

## CREATIVITY UNFURLED: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE STATUE MAKERS OF GHURNI, KRISHNANAGAR CITY, WEST BENGAL

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**Abstract** The present study makes an ethnographic account of the life and livelihood mechanisms of the statue makers of Ghurni, Krishnanagar city. It is a heritage activity of Ghurni. Statues of different types are made by the sculptors like bronze, cement, stone, fibreglass, and Plaster of Paris (POP). The study foregrounds the techniques involved in the making of a sample bronze statue and the life of artisans by taking a sample case study. The statue-making activities belong to the category of unorganized sector. The gender participation rate of females is very less in this activity. The entire market distribution chain incorporating both the demand and supply chain mechanisms has been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. More comprehensive and inclusive planning needs to be taken by the government to ensure sustainable growth and inclusive development of the statue makers in the long run.

**Keywords:** ethnographic account, statue makers, unorganized sector, market distribution chain, COVID-19.

### 1. Introduction

Creativity is one of the most celebrated elements which has defined and redefined human evolution along with its history. Statue making of Ghurni is an important facet of Krishnanagar city of the Indian state of West Bengal comprising of statue makers who are renowned all over the world for the making of picturesque statues of various eminent personalities, occasions, monuments, figures, and so on made mostly of bronze, fibreglass, cement, and stone. The present study attempts to conduct an ethnographic investigation to foreground the creative aspects, life, livelihood, and techniques involved in the making of the statues by the statue makers of Ghurni.). Creativity is defined as the process of communicating a new concept or a new product [1]. The divergent thinking process is an important facet of creativity [2]. The creativity which defines human history has got four important characteristics: the creative process, the creative product, the creative person, and the creative situation [3],[4]. All these creative characteristics are omnipresent among the statue makers of Ghurni. The ethnographic investigations are very important to decipher the basic characteristics of human creativity and its relationship with the existing culture and traditions. “When used as a method, ethnography typically refers to fieldwork (alternatively, participant-observation) conducted by a single investigator who ‘lives with and lives like’ those who are studied, usually for a year or more.”[5]. The literal meaning of ethnography also means a portrait of people. It is a qualitative expression and description of a particular culture, customs,

beliefs, and behaviour, where such information is obtained by field observation and investigation [6]. It is a description of the culture and way of life of people with respect to a particular historical and geographical setting [7]. The ethnographic investigations conducted by the present study help us to decipher the life and livelihood mechanisms of the statue makers of Ghurni.

It is worth noting that the statue-making activities of Ghurni represent an unorganized sector. According to the National Commission for Enterprises the unorganized sector comprises 93% of the total workforce of India forming an overwhelming proportion of the workforce of the country i.e. approximately 290 million working population out of 317 million. As per their reports, the workers belonging to these sectors do not have work security, employment security, and social security. Despite the large share of the unorganized sector in the economy of India, it is a relatively neglected sector in the domain of academic discourse and public policy support [8]. According to the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (2007), "the unorganized sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers"[9]. In many cases, informalization is a double-edged sword where the workers lack the legal entitlements to fair wages on one hand and lack of employment security on the other [10]. It is worth noting that the unorganized sector of the statue makers of Ghurni is somewhat different in their life and livelihood mechanisms. The average incomes of the statue makers are much higher compared with the clay doll makers, idol makers, and decoration artisans in the area. The nature of their income is however not permanent, it varies depending upon the number of orders received in a month or season. The statue makers of Ghurni hold a unique characteristic of their own.

Pieces of literature are scanty in the domain of the livelihood mechanisms of this type of unorganized sector who are having a unique system of livelihood and production mechanisms and are deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is much literature available and research conducted on diverse aspects of the unorganized sector. Banerjee (2017) has studied the conditions of the artisans involved in the idol-making activities of Kumartuli [11]; Paul & Mondal (2018) studied the technology of idol-making activities in the Kumartuli area of Kolkata [12]; Barua (2016) studied the activities of the pandal makers in West Bengal [13]; Das (2018) and Jana (2015) have studied the diverse aspects of the clay doll making industry or the terracotta industry of Ghurni of Krishnanagar city and the challenges faced by it [14], [15]; Saha (1922) has studied the declining trend of pottery entrepreneurship of Krishnanagar and Birbhum of West Bengal state of India [16]; Hazra (2017) studied the prospects and characteristics of the traditional clay doll making of Krishnanagar city [17] and so on. Therefore it is evident that literature is almost nonexistent in the domain of the analysis of the statue makers of Ghurni in Krishnanagar. Such investigations are very important in the context of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and how do these artisans recover from the shocks of the pandemic. The present study also attempts to bring some light on the caste and gender dimensions involved in such activities, analysis of the stages of a sample bronze statue making, production and time involved in the making of statues, cultural traits, values, and interests reflected from the statue making activities, the effect of the COVID-19

