

Sale Outlays and Problems of Marketing of Wares of Hira Pottery Craft

(A Socio-Economic Survey on Hira Potters in Morigaon District, Assam)

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Abstract

In the name of Hira Devi - the original mother of Hira Jati, a caste with her progenies was formed and it came to be known as Hira Jati and the potteries, produced by them came to be known as Hira potteries i.e. locally known as Hira bachon. The pottery associated with Hira Devi is known as Hira pottery craft . By Hira pottery craft we mean a pottery craft for making pottery from Hira clay with the help of hands of the Hira woman potters or artists of the Hira community known as Hireni as their traditional occupation who transmit their skill orally from one generation to another. The Hira pottery craft of Assam is an ancient hand-made cottage industry handed down from generation to generation based on caste. . The Hira potters are a class of woman artisans associated with the profession of pottery. The Hira woman artisans who shape different types of pottery out of the Hira clay with the help of their hands by using a handy wooden log known as 'Pitoni' without using a potter's wheel and who transmit their skill orally from one generation to another are called Hira potters. Now a days it has been a serious problems for the potters in marketing their pottery wares through different marketing channels due to lack of their organized market . So they are not in a position to ply their traditional profession of pottery craft. Keeping in view here an attempt is made to find out the constraints standing in the path of their pottery craft and to highlight the different marketing channels and sale outlets. For this purpose we have intended to carry out a socio-economic survey on Hira potters in two villages in Marigaon district of Assam .

Key words : Pottery craft , Hira , Hireni , Marigaon district , Assam , marketing channel

The paper consists of five sections:

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Section -2:Background of Sample Villages

Section -3: Problems of Rural Marketing of the sample village

Section - 4:Socio-economic Conditions of the Sample Households

Section -5: Concluding Observations and Suggestion

Section -1

Scope of Research and Design of the Study

1.1 Introduction

The Hira women locally known as Hireni are solely related to the pottery craft. They turn clay into soft mud and then *dan* i.e. lump and then putting this lump on a 2 or 3 square feet stone or on a piece of plank, they beat it by a piece of wood so that they can shape it into a pot as desired . From the very ancient time, in the economy of Assam, the Hira pottery craft occupies an important place. In terms of employment the pottery craft has played a very important role in giving self-employment to the woman Hiras to earn their livelihood and to maintain at least the minimum living standard in the society. During the period (2007-2008) , under Khadi and Village Industries Board , Assam there were 202 working centres of pottery industry where as many as 28509 potters were employed. These potters produced the earthen wares of Rs.109.12 lakh. The value of production of earthen wares decreased from Rs.159.00 lakhs in 2006-2007 to Rs.109.12 lakhs in 2007-2008, while the total sales of earthenware of village

pottery decreased from Rs.166.68 lakhs in 2006-2007 to Rs.130.40 lakhs in 2007-2008¹. It implies that the marketing of pottery wares has fallen day by day. It is a matter of serious concern to be studied.

In spite of the availability of the raw materials like clay, sand, rice, straw, dry pieces of wood and the paddy husk and other required inputs needed for this purpose, as well as its high demand, question arises regarding the obstruction of pottery craft and marketing of its pottery wares :

The obstructions faced by the pottery craft are manifold. The first and foremost problem, the pottery craft faces, is the scarcity of clay. The potters have to suffer from serious problems in the process of collection of Hira clay from the different spots, because of the illegal occupation of the clay deposit by some local people. The second serious problem of the pottery craft is to collect the dry firewood. The artisan is to burn about eight or ten Bhatas i.e. kilns. In each time they have to pay the tax and have to pay a part of their income to get permission. The third serious problem of the potters is to burn the raw haris and other pots to be used by the people. They have to wait in the rainy season for the fair weather so as to burn their potteries. The fourth important problem of the Hiras is the want of store-houses for preserving their raw haries and potteries till the time of burnt.

Regarding the problems of marketing some questions arise :

Why does the problem of marketing of pottery wares arise ? Whether it is due to the low quality of products or it is due to appearance of other metallic substitutes or due to other social factors . In towns and cities, the potters from outside Assam have occupied the markets with their own products .The potters of Assam are generally unconscious about the transformation of the market mainly in the global market. Though at present, lots of aluminum vessels are dazzling the shops in the town, the local potteries have failed to compete with them yet the use of the potteries have not been abolished from the villages or towns. The pottery craft is remaining backward even though the poor people of the villages make the plentiful use of them.

In addition to the local market, sometimes, they have to carry the utensils to the distant places for sale. Sometimes, they carry their products to different villages for selling in exchange of other agricultural commodities. The widow potters carry the load of the potteries on their heads to the market for sale. They also make the barter exchange of the potteries in lieu of rice, paddy and other things they need. Yet, they are quite unable to earn the livelihood of their families. It is because, the potteries have no well-organised market .The customers are not willing to buy the potteries at a high price because, it is easily broken. Though these vessels are highly congenial for health, yet these are not highly demanded and they are bound to be disposed of at a cheaper rate .In comparison with the wages of the potters and the expenditure they require, the potteries have to be sold at a low price and this profession is not a profitable one .The government or its concerned department should do research on these as they can be made hard not to be broken easily.

