Chapter - III
3.1. Geographical and demographic background of Assam

The importance of geography as well as demography of a place for the introduction of man’s past has been properly and eloquently stated by a philosopher Camille Julian in the following words – ‘give me the map of a country, its configuration, its climate, its water, its wind and all its physical geography give me its natural production, its flora, its zoology and I pledge myself to tell you a priori, what part that country will play in history, not, by accident, but by necessity, not at one epoch, but in all epochs” (Febvre, 1950). Despite the poetic exaggeration with which these lines were written, the fact still remains that direct influences on economy are exercised by geographical environment, by earth, nature, soil and climate on man and his life and culture (Medhi B., 1992). With these facts in mind a brief account on the geo-historical and demographical background of Assam with special consideration of Kamrup District, is made in following section.

Spate (1954) in his book, “India and Pakistan” opines the geographical account of Assam with the following remarks “The state of Assam possesses a very marked individuality. It is in a sense, transitional towards High Asia and Indo-China and even to China itself”. Some writers often described it as a miniature India an epitome of the subcontinent.

Barua (1966) opines that the ancient history of Assam, or Pragjyotish – Kamrup, the names of which the land was known from the dawn of its history, is an almost unexplored and un-investigated field study.

According to Gait (1925) Kamrupa included roughly the Brahmaputra valley, Bhutan, Rangpur and Coach Bihar. Further, he stated that the country was divided into four ‘Pithas’ or sectors with clearly marked river boundaries, viz. Kampith from the Karatoya to Sankosh, Ratanapith from the Sankosh to Rupahi, Suvarnapith from Rupali to the Bharali and Soumarpith from Bharali to the Dikrong. Elsewhere, Rabanapith is said to be included the tract between Karatoya and the Manas, Kampith that between the Manas and silghat on the North Bank of the Brahmaputra, and
Suvrnapith, the corresponding portion of the south Bank, while soumarpith as before, is the most easterly tract (Gait 1925). Thus, whatever may be the alignments of the borders of these portions, the Ratnapith division of old Kamrupa is the present district of Kamrup.

The name of the Province Assam has actually a quite recent origin, and it is interpreted by different scholars in a number ways. Some are of the opinion that it is connected with the shan invaders who entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of the thirteenth century AD and who were known as ‘Ahom’s. The present name of the state ‘Assam’ is derived from Ahom whose tradition is ‘unequalled’ or ‘peerless’. They say that this was the term applied to them at the time of their invasion of the valley by the local tribes, in token of their admiration of the way in which the Ahom king first conquered and then conciliated them (Gait 1925).

3.1.1 Location

Assam is situated between the parallels of N 24° 88’ and N 27° 10’ north latitude and E 80° 42’ and E 90° 10’ east longitude. Situated in the north eastern part of India, Assam is surrounded by six states (Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura) and two countries (Bangladesh and Bhutan). The state of Assam constitutes about 2.4 per cent of the countries total geographical area.

There are 27 districts in the state, and further they are sub divided into 145 revenue circles. The table 3.1 illustrates key demographic statistics of the state:
Table – 3.1 : Demographic statistics of Assam and Kamrup District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>Kamrup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Geographical Area</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Sq.km.</td>
<td>78,438</td>
<td>4345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>3,11,69,272</td>
<td>15,17,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Density of Population</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Population/Sq.km.</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sex Ratio</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Females/1000 Males</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Literacy Rate</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>73.18</td>
<td>72.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 2011, Assam Series 19

So far as demographic background is concerned it is observed from Table-3.1 that Assam has an area of 78438 sq.km according to latest census 2011 and the total population of the state is 1,59,54,927 out of the total population 85.91 per cent are rural and 14.08 per cent are urban people. Assam ranks 14th in the size of population among the states of India, 15th in the density and sex ratio and 26th in literacy among the states of India. (Census of India, Assam, 2011).

3.1.2 Climatic condition of Assam

Climatically, Assam has mainly two seasons, the rainy season and the cold season. The monsoon usually starts in June and lasts until the end of October. The topography and the warm and humid climate are conducive to plant and vegetation growth. Assam is the home of 51 forests and sub-forests and the confluence of diverse pattern of vegetation.

