CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Hiras are the major scheduled caste people of Assam and are distributed in the different districts of the State. They are traditionally an occupational caste and considered lower caste population in the caste hierarchy. The Hiras are the largest artisan group of Assam next to the Kumars, another potter community of the region, but their womenfolk manufacture pottery by hand unlike those of the Kumars who use circles for pottery making.

Occupational mobility is a natural phenomenon and is generated by any kind of social mobility of a community or a group of people under the influence of factors like political system, historical development, new technological invention, communication, modernization, urbanization, education, population explosion and in the event of a meagre income in the present day economic development. Impact of western culture is also responsible for bringing change in economic structure. Moreover a rural-urban contact, migration, education, communication and above all poverty, compel the Hiras in the environs of Barpeta to change their traditional occupation.

It has been observed that the scheduled caste people, particularly the Hiras are trying to improve their social status and their material condition either by sanskratization and westernization or through modern education and also adopting
western dress and style of living. This process has been accelerated by the removal of traditional legal and ritual sanctions through the Indian Constitution and the various social legislations. Through education and by taking new careers in the professional and administrative areas, they have now got the scope to improve their social status and conditions of living although they continue to have a traditional but heritage vocation of earthenware making.

Political power has also improved their social status. Late Motilal Nayak, a notable personality from the Hira community of Kumarhati of Barpeta town represented this community as a member of Assam Legislative Assembly from 1962 to 1967. He was a literate person and wrote many books. He visited many foreign countries during his political career.

In the preceding chapters of this study, the author has referred to several studies on occupational mobility in India and abroad, which show that there has been considerable departure from caste-based occupations. The upper caste and the middle caste have generally given up their hereditary caste occupations and, are pursuing the new occupations by virtue of their modern education and technical training. However the major reason for an occupational mobility among the Hiras is their age-old pottery-making technique that does not bring in larger economic benefits to them. In fact, economic hardship compels the Hiras in the environs of Barpeta town to change their traditional occupation. Modernity brings in diversification of occupation and creates new promising occupational avenues upon the old ones. This helps them to engage themselves in more than one occupation for better economic support and benefits. Today holding more than one occupation by one person is also an attempt to raise their standard of living. It is indicative that a
large number of children are selecting occupations in different informal sectors. When there is a great effort to eliminate the child labour from Indian society, the situation is reversible among the Hiras who are living below the poverty line. The author feels that it is their moral obligation and duty to learn this traditional craft making occupation. The change of traditional occupation is not culture-bound but it is purely economic.

In an intergenerational study, the writer could trace the process of occupational mobility in which the son becomes more active than his father. It shows that mobility is actually taking place due to an increase in the family size and when the father is unable to meet the expenditure of his dependents, since the pottery-making has been losing its credibility as a self-sufficient profession. In the case of the father's generation, mobility was taking place when his siblings could get education through a prolific business of pottery in the past and left their traditional subsistence economy. Thus educated members of the Hiras never allowed their children to return to their age-old profession since they were equally aware of their social status. Further, pottery-making requires a large man power although womenfolk is a major participant in it; and when modernization and impact of education did eliminate the joint-family tradition and also at the same time prune the family size, this vocation was to be pursued with participation of the members of a nuclear family. Therefore, the pottery-making itself has been facing a crisis at its production and distribution levels. In earlier instances the male members collected the clay, the firewood and also went on boat with the cargo of earthenware to distant places to sell and exchange their products via barter system and it enabled them to get maximum benefit from their products, such a system which essentially required a large family to continue the
production at the home front and the selling of the products elsewhere. The present study also reveals that the Hiras were never concerned with their downtrodden identity connected with their profession, but were proud enough to continue the profession, a heritage pottery craftsmanship that they received from their forefathers through ages together and the good office of Shri Shri Sankardeva who elevated their status of a low caste through acquiescence to supply their earthenwares, the choru to distribute prasada to the devotees of the Kirttanghars of the different areas.

Education as mentioned, becomes a main factor of occupational mobility that plays a deciding role among the Hiras of Barpeta town. The educated ones are holding government services, private company jobs and could also start a petty business by themselves. But those who do not have education they are still adhering their age-old traditional occupation. Owing to economic hardship and illiteracy they find it difficult to go outside their traditional occupation and to take up a new one.

Occupational mobility that is occurring among the Hiras of Barpeta in its rural and urban settings is both 'horizontal' and 'vertical'. Horizontal mobility is greater among the rural Hiras of Bamuna, Sundaridia and Bodorurtoop. The factor responsible in both of them is the unsustainable economic condition of the community, which has been stated on a number of occasions in the preceding chapters. In the rural area except a few, majority of Hira people cannot acquire the required qualification for holding a prestigious occupation. So in rural areas horizontal mobility is taking place in respect of pottery-making and selling their products. With a higher education, one can acquire an upward mobility in Government service/job sector and they get new occupational avenues to which the
Hiras are attracted. However, in educational level, a significant number of drop-out students becomes a concern in this respect and it is clearly noticeable in the primary, high school and higher secondary levels. Even those who manage to reach the college level sometimes, their economic hardship make them to drop their education.

In urban areas, the scenario is somewhat different. Here the rate of occupational mobility among the Hiras is higher than that of rural areas. Among them both horizontal and vertical mobility are found. The high rate of mobility is occurring due to the economic development in its surroundings of other highly educated higher caste populations. The economic development is related with occupational mobility and this effectively throws out the craftsmen out of their parental occupation. The lack of demand for their products and a big failure in their competitive capacity in changing modes of technology and consumers preferences, they now prefer to join in other occupations. The mobility from their parental occupation is also taking place due to the psychological frustration. The highly prestigious occupations, which are held by the other caste people also make an impact on the Hiras who are living in the urban set up. So, personal motivational factor is also responsible for acquiring new occupation. However, in the new-Vaishnavite religion propagated by great reformer Shri Shri Sankardeva, the Hiras were entrusted with the duty of supplying earthen pots (Choru) for distribution of Prasada to the devotees of the Sattras of Sundaridia, Bamuna and Barpeta Kirtunghar. This was a highly prestigious religions assignment to the Hiras that represents a status of low caste community. A critical analysis about the earthenware making tradition of the Hiras does not reflect any sort of characters involving a low status culminating to the point of untouchability of this community or caste who are basically an artisan class. It is hard to believe why a low status in the
caste hierarchy has been given to the Hiras and also the Kumars to some extent. The socio-religious factor is intertwined with the use of pottery in any religious institution since the very beginning of human civilization. Pottery becomes a part and parcel of human need.

At present they are gradually accustomed to their new mode of occupational pattern. Owing to modernization, pottery-making industry is gradually losing its essence as a traditional craft. Better facilities of transportation and communication enable the Hiras to leave their age-old craft. Migration in search of new occupations also helps them to give up their hereditary profession.

Earlier those people who considered hand made pottery to be cheaper and pure is, at present, using aluminum and other durable metallic utensils for their daily use. So this industry is facing a serious hardship in the modern atmosphere. For raising the economic status or to encourage the Hiras to adhere to their traditional occupation, the government should supply the raw materials at a subsidiary rate. They are skilled artisans. So if they are given proper training by some experts, or they are given training to make other ceramic pots and utensils, then their economic condition is expected to become better. Until and unless schemes of economic development for rural artisans are properly implemented, there will be no development in their present economic state of affairs. For economic development, the educated unemployed youths of this community can be employed in other profitable business or in agricultural activities, or fish culture, which has greater prospects and opportunities at present time. At Barpeta, there are no industries where these educated unemployed can get any employment. Except the motor-vehicle business, no other new employment generating avenues are found in Barpeta. So to raise the economic
condition of the Hira people, new occupational avenues must be established, which
could give them better economic support. Because the manpower and other factors of
production can be best utilized or used in a more productive way by the effective
economic planning.

Finally the author likes to assert that modernity is responsible to bring
an occupational mobility of horizontal and vertical nature amongst the Hiras of
Bamuna, Sundarida and Bodorortup in the rural set up and also in different pockets of
Barpeta Town. Change in family pattern, restriction in mobile trade through riverine
routes, abolition of barter trade, non-acceptance of their products by people who
preferred the metallic utensils, unavailability of clay materials have made the Hiras to
face an altogether critical situation in pursuing the age-old tradition of pottery-
making, but they could not give it up in totality since they are prestigiously connected
to the profession which although fail them to give enough bread. As said, there is a
considerable amount of mobility but never a final departure from their pottery-making
tradition which is sure to survive many generations to come.