

Impact of Social Change on the Traditional Occupation of Hira Community with Special Reference to Azara in South Kamrup, Assam

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ABSTRACT: *Earthenware is a traditional occupation of human civilization. There are many traditional potters in India who earn their livelihood by earthenware pot making. They practice their traditional occupation from generation to generation. In Assam there are two potter Communities- Hira and Kumar who engage in the manufacture of earthenware. In society individual are subjected to go by the prevailing rules of the society and the tradition to follow. As time passed by a man is bound to change his social habits and course of action in line with the changing social needs. Further due to ideological and technological advancement wider social changes have taken place. The old culture and habits of occupation die fast and new ideas and dynamism taken birth. Here the question arises as to how far have the Hiras still not left the earthenware culture. This study proposes to investigate what is the impact of social change on their traditional occupation and Socio-Economic condition of Hiras in the modern times.*

KEYWORDS: *Hira, Earthenware, traditional occupation, livelihood.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Earthenware is an ancient handmade traditional occupation of the human civilization. Earthenware is a craft of making ceramic materials into pots by using some types of special mud. It is a type of pottery. There are many traditional potters in India. They are earning their livelihood by their traditional occupation and they are now also struggling for their better livelihood. The earthenware making art by using some type of special clay reflects one kind of traditional knowledge and they habitual these traditional knowledge from generation to generation. According to Sir E. A. Gait (1925), “The main characteristics of a caste are the belief in a common origin held by all the members and the possession of the traditional occupation. It may be defined as an endogamous group or collection of such group bearing a common name, having the same traditional occupation, claiming descent from the same source, and commonly regarded as forming a single homogenous community.” The potters of India are known as Kumar/Kumor/Kumbhakar/Kumhar who habitual this traditional occupation in India. There are two potter communities in Assam. They are known as the Hiras and the Kumars. Earthenware is the traditional occupation of Hira potters. In Assam, numerically hiras take up the 5th position among the Scheduled castes communities of Assam. Hira community is mostly found in Goalpara, Kamrup, Nagaon, Darrang and Barpeta district of lower Brahmaputra valley of Assam. In comparison to various studies related to earthenware; only few studies have been made on the Hira potters who make earthen pots without using wheel. But due to ideological changes and technological advancement wider social changes have taken place. The old culture and habits of occupation die fast and new ideas and dynamism taken birth. It is thus, the cultural death of the old and the emergence of the new technology which is newly interpreted and practised. Here the question arises as to what are the impacts of social change on their traditional occupation, their socio-economic Condition and how far have the Hira community still not left their traditional occupation.

Objectives

1. To study the impact of Social changes on the earthenware craft of Hira Community in Hirapara village.
2. To know the Socio-Economic condition of Hira Community in Hirapara village in present times.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on both primary and secondary data where primary data was obtain by conducting interviews using interview schedule. The study was conducted using 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 and further some case

studies were conducted to support the fact findings. The study consists of 20 Households as the sample size for study.

Universe Of The Study

Kamrup is situated on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River, Assam. South Kamrup is lies between E 91⁰ 01' and E 92⁰ 15' east longitudes and N 26⁰ 15' and N 26⁰ 30' north latitude. It is bounded in the east by Morigaon and on the west by Goalpara district. Meghalaya Hills is on the south and River Brahmaputra is on north. Total population of South Kamrup is 811,805 (2011 census). In South Kamrup 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 in Hirapara village of Azara. This section of people is known as Hiras. Their main occupation is mainly Earthen pot making. Azara is situated 5 kilometers from Guwahati Airport. Hirapara is a small village of Azara under Rani Block and Guwahati Subdivision. Different scheduled castes communities are living in this village i.e., Kaibarta community, Hira community. In Hirapara village of Azara Total population of Hira people is 215 and total Hira household is 30.

Hira Potters

Hira Community is one of the potter community of Assam who manufacture earthenware. The Hiras are the traditional pot makers and the native people of Assam. Their speciality is that they manufacture earthenware by hand without using the wheel like Kumars do. This technique is one of the ancient techniques of earthen pot making. Their women only engaged in earthenware making. It is mainly a feminine task. The potteries of Hiras are famous for its beautiful design and colours. Hira potter uses one sticky type of blackish clay for making pot. This special type of clay is known as 'Hiramati'. The Hira potters lives in a separate site of the village near stream or river which is known as 'Hirapara' or 'Hirachupa'. They mostly live in rural areas. Hiras have their own priest which is called as Hira Bamun, they serve Hira people only. They are lower in status than the upper castes priest. Because they consider Hiras as a lower caste community.