pandemic in the life and livelihood mechanisms of these artisans and finally the role of the government in the conservation of the statue making activities. The structure of the present study consists of an introduction, followed by objectives, study area, methodology, analysis consisting of a sample case study, and then discussion and finally concluding with some policy implications directed towards the development of the artisans. The main objectives of the present study are as follows: firstly, to study the livelihood mechanisms of the statue makers or the sculptors of Ghurni. Secondly, to analyze the techniques and stages involved in the making of statues. Thirdly, to conduct a case study of a sample sculpturist to obtain greater insights into the life and livelihood mechanisms of the sculptors.

## 2. Study Area



**Figure 1: Study Area (Ghurni lies in the south eastern part of Krishnanagar City) (Source: Krishnanagar Municipality)**

The study area of the present investigation is Ghurni of Krishnanagar City of Nadia District in West Bengal. It is famous for the production of clay dolls all over the world. These artisans are said to have been brought by Raja Krishnachandra who was the king and zamindar of Krishnanagar, Nadia district in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Krishnanagar city is located on the right bank of river Jalangi and has a total area of 15.80 sq. km. The city is located at 23 Degrees 24 Minutes North latitude and 83 Degrees 31 Minutes East longitude. Ghurni is located in the southeastern part of Krishnanagar City. Economically, Krishnanagar is an important agrarian distribution centre. The economy of the city is primarily characterized by small to medium agro-based industries and trading activities. The city is famous for the making of delicious sweets like “Swarpuria” and “Swarbhaja” prepared by the local moyras. The place of Ghurni is an important feather of creativity in the city of Krishnanagar which has won several awards and accolades for the making of clay dolls historically from Queen Victoria and other Europeans over the years. The

first rewarded artist of this area was Sri Ram Paul (1819-1885). The statue making has evolved gradually over the years in Ghurni. It is said that previously before independence, statues of cement and stones were primarily demanded mostly by the Britishers, Municipalities and offices. However, after the Indian independence of 1947, there was a progressive growth of statue making by the artisans of Ghurni. After the independence, gradually, the fibreglass, bronze, and Plaster of Paris (POP) statues started to evolve according to the needs of the customers. After the year 2000, there was an increase in the demand for the statues. The demand has risen further after the change of the government from the communist regime to the present government formed in 2011. The demand for statues comes mostly from the government offices, schools, municipalities, foreign customers and clubs, local clubs and committees, and governments of foreign countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and so on. Presently, five types of statues are mostly demanded i.e., bronze, fibreglass, stone, cement and POP. The most eminent artisans or the sculptors of Ghurni include Subir Pal, Gautam Pal, Sanjay Sarkar, Tarit Pal, Mukti Pal, Shambhu Pal and so on. The statues reflect the changing taste and preference patterns of the people with time. Statues consist of figures of eminent personalities like Tagore, Gandhiji, Netaji, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandella and so on and also that of other Gods and Goddesses and important monuments of the different parts of the world. Nowadays statues of forefathers are also demanded by the customers from local and far and wide places. The statue making activity of Ghurni is an important facet of creativity and is one of the most celebrated creative destinations in Krishnanagar city.

### 3. Methodology

The present study delves deeper into the analysis of the life and livelihood mechanisms of the statue makers or the sculptors of Ghurni. In order to obtain information about these artisans, the current study has employed the methods like Questionnaire Survey, In-depth Interview, telephonic interview, Focus Group Discussion and Participant Observation. The questionnaires are used in censuses or sample surveys to reflect the reports of attitudes, facts or subjective states. Questionnaires are administered by the interviewers by telephone or in person which is self-administered on paper or in other mediums like audio cassettes or the internet [18]. The Focus Group Discussions fall within the branch of qualitative analysis which focuses on specific issues with a particular group of people generally predetermined who participates in a discussion which is interactive in nature [19]. Participant Observation involves living or working with people or communities, and spending time with them to understand them. In other words, it involves observation in which field notes, photographs, sketches and video recordings are used as important methods of data collection where the basic approach is to stay close to the spatial phenomenon being studied [20]. The observations in the present study are based upon an ethnographic study design. The pieces of information have been collected from a sample of 52 sculptors in Ghurni, Krishnanagar.

