-B</p>	<p>Regional or Local Importance Significant, but allows for some adaptation.</p>	<p>Adaptive Preservation The "heritage character" must be maintained.</p>	<p>Additions Allowed: Horizontal and vertical additions may be allowed if they are compatible with the existing heritage structure. Alterations: Allowed subject to approval.</p>
<p>GRADE III</p>	<p>Cultural/Historical Value Lacks unique architectural importance but holds contextual or historical value.</p>	<p>Documentation Priority is on recording the history.</p>	<p>Demolition: May be allowed if the structure has no architectural importance and is structurally unsound. Requirement: A plaque depicting the history of the building must be provided in the new structure.</p>

III.METHODOLOGY

The research needs a strong, evidence-based methodological foundation in order to effectively argue for the Chitpur district in North Kolkata to switch from a passive preservation strategy to a dynamic "living heritage" paradigm. For this study, the combination of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is extremely pertinent since SLR meticulously collects global precedents while QCA examines the intricate circumstances that lead to those precedents' success.

A. Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

SLR is used to locate, evaluate, and gather case studies and international research on experience tourism and urban conservation. Unlike a traditional narrative review, an SLR minimises selection bias by following a strict, repeatable technique. Relevance to the study: a) Setting Global Precedents: before offering suggestions for Chitpur, the successful global precedences must be understood (e.g., streetscape revitalisation in Hanoi, Albergo Diffuso in Italy); b) Parameter Identification: SLR provides an organised strategy for obtaining these case studies from academic databases. The study can systematically identify specific "economic models" (PPP, micro-entrepreneurship) and "spatial factors" (alleys, courtyards) that have been successfully applied in other historical urban cores by using SLR; c) Policy Mapping: it offers a comprehensive overview of how local governments worldwide have shifted from building-centric to experiential, community-integrated methods of conservation [11][12].

B. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

The QCA methodology, developed by Charles Ragin, is used to analyse complex causal relationships. It establishes a connection between qualitative (case-study based) and quantitative (variable-based) research. According to QCA, rather than being the result of a single variable, results are usually the result of a confluence of factors (configurational logic). Relevance to the study: a) Analysing Combinatorial Strategies: urban conservation in Chitpur won't rely solely on one factor. QCA helps identify the combination of factors (such traditional artisan presence, localised tourism strategies, and adaptive reuse rules) that lead to sustainable "living heritage"; b) Cross-Case Comparison: various worldwide models from various socioeconomic backgrounds are being investigated. QCA focuses on small-to-medium case studies, which compare five to fifty global cities. By providing multiple paths to the same successful goal, it enables you to select the specific track that is most appropriate for North Kolkata's high density and unique socio-cultural fabric; c) Policy Formulation: by identifying the "necessary" and "sufficient" criteria for successful experience tourism, QCA provides the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) with a very useful, evidence-based foundation for recommending specific policy interventions [13][14][15].

IV.ANALYSIS

The relationship between sustainable urban conservation and experiential tourism, with an emphasis on how spatial elements might support a "living heritage" concept in the Chitpur district in North Kolkata. Conventional conservation frequently places a higher priority on the static preservation of specific structures, which runs the risk of "museumification" and uprooting local communities

[16]. On the other hand, the living heritage strategy ensures that historic locations continue to be functionally relevant by integrating the built environment with ongoing sociocultural practices [2]. Successful urban conservation on a global scale depends on utilising certain geographical variables. For example, the Albergo Diffuso model in Italy uses micro-entrepreneurship to revitalise decentralised ancient homes, converting the existing urban fabric into dispersed hospitality networks without changing its structural plan [17]. Similar to this, the neighbourhood's vibrant, unofficial economy in Hanoi has been maintained by the preservation of small "tube houses" and the incorporation of traditional craftspeople into bustling streetscapes [18]. Table 3 represents the comparative analysis of different examples practiced globally. For Chitpur, these international precedents are extremely pertinent. Kolkata may move from building-centric preservation to community-integrated experience tourism by implementing various tactics, such as the pedestrianisation of artisanal alleys and the adaptive reuse of inward-looking courtyards. By striking a balance between the city's rising urbanisation and the preservation of its socioeconomic vitality and communal memory, this spatial solution guarantees North Kolkata's sustainable conservation.

An experience-based economy, where value is co-created via emotional connection and active engagement, is replacing a service-based economy that sells passive museum or monument visits. Urban conservation and experiential tourism are frequently examined using environmental and cultural economic valuation models. Because heritage and cultural experiences are sometimes considered "non-market goods" (i.e., they are not directly sold in traditional markets), economists utilise specific stated and revealed preference models to quantify their value [19]. Table 2 describes the comparative analysis of different economical models based on experiential tourism.

