

Creativity by Divine Hands, Yet Struggles for Existence: An Ethnographic Account of the Heritage Craft and Livelihood Resilience among the Statue Makers of Ghurni, Nadia District, West Bengal, India

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Abstract : *The statue-making tradition of Ghurni in Krishnanagar, West Bengal, exemplifies a vital legacy skill that merges artistic ingenuity with economic sustenance for a considerable portion of the local artisan population. This study offers an ethnographic examination of the life, livelihood strategies, and production methods of the statue makers in Ghurni. Primary data were gathered using field-based techniques, including questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, with 52 sculptors. The study examines the socio-economic traits of artisans, the materials and manufacturing methods utilised in statue creation, and the obstacles encountered by the craft community. The findings reveal that statue production is a labour-intensive and skill-based activity sustained through intergenerational knowledge transfer and informal labour networks. Although artisans have a comparatively higher revenue potential than many traditional crafts, they face numerous challenges, including fluctuating market demand, rising raw material costs, insufficient institutional support, and waning interest from younger generations. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted industrial operations and supply chains, affecting the income stability of many craftspeople. The research underscores the need for greater institutional support, stronger market connections, and heritage-oriented legislative measures to ensure the enduring viability of this traditional craft sector and the economic stability of artisans in the future.*

Key words: *Ethnography; Heritage craft; Statue makers; Informal economy; Artisan livelihoods; Ghurni; Cultural geography.*

Introduction

Creativity is an essential component that has shaped human evolution throughout history. The statue-making industry in Ghurni is a significant aspect of Nadia District in Krishnanagar city, West Bengal, India. It is known worldwide for creating artistic statues of notable personalities, events, and monuments, primarily in bronze, fibreglass, concrete, and stone. This study conducts

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an ethnographic investigation into the creative aspects, life, livelihood, and techniques of statue makers in Ghurni. Human history's defining creativity encompasses four key characteristics: the creative process, the creative product, the creative person, and the creative situation (MacKinnon, 1970). Notably, all these creative characteristics are prevalent among the statue makers of Ghurni. Ethnographic investigations are essential for understanding the fundamental aspects of human creativity and its connection to culture and traditions. Ethnography literally refers to a portrait of people. This describes the culture and lifestyle of individuals in a specific historical and geographical context (Mohanty et al., 2009). This study's ethnographic investigations elucidate the life and livelihood mechanisms of Ghurni's statue makers.

Ghurni's statue-making activities represent an unorganised sector. The National Commission for Enterprises reports that the unorganised sector constitutes 93% of India's workforce. Reports indicate that workers in these sectors lack jobs, employment, and social security. Despite constituting a significant portion of India's economy yet remains underexplored in academic literature and public policy (Kabra, 2003). The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (2007) defines the unorganised sector as comprising unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households that engage in the production and sale of goods and services, operating on a proprietary or partnership basis with fewer than 10 total workers. Given its informal status, Ghurni's statue-making activities should be prioritised in inclusive planning by the Indian government and administrators, as many artisans and their families rely on it for survival.

Informalization often presents a dual challenge, as workers are deprived of legal rights to fair wages and employment security (Roy Chowdhury, 2005). The unorganised sector of statue makers in Ghurni exhibits distinct life and livelihood mechanisms. The average incomes of statue makers significantly exceed those of clay doll makers, idol makers, and decoration artisans in the region. Their income is variable, depending on the number of orders received each month or season.

Research on the livelihood mechanisms of this unorganised sector is limited, given its distinct livelihood and production system, which has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Extensive literature exists on various aspects of the unorganised sector. Banerjee (2017) examined the conditions of artisans in Kumartuli's idol-making. Paul & Mondal (2018) analysed idol-making technology in Kolkata's Kumartuli. Das (2018) and Jana (2015) explored the clay doll and terracotta industries in Ghurni, Krishnanagar, and the challenges they face. Hazra (2017) assessed the prospects and characteristics of traditional clay doll making in Krishnanagar. Thus, there is a significant lack of literature on the statue makers of Ghurni in Krishnanagar. Investigations are crucial in understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on artisan recovery. This study examines the caste and gender dimensions of bronze statue-making, analyses the production stages and time required, explores cultural traits and values reflected in the process, assesses the

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on artisans' livelihoods, and evaluates the government's role in conserving these activities. The study emphasises the strong need for sustainable policies to support artisan development and resilience in the future.

Literature Review

In India, craft industries are vital for employment and for preserving indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions within local communities. Craft production generally operates through household-based labour systems, in which skills are transmitted through informal apprenticeships and family networks (Liebl & Roy, 2004). The integration of craft economies into global markets has created new vulnerabilities for artisans. Globalisation and industrial production have intensified competition from mechanised goods, marginalising traditional craft workers in modern capitalist economies (Scrase, 2003). Research shows that many artisans work in precarious conditions, marked by unstable incomes, limited institutional protection, and dependence on fluctuating market demand (Debbarma, 2020).