3.2 Economic Background of Assam

Assam, the largest economy of the North East India is witnessing economic growth rate of close to 8 per cent over the last few years. Agriculture and allied activities contribute more than 30 per cent of the NSDP (Net State Domestic Product). The table below shows the key GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product) of the state’s economy:

Table – 3.2: Gross State Domestic Product of Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particular</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11(P)</th>
<th>2011-12(Q)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)</td>
<td>Rs. Crore</td>
<td>69793.89</td>
<td>75297.77</td>
<td>80171.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant (2004-05) Prices</td>
<td></td>
<td>95974.57</td>
<td>112466.26</td>
<td>126543.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Growth Rate as per GSDP</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>14.39</td>
<td>12.16</td>
<td>10.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Economic Survey of Assam
Economic backwardness of North Eastern Region in general and Assam in particular is almost proverbial. The economy of Assam represents a unique example of poverty amidst plenty. Assam holds a unique position in respect to mineral oil production. The present state is much smaller than what it was forty years ago. It is still the largest economy in the North East. It is like the gateway to the other North Eastern States with an infrastructure index (according to CMIE in 1992-93) of 93, quite close to the average of 100. Although it is more industrially developed than the other North Eastern States, it is primarily an agrarian economy with 74 per cent of its population engaged in agriculture and allied activities. The state is known for its large industries in the tea and petroleum sectors. According to 2001 census, 2.66 crores of the total population of the State depends on agriculture fully or partially.

Compared to most other states in India, Assam is considered to be a less developed state. The socio-political problems afflicting the state since last few decades and they are partly to be blamed for a lack of conducive environment for economic development of the state, particularly in industry or service oriented areas.

Assam’s tea gardens produce just over half of the country’s tea and contributes about one sixth of the world’s tea production. Extensive oil reserves were found in Assam in the 19th century and Digboi became the site of Asia’s first oil refinery. A polyester spinning mill has also been established at Nathkuchi village of Kamrup district. The major power stations in the state are Chandrapur Thermal Project, Namrup Thermal Project, Karbi-Langpi-Hydel Electrict Project and Lakwa Thermal Power Station. Assam is the largest producer of the golden coloured “Muga Silk” in the world. Assam is the economic hub of the region, accounting for about 69 per cent of the regional population and about 65 per cent of the regional output.

3.2.1 Agriculture

Agriculture and its allied activities play an important role in the socio-economic development of the State as this sector is the major contributor to the State economy and is providing livelihood to a significant proportion of the population of the State. About 99 per cent of the total land mass of the State is rural. Agriculture sector in the State is providing employment to more than 50 per cent of the rural people. The net cultivated area of the State is 28.11 lakh hectares (2009-10) which is about 88 per cent of the total land available for cultivation in the State. The cropping intensity is 149 per cent. Assam produces both food and cash crops. The principal food crops produced in the state are rice (paddy), maize (corn), wheat, pulses, potato,
etc., while the principal cash crops are tea, bamboo, rubber, jute, oilseeds, sugar cane, cotton, tobacco and fruits.

The contribution of Agriculture sector to the State Domestic Product was nearly 25 per cent during 2010-11. The government of Assam claims an all time high production of rice of 55 lakh MT in the year 2012-13. The state annually produces more than 15.0 lakh MT of fruits, 44.0 lakh MT of vegetables and 2.0 lakhs MT of spices besides nut crops, flowers and medicinal and aromatic plants are contributing significantly towards food and nutritional security of the State according to economic survey, Assam, 2011-12.

In the fifties, the share of agriculture in state income was approximately 60 per cent, in the eighties it was about 50-55 per cent, in the nineties, it was only around 35 per cent, but in the first two years of the twenty-first century, the share of agriculture in the state income has once again moved up to 40-41 per cent. The annual production of rice has maintained an upward trend but the total production is far less than the amount required for providing food security to the people.

3.2.2 Forest

The allied sectors, such as forest or fishery products, albeit their importance in the state’s economy. As per forest profile of the state, there are Reserved Forest area and Proposed Forest area. The reserved forest area constitutes around 18 per cent and total forest area excluding unclassed forest constitutes around 26 per cent of the total geographical area of the State. Forests form an important part of the Assam Economy, with the forest products like timber and bamboo earning sizeable revenue for the state.

