Chapter 1
Socio-Economic Status of Hira Women: A Case Study of Barpeta, Assam

1.1 Concepts

In the layman perception, the concept of status refers to standard, a person or group may be of high status or low. Sociologists enlist two kinds of social status namely ascribed status and achieved status. While the ascribed status is attained by birth like that of sex, age and kinship, achieved status on the other hand is derived by the virtue of individual choice, ability and accomplishment.

The idea of status connotes the notion of equality in general. It can be perceived in different ways, such as self perceived and group perceived. In order to identify the status of any section of people, it can be compared with the status of another related section of people, by considering it as the reference group.

Talcott Parson has defined the term status as “the participation of an actor in a patterned interactive relationship which is for many purposes the most significant unit of the social system.”

Ralph Linton defined “A status is marked off by the fact that distinctive beliefs about, and expectations, for social actors are organized around it.”

Status usually refers to the position or positions which a person, group or community holds in the social structure of a particular society like in the educational institution, in its occupational structure, in its political system, in the family and so on. Thus each of these positions can be ascribed with varying degree of prestige, power, Privileges, right and roles, which the occupant of a specific position is expected to maintain and perform.

In the Indian context, there are many categories of stratification in the society like caste, class, gender etc. The status on the basis of gender involves the other entire stratum be it caste, class and to this day it is qualification, social network and the like. It is general understanding that compared to men; Women occupy an inferior social status so far as strength, weaknesses, opportunity and threat. Women are treated as general phenomenon as well as specific issue due to the unique feature; they exhibit in the society and in their respective groups.

According to Malinowski the correct definition of status could be given only after taking into consideration all the mutual duties between the sexes and the safeguards provided for the protection of each sex against the high handedness of the other.

Indu Menon (1991) asserts that single measurement cannot be used to assess the status of women rather ‘a multi dimensional cluster of variable is required to indicate their status status of women in the society depend


4. Ibid.

particularly upon the nature of its economy, attitudes of the society towards women, political participation of women, social and religious taboos, consciousness of women and so on. Moreover, it can be measured from other ways also such as - the extent of a women access to social and material resources within the family, her authority or powers within the family and community, women access to knowledge, political powers, decision making powers, and so on. Thus, the term status of women can be used to define the position in the social system causing many aspects like social economic, political, psychological etc. As defined in the Report of the National Committee on the” Status of Women in India” (1974) “Status refers to a position in a social system or Sub-system which is distinguishable from and at the same time related to other position through its designated right and obligation”.

Accordingly, the term “social status” comprises the position, power, abilities of women as well as privileges enjoyed by them in their society. It includes mobility and freedom outside the house, opportunities of interacting and inter - relationship with outside people, free outside movements for various reasons like organization, friends, society, groups, standard of living, level of education etc.

Similarly the term economic status comprises of the position, power, and abilities of women as well as work done by them both in the formal and informal sectors. Here, the question of due recognition of their work in terms of its importance to the economic share of the family or country on the basis of certain universal economic features are taken into contribution. Women contribute in their own ways to the family wealth and income by engaging

6. Ibid.
themselves in different economic activities. Hence the question of economic position and privileges are connected with the economic status in the family and thereby the family.

One school of thought states that in this context basically reference must be made to women right in family properties, on their personal income, wealth, employment opportunities and the like to understand women economic status. Regarding property rights of women in India, in ancient times, we find women had owned and possessed wealth. But in course of time, when physical prowess became a social and political necessity for protecting person and property, women gradually lost their rights. Moreover, some cultural and social practices have also discouraged the women right to property. There is no tradition of daughter’s having a right of inheritance from father among the Hindus. In most Indian families, women do not own property in their names. Even today, in spite of provisions like equal ownership of property, the share in father’s property is not fully implemented. The irony of the fact is that sons had an independent share in the ancestral property but daughter’s shares were based on the share received by their father.

Political status basically talks about decision making from the family to state matters. Political participation covers many things like reading newspaper, casting vote, taking decisions, etc.