### 4. Analysis

The statue makers or the sculptors of Ghurni make various types of statues made of bronze, stone, cement, POP and fibreglass. As noted earlier that the statue and models made by them range from a wide range of famous and eminent personalities to famous monuments from all over the world.

The present study hereby describes the processes and techniques involved in the making of bronze statues. These techniques are time-consuming and laborious in nature.

#### *4.1. The Techniques and Procedures involved in the making of Bronze Statues*

There are several steps involved in the making of the bronze statues. These stages are very important to accomplish a very well-furnished bronze statue. The following section describes the stages or steps involved in the making of bronze statues.

*4.1.1. Preparation of a mud model or statue:* firstly, a mud model is prepared by hand by specialists. That model may be of any deity or eminent personalities like Tagore or Gandhi. After the preparation of the clay model, it is shown to the customers for verification and to ensure that it meets the needs of the final customers. If the model is satisfactory enough then it becomes recommended for bronze casting.

*4.1.2. Preparation of mould or Dice for fibre casting:* after this dice are prepared over the mud-made model. The dice are made of either Plaster of Paris (POP) or fibreglass. After the dice get dried, they are taken off from the mud model. In this process, the mud model gets broken.

*4.1.3. Fibreglass casting over the POP mould:* then a fibreglass casting is done over the already made POP dice. After drying, the fibreglass is taken off from the dice. The fibreglass is then properly given shape by hand using some metal instruments and sandpapers.

*4.1.4. Preparation of Part Dices:* after this dice are prepared in parts from the fibreglass statues. These dices are small in size. Generally, these dices are prepared by using POP. After the dice are prepared over the fibre statues, they are removed carefully from the fibre statue. Then the POP dice pieces are properly placed and given shape for wax casting.

*4.1.5. Wax casting:* wax liquid is poured in measurable amounts over the dice, the thickness of the wax depends on the thickness of the bronze. The general convention is if 1 kg bronze metal is to be taken, then 100 gm of wax is used. The wax figure is prepared using this basic formula or convention. A separate dice is also prepared inside the wax figure as the wax can get broken. The inside part of the wax figure is hollow in nature. After this, the part dice and the dice inside the wax figure are carefully taken off. Then a finishing touch is applied over the wax figure to make it more prominent and original using sandpapers, cheeries, and so on. If required, wax is applied over the statue separately to lend an original look to the wax statue.

*4.1.6. Preparation of channels over the wax model:* after this, channels or pipe-like routes are prepared throughout the entire wax model. The channels are made purely of wax. The channels are prepared over the wax figure in such a way that when the melted metal of bronze will be poured inside the wax model, the bronze will spread evenly throughout the body of the wax statue despite some obstructions if any.