Assam has ample scope for bamboo based industry like paper manufacturing industry, since this region has highest concentration of bamboo i.e., around 60 per cent of the total bamboo of the country.

3.2.3 Fishery

The state is gifted with vast fisheries resources with enormous potential for development. There are about 3.91 lakh hectares of water area in the state in the form of rivers, beel, derelict water bodies, ponds and tanks. There is a positive trend in fish productivity during recent past. During the year 2012-13 fish production has reached 2.54 million ton against 2.32 million ton in 2010-11. State is yet to reach self-sufficiency in fish production as well as minimum nutritional requirement.
3.2.4 Tea

The main commercial crop of Assam is the tea which offers employment to over a million of people. The Tea Industry of Assam is playing a vital role in the state as well as in the national economy. The total area under tea cultivation is accounting for more than half of the country’s total area under tea and the tea industry of Assam provides average daily employment to more than 6 lakh persons in the State which is around 50 per cent of the total average daily number of labour employed in the country. The number of tea gardens in the state is more than 49 thousand covering 322 thousand hectares of land out of 578 thousand hectares of land in the country as a whole. The tea production in Assam constitutes more than 50 per cent of the total tea production in the country.

3.2.5 Industry

Although Assam has plenty of minerals, forests and agricultural wealth, its industrial development is comparatively much less than the rest of India. Due to remoteness from the nation’s main land, volatile law and order situation and insurgent groups activities, not many industries have come up in the state. However, among eight states of the North Eastern Region, Assam is the most industrially advanced state. There are some large, medium and small scale industries based on the resources like agriculture, forest and mineral. Assam has some food products, timber products, chemical products, non-metalic mineral products, tea, and oil related industrial units. In addition to petroleum, large quantities of natural gas are also available from the oil fields.

Two main large scale industries are oil and natural gas which accounts 50 per cent of India’s on-shore production and tea contributes around 53 per cent of all India tea production. Some other industries are fertilizer, sugar, jute, silk, paper, plywood, rice mills, oil drilling, handloom, sericulture, cement and petrochemical. The region has an abundant supply of hydro resources, coal existence, petroleum existence, but of little use. The growth observed in the manufacturing sector is the result of the production of some selected industrial items like tea, wheat flour, jute textiles, cement, etc. over the level of production of the previous year.

The major traditional industries of the state are weaving in country looms, pottery, black smithy, bell-metal and brass-metal works, gold smithy, village carpentry, bamboo and cane works, spinning of endi, muga and mulberry silk, vegetable dyeing, wood carving, hand pounding of rice, manufacture of ivory
products etc. Some of these industries are decaying due to competition from machine made goods, lack of marketing facilities etc. Handloom industry of Assam is known for its rich glorious tradition of making handloom and handicraft products. It also plays a very important role in the socio-economic development of the State. Assam is a proud owner of more than 13 lakh looms out of the total 28 lakh looms in the country and also the only producer of three unique varieties of silk, the Golden Muga, the white Pat and Warm Eri.

3.2.6 Standard of Living and Economic Condition of People of Assam

The whole of North East is poor as compared to India, and Assam seems to be the poorest state, going neck to neck with Manipur in terms of real per capita income. It is to be noted that there has been a decrease in the incidence of urban poverty in the state over time and it has also been lower than all India average, but the incidence of rural poverty continues to be higher than all India average and not shown any sign of improvement over time. Other indicators of poverty like monthly per capita consumer expenditure, the proportion of expenditure on food to total expenditure and level of food security also place Assam at a much lower level than all India average.

3.2.7 Poverty

The Planning Commission estimates found that Assam had 37.9 per cent (116.4 lakh) population living below poverty line in 2009-10, as against 34.4 per cent (97.7 lakh) population in 2004-05. Assam witnessed 3.5 per cent points rise in poverty between 2004-05 and 2009-10. The State’s population continues to live below the poverty line with 40 per cent in rural areas (105.3 lakh) and 26 per cent in urban areas (11.2 lakh).

3.2.8 Human Development Index

Assam ranks 3rd in the rate of progress in human development index (HDI) among all the major states of the country achieving 32.1 per cent progress for the period of 1999 – 2008.