9. Ibid., p.243
So far as political status of women is concerned, it covers the women right of forming the government and becoming its part themselves, avail opportunity of franchise and its usage in practice. Basically in India, the Panchayati Raj Institution has given the highest national priority to women of rural areas so that more and more women power is involved in governance. It has brought about significant transformation in the lines of women themselves who have become empowered, have gained self confidence, political awareness and affirmation of their own identity. After 73rd amendment 33% women are taking part in the Panchayat Election all over India. But for the reservation in state assemblies and the parliament, women have not seen successful.

Women awareness about their own interest, their thoughts and attitudes towards various social changes and the degree of traditionalism and modernity etc. Thus the concept of status of women is wide and it can be judged from different angles.

1.2. Statement of the problem

In our demographic distribution, the share in the countries total population of Scheduled Caste is account for 179.9 million representing 17.5 percent in 2001 (projected on the basis of the trend of their decade’s growth rates, in the absence of the data if 2001)). According to 1991 Census, the Scheduled Castes account for 138.2 million of whom 8.1% live in rural areas. According to (Census Data 2001 / India at a glance / scheduled caste and scheduled tribes population), the total scheduled caste are 166,635,700 (16.2%) of countries total population.2011 census recorded nearly 20.14 crore

people belonging to various scheduled castes in the country and there are around 9.79 crore women among the total scheduled caste population.

In our Constitution provisions for upliftment of Scheduled caste as well as for all tribes are provided. According to article 341, the president of India shall prepare the list of castes and tribes for the first time in consultation with Governors of states. And accordingly lists are made in respective states as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Article 14 states that “the state shall not deny to any person equality before law or equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. Article 15 states that state should not discriminate against any citizen only on the ground of caste, creed etc. Article 46 of the constitution directs the state to protect the educational interests of weaker section of society especially the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Article 330, 332 and 334 states that seats are reserved in the parliament and state Legislatures in favor of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The article 338 provides for the establishment of National Commission for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Article 75 (1) makes provision that the union of India shall make grants to states for implementing welfare schemes in the areas of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. But despite these provisions laid down in the Indian constitution regarding the protection and upliftment of the scheduled caste people in general, people in our study areas are found living in both rural and urban set up. No doubt, the government, non- government organizations has been taking some steps to fulfill the need of certain areas belonging to the backward people but due to lack of education, skill and initiative on their part they have not been able to make use of the opportunities. Though in Assam caste system is not so strongly practiced yet in our
study area our target group seem to be in the periphery of the society not being a part of the society.

The target group of my study are in particular the women of the Hira community. As mentioned earlier this group of women mainly do pottery work for their earning. They spend lot of time on this work in addition to their household job, like many cottage industries their production have not been able to compete in present day market economy. Raw material for their work too has become scarcity. Neither the men or the women thus have developed any skill for alternative earning as a result they are in a very deplorable condition. My attempt was to find out if any of the initiative taken up by the government for development have been able to cover their needs.

It must be noted here that in our country though different five years plan has stressed on various schemes of women upliftment and development. For example, the Sixth Five Year Plan contained exactly six references to women. During Tenth Five Year Plan, Govt. of India had tried to formulate different policies for improvement of women studies. Accordingly, the working towards the targets of the planners was conceptualized in radically different term which stress on human development believing that the society would be highly developed and prosperous where women will have their rightful place.

Besides, the facts on women status like, education, health, political participation revealed in the findings of the Report of the “Status of Women Committee” appointed by the Government of India in 1971, exposed the shocking condition of women even after independence. The Center for Women Studies since its inception carries on various research concerning women issues. When the center first began in 1980, a major concern was to
extend the understanding of women studies. The First National Conference on Women studies in 1981 laid down the objective of women studies as the pursuit of mere comprehensive, critical understanding of social reality. It is viewed as a critical instrument for social and academic development. One of the important functions of the centre since its inception was to engage in dialogue with academician, policy maker etc. Thus, it can be said that during the late seventies, one of the significant developments in academic exploration has been the pursuit of systematic study of women issues. But even after all these attempts for women development, this section of people is not developing in an equal manner. These are, particularly out of reach concepts for Hira women. They are even unconscious about the general concepts for their developments. Child Labour Act, various women protected Acts, and other beneficial programmes relating to health and education are out of their reach. As a result, these people are alienated from the main stream of our modern society. The contemporary position of the scheduled caste Hira women is more pathetic. Hira as a Scheduled Caste community suffers in multitude in the present day scenario in Barpeta. Thus, considering the present changing scenario, all these forces which set back women status and position in our study areas has to be found out by the researcher.

