

CREATIVITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE FEMALE ARTISANS OF KUMARTULI, KOLKATA

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Abstract

The Kumartuli area of Kolkata is a fine manifestation and hub of creative economic activities involving the heritage activity of idol making over the years. The female artisans of Kumartuli are engaged in idol-making activities along with the male artisans is an important facet of women empowerment and gender equality in economic participation. Therefore, creativity has ensured the inclusive participation of women in idol-making activities. A SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) analysis clearly reflects the importance of the geographic location of Kumartuli as a whole in the state capital city of Kolkata. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected the livelihood mechanisms of female artisans. A comparison of the pre-COVID-19 annual turnovers with the post-COVID-19 ones clearly foregrounds the above fact. The case studies also reveal the onerous effect of the pandemic on the life of the female artisans. The creative activity of idol making has shown gradual improvement in 2022. However more sustainable, inclusive policies must be undertaken by the government to ensure an all-around inclusive growth keeping in mind the promises made by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Millennium Development Goals in the long run.

Keywords: Creativity, idol making, COVID-19, female artisans, women empowerment.

1. Introduction

The empowerment of women is consistent with economic development where growth and development play a significant role in reducing the inequality between men and women on one hand whereas on the other hand empowering women promotes overall development and growth (Duflo, 2012). Pandit Nehru once said: “If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered”. Empowerment as a process strengthens the ability by acquiring knowledge, experience, and power (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996). Women empowerment can be defined as the process by which women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliability, acquire the independent right to make choices, and control the resources to remove their own subordination (Keller and Mbewe, 1991). The global empowerment of women as a concept started to develop in the second half of the twentieth century, mainly in the 1960s (Mandal, 2013). The word empowerment means to empower or to give power to someone. According to Sahay (1998), ‘Empowerment’ is a multidimensional and active process that enables women to realize their potential, identity, and powers in all spheres of life. Chattopadhyay (2005) has reflected empowerment as multidimensional referring to the freedom of action and choice in all spheres of life (political, social, and

economic) to shape the life of an individual or individuals. As per World Bank, the word empowerment is defined as the increment in the capacity of individuals in making productive choices and transforming them into the desired outcomes. Vital to this process are actions and activities that help in the making of individual and collective assets inclusive of the efficiency and efficacy, and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which governs the use of these assets (Chattopadhyay, 2005, p. 27).

The land of Kumartuli represents a holy assemblage of creativity with economic sustenance over the years where the women artisans or the women karigars play an important role in the production of idols and other artifacts representing an important aspect of women entrepreneurship, especially in the modern-day competitive world. As per MacKinnon (1970) and Mooney (1963), the creativity which defines human existence has got four important facets: 1) the creative process, 2) the creative product, 3) the creative situation and 4) the creative person. Lubart (1994), has defined creativity as the capacity to produce a work that is both appropriate and novel. Creativity has got two important phases: one is generative and the other is an exploratory process (Kaufman and Sternberg, 2007). According to Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), creative ideas and creativity have three important components: ideas of high quality, ideas that are innovative and the creative ideas must be appropriate to the task at hand. It is worth noting that the female artisans of Kumartuli possess all the above-mentioned facets of creativity. The female artisans include idol makers, clay doll makers decoration artisans, and sculpturists. These artisans work alongside their male counterparts.

The female artisans of Kumartuli belong to the unorganized sector or the informal sector. It is worth noting that the earnings of women who work in the informal sector are generally low, especially in a developing country like India (Mehra, 1997). The earnings of the female artisans are less compared to the male counterparts in Kumartuli. As per the National Commission for Enterprises, the unorganized sector comprises an overwhelming 93% of the total workforce of India which is approximately 290 million working population out of 317 million. As per the reports of 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". According to Kabra (2003), the workers belonging to the unorganized sector do not have employment security, work security, and social security. Despite a significant share of the unorganized sector in the Indian economy, it is relatively a neglected sector in the domain of public policy support and academic discourse. In most aspects, informalization is a double-edged sword where the workers or the artisans, or the labours lack the legal entitlements of employment security on one hand and entitlements to fair wages on the other (RoyChowdhury, 2005). The female artisans of Kumartuli are unorganized in nature and possess all the characteristics of the typical informal sectors in a developing country like India.