Craft industries sustain rural and urban livelihoods, despite challenges. Craft clusters and artisanal production systems provide substantial non-farm employment and contribute to local economic development in various regions of India (Das, 2017). The handicraft sector maintains cultural diversity and heritage, employing millions of artisans nationwide. The Government of India acknowledges the importance of handicrafts for rural development and cultural heritage, providing support to artisan communities via policies and programs (Government of India, 2025).

Research shows that globalisation has increased market exposure for traditional crafts while changing production systems and market structures, forcing artisans to adapt to shifting consumer preferences and competitive pressures (Jena, 2010). Artisans often combine traditional crafts with alternative income sources to mitigate economic uncertainties (Prasad, 2021). Craft-based livelihoods foster inclusive development by merging cultural preservation with income generation for marginalised communities (Deshmukh et al., 2024). Recent studies highlight the significance of innovation, market access, and institutional support for the long-term sustainability of artisan livelihoods. Ethnographic research indicates that craft production is essential to social relations, cultural identity, and local traditions.

This study examines the interplay of culture, place, and economic activities within the context of cultural geography and the creative economy. Craft-based industries are essential to local creative economies, linking cultural heritage, artistic creativity, and livelihoods (Liebl & Roy, 2004). Artisan livelihoods in the informal economy are characterised by small-scale production, family labour, and market uncertainties (Scrase, 2003). The statue-making community in Ghurni, Krishnanagar City, West Bengal, India, illustrates the role of heritage-based creativity in sustaining livelihoods within an informal urban craft economy. Despite extensive research on traditional craft industries and informal artisan livelihoods in India, the Ghurni statue-making community in

Krishnanagar has received limited scholarly attention. Research has mainly focused on clay doll-making and related crafts, leaving the socio-economic dynamics, production processes, and livelihood mechanisms of statue makers under-examined. This study provides an ethnographic analysis of the heritage-based statue-making industry and the livelihood of artisans.

Conceptual Framework of the Present Investigation

This study develops a conceptual framework (Figure 1) to analyse the relationships among heritage craft activities, production processes, artisan livelihoods, and their socio-economic implications, drawing on the existing literature on cultural heritage, informal economies, and craft-based livelihoods, and linking to wider sustainability debates with academic and societal relevance.

Objectives

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To study the livelihood mechanisms of the statue makers or the sculptors of Ghurni.
- To analyse the techniques and stages involved in the making of statues.
- To conduct a case study of a sample sculptor to obtain greater insights into the life and livelihood mechanisms of the sculptors.

Study Area

The study area of the present investigation is Ghurni, Krishnanagar City, Nadia District, West Bengal (Figure 2). It is famous for producing clay dolls worldwide. These artisans are said to have been brought by Raja Krishnachandra, who was the king and zamindar of Krishnanagar, Nadia district, in the 18th century. Krishnanagar city is located on the right bank of the Jalangi River and covers a total area of 15.80 sq. km. The city is located at 23°24'N, 88°31'E. Ghurni is located in the southeastern part of Krishnanagar City.

Statue-making in Ghurni has evolved gradually over the years from making clay dolls and idols. It is said that before independence, stone and concrete statues were primarily demanded by the Britishers, Municipalities, and offices. However, after Indian independence in 1947, the fibreglass, bronze, and Plaster of Paris (POP) statues gradually evolved to meet customer needs. After the year 2000, demand for the statues increased. The demand has risen further since the change in government in West Bengal in 2011. The demand for statues comes mostly from government offices, schools, municipalities, foreign customers, clubs, local clubs and committees, and organisations from countries worldwide. Presently, five types of statues are most in demand: bronze, fibreglass, stone, cement, and POP. The most eminent artisans and sculptors of Ghurni

