

Chapter 5

Summary, Findings and conclusions

5.1 Summary

The present study entitled “**Socio- Economic Status of Hira women: A Case Study of Barpeta, Assam**” discusses the social and economic status of Hira women. Initially, the study attempts to identify the nature of the problems of Hira women as a potter. And subsequently, a correlation was observed with the socio- economic background of the respondents to ascertain their actual positions. This is an empirical study based on primary and also secondary data. Data's are collected through field survey where the primary data's are analyzed with statistics.

Barpeta is one of the important towns of the district Barpeta. It is basically, the abode of different castes- Hindus and Muslims. The Hiras are also Hindus who are scattered in and around villages as well as in towns. Those who lives in town, many of them shifts for their livelihood. A good number of villages of the Hira community are living under Barpeta Development Block. We selected two villages out of those villages, viz, **Bamuna and Hirapara (Dakhinhati)** and four urban localities viz, **Kumarhati, Mazorhati, Ghoramarahati, and Ambarihati** where most of the Hira people are scattering and concentrating their livelihood.

Pottery making is an age-old traditional occupation of the human civilization down the centuries. The process of making pottery from a particular type of clay on wheel reflects traditional knowledge in general. Where as the

women folk of the Hira Community of Assam are practicing pottery without wheel since centuries ago as their traditional occupation in particular.

Significantly, there have been remarkable changes in the socio-economic life of women in many parts of the world. In Indian context also, although we find certain changes but not uniformly among all sections of women. In regards to Hira women, in particular, we do not find much change in their socio-economic life. Their conditions as a whole are not satisfactory at all.

In respect of social status, we have seen that, Hiras are maintaining the old family traditions of obeying to the command of the elder members of the family in one hand, and obeying their husbands on the other. Although there are both nuclear as well as joint families among Hiras, the inclination is towards maintaining nuclear status. Thus, most of the families in our study areas are found to be nuclear families. In this regard, we find the abolition of joint family system as one of the factors responsible for the pottery industry. In a small family set up, the womenfolk cannot devote more time in making pottery, because they are bound to look after their household affairs. The Study shows that in rural areas, where 71.52% of domestic work is done by women at home, 12.79% work is done by them outside home.

Again, regarding marriage, the study reveals that the maximum average age for marriage is within the groups between 25-29 in India, specifically, in rural area (94.5%) and in urban settings (92.9%) (Hans Raj, 2007). Comparing this feature to the *Hira* community of Barpeta, a great difference is observed. Girls in a Hira community marry much before than the boys and also much before the Indian average age. The table-4.2 (e) 1 shows that child marriage is

still prevailing among the *Hira* community. However, it is more in rural area in comparison to urban area. It is observed that altogether 27.84 per cent rural *Hira* women got married before attaining 18 years of age. In urban area, only 4% (per cent) women got married before 18 years. Generally, early marriage means possibility of having child at an early age which can break down the health of the mother concerned. Though child marriage is prevailing among the *Hira* community, majority of *Hira* women got married at the age of 18 or above 18 years of age in both rural and urban area. In rural area, 45.08% (per cent) women got married at the age of 18 while 66 per cent in urban area. From the age group of married women in both rural and urban area, one can find that health of urban *Hira* women is better than that of rural one.

Regarding education of the spouse in the study area, it is found that illiterate percentage in rural areas is 52.45% (per cent) and in towns it is 48% (per cent) with a total of 51.16% (per cent) (Table-4.2 (a) 2).The highest educational level found in rural areas is up to tenth standard with 11.47% (per cent) and in urban it is 20% (per cent). No graduate female is found in the village area. Only female graduate was found in the urban area. It shows that there is a dearth of higher education among the women in *Hira* community both in rural and urban areas. The reason behind illiteracy may be poor economic conditions of their family. Thus, in spite of availability of free education by the state government at present, the above factor hinders the step towards education.

The economic status of *Hira* women is not satisfactory at all from the point of occupation. Pottery is the main source of income for *Hira* women within the surveyed villages. They are actively involved in the pottery making only for

8-9 months in a year. And, thus, they remain unemployed for three to four months in a year. However, the real magnitude of their unemployment cannot also be gauged correctly. Because of seasonal nature of their occupation, their income level is low and is unable to meet two squares meal properly a day. They do not have any opportunity to engage themselves in part time job in the village area. Of course, it is observed that in urban area like Kumarhati and Ghoramarahati, a few women do weaving at micro level.