2. Significance of the Study

While discussing about the creative aspects of the unorganized sector in the context of Kumartuli, most of the existing literature has focused on the processes of idol-making and its relevance in the context of puja celebrations among the Bengali population, tradition, and culture. Works of literature are scanty and are almost non-existent in the domain of women

empowerment in the unorganized sector. The present study is devoted to unfurl this aspect in the context of the ghastly effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the pandemic has affected the life and livelihood mechanisms of the female artisans of Kumartuli. It is worth mentioning here that, strong, sustainable policies must be adopted by the government to ensure sustainable and inclusive development in the long run, protecting the female artisans from future pandemics and their shocks and promoting gender equity and equality in the long run. The structure of the present study is followed by the aims and objectives, description of the study area, description of materials and methods, analysis of the present findings followed by discussion and finally ending with a conclusion.

3. Objectives

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To examine the role of female artisans in the promotion of woman empowerment and employment generation.
- To examine the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life and livelihood mechanisms of the female artisans.

4. Study area

The study area of the present investigation includes the Kumartuli area of Kolkata city. The proud history of Kumartuli dates back to the 17th century when the potters or the kumbhakars mainly from Shantipur, Krishnanagar, and other parts of Nadia District migrated to the erstwhile Gobindapore village along the banks of river Hooghly; settled there to make a living by producing toys, earthen pots and essential household utensils made of clay. Later, when the British East India Company acquired the land, the potters moved further north and settled in the Sutanuti area. Later, this area came to be known as “the land of potters” or Kumartuli. Gradually, the area became more vibrant with artisans who made idols of various gods and goddesses alongside items of daily use. At present, these artisans supply idols, sculptors, and decoration artifacts to the other states of India and abroad. The Kumartuli area of Kolkata comes under Ward number 9 of Kolkata. The Kumartuli area represents a perfect juxtaposition of the male and female artisans who produce variegated artifacts of clay mainly idols over the years. The female artisans have their workshops side by side with the male artisans. One of the important strengths of the place Kumartuli is, that it lies in the proximity of both Howrah and Sealdah rail stations which is well connected with the rest of the parts of India. And that it lies in close proximity to the Kolkata Airport. Therefore the place as a whole has good mobility facilitating the artisans in transporting their finished products to customers from far and wide places over the years.

5. Materials and methods

The information necessary for the present study has been collected from a sample size of 50 women artisans by questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion, participatory rural appraisal, and in-depth interview methods. To reveal the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life and livelihood mechanisms, a box plot analysis has been made over the annual turnovers of the female artisans for the years 2018 and 2019 (pre-COVID-19 phase) and 2020, 2021, and 2022 (post-COVID-19 phase). Case study analyses have been made to focus on the aspects of creativity, livelihood, and women empowerment at the individual levels. Moreover, a separate

SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat) analysis has also been made to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of Kumartuli as a place and to reflect upon its role in the sustenance of the female artisans over the years.

6. Analysis

6.1. The SWOT Analysis

For comprehending the geographic potential of Kumartuli as a hub of creativity and business in idol making a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) analysis has been performed by the present study.

SWOT Analysis of Kumartuli	
Strength	Kumartuli is situated in a geographically advantageous position in the heart of North Kolkata, Ward No. 9. The place is well connected with the rest of India by two major rail stations Howrah and Sealdah. Furthermore, it lies in close proximity to the Kolkata Airport. The place is also well connected by Kolkata Metro Railway. Therefore, the place of Kumartuli offers excellent connectivity and facilitates mobility for both domestic and foreign customers. The place lies close to the Burrabazar area, from which the decoration artisans purchase their raw materials and are essential for the ultimate finishing of the idols. Moreover, the Kumartuli area is a distribution market of idols, decoration artifacts, and sculptures. Kolkata being the capital city attracts tourists from far and wide places. The place is well connected by bus and autos.
Weakness	The place of Kumartuli suffers from the dearth of space. The area is very much congested for the idol makers who work day in and day out here. There are no proper storage facilities for the idol makers, decoration artisans, and sculptors. The narrow lanes of Kumartuli become very congested during the puja occasions. There hardly remains a place for walking. The artisans of Kumartuli work under very dingy conditions. The artisans work, eat and sleep in their own studios which are very congested and unhealthy.
Opportunity	Kumartuli is a market distribution center of idols, decoration artifacts, and sculptures. As Kolkata is the capital city of the state, it attracts tourists from far and wide places. The raw materials used by the idol makers like mud, straws, ropes, and so on come from Uluberia, Nadia, and Diamond Harbour areas. These are transported by lorries and vans. The raw materials of the decoration artisans come from Krishnanagar, Katwa, and from outside states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, and so on. These raw materials are purchased directly from the Burrabazar area of Kolkata situated near Kumartuli.
Threat	Owing to the dearth of proper space, there is severe competition among the artisans for production in the light of the political dynamics of the area