TABLE III
Economic Models Related with Experiential Tourism

Economic Model	Preference Type	Description / Core Concept	Application in Heritage & Tourism	Key Source(s)
Contingent Valuation Method (CVM)	Stated Preference	Surveys individuals directly to determine their Willingness to Pay (WTP) or Accept (WTA) for a non-market good.	Quantifies the value tourists place on an "authentic experience" (e.g., willingness to pay taxes or fees to fund restorations).	[21] [22]
Travel Cost Method (TCM)	Revealed Preference	Uses travel time and incurred expenses as a proxy for the "price" of accessing a site.	Quantifies the baseline economic value generated by tourists traveling specifically to experience a preserved historic center.	[21]
Choice Experiment (CE)	Stated Preference	Asks respondents to choose between different hypothetical scenarios or bundles of specific site attributes.	Helps urban designers/planners identify exactly which conservation strategies (e.g., restored facades, artisan workshops) drive the highest value.	[22]
Hedonic Pricing Method	Revealed Preference	Estimates the value of non-market goods by observing the prices of related market goods (typically real estate).	Measures economic spillover by calculating the "cultural premium" on property values located near conserved heritage districts.	[23]

TABLE IIIV
Global Examples of Experiential Tourism + Urban Conservation

Global Case Study & Location	Spatial Factors Leveraged	Economic Models Applied	Conservation Strategy & Outcome	Reference
Albergo Diffuso (Scattered Hospitality) Santo Stefano di Sessanio & Matera, Italy	Decentralized Hospitality: Utilizing abandoned or underused historical dwellings spread across a village rather than a single large hotel block.	Micro-entrepreneurship & Cooperatives: Revenue from tourism is directly reinvested into the structural restoration of private homes.	Living Village Revival: Prevents neighbourhood desertion by turning the entire urban fabric into a unified tourism asset without altering its historical spatial layout.	[17]
Hanoi Old Quarter Hanoi, Vietnam	Streetscape & Tube Houses: Preservation of deep, narrow "tube houses" and the pedestrianization of alleys. Integration of traditional artisan workshops and street food vendors into the public realm.	Informal Economy Integration: Tourism-driven retail and culinary economy that subsidizes local artisans, keeping traditional trades financially viable.	Dynamic Heritage: Maintains the bustling socio-cultural street activity, proving that heritage can be a busy, functional commercial hub rather than a static museum.	[18]
George Town, Penang Malaysia	Adaptive Reuse & Corridors: Restoration of traditional "shophouses" (commercial ground floor, residential above) and the creation of walkable street-art corridors linking heritage enclaves.	Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) & Grants: Government grants for heritage repair combined with private investments converting shophouses into boutique cafes and galleries.	Cultural Ecosystems: Prevented the demolition of the historic core by making heritage properties economically lucrative for private owners through experiential cultural tourism.	[24]
Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood Dubai, UAE	Courtyard Reactivation: Adaptive reuse of traditional courtyard houses and wind towers (Barjeel) into public-facing galleries, artisan workshops, and experiential museums.	State-Sponsored Leasing: Government subsidizes the restoration and leases spaces at favorable rates to creative, cultural, and culinary enterprises.	Oasis in the Modern City: Creates a low-rise, pedestrian-friendly contrast to the hyper-modern city, utilizing historic spatial cooling techniques for tourist comfort.	[25]
Pingyao Ancient City Shanxi, China	Walled City & Mansion Conversion: Retaining the historic city wall as a definitive spatial boundary while converting large courtyard merchant mansions into experiential guesthouses.	Ticketing Revenue Sharing: A centralized tourism management model where entry fees to the ancient city fund the municipal conservation of public infrastructure.	In-situ Preservation: Maintains original residents within the city walls while managing tourist footfall, balancing domestic life with heavy heritage tourism.	[26]

Relevance to Chitpur, or North Kolkata can be described as the huge, disjointed Indo-Saracenic homes in Kolkata could be used for dispersed historic stays, much like Italy's Albergo Diffuso; the mixed-use character of Chitpur's residential and business streets is reflected in Penang's shophouses; the artisan clusters that make up Kolkata's intangible living legacy, such as the idol manufacturers of Kumartuli or traditional commercial activities, are strikingly similar to Hanoi's streetscape.

