

Associated Problems of Decaying Art of Clay Modelling in Krishnanagar Town of Nadia District, West Bengal, India- A Baseline Study

Dr. Rajashree Dasgupta

Assistant Professor Department of Geography, Government Girls' General Degree College, Kolkata

Author Email: rajjdg@gmail.com

Abstract— Handicrafts – a labour intensive industry in India is one of the most creative and elegant industries that earn a substantial earning for a large number of artists throughout the country. The West Bengal State is renowned all over the world for its handicraft industry. Clay idol making is one such unique handicraft industry and art of Krishnanagar Town – the head quarter of Nadia District in West Bengal, India. However, at present this very old traditional art introduced by Raja Krishna Chandra Ray in the locality some 200 years ago is in its decaying stage. The artists of clay modelling in Krishnanagar town reside at Ghurni area or Putul Patti in Ward no. 2 at the extreme north-west corner of the town. Only a very few families are still engaged in this profession at present since this industry is facing a stiff competition with other materials like glass fibre and the profit margins from this profession is steadily declining. The young generation is not very inclined to sustain this family tradition since this profession is no longer very remunerative. Under this backdrop the present study has tried to assess the current status of the decaying form of this art and to assess the different economic and health challenges of the workers associated with this job. This study intends to assess the current status of clay idol industry in the town and to suggest some fruitful measures to revive the glory of this unique art and heritage. The paper has chiefly relied on primary survey data carried out at household level covering almost all clay idol making artist families at Ghurni locality of Krishnanagar town. The major problems associated with this art as opined by the artists and the economic and health crisis that the workers are facing at recent times are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Artisans, Clay modelling industry, Decaying art , Krishnanagar town.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian handicrafts industries is renowned and popular throughout the world. This industry is a labour intensive industry that provides employment to over six million artisans section of women and people belonging from weaker sections of the society. The economic importance of the industry lies in its high employment potential, low capital investment, high value addition and huge demand both in the domestic and foreign markets.. In West Bengal State, one of the best and popular showpiece industries is clay doll industry which belongs to Krishnanagar town – the headquarter of Nadia District . The artisans chiefly reside in Ghurni locality included unde4r Ward No. 2at the north-east corner of the town.

Handicrafts Industry of Krishnanagar town in Nadia district dates back to 18th Century . It was introduced in the locality by Raja Krishna Chandra who took over the reign during 1728 (District Gazetteer, Nadia 1910). The major initiative of introducing clay dolls was done by Raja hiring labours from other surrounding states. Clay dolls of Krishnanagar soon became a trade name for their outstanding quality in all respects. In 1851 East India Company of British India introduced these beautiful clay-dolls at an exhibition of 'all the works of industry of all nations' ceremony where it had gained huge appreciation. (Das U., 2018)

In West Bengal, Krishnanagar is a very popular and renowned name in the field of clay doll making since long. The people engaged in giving shape to these fascinating clay dolls mostly belong to Kumbhakar community. Their quality of being perfect in giving forms to the figures and figurines and the amazing expressions are so real that compel the customers and tourists to purchase the items for beautification of their rooms. The reputations of those clay dolls gained major attention and demand from international markets apart from meeting the domestic requirements.

In the last two decades however the industry is decaying fast due to some major problems associated with the industry. The artists are feeling insecured economically since the cost of the raw materials are rising steadily but the profit from the profession is not increasing at the same pace. The industry is also facing a stiff competition with the plastic fiber materials recently. There is also space shortage for storing raw materials and transportation problems. The people engaged with the

profession are compelled to revert to some new professions for earning their family income. Furthermore, the health hazards among these workers are also rising since they work long hours with the harmful colours and painting materials. The economic condition of majority of the clay workers further acts as a major hindrance to avail proper medical treatment on regular basis. The artists are gradually becoming vulnerable both economically and physically getting exposed to different health hazards. Based on these issues, the present study has tried to examine the different problems associated with the industry and the economic and health challenges of the people engaged with the profession which are making them vulnerable day by day.

II. SELECTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The study area selected for the present study is the Ghurni area of Krishnanagar Municipality where the clay modelling workers chiefly reside. Ghurni (Ward no-2) is the very epicenter of the production of clay dolls and idols. In addition to Ghurni area, it spreads over the area of Kalipur, Bhatjangla, Pal Para, Halder Para, Sandhya Para and the surroundings. The Jalangi River, local ponds, wells, tube wells, serve as important water resources for the industry. The riverside supplies the alluvial soil which is the chief raw material for the industry. All the materials are locally available and are organic. The area of Krishnanagar Municipality is 15.96 sq.km. spread under twenty four wards (shown in Fig .1). The total population of Krishnanagar Municipality as per 2011 census is 38,052 and the population density is 2384 persons per sq. km.*as per 2011 Census). The clay Modelling workers cover a very meager portion of the total population at present –within the town residing chiefly in the Ghurni locality under ward No. 2.

III. FRAMING OF OBJECTIVES

The major objectives framed for the current study include the following

1. To estimate the current status of economic and health challenges faced by clay modelling workers in Krishnanagar, .Nadia
2. To find out the major reasons behind the decaying industry and to suggest some feasible measures for reviving the past glory of this art and overall improvement of the persons involved in this profession.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

To carry out a detailed and precise study on the economic and health status of clay modelling workers at Krishnanagar Municipality a sufficient amount of time is needed (atleast 12 to 18 months) which was not available for the present study. In order to revive the heritage and popularity of this art in the town, systematic data on the existing problems of clay modelling workers are needed both from secondary and primary sources . Lack of systematic secondary data on this industry is a major drawback to work on this particular issue.