concerned. Due to congestions, fire breakouts due to short circuits, and accidents cause huge damage to the idol makers and the decoration artisans. Owing to high congestion, the shops and studios catch fire easily and instantly. The occurrences of rain, floods, and cyclones greatly affect the idol makers and decoration artisans due to the lack of proper storage facilities. Owing to the congestion, the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly among the artisans in 2020 and 2021. Therefore congestion poses a serious question about the security and sustainability of proper working conditions in the future.

Table 1: SWOT analysis of Kumartuli

6.2. Statistical analysis performed by Box Plot analysis

A box plot analysis has been performed over the annual turnovers of the 50 sample female artisans of Kumartuli to reveal their pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 annual turnovers. The analysis reveals that the effect of the pandemic has been severe in the lives of female artisans. This is evident from figure 1. The drastic condition and the crisis were severe in 2020 and 2021(the post-COVID-19 phase) compared with the pre-COVID-19 phase (2018 and 2019). The condition improved a lot in 2022 as reflected in the annual turnovers in lakh rupees from figure 1.

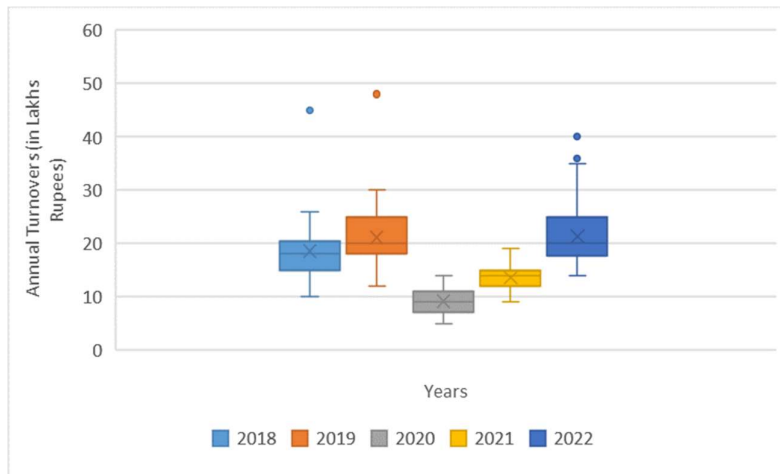


Figure 1: Box plot analysis of the annual turnover (in lakh rupees) in the pre and post-COVID-19 phase.

6.3. Case Study Analysis

6.3.1. Case Study of Mrs. Mala Pal

Mrs. Mala Pal is a renowned idol maker of Kumartuli. Miss Pal and her elder brother Mr. Vanu Pal are engaged in the making of various idols of Ganesh, Durga, Kali, Sawaswati, and many other gods and goddesses. Her workplace encompasses a fine blend of clay, straws, muds, and dice which are used for the making of idols. Mala Pal is the daughter of Kamakshya Pal who was the first women artisan of Kumartuli. Her mother used to make idols in the Krishnanagar and Shantipur cities of Nadia District. Her mother always encouraged Miss Pal and her elder brother to come to Kumartuli and settle there for better business and a better career. Her father

used to stay at Shantipur, Nadia. During her father's days, many artisans used to migrate to Kumartuli in search of better work. Her father used to make traditional or 'shabeki' Durga icons known as the Bangla shaj in those days. There are various types of background structures made by Miss Pal, they are 'kata chal', 'Moth chauli', 'Sarba sundori kathamo', ekchal, and so on. Miss Pal and her brother started to learn the idol-making activities from their very childhood days from their father and mother. After her father's untimely departure in 1985, the family situation deteriorated. Thus from her very childhood days, Miss Pal had taken up idol-making activities to supplement the family income.