3.3 Demographic and economic background of Kamrup District

Historically, Assam was referred as Kamrup in many of the ancient Indian literature. Till the Ahom conquest, Kamrup district was known as Pragjyotispur due to the astrology (Jyotish Shashtra) practices that prevailed in this part of the country. The mythologies of ancient Assam reveal that the word “Kamrup” means the land where ‘Kamdev’ regained his “Rupa” (form). During Ahom reign, Guwahati became an
important strategic point and saw the famous battle of Saraighat between Ahom and Mughals, and since then Guwahati as well as Kamrup district continue to play the Political, Social, Economic and intellectual leadership of the state.

Kamrup is one of the oldest districts of Assam which was created in the year 1934 by the British Government (the legal position of the district was defined by Act II of 1835). By the passage of time the original Kamrup district has been fragmented into a number of smaller administrative units such as – Barpeta district in 1983 and Nalbari district in 1985. The latest fragmentation of Kamrup district was made in 2003, by which it was further sub-divided into Kamrup (Rural) and Kamrup (metro). However, the discussion made in this study is about the Kamrup (rural) district.

3.3.1 Population

As per the latest census report of 2011, Kamrup (rural) is the sixth populous districts of Assam. The total population of the district is 15,17,202 with a decadal growth rate of 15.67 per cent during 2001-11. The district accounts for 4.87 per cent of total population of the state. Out of the total population in the district, 7,79,608 (51.38 per cent) are male and 7,37,594 (48.62 per cent) are female; while 1,02,866 (6.78 per cent) are scheduled castes (SC) and 1,50,658 (9.93 per cent) are scheduled tribes (ST). Again, 72.81 per cent of the total population in the district are literate, of which 77.64 per cent are male and 67.69 per cent are female. The density of population in the district is 436 per sq. km with sex ratio 946.

Being the gateway district to the north east, Kamrup (rural) attracts a large number of people from within and outside the state for various administrative purposes, trade and commerce and for many other services. Almost all the
administrative, commercial and political head-quarters of Assam are within the reach in this district. Amingaon is functioning as administrative head-quarter of the district.

3.3.2 Location

The district Kamrup (rural) lies between N 25° 43′ and N 26° 53′ north latitudes and E 90° 39′ and E 92° 12′ 20′ east longitudes, covering a geographical area of 4345 sq km which accounts for 5.5 per cent of the total geographical area of the state. The district is bounded by Darrang and Kamrup (metro) districts on the east; Nalbari along with some parts of Goalpara district on the west. The kingdom of Bhutan is located on the Northern boundary, while the Southern side is bounded by Meghalaya. The mighty river Brahmaputra and its tributaries are flowing through the districts.

Kamrup has 2 Sub-divisions, 7 Towns, 11 Revenue circles, 1422 villages, 162 Gaon panchayats and 15 Development Blocks.

3.4 Economic background of Kamrup District

Although the rural economy of Kamrup district is agrarian in nature however, the tertiary sector is dominant in terms of its income share and employment and livelihood generation. The sector contributes 66 per cent of the total income in the Gross District Domestic Product while secondary sector contributes 20 per cent. The primary sector contribution is estimated to be 14 per cent. The per capita Gross
District Domestic Product of Kamrup estimated at Rs. 22292 is the highest among the districts of the state.

As per the Census report of 2011, the volume of total working population in the district is 8,42,253 of which 6,66,968 (79.19 per cent) are male and 1,75,285 (20.81 per cent) are female. The workforce participation rate in the district is 33.4 per cent of the total populations, of which 24.6 per cent are cultivators, 9 per cent are agricultural labours, 5.6 per cent are engaged in household industries and 60.8 per cent are other workers.

3.4.1 Land

The major portion of the geographical area of Kamrup district is put to agricultural uses. Net area under different crops in the district works out to 1.82 lakh ha forming about 42 per cent of the total geographical area.

3.4.2 Forestry

The forest resource base of the district comprises of 23 reserve forests under three forest divisions of Kamrup East, Kamrup West and North Kamrup. The total forest area in the district is 122905.105 hectares excluding the unclassed state forest. In respect of farm forestry, the district has vast scope for development of baboo sector. The two paper Mills existing in the state depend on bamboo as their raw material. The bamboo existing in the forest areas are limited in supply and also exist in inaccessible areas.