So, through this study, we eagerly want to find out what are basic reasons of their backwardness and underdevelopment. Is it because of their educational backwardness? Or is it the fault of the government and the community itself is responsible for their deplorable condition? My study will try to find out the actual reasons lying behind it.
1.3 Importance of the study

Our Constitution has listed certain communities as Scheduled Castes. They are regarded as the backward sections of our society. They have been at the lowest stratum of social stratification since past till today. They suffer from social disabilities and economic backwardness.

Moreover, one thing is certain that, in a caste ridden society of ours, social and economic status are the pre-requisites for any individual to progress. That is why special provisions are made by the constitution for them. Certain section of these backward communities in our society are still deprived of many facilities. Due to lack of educations and awareness they have not been able to enjoy the privileges given by the govt. through different schemes. Though in today’s world some of the scheduled castes have reached a higher positions in the society, they are politically aware yet there are large number of scheduled caste men and women particularly in rural areas who are still in a deplorable position. So under these circumstances, the objective of my study is a particular Scheduled Caste community of women and their socio-economic status, which is known as Hira community in Barpeta.

Our economy is pre dominantly agricultural. But the target group of my study by a large is landless as history reveals that they are migrated people. So they are mostly engaged in menial jobs which add to lower social and ritual status. Though the constitution has provided various provisions for the upliftment of these communities, yet several findings has proved that they are not improving in many aspects compared to other communities, particularly in the fields of education, standard of living, employment, income, etc.
In Assam the following table shows the scheduled castes categories

**Table 1. 4 Scheduled Castes in Assam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. no</th>
<th>Names of the community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bansphor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Brittial, Bania,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dhupi, Dhobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dugla, Dholi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Hira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jalkeot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Jhalo, Malo, Jhalo-Malo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Kaibartta, Jaliya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lalbegi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mehara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mehtar, Bhangi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Muchi, Rishi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Namasudra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Patni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sutradhar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Constitution of India, (Scheduled Caste) order, 1950.*

The Hira community as enlisted in the above table belongs to the Scheduled Caste population. Traditionally, they are potters in Assam. Numerous studies have been carried out by the professionals about this community. Government bodies and voluntary organizations has pointed out that in spite of various schemes of government, these community is still not in a position to compete with the rest of the society.

In Barpeta, they are found in certain places namely Sundaridia, Bamuna, Budartup, Ambarihiati, Ghuramahati, Kumarhati, Mazorhati, Gandhinagar. There are almost 400 Hira families within these areas. It is found that the community has no other alternative source of income. As women are mainly potters, they engage themselves in this craft all the time apart from doing their household duties. Various anthropological researchers (mentioned in bibliography) have found that this potter class occupies a very low socio economic status.

The problems are many which can be discussed as under ---

In the Hira Community of Barpeta, firstly the men folk collect the raw materials from nearby river banks. At present there are scarcity of raw materials. They are suffering due to the soaring price of the raw materials. The potters can’t supply sufficient products according to the demand of the buyers. Huge money is needed, as they have to hire truck to collect Hira mati (raw material) from Tetelia, Dighli Beel, Molong Jan, Ketkijhar, Hiragata of Kamrup districts. The places from where they collected raw materials have lot of occupants now. As a result easy access to these places are difficult.

In today’s society pottery is not popular in rural area, the way it was in earlier time. The potters of my study areas are not aware about the change of the situation. As a result they do not produce their products ac. to need of the market. They have not developed their skill. Moreover they are not used to any society. Thus economic conditions of the target group is in a deplorable condition.

Again, in the past, barter system was practiced and the Hira potters could collect food and goods in exchange of pots. But in the absence of this system today, minimum necessities of livelihood of them and their families has become difficult. There are limited scope in infrastructural amenities available for socio-economic development of the potters. The upgradation and improvement of the pottery industry done by Government is not sufficient for their livelihood and upliftment. Due to impact of modernity and occupational mobility some of the potters have changed their occupation. Mainly the younger generation opts for alternative career avenues. If this trend follows continuously, then this traditional craft will extinct from the study areas. So this is my sincere attempt to highlight on the socio-economic status of the Hira women of Barpeta at large.