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected the lives of Miss Pal and his entire family. There has been a substantial increment in the price of raw materials. In 2020, the demand for idols had fallen considerably. The orders of idols from clubs, committees, and households had all fallen in the same year owing to the fear of the pandemic. In 2020, the pandemic increased the overall cost of production. There was a considerable decrement in idol production, it decreased by more than half compared to what used to be before the onset of the pandemic. 'I have witnessed many bad situations like the Malaria, Japanese Influenza, but none can be compared with the COVID-19 pandemic', (says Mala Pal during the interview). The losses were beyond imagination, many customers withdrew their orders at the very last moment as they were skeptical regarding the occurrence of Durga Puja. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 created an absolute deadlock situation. 'It deeply affected the supply chain of raw materials, says Miss Pal. The price of ropes had increased from Rs 80 to Rs 140 per Kg, and the price of bamboo increased from Rs 180 to Rs 250, moreover, there were further increments in the prices of muds, straws, plaster of Paris, and so on. The customers had demanded short-height idols and low-cost idols amidst the pandemic situation. However, there was some recovery in the business of idol making from 2021 onwards but not much as compared to the pre-COVID-19 phase. In 2022, the business has improved significantly with considerable improvement in the orders for idols from the customers. The idols of Miss Pal go to the various places of West Bengal and outside West Bengal.

'There has been no assistance from the government amidst the COVID-19 pandemic', says Miss Pal. There has been some assistance received from the clubs, committees, High Court associations, and so on. The 47-year-old Miss Pal is trying her best to recover from the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic. She has recently opened an art school at her small workplace where she trains young children in the making of small artefacts made from clay. Besides this, she also teaches them the idol-making techniques which are the true heritage activities of Kumartuli. Moreover, she opines that the integration of the art colleges with the Kumartuli artisans can help in the transfer of both education and knowledge to the young generation and would play a vital role in keeping the young generation in the idol-making activities in the long run.

6.3.2. Case study of Mrs. Kakoli Pal

Miss Kakoli Pal is one of the most eminent and important personalities in the idol-making activity of Kumartuli. She is the emblem of women's empowerment and creativity and is renowned for the making of idols of Ganesh, Saraswati, Durga, Kali, Jagatddhatri and various other gods and goddesses. She started learning about idol making from her father at a very early age of 11 years. Unfortunately, her father died when she was 15 years old. Being helpless,

she started to hold the family by actively involving herself in the making of idols. Her parents came from North Bengal and settled in Kumartuli in the 1970s in search of better living. Miss Kaloli Pal is a renowned artisan in the making of big idols of Durga and Kali. The idols made by her reaches heights of 14 to 18 feet. There are about eight workers currently working in the workshop of Miss Pal. She currently takes an active role in the dissemination of idol-making knowledge to the younger karigars or artisans. With one child and three other family members, she plays the role of head of the family. Miss Pal is widely famous for the making of wonderful Art Bangla Durga idols giving a nice blend of shabeki patterns to the eyes of goddess Durga. The orders received by Miss Pal transcend the geographic boundaries of the state. However, the orders of idols from foreign countries have fallen since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 wreaked havoc on the life of Miss Kakoli Pal. The labour supply fell drastically during that period along with a sharp rise in the wage rates of the labours. The price of raw materials and the overall cost of production had increased by many times since the onset of the pandemic. During the pandemic times, Miss Pal resorted herself to social activities like disbursements of food, clothes and many other articles of necessities to the poor karigars or labours. She is also an active member of the Kumartuli Mrtishilpa Sanskrity Samity, helping the poor, and disabled labours continuously. The role of the government has been very disappointing during the times of the pandemic. The assistance from puja committees, clubs, organizations and other NGOs has been very limited during the pandemic period. The situation remained almost unchanged in 2021. The demand for idols from the customers had been very limited during the pandemic times. The customers demanded cheaper idols of low heights of six to eight feet height. Therefore the returns from produce had been very limited in 2020 and 2021. The pangs and vexations of the pandemic have been very eminent since she lost her brother due to the pandemic itself in 2020. The situation improved considerably in 2022. There has been a constant increase in the idol orders of very large sizes of 10 to 18 feet in height. The orders from foreign countries have become more consistent in 2022. Miss Pal has received orders of Durga Pratima or idol from countries like Spain, the UK, France, the US, Germany, South Africa and Australia besides having received orders from the other states of India itself. Miss Kakoli Pal is the only earning member of the family at present. She believes that the government has to come forward and take more proactive steps towards the development of the women and men artisans of Kumartuli. 'Schemes for the welfare of female artisans exclusively can help a lot, especially after the pandemic times. Moreover, the government must take steps towards the flexible disbursement of credit facilities to the artisans, especially after the pandemic', (says Miss Pal during the interview).



