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Manuscript ID:
IJWGAFES-2025-021203

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18254594

DOI Link:
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18254594>

Volume: 2

Issue: 12

December

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 3066-1552

Submitted: 06 Nov.2025

Revised: 11 Nov.2025

Accepted: 04 Dec 2025

Published: 31 Dec. 2025

Assistant Professor, Department of
Geography,
Panchmura Mahavidyalaya, Bankura
Email: atanusenvugeo2@gmail.com

Address for correspondence:
Atanu Sen
Assistant Professor,
Department of Geography,
Panchmura Mahavidyalaya, Bankura
Email: atanusenvugeo2@gmail.com

How to cite this article:
Sen, A. (2025). The Quality of Living Standards among Women Artisans at Post Lock-Down Scenario: A Case Study of Women Terracotta Artisans at Panchmura Village, Bankura, West Bengal. *International Journal of World Geology, Geography, Agriculture, Forestry and Environment Sciences*, 2(12), 12–18.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18254594>

The Quality of Living Standards among Women Artisans at Post Lock-Down Scenario: A Case Study of Women Terracotta Artisans at Panchmura Village, Bankura, West Bengal

Atanu Sen

Abstract

Panchmura is the heart of Bengal Terracotta craft. It comes under Taldangra block of Khatra subdivision of Bankura district. It is located around 22 km away from temple town Bishnupur. Its locational extent is 22°96' N and 87°16' E and average elevation is 68 mt. As per latest census (2011) the total population of village Panchmura was 3719 among which the male and female population was 1854 and 1865 respectively. The Population below 6 years was 425. The literacy rate was 76.65%. The Kumbhakar artisans are produced the unique Terracotta art. The Term Terracotta indicates red baked pottery items. The local clay soil is used to prepare the earthen articles in red and black colour. The term Terracotta originates from Latin word 'Terra' and 'Cotta' which means baked red earthen agents. The long neck earthen horse adorns of home interior and bears symbolic value of Terracotta. The long neck Terracotta horse and earthen elephants are manufactured in this village. The fan shaped earthen Manasa Chali is another popular religious article which symbolizes the regional goddess Manasa Devi. The locally available red Terracotta clay is used for making pottery items. Various earthen tiles, cup, plate, utensils and other decorative articles are manufactured with wide range of colour & design. Terracotta articles were used to decorate the sculpture of the temples made during Malla dynasty. The Kumbhakar artisans usually produce Terracotta articles by mouldings dry and burnt clay since its inception that symbolizes the local culture. This article tries to focus about the socio-economic profile of women artisans at Panchmura village after COVID Pandemic situation. The major problems are also identified along with some suggestive measures also recommended for the artisan community in this study.

Keywords: Panchmura, Kumbhakar, Terracotta, Pottery, Long neck horse, earthen elephants, Manasa Chali, Malla dynasty

Introduction

A socio-economic survey is regarded as one of the most important sources of statistical data on income and household expenditure as well as other data on the status of housing, individual and household characteristics and living conditions. Socio-economic survey tools are designed to collect data regarding improving understanding of local resource management systems, resource use and the relative importance of resources for household of selected study area village. Surveys also provide information on interaction with the government decision-making systems and community perceptions of trends and priority issues. Knowledge about community-based institutions, which is also obtained and their roles in the sustainable use and conservation of natural resources, helps to facilitate or reinforce welfare schemes for the region, in present and future.

Location of the study area:

West Bengal is one of the pivotal states for production of unique pottery and Terracotta crafts among India. This Terracotta craft is not a new craft rather it has a significant historical background. From various archeological evidences it has found that such crafts were prevalent in the era of Indus valley civilization. The tourists mostly visited Panchmura to buy the Terracotta crafts for its creative and decorative value. It is located in Taldangra block under Khatra subdivision of Bankura District. Panchmura is located between 22°58'00"N 22°66'67"N and 87°10'00"E 87°16'67"E. The average elevation is 68m from mean sea level. The total village population of the study area village is 719 (as per 2011 population census data), among which maximum population is engaged in Terracotta craft making. The long neck Terracotta horses are the symbolic representation of this region. This long neck evokes the royalty of the Malla kingdom in Bishnupur. It not only possesses its religious or spiritual value but it adorns the guest houses, verandas of luxurious hotels for its decorative appeals (Sen, 2024). The Kumbhakar potters belong from OBC-B category and most of them belongs from BPL section (Ghosh, 2014).