Apart from assisting women in pottery making, the male members of the community are engaged in various works like pulling hand cart, rickshaw pulling, driving car, small grocery, handyman, etc. which yields low income to their family. Thus, horizontal mobility is there in villages among the males to some extent but for women there is no other option than, pottery. From table- 4.2 (b), it is observed that out of 122 rural *Hira* families, 22 (i.e. 18.03%) families while out of 50 urban *Hira* families, only 4 (i.e. 8% per cent) are below poverty line which is less than the State average. Although BPL *Hira* family in rural area is less, their maximum income does not exceed Rs. 8000/ per month. On the other hand, monthly income of 18 (i.e. 36%) urban *Hira* families exceeds Rs.8000/. It is because of availability of better job in urban area. It indicates that economic condition of urban *Hira* families is better than that of rural *Hira* families. . Another problem that has been found is that, those who are educated especially the younger group, is not interested in pottery making at present. Uneducated youths even prefer to be engaged themselves as daily lab- ours .Girls get married and some of them prefer in doing other works like weaving, stitching, small shops etc. Thus, within them, there is occupational mobility.

The income of the rural & urban Hira women reflects that whatever they do & earn from pottery, they contribute all to the household expense and do not save for themselves. And so they have no savings in their name. As a result they can not spend even a penny at the time of their utter need.

Another reason for low socio- economic condition is the lack of property in their name. Our study reveals that women of Hira's have not owned any land and other property by their names except widows, table 4.2 (g), shows, only a total of 7.56% females have owned property against their names . It is also only after the deaths of their husbands' .And rest of the women have no ownership. Female possesses right over property specially in rural areas about 4.09% (per cent) and 16.00% (per cent) in urban areas. Thus there is no scope of loans for Hira women as revealed in our study area as against mortgage of their lands. However, no governmental organization or NGO's is coming yet to guide and help them in this regard. Also, despite the fact of availability of such financing agencies in the premier town, namely Barpeta this unprivileged Hira Community are not getting any help or assistance from their end.

Since the Hiras are landless, so they are not generally engaged with the agricultural activities. The barter economy was so much part of the society till the middle part of the 20th century. Therefore, during that time, potters exchanged their vessels in kinds rather than coins. And the impact of barter economy is the one of the major causes of landlessness of the potters of Barpeta. The condition of Hira is further deteriorated by the population influx from the neighboring countries particularly from Bangladeshi immigrants resulting in overcrowding of area. Moreover, some neighboring Muslim villages of Barpeta

were the main barterer and buyers of pottery of Hiras earlier. But now a day, they engage with other works like bamboo craft, fishing and others. The coming of Bangladeshi immigrants inspire many Muslims to do lab our works in Barpeta. As a result, due to over flux of those people who are mainly dependent on manual works, the Hira Communities are being deprived and at the same time the economic conditions of the Hiras have been gradually worsened day by day.

Apart from these, the Hiras have to face stiff competition from the non-Assamese potters all over Assam. The problems faced by Hiras which is discussed above are generally faced by most of the traditional crafts all over Assam. But, in most of them modifications are seen to cope with changing scenario. We can cite the example of another crafts of Assam i.e. terracotta craft that has changed its scenario of art and culture today. The modern terracotta artisans are not only skillful in making the traditional idols of gods and goddesses but also equally efficient in offering a numerous embroidered articles with variety of colors. For this, all though the industry becomes the main attraction for tourists' buyers in the state, the pottery of the Hira Community still remains lagging behind. Moreover the impact of rapid growth of steel industry, more use of plastic, aluminum etc. caused great harm to the pottery industry. Therefore potters must take keen interest to modify their technology and skill, to produce items of aesthetic value as well so that they make pottery more market oriented. Only utilitarian and ritualistic production cannot help them much to improve economic condition. People of the study areas are not interested to use pots for their daily uses at present time. As a result the production & level of development as compared to other industries in Barpeta is becoming gradually

low. In spite of all these, Hira Community is still engaged in pottery industry for their livelihood. It also shows that especially in Barpeta district most of the local traditional cottage industries like bell metal, dairy establishments, brass metal, handloom etc, are the main approved industries developing day by day in Assam and they are also trying to enter into the competitive market. Since Hira Community of our study areas is not getting financial assistance, they do not have least scope to enter such competition. This is another cause for the under development of their pottery industry.