The prosperity of an industry depends on the extent of the market of its output .The market of potteries produced by Hiras is confined within the four walls of the state. The pottery craft has failed to popularize its potteries in the markets outside Assam for want of the sale centres, advertisement etc..Moreover, it has not been in a position to occupy the wide national, regional and foreign market for sale its products. Since the outputs of the pottery industry are confined within a particular region, its growth cannot be expected.

The excessive cost of the production is another serious problem for marketing pottery wares .The cost of production goes up because of want of proper suitable communication, lack of means of publicity, lack of knowledge about market, want of raw materials, high rate of interest in case of capital borrowed, want of skilled labour and lack of organization of their own as may manage for marketing of their products. Its demand comes down slowly either because of its high price prevailing due to its high cost of production or because of the cheap price of the similar products of other industries at the same time.

Another most important problem of marketing of pottery wares is that the Hira potters have to face the competition with the products of silver and aluminum which have captured the markets due to low price of its products .Without the minimization of its cost of production, the potteries cannot face the competition in the market and then, the pottery craft will be nowhere throughout the state of Assam . So it is a matter of research on the problems of marketing of earthen wares.

Under this background the two villages of the Morigon district namely Santipur and Dharamtul have been chosen purposively for the purpose of our study. Out of the total households of the sample villages 20 per cent households have been taken as sample households.

I.2 Objectives : The objectives of the study are :

- i. To study the market channels for marketing the pottery wares.
- ii. To examine the problems of rural marketing of pottery wares.
- iii. To study the socio-economic status of the sample Hira women potters
- iv. To give suggestions to the policy makers , planners and government for taking appropriate measures for convenient marketing of pottery wares and for their all-round development.

1.3.Universe and Sample

(i) Universe : The universe of the study consists of Hira Women potters of Morigaon district and the marketing of their products.

(ii) Sample Villages: The villages of Morigaon district namely Dharamtul, Santipur have been purposively selected as sample villages for our study.

(iii) Sample households : In the sample there are as many as 540 households as per our survey. These households have been classified and stratified into three occupational categories viz . primary , secondary and tertiary sector . From the total of each sector 20 per cent households have been selected according to the systematic sampling method. Thus, we have 108 sample households of which 55 households belong to primary sector , 32 are secondary sector and 21 households belong to tertiary sector.

Table 1.1
Sector and village wise Sample Households against the Total Households

Sector-wise occupation	Dharamtul		Santipur		All	
	Total	Sample	Total	Sample	Total	Sample
I. Primary	180	36	95	19	275	55
i. Agriculture	165	33	85	17	250	50
ii. Fishing	15	3	10	2	25	5
II. Secondary	120	24	40	8	160	32
iii. Pottery	120	24	40	8	160	32
III. Tertiary	60	12	45	9	105	21
iv. Service	20	4	15	3	35	7
v. Others : Trade	40	8	30	6	70	14
All	360	72	180	36	540	108

1.4.Data collection and methodology

The study depends both on the primary and secondary data . The primary data have been gathered through sample survey method. That is, the sample households of the sample villages have been canvassed from door to door by using a special set of household schedule and thus, the requisite data have been collected for the purpose of our study .

1.5 Analysis of data : The tabulated data have been analyzed by using statistical tools like percentage according to the chapter scheme prepared already. The work analysis of data has been over on 9-9-2015 but it has been updated on 9-9-2019 .

Section -2

Background of Sample villages- Dharamtul and Santipur

Dharamtul and Santipur are the two oldest and largest centre for production of earthenware in Morigaon district in Assam . People from even distant places of the Morigaon district come to these villages for purchasing various kinds of earthenwares that exhibit dexterity of the artisans .

Both the villages are predominantly inhabited by the Hiras .The traditional potters residing in these villages for several centuries .The two villages are situated at a distance of 9 kms from sub-divisional headquarter Morigaon in the district of Nagaon .These two fall under jurisdiction of Jagiroad police station which is 24 kms from the villages. Sub-Deputy Collector's office and Block Development office are situated at Morigaon . The post office with money traction facilities is available within the villages itself. The nearest telegraph and telephone facilities are available at Jagiroad .

The two villages are well connected with the rest of the district and the state .The National Highway passes nearby the village and as such all the private or state owned buses pass through this village between lower and upper Assam .A kutch motorable road also passes through the villages to Morigaon .

Primary, middle and secondary school facilities are available inside the villages . The nearest college is at Morigaon . College at Jagiroad also caters the need of the villages and medical facilities are available both in Jagiroad and Morigaon.

Situated on a plain surface the villages are surrounded by jungles . The river Kapili is flowing through the villages . Almost every this inundates its banks during rainy seasons which causes great distress to the villagers .However , this river has a beneficial role to play as it provides fishing facilities to the villagers which augments their earnings . Apart from this the clay of this river is good for making pottery .

The climate is more or less tropical .The rainfall is moderate during summer .The monsoon breaks about middle of April of September .

The original inhabitant of the villages are Hiras . Pottery making is the prime occupation of the two villages .The women manufacture various earthen wares which famous all over Assam . Besides pottery making few households are also engaged in fishing a subsidiary occupation . A few households have cultivable land .Pottery plays an important role in molding the socio-economic life of the village in general. Houses are simple and constructed on both sides of the village main road. Wells and Tube-wells are the sources of drinking water . Water is used for washing as well. The river Kapili is another source of water for washing clothes and utensils . Villagers usually take bath in the river Kapili.

There is small market inside the village where all essential commodities are available . The Hira potters sell their products in the market to the buyers coming from outside the village.