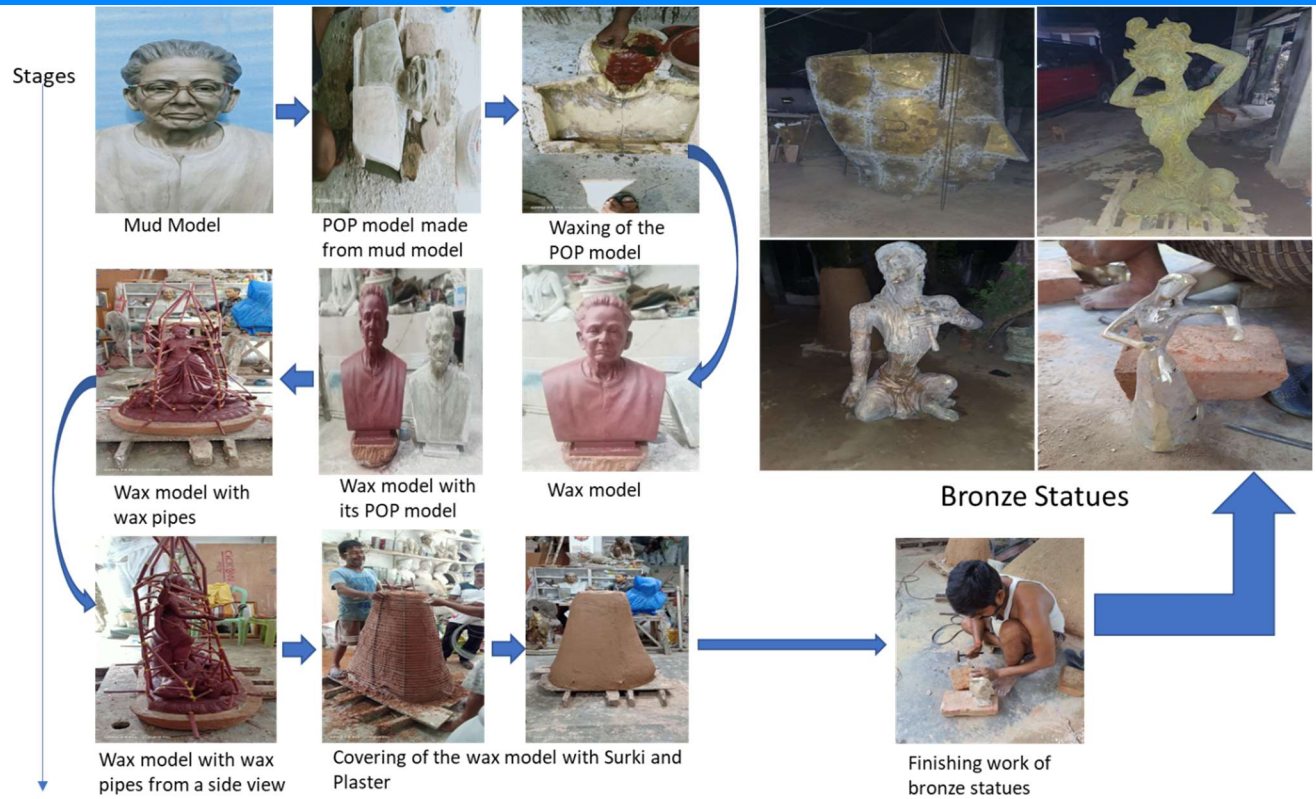
*4.1.7. Filling up using Surki and Plaster:* After the channels are prepared, the entire structure is then covered by using a mixture of surki and plaster. The entire model or the structure is filled up evenly by the above mixture. There is a hole on top of the structure to pour the liquid bronze and there is a gas pipe attached beside the structure so that the excess gas produced can get out without any obstruction.

4.1.8. *The burning of the structure:* now, the entire dice along with the wax structure goes inside the furnace or vati for the burning and heating of the entire structure. The burning process continues up to 3 to 4 days until and unless the entire wax gets melted away. The smoke of the wax vapour comes out of the hole situated above the structure. When the wax gets completely melted away, the smoke coming out through the hole stops. Now two dices are left, the dice of the outer part and the dice of the interior part of the structure. The wax has now vaporized to create a vacuum space that will ultimately be occupied by the bronze metal.

4.1.9. *Pouring of the liquid bronze:* After the wax gets completely vapourised, the next day or a day after, the liquid bronze is poured through the hole inside the structure. The liquid bronze is formed at a temperature of around 1200 to 1400 degrees Celcius. The melting of the bronze metal takes place with the help of muchis. When the liquid bronze metal is poured, it passes through the entire structure with the help of channels and continues to flow inside the structure till the end to fill up the entire structure from inside. It is worth noting that the liquid bronze is heated and prepared by using coke coal or by using diesel or electric furnace. The process of pouring the liquid bronze is risky on part of the experts involved in the process. The experts wear special hand gloves, shoes, and spectacles during the process.

4.1.10. *Taking out of the bronze metal statue:* after this, the surki and the plaster structure is taken out of the furnace. Then gradually the part dices and the surki, plaster associated with it are removed gradually to take out the bronze metal structure from inside. The channels also become attached to the metal body which is later given proper shape and cut away by the experts by grinding process or by using chenish and hammers. Then drilling, and sandpapers are used to give the finishing touches to the bronze structure. Then if separate parts of the metal are to be attached to the bronze statue like in the cases of Kali or Durga models, the hands are attached later. In this case, these separate parts are attached to the main body of the statue by welding process using the same metal. The welding is done by the gas welding process. Then again finishing is done by experts. After this stage, the entire bronze casting process ends and the finished statue is delivered to the final customers.

The description of the stages involved in the making of bronze statues is reflected in figure 2. The figure 2 describes the procedures involved in the making of bronze statues as the final product to be delivered to the customers.