In the social stratification Hiras occupy the lower status than the Kumars who use wheel for making earthenware. There are also many differences between the Hiras and the Kumars on the basis of techniques of earthenware 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 Kumars. Because it is thicker than the vessel made by Kumars.

Impact Of Social Change On Hira Community In Azara

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 of the Hira community that has not been touched by the changes in. From the field study I have found that-

The techniques, methods and the beliefs among the Hiras towards earthenware making is same as earlier. But there are some changes in knowledge of pot making. Their ancestors were expert in making large earthen pots. But now many families don't know how to make large earthen pots. They make only small earthen pots (choru). And supply those to the hotels, local markets etc. In present days many families of Hirapara left this craft and start doing other different jobs for livelihood. The main reason behind leaving earthenware craft is 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 major reason for leaving earthenware occupation in present days is collecting the Hira clay from the river is very difficult work. Earlier Hira clay was available in the river. But now it becomes so rare to get this clay. 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.

Among the sample population 45% of respondents are still engaged in earthenware pot making activity, 25% respondents are housewives, 20% respondents have some petty business, and 10% respondents are fishermen. These data indicates that 55% Hira families left the earthenware occupation and engaged in other occupation.

Socio-Economic Condition Of The Hira Community In Hirapara Village In Present Times

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. From the field study I have found that-

The socio-economic condition of Hira Community in Azara is not so good. In social stratification, Hiras occupy a very low position. Most of the people in Hirapara village from this community are potters, fisherman, labourer and some of them have some petty business. They have to face many economic hardships and they are not getting proper profit for their craft. Poverty is their main problem. Hiras are born and brought up under poverty. Because of poverty most of the Hira people are uneducated. But to improve and develop their craft education is the main factor. In present times also some Hira families are still practicing earthenware pot making for their livelihood because they are socio-economically backward.

a. Educational Qualification of the respondents

60% respondents are illiterate in Hirapara village in present times. They are not aware of the importance of education. 25% respondent's educational level is primary and only 15% respondent's educational level is high school. Compare to male potters female potters are more uneducated. In some Hira families their daughters also engaged in pottery making activity.

b. Production of the households in every months

Out of 20 households 9 households practiced earthenware making activity. Among them 66.67% households produce 5000-6000 earthen products in every month. Only 33.33% households' total no. of monthly production of earthen pots is 3000-4000. Most of the Hira households (55.56%) used to produce Earthenware product for both domestic and market use. Only 44.44% Hira households make earthen pots for only market use. But not any Hira family makes earthen pots only for their domestic use. But every household's (100%) answer is positive to marketing facility of earthen pots. They are not facing any problem in marketing the earthen pots.

c. Income of Hira Households

Above data indicate that 65% households have low family income, range from Rs 3001 to 5000 and 15% each of the household's monthly income is below Rs 3000 and Rs 7001 to 9000. While only 5% household's average income is Rs 5001 to 7000 per month.

40% households have two earning members in their family and 25% of the households consist of three earner and 20% of the households have four earners in their family. Remaining 15%'s earning member is one in their family.

d. Types of House among the Respondents

In Hirapara village 60% family's type of houses are Assam type brick wall, 25% family's type of houses are Assam type half wall with bamboo mud plaster and now also 15% families are living in Assam type mud wall with thatch roof houses .

From sum up we can say that in Hirapara village 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. Today also 90% families are in the below poverty line.

III. SUGGESTIONS

Following suggestions are made from the study-

1. It is very essential to organise 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 in Hirapara village.
2. Government should implement some important programmes and policies for the development of Hira people.
3. After implementing some special programmes and policies for Hira it is very important to organise some awareness camps to make Hira people aware of all programmes and policies which are there for them.
4. Government should look after the problems of Hira people and try to solve their problem in a concrete manner.
5. Special attention needs to be given to improve the educational condition of Hira people in Hirapara Village.

IV. CONCLUSION

On the basis of above discussion we can conclude that Earthenware is an employment oriented craft. Hira women also engaged in pot making in their free time. But in present times there are many changes occur in society, occupation and environment. So Hiras traditional occupation also influence by these changes. Now this earthenware pottery 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 Hirapara village also many Hira people left their traditional occupation for various 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 earthenware occupation is a full time occupation their socio-economic condition is worse than the Hira families who engaged in other occupation.

Earthenware is the traditional occupation of Hiras, but under all those changing situation Hiras would be compelled to leave their traditional craft if proper, essential resources and facilities are not provided. So appropriate measure should be taken up to improve and uplift the condition of Hiras and their traditional craft.

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