There are many skilled potters in these villages and their products have great demand in and outside the village . All the females irrespective of their economic status know the art of making pottery , a skill inherited from their mother or ancestors. Earthen wares especially the Kalah i.e. pitcher of this village is known all over the state . The products of this villages are Kalah, Ghat , Kata , Saru , Hari , Tekeli etc.

Settlement pattern

Settlement pattern of the artisans in the two selected villages is very simple and bears a close simplicity .A cluster of three or four thatched structures around a common courtyard is the typical residential pattern of the households of the artisans .Houses are constructed in a common compact area . They reside in a separate hamlet or para. Houses in the two villages are built on mud foundation having walls made of reed and split bamboo. Houses are plastered with mud and cow dung . The roofs are made of thatch and pillars and beams are made of wood and bamboo. The kitchen is generally attached with the main dwelling house and in some cases it is separated from the dwelling house . Most of the Hira potters have a garden called 'bari' behind their houses where varieties of plants and trees like clumps of bamboo , betel-nut , betel leaf, plain tree and many other fruit-bearing trees are grown. Besides , some of the households also keep a kitchen garden either in front or back of the house .Every households has its own opening to the village path . Generally all the household compounds are well demarcated by bamboo fencing .

Social Status of the artisans

The social status of the Hira potters is low as they belong to Scheduled Castes .In order to raise their social status most of the Hira potters moved from the profession pottery to the occupation of cultivation and changed their titles from Hira to other titles like Medhi , Daloi, Das, Saikia etc. In the new occupation they have become economically sound and raised their social position to a great extent implying high social status.

Categories of potters in the sample villages

In the two villages there are three categories of Hira women potters namely master craftsman ,very old craftsmen and new entrants or amateur craftsman.

Section -3

Sale Outlays and Problems of Marketing of Pottery Wares of the sample villages

3.1 Meaning of Marketing of Pottery wares

Simply marketing of pottery items means selling of the products produced in pottery craft to the market which means a set of buyers –existing as well as potential or actual and potential customers. Here marketing of pottery items is either an act; operation through which the original producers sell their products to the market i.e. to the final consumers or it is a point at which the potters' labour and the value of potters' products generated through the action of their labour on raw materials and fuels, is converted into cash income.

In the marketing of pottery items there are two considerations i. consumer's demand or lack of such demand and ii. rising, static or falling demand . If the consumer demand for pottery item is high then producer will produce or supply according to needs of the consumers on one hand and on the other hand if there is lack of demand for earthenware then the potters will not produce or supply. Further, with respect to rising or falling demand for pottery items the pottery will do accordingly.

3.2. Existing sale outlays for direct sale of the pottery wares

The development of the pottery craft depends on the marketing of its products and the production of pottery and its supply depends on the outlet for its sale. So higher the provision of marketing facilities to the potters for selling their earthenware, higher is the prospect of growth and development of this traditional craft. But absence of an organized market or a sale outlet centre is the main constraint faced by the Hira potters. There is no assured market or outlet centre where the potters can display or dispose off their products .However, the Hira potters are bound to continue their profession as their sole livelihood by marketing their products in traditional way

The general impression of potters of Assam is that they are getting only about half of the ultimate price that the consumer pays for their products because of lack of organised sale outlets. The potters are generally conscious of the advantages of having direct access to the market. There are a many as thirteen different types of sales outlets to sell the products of the potters in Assam in general and in Nalbari and Morigaon district in particulars. The sales outlets, fall into three broad categories viz. 1.1 direct sales by potter, 1.2. sale by Hira potter-trader, and 1.3.sale by shopkeeper or *Dukani*

Here in this section we discuss the existing sale outlays for direct sale of the pottery wares of the potters and problems of the marketing of their products.

1.1 Direct sales by potter

Direct sale by the potter-producer himself of the pottery goods produced by him is considered to be the most advantageous from the point of view of maximizing his returns. There is a view that it is not possible for potters themselves to directly supply their products to the market as they have to work on pottery production and they have no extra persons in their families to undertake direct sale of their products, though such direct sale will bring them better income.

The pottery wares produced in the villages of Marigaon district are largely , if not entirely for commercial use . The products are generally directly disposed of through the ten channels as mentioned below:

- i. **Sale by potters in their home premises i.e.** sale at residence
- ii. **Hawking by potters on *pheri***
- iii. **Sale direct to commercial business users in local market**
- iv. **Faires or melas**
- v. **Haat (market) or weekly or bi-weekly haats**
- vi. **Supply on contract or on order basis**
- vii. Paikari system (whole sale)
- viii. **Barter system**
- ix. **Jaota system**
- x. **Sales in exhibitions**

i. Sale by potters in their home premises i.e. sale at residence

Many potters, after production, keep their goods for sale in their own house. Customers come to their houses and make their purchases. Thus , a part of the vessels produced by the potters are sold directly from their residences. According to the respondents of the Dharamtul and Santipur villages in Morigaon district ,the customers come to their residence and purchase their articles as per their choice and need.

ii. Hawking by potters -Hawker -peddler *pheriwala on pheri*

Hawking (*pheri*) of pottery items means the traveling about with a bundle of earthenwares for sale by Hawker (peddler or pedlar) i.e. *pheriwala* of Hira community. They take their products to the nearby hats and market at Morigaon town and sell them directly to the consumers . In most of the Hira villages in Morigaon district some families having adequate manpower are engaged in disposing of their products by hawking house to house in different villages.