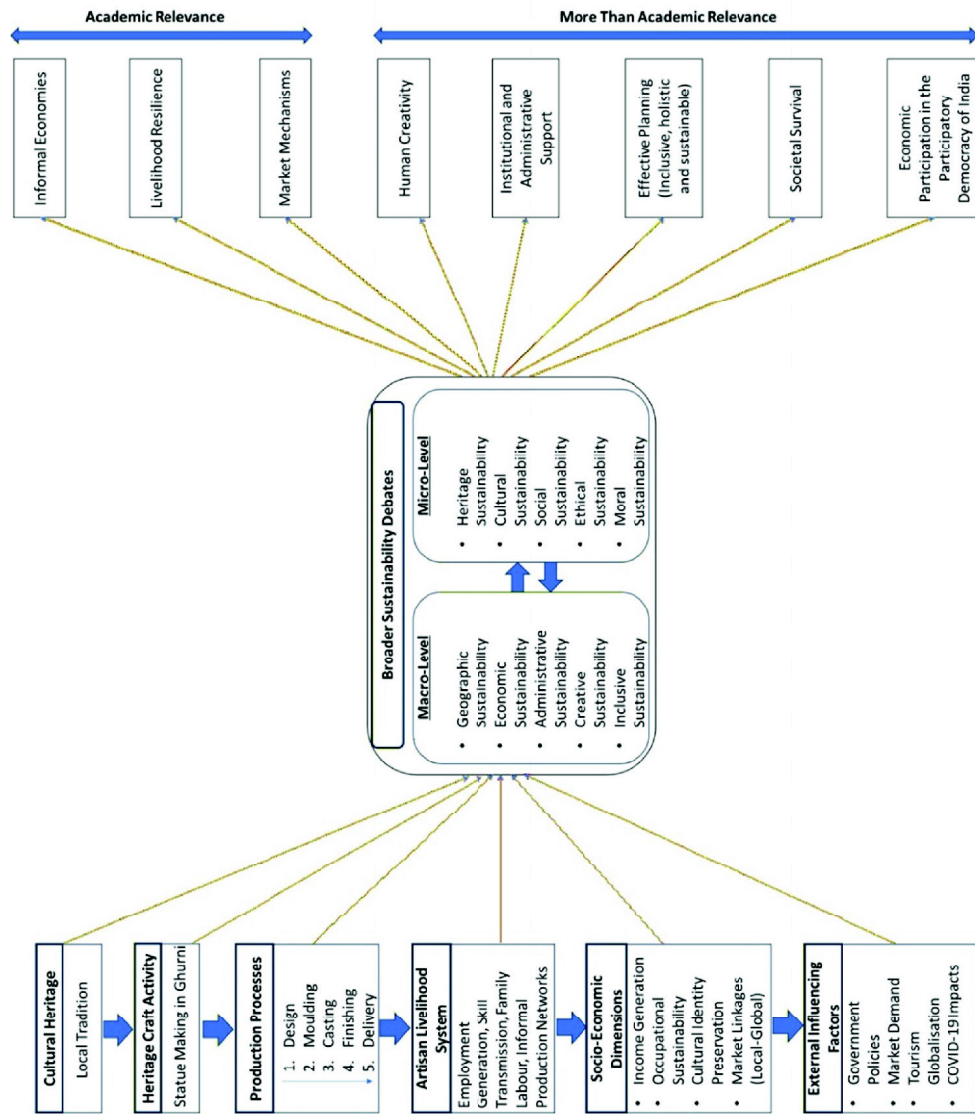


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of Heritage Craft Production, Artisan Livelihood Systems, and Socio-Economic Outcomes in Ghumi, Nadia District (Source: Prepared by the Author).