V. DISCUSSION

The present status of the tourism sector of West Bengal has been discussed whether allowing the necessary fabrics to support the tourism-based economy. As per World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024, by the end of 2024, Indian tourism sector, produced ₹13.2 lakh crore (US\$170 billion), or 5.8% of India's GDP. It is anticipated that by 2031, the industry would account for 7.2% of GDP.

The growth rate is at an annual pace of 7.8% to ₹33.8 lakh crore (US\$420 billion). West Bengal has emerged as the second most popular destination for international tourists visiting India, trailing only Maharashtra, according to the Union Tourism Ministry’s India Tourism Data Compendium 2025 [27]. West Bengal drew 31 lakh international visitors in 2024, a 14.8% rise over 27 lakh arrivals in 2023 [28]. A total of 27,11,708 foreign tourists had already visited the state in the first six months of 2025, from January to June [27]. A total of 184.5 million domestic tourists had visited West Bengal in 2024, making WB the 8th most popular domestic tourist attraction with 6.26% national share [29]. Figure 2 shows the frequency study of research on tourism sector of India from the SCOPUS database of 1970–2022. It can be seen that the mostly researched phenomenon is the experiential – cultural tourism sector.

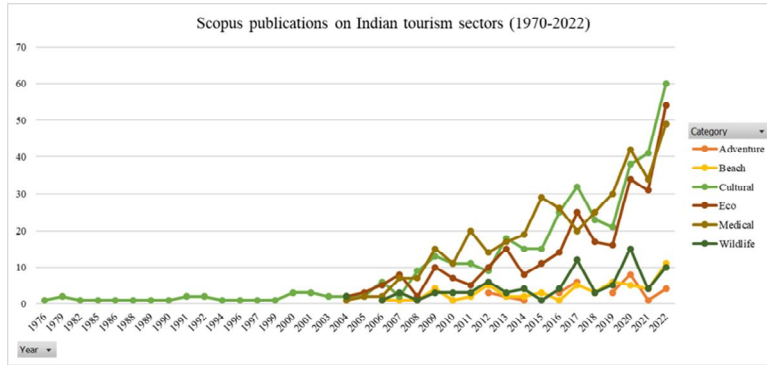


Fig. 2 Scopus publications on Indian tourism sectors (1970-2022) [30]

Based on Kolkata’s rich cultural heritage and enhanced flight connectivity. The city's colonial architecture, literary history, and thriving arts scene were the key attractions for global tourists. The state also has scenic landscapes, river tourism [31][27]. To make West Bengal the next tourism center, the state tourism department would put out a new tourism roadmap to promote cultural tourism and protect heritage structures in the state in the next six month [32]. India's cultural and heritage tourism has gained national attention as a result of the Union Budget 2026, which was unveiled by Finance Ministry of India in a new turn that combines economic strategy and history. The Union government's conviction that India's history and culture can be potent catalysts for economic growth is revealed in the Budget 2026 [33]. While the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) Act, 1980 provides a framework for conservation, critics, heritage activists, and legal experts have identified several loopholes on the contradictory that have led to the loss of many historic structures. The info-graphical figure 3 shows the identified loopholes of the present act.

