

Clay Doll Making Industry in Ghurni, West Bengal: Revisiting the Status during Covid Period



Sampriti Sanyal¹, Samhita Chaudhuri^{*2}

Department of Geography

Bijoy Krishna Girls' College, Howrah

5/3, Mahatma Gandhi Rd, Howrah-711101, West Bengal, India

¹ sanyalsampritiworld@gmail.com, ^{*2} samhita.chudhuri@gmail.com

Abstract- Indian Handicrafts is famous for its aesthetic value, vibrancy of colors, a mixture of traditionalism and modernization, region specific ideas and artistry. In Ghurni, located in Krishnanagar city of the state of West Bengal, the clay doll making industry has created its specific identity all over the globe since the historical past under various political patronages. The easily available water from Jalangi River and its alluvial soil helped the industry to flourish in this place and made the clay doll a unique expression of culture, tradition and heritage of the country. This paper aims to find out the present condition of the clay doll making industry in Ghurni with special emphasis on the making process. Based on both primary and secondary sources of information, this study also opens up wide scope for further research through identifying some major socio-economic possibilities of this industry and suggesting that this eco-friendly industry offers numerous opportunities to the holistic development of the region.

Keyword: Clay dolls, Artisans, Production Process, Economy, Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian Handicrafts is famous worldwide due to its aesthetic value, vibrancy of colors, brilliant mix of traditionalistic with modern ideas and gorgeous artistry. Every state of the country is putting their imprints on creating specific identity in every dimension of cultural art. Likewise, West Bengal with a rich heritage of traditional artistic views developed a popular field in the making of handicraft items like terracotta dolls or clay dolls. Terracotta or clay dolls is basically the work of earthen matter and the making of this item have flourished in Ghurni Region in Krishnagar city of West Bengal that have spread the essence of Bengal art and craft all over the world. The easily available water from Jalangi River and the alluvial soil of the river became the perfect combination along with the traditional knowledge of the local artisans to help the industry to flourish in this place and made the clay doll a unique expression of culture, tradition and heritage of the country.

This paper aims to find out the present condition of the clay doll making industry in Ghurni with special emphasis on the making process in the areas of Pal Para, Bhatjangla, Kalipur, Sandhya Para, Haldar Para and surroundings of Krishnanagar city in West Bengal. This study is based on both primary and secondary sources of information. As this industry is economically important for the local artisan community due to its low capital investment character and simple making

process, thus the study has the scope to add a new dimensioning social science research through enriching the local economy of West Bengal with traditional creative ideas of people.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this project we talked about employment in the public and private sector in India. We know the fact that after the reform period the employment rate increased from the agricultural sector to the other sector. In this project we will talk about the public and private sector employment trend. First, we need to know about this.

The public sector represents the segments of the economy owned and operated by the government. These organizations typically do not seek profit and often provide public services to the government. There are so many advantages to working in it. These sector employees typically enjoy more job stability because their organizations do not need to face market pressures. Individuals working for government agencies often receive a comprehensive benefit package. These benefits may include health insurance and retirement benefits. This advantage can make it easy for such employees to move amongst different public-sector jobs while retaining similar benefits. Some individuals may enjoy the public sector because it can provide opportunities to serve the community. There are so many public sectors like govt agencies, public purpose corporations, public authority and state-owned enterprises. On the other we have the private sector which represents the segment of the economy owned and operated by individuals and for profit-companies. Unlike the public sector, companies in the private sector are not government owned or operated. There are also some advantages to working in the private sector. These employees typically receive more opportunities for job advancement because the decisions are based on their performance. They also have more opportunities for pay raises and higher salaries than their public-sector counterparts. There are many types of private sectors like sole proprietorship, partnerships, small and mid-sized enterprises, large corporations and trade unions.

The public sector has contributed to a significant extent to the overall employment situation in the country and has acted as a model employer by providing the workers with better wages and other facilities as compared to the private sector. At the time of independence, activities of the public sector were restricted to a limited field like irrigation, power, railways, ports, communications and some departmental undertakings. After independence, the area of the activities of the public sector expanded at a very rapid speed. To assure the private sector that its activities will not be unduly curbed, two industrial policies were introduced in 1948 and 1956 respectively. These policy resolutions divided the industries into different categories. Some fields were left entirely for the public sector, some were divided between the public and private sector and some others were left totally to the private sector.

III. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the study are:

- To identify the production process of clay dolls from raw materials at Ghurni.
- To explore the present status of the local economy based on this industry.

- To identify the problems and prospects of this industry.