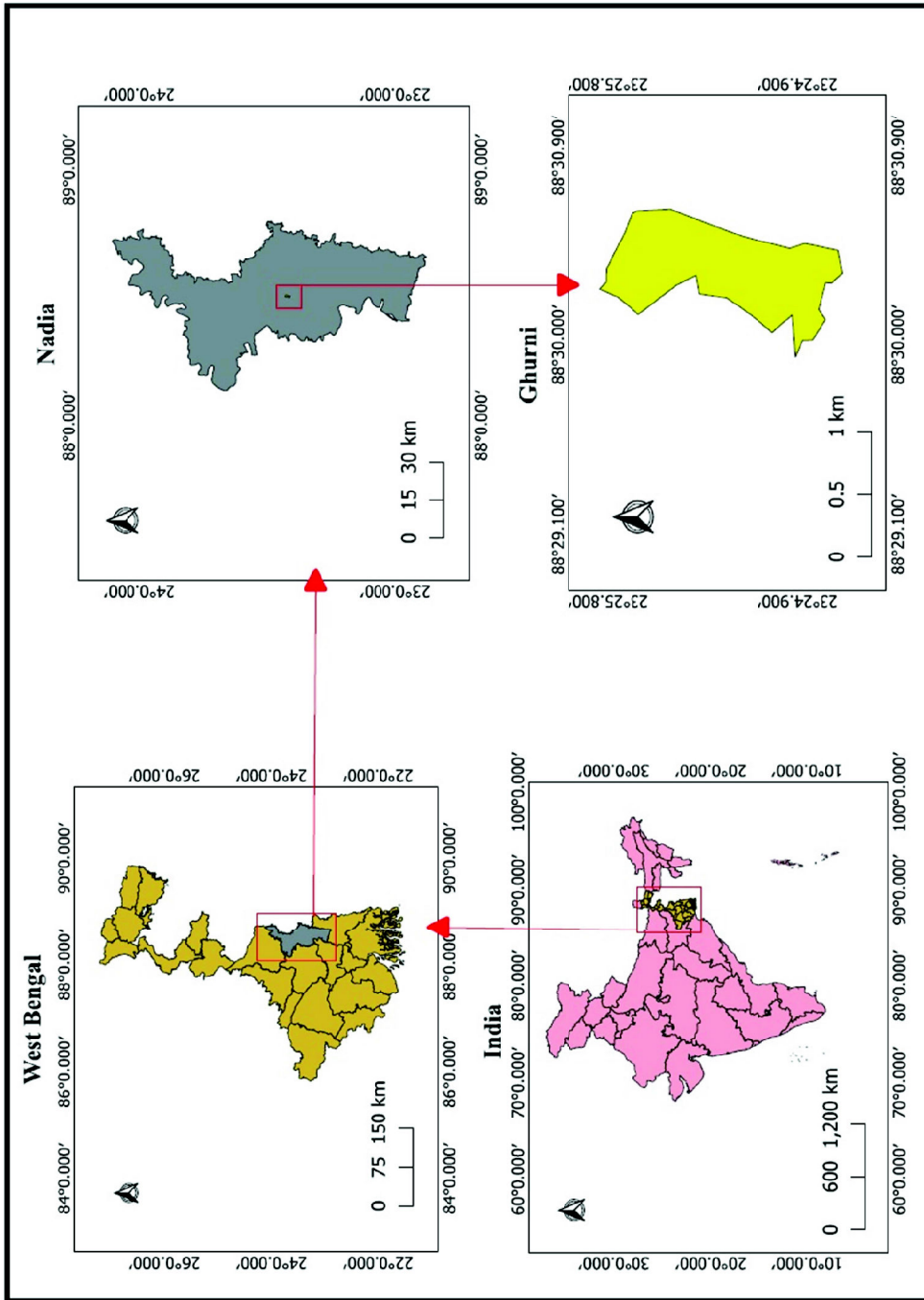


Fig. 2: Study Area (Ghurni Village of Krishnanagar City, which lies in the central part of Nadia District) (Source: Prepared by Author)

include Subir Pal, Gautam Pal, Sanjay Sarkar, Tarit Pal, Mukti Pal, and Shambhu Pal. The Ghurni statue-making activity is an important facet of creativity and one of the most celebrated creative destinations in Krishnanagar city.

Methodology

This study analyses the life and livelihood mechanisms of the statue makers, or sculptors, in Ghurni. The current study utilized questionnaires, in-depth and telephonic interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation to gather information about these artisans. Local administrative authorities were interviewed, including Mr Ashim Saha, the former Municipal Chairman of Krishnanagar City, who offered insights into the livelihood mechanisms and challenges faced by the statue makers of Ghurni, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Focus Group Discussions, in-depth interviews, and participant observations also validated the onerous impact of the pandemic on artisans' lives and helped us understand their daily lives and livelihood mechanisms. This study employs an ethnographic design for its observations. Data was gathered from 52 sculptors in Ghurni, Krishnanagar, during fieldwork from 2020 to 2025 to examine livelihood mechanisms, resilience, pandemic impacts, and the importance of sustainable policies for future inclusive growth. The sample of 52 artisans represents a notable segment of Ghurni's active statue-making community, chosen through purposive sampling based on availability and occupational involvement.

The history behind the origin of the statue-making activities of Ghurni

No written record exists indicating the precise year when statue-making activities commenced in Ghurni. Local administrators and artisans of Ghurni indicate that statue-making began before Indian Independence in 1947, when artisans known for their high-quality miniature clay dolls began creating large statues of prominent figures. Statue making was notably restricted during that period. Cement and stone statues were available then. Statue demand increased after the 1970s during the post-Independence period. A slight thaw occurred in statue production and demand in Ghurni after this phase. Statue demand increased post-2000. Demand increased significantly following the 2011 government transition. Since 2011, there has been significant demand for statues and models of notable figures and famous monuments from various entities, including government offices, institutions, schools and colleges, private organizations, clubs, committees, and individuals, transcending geographic boundaries.

Analysis

The socio-demographic profile of the statue-making artisans in Ghurni is described in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Sampled Statue Makers in Ghurni (n = 52)

Variable	Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age Group	20–30 years	9	17.3
	31–40 years	16	30.8
	41–50 years	15	28.8
	Above 50 years	12	23.1
Educational Level	Primary Education	14	26.9
	Secondary Education	21	40.4
	Higher Secondary	11	21.2
	Graduate and above	6	11.5
Years of Experience in Statue Making	Less than 10 years	10	19.2
	10–20 years	18	34.6
	21–30 years	14	26.9
	More than 30 years	10	19.2
Monthly Income from Statue Making	Below ₹ 20,000	8	15.4
	₹ 20,000 – ₹ 50,000	12	23.1
	₹ 50,000 – ₹ 1,00,000	14	26.9
	₹ 1,00,000 – ₹ 2,50,000	11	21.2
	Above ₹ 2,50,000	7	13.5
Type of Work in the Production Process	Clay Modelling	12	23.1
	Mould Preparation	10	19.2
	Casting Work	8	15.4
	Grinding/Finishing	11	21.2
	Multiple Roles	11	21.2

Source: Field Survey conducted by the author in Ghurni, Nadia District (2025).

Table 2 indicates significant variation in statue production in Ghurni across materials, time requirements, and market value.

Table 2: Materials, Production Time, and Approximate Cost of Different Types of Statues Produced in Ghurni, Nadia District, India.