iii **Sale direct to commercial business users in local market** : At present majority of the potters sell their goods in various local markets .However, peddlers selling earthen wares by travelling from one village to another is still a common sight .Thus,they often sell their products in the local market where other articles of day to day use are also sold. In the local markets the products are generally displayed in the temporary stalls for sale. The customers purchase their required articles from these stalls .

iv. **Faires or melas** : ‘Melas’(fairs) held during puja and other socio-religious functions are also important centres of disposing of their finished products. In Morigaon district fairs or melas generally take place on certain religious occasions or festivals . The craftsmen living in nearby villages participate in these fairs or melas , and dispose of their products directly to the consumers . There are some fairs taking place annually on the eve of Bihu , Puja, Bhatheli etc. .These are organised by the local villagers in some villages .Potters go there with their products and sale them .Most of these are one-day fair while some are held for more than one-day , sometimes even for a week

v. **Haat (market) or Weekly or bi-weekly haats**: In Assam as well in Nalbari district and Morigaon district weekly hats and Bi-weekly markets are the main marketing centres for selling the products of the potters. Weekly or bi-weekly hats are held in almost all villages in Assam . The potters living in the adjoining areas carry their products to these hats and dispose them directly to the consumers. For example in Nalbari district the Hira potters sell their products at weekly or bi-weekly markets like Bjeli Bi-weekly market (Tuesday and Saturday) Marowa Bi-weekly market (Tuesday and Saturday) , Kumrikata Bi-weekly market (Saturday and Wednsday) , Dhamdhama Bi-weekly market (Saturday and Wedness day) and Stra weekly market (on Wednesday) etc. Thus ,the role of the *haat* (market) in Nalbari district as a direct sales outlet for artisans including potters has also been noticed earlier.

Like the exhibition, the *haat* too has a limitation regarding the number of potters for whom it can provide sales facilities. It has got greater potential as a mechanism of market development and for securing market intelligence.

vi. Supply on contract or on order basis : The potters undertake production on advance orders from people or shop-keepers. In other words the potters also dispose of their products on contract or on order basis . They receive contracts or order from the individuals or from the dealers , traders and contractors and supply the articles according to their specifications. Sometimes the potters receive some advance payment for purchasing the raw materials (like fire wood etc). During the course of supply or sometimes afterwards they get the amount . Usually they sell the materials on piece-meal basis. The potters are normally asked to make specific types of wares on the occasion of religious ceremonies and marriages.

vii. Paikari system : The finished products under study are marketed by the Paikari system or through middlemen. The middleman or Paikari plays an important role in marketing system . He visits the potter's houses and picks up the finished products in accordance with the presumed demands for these articles. He may or may not place an order for a particular amount and type of objects. The finished products thus gathered are then displayed through temporary stalls which are installed during festivals, *melas* or in regular shops in the town or cities .The price paid to the makers by the middleman is about half or less than half of the customers' price .Because the middleman has to pay for the transportation of the finished products from the potter's village to the stalls and also at times may have to pay the rent for the shop or the stall

viii. Barter system : In the past buying and selling of pottery was usually done on a barter system .Even now this system has not totally been abolished. In the past pottery articles were sold to the peasants in exchange of paddy by travelling peddlers who were the men folk belonging to the potter's families . It has been observed that although modern marketing system is prevalent in the district, still barter system co-exists. They go door to door of each village with their products on foot and exchange their pots for paddy, rice , pulses , oil seeds , cloths and other household requirements without a common standard of exchange.

ix. Jaota system : There is another system of exchange of pottery item for paddy known as *Jaota* system but in very limited extent . *Jaota* means that a potter provides a peasant all his requirement of pottery for the whole year and in turn the peasant gives him some quantities of paddy just after harvest of his crops in the month of December/January without having any amount from both sides.

x. Sales in exhibitions

Exhibitions have been referred to earlier as one of the outlets available to potters for direct sale. It has been noticed that it is only a handful of highly skilled potters who have been able to avail themselves of the exhibitions as an outlet of direct sale. Exhibitions have a more significant role than as sales outlets. They help in the effort for market exploration and market development, apart from also contributing to market intelligence.

Exhibitions conducted by organizations like the All India Handicrafts Board (Development Commissionerate of Handicrafts) are an avenue of direct sales for potters. The potters of Charia village in Nalbari district come with their products to the exhibition conducted by the industrial Department in Gardan field in Nalbari district from time to time and sell these directly.

1.2. Sale by Hira potter-trader

The potter-trader is a person who on the one hand produces his own products but also buys pottery goods from other producers and sells them along with his own products. By such purchase from other potters he is filling a gap in the range of the requirements of the customers in his reach by a means other than production by himself. Near his residential locality there are general residential areas with demand for products more than what he makes or different from what he makes. He does not have the option of meeting the gap by his own production either because he is specialized in making some other products or he does not have the skill of the facilities to produce all the products within the range of his customer's requirement, or there are quantitative limitations on his productive capacity. The balance, he buys in from other pottery producers particularly from the large pottery producers of Nalbari district .

1.3. Sale by shopkeeper or Dukani

Some potters of the Hira community set up a shop in a convenient place specially in the market of the Nalbari district and Morigaon district so that they may sell the pottery wares either made by them or purchased by them from different potter-producers .

