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Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal



Department of MSME&T
Government of West Bengal



Clay Doll

Play With Clay



Clay can be dirt in the wrong hands, but clay can be art in the right hands

Lupita Nyong'o

Academy Award Winner Kenyan – Mexican Actress

Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal



West Bengal is a treasure trove of natural and cultural heritage. The intangible cultural heritage of Bengal is an exemplary instance of the aesthetic lineage of Bengal. Utilitarian lifestyle items like basketry made with date palm leaves and Sabai grass, hand spun and hand woven jute rugs (Dhokra), mats made with cane slips (Sitalpati) or Madurkathi (Madur), pottery, Kantha-spreads, decorative and ritualistic items made out of Shola and others, reflect a curious fusion of indigenous craftsmanship and utility. Bengal's art and craft reflect cultural history, ethnic roots, and lifestyle in-tune with nature. Variety of masks, Dokra and metal work, range of indigenous weaves and embroideries, dolls, masks and figurines curved out of wood are examples of Bengal's artistry. Culture of Bengal is enriched by the mellifluous tunes of the Baul, Bhawaiya, Bhatiyali singers, rapturous dances of Chau, Raibenshe and Jhumur, storytelling traditions like puppetry and Patachitra, and folk theatres like Gambhira, Banbibir Pala among other folk forms.

The Rural Craft and Cultural Hub (RCCH) Project is an initiative of the Department of Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T) and UNESCO aiming to rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage of West Bengal and strengthen rural creative enterprise. The journey started in 2013 and the RCCH project currently covers 50,000 handicraft and folk artists across the state. It has strengthened the ecosystem supporting the transmission of traditional skills in art and craft, fostered direct market linkage, engaged youth in pursuing their traditions, and promoted cultural tourism to the villages of the artists. The project is indeed a testimonial to the contribution of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to sustainable development, social inclusion and also to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





The Craft

The brilliance of human imagination lies in its transformation of the mundane into magnificence. Being a river basin, West Bengal has a rich abundance of clay, which has been used as a raw material for a wonderful tradition of doll making in Ghurni. From realistic and naturalistic to symbolic, the clay dolls of Ghurni are recognised worldwide. These dolls are unique in their style and in the quality of their finish. The craft persons shape the humble clay into miniature figures. The perfect detailing of form, feature and stance, the meticulous realism of the clothes to the last fold and tuck, and the marvellous expressions make each Krishnanagar doll a collector's item. From dainty human figures to large ones, from animals to motifs of religious rituals, these art pieces bear the signature of inherent artistic skills as the artists are traditionally practicing the art form since generations without any formal training. These beautiful, lively clay structures are adorned with vibrant colours.

Though the art of doll making has always been an integral part of Bengal's culture, it gained momentum under the patronage of Maharaja Krishnachandra of Krishnanagar, who was a patron of the art, literature and music. In 1728, he brought families of potters from Dhaka, now in Bangladesh and Natore in West Bengal and settled them in Ghurni.

The clay dolls of Krishnanagar gained immense popularity with the advent of the British, who patronised this art and took them to various exhibitions making it a popular art form. The exquisite craftsmanship of these artisans have earned them laurels and accolades from the British royalty like Queen Victoria as well as other important people of the British Raj. The first of the rewarded artist was Sri Ram Paul (1819-1885).

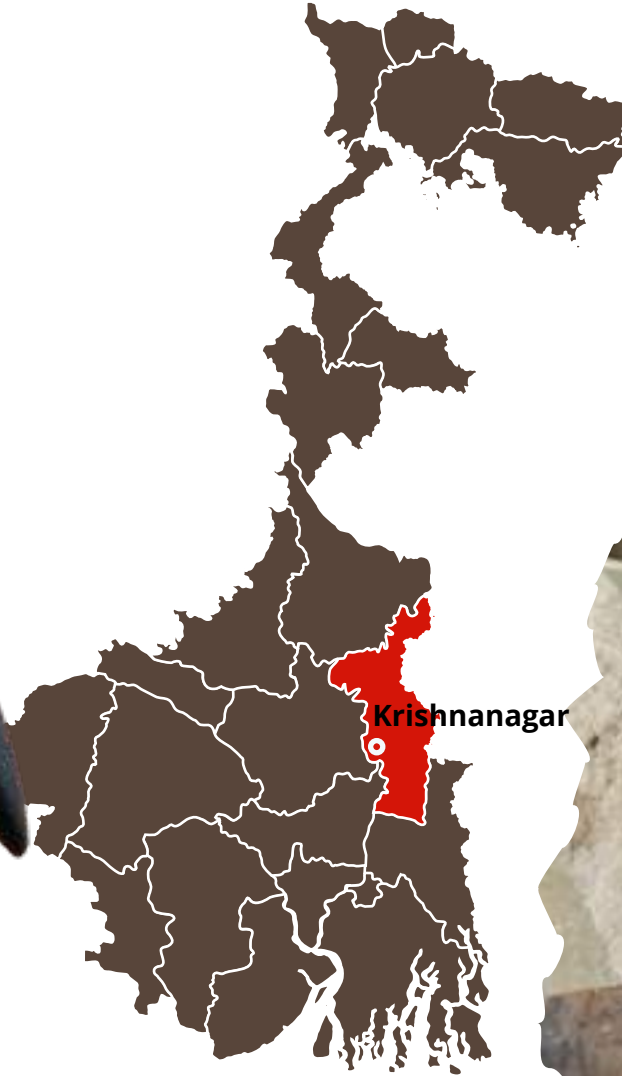


Craft Hub

District: Nadia



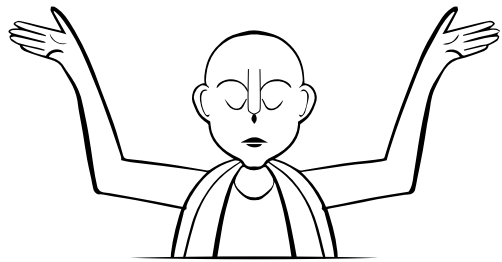
Krishnanagar



Krishnanagar

Ghurni in Krishnanagar, Nadia, is the hub of Clay doll makers. There are around 500 artists deft in this age old tradition, giving shape to the clay that turns out into a delectable work of art. There are 309 artists in the Rural Craft and Cultural Hub project.

Many artists of the region have travelled abroad and worked as sculptors, in temples, mosques, monuments, etc. Master sculptor Late Kartick Chandra Pal's sculpture, has found places of honour in many parts of the world. Narottam Pal, Pranab Biswas, Rana Mallick are eminent artists of the area. Young artists like Simanta Pal, Monoranjan Das, Satyajit Adhikari have also excelled in the craft.



Krishnanagar Artist
Men - 210 | Women - 99

- Rana Mallick : 7908938015
- Manoranjan Das : 7908038190
- Satyajit Pal : 7364927800
- Simanta Pal : 9614224173
- Debu Pal : 9064163721
- Sankar Adhikari : 9126494214
- Pranab Biswas : 9474483055





Process

The traditional clay dolls undergo many interim processes before taking final shape. As a first step, the craftspersons prepare the clay and process it as desired and dumps it for at least one night to make it ready for the mould. Next important step is drying the models. Dolls are usually kept in the open to be dried under sunlight. Sometimes, a hand blower is also used for the same. Once the clay dolls are fully dried, they are placed in a furnace for 4 to 5 hours at 500 degrees centigrade.

The doll is then earnestly painted with vibrant colours. The most vital thing is giving the eyes

and facial expressions of the dolls. Unique colouring pattern of Krishnanagar clay dolls deserves much appreciation in the world of dolls. After that, kerosene is added to the burnish which increases the brightness. The special technique used by the craftspersons has resulted them in achieving fame and awards on state, national and international levels.





Doll makers prepare the clay and process it and dumps it for at least one night to make it ready for the mould.



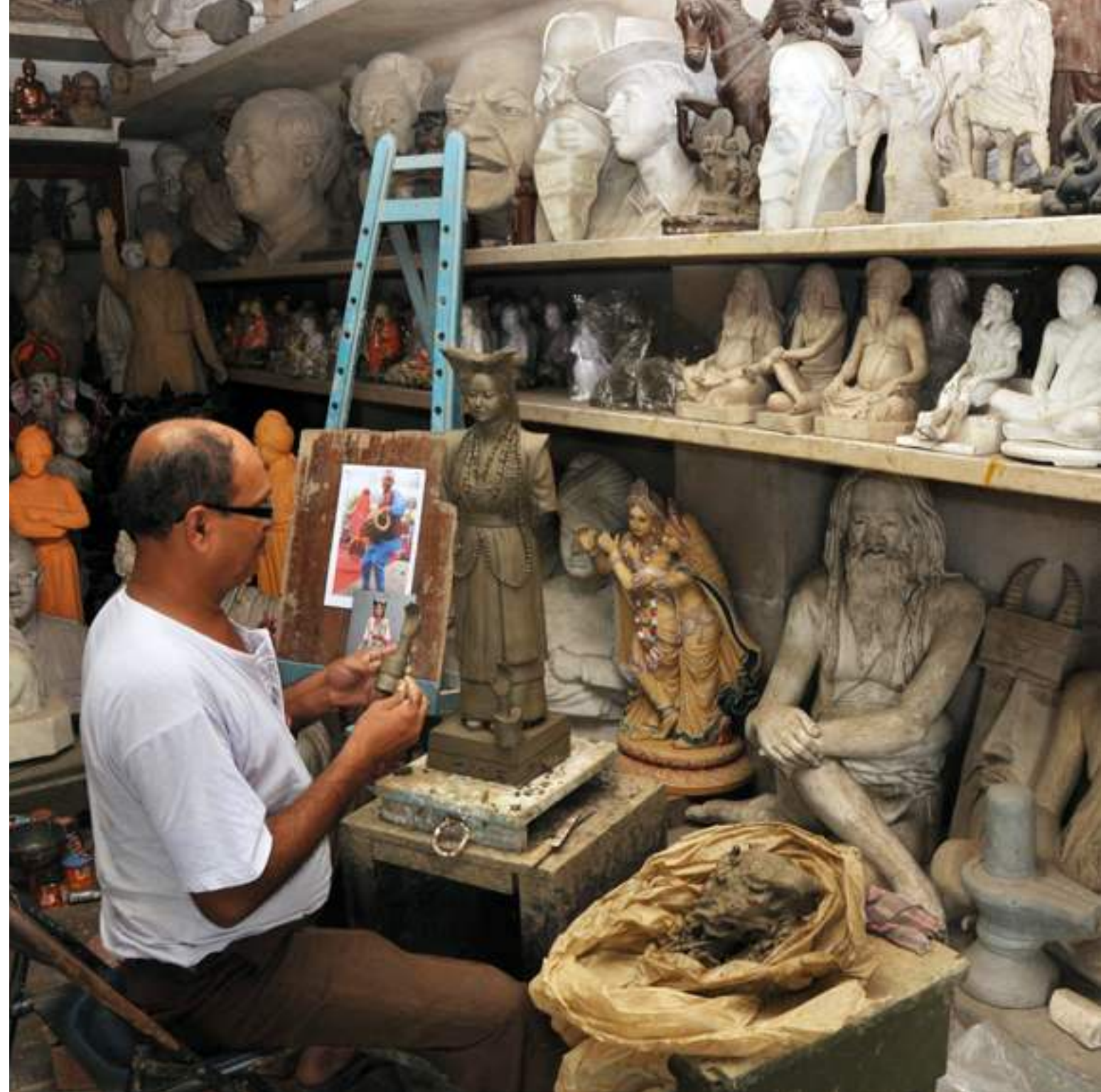
Moulding and drying the figures.



Dried models are put in the furnace. Models are kept for 4-5 hours at 500 degree centigrade.



Then the dolls are painted.





Products

Putuls, as the Bengalis fondly call their clay dolls, are replications of the thoughts of the doll makers. They make life like models of eminent personalities. These dolls are famed for their realistic depiction of everyday village life – fishing, farming, rag picking, basket making, cooking, cleaning and worshipping, among others – and subjects like fruits, vegetables, birds and animals.

The artists are also famous in making idols of deities. These idols are in high demand during festivals across West Bengal. Idols also travel to other parts of India and also to international countries.





Diversified clay dolls



Various dolls





Idol

Clay figures of Gods and Goddess







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