3.4.3 Industry

The industrial base of the district is agro based. The district has 676 (23 per cent of the state total) industrial units registered which comprise of food products and beverages, manufacture of wood and wood products. The district has a total number of 14776 SSI units which is alomost 30 per cent of the state total. The industries having major concentration around Guwahati include engineering, agro-based and chemical industries. The forest based industries are concentrated in Palasbari, Sualkuchi, Hajo and North Guwahati. Sualkuchi and North Guwahati are also famous for handloom and handicraft activities. The existing rural non-farm sector activities in the district are classified under three broad heads as manufacturing and processing, trade, transport and services. The data from District Industries and Commerce Centre, Kamrup shows the various categories of industries already set up in the district and where high growth potential exist.
Table – 3.3: Categories of Industries set up in Kamrup District with high growth potential

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice Mills</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cane and bamboo</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer assembling</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Products</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readymade Garments</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Product</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paints</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooden Furniture</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steel fabrication</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PLP, Kamrup; 2006-07, NABARD

The agro-climatic condition of the district is suitable for sericulture. The muga silk of Assam is popular in India and other countries. Since sericulture mainly involves women in rearing and spinning, it has great potential for creating employment opportunities for them. Around 420 villages in the district are involved in sericulture activities.

The silk and weaving industry of Sualkuchi is one of the traditional handicraft activities which has generated employment and provided livelihood opportunities to people in the district.

3.4.4 Plantation and Horticulture

The agro climatic condition of the district makes it ideally suited for plantation and horticulture. Development of horticulture not only helps in creating additional job opportunity for the unemployed youth but is also useful from the point of view of value 20 addition to the food and food processing units. The district has good potential for growing of fruit crops which include pineapple, litchi, orange, lemon, papaya, banana, mango, guava, etc. The district also offers good scope for mushroom production and floriculture, being close to the urban centre like Guwahati.

3.5 Infrastructure and connectivity

3.5.1 Roads

The district has a total of 192 km. of national highway and 73 km of state highways besides 1670 km. of rural roads. This indicates that access and availability to
good road connectivity in the district is fairly low. The district has three national highways viz. NH-37, NH-52 and NH-31 passing through it.

3.5.2 Air and Water transport

The district headquarter of Guwahati has an international airport with well developed air connectivity to rest of the country. The international flight operation from the city is restricted to Bangkok only at present. Although during the pre independence period and even till the end of sixties water ways served as a major mode of transportation for export of tea, however in the post 1971 period, the river transport and shipping facilities gradually stopped as access via Bangladesh was denied. However, at present there is an IWT depot port at Amingaon which is responsible for cargo handling and transshipment of bulk goods and tea mainly by waterways. The Inland Water Transport department runs regular ferry services.

3.5.3 Telecommunication

Although the telecommunication facilities in urban areas of Kamrup district are fairly well developed, the rural telecommunication facilities requires strengthening. Only 28 per cent of the villages in the district have P&T facilities.

3.5.4 Power and Energy

Of the total villages in the district although 77.65 per cent have power supply however, domestic connection for lighting is available in 75 per cent of the villages in the district which shows that remaining 25 per cent of the households use other sources as lighting. The district has a total demand of 15 MW of power while supply is only of 12 MW. This gap in demand and supply indicates that inadequacy of power supply is one of the reasons for slow pace of rural electrification as much also slow pace of industrialization.

3.5.5 Banking

The population coverage of banking service is estimated to be 31,040 persons per bank office as per the number of offices in 2006. The total number of reporting offices in the district stands at 71 which comprises of SBI, SCB and OSCBs.

3.6 Human Development Index

Kamrup is one of the better performing districts in respect of developments in basic human capabilities in three fundamental dimensions, viz., a long and healthy life, knowledge and standard of living, as indicated by its HDI value of 0.574 (2nd rank),
which is far above the state average of 0.407. In terms of income, education and health this district occupies 1st, 3rd and 7th place respectively in district wise rankings. The Human Poverty Index calculated in 1999 indicates that 17.44 per cent of populations in the district are poor. The Gender related Development Index for Kamrup in 2001 is estimated to be 0.642, which is above the state average of 0.537, ranking 4th in the state. However, the HDI-GDI rank (-2 ranks) disparities indicate that women in this district suffers from deprivation of development potentials leading to lower achievement than men.