Type of Statue	Major Materials Used	Average Production Time	Approximate Cost Range (₹)	Demand Pattern
Bronze Statue	Bronze metal, wax, <i>surki</i> (brick dust), plaster, fibre moulds	1–4 months	₹ 1,50,000 – ₹ 10,00,000+	High demand from government institutions, public spaces, and international clients
Fibreglass Statue	Fibreglass sheets, resin, hardener, moulds	15–30 days	₹ 20,000 – ₹ 2,00,000	Moderate to high demand due to lightweight nature
Cement Statue	Cement, sand, iron rods, moulds	10–20 days	₹ 15,000 – ₹ 1,00,000	Mostly demanded by local institutions and households
Plaster of Paris (POP) Statue	Plaster of Paris, fibre moulds, paints	7–15 days	₹ 5,000 – ₹ 50,000	Lower demand, generally used for temporary installations
Stone Statue	Stone blocks (granite/marble), chisels, grinding tools	1–3 months	₹ 80,000 – ₹ 5,00,000	Demand mainly for temples and heritage spaces

Source: Field Survey conducted by the author in Ghurni, Krishnanagar (2025).

Table 3 shows that irregular market demand and rising raw material costs are the primary challenges for Ghurni's statue makers amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3: Major Challenges Faced by Statue Makers of Ghurni

Sl. No.	Nature of Challenge	Number of Respondents (n=52)	Percentage (%)
1	Irregular market demand and seasonal orders	32	61.5
2	High cost of raw materials (bronze, fibre, cement, etc.)	28	53.8
3	Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on orders and income	26	50.0
4	Lack of institutional or government support	24	46.2
5	Declining interest among the younger generation	21	40.4
6	Limited access to credit and financial assistance	19	36.5
7	Competition from machine-made or factory products	17	32.7

Source: Field Survey conducted by the author in Ghurni, Nadia District, 2025.

Note: Multiple responses were allowed; therefore, percentages do not sum to 100 %.

The Techniques involved in the making of Bronze Statues

The following section describes the stages involved in the making of bronze statues (Figure 3).

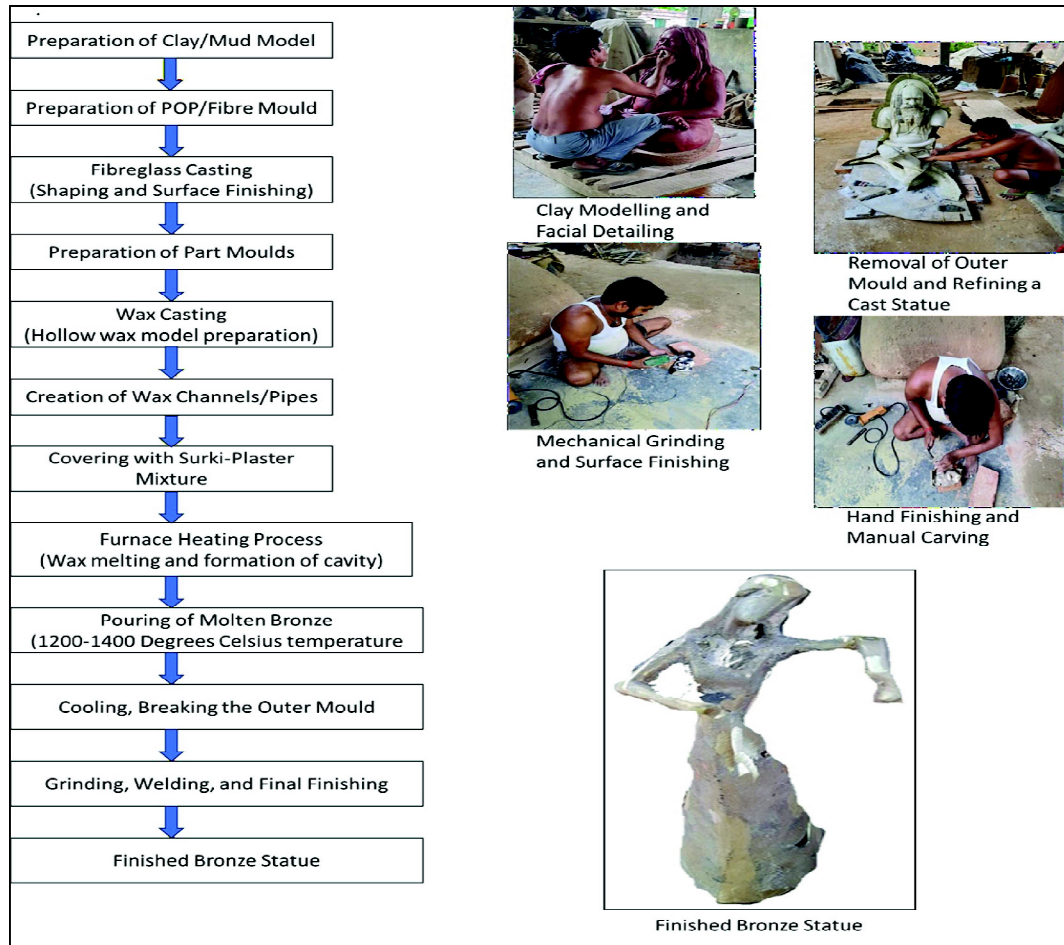


Fig. 3: Conceptual flow of the bronze statue-making process and manual labour involved in it, with fieldwork evidence from Ghurni, Nadia District, West Bengal, India. (Source: Prepared by the author)

- Preparation of a mud model or statue: Upon preparing the clay model of the desired figure, it is presented to customers for verification that it meets their requirements. Recommendation for bronze casting is contingent upon model satisfaction.
- Preparation of mould or Dice for fibre casting: Subsequently, the dice of Plaster of Paris

(POP) or fibreglass are arranged on the clay model. Once dried, the dice are removed from the mud model.