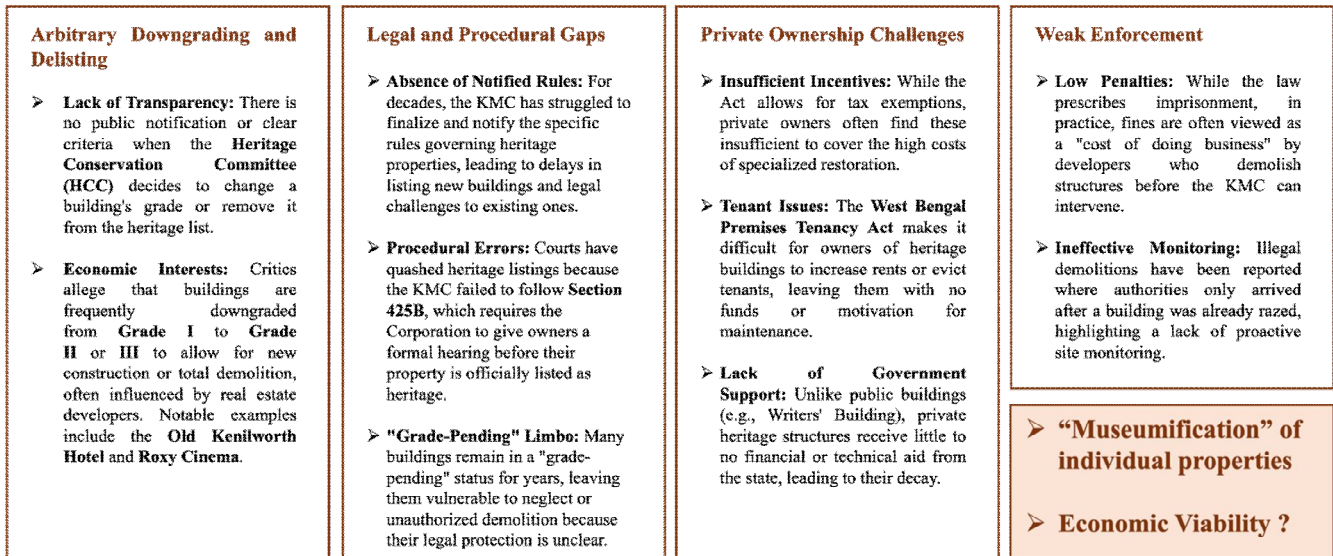


Fig. 3 Identified Loopholes of Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) Heritage Rule [34] [35] [36] [37] [32]

VI. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that a shift from passive, building-centric preservation to a dynamic, community-driven "living heritage" strategy is necessary for the survival of North Kolkata's ancient Chitpur district. In the face of rising urbanisation, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation's (KMC) present frameworks isolate structures and run the risk of "museumification" and the erasing of local socio-cultural vibrancy. This study offers a practical guide for the area by presenting experiencing tourism as a spatial and sustainable conservation tool. By protecting lively, artisanal streetscapes and leaping into bustling public nodes, the neighbourhood may modernise without losing its historical essence. Additionally, localised frameworks like Public-Private-People Partnerships (PPPP) and community-based micro-entrepreneurship ensure that conservation directly benefits and subsidises the local population by translating global economic precedents. In the end, this strategy demonstrates that modernisation does not have to come at the expense of North Kolkata's architectural character and cultural memory. Rather than being a static relic of the past, Chitpur can be kept as a vibrant, economically sustainable, and dynamic urban setting that still embodies the genuine warmth of the "City of Joy" by carefully integrating spatial design and experiential tourism.

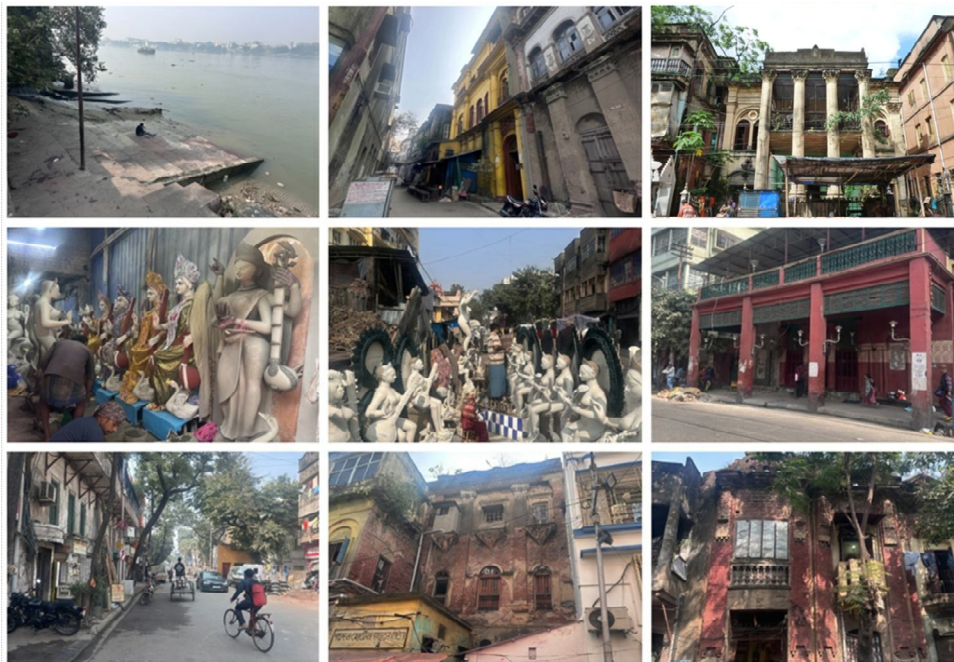


Fig. 4 Collage of Some Glimpses of Old Mansions, Streetscapes, Artisan's Hub of North Kolkata

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