3.7 Demographic background of Hira Community of Assam

For evaluation of the present status of Hira community demographic characteristics are very much essential. The demographic traits of the Hira Community represents their size of population, its growth rate sex ratio, rural urban composition, and literacy etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table – 3.4: Demographic Features of Hira Community of Assam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Above table reveals that in 1931 the size of population of the Hiras in Assam was 17,000 which increased to 32,622 in 1971. So the growth rate of population of Hira people was only about 1.3 per cent per annum during the last four decades (1931-71) and during the next two decades (1971-91) it rose up to about 2 per cent per annum.

3.7.1 Sex ratio

Table 3.4 reveals that the sex ratio of Hira community was 982 in 1961 and it came down to 938 in 1971 but it rose again to 954 during 1991. This sex ratio was higher than the sex ratio of Assam (927) as per 1991 and (935) in 2001 census.
3.7.2 Rural-urban composition

The percentage of Hira population living in the rural areas decreased from 94.3 in 1971 to 89.3 in 1991, while the same in the urban area increased from 5.7 in 1971 to 10.7 in 1991.

3.7.3 District wise distribution of the Hira villages

From the table-3.5 it is known that in Assam there are as many as 267 Hira villages and out of which as high as 50 numbers (18.7 per cent) are found in Marigaon district while as low as 2 (0.7 per cent) are seen in two districts viz. Sonitpur and Kokrajhar district.

Table – 3.5: District wise Distribution of Hira Villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Number of Villages</th>
<th>% to the total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nalbari</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bongaigaon</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaon</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marigaon</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonitpur</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>267</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Das Guneswar (2011): Asomor Hira Sampradai*

Thus the Hiras are distributed all over the plains of Assam with a more concentration in Marigaon, Barpeta, Kamrup, Nalbari and Darrang districts. In addition to the above mentioned districts the Hiras live in the district of Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Karbi-Anglong, Dima Hasao, and in different areas of the Kachar district, but their actual number of population is not yet known. Generally the Hiras live in a village on a separate hamlet or patch area. These hamlets in every village are known as Hira paras or Hira Chubas (Hira hamlet).

3.7.4 Literacy

The literacy rate among the Hiras is very poor. The total literacy rate is 72 per cent, where 82.7 per cent is for male and 61.8 per cent is for female among Hira community as per 2001 census.

Apart from historical and demographic background of Hira community, they follow the local customary laws which have been framed by the village people on the
basis of prevalent customs, uses, tradition, and religious beliefs etc. However, village councils are the most common institution of the Hira villages. Only the male folk of the villages are associated with the village council. The village headman is the head of the village council. The decision of the council is binding and people of the villages are obliged to follow it.

3.8. Origin and development of pottery in Assam

As stated earlier that pottery making among the Hiras is a feminine activity, contrary to that, among the kumars it is a male’s job, but their females also prepare pot by beating like Hira women potters. Thus, beating as a pottery making technique is in fact, present among both the potters groups and that too is confined only to the women folk. The kumars though introduced an advanced technique of pottery making i.e. use of wheel, they could not totally got away with the beating technique. Therefore, at one stage of their pottery making they established a close technological link with the Hiras.

The archaeological inference/records indicate that wheel made in Assam was found in the early historical period, when people from different parts of India, particularly from the northern India and Gangetic valley were migrated to Assam. The earliest record of the kumar (kumbhakara) was found in Nidanpur and Kaumuli grants of 7th & 12th century AD respectively. From these references one may suggest that the wheel as a technical device of pottery making by the kumar might have been introduced during the early historical period. But at the same time one cannot deny the fact that the wheel used potters (kumars) also partially apply the beating technique in making potter by the Hiras. Therefore, to visualize the over all development of pottery
in Assam, the following model may be suggested. However, to make it a full proof
model, one has to work further and this is just a beginning (Medhi 1992).

**Figure 1: Origin and development of pottery in Assam**

3.8.1 The Process of Preparation of clay, technique & Pottery of Hira Community:

The process of preparation of clay starts only after it has been brought home
from the source area. In fact, the clay cannot be used in its raw or natural condition
and it needs preparation before using it for pottery manufacturing. As regards the
preparation of clay, Saraswati and Behura (1966) remark that “The methods of
preparation differ largely from region to region, according to the nature of locally
available clays …………………”. But there are certain standarised process which are
adopted by potters all over the country. These are mainly in relation to cleaning,
mixing, and Kneading”. Ansari (1964) on the other hand, observed three different
stages of clay preparation at poona. These are levitation, treading and kneading. He
also states that “The clay in Kutch does not require the elaborate process of levitation
as good quality of clay is available naturally and is used without levitation. Therefore, the preparation of clay solely based on the nature and quality of clay procured for”.

In Assam, the clay used by the Hiras is known as ‘Hira mati’ and ‘Kumar mati’ is used by the Kumars. The entire Kamrup district is prominent for good quality of Hira clay. In south Kamrup, Deepar Beel, Gaijana Pathar (Bhagaboti para) and in North Kamrup, Changsari, Madankamdev are the main sources for Hira clay in Assam. These clays are not same, so far as their location and mineral composition are concerned, Laboratory analysis by Medhi B (1992) reveals that ‘Hira mati’ (Hira clay) contains 47.5 per cent sand, 27.0 per cent silt and 25.0 per cent clay. ‘Kumar mati’ (Kumar clay) on the other hand contains 21.0 per cent sand, 49.5 per cent silt and 29.5 per cent clay. Both of them, however, contain mineral like calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium, aluminum in different proportions. Moreover, analysis reveals that Hiramati is sandy clay and Kumar mati is a silty clay variety (Medhi B 1992).

The perfectness and durability of the ceramics depend upon the quality of clay as well as the techniques used for making these. It is observed that the Hira pots have more demand than the Kumar pot; so far its utilitarian value and technique is concerned, it is found that each group used separate techniques and methods and even the implements used for pottery making. The production of pottery among the Hira is typically a feminine activity. They make pottery by hand and never use wheel. The males, however, help women in collecting the raw materials for ceramic and also help in transporting and marketing of pottery.

The “Hira mati” is collected from the places which are about 3 – 4 km away from south Kamrup and 5 – 30 km from north Kamrup. The Hira potters of Kamrup district obtain the Hira clay field from the Government on lease basis. These are only localities where the required type of clay is available. The potters collect the clay before the eve of rain, particularly in winter and preserve it in their courtyards.

Hira takes much care for the preparation of clay. The raw clay is powdered first by wooden hammer (Gayan or some times it is called pitani) and unwanted particles are taken out. It is then kneaded and required quantity of sand is mixed. Finally a required quantity of water is poured into it to prepare the paste of clay for pottery. For collection of raw materials and preliminary preparation of clay, the male members are sometimes helping the females. The techniques applied comprise coil, building, pressing and moulding. For making pots anvil, beater, wooden plank and moulds are used. It is found in field survey that the wooden moulds are constructed
with the help of the carpenters and the terracotta moulds prepared by the Hira themselves.

3.8.2 Types of Products and their uses:

Hira potters are manufacturing a number of items from long back without any specific change. The types include pitcher (Kalash), varieties of bowls (Choru), miniature vessel (Takeli), basin on stand (Dhunadani), vessel on stand (marriage ghat), shallow basin (chaki) etc. Some special forms constitute toy and drum (Nagra and Kurkuri, musical instrument) are also prepared by them.

Potteries manufactured by the Hiras are basically utilitarian and use for domestic purpose particularly for cooking, preservation or storing of food items. These are seldom used for ritualistic purpose. But in certain cases chaki, takeli, charu, dhupdani, dhunadani etc. are also used for ritualistic purpose where kumar’s pottery is not available. It is interesting to note that though they make miniature vessel i.e. Takeli which is used for ritual but they named it as ‘kumar takeli’ for marketing. The clients also purchase these for ritualistic use on the plea that the word “kumar” is involved in it.

Products of Hira pottery

Chaki Dhunadani Kota Mola Soru
Note: As socio-economic census for 2011, Assam is not completed yet and information related to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes (individual caste) for Assam are not recorded properly by respective department of Assam, therefore, the data of 2001 census is used in the text.

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