1.4 Area of the study

Although the overall study will cover the Barpeta block (Kautkuchi block) of Barpeta district, yet attempts has been given to focus on the socio-economic status of the Hira women of Assam. There are 11 (eleven) Community Development Blocks in Barpeta district namely Gobardhana, Sarukhetri, Bhawanipur, Chenga, Bajali, Barpeta, Gomaphulbari, Chakchaka, Paka- Betbari, Mondia and Rupshi C.D blocks.

Since a very limited study has been done in the context of Hira Women and their empowerment, this study has chosen mainly to study rural and urban based Hira’s of Barpeta for this study.

The main rural study areas are **Bamuna** village and **Dakshinhati** (Hirapara) of Sundaridia village and the main urban study areas are **Kumarhati, Mazorhati, Ghuramarahati** and **Ambarihati** of Barpeta town where most of the Hira Potters are dwelling.
According to statistical handbook of 2001\(^{13}\) In Bamuna Village, out of total population of 772 the number of Scheduled Caste is 438 and in Hira Para, out of 2416, the number of Scheduled Castes is 438. In these two villages, women are traditional pottery makers and their livelihood is primarily based on pottery making arts only. But in other four urban localities mentioned above women potters are continuing this traditional craft in limited ways because of their alternative ways of earning livelihood of their families. Above all in all these areas (both rural and urban) conditions of women are not satisfactory due to many reasons. The study has been carrying on amongst the Hira Community of Barpeta based on these reasons.

1.5 Rational of the study

In view of the above, it is an essential to undertake an empirical study of the socio-economic status of Hira women, especially of Barpeta. Women of this community have enough potential of pottery making arts. As a result, they can be a channel in the emancipation of traditional industry and their positions. This will also open new vistas for this economically backward region of our country.

However, it must also be mentioned that in spite of age old cultural heritage in Assam, this traditional craft is still unorganized. It is practiced totally in a traditional manner by the community.

Thus, it has become the responsibility of the newer generation to preserve this traditional art system and improve and exploit its emergences for general acceptance by people as one of the most imprudent traditional craft of

\(^{13}\) Economics and Statistical Department, Barpeta. (2008), A report of the Director.
Assam. It can be used as an effective tool for socio-economic reforms of the state.

1.6 Objectives of the study

The following are the objectives of this study –

a) To study the present social and economic position of the Hira women of Barpeta.

b) To find out the reasons for their backwardness.

c) Despite Barpeta being a well-known business place in Assam way it is, yet the business of the Hira community is not developing over the years as compared to that.

d) To suggest measures for the overall upliftment of their position through pottery business.

1.7 Hypothesis

The following hypothesis are formulated.

1. Hira people lives under the shroud poverty and unless measures are taken, this inherent craft will not survive.

2. Hira women are socially and economically not aware of their positions.

1.8 Chapterization

The study is divided into the following five chapters

1. Introduction (statement of the problem)

2. Profile of Barpeta district and selected study areas.

3. A general description of the social-economic status of Women.
4. An analysis of the socio-economic status of the Hira women of our study areas.

5. Summary, Findings and conclusions.

1.9 The target group of the study

The target group for the present study is defined as all rural and urban women of the Hira families in and around Barpeta town. They are assumed to be the Hira potter of Barpeta.

1.10 Sampling

When a small group is selected as representative of the whole universe, it is known as sampling. Pottery is a common profession in both the selected village for study and in the other selected Hira concentrating areas of Barpeta town. So out of the 11 Community Development Blocks of Barpeta, the Barpeta Block (Known as Kautkuchi Block) is selected for this study. There are 129 gaon panchayats and 1064 villages in Barpeta. So out of them, two villages are taken as sample village within the Barpeta block. They are - Bamuna and Daskhinhati of Sundardia village. There are two Municipal Board, four towns Committee, one Census town, and one Revenue town. Out of them, four Hira concentrating urban areas are selected as -- Ghoramarahati, Majorhati, Kumarhati, Ambarihati of Barpeta Municipality areas.