**Figure 2: Procedures involved in the making of bronze statues.**

Figure 3 reflects some of the equipment and infrastructure involved in the making of bronze statues. For precautionary measures, the statue makers wear special gloves and masks during the welding and pouring of the liquid bronze metal. Figure 3 well reflects the furnaces used for the bronze casting process. The coal used for bronze casting is coke coal. This entire process of bronze casting can take from several weeks to months. The procedures are different in the case of statues made of cement, stones, fibreglass and POP. The demand for bronze statues is increasing day by day alongside the fibreglass statues.



**Figure 3: Infrastructure and equipment used for bronze casting.**

*4.2. Case Study of Mr. Subir Pal, a renowned statue maker of Ghurni*

Mr Subir Pal is one of the most eminent personalities whose work as a craftsman expounds the art and creativity of Ghurni and helps to redefine the place as an art landscape. At times art defines a place while at other times the place the art. Mr. Pal’s works add to the very heritage of craftsmanship for which Ghurni is famous for centuries transcending the barriers of history and sailing through the tides of time across generations. Mr. Pal is a famous clay artisan, sculpturist, idol maker and statue maker in the heart of Ghurni. The works of Mr. Pal reflect the very fingerprints that redefine art and creativity; an absolute blend of religiosity comprehending heritage, art and sculpture each speaking its omnipresence in the world of creativity much to the voice of the heart of creativity i.e. Ghurni. The artefacts made by him encapsulates Hindu clay models of Gods and goddesses, Muslim clay models, Christian Clay models of Jesus Christ, and Mother Mary, to the modern architectural artefacts of rail engines, chariot, artistic vehicles like cars, bicycles, figures of modern personalities like that of actor Soumitra Chatterjee, honourable Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, Mrs Indira Gandhi, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and many other eminent personalities over the years embracing the history of demand and time. He makes sculptures of clay, bronze, fibre, cement, stone, etc. Therefore besides being a famed mritshipli, he is also a renowned sculpturist.

Mr Pal was born on 15th September 1969 in Ghurni in a poor family. From his very childhood days, Mr Pal was interested in making small clay artefacts, hiding them from his father’s view, who wanted his son to concentrate on his school studies. It is worth mentioning here that Mr Pal’s father, Mr Biren Pal (late) was a person of exceptional talent in art and creativity. His father was famous and received accolades in his days for the wonderful unparalleled artefacts which he made from clay in those days. His father made the clay artefacts purely based on natural observation of



the surrounding scenes and sceneries encompassing the rural landscape, people's village life, fishing, agriculture, etc. It is worth noting that his father Mr Biren Pal was the first-ever National Award winner in 1982 from Ghurni, Krishnanagar. Mr Subir Pal is carrying forward the prestigious artworks and craftsmanship which he inherited from his father. Mr Pal from his very childhood days closely observed his father's works and tried to emulate them. Mr Pal has a setup team of 10-12 artisans including himself who work on a daily basis, where each has some specific work and role in the making of variegated artefacts of clay, metal, cement, bronze, fibreglass, etc. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic situation, the workers are not removed or replaced by Mr Pal, however, they are employed or rather given work in a shift for four days to manage the situation.

Mr Pal's journey as an artisan started at the age of twelve when a group of experts from Delhi and officers from the DIC office of Kolkata visited Ghurni in 1982 in search of talented artisans who could represent London India festival of 1982. The organizer of that group was Mr Rajib Shetty. When Mr Shetty and his team visited the house of Biren Pal, they were bemused and stunned by some magnificent artefacts made by Biren Pal. During the observation, Mr Shetty was amused and befuddled by the astounding clay artefacts of Mr Pal (Subir Pal) which were kept hidden under tables and beds. Seeing the quality of the artefacts Mr Shetty decided to take young Subir Pal to the London festival. Before going to London, there was an arrangement for three months of training for the artisans from all over India for the London festival which Mr Pal did and was greatly helped. He says that the three-month training with his father has helped him like ten years of expertise training as an artisan. Moreover, separate training was given for making live human artefacts in front of celebrities like the queen of England, Mrs Indira Gandhi etc.

Mr Pal believes that the artisans or the shilpis are the actual identities of a place. However, Mr Pal believes that there is no grant of GI tag for the Ghurni artisans due to evaluation and other administrative challenges. The ordering of artisans should be proper and appropriate says Mr Pal. The first name which comes to the foreground is Mr Bakreshwar Pal (grandfather of Mr Subir Pal). The man whose work has bound the history of Krishnanagar with creativity. According to Mr Pal, actual ordering of the renowned mritshilpis of Ghurni for which the place bears the identity are Bakreshwar Pal, Narendranath Pal, Biren Pal (of the 19th century); Kartik Chandra Pal, Mukti Pal, Shambu Pal, Gautam Pal (of the 20th century); Subir Pal, Tarit Pal and Mriganka Pal (of the present 21st century).