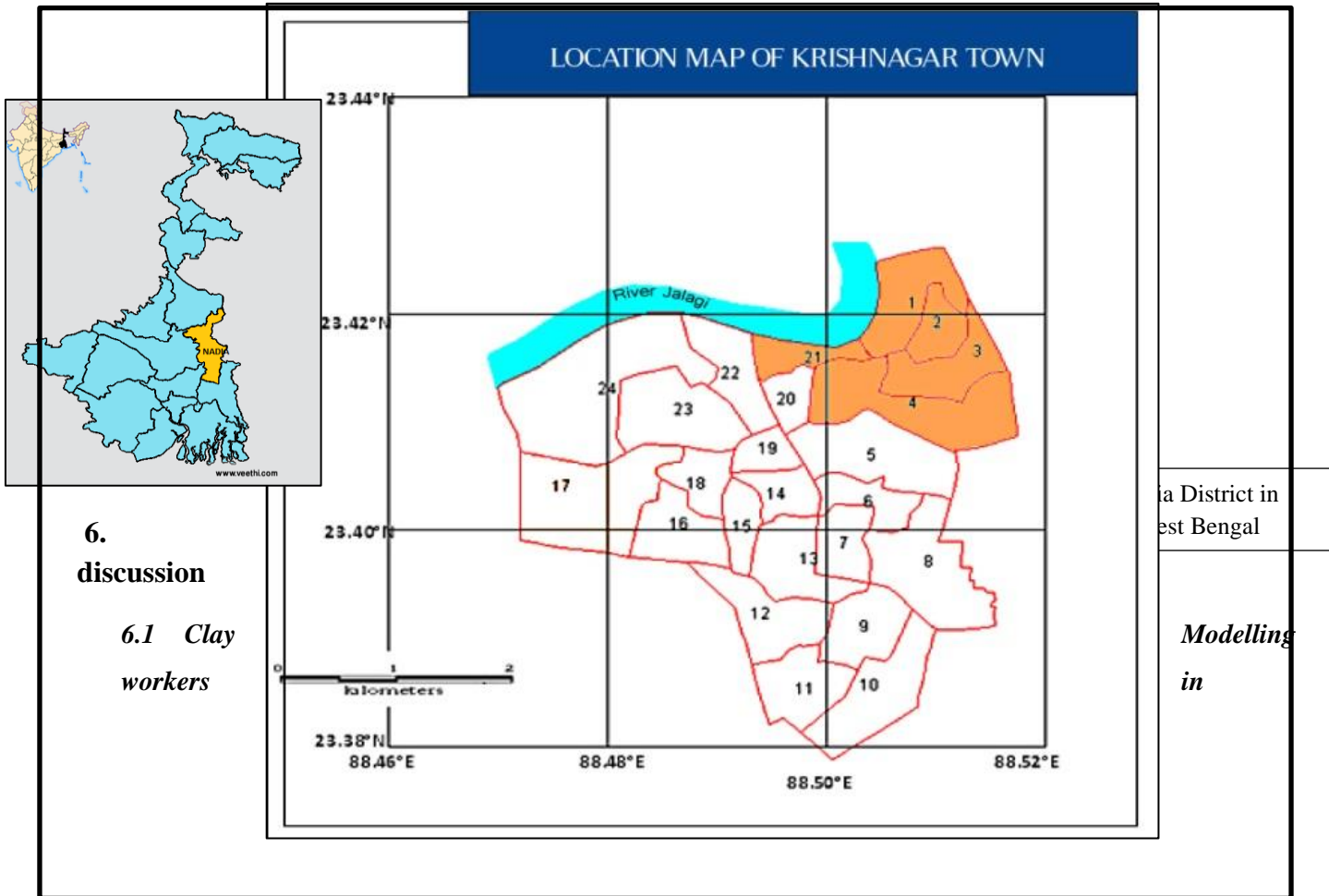
V. MATERIALS AND METHODS USED

The present study is chiefly based on primary data collected from stakeholder investigations at the household level. Secondary data were collected from Krishnanagar, Nadia, Municipal Corporation and Mritshilpa Samabai Samity. Household survey data of families engaged in this profession at Ghurni locality (Ward No.2) of Krishnanagar Municipality is the major data base for the present study. Sample population size is 159. House numbers where primary survey was carried out were selected from the Random Sampling (without replacement) procedure. For having a micro-level insight into the problem at the household level, a questionnaire has been designed to collect the primary data to asses their family details on :

- Educational and economic attainments of the workers.
- Health conditions and family planning status
- Housing and environment conditions
- Major problems associated with the particular profession

Attempts have also been taken to compute the Body Mass Index of each of the family members of the surveyed households measuring their height and weight to examine the nutrition status of the family members. Simple statistical analysis have been

done to represent different graphs using Microsoft Excel. The location of Ghurni area (Ward No. 2) with some other localities where clay modeling families reside is shown in Fig.1 (below)



6. discussion

6.1 Clay workers

V.I. KRISHNANAGAR MUNICIPALITY

Clay modelling is a unique tradition of Krishnanagar town of Nadia district in West Bengal. It started from the time of Raja Krishnachandra. The art of clay modelling is very popular in the region, but at recent times only a few families are engaged in this profession in the town. The families chiefly reside at Ghurni locality, which is included under Ward No. 2. The percentage of clay modelling family is very insignificant at present. Very few families are trying to keep alive this unique art of the Krishnanagar town which is fast decaying due to several reasons. The total number of persons directly involved in this clay Modelling have been reduced to 159 at present. Among this, 86.33 percent are working population where 50.83 percent are male workers and 49.17 percent are female.

As observed during the household survey of the families presently engaged in this profession- 75% people within these families work as clay Modelling workers while the rest 25% people earn their family income from other professions like driving, factory works, business, teaching etc (shown in Fig.2 below). The profit margin from this profession has gone down drastically in the last two decades and therefore these families cannot solely rely on this profession to meet their daily needs.

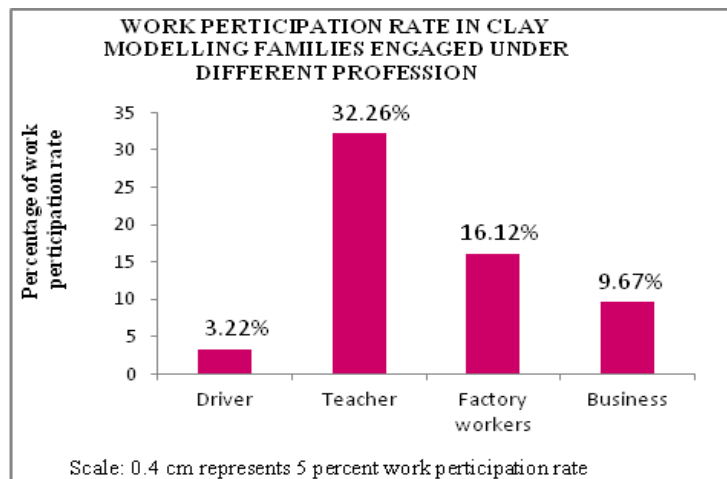


Fig. 2

VI.II. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS OF THE CLAY MODELLING WORKERS

In order to raise necessary demands to the local Government for reviving the glory of this industry the workers should be aware of the different existing Government policies. This again depends on the educational attainments of the workers which is not at all impressive. 31.66 percent clay modelling workers are illiterate and 68.34 percent are literate. Within the literate clay modelers, 41.01 percent are male and 27.33 percent are female.

Majority of the male workers have their education only upto primary level. Very few have attended the secondary or higher secondary levels. College level education among these workers is almost nil. This low level of literacy and awareness among the workers is also one of the chief reasons that they are not being able to raise their legitimate demands to the local authority for the adequate financial support for the industry

VI.III. INCOME STATUS

Economically this group of workers is becoming vulnerable day by day. The profit margin from this profession is steadily declining because of the stiff competition from other materials. The young generations are not very inclined to carry out their family tradition of clay modelling in the future. There are different category of workers among the clay modellers viz. clay makers, colour designer, structure maker, artist and model maker whose wage rates per day vary from one another. The clay makers earn Rs. 100 per day while the artists, structure makers and model makers earn Rs. 200 per day (Das, U, 2018). The wage rate for colour designer is Rs. 150 per day. The primary survey of clay modelling workers shows the income status of clay modelling workers is not satisfactory at present (shown in Fig. 3 below). Majority of the families have their income ranging between Rs. 5000 – 10000 per family per month which is very insufficient to meet the daily needs of a family. This compels the families to search for some other alternate jobs besides this profession to earn their family income. According to the Planning Commission Report published in March 20, 2012, the BPL level was considered to be Rs. 672.80/- per month in urban locales. The household survey has revealed that few families of the clay modellers also belong to the BPL group (Fig.4a) with income below Rs. 5000/- per month. The distribution of clay modelling workers under different income groups is provided in Fig. 4b.

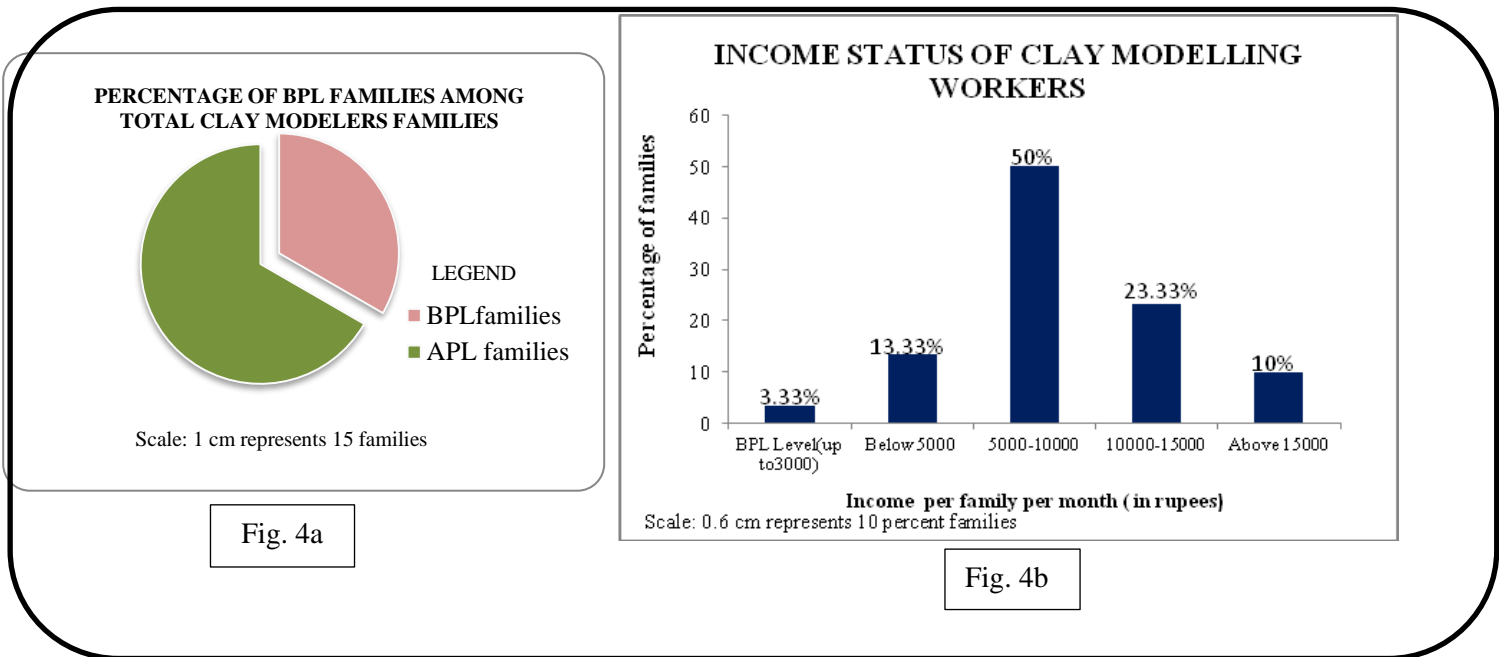


Fig. 4a

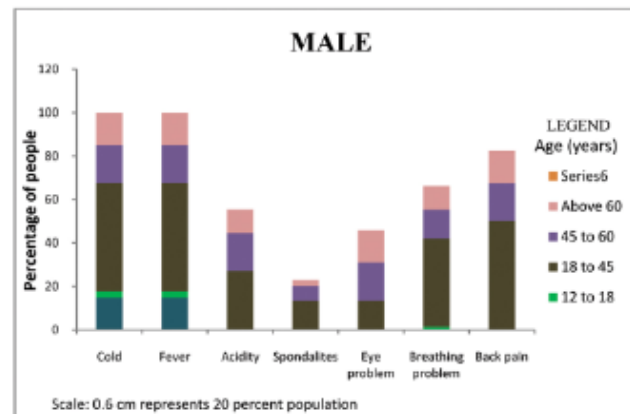
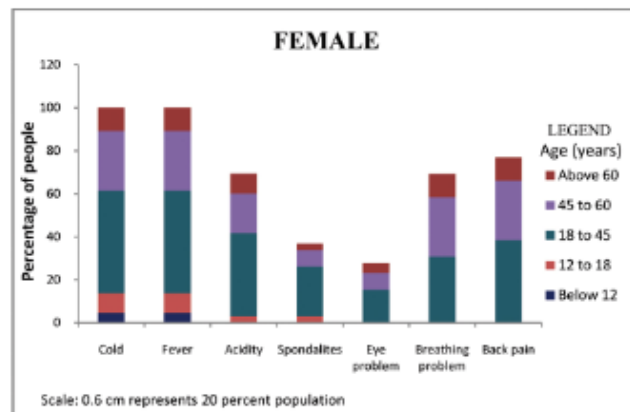
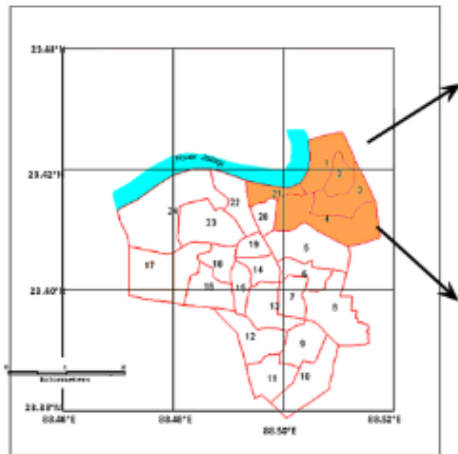
Fig. 4b

VI.IV. MAJOR HEALTH CHALLENGES

In addition to economic challenges, the health status of the clay modelling workers is also deteriorating steadily. Almost all workers engaged with the profession suffer from diseases like cold and fever very frequently. Other common diseases both among the male and female workers are acidity, eye problem, spondylitis, breathing problem and back pain. Male people are mostly affected by these type of diseases compared to females. The health problems arising from eye irritations, acidity and breathing problems may be due to the long time exposure to different types of harmful chemicals (colours and painting materials). Fig. 5 (below) shows the distribution of different diseases among male and female workers under different age groups.

Regular medical treatment and health checkup is also not done by these workers chiefly due to poor economic condition. Those belonging to the BPL group can hardly afford to pay Rs. 100/- per month for medical treatment and therefore completely depend on Government hospital facilities during the emergencies. 17 percent family have health insurance and remaining 83 percent families have no health insurance as revealed from primary survey. The health insurance facility was provided by from DIC (District Industrial Centre) to the workers.

DISEASE PROFILE OF CLAY MODELLING WORKERS IN KRISHNAGAR MUNICIPALITY, 2014



The nutritional status of clay modelling workers as was assessed from primary investigations measuring the height and weight of individual persons in each households indicate that majority of the clay modelling workers both male and female are healthy. The male working population are more underweight than female working population. The number of overweight population is very low both among males and females. Again only 1.35% male child population and 1.54% female old population are found to be obese (table 1) below.

Table 1 : Nutritional Status of the Clay Modelling workers

Clay Modelling Workers	Age Group (Years)	Underweight	Healthy	Overweight	Obese
Male	1-12	-	10.81	2.70	1.30
	12-18	-	2.70	-	--
	18-45	13.51	36.49	-	-
	45-60	-	17.57	-	-
	Above 60 yrs	4.05	10.81	-	-
Female	1-12	1.54	1.54	1.54	-
	12-18	1.54	7.69	-	-
	18-45	9.23	38.46	-	-
	45-60	3.08	28.08	1.54	-

	Above 60 yrs	1.54	9.23	-	-
--	--------------	------	------	---	---

VI.V. MAJOR PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CLAY MODELLING INDUSTRY IN KRISHNANAGAR

The petering out of the Zamindar-culture brought with it days of gloom for the clay modelling artists in Krishnanagar and they witness continuous erosion of patronage. Even ten years ago, the demand was for clay models for the great poets and traditional icons such as Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Now, they are losing out and are declining fast. The demand has shifted to the ‘hottest pin-up idols of cricket’, Sourav Ganguly, Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid. Even saints and religious leaders like Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Baba Loknath, and Sai Baba, have lost their popularity to the cricketers.

The major problems that the artistes have mentioned during the household survey are listed below in Fig.6 (below). The survey was carried out chiefly among the 36 families residing in the Ghurni locality (sample population covered was 159) during March 2019.

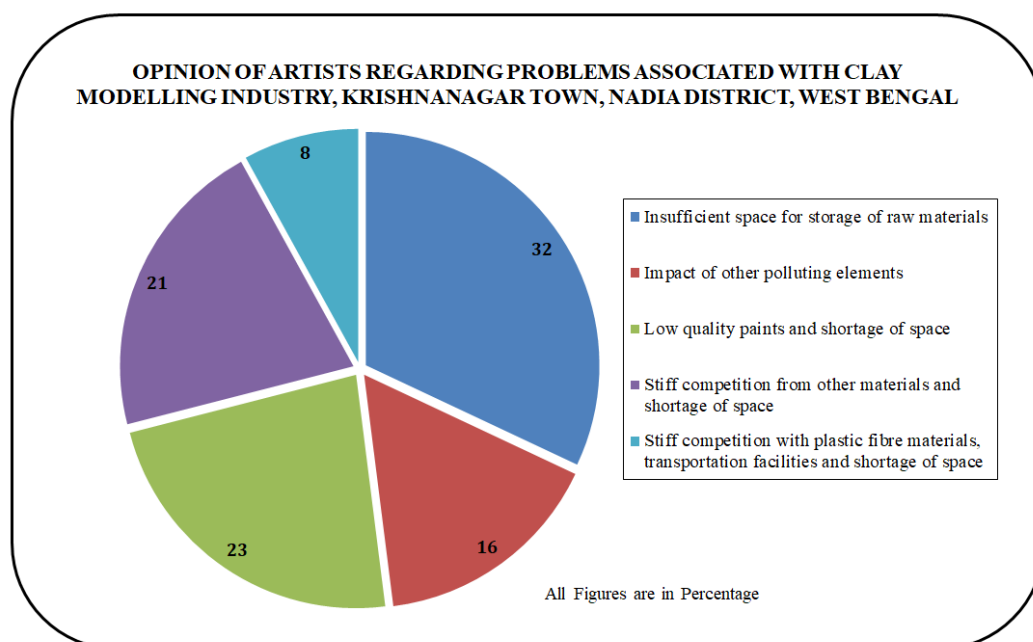


Fig. 6

The household survey further revealed that majority of the clay modelling workers are facing different challenges to continue this art form at present to sustain the age old glory in the town. The raw materials for the clay modelling units i.e. clay , paints and chemicals are procured from the Riverside areas of Jalangi and from local markets of Krishnanagar. However the paints and colours procured from the local market are not of international standards as opined by the artists The artisans do not have sufficient space for storage and those who have place them carelessly in open area or scattered together. Due to the effect of temperature, and mixture of polluting elements like plastic etc, the raw especially clay often gets contaminated with the external impurities which come with air, water, dust etc. Because of the inconsistency in raw material, the outcome also gets affected. The activities largely depend for designing of an alternate drying or hot chamber which will be helpful during these seasons. There is also a gradual degradation of the quality of painting. The painters are paid on piece basis. So to earn more income within a short time the intention of the workers is to complete maximum number of pieces in a day compromising the quality of the art-work done. Because of low quality in painting the demand for the products is also declining steadily.. The artisans usually depend on exporters and clients for new subjects and designs.

Presently, many of the clay doll artists are getting attracted towards other materials like glass fibre which is causing a threat for sustaining the age old Ghurni clay doll profession in Krishnanagar town. Majority of the young people in the clay modelling families are inclined for different types of services or other business to earn assured income at the end of the month. The number of master craftsmen is decreasing as members of the younger generation are switching over to more lucrative trades or more paying professions.. A few of the artisans who can invest money are getting engaged in stone sculpture, fiberglass models since fiberglass is more durable and easy to mould. The infrastructure for making fibre glass models is however not at all developed within the town.

Dependency on mediators for marketing the products is another major concern for the artists since there is very little scope of these workers for marketing their products directly and to export abroad. The profit margins earned by these artists are therefore going down steadily. Furthermore, the illiteracy and unawareness of the artists in availing the existing Government Policies in favour of the industry is another major drawback associated with this job.

VI.VI. STRENGTHS OF THE INDUSTRY IDENTIFIED

Inspite of all these issues, there is still today a huge demand of Hindu God's figurines and idols such as Radha –Krishna, Durga, Kali and Shiva, Great men statues like Netaji, Ghandhiji, Indira Gandhi, Vivekananda from this locality and the products are transported to different states of India especially during festivals. As per the article contributed by Sengupta A., (2020) available at website [http : painindustrialdesign.wordpress.com/2021/01/18/clay-models-of-ghurni-krishnanagar-west-bengal-india](http://painindustrialdesign.wordpress.com/2021/01/18/clay-models-of-ghurni-krishnanagar-west-bengal-india) -. the concepts and the quality of the Krishnanagar handicrafts are very well fabricated. The clay dolls play a major role in the livelihood of the residents of the artists at Ghurni as they live by the very art they create.. The artists have won the global recognition, as they had exhibited their works in London, Paris, and Boston.. The exquisite craftsmanship of these artisans have earned them rewards from the British royalty like Queen Victoria as well as other important people of the British Raj and Catholic Popes in recent times. The major strength of the industry lies in low cost of investment required for infrastructural development and availability of raw materials from the local sights. The art is a symbol of Craft heritage which is to be sustained at any cost.

VII. SOME FEASIBLE MEASURES TO MEET THE CRISIS

To revive the glory of this age old heritage and unique art of the locality and for the overall improvements of the economic and health conditions of the artists engaged with this profession the local administration has to come up with some feasible strategies. This may include

- the granting of easy loans in small groups to the artists to meet the daily expenses in their jobs
- health insurance to all workers at easy terms,
- removal of intermediaries for marketing the products and provisions of direct marketing by the artists to earn the maximum profit, to improve the transportation facilities
- to arrange vocational training to the youth for clay idol making by involving experts and experienced artists of this profession . Vocational training to the youths will enable new employment opportunities in the town
- allocate some space for storage of raw materials for the artists in the Ghurni locality.
- Co-operative marketing system should be encouraged by the Government to avoid bad competition in makers.
- Research and testing laboratory is also needed for quality control and to improve the process of burning to avoid breakage etc.
- Cheap and modern packaging system is also essential for this industry to avoid breakage of goods in transit.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present study on the economic and health status of clay modelling workers of Ghurni locality in Krishnanagar Town of Nadia District in West Bengal indicates that the artists are facing different challenges and crisis to continue with their

profession and to sustain the glory of this art form. The art form is in the decaying stage at present because of the rise of different associated problems with this industry in the last two decades. The stiff competition with other products like Glass Fibre materials has posed a major threat to the industry and the profit margins for the workers have gone down steadily. The economic condition of the artists have declined and so the young generations are no more inclined to continue with this family profession in their future. The workers are also getting increasingly affected by such health problems like acidity, breathing troubles, eye irritation etc. because of their long duration works with the chemicals and paints. So, to earn assured income majority of the clay Modelling industry workers are relying on other jobs like business, construction works, teaching, driving etc. besides this family tradition of clay doll making. To resolve the issues associated with the clay modelling industry the local administration has definitely a major role to play involving the local artists in designing the policies. If the Government policies get implemented in the locality successfully, the industry will surely become remunerative again and the glory of the unique art form of clay doll making will be revived.

REFERENCES

1. Chatterjee, S (1985): Mritshilpa O Samaj, Published by Mritshilpi Samiti.
2. District Census Handbook, Series 26, Part xii A, Villages and Town wise primary census abstract, Nadia District, Directorate of Census Operation, West Bengal (2011).
3. District Statistical Hand Book, Nadia, Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Government West Bengal (2008).
4. Garrett J.H.E : District Gazetteer of Nadia (1910), Reprint by Govt. of West Bengal, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, Reprint (2001).
5. Krishnanagar Municipality Report and Data; Krishnanagar Municipality, Krishnanagar , Nadia, West Bengal (2011).
6. Das, U (2018) . Journal paper *An Overview of Traditional Handicraft Industries of Krishnanagar Clay Doll, District-Nadia, West Bengal*. Published in International Journal of Research in Social Sciences Vol. 8 Issue 9, September 2018, ISSN: 2249-2496
7. Sengupta A., (2020). Article on *Clay models of Ghurni, Krishnanagar, West Bengal, India*. Available at website <https://spainindustrialdesign.wordpress.com/2021/01/18/clay-models-of-ghurni-krishnanagar-west-bengal-india/>