The total scheduled caste in the Barpeta district is 93861 where male are 48694 and female are 45167. Barpeta block (study areas, both rural and urban) consists of 6059 scheduled castes.\textsuperscript{14} According to 2001 census,

\textsuperscript{14} Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam. (2006),\textit{ Statistical Handbook}, Table 1.08, p.20
Directorate of Census Report, in Bamuna village, out of the total population of 772, Scheduled Caste is 438 and in Deskhinhati out of the 2416 people, Scheduled castes is 438. So from these two villages, out of the total population of 876, the Hira households who are involving in pottery (approximately 122 households) are taken as sample for collecting data based on the population.\textsuperscript{15}

The other selected Hira concentrating areas are urban based consisting of about one thousand Scheduled Caste people from where approximately 50 households are taken as sample based on population shown in the voter list of Barpeta municipality areas. \textsuperscript{16}

Interview with the help of a prepared questionnaire is taken for collecting data. The questionnaire is prepared in such a way that all the questions are significant to highlight on socio-economic status of women in those study areas. Moreover, personal observation is made while developing and constructing the study. The selection of households for primary data collection is done on the basis of observation though most of the households are visited and women who are practicing this craft are interviewed and considered as samples.

At the beginning of the survey, prior visit are made to have a general overview of the community and knowledge of these two villages. Gaon buras of the two villages are contacted & their comment about their localities & position of the Hiras are taken. Moreover many local people’s comment is also taking into consideration.

\textsuperscript{15} Election Office, Barpeta. (2007), \textit{Voter List of Panchayat Election}.

\textsuperscript{16} Deputy Commissioner Office, Barpeta. (2008), \textit{Voter List of General Election}. 
1.11: Methodology

The study is based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method includes observation and participatory techniques. Personal contacts in the first stage of our study were done because at that time it was very difficult to ascertain as to who would actually be able to provide reliable data about them. The pilot surveys were done and ultimately contacts with the gaonbura of the two villages were completed getting the idea that they live in cluster in the same localities.

The tools for study are --- questionnaire containing 31 questions. The questionnaire was tested in our pilot study and necessary correction was done. All the respondents answered orally for which the researcher had to fill up each questionnaire.

Data was collected over a long period by a single individual. Every question of questionnaire was translated into Assamese language spoken by the respondents. Besides, there were number of personal observation made during visits that needed to be recorded. Finally, when the entire questionnaire were collected and completed, they were taken together and sorted out.

The data’s has been carefully processed in tabular form which is another tool. A table is a systematic method, presenting statistical data in vertical columns and horizontal rows, according to some classification of subject matter. It is easy to interpret and comprehend data. Frequencies are always unequal in size. To make comparison with each variables, frequencies were converted into percentage. The percentage of a given number indicated the number out of one hundred. Thus this simple statistics of percentage (%) is used to analyze the data gathered for the study.
The total scheduled caste in the Barpeta district are 93861 where Males constitutes 48694 and female are 45167 (According to statistical hand book of govt. of Assam, 2006). In the Barpeta block there are 6059 scheduled caste (According to 2001 Census, Directorate of census report). In Bamuna village, out of the total population of 772, scheduled caste is 438 and in Sundaridia village out of the 2416 people, Scheduled castes are 438 (source: 2001 Censes, Govt. Assam). From these two Villages, out of the total population of 876, approximately 122 Hira households are taken as sample on the basis of pilot surveys and electoral role. The other selected Hira concentrating areas are located at Barpeta municipal area consisting of about one thousand scheduled caste people (Deptt. of Economics and Statistics, Barpeta). where approximately 50 households are taken .The selection of households for primary data’s is done on the basis of observation at the time of pilot surveys and electoral role for urban localities). One thing must be mentioned here that as the number of Hira households are few in urban settings, therefore all the Hira households are surveyed to make the rural- urban comparison more accurate. Data’s collected are analyzed through statistics and results are shown in percentage making comparison with rural and urban. However our observation is also used while developing analysis.