The seasonal nature of the pottery craft provides hardship among women; they can produce only in the month from August to April. Because of rainy season in other months, they can not produce. In spite of their interest in making pottery, they have to live in a jobless situation that time. But male members become busy in doing various other small works like hand cart pulling, daily wage earner, rickshaw pulling etc.

As demand and marketing are the two vital and indispensable components of a craft. They jointly control or regulate the ceramic industry. Demand, by far, is the only factor which works as amplifier for both promotion and demotion of the craft. When demand increases, the production of pottery must have to be increase and vice- versa. Our study reveals that, the appearance of fashionable, portable, durable as well as cheap vessels reduces the value and demand of the pottery. As a result production of pottery also reducing.

Marketing facilities for the potters in our study areas is inadequate in true sense. Most of these are weekly markets (HAATS) and are located far away from the Hira areas. Women never go to sell their products and do not know the

markets and demands .Women have to be at the mercy of the middlemen who takes away a big chunk of their profit and have been giving them only nominal amount. So the producers are in loss. From Table 4.2 (f) 1, it is observed that majority of women sale their product at home rather than going to market to sale. Here, 96.51 per cent women sale their products at home and only 3.49 per cent female artisans sale their product outside their home. The distribution between rural and urban in this issue is almost same. It is only 0.82 per cent in rural area and 10.00 per cent in

Due to lack of encouragement from family & society in this regard to do something on their own by availing bank finance has not become possible among Hira women of our study areas. In addition to that there are general feelings prevailing in the society is that the fairer sex are not suited to such ventures to take such benefits which is another obstacles to develop their socio-economic position .As a result, they are unable to start her work in a commercial line and remaining poor .

Most of the major commercial banks have been in operation in the district, yet there is a dearth of financial institutions to supply credit to Hira Community. During the field survey, the poor and needy entrepreneurs reported that they are unable to obtain institutional finance because of the tedious and lengthy procedure of sanctioning loans and rigid terms and conditions. Besides, they have to prepare and submit scheme and project report (which is very difficult for them as most of them are either illiterate or semi-literate), obtain non-encumbrance and valuation certificates from land records officers for collateral security, search for guarantor of loan etc, and what is more, the value of land

offered as security in most cases falls far short of the norms insisted on by the institutions for the required amount of advance as they are the owner of very small property. It was also found that some of the entrepreneurs or needy artisans were not aware of the availability of institutional finance due to information and communication gap or ignorance on their own part.

Again so far as the governmental assistance is concerned, which has ample scope to upgrade their status have not reached to them. The schemes like, National Rural Employment Programme, Minimum Need Programme, and Food For work Programme etc. are not implemented throughout the entire study area. It is to be worth mentioning here that the D.R.D.A, has provided some tube wells only to some of the villagers as government help, along with some few Indira Avaj Yujana houses. Table 4.2 (h) shows only 16.28% 9(per cent) *Hira* families are benefitted directly from Government assistance.

Urban settings, only, 22.13 per cent have secured small help from the government in the name of Indira Awas Yojana in villages. In the urban areas, only 2.00 per cent has got help from Government. It is the Sericulture department of Government of Assam who has provided help the *Hira* women in rearing eri worm to earn income through SHGs in urban area. But not anything for pottery.

Our study reveals that, self help group is not becoming popular among them though now days some small self help group is organized among *Hira* women of our study areas. (Self Help Group is a Voluntary informal group of homogeneous rural poor, whose members poor Savings and relent within). Some of the self help groups of Bamuna village are- Manoka self help group, Joy Guru Sankar Mahila group etc. And some of the self help group of Daskinhati village

are- Pragati, Bahagi, Koilani, Manumati, Kanaklata, Daskinhati self help group etc. Basically women, organize self help groups in our study areas to cope with problems such as illness, marriages, admission of children, opening shops, livelihood generation etc. Self Help Group has been instrumental in accelerating the amount of loans sanctioned to rural poor. And Hira women can do such things as pottery work needs financial support.

Participation of the poor Hiras in the mainstream social, political, economic sectors is also lacking. . It is observed from Table 4.2 (f) 5 that only 19.18 per cent women are member of any organisation like SHG. In the villages 18.85 per cent belong to any organisation like SHG while in urban areas, it is 20.00 per cent. But most of the women are not a part of any big social organisation.

The involvement and representation of women in local self governance is also very poor. Even if reservation policy has provided certain scopes but yet they are not involved in a true spirit. Women usually do not demand anything in our study areas. It is observed from {Table 4.2 (f) 6} that only three (1.74 per cent) of 172 Off late *Hira* families have contested in election specially in *panchayat* level. Political participation in the form of contesting election at *panchayat* level is observed only because of reservation of seats for SC *Hira* women. In urban area, no *Hira* woman has the experience of contesting in election at any level.

Out of contested *Hira* women, the winning percentage is quite high. It was found that out of three candidates two won in the panchayat election 66.67% (per cent) as table shows such a participation of women among *Hiras* shows a dismal

picture. *Hiras* women thus lack leadership in their own community. It may be due to the attitude and outlook of the society towards women. Women's status in this regard would be achieved only when the attitudes like the ways of thinking, feeling and willingness changes.

So far the cultural activities of Hira potters are concerned they are the major contributors in their societies. But due to cultural fundamentalism the *Hiras* are lagging behind in cultural activities, their cultural involvements are very few compare to other caste in Barpeta area. They are not getting the equal opportunity to mingle with the rich culture of the society as other people negate them as low caste or merely as from Hira Community. Though at present our society has been changing with the modern outlook. Therefore, the change in regards to culture among the Hira Community is utmost necessary to uplift their cultural heritage for their socio- economic development

Industrial development activities in India have been concentrated around few metropolitan cities and big towns. Only As a result of this, the development of entrepreneurship in backward regions has been adopted as a basic strategy of economic planning in India. Although the entrepreneurial world is open to all sections of people, unfortunately Hira Community are being deprived of all those benefits. It may be due to lack of knowledge, information, experience and government assistance. It shows that the Hira women have not developed the capacity of managing the business efficiently in an entrepreneurial line which might definitely increase their status in near future.

5.2 Findings and suggestions

On the basis of the above analysis, the following findings are emerged from the study -

1. Pottery of Hiras in Barpeta is a traditional cottage and village industry in which women are totally engaged.
2. Hiras are self-employed section though lack of financial assistance is there. They do pottery on part time basis. Pottery is not a full-fledged work for them. .
3. Pottery craft has provided a short of engagement among Hira women in villages as occupation. They are interested in doing the craft as they inherent the craft and that increases its importance. Though in urban areas women of the economically well to do families do pottery as recreation. Some of them have left the craft.
4. Overall status of Hira women in both rural – urban areas is not good. The comparison between the women of Hiras in rural areas with urban localities reveals that rural women's socio-economic condition is very poor in all respect than urban Hira women.
5. Need for achievement, economic independence and autonomy are absent among Hira women.
6. Poverty is a curse for their very existence. Hira people are born in it and they have to be brought up under it, particularly in village areas. For them words like rights and empowerment are unknown & not significant as these words have nothing to do with their basic needs. They still live in the twenty first century as poor families and their lives are being spent “on satisfying their basic needs”.

7. Lack of education is one of the reasons for low socio- economic status. It is a prime need to develop their socio- economic position and to improve their craft. As without education, development of knowledge has not been possible among Hira women.
8. Handicraft and small scale industries have to be encouraged as it is a traditional craft of Assam and it is an inherited craft of our people. It is in this context pottery industry is needed sincere attention in Assam.
9. The Skill development among Hira potter is not yet done. No female has attained technical education. Proper training and knowledge can develop their craft as well as their position.
10. Government agencies and N .G. O's are not giving due interest in the pottery industry in Barpeta. D.R.D.A is not taking any interest in respect of developing the pottery craft.
11. Due to social exploitation and rigid mentality of upper caste people towards the community in our study areas, Hiras has been suffering negligence within their localities. They have to live in cluster within their localities with other Hindus.
12. Hira potter has found difficulty in collecting raw- materials .Middlemen is entering in it. Moreover, the prices of the fuel products like wood, bamboo, etc. are gone up enabling potters to buy products.
13. They have not done any market survey and producing their products. The stiff competition with metal made domestic utensils has reduces its demand. People consider metal wares more durable & reasonably chap.

14. Besides, due to more or less static demand of the products, the artisans produce only limited number of articles. The use of earthenware is gradually being restricted to a few occasions of social and religious ceremony.

15. At present, there is a specific problem faced by pottery business in Barpeta. That is the assured market for the sale of products. Modern ways of rural marketing which are popular in Bihar, Punjab etc has not been possible among women section in our localities.

16. Hira's do not enjoy the advantage of having any proper display of their products which could draw the attention of prospective buyers from outside.

17. Environment is such that they are not properly socialized so that they can not overcome their situation..

18. As a result, overall presumption is that women of Hiras are not conscious about their socio- economic status and they do not demand anything to the authorities. They are rather not interested to change their pattern of making pots even today. Lack of aptitude and necessary motivation results no development in their craft.

19. Hiras is a small group in Barpeta and so they are not in political demand in Barpeta. Parties do not give special attention to them. As a result there is no scope to solve their problems.

Suggestions

Following are the suggestions -

1. Education should be popularized among Hiras. And they must be encouraged and informed about the need & value of education. All Governmental educational policies should be accelerated further for spreading of education among Hira's.
2. As pottery among Hira's is being a feminine occupation, as male member free to go for any kind of occupation , the present status of the craft is totally depend on women. So talents of the women be recognized and proper training is necessary to moderate the craft so that occupational mobility can not come.
3. Technological knowledge should be developed to moderate the craft. They should introduce modern technologies in their production and produce items which are essentially in demand both in rural & urban areas.
4. All governmental as well as non- governmental schemes should be formulated at the micro level, through the organized goan panchayat planners, village level leaders and the bureaucracy acting in unison should carefully assess the situation. This should be carried forward to the block, the subdivision, and district levels.
5. Co- operative societies can do a lot to develop socio- economic status. If the societies supplies the raw- materials to the potters with a reasonable price, and help them in marketing their products and take necessary steps for exporting the quality products outside the state, it will enhance the quality of life of the potters definitely.

6. Government agencies and N.G.O's must give due interest in the pottery industry. D.R.D.A specially must take interest in respect of developing the pottery craft. Government agencies can provide loan at a lower rate of interest. As potters are not educated, they are not interested to take loan out of fear of inability to repay in time. If they once get the facility of finance from banking institutions, they would be able to repay the loan in time.
7. Confidence is needed and to develop confidence education is must. It will not only give modern outlook and awareness by developing positive attitudes and knowledge but also will reduce the gaps with the mainstream.
8. Proper market planning is required. For this, women must be organized in such a way that they can directly sell their products to the buyers without the help of middle men.
9. Middlemen must be stop in all respects whether in case of selling the finished products or collection of raw- materials.
10. Local people must show eagerness in solving their problems and should encourage & provide helping hand to go forward. The students, scholars, intellectuals, businessmen, can gather more information to improve the skill of potters.
11. As a publicity technology like distribution of pamphlets and announcement of the display of products in a specific area chosen already, can help them a lot.
12. Political parties should patronize and evolve women's wing to promote women leadership. Participation of the Hira women in the mainstream social,

political, economic sectors requires positives. Unless and until it will not happen, they will be pushed back from all benefits and decisions.

13. Potter must prepare such items which have commercial value and demand, besides ritualistic products.

14. They are not getting those benefits of the below poverty lines. So measures must take to reduce their shroud poverty .

15. Entrepreneurial development should be made possible among them. Particularly the educated section can be encouraged to be an entrepreneur at first so that they can inspire others. Financial institutions should come closer to help the young entrepreneurs so that they can help Hira women in developing and upgrading their craft in the competitive market

5.3 Scope for future study:

There is a saying that think globally act locally. This is very much applicable in case of our pottery making industry. Potters must change their outlooks and change their way of making pots. They must make this traditional craft putting modern science and technology which will not deface the old tradition but also give a boost to productivity in a better way which will ultimately inspire the new generation into the profession and make it their livelihood. We hope our study will help in minimizing the problems of Hira women along with development and protection of our traditional craft.

Like other districts, in Barpeta districts of Assam, the practice of pottery making is still running by women of Hiras, though not in a right track. Village women of Hiras are totally depending upon the making of pottery for their

livelihood. Therefore our effortless endeavor is to bring the potters in the right track, through this study, so that they can lead an active and comfortable life and can enhance their quality of life through the traditional prestigious occupation of pot making enterprise. Self realization develops with the changes of the socio-economic situation, and so when Hira women's socio- economic status will change, it will ultimately develops their confidence & result will be empowerment and development of pottery industry more swiftly in Barpeta.

For that helping hand from grass root level (the mainstream) to governmental & non- governmental support is required. Our study opens up new scope for further study in this regard.