Mr. Pal strongly believes that there must be an art college and museum nearby to promote, encourage and cultivate the artwork where the young generation will have the opportunities to learn the original heritage artworks of Ghurni and would promote the generation wise transfer of art and skill accordingly. Mr Pal emphasizes the importance of integration of art colleges with the Ghurni mritshilpis to enable the transfer of both skill and technology. Customers of artefacts produced by Mr Pal range from local to global scales. Accordingly, there are three types of customers, customers from local areas, outside the state of West Bengal and foreign (other countries outside India) customers. Mr Pal says that "It is not possible to enumerate demand in quantitative terms on a monthly basis as it depends on a variety of factors". He says, "I produce

the sculptures as per demand and taste and preference pattern of the customers”; “The price of the artefacts varies according to the nature of materials i.e. highest price charged in case of Bronze statues, followed by Stone statues, Cement Statues, Fiber statues and the like”. According to Mr Pal, the geographic distance and medium of transport also play important role in the overall cost and prices of the product.

Following the footsteps of his father, Mr Pal’s work and his genius in craftsmanship are widely acknowledged nationally as well as on the international platforms where, many of his works including his magnificent, well-illustrated artefacts go to various countries of Europe, the US, Asian and African countries; such countries encompass Spain, UK, Germany, Italy, France, Japan, South Korea, South Africa, even Australia. Besides this, Mr Pal was a participant in India Festival in London(1982), the USA(1985), Germany(2000) and Spain(2007). Mr Pal was a National Award Winner in 1991, an award winner from Krishnanagar Municipality many times (2006, 2015), an award from “Chatra Jubo Sampriti Utsav”, Smarak award from “Rajib Gandhi Smriti Sangha”, Chakdaha, Nadia; besides these honours, Mr Pal won praises, recognition and accolades from all over the world in different periods for his heavenly creations. Moreover, Mr Pal has his name enshrined in many record books like Limca Book of Records (2019), India Book of Records (2018), Unique World Records (2019) and many others. It is worth noting in this regard that Mr Pal is the first artisan to be awarded a doctorate degree which ultimately enlightens the creative genius of the statue makers of Ghurni. He was awarded the degree for his creativity and social work and activities.



**Figure 4: Mr. Subir Pal with his doctorate degree certificate.**

#### 4.3. Life and Livelihood mechanisms of the Statue makers of Ghurni

As already noted earlier that the statue making activities are very time consuming and laborious and are risky in nature. These statue makers do not have fixed incomes, rather it depends on the volume of orders received. The statue makers of Ghurni make a variety of statues made of bronze, stone, POP, cement and fibreglass. The time required varies from a few days to several days

depending on the material and size of the statues. Generally, the workers wake early in the morning to prepare for their daily activities of statue making. They usually do their breakfast with tea and bread at around 8 AM in the morning. Then after hours of hard work, they take their lunch at 2 PM in the afternoon. The workers generally work for very long hours, up to 6 to 8 PM at night depending on the volume of orders received from the customers. The statue makers of Ghurni generally reside at Ghurni. The demand for the statues comes mostly from government offices and buildings, schools, and colleges and also from individual customers from far and wide places. It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the life and livelihood mechanisms of these sculptors. Their market demand and incomes have fallen considerably during the 2020-2021 period. Their market and returns from business are showing signs of gradual improvement from 2022 onwards. The statue makers of Ghurni have received a wide range of accolades over the years for their majestic creations. Apart from statue making some artisans also resort to the making of idols of Durga, Jagaddhatri, Kali and other Gods and Goddesses and even miniature clay dolls for which Ghurni is widely famous all over the world.