- Fibreglass casting over the POP mould: A fibreglass casting is applied over the pre-existing POP dice. Post-drying, the fibreglass is removed from the dice, which are reshaped.
- Preparation of Part Dices: Subsequently, the dice are assembled from the fibreglass statues. The POP dice pieces are positioned and shaped for wax casting.
- Wax casting: Wax liquid is applied in measured quantities over the dice, with thickness contingent on the bronze's thickness. A finishing touch is applied to the wax figure later.
- Preparation of channels over the wax model: Subsequently, channels or pipe-like routes are created throughout the wax model, ensuring that bronze flows evenly into the wax model.
- Filling up using *Surki* and Plaster: subsequently, the structure is coated with a *surki* and plaster mixture. A hole at the top of the structure allows liquid bronze to be poured.
- The burning of the structure: The complete dice and wax structure are placed in the furnace for burning and heating for 3 to 4 days until all the wax is melted and vaporised, creating a vacuum that will be filled by the bronze.
- Pouring of the liquid bronze: Once the wax has fully vaporised, liquid bronze is poured through the structure's hole the following day or shortly thereafter. Liquid bronze forms at temperatures between 1200 and 1400 degrees Celsius. The liquid bronze fills it from the inside. It is heated in a coke-fired, diesel-fired, or electric furnace.
- Removing the bronze statue: Subsequently, the *surki* and plaster structure are extracted from the furnace. The part is diced, and the *surki* is removed to extract the internal bronze structure. The channels are affixed to the metal body, which is subsequently shaped and trimmed by experts using grinding techniques or chisels and hammers. The statue's components are welded to its main body using the same metal. The bronze casting process concludes at this stage.

The stages involved in the making of bronze statues are shown in Figure 4. Figure 4 describes the procedures, with detailed pictures, involved in the production of bronze statues, the final products delivered to customers.

Figure 5 reflects some of the equipment and infrastructure involved in the making of bronze statues. This entire process of bronze casting can take from several weeks to months. The procedures differ for statues made of cement, stone, fibreglass, and POP. The demand for bronze statues is increasing day by day, alongside that for fibreglass statues.

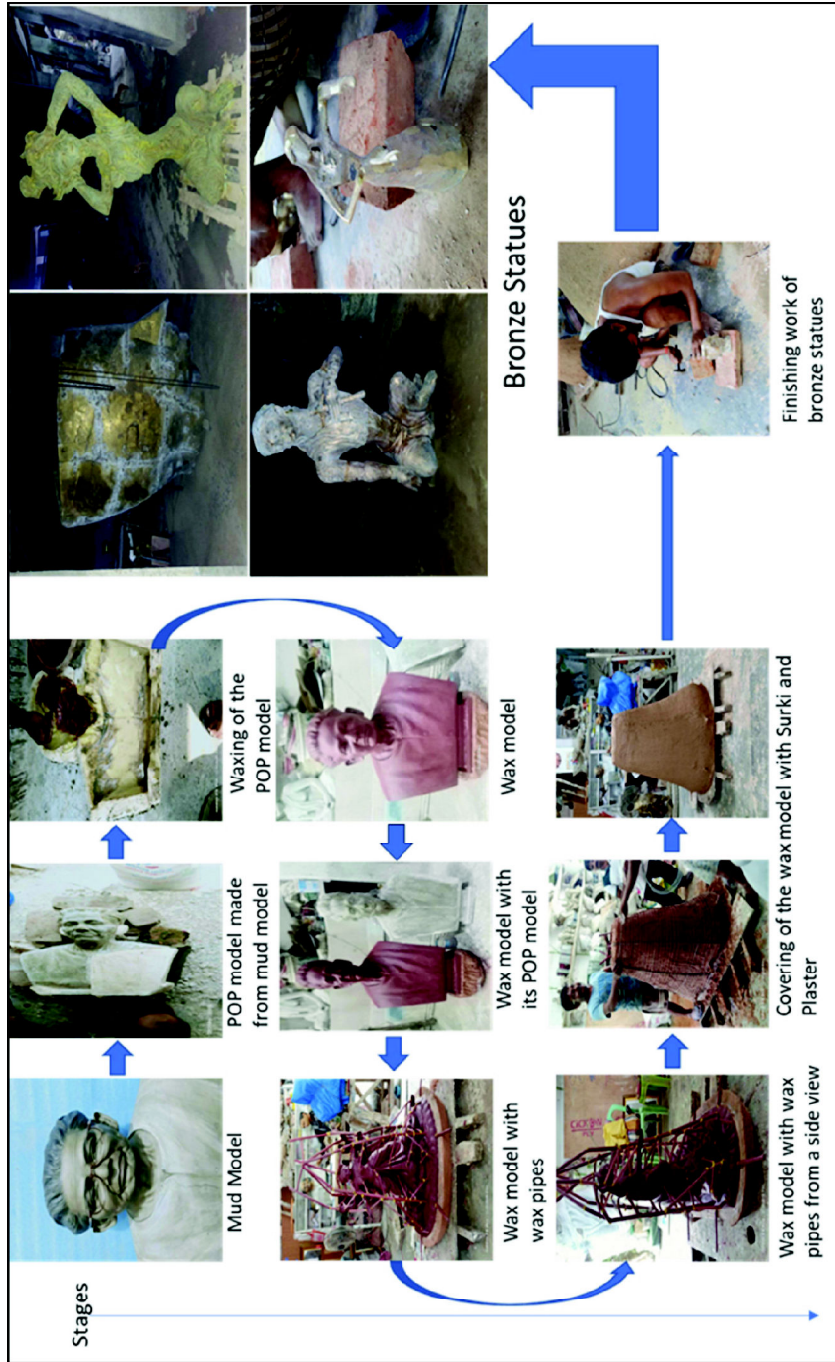


Fig. 4: Detailed pictorial representation of the stages involved in the making of bronze statues. (Captured by the author on August 15, 2025, Ghurni, Krishnanagar, West Bengal, India)



Fig. 5: Infrastructure and equipment used for bronze casting. (Captured by the author on August 27, 2025, Ghurni, Krishnanagar, West Bengal, India)

Ethnographic Case Study: Subir Pal – A Master Sculptor of Ghurni

Mr. Subir Pal is a distinguished sculptor from Ghurni, whose oeuvre embodies the area's cultural legacy and creative identity. He was born on 15 September 1969 in Ghurni, Krishnanagar, and hails from a lineage of traditional craftspeople. His father, the late Biren Pal, was a nationally acclaimed clay artist and the inaugural recipient of the National Award in 1982. Raised in an artistic milieu, Subir Pal cultivated an early fascination with sculptural arts and progressively perfected several techniques in clay modelling, statue creation, and artistic output. Subir Pal now operates as a sculptor, clay artist, and statue creator, crafting artifacts from materials like clay, bronze, fibre, cement, and stone. His workshop functions with a compact production team of around 10–12 artists, each specializing in distinct phases of statue creation, including modelling, mould preparation, casting, finishing, and polishing. This division of work illustrates the cooperative essence of craft-oriented production processes within Ghurni's informal artisan sector.

His artworks encompass sculptures of eminent figures, religious deities, and architectural models. These sculptures are commissioned by governmental entities, educational institutions,



Fig. 6: Photo of Mr. Subir Pal with his doctoral certificate. (Captured by the author on July 22, 2024, Ghurni, Krishnanagar, West Bengal, India)

business organizations, and foreign clients. His work has progressively penetrated national and international markets. Subir Pal has participated in various international cultural festivals, including the India Festival in London (1982), the United States (1985), Germany (2000), and Spain (2007). His artistic talents have garnered recognition through several honours, records, and distinctions. Subir Pal's story underscores the tenacity and adaptive methods of the artisan community in Ghurni. In spite of economic uncertainty, pandemic, and market swings, craftsmen persist in preserving traditional craftsmanship via innovation, diversified production, and engagement in global cultural marketplaces. His career exemplifies how heritage-based craft processes are ingrained in local cultural identity, encompassing national and international scales in light of ongoing sustainability debates.

Discussion

Life and Livelihood mechanisms of the Statue makers of Ghurni

Statue-making is time-consuming, labour-intensive, and risky. Statue makers lack fixed incomes; their earnings depend on the volume of orders. Statue makers in Ghurni produce a variety of statues in bronze, stone, POP, cement, and fibreglass. The duration ranges from a few to several days, contingent on the material and size of the statues. Workers typically rise early to prepare for daily activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the lives of these sculptors.

Socio-economic Characteristics, Production Dynamics, and Livelihood Resilience of Statue Makers

The socio-economic and production traits of Ghurni's statue makers indicate a strong link between traditional craftsmanship and sustainable livelihoods. Table 1 indicates the reliance on

experienced workers of the age group of 31-50 years. Educational levels are moderate, where skills are passed through apprenticeship and intergenerational knowledge transfer. The production system demonstrates a distinct division of labour, with artisans specializing in modelling, mould preparation, casting, and finishing. Table 2 illustrates differences in materials, production time, and cost, indicating that bronze statues are the most time-consuming and costly.

Table 3 shows that the sector faces significant challenges, including irregular demand, rising raw material costs, and insufficient institutional support. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted production and income stability, while decreasing youth participation jeopardizes long-term sustainability.

Dimensions of Caste and Gender of the Sculptors of Ghurni

The majority of Ghurni's sculptors are from the Hindu community. The sculptors of Ghurni are primarily *Kumbhakars* from the Pal caste. They are a ceremonially pure caste known as "*Kumhars*" in Bengal. The artisans primarily belong to the Other Backward Classes (OBC). A segment of the Kumar group began creating statues and models at Ghurni before India's independence and subsequently established itself. The gender participation rate in statue-making is low, attributed to high physical demands, labour intensity, time requirements, and associated risks. Miss Saheli Pal (Figure 7), the daughter of Mr. Subir Pal, seeks to preserve the creative dimension of her family's heritage through the creation of miniature artefacts.



Fig. 7: Photo of Miss Saheli Pal, the record holder in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Production, Market, Time, and Labour in the Making of Statues.

Statue-making is labour-intensive and time-consuming. The creation of a statue may take several days to months, depending on its type, size, and material. Artisans and labourers typically begin work early in the morning and continue until late evening, working approximately 10 to 12 hours daily. Statue-making occurs year-round, without a specific season. Upon completion, the statues are transported to the order locations via vans and trucks.

Several orders for the statues originate from countries including Spain, Italy, Germany, Sweden, and France. Small statues are transported by air; larger ones are typically shipped. The annual production of statues by Ghurni artisans ranges from 10 to 20. In India, states with higher demand for statues include Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Assam, Kerala, Odisha, and Himachal Pradesh.

Upholding of Cultural Traits, Values, Characteristics, and Interests

Statue-making primarily reflects consumer demand, preferences, choices, tastes, cultural values, and traditions. There is increased demand for Rabindranath Tagore statues in Birbhum District, West Bengal, particularly in Bolpur, known for Shantiniketan and Visva-Bharati University, which represent the region's cultural values. The statues of freedom fighters such as Gandhi, Subhash Bose, and Bhagat Singh symbolize India's patriotic pride. This reflects societal values and interests, thereby fulfilling a Fundamental Duty under the Constitution of India to preserve and value our composite cultural heritage.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of the Statue makers

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the livelihoods of statue makers in Ghurni. In 2020-2021, the COVID-19 pandemic led to decreased demand for statues, alongside decreased labour and raw material supply, and higher production costs. The pandemic compelled many artisans in Ghurni to abandon their heritage activities and pursue alternative occupations for survival, including selling vegetables, cosmetics, and other goods; operating sweet shops and tea stalls. The production showed some improvement from 2022, when domestic and foreign demand for statues had gradually increased. Recent observations indicate that prices of essential raw materials and input costs, which rose during the COVID-19 pandemic, have remained elevated in 2024 and 2025. The price of finished statues has remained relatively unchanged since pre-pandemic times. Artisans' monthly turnover has declined over time, despite a recovery in supply and demand chains since the post-pandemic period. Recent global economic tensions, tariff wars, sanctions, and rising oil prices have significantly impacted artisans' foreign market mechanisms and demand since 2025. Economists anticipate significant consequences if the government does not implement welfare measures for impoverished artisans, considering global tensions.

Role of Government in the Preservation of the Statue-making Activities

The government should adopt measures to preserve Ghurni's statue-making heritage. The state government should include statue makers in the Cluster Development Approach framework, Biswa Bangla fairs, and other government initiatives. The government ought to offer low-interest credit facilities to facilitate statue production due to elevated costs. The government should create training facilities to engage artisans and impart skills to youth, thus preserving the statue-making heritage. The government should provide more space for statue-making, link art colleges and universities with Ghurni artisans to enable knowledge and skill transfer, and provide artisan identity cards to allow artisans to directly access state-run businesses in statue-making. Ghurni is noted

for both its clay doll and statue makers. A Geographical Indicator Tag would enhance sustainable statue production. Initiatives like Vocal for Local, Viksit Bharat 2047, and National Handicrafts Development Programmes are essential for promoting a self-reliant Indian economy in line with *Atmanirbhar Bharat* within an inclusive framework.

Conclusion

This ethnographic study shows that Ghurni's statue-making tradition is a vital heritage craft that combines artistic creativity with livelihood opportunities for local artisans. The study shows that statue production is labour-intensive and reliant on skill, intergenerational knowledge transfer, family production systems, and informal labour networks. The statue-making sector is culturally and economically significant. Still, it faces structural challenges, including fluctuating market demand, insufficient institutional and financial support, rising production costs, and declining interest among younger generations. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the disrupted market economy of the informal craft economy. Ghurni sculptors maintain their craft through resilience, creativity, and adaptability, preserving artistic traditions through innovation, material diversification, and expanded market connections. Institutional interventions are crucial for the long-term sustainability of this traditional craft industry. Policies enhancing credit access, skill development, market linkages, cultural tourism, and recognition of Ghurni as a heritage craft cluster can improve artisans' livelihood security. Training institutes, with enhanced collaboration between art colleges and local artisans, can aid in transmitting traditional skills to future generations. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing inclusive policies that protect cultural heritage and sustain artisan livelihoods in India's changing socio-economic context.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The present research declares no conflict of interest.

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