

Indigenous Craft of Hiras in Community Development at Barpeta District Of Assam, India

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Abstract

Indigenous crafts are mainly a small scale production with some particular skill and knowledge. India is rich in diverse crafts and culture. North-East India is also recognized by its different beautiful indigenous handicrafts. Handicrafts are the traditional crafts which are made by hand or by some small tools. These crafts are still practised within the rural communities by generation to generation. These are weaving, pottery making, bamboo and cane crafts, goldsmith etc. Mahatma Gandhi also gave importance on handicrafts. His ideas emphasised the significance of handicrafts i.e. spinning, weaving and other hereditary indigenous handicrafts of rural areas. His views on handicrafts are related to this industrial society. Industrial societies produce endless goods which create competition and ended on violence and war. Gandhiji tried to develop the rural villages, their economy, handicrafts and make them create a system which would be different from industrial societies of western country. Gandhi's view on handicrafts is in his self-sufficiency vision. According to him Indian should try to revive and preserve their indigenous art and crafts. This would help people to become more self sufficient. In Assam there is one potter community- The Hiras. They also prefer handicraft products to other cheap and Chinese products. Hiras are the native people of Assam. Earthenware pottery is their traditional occupation. In this 21st century hiras are still practicing their hereditary craft. In my present study "Indigenous Craft of Hira Community in Community Development at Barpeta District of Assam" is an attempt to know what is the role of indigenous craft of this particular community in their community development and self sufficiency.

Keywords: Indigenous Craft, Handicrafts, Self Sufficiency, Hira Community.

Date of Submission: 08-05-2019

Date of acceptance: 24-05-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

India is rich and diverse in crafts. The crafts in different region reflect their tradition and custom. Indigenous craft is the culture of a rural community. Mahatma Gandhi gave importance on handicraft. He also focused on other indigenous handicrafts of village communities with spinning and weaving. Gandhi stated that, "A cause is often greater than the man. Certainly the spinning wheel is greater than myself; with it, in my opinion, is mixed up the well-being of the whole mass of Indian humanity". Gandhi's ideology on handicraft and self-sufficiency is mainly related to industrial society. According to him, industrial society creates greed and competition. Gandhiji wanted to wake up the craft economy of villages in India and make them portray a different picture of economy from western industries. And this would help to revive the Indian villages. He always encourages people to take care and preserve the indigenous art and craft of village communities. This will make local people and villages more self-sufficient and able to earn their livelihood. And by doing this villages would be independent and free from the western industry and machineries. And they could stand against the bad impacts of industrialisation. The idea of self-sufficiency was very important for Gandhiji. According to him only one independent individual, village or community become self-sufficient. Gandhi also suggests providing craft centric education to the students. According to him, handicrafts should not be taught only for production, it should be taught to improve the intellectual knowledge of students. It helps in earning livelihood through sustainable roots of income and community goals that results in unite societies and micro industries.

North East India is also famous for its creative and unique indigenous art and craft. Assam, one of the states of seven sisters of north-east is famous for using raw materials for making handicrafts. Some of the crafts of Assam are bamboo and cane craft, muga and mulberry silk weaving, pottery, blacksmith, bell metal and brass metal, goldsmith etc. Mahatma Gandhi said that "Assamese women are born weavers; they weave fairy tales in their cloth". One of the Important Indigenous craft in Assam is Pottery. In Assam there are two potter communities- Hira and Kumar. Hiras are the native people of Assam. Hira community is mostly found in Goalpara, Kamrup, Nagaon, Darrang and Barpeta district of lower Brahmaputra valley of Assam. They are practising pottery from generation to generation. Though in this science and technological era many changes occurs in the socio-economic, cultural life of people there are still some Hira families who practise their

indigenous craft for earning their livelihood. In comparison to various studies related to pottery craft; only few studies have been made on the Hira potters who make earthen pots without using wheel. So present study is an attempt to know the indigenous craft of Hira Community and what are the impacts of this craft on the development of socio-economic life of Hira Community at Barpeta district.

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the pottery as the indigenous craft of Hira Community.
2. To know the impact of pottery craft on the socio-economic life of Hira Potters.
3. To analyse the present status of Hira Craft.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on both primary and secondary data. Where primary data was obtain by conducting interviews using interview schedule. For primary data collection I have used snowball method. Secondary data was drawn from published books, journals, Government gazette and any other printed materials available related to the study. The application of observation technique in the entire period of study was used. The study consists of 40 Households as the sample size from two villages of Barpeta district- Bamuna and Sundaridia. Some case studies are also done to support the fact findings.