The significance of Terracotta at Panchmura village:

Around 300 artisans are engaged in Terracotta practice at Panchmura village. The craft is famous for its elegance and royalty, specially the long neck horses and elephants, manasha chali, idols of god and goddesses, Sankha (Sakh), Tiles and decorative items (Halder and Bhattacharyya, 2021). Terracotta represents baked clay. The artisans often coloured their end products with baked clay and burn it through fire in a kiln with the help of forest fuel collected locally (Satpathi, 2011). It was believed that this Terracotta pottery was beganat Malla dynasty (end of 7th century AD) (Gangopadhyay and Sen, 2019). Later on the artisans started to project this craftwork in the wall of temples in Bishnupur, known as Mandir Nagri (Temple town) of Bankura (Bhattacharjee, 2021). There is an artisan's guild named *Panchmura Mritshilpi Samabay Samity*, situated at Panchmura providing assistance regarding betterment in production and development of this craft work. Each year during the month of November to December, a three to five day long Terracotta craft fair is organized which attracts tourists from various corner of the state as well as abroad. Panchmura is well connected by road transportation. The nearest railway station is Bankura and Bishnupur. From both towns frequent bus services are available to reach Panchmura.

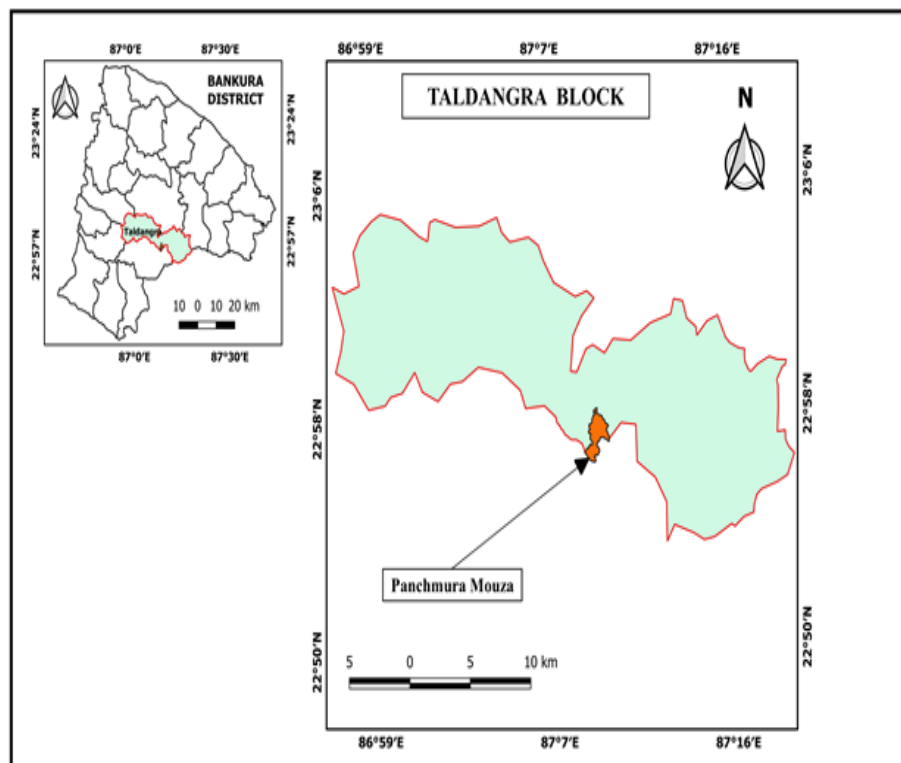


Fig-1: Location map of Panchmura village

Literature review:

Shaw (2011) prepares a brief documentation on typical Terracotta horse manufactured in Panchmura village. The brief narration on production techniques and variety of craft items are found in his article. Sarvamangala (2012) in his article briefly examines major problem and prospects of village based cottage and craft sectors in India. Ghosh (2012) in his book briefly elaborate the cultural significance of Bengal potteries. Hazra and Barman (2017) in their article focuses the historical value and cultural significance of earthen doll of Krishnanagar, West Bengal. Mukherjee (2023) in his article focuses on evolution and development of Terracotta sculpture from Harappa civilization to Chandraketugarh.

The unique process of Terracotta production:

1. Preparation of the materials.
2. Wheel work.
3. Drying.
4. Hand work.
5. Detailed motif work.
6. Final drying.
7. Colouring.
8. Firing.
9. Testing and sorting.



Fig-2: Terracotta horse and artifacts



Fig-3: The famous Manasha Chali

Objective of the study:

1. To find out present socio and economic profile of women artisans of Panchmura village.
2. To find out major problems and some suggestive measures for this study region.

Methodology:

The present study is based on field-based survey design in the selected craft village Panchmura of Bankura district. The female artisans are taken under interview schedule through purposive sampling method. It is an intensive study on the socio-economic status of women Kumbhakar artisans at post lock down phase. As the Terracotta pottery have its significant role in rural development through employment creation and earning revenue. Both the primary and secondary, data's are collected for this study. The primary data have been collected through questioner survey and focus group interview method. The secondary database is taken from various books, journals and census data. The major identical problems and their possible measures also discussed. A structured questioner is prepared for field study. A total number of 50 female artisans are selected for this study.

Results and Analysis:

Table: 1 Demographic profile of selected women artisans of Panchmura (N-50)

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
0-14	2	4
15-29	25	50
30-59	20	40
>60	3	6
Family types		
Nuclear	3	6
Joint	47	94
Literacy Status		
Illiterate	8	16
Primary School	25	50
High School	12	24
College and Professional	5	10
Marital status		
Married	39	78
Unmarried	10	20
Widow	1	2
Age at marriage		
> 15	8	16
15-25	22	44
25-35	8	16
35-45	1	2
>45	0	0

The productive age group (20-40) is the dominant among women artisans at Panchmura village. Mostly they live in joint family. Most of them possesses basic literacy. In rural system they are mostly married and lives with their in-laws.

Table: 2 Socio-Economic status of selected women artisans of Panchmura (N-50)

Reason for craftsmanship	Frequency	Percentage
Traditional practice	12	24
Employment source	32	64
To combat Poverty	6	12
Daily income (in Rs.)		
> 50	5	10
50-100	16	32
100-200	20	40
< 200	9	18
Work starts at		
4-5 am	3	6
5-6 am	28	56
6-8 am	14	28
8-10 am	5	10
Work ends at		
4-5 pm	7	14
5-6 pm	33	66
6-8 pm	10	20
Daily work duration		
> 6 hours	4	8
6-8 hours	10	20
8-10 hours	22	44
< 10 hours	14	28

The Terracotta practice is taken due to earning livelihood. A few women artisans joined the craft practice to sustain family heritage and traditions. Each women artisan earns three to four thousand rupees per month. In average they have been working for eight to ten hours in a day.

Table: 3 Status related with Infrastructural set-up of selected women artisans of Panchmura (N-50)

Types of houses	Frequency	Percentage
Kuchha	3	6
Pukka	35	70
Semi-Pukka	12	24
Frequently used consumerable goods		
Music system	3	6
Television	34	68
Mobile phone and internet	7	14
Refrigerator	10	20
Scotty	1	2
Computer	1	2
Sources of drinking water		
Tube-well (Hand pump)	4	8
Deep Tube well	40	80
Tap	2	4
Pond	4	8
Nature of Toilet		
Pit latrine	8	16
Latrine attached with home	42	84

Due to rational implementation for *House for all* project the women artisans mostly live in Pukka (concreted house). Most of them love to spend leisure time by watching televisions. Recently smart phones occupy that place. The major source of drinking water is deep tube well. Recently usage of home attached toilets is increased at Panchmura which shows a positive sign in health domain.

Table: 4 Nature of Problems of selected women artisans of Panchmura (N-50)

Major physical illness faced by the artisans	Frequency	Percentage
Headache	3	6
Respiratory diseases	4	8
Eye problem	12	24
Coughing	7	14
Asthma	2	4
TB	2	4
Chest pain	5	10
Joint pain	22	44
Back pain	29	58
Leg pain	12	24
Major social problem faced by the artisans		
Inflation of raw materials	2	4
Lack of mechanization and electrification	5	10
Physical weakness	2	4
Tiresome work in respect of income	43	86
Lack of modern marketing skills	47	94
The impact of COVID-19 on craft production		
Crisis of raw materials	2	4
Sharp decrease in order	7	14
Low tourists arrival rate	14	28
Input cost increased	27	54
Lack of transport facilities and high transport cost	15	30
Lack of skilled artisans	4	8
Source of loan received by the women artisans		
Govt. Banks	2	4
Private Banks	3	6
Rural and Co-operative banks	40	80
Neighbours and relatives	5	10
Status of loan received by the artisans		
Received in a very easy way	12	24
Received but the process is not smooth enough	33	66
Not yet received after taking effort	5	10

Due to prolonged sitting in one place continuously, the women artisan has faces back pain and shoulder pain issue. Due to loss of calcium, they have been suffering from osteoporosis and arthritis issues. The income generated by the women artisans is very scanty. The input cost is increased in terms of price of Terracotta items after pandemic situation, which may rise financial issues for the artisans. The Bandhan group and local cooperatives are the major source of receiving artisans' loan and financial support. Thus women artisan plays a crucial role for upliftment of Terracotta sector in Panchmura village (Yadav et al, 2022).

Major problems faced by the women artisans at Panchmura village:

- Lack of capital:** Mostly the lack of working capital of women artisans becomes a major problem to sustain the craft practice. Due to poor investment the earning level of artisans remain poor. Thus majority of the craft units are remains in the clutches of vicious cycle of poverty.
- Paucity in investment for fixed assets:** Due to poor capital assistance owners cannot buy essential equipments which restrict their production volume.
- Low returns in respect of investment:** As market is volatile hence it leads to low income level.
- Lack of credit facility:** Sometimes the traders lend money from artisans in form of advance payment. When the end products are delivered to the dealers such advance amounts are adjusted against the payment due for the artisans. Such financial gap exploits women artisans in craft business.
- Transportation issue:** the transportation cost specially in rainy season arrives at its peak. Hence it could be troublesome for the artisans to manage the entire things.
- Poor marketing strategies:** In some cases presence of middleman, deprives women artisans to get their actual profit which they deserves. Poor and traditional marketing creates hindrances for them.
- Lack of training:** A few formal training is organized for women artisans WHICH IS inadequate for enrichment of women artisans.

8. **Poor living standards:** In majority poverty, insufficient accommodation in terms of living and working place creates major hindrances for women artisans at Panchmura village.
9. **Lack of medical assistance:** The women artisans are not well aware about their health. Due to poor concern they often attack by various illnesses. But they have not received proper care and attention in family due to tremendous work pressure.

Some suggestive measures for the women artisans:

1. **Modernization in techniques and methods:** The traditional methods and techniques are usually follows for Terracotta production. Although some technological innovation regarding raw material assembles, usage of electric furnace for burning and drying potteries may enrich the production system and save times.
2. **Product diversity:** Besides traditional long neck horses, artisans must focus on customize articles like decorative tiles, utensils, dolls, domestic usage products, which may enhance the utility and market potentiality.
3. **Welfare schemes:** The local authority may implement various schemes and projects which may lead their future security. Like health insurance, artisans credit card etc.
4. **Rational policy framework:** The overall policy formulation and implementation regarding research activities and marketing policies are very crucial for achieving holistic goals for the women Kumbhakar artisans' community.

Conclusion:

The policies listed above are not all-inclusive. In actuality, these regulations may alter as the climate, time, and particular artisan community do. It goes without saying that highly effective and dedicated artisans are required for the rational implementations of policies and with potential strategies. The entire programme for the development may need to be marshaled through a particular governmental entity tasked with the mission of developing the Terracotta sector. Such holistic approaches may enhance the quality of living of the women artisans at Panchmura village.

Acknowledgment

The author sincerely acknowledges the cooperation and support of the women terracotta artisans of Panchmura village, Bankura district, West Bengal, whose valuable time, experiences, and responses formed the foundation of this study.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Fig 4: Women artisan creating Terracotta sculpture at Panchmura village