Figure 2: Female artisans of Kumartuli

7. Results and Discussion

7.1. Women empowerment through creativity

Creativity with a blend of divinity is the emblem of the Kumartuli area of Kolkata. The female artisans bear an important symbol of empowerment through the creative economic activities of idol making. The Kumartuli is the creative destiny where, the female artisans work day in and day out, preparing the magnificent idols to satisfy thousands of domestic and foreign customers alike. The female artisans earn their living from the production of idols. This tradition has continued over the last many decades. The women artisans play an important role in the supplementation of the family incomes, meeting the daily needs of the family on one hand and taking part in the creative activities on the other hand alongside their male counterparts is an important facet of Kumartuli. Thus creativity sustains women's empowerment and vice versa. Many women artisans like Mala Pal, have also been involved in the provision of training to the young interested artisans who desire to learn the heritage activity of idol making. From table 1, it can be inferred that Kumartuli as a whole has a lot of geographic locational attributes essential for the growth of the business activities in idol making. In the light of this situation, creativity through idol making is an important facet of the Kumartuli female artisans over the years.

7.2. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life and livelihood mechanisms of the female artisans

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected the lives of the female artisans of Kumartuli. Owing to the pandemic situation, there has been a significant rise in the price of raw materials. The prices of bamboos, straws, ropes, glues, mud, colours and so on have increased a lot in 2020 and the situation remained unchanged in 2021. Consequently, the cost of production has

also risen further since the onset of the pandemic. The customers, on the other hand, demanded low-cost idols of lower sizes, thus the overall return from produce and profit received have fallen considerably in 2020. The government did not play an active role in the mitigation of the problems faced by the female artisans during the pandemic times. Many female artisans succumbed to death during the trying times of the pandemic situation. Many female artisans have even left the idol-making activities permanently. In 2020 and 2021, there was a substantial decrement in the domestic and foreign orders for idols. Many idol orders were cancelled before the mega event of Durga puja by the clubs and committees of abroad countries. Many domestic orders were also cancelled in the last stages owing to the uncertainties of the pandemic situation. There has been some assistance received from the local clubs, High Court associations and local puja committees during the pandemic times. The Kumartuli Mritshilpi Sanskriti Samity has taken some steps towards the mitigation of the problems faced by the poor female artisans amidst the pandemic times by disbursement of financial assistance, clothes and other artefacts needed by the artisans. This was very important at a time when the government was required to take more proactive steps aimed toward the development and sustenance of the artisans, especially after the pandemic situation.

7.3. Artisan's dilemma in business

It is worth noting that idol-making activities are the main business and means to earn the daily bread of the female artisans of Kumartuli. The pandemic has affected this very centroid of female artisans. Owing to the low returns and uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic many female artisans have left the idol-making activities and have taken on other occupations for sustenance amidst the current trying times of the pandemic. Many artisans have even kept other occupations like tea stalls, sweets selling, and cosmetics selling along with the idol-making activities to survive the shocks of the pandemic. Many female artisans like Anima Pal, Bela Pal, Arati Pal and so on are sceptical regarding whether to remain in the idol-making business in the long run. Many are in a dilemma whether to adopt a new occupation to sustain the shocks of the pandemic. Many artisans have even migrated back to their home towns and have started businesses or have adopted other occupations like housekeeping, labour, selling vegetables, and so on. Many female artisans are not interested in involving the next generation in idol-making activities. These artisans are apprehensive about future shocks and pandemics as these pandemics keep on questioning their survival amidst the trying times.