In some cases, the *dukandar* come to the potters' houses and make their purchases. In some other cases, the potters take their goods to the shopkeepers. In some cases, even between the same two parties, both types of flows are there. There are a few men of Hiras who transport pottery goods from the potter to the *dukandar*.

As many as twelve potters of the Charia village in Nalbari district who makes pots and also transports pottery goods on *thela*. In Nalbari district some shopkeepers belonging to other castes take earthenwares from Hira potters of Charia village and other Hira villages of the district and they sell these in their shops.

3.3 Problems of marketing of pottery wares

The craft economy of the potters depends on the marketing of the pottery wares . So the better the marketing of the pottery goods the better is the craft economy . But the craft economy has undergone a change from the point of view of decline of the pottery trade i.e. marketing problems of the pottery wares of the potters . In the days of barter system the requirements of the people were limited and these were satisfied by the barter system . But later on the introduction of money economy has affected the self-sufficiency and traditional social economy of the village. In

modern times money has, of course, a great value for the potters. The village customers would provide them only with grain, while they need money for buying clothes and all other necessities of life which can be purchased only for cash payment.

In the open markets or in the market places like weekly fairs, periodically the potters are free to sell their goods for cash or kind to any customer. But in course of time the marketing of the pottery goods has become a burning problem before the potters due to many factors like emergence of metal ware pottery and porcelain. Here two things are notable, one is the potter's fear of losing their occupation and the other is contentment with their subsistence economy.

The artisans continuing in their occupation could not market their products successfully because of the following factors.

i. Introduction of metal ware pottery and porcelain: First, with rapid industrialization, the pattern of life is changing both in rural as well as urban areas. People living in rural and urban areas to-day prefer to use stainless or other cheap metal utensils to earthen vessels. Even in the rural areas the people had formerly high demand for earthen vessels for different purposes but now-a-days they prefer gradually the metal utensils because of their low price and more durability. Thus, with the introduction of metal ware pottery has gone into decline. As a result the trade of pottery has declined. Secondly, introduction of porcelain and its mass production by ceramic factories is another factor responsible for the disuse of the earthenware prepared by village potters. According to the custom of the Hindus, earthenware once used for taking food or drink is discarded at once. On occasions like birth, death etc. The household's earthenware is believed to be polluted and, therefore, replaced by new ones.

ii. Absence of an organized market: The development of the pottery craft depends on the marketing of its products. So higher the provision of marketing facilities to the potters for selling their earthenware, higher is the prospect of growth and development of this traditional craft. But absence of an organized market is the main constraint faced by the Hira potters. There is no assured market or outlet centre where the potters can display or dispose of their products. However, the Hira potters are bound to continue their profession as their sole livelihood by marketing their products in traditional way.

iii. Weak in their bargaining power: The potters are very weak in their bargaining power due to their inferiority complex and are unable to face the onslaught of the competitive prices. Consequently, they are compelled to sell their products to the customers at throw-away prices. Whatever they produce is to be marketed in their immediate surroundings and that too for some selected types of vessels.

iv. High cost of production: The cost of production of pottery is generally higher than the factory or machine made vessels. Higher cost not only restricts consumer preference, it limits the marketing potentialities of the pottery craft, thereby affecting the entire production process.

v. Less competitive: Pottery craft is one of the oldest known form of cottage industry in Morigaon district. But as a result of modern development and emergences of durable metallic utensils and vessels, the craft faced with the inevitable problem of competition with the industrial products. This restricts their production and has made the problem acute and strike at the root of the economic viability. It is, therefore, said that the success or failure of the pottery craft is largely dependent on the marketing potentiality and avenues.

The products of the Hira potters have become less competitive. Skills of rural artisans continue to be old and the technology used is traditional.

vi. Price disadvantages: Artisans face price disadvantages. For instance, cheap plastic and aluminum products have wiped out the market for earthenware. In the opinion of the potters, artisans cannot charge lower prices than machine-made products because of the following reasons.

(a) High raw material costs: First, due to high cost of raw material like clay, firewood for baking pottery the price of the pottery wares is high in comparison to the machine-made products.

(b) High rate of interest: As most of the rural artisans households are landless, they have minimal resources to mortgage or use land as collateral for a loan. In such situations, informal credit plays a critical role in the production and expansion of artisan's enterprise. They are forced to take loans from local middlemen and moneylenders at exorbitant rates of interest. As a result they cannot charge low price of their product.

(c) Lack of purchasing power: The pottery goods are purchased by poor people who cannot afford to pay much due to lack of their purchasing power.

(d) A breakable article: Pottery is a breakable article; it is in every use and, therefore, the price cannot be raised high.