STUDY AREA

Barpeta district is an administrative district of Assam. Barpeta district was split from old Kamrup district on July 1, 1983. Total area of Barpeta district is 3,245 km² (1,245 sq mi). From here the famous Kirtanghar of Barpeta is the living destimony of the influence of the Vaishnavite moment which is still very strong as Barpeta is also consider as a seat of Satriya culture. The Barpeta town is situated to the south-west of Guwahati, the capital of Assam, at a distance of about 95 km and it connected by roadways. It is bounded by Nalbari district on the east, Bongaigaon district on the west, Kamrup and Goalpara district on the south and Bhutan on the north. According to 2011 census the total member of the population in the district was 1,693,190. The sex ratio is 951 females per thousand of male population. Barpeta has turn out to be one of the most thickly populated districts of Assam. The district has two divisions- Barpeta and Bajali. There are 8 revenue circles, 8 community blocks and 46 Gaon Panchayat covering 1081 villages.

In Barpeta town, the head quarter of Barpeta, all sections of people irrespective of caste, creed and religion live. Out of these populations, one special class of people belonging to Scheduled Caste community lives at Barpeta district. This section of people is known as Hira potters. Their main occupation is pottery making. For the present study Bamuna and Sundaridia village is preferred. Total population of Bamuna village is 470 and Sundaridia village is 444.

POTTERY AS AN INDIGENOUS CRAFT OF HIRA COMMUNITY

Pottery is the indigenous craft of Hira Community. It is almost as old as human civilization. It is an ancient handmade traditional occupation of the human civilization. Pottery is one of the oldest traditional occupations, originating before the Stone Age. Hira potter use hand for making pottery which reflects their traditional knowledge. In 1838 Mount Goumeri wrote that the Assamese potters didn't know how to use wheel. Because he saw the potters making pottery by hand only. Women are the main artisans in Hira Community. Girl children, middle aged women, old aged women, widow every one engaged in pottery making activities in the Hira community. Male members of this potter community help to collect the raw materials and marketing the earthen products. Pottery is the hereditary occupation of Hiras. Still many Hira families are practising pottery for some social, economic, domestic purpose. They have some traditional beliefs in pottery craft. They are habitual of this craft from generation to generation. The techniques, methods and instruments for making pottery used by Hiras are all traditional. They use spade, different sized stone, wooden beater etc. For making pottery Hiras use one sticky type of blackish clay which is differ from the clay Kumar used for manufacturing pottery. This clay is known as 'Hiramati' or 'Hiraclay'. This type of special clay is mostly found in Kamrup district. So potters from different places come to Kamrup district to collect this glutinous clay. This clay and soil for making pottery craft Hiras collect from the river banks of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Clay and soil are the primary resources for making pottery. Generally Hira clay is found in muddy and marshy areas. Generally in the months of September-November potters collect the clay. First they use spade to remove the upper part of soil up to 40 inches and then they go deep inside the ground by creating a pit of almost 2-3 meters deep looking for essential Hira clay. After bringing the clay to home potters store the clay and soil in a pit in a side of their courtyard. And they covered it with some old cloths or leaf and use it in the time of making the pot making craft. For making this craft Hira female mix sand in the amount of 4:1 and water into the clay with the help of their fingers.

In the social stratification Hiras occupy the lower status than the Kumars who use wheel for making pottery craft. There are also many differences between the Hiras and the Kumars on the basis of techniques of pottery making. Instead of using the wheels hiras use different sized stone and a wooden beater for making pots. The vessels made by the Hira potters are stronger than the Kumar's. Because it is thicker than the vessel made by Kumar.

IMPACTS OF POTTERY CRAFT ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF HIRA POTTERS

The term socio-economic refers to a wide range of interrelated and diverse aspects relating to or involving a combination of social and economic features. It can be a combination of variables such as occupation, education, income, wealth, housing, sanitation, participation in community life as well as other social and cultural attitude and values, etc. "The socio-economic Condition" is the position of an individual occupies in society with respect to the amount of cultural possession, effective income, material possession, prestige and social participation.

a) Social condition-

The socio-economic condition of Hira Potters at Barpeta district is not so good. In social stratification, Hiras occupy a very low position. In social Stratification Hiras are the lower than the Kumars. They come under Scheduled Castes Communities. They considered other castes people as higher than them. Some out caste people neglect them for their occupation. Because those people found hiras's occupation as dirty. 75% of the Hira families in the Study area are still living in joint families. Only 25% lives in Nuclear family. Pottery is mainly a feminine activity. So some Hira female practice their indigenous craft in their free time. It gives them engagement.

b) Economic condition-

In present times also some Hira families are still practicing earthen pot making for their livelihood because they are socio-economically backward. They have to face many economic hardships and they are not getting proper profit for their indigenous craft also. Poverty is their main problem. Hiras are born and brought up under poverty.