1.12. Review of Literatures

Every study requires certain inter-related thorough studies of books, journals, articles, surveys etc. Before going into the details of the problem of our study, thorough library work is made in different libraries. Several departments of the governmental/non-governmental or cooperatives are visited. The following are some of the libraries and departments that visited – i) Assam Institute of Research for Tribal and scheduled castes, Guwahati, ii)
District library of Barpeta, iii) Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social-change Research and Development, Guwahati, iv) North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong, v) Women Studies research center ,vi) G.U, K.K.Handiqui Library of G.U, v) the Departmental Libraries of Political Science and Anthropology, G.U, vi) Sub-divisional Welfare Office, Barpeta, vii) Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati, vii) Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Barpeta, viii) Election Office, Barpeta, ix) Library of Barpeta Girls’ College. The study of the books enlisted in the bibliography has given me an overall picture of our study and about women status. It has given us the idea about the conditions of the Hira women in Barpeta and that also helps in developing scheduled of questionnaire for data collection. And in the succeeding discussion an attempt has been made to trace the trend of literatures on the position of Hira women. It seems that, while there have been a lot of empirical studies on socio- economic status of women in India and Assam, there has been little or no such empirical study reported on the topic.

Social problems in India, Ram Ahuja, 2007 2nd edition, Rawat publications.

Among various social problems in India, problem of status of women is one of the core problem. The problem is though more or similar to all the women in India, yet not similar to all the communities in India. Considering this point, the researcher has studied further books covering status of women of scheduled caste in India and Assam.

Constitutional Provisions for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, (1992) Gomango Giridhar Himalaya publishing House has pointed out
various constitutional provisions for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. These are as follows ------

a. Article 15—Provision of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.


c. Article 17—Abolition of untouchability.

d. Article 46—Promotion of educational and economic interests of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other weaker sections.

e. Article 330—Reservation of seats for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the House of People.


Stratification of societies is a phenomenon known to all civilizations – living as well as dead. This is a direct result of class struggle and class exploitation. The ancient Indian society was not only stratified but also fossilized into different varnas and jatis which were determined by the accident of birth.

The sudras who were the lowest on the social ladder, were further divided into infinite number of mixed castes of varying status and finally into a group of despised caste. Scheduled caste is also formed in this line.

They also says that any assessment of the status of women has to start from the social framework, social structures, cultural norms and value system.
It influence social expectations regarding the behaviour of both men and women and determine women roles and her position in society to a great extend.

*Status of Indian Women*, Sarawati Mishra, (2002) Gyan publishing House, New Delhi, has said that by considering the following aspects of women life related with their status, its clear, total and multi dimensional picture can be imaged. These are ---

a. Demographic status

b. Educational status

c. Occupational status

d. Familial status

e. Legal status

And others. The author has highlighted the status of women in India during various periods of time starting from Ancient period (B.C 3000—1200A.D) to status after independence (after A.D 1947). He has mentioned various dimensions of status of Indian women in modern period as ------- sex ratio, death rate, age at marriage, health, family planning / welfare programmed, role of women organization etc. All such discussions helps the researcher to have a clear picture of the status of women India. The specific discussion on women movement in India has gave the idea about the straggle of women for their position and equal rights & recognition.

Status of women in the Char areas: *A study in Nagaon districts in Assam*, A report (2001), by Mitra Das submitted to OKDIS, GHY. She has divided her paper in different chapters and in her introductory chapters she has given the meaning of the term status of women. She says in recent time
especially the topic “status of women” is becoming more important because of the growing realization and acknowledgement that women in many societies have been unduly suppressed. And different scholars have different meaning of status of women. Moreover there is no definite criteria of a direct measurement of status. Which makes it difficult to assess and evaluate the actual status of women in a particular society.

*The study of Hira community in and around Barpeta*” an M. Phil dissertation by Hem Chandra Sarma, Deptt. Of Folklore Research, Gauhati University (1990-91)

It has given a detail overview on the life and culture of the Hira community in Barpeta and also about detail picture of the Hira’s of the Barpeta through his observation. He mentioned that there are two principle castes viz the Hira’s and the Kumar’s who derive livelihood from earthen vassals in Assam says that no definite evidence has been found about the origin. But there are lots of probabilities, stories, legend, provided by different scholars. He has provided a detail picture of the life and culture of the Hira’s in Barpeta. The life of the Hira families in Barpeta is like the general life of an Assamese family but their socio economic life reflects poorer life style in this dissertation. The whole study has reflected the low standard of living of the Hira family which is due to low income from pottery in Barpeta and not changing their methods of pot making techniques, low marketing facilities in and around Barpeta. As a result their position is low even today in social hierarchical order. It has therefore helps the researcher to gather basic knowledge about Hira women.