(e) Payment in kind: The customers are villagers who pay mostly in kind.

vii. Lack of the optimal size for a potter-settlement: The potters of Assam in general and of Morigaon district in particular lack the optimal size of land for settlement which limits the size of the marketing of their products.

viii. Lack of market exploration and market development: Due to lack of market exploration and market development the pottery wares have not been marketed properly for which the potters have to bear losses in their marketing of pottery goods. There are the dynamic aspects of market exploration and market development which

supplements the market intelligence. The potters are also aware of the potentialities of the mass-media, the newspapers, the Radio and the T.V. for market exploration and market development on their own products.

ix. want of adequate space and infrastructure: Due to want of adequate space and infrastructure, the potters are handicapped in the following ways in dealing with the market and availing themselves of market opportunities:

- (a) They are not able to work during the winter lean season, the rainy off-days, and the rainy lean season.
- (b) Production is below their physical potential and below the market potential.
- (c) They are not able to store adequate clay at a time. This affects the economics of production as well as the flow of production.
- (d) Part of the clay is lost through exposure to the elements.
- (e) They are not able to stock adequate sawdust/cow dung cakes. This also affects the economics as well as the smooth flow of production.
- (f) Seasonal conditions affect the progress of kiln-firing.
- (g) They are not able to install better equipment even to the extent permitted by current technology and warranted by their own knowledge.
- (h) Quality of the products suffers.
- (i) They are forced to spill over into the footpath, road margin etc.
- (j) The health of the adults and the children, and education of the children suffer.

x. Lack of availability of credit: The marketing of production of pottery goods goes on increasing continuously with the rise in the extension of its market and credit facilities for potters. But the potters have received surprisingly limited support from the organized public and credit institutions—co-operative as well as commercial. In Morigaon district the potters are not in a position to avail the credit facilities either from bank or from other co-operative societies. As a result they are dependent on the private parties for loan at high rate of interest for purchasing raw materials and other important items required for pottery craft.

xi. Problems arising in the *bhatti* or the kiln: The potters are far away from using modern kiln for baking the pottery wares. Besides they are also facing with the increasing problems associated with the baking of pottery wares in kiln. These problems are lack of availability and price of their respective fuels, namely dry wood, cow dung cakes, straw etc.

Section-4

Socio-Economic Conditions of the Sample Households

On the basis of the tabulated data collected from the sample households here an attempt is made to explain the socio-economic conditions of the Hira potters of the sample households in terms of five major parameters namely demography, age composition, literacy, occupation, landholding and housing pattern.

i. Demography

Table 4.1 reveals that there are 439 population. Out of this 229 persons are males and the rest are females. So the sex ratio of them is 934 per thousand male. The size of family of the Hira sample households is as low as 4.1. The low size of family is due to separation of the family after the marriage of the new couple and economic hardship.

Table 4.1 : Size of Population, Sex Ratio and Size of Family of the Sample Households

Village	Total Households	Sample	Male	Female	Total	Sex Ratio	Size of family
Dharamtul	360	72	154	144	298	935	4.1
Santipur	180	36	75	70	145	933	4.0
Total	540	108	229	214	443	934	4.1

Source :Field Survey

ii. Age composition : Table 4.2 reveals the age composition of the sample households and shows that out of the 443 people 9.7 per cent belong to the age group of 0-6 years i.e. non-schooling children. Of the age group of 6-17 years or those who are school-going but not yet entering into the labour market are 66 in number or 14.9 per cent of the total. People at the age group of 18-60 year, the real earner group of the society which is known as economically active population, constitutes 59.8 per cent against 36.4 per cent of the state participation rate as per 1991 census report. And the persons of the age group of 61 years and above constitute 15.6 per cent.

Table 4.2: Size of Population, Sex Ratio and Size of Family of the Sample Households

Village	Male		Female		All	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Dharamtul	154	100.0	144	100.0	298	100.0
0-6	17	11.0	12	8.3	29	9.7
7-17	27	17.5	17	11.8	44	14.8
18-60	78	50.6	100	69.4	178	59.7
61+	32	20.8	15	10.4	47	15.8
Santipur	75	100.0	70	100.0	145	100.0
0-6	8	10.7	6	8.6	14	9.7
7-17	14	18.7	8	11.4	22	15.2
18-60	38	50.7	49	70.0	87	60.0
61+	15	20.0	7	10.0	22	15.2
All	229	100.0	214	100.0	443	100.0
0-6	25	10.9	18	8.4	43	9.7
7-17	41	17.9	25	11.7	66	14.9
18-60	116	50.7	149	69.6	265	59.8
61+	47	20.5	22	10.3	69	15.6

Source :Field Survey

iii. Literacy: Literacy is very much essential to everyone and the government is trying hard to reach 100 per cent literacy level in the country. As a result after independence there has been considerable progress in the field of education not only in the compact area but also in different states of the country. Literacy rate among the male and female has also increased steadily after independence . Table 4.3 reveal that 67.3 per cent of the total population of the sample households are illiterates . Again 20.3 per cent people belong to primary standard , 9.9 per cent people belong to secondary level of education and only 2.5 per cent people have achieved higher education .

Table 4.3 : Literacy Rate of the Hiras of the Sample Households

Education	Dharamtul			Santipur			All		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	63.6	75.0	69.1	57.3	70.0	63.4	61.6	73.4	67.3
Primary	20.1	15.3	17.8	28.0	22.8	25.5	22.7	17.8	20.3
Secondary	13.0	7.6	10.4	10.7	7.1	9.0	12.2	7.4	9.9
Higher	3.2	2.1	2.7	4.0	-	2.1	3.5	1.4	2.5
All	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source : Derived from Table 4.4

Table 4.4: Size of Population of the Hiras According to the Literacy Level

Education	Dharamtul			Santipur			All		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	98	108	206	43	49	92	141	157	298
Primary	31	22	53	21	16	37	52	38	90
Secondary	20	11	31	8	5	13	28	16	44
Higher	5	3	8	3	-	3	8	3	11
All	154	144	298	75	70	145	229	214	443

Source: Field Study

iv. Occupation

Table 4.5 reveal that out of 108 sample households 50.9 per cent are employed in primary sectors where as high as 46.3 per cent households are engaged as cultivators and as low as 4.6 per cent households are engaged as fishermen .Further, it has been observed from Table 4.5 that 26.9 per cent Hira women potters are directly engaged in secondary sector i.e. in pottery making art and 19.4 per cent persons of the total households are employed in tertiary sector . Village-wise the percentage of heads of the households engaged in primary sector is more in Santipur (52.8%) than Dharamtul (50.0%) . In secondary sector i.e. in the pottery craft the percentage of Hira women potters are more in Dharamtul village (33.3%) than Santipur village (22.2%) . But the proportion of

the male heads engaged in tertiary sector is higher in Santipur village(25.0%) than that of the Dharamtul village(16.7%).

Table 4.5 : Sector and village wise Sample Households against the total households

Sector-wise occupation	Dharamtul		Santipur		All	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
I. Primary	36	50.0	19	52.8	55	50.9
i. Agriculture	33	45.8	17	47.2	50	46.3
ii. Fishing	3	4.2	2	5.5	5	4.6
II. Secondary	24	33.3	8	22.2	32	29.6
iii. Pottery	24	33.3	8	22.2	32	29.6
III. Tertiary	12	16.7	9	25.0	21	19.4
iv. Service	4	5.6	3	8.3	7	6.5
v. Others : Trade	8	11.1	6	16.7	14	13.0
All	72	100.0	36	100.0	108	99.9

Source : Field Survey

Section -5

Concluding Observations and Suggestions

In the present study an attempt has been made not only to highlight the problems of marketing of the pottery wares of two villages of Morigaon districts namely Dharamtul and Santipur but also socio-economic plight of the Hira potters. In Morigaon district out of sixty villages we have purposively selected two villages viz. Dharamtul and Santipur as sample where majority of the Hira households are engaged in pottery craft and marketing of its products. Out of the total households of the two sample villages we have taken 20 per cent or 108 households as sample for our study regarding the marketing of rural pottery products.

On the basis of the analysis made above we can discern the following observations.

- i. Out of 443 population ,229 are males and 214 are females .So sex ratio is estimated at 938 . The size of family is low (4.1) due to separation of the family after the marriage of the new couple and economic hardship.
- ii. As regards the age composition of the sample households it has been observed that out of the 443 people 9.7 per cent belong to the age group of 0-6 years i.e. non-schooling children 14.9 per cent are in the age group of 6-17 years and 59.8 per cent are in the age group of 18-60 year against 36.4 per cent of the state participation rate as per 1991 census report. And the persons of the age group of 61 years and above constitute 15.6 per cent.
- iii. As regard literacy rate we see that only 32.7 per cent of the total population are literates . Again 20.3 per cent people belong to primary standard , 9.9 per cent people belong to secondary level of education and only 2.5 per cent people have achieved higher education
- iv. Out of 108 sample households 50.9 per cent are employed in primary sectors , 26.9 per cent Hira women potters are directly engaged in secondary sector i.e. in pottery making art and 19.4 per cent persons are employed in tertiary sector .
- v. With the change of their structural change it has been observed that economic structure of them specially of them is changing from occupation of pottery making to diversified market oriented occupations and permanent cultivation leading to development of a loosely organized middle class centering around the semi-urban areas of the Morigaon district. This change has been because of multiplicity of causes like dual handicap viz. social disability and economic deprivation, hatred towards pottery making art etc..
- vi. The original status mobility pattern of horizontal nature has changed to a vertical character through inter-caste marriage, occupational diversification , educational and cultural improvement and political suzerainty .

Suggestions

On the basis of our observations derived from our study we could recommend the following suggestions for improvement of pottery wares required for marketing of pottery wares and for ameliorating the economic plight of them .

1. Protection of market: The role of planning

Though there is a good demand for many traditional and new pottery products yet the potters are to face with severe competition from plastic, metal and advanced ceramic products. So there is need of a good planning for convenient marketing of the pottery goods so that they compete with that of the products made of metals, plastics and advanced ceramics. When planning will be made by the government at national and state level to help potters to sell their products, to increase their sales and then it will enhance their incomes.

2. Credit facilities : In order to provide credit facilities to the needy potters the following steps need to be taken.

- i. Simplification of procedural formalities for applying for and obtaining loans
- ii. A thorough assessment of the full requirements of productive, developmental and related credit and matching the requirements in full, in each case taken up.
- iii. Taking up potters' colonies as the unit for credit flow, and institutional personnel going to each colony on pre-announced dates and timings, taking applications and sanctioning credit to all deserving and interested potters in the colony .

3 . Improvement of kiln : In order to improve the quality of the pottery products it is necessary to improve the condition of the kiln . Besides the kiln needs to be economically, technologically and operationally advantageous, but also be culturally acceptable.