IV. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY:

The source of data is both primary and secondary information. Population data have been collected on the Ghurni region from the 2011 census of India reports and other official records collected from the regional government offices. The study is also based on the primary data collected through interview methods from households and workers engaged in this industry. Some socio-economic, demographic and educational data are also collected from local people with special reference to the cottage industry of Ghurni through purposive sample survey. Total 60 households and 110 workers have been surveyed to know the opinion of the workers about the present condition of the clay doll making industry. Later these data were analyzed to get the idea about the condition of the clay doll industry in Ghurni In pre-Covid and during-Covid period.

V. STUDY AREA

The study area is Ghurni, located in Krishnanagar town. Krishnanagar is the district headquarters situated on the bank of Jalangi river in Nadia District. Ghurni is situated on word number 2 in Krishnanagar Municipality. The climate of the study area is humid and subtropical monsoon type. Hot weather during summer and dry weather conditions during winter months help to develop this industry in this place. Ghurni is a very important center for the production of clay dolls. It spreads over the area of Kalipur, Bhatjangla, Pal Para, Haldar Para, Sandhya Para and the surroundings. There are a few sugar mills and brick kilns also found in the surrounding area.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

Process of Clay Doll Making in Ghurni

Krishnanagar is the district headquarters of Nadia. Krishnanagar is situated beside NH 34 and is connected with Nabadwip through SH 8. Krishnanagar Town is located 80 km from Bardhaman Town and 106 km from Kolkata. It is well connected by eastern railway, road and river water transport and telecommunications. Express bus service is available to connect this place with other important centers of West Bengal.

- 1) **Raw Materials:** Different types of raw materials are used to make clay dolls. Makers of clay dolls use not only clay, but stone dust, cement, fiberglass, organic cloth, bamboo, threads, marble, wax dolls and also some metals like bronze to fulfill the demands of the market. Regarding color, previously clay doll artists used only powder color, but now they have shifted to pastel color, tube color, tarpin oil, varnish, kerosene oil etc. to make the clay dolls more attractive. Some artisans often use organic colors to make eco-friendly objects. The artisans collect all these raw materials from local markets and from wholesale markets in Kolkata.

- 2) **Instruments:** The artists of Ghurni mostly use easily available tools like spade, wooden spatula, chisel, wooden pieces, pliers, scissors, screw driver, hammer, hand drill, water pot, bucket, mug, brush, water sprayer, palate, coconut shell etc. Some semi heavy and heavy machineries are also used well like blow lamp, grinder, spray gun, driller, punching cutter, punching machine, board cutter etc.
- 3) **Stages of Clay Doll Making:** Following are the steps used in the clay doll making process-
 - a) **Preparation of Clay for Doll Making:** Krishnanagar clay dolls are mainly made of the soil or the deltaic mud. After collecting the soil from river bed or from sellers, all the impurities like pebbles, stones and other unnecessary things are removed. After that the mud is needed, i.e., make dough or paste with the hands to make it more flexible for doll making.
 - b) **Making the Body of the Doll:** The body of the clay doll is made by hand and here the traditional idea and indigenous knowledge of the artisans help to create the unique products of the region. Sometimes iron wires or pieces of bamboo are used to make the frame of the doll. Using clay modeling tools, facial features, hands, hair, feet etc. are defined. After that, the dolls are dried in the sun and put in a kiln to make them durable. Some dolls specially made of plaster of Paris, wax etc. are made by using molds.



Photo 1 & 2: The Artisans of Ghurni (Source: Primary survey by the researcher)

- c) **Decoration of the Doll:** After the body of the doll is prepared, it is painted with colors and decorated with clothes and ornaments. Then finally the dolls are prepared.



Photo 3: Artist Making a Clay Doll (Source: Primary survey by the researcher)

- 4) **Packaging System:** For packaging the clay items, thermocol box, pitch board box, wooden box, glass box, newspaper, plastic packets etc are used. For interstate or international delivery of their products people use mainly bubble sheets.
- 5) **Marketing:** Most of the Handicraft workers of this region can sell their products directly to the local market but in case of long distance supply, other intermediaries take part. Local dealers, some businessmen from Kolkata and other places buy their products from them and export them to different countries of the world. Artists also sell their models directly to customers as per their orders. But in most of the cases they generally depend on wholesale markets. The demand of the clay dolls of Ghurni generally increases in festive seasons from September to February. Recently the demand for the clay dolls of Ghurni has been decreasing.





Photo 4, 5 & 6: Clay Doll Shops at Ghurni (Source: Primary survey by the researcher)

6) Status of Production of Clay Dolls during Covid period: Clay doll making sector occupies an important place in the economy of Ghurni as it contributes significantly to generate employment for local people and sometimes earn more revenues when they get demands from abroad. The economic importance of the sector also lies in its high employment potential, low capital investment, high value addition and a constant, if not increasing, demand both in the domestic and overseas markets.