Fig 1: Primary Occupation of the Households

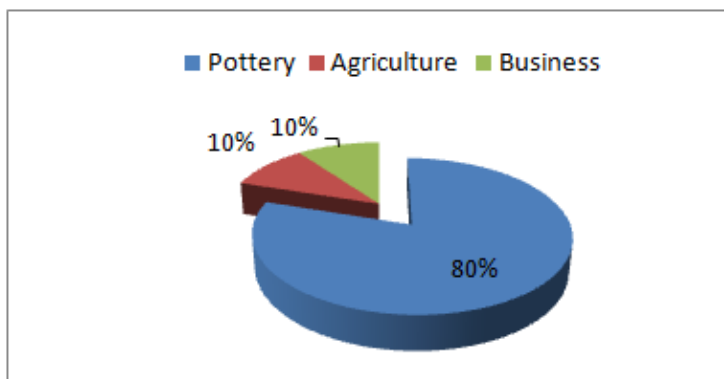


Fig 1 shows that among the sample, 80% of household's primary occupation is pottery, 10% each households are engaged in agriculture and business as their primary occupation. These data indicates that 20% Hira families practised their indigenous craft as their secondary occupation. 52.5% (21) respondents produce 5000-6000 earthen products in every month. Only 47.5% (19) respondents' total no. of monthly production of earthen pots is 3000-4000. All Hira families produce earthen products for both household and market use.

Table 1: Monthly income of the Households

Monthly Income of the households	No. of the Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below Rs. 3,000	5	12.5%
Rs. 3001 -5,000	19	47.5%
Rs.5001 -7,000	13	32.5%
Rs.7001 -9000	3	7.5%
Total	40	100%

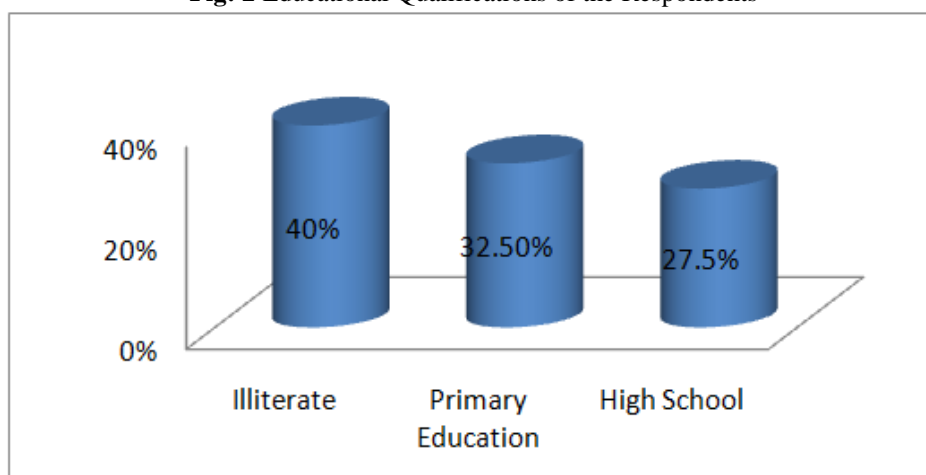
From the above table it is known that 47.5% (19) respondent's have income range from Rs 3001 to 5000, 32.5% (13) respondent's monthly income is Rs 5001 to 7000, 12.5% respondents have low family income of below Rs 3000. While only 7.5% respondent's average income is Rs 7001 to 9000 per month

The Below Poverty Line family also known as BPL family is an economically backward family which needs government assistance and aid for survival. Most of the respondent's (90%) types of ration card are BPL, only 10% respondent's have APL ration card that is Above Poverty Line. 60% Hira potters type of houses are Assam type brick wall, 25% potter's type of houses are Assam type half wall with bamboo mud plaster and now also 15% are living in Assam type mud wall with thatch roof houses.

c) Educational qualification-

Educational Qualification of the 40% (16) respondents of the study area is illiterate in this modern time also. They are not aware of the importance of education. 32.5% (13) respondent's educational level is primary and only 27.5% (11) respondent's educational level is high school. One of the main reasons for not continuing education is poverty. Because of poverty most of the Hira people are uneducated. In the present study area 20% girl children of Hira community also left their school in the middle and engaging in pottery making activities with their parents.

Fig: 2 Educational Qualifications of the Respondents



d) Political participation-

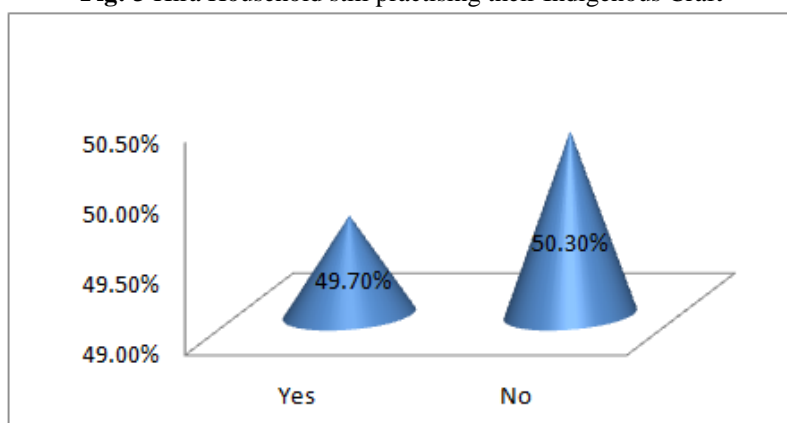
The Hira potters of the study area are politically active. 90% respondents are casting Vote in Elections regularly. Only 10% respondents are not casting vote in election. But they are not involved in any Gaon Panchayat activities.