7.4. Assistance in the family income

The female artisans of Kumartuli, by participating in creative activities like idol making assists their families with the income earned from the selling of finished idols. The current study reveals that the entire family of the women artisans depend upon the artisans themselves for sustenance and survival. As noted earlier that the idol-making activities are the bread and butter of the family of these female artisans. It is worth noting that before the pandemic, the women artisans only involved themselves in idol-making activities and did not take part in other economic activities. However, the pandemic scenario changed this entire complexion, where, presently to assist the family and ensure financial stability, the female artisans are now taking other alternate occupations like the opening of tea stalls, selling sweets, vegetables, cosmetic goods, and so on. Thus the pandemic forced a change in the creative economic activities of idol

making by the female artisans, where alternative occupations are the need of the hour to sustain the current shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. Limitations of the study

One of the most important limitation of the present study has been the sample size of 50 women artisans. The present study agrees to the fact that there are more female artisans at Kumartuli however, a vast majority of them migrated back to their native/hometowns owing to the pandemic situation and have never returned back. That is there has been a significant case of reverse migration. Moreover, many female artisans have taken other occupations like shop keeping, vegetable selling, cosmetics selling, working in saloons, hospitals, construction workers; these artisans remained unaddressed by the present study. Therefore there has been a significant case of occupational transformation as well due to the pandemic situation. Furthermore, owing to shyness and other privacy issues, some of the women artisans were unaddressed by the present study. Therefore more research and study is required in the domain of reverse migration and occupational transformation in the unorganized sector caused predominantly by the COVID-19 pandemic. More study and research are required in the domain of gender equality and women empowerment in the unorganized sector like that of the idol makers of Kumartuli, Kolkata. Furthermore studies are also required in the areas of multiple creative activities like some women artisans make idols as well as statues, even some of them makes the decoration artefacts required to decorate an idol. The present study has considered all of these artisans together, but has not differentiated among them to verify that whether such occupational diversification adds and contributes significantly to the family income or not.

9. Policy Implications of the study

This section discusses the policy framework that needs to be taken to ensure all-around inclusive growth of the female artisans of Kumartuli. These are described below:

- There must be schemes directed toward the easy disbursement of credit facilities to the women artisans, especially after the pandemic situation like the DRIs (Differential Rates of Interests) to artisans.
- Direct monetary assistance should be provided to the female artisans by the government through Direct Debt Transfer mechanisms as they remain deprived compared to the male artisans.
- The government must ensure that the price fluctuations of the raw materials during the pandemic times are checked and should be brought under control. The government must also take proactive measures to control the interferences of the middlemen in the distribution of raw materials and transport of the finished idols to the customers.
- The artisans should be given artisan identity cards which should be directed towards financial assistance and special assistance in the idol-making business like easy access to the fairs and festivals organized by the government.
- There must be proper storage facilities to ensure the proper storage of idols. This will also protect the idols from occasional rains, storms, cyclones, and accidental short circuits and fires.

- The government must provide insurance facilities to the artisans against fires and other damages from natural disasters to protect the idol-making activities in the long run.
- Both the male and female artisans of Kumartuli should be connected with the art colleges which would enable the proper dissemination and transfer of technology, knowledge, and education among the artisans.
- The artisans can be directed towards alternate sources of employment like employing them as construction workers, involving them in hospitals, hotels, saloons, and so on during pandemic times. However, the policy must be adopted in such a way that the artisans return to their original heritage idol-making activities after the pandemic is over.
- The Kumartuli artisans can also be integrated with other creative economic activities like Chau mask making, Dokra making, Stone carving, and the like which would enable diversification of economic activities and additional income for the artisans.

10. Conclusion

Finally, it can be concluded that creativity empowers the female artisans of Kumartuli. The idol-making activities are the emblem of the creativity of the female artisans of Kumartuli. The idol-making activities are the bread of the female artisans. The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected the lives and livelihood mechanisms of female artisans. The annual turnovers fell drastically in the post-COVID-19 phase in 2020 and 2021. The situation however improved in 2022. However, it must be kept in mind that adequate steps must be taken by the government to protect the heritage activity of idol making by the artisans and more so for the female artisans to ensure an all-around inclusive economic growth in the long run. Furthermore, well-being, gender equality, decent work, economic growth, and reduction of inequalities, are some of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are the crux and fulcrum of policy making by the administrators. Therefore, the government must ensure adequate assistance and gender empowerment among the female artisans of Kumartuli to ensure an equal standard of living and all-around sustainable growth of the artisans in the long run which would also protect the vulnerable artisans from future shocks and pandemics.

11. Conflict of Interest Statement

The present study declares no conflict of interest with any person or stakeholder.

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