## 5. Discussion

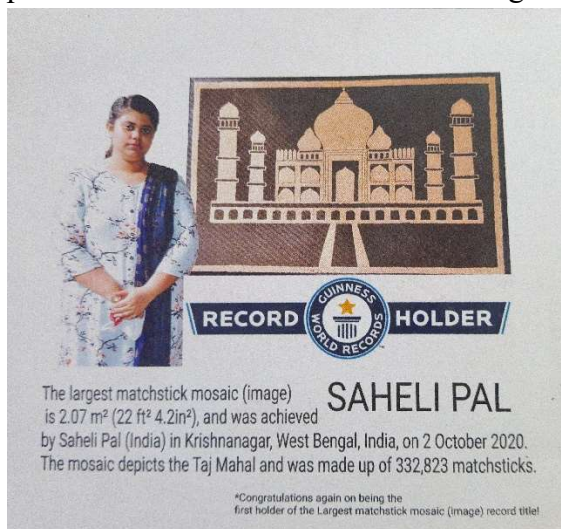
### 5.1. *The history behind the origin of the statue making activities of Ghurni*

There is no written document or evidence regarding the exact year from which the statue making activities in Ghurni started. According to the local administrators and locally renowned artisans of Ghurni, the statue making activity started much before the Indian Independence of 1947 when a certain section of artisans who used to make quality picturesque miniature clay dolls started the production of big statues of eminent personalities. However, statue making was very limited then. Statues made of cement and stone were available in those days. The artisans received high accolades from the Britishers for their majestic creations in those days. The demand for statues gradually expanded after the period of the 1970s in the post-Independence phase. There was a slight thaw in the production and demand of statues after this phase in Ghurni. The demand for statues again rose after 2000. The demand has risen mostly after the change of the government from the communist regime to the present government in 2011. Since 2011, statues and models of eminent personalities and famous monuments are highly demanded by the government offices, buildings, institutions, schools, colleges, private bodies, clubs, committees, and individuals from far and wide places.

### 5.2. *Dimension of Caste and Gender of the Sculptors of Ghurni*

It is worth noting that the majority of the sculpturists of Ghurni belong to the Hindu religious community. The sculptors of Ghurni are mainly “Kumbhakars”, belonging to the “Pal” caste. They are one of the ceremonially pure castes and are also known as “Kumhars” in Bengal. Professionally these groups of people are engaged in clay modelling and the making of household items including earthenwares and toys made from clay. These kumbhakars belong to the potter's community and comprise 73% of the total Kumbhakar population of India in the state of West Bengal. These artisans are mainly the categories of the Other Backward Classes (OBC). As already noted earlier that a certain section of this Kumar group population started the making of statues and models prior to the independence period of India at Ghurni and gradually established themselves later on.

It is also to be noted that the gender participation rate in statue making is very less or negligible in nature. This can be attributed to the high amount of physical load and labour and time inclusive of the risks involved in the making of statues. However, it is to be noted that Miss. Saheli Pal, the daughter of Mr. Subir Pal is interested in preserving the creativity and the creative dimension of the family heritage of her father Mr. Subir Pal. She presently is engaged in the making of wonderful miniature artefacts made from tea leaves and other types of small, natural objects. Very recently, she has enshrined her name in the Guinness Book of World Records for the creation of the largest matchstick mosaic image of 2.07m<sup>2</sup> in Krishnanagar on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020. Her mosaic depicts the Taj Mahal which was made of 3,32,823 matchsticks. This reflects the very creativity that has passed from her father to herself although in a somewhat different form.



**Figure 5: Miss Saheli Pal, the record holder in the Guinness Book of World Records.**

### 5.3. *Production, Market, Time and Labour involved in the making of Statues*

The statue making activities are very laborious and time-consuming. The making of a statue can take from several days to several months depending on the type, size and material of the statue. Generally, the artisans and labours start working in the early morning and work till late evening for almost 10 to 12 hours. It is worth noting that there is no particular time of the year for the making of statues, rather, the statue making activities continue throughout the year. After finishing has been done, the statues are transported to the places from where the orders came by vans and trucks. The statues are demanded by the government offices, institutes, schools and colleges as noted above. It is worth noting that several orders for the statues also come from foreign countries like Spain, Italy, Germany, Sweden, France, Hungary, Australia, the US, UK, Canada and so on. If the size of the statues is small, then it is transported by air, else in a majority of the cases, it is transported by ships. The entire cost of transportation is borne by the final consumers. The number of statues made in a year by the artisans of Ghurni varies from 10 to 20 which obviously depends on the size and material of the statue as well as the number of labours involved in the production process. Within India generally, higher demand for statues comes from the states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Assam, Kerala, Orissa,

and Himachal Pradesh. Therefore the domestic demand and supply chain of the statues are mostly concentrated in these states.