picture of women in India today. He says that even today, the provision of the
daughter’s share in her father’s property in Hindu Law is not fully
implemented. Many daughters give up their rights of their own accord or
many not fight for it. Son is looked upon as succession and supporter of the
parents in old age. As a result women lacks property of her own or in her
name. He also has pointed out the role differentiation among male and female.
He says while granting equality of rights to men and women in the polity,
Indian society implicitly accepts a sharp distinction between men’s spheres
and women spheres. And in the social context, due to the low status attached
to manual labour in our society & cultural value associated with women
confinement to home, the work of rural and urban women wage labourers,
unskilled factory workers is not conductive to a better status for women.

“International Dimensions of women problems”, Raj Pruthi and Bela Rani

Industrialisation, the population explosion and the rise of democracy,
all combined to shape the rise and nature of modern feminism, the group for
the cause of women due status and position. It is mentioned that, feminist
state it was the need for a new identity started women, a century ago, on that
passionate journey, that verified, misinterpreted journey away from home.

Status of girl child and women in India Niranjan Pant, published by
S.B.Nangia for APH publishing corporation,

Major tragedy of Indian women are that on whole, their work is not
considered work in the first place and their man folk tend to take for granted a
great deal of their contribution to the family’s economy and other well being.
Moreover rural urban differences are also there which are responsible for
differences in status of women.

The book is a collection of selected papers presented in the national seminar on the same theme, organized by women Studies Research. Center, G.U. Mitali Sarma in her paper entitled “Status of Women, need for multi dimensional change “says that, civilization was constructed without consulting women, due to patriarchal system (p.14). As a result women status is low as compared to men over the years in all aspects.

Ripima Buzarbaruah in her paper entitled “Human Right and Women “has highlighted the importance of human right for women. She insists that as inherent rights of all human beings, the only criterion to be entitled for the human rights are to become a human being irrespective of religion, race, sex, caste etc. (p.20)

In India, apart from human rights, there are directive principles of the state policies and several other laws enacted before and after independence which secures rights of women in India, Yet the status of women in India is not good. The status of women is high in Assamese society in comparison to the women of some parts of India (p.24). But at present some of the social evil practices are gaining ground in Assamese society. The overall status of women is not good in Assam. Even today, the plight of working women is also by no way better. They have to play a double role as a house wife and as an office worker (p.25). So she suggests that in the present context the most important thing is to impart education to women which will make women economically sound and mentally strong.

Another paper written by Dr. Malaya Madhuri Bora and Alaka Bhattucharaya entitled as “Raising the status of plain tribe’s women through
income generating training” says that women in general are the pitiable lot of human resources all over the world. Though they render selfish services in every household. The progress of the society and the families in India had been badly affected due to the low status of women in large segment of our society.

*Women In Indian society*, Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar (2001, first edition) published by National Book Trust, India, has presented a cohesive picture of women in Indian society. Moreover it has presented women of India in the context of the currents and crosscurrents of events.

It is mentioned that over the years the changing perception of status and role of women in the world, accounts women journey towards gender equality in the context of a changing politico- economic background and values legitimize inequality in India. Various debates are drawn attention to many issues of women lives and signify the importance of the status of women to be risen up in India. The book has highlighted some of the periods through which the position of women has changed and also some of the academic explorations, which made a systematic study of women issues. It has mentioned about the study of women issues under the rubric if women studies and establishment of special centers/ cells in few universities/ colleges, research centers by University Grant Commission. The SNDT university in Mumbai was the first university in India to start Research Center on Women Studies in 1974. Such attempts has affected the position of women gradually in India and the values of individualism and personal growth rather than subordination of the self and giving priority to the needs of other kin members. For the development of personal growth and prosperity, an individual’s advance, career, mobility, priorities are considered most
important. The book also has provided discussions on women and laws through which they can challenge all the difficulties and disturbing issues which have implications on women life.