From sum up we can say that at Barpeta district Hira Community live in very poor condition. They suffer from multiple problems. In this modern scientific era also economic life of majority of them is in bad shape. Education awareness is yet to develop among them.

PRESENT STATUS OF POTTERY CRAFT

Man is a social animal and they lives in society where they are subjected to go by the prevailing rules of the society and the tradition to follow. As time passed by and with the mixture of various castes and communities, a man is bound to change his social habits, traits and course of action in line with the changing social needs. One of the striking features of modern society has been the tremendous changes taking place in recent years threatening the essence of socio-economic status. Some changes have been drastic while others have been more gradual that occurs daily. There is no aspect of life that has not been touched by change in the life of the Hira community. At Barpeta district also there are many changes occurs in pottery making craft. The techniques, methods and the beliefs among the Hiras towards earthen pot making are same as earlier. But there are some changes in the case of knowledge of pot making. Their ancestors were expert in making all types of earthen pots. But now many potter families don't know the methods and techniques of making all types of earthen pots. In present days many families left this craft and start doing other different jobs for livelihood.

Fig: 3 Hira Household still practising their Indigenous Craft



From the fig 3 we can observe that in this present times only 49.70% potters practising their Indigenous craft in the study area. Rest of 50.30% potters left pottery making due to various reason. The main reason behind leaving pottery craft is this they don't get proper profit in this occupation. Now in market many cheap products are available which are alternative to Hira products. So people prefer those to Hira products. Another important cause of not continuing pottery occupation by the hiras is problems in collecting raw materials. Earlier Hira clay was available in the riverbanks but due to some natural and environmental reason this type of glutinous clay became very rare in the riverbank. So in present times collecting clay from the river bank is a most difficult work. So many people are leaving this occupation and starting new occupations like fishing, business, agriculture etc. Hira people are starting to send their children to school. So after being educated children don't like to do this type of earthen work. The traditional art of making pottery using some type of special clay from the river banks could lost soon because of the erosion also. Potters will be forced to leave their traditional craft. Because collecting the clay from the riverbank is main cause of erosion according the experts of Brahmaputra Board. And Government already banned collecting the clay in some places.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion we can conclude that the earthen pot making craft is playing an important role in boosting up the condition of Hira Community. Because it is an employment oriented culture. It is a type of cottage industry. But in modern times there are many changes occur in society, occupation and environment. So Hira's traditional occupation also influence by these changes. Now this pottery craft is facing many problems in this science and technological era. But most of the Hira people shifted to the urban areas for earning their livelihood. In study area also many Hira people left their traditional occupation for some reasons. But some Hira families still practicing pottery for their livelihood. But because of social changes now among the present generation of Hira community has changed. Many of the Hira people are now wage labourer, business man, fisherman, farmer etc. but the socio-economic conditions of the Hira people are not very satisfactory. Hira families whose pottery craft is a full time occupation their socio-economic condition is worse than the Hira families who engaged in other occupation. Only the engagement in pottery is not sufficient for livelihood in present times. They have to depend in other secondary sources also for earning their livelihood.

Now many Hira families left their traditional occupation and some Hira families are still practicing pottery for their livelihood. But because of all these difficulties now the present generation of Hira community doesn't want to continue their traditional craft. Though pottery is the hereditary occupation of Hiras, but under all those changing situation Hiras would be compelled to leave their traditional and beautiful craft if proper, essential resources and facilities are not provided. So proper measures should be taken up for improvement and upliftment of the condition of pottery craft and make Hira community self-sufficient.

SUGGESTIONS

Following recommendations are made from the study.

- a. It is very essential to develop the methods and techniques of pottery making for the economic development of Hira Community.
- b. There should be some workshop or programmes for Hira people to make them understand the scientific and modern techniques and methods to make earthen pots with less cost, time, labour .
- c. Special attention needs to be given to improve educational attainment of Hira Community.
- d. Government should look after problems of Hira Community and try to solve their problem in a concrete manner.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I sincerely thank the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) for Centrally Administered Doctoral Fellowship.

IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Linu Sarma". *Indigenous Craft of Hiras in Community Development at Barpeta District Of Assam, India.*" *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 24 no. 05, 2019, pp. 57-62.