#### 5.4. *Upholding of Cultural Traits, Values, Characteristics and Interests*

The most important aspect behind the making of statues is that it reflects the consumer's demand, preference pattern, choices, taste, cultural values and traditions. For example, there is a higher demand for statues of Rabindranath Tagore in Birbhum District of West Bengal, where the city of Bolpur is famous for the Shantiniketan and Viswabharati University in which Tagore is the emblem and symbol of the cultural values of Bolpur Shantiniketan. Along similar lines, the statues of freedom fighters like Gandhi, Subhash Bose, and Bhagat Singh bear the patriotic proud history of India. These reflect the values and interests of society in general. This in turn helps to fulfil one of our Fundamental Duties of the Constitution of India, i.e. preserving and valuing the rich heritage of our composite culture. Along similar lines when the statues are demanded by the foreign countries, it reflects the people's demands, choices and cultural values from those countries as well. The foreign trade with statues also helps in the process of cultural diffusion and the spreading of values and interests in general.

#### 5.5. *Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the life of the Statue makers*

It is to be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the life and livelihood mechanisms of the statue makers of Ghurni. During the times of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, there were shortages of demand for statues, accompanied by the thaw in labour supply, supply of raw materials and a rise in the overall cost of production. Owing to the pandemic situation, many artisans were forced to leave this heritage activity of Ghurni and have taken alternative occupations to thrive under the stress of the pandemic situation like vegetable selling, selling of cosmetic goods, and opening of sweet shops, tea stalls, running of Totos and so on. Some of the artisans even have succumbed to the pandemic. The production and business scenario improved somewhat in the post-COVID-19 phase from 2022 onwards. From 2022, there was a gradual rise in both the domestic and foreign demands for statues. It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic effect has been fatal in the minds of the young generation who are not interested to carry forward the heritage occupation of the statue making. The young generation is apprehensive of more of such pandemics and their devastating effect in future. The young generation who are educated now is taking different other occupations like teaching, service, trading, and so on. If this present trend continues, there might be a day when this traditional cultural activity of statue making might be lost forever.

#### 5.6. *Role of Government in the Preservation of the Statue making activities by the statue makers*

The government must take sound and proactive steps and measures to preserve the heritage activity of the statue making of Ghurni. The state government can include the statue makers in the comprehensive framework of the Cluster Development Approach. The state government can promote the statue making activities by incorporating the artisans in the Biswa Bangla fairs and other government projects and festivals which can enhance the market of these artisans. The government must ensure easy accessibility of credit facilities with low-interest rates to facilitate

the statue production where the cost of production is high. The government must build training facilities or institutes which will incorporate the artisans and help in the dissemination of skills and knowledge to the young generation. This in turn will help to preserve the heritage activity of statue making. The government must provide more space for the building of workshops where the statue making activities can be done and properly stored. Moreover, the government must take steps to connect the art colleges and universities with Ghurni artisans to ensure the proper dissemination of knowledge and skills. The government must provide artisan identity cards to the artisans so that the artisans can benefit from the businesses in statue making directly from the government. As we all know that Ghurni is popular for clay doll makers, but now it is also renowned for the wonderful statue makers as well. A GI Tag would encourage and facilitate the production of statues in the long run. Furthermore, more hotels, restaurants and car parking facilities must be constructed so that the foreign tourists visiting Ghurni can stay and enjoy the creative genius of the artisans of Ghurni. Lastly, the government must also ensure that the Ghurni museum must properly displays the high-quality statues made by the artisans over the years which can ultimately facilitate tourism potential in future.

## 6. Conclusion

The statue making activities of Ghurni is a heritage activity of the city of Krishnanagar. The heritage work must be preserved at any cost. The statue making activity is indeed very laborious and time-consuming work which involves a lot of risks. The present study finds that the gender participation rate of the females is very less. The artisans have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The government, planners and the executive bodies must take proactive steps to ensure a long sustaining growth of these artisans as our mother Earth might face many more pandemics in near future. Therefore, more sustainable and inclusive planning is the need of the hour to preserve and protect these heritage activities keeping in mind the promises made by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Millenium Development Goals in the long run. The young generation must be encouraged to take the heritage occupations. Works of literature are very few or are almost non-existent in these areas. More research work needs to be done to analyze the survival strategies, value chain, supply chain, market mechanisms and anthropological characteristics of these artisans over the years.

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## 8. Declaration of Interest Statement

The present research declares no conflict of interest with any person, institute or stakeholders.

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