Krishnanagar clay idols have demand not only within states but all over the world. According to data collected from municipal offices, maximum sales of clay idols is in Nadia district (38 percent) and in Kolkata (33.32 percent). Clay idols have huge demand in other districts as well. Krishnanagar clay idols are in great demand in Bihar, Kerala, Orissa and other states in India. Many great personalities, like the Idol of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Idol of others leaders have been demanded all over the world. The primary survey reveals that, during 2020-2021, the artists of Ghurni received more orders online, mainly through telephone and e-mail (78 percent of total order) in comparison to the face to face sales (i.e., only 22 percent). A large number of shops earn 1000 to 2000 rupees from their daily sale. Only a few shops have their daily sales of above 2000 rupees (Primary Survey).

Ghurni is famous for the clay-doll industry. A large number of people are engaged in selling those products to customers of various statues including tourists who come to this place for this purpose. According to demand, different types of clay models are made such as small dolls, human figures etc. The local artisans in the study area make different types of clay dolls suitable for local market needs, local tourists and export to different districts, states and abroad. About 7 percent of total dolls are the replica of great persons like Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Netaji, Gandhiji etc. However, about 26 percent of dolls are made of God statues like Durga, Kali, Radha Krishna, Shiba etc. During Covid period, dolls for home decoration were of high demand, constituting about 66 percent of total production of the region. Replica of various fruits, flowers, vegetables and other everyday items too took on miniature clay versions. During the period of 2020-2021, artisans prepared mainly small sized dolls (34 percent). Also 10 to 12 feet height mother idols have been made (13 percent) here. In addition to clay dolls, plaster of Paris and marble dolls are also made in this place to fulfill the market demand at the present time. In the Covid-period, out of total dolls produced, about 72 percent were clay dolls followed

by dolls made up of plaster of Paris (16 percent) and marble dolls 12 percent of total production) (Primary Survey).

7) Problems Faced by Workers before and during Covid pandemic period: Soil is the main raw material but the construction of Dam has resulted in the quality of silt. Presently the soil is brought from the remote villages.

1. Lack of infrastructure for storage of raw materials, fired products and finished ones.
2. Absence of marketing arrangements for direct sale of goods.
3. Due to no reasonable wages, laborious work and regular job artisans are migrating to the other regular jobs in nearby urban areas like Bardhaman and Kolkata.
4. Artisans find difficulty in communication especially during the fair and exhibitions. It is because most of the people involved in this trade are uneducated.
5. Unhealthy competition leading the customers to buy cheaper dolls made of plastic and glass fiber.
6. Present young generation is less interested in taking up this craft as their professions.
7. Due to gradual degradation of quality, there is a large rejection in which export reduces its popularity in the international market.
8. The cost of raw materials for doll making goes high but the overall sale is low which results in loss in business.
9. During Covid-19 pandemic, the festival season brings no cheer to clay doll makers and doll makers are at huge losses as there are no buyers for their wares and no way to transport their goods.

VII. CONCLUSION

Krishnanagar is one such place of interest around Kolkata which is popular amongst tourists for its glorious history and clay idols. Ghurni is one of the major tourist attractions in the neighborhood of Krishnanagar and is widely known for the production of clay idols, toys, dolls and sculptures. This place is also the home to prominent clay artists of West Bengal who became famous for making clay replicas of famous personalities. Ghurni's economic structure is dependent on clay dolls to a large extent as many households directly or indirectly get their livelihood from this industry. It is also a revenue earning industry from international tourists as many tourists come here from different places to buy clay dolls. Some co-operative societies are formed by women entrepreneurs with financial assistance from the funding agencies. Thus, the clay doll industry has also had a significant impact on the regional development of not only Ghurni but the Krishnanagar urban area as a whole. The government has focused on improving the infrastructure especially the transportation sector in Ghurni as transporting the breakable clay dolls properly to markets is one important part of this industry. To some government schemes and benefits, all the low income earners in Ghurni are now getting the benefit of staying in a permanent house. Taxis, auto, buses are available for travel within Krishnanagar. However, more emphasis should be given to increase the skill of the artisans in the field of clay doll making.

The West Bengal government has taken some steps to improve the condition of clay doll industry through i) introducing District Level Fairs, ii) reimbursement of TA, DA & Carrying

Cost to the handicraft artisans, iii) Awards to handicraft artisans, iv) old Age Pension to artisans, v) Artisan Credit Card (ACC). By this Card artisan can avail a loan of maximum 2 lakh rupees from banking institutions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for making India the clay doll manufacturing hub of the world and called youngsters, state governments, and organizations to help the artisans, in boosting the local economy.

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