4. Provision of infrastructural facilities: In order to make a solution to the space and infrastructure it will be necessary to be comprehensive, covering all aspects of their domestic, educational as well as economic activity. This can be implemented over a length of time, but the framework of the blueprint for the entire Assam can and must be prepared without loss of time as suggested under the section on improved access to the market. At the same time short term solutions are required on an emergency basis and are possible in a number of localities

5. Improved access to the market i.e. improving the potter-producers' market access: The potters are conscious of the need to improve their access to the market and enhance their returns from the market. For the propose of improving the potter-producers' market access the various suggestions received from numerous potters of the Dharamtul and Santipur are enumerated below:

i. Provision of shops: They should be provided the shops for potters in markets and localities where there will be better sales.

ii. Provision of space : The government should provide for potters, space in market places .

iii. Provision of sales facilities: Sales facilities should be provided for potters in markets.

iv. A separate market : A separate market should be set up for potters .

v. Purchase of pottery goods by Government directly: In order to improve the potters' income government should buy directly from them the pottery goods required for government canteens, railways etc.

vi. **Space for exhibition :** In addition to the rural village complex in the Pragati Maidan under the auspices of the Trade Fair Authority, more space may be provided in the exhibition ground for potter-artisans. Similarly in Assam the state government should provide space for trade fair for exhibition of pottery goods.

vii. **Provision of some sales space:** Some sales space for a limited number of potter-artisans of the vicinity may be provided in each important bus stand so that the public can purchase pottery goods while waiting for their buses.

viii. **Provision for making monthly or bi-monthly fair:** Now and then when the sports stadia are not in use, provision may be made for monthly or bi-monthly fairs/sales by potters and other traditional self-employed producers.

ix. **Organised Potters' Bazars:** Potters' Bazars may be organised periodically every year in some convenient rural setting near the city. A crafts *Bazaar* was organised near Surajkund in a rural setting by the DCII in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, in 1986. This was successful from the point of view of craftsman as well as visiting customers who flocked in large numbers, taking advantage of the subsidized bus service arranged from Delhi. This service was available both for public as well as crafts persons. Similar *Bazaar* with the same facilities may be arranged periodically.

x. **Arrangement for sales facilities :** Sales facilities for the potter-producers may be arranged in important gatherings of women like ladies club meetings, *mela*, exhibitions organized by the Railway Officers' Wives Association, and other such associations.

xi. **Licensing of exhibition :** Whenever any circus or exhibition or *mela* is licensed, as a condition of such license, they may be required to earmark adequate convenient space for the use of traditional potter-producers and potter-traders.

xii. **Arrangement for sales of pottery goods in and around the national or international conference :** Wherever large regional, national and international conferences, conventions etc. of professional classes/bodies are held, facility for traditional potter-producers may be provided for sales. This will not only help the potters but also will win the appreciation of the participants of the conferences.

xiii. Encouragement to purchase pottery goods by all government department: All governmental departments and public sector organisations and educational institutions should be required to purchase the pottery goods needed by them only directly from potter-producers through a proper price fixation formula which can be worked out through the good offices of the DCH and/or the KVIC, on the basis of sound costing principles, and providing for a fair return for the talents, skill and labour invested by the potter- artisans.

xiv. **Resolving of market conflict:** The market conflict between terracotta *jālee* and cement *jālee* could be resolved with the help of representatives of the association of architects, and the concerned government departments, associating potter-producers with the efforts. Their areas could be demarcated—cement *jālee* and iron grills in the external part of buildings where security is important, and terracotta *jālee* inside where they can provide aesthetic

attractiveness. Terracotta *jā!ee* can also be used in the rapidly growing weaker sections' housing programme even on the outside since security of property is not a major consideration in the case of residents of such houses.

6.The optimal size for a potter-settlement : In the case of pottery goods, the consumer profile is different. Its market largely consists of lower income groups. The elite or *Traditional Potters Marketing* even upper middle and middle-middle classes' contribution to the market for pottery goods is very limited. Therefore, pottery goods tend to be largely disposed of at a large number of local points and there is very little movement to central points.

A size of about 100 to 150 professionally active potter-families would be, in the author's view, the optimal size for a potter-settlement considering a) the size and location of the market, b) the size required for convenient in-flow of raw materials and fuels, and outflow of finished goods. c) the size required for setting up of common facilities; training facilities; credit facilities; adult education facilities; out-of- school child development facilities; sports, cultural and recreational facilities; requirements for the growth of democratic socio-professional organizations as well as functional.

7.Improvement of trade margins and trade relations

One of the basic themes of the economy of artisans is exploitation of their talent, skill and labour. This takes the shape of their being given or allowed to receive only too small a share of the price paid by the market for their products. This important issue has been examined with reference to the potter-artisans of Nalbari district in this survey. The general perception of potters is that market prices are double the prices at which they sell their products to *dukandar* or contractor. This applies to the relatively small part of the product which is sold by the potter through the *dukandar* contractor.

8 Fishery Co-operative Societies among the Hiras should be revitalized and registered. These societies should be given the right of taking hira mati from the beels and river at a reasonable price so as to reduce the influence of the Mahaldars over the sources of raw materials .

9. Since they are not in position to generate sufficient income from their paternal occupation, they should be encouraged by providing them economic incentives in the form of self-employment opportunities or subsidiary occupations like dairy farming, piggery, bee-keeping, poultry farming etc. by concerned departments .

In our concluding remark we may say that for the development of the pottery as an industry , the government of Assam will have to take certain necessary steps as regards granting- (a)permanent settlement of the Hira reserves to the Hira potters ,(b)permission to collect the waste dry woods of the forest areas for utilization in the industry ,(c)providing training facilities to each and every Hira potter who is engaged in the industry , (d) creating provision of easy financial accommodation to their self-employment youths and (e) creating marketing avenues for their product.

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