It focuses on the position of the contemporary society. It mentions about the concept of status, status of Indian women including position in Assam. She has defined status as a relative term and divided it as family status, legal status, and political status and so on.

*Women Power in India*, Vol.1, (1994) Premlata Pujari & Vijay Kumari Kaushik, published by Kanishka publishers, Delhi has highlighted the real picture of women in India today. He says that even today, the provision of the daughter’s share in her father’s property in Hindu Law is not fully implemented. Many daughters give up their rights of their own accord or many not fight for it. Son is looked upon as succession and supporter of the parents in old age. As a result women lacks property of her own or in her name. He also has pointed out the role differentiation among male and female. He says while granting equality of rights to men and women in the polity, Indian society implicitly accepts a sharp distinction between men’s spheres and women spheres. And in the social context, due to the low status attached to manual labour in our society & cultural value associated with women confinement to home, the work of rural and urban women wage labourers, unskilled factory workers is not conducive to a better status for women.

*Socio- economic development of the scheduled castes of Assam*, (edited book), Dr. G.C. Sharma Thakur (editor) published in 1995 published by
Assam Institute of Research for Tribal and Scheduled Castes, where some important articles about scheduled caste community were included like --

Nandeswar Bania’s article entitled as “socio-economic condition of the scheduled castes in Assam” has said that castes have been an enigma to the modern thinkers. It is a social class in India – an exclusive social class. That means it is limited to India and to the Hindu religion only and to no other country or religion, in the world.

Castes in Assam have begun to be recognized in official records since 1872. But it was only after, 1950, the sixteen castes including “Hira” were specified as scheduled castes by the Constitution Order. The scheduled caste people are seldom found in large compact areas. And usually, they live interspread with the general population (P.9). They earn their livelihood by pursuing their traditional occupation in Assam like catching and selling fish, goldsmithy, pottery, etc. The socio-economic problems of the scheduled castes are characterized by lack of education, absence of ownership of productive resources, uneconomic indebtedness, low income etc.

Another article “A step towards removing educational Backwardness from scheduled caste society” by Mausumi Das has attempted through this paper to find out different problems faced by the scheduled caste in the educational field. She says that scheduled castes, wherever they live, are faced with many and diverse problems, which are of social, economic, political and educational in nature. These problems have aggravated the situation over years and pushed the unfortunate scheduled caste to total subjugation and exploitation. As a result, their status is low. It is certain that in a caste ridden society like ours, social and economic status is pre-requisites for any individual to progress. Even though government has made different schemes
for upliftment, they are still not in a position to complete with the rest of the society.

Again an article entitled as “Hira Samprodaior ate artha- samajik samiksa” by Motilal Nayak has highlighted the life of the Hira’s in Barpeta. He has shown that there are Hira’s in Barpeta in some areas like Sundaridia, Bamuna, Budartup, etc. About 50/60 years ago, in Assam, people used pots for domestic purposes and also for offering puja. Takeli, charu, mola etc were some of the items that were used by the people that time. He also says about the barter system used in the earlier time within Hira’s in Assam.

The Hira potters and potteries of South Kamrup: A study of their ethnography and occupational mobility, an unpublished Ph.d thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology, by Preti Rekha Sarma.

It has pointed out that Hira’s are divided into three gotras namely – kashyap, Bharadwaj, Byash which are exogamous. They are divided into sub-groups namely Hira Bamun and Hira which are further divided into lineages like piri, purush etc. They are original pot maker in Assam and women are main worker in pot making craft. They makes pots in a traditional way by their hands. For their livelihood, they are entirely dependent on pot making.

Census of India, 1981, Part XD. Series 3 Assam, Survey Report on Pottery as practiced by Hira’s in Assam, Dr.S.K.Baruah (Investigator) published by the controller of publication, Civil Lines, Delhi, 1989 has identified certain problems of Hira potter for the marketing of their finished products. They are ----

a. No assured market for selling of products.
b. Stiff competition with metal made domestic products.

c. There is no proper display of their products.

d. More or less static demands of the products.

He suggests that for better prospects of the craft, the Hira potters should introduce modern technologies in their products and produce item and which are essentially in demand both in rural and urban areas.
References:

