CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
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9.1 Summary:

In this chapter it is intended to present the entire work in a compressed form. The main aim of this is to bring out the salient features of the work. In addition, it also displayed the major research areas which are given due emphasis. In fact, this kind of comprehension is essential in terms of the transperancy of the work as well as on the part of the worker. It is, by far, a recapitulation of the entire work followed by the conclusion which highlighted the results of the work.

The central theme of this research work is to study the Hira potters and their potteries of South Kamrup who are the unique potter community of Assam. The study covers the ethnography of the community and their ceramic products along with their occupational mobility. The data has been collected by surveying all the Hira potters living in different villages of respective block areas on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. This south bank of the river Brahmaputra covers two sub-divisions, viz— Guwahati and Pragjyotishpur which is informally or colloquially known as South Kamrup.

The entire work is divided into eight major chapters and the summary is given in accordance with the format of the work.

The first chapter deals with the introduction to the creation and socio-political development of Assam and South Kamrup as well. A detailed discussion about the Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa—the ancient Assam, as well as
the present Assam has been presented. In this, however, Kamrup, the district in which the present work has been conducted is given due consideration.

It is mentioned in the Epics, Puranas and many other ancient literature that Kāmarūpa was the ancient name of Assam. It was a vast country bounded by Mount Kanja (Kanchanjanga) in the north, river Karatoyā in the west, the holy river Dikshu in the east and the confluence of the river Brahmaputra and Lākshā in the south, covering — a major part of the eastern India. The boundaries of Kāmarūpa underwent changes in different periods for political or other reasons. During the Tai-Ahom regime the western boundary of Kāmarūpa had receded from the river Karatoyā to the river Manas. Later, however, this vast ancient state of Kāmarūpa of eastern India coverted into a small district. This district now extends on both the banks of the river Brahmaputra. The area stands on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra is known as North Kamrup and the South Kamrup contains the areas of the south bank of the river Brahmaputra.

The district Kamrup at present, embraces three sub-divisions, viz-Rangia, Guwahati and Pragjyotishpur. Recently, however, Pragjyotishpur sub-division is merged with Guwahati sub-division but at the time of the field work for this research it was counted as separate sub-division. Except Rangia which is on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra, other two sub divisions i.e. Guwahati and Pragjyotishpur stand on the south bank of the said river. In fact, the present research work is conducted by covering those two sub-divisions.

The genesis and development of pottery, in general, and Assam in particular, are incorporated in this chapter. It is found that the genesis of pottery tradition in Assam has been lodged in the Neolithic period. Although the aftermath of Neolithic period and culture are not clearly defined but the ceramic tradition is reappeared rather continued, with exquisite design, decorations and
morphology in the early and medieval historical periods of Assam. And it is still persist with two indigenous potter communities of Assam -the Hira and the Kumar.

In Chapter II the geo-physical background of South Kamrup and an ethno-historical background of Hiras are dealt with.

The geographical area and location, drainage, soil, climatic condition etc. of South Kamrup are briefly described. It is bounded on the east by the district of Morigaon and Goalpara stands on the west, the river Brahmaputra flowing on the north and Meghalaya hills stand on the south.

It comprises both hills and the plains. More than three-fourth of the area is covered by the hills and the rest is the plain areas which is shrouded in river, stream, lake, marsh and forest.

The drainage pattern of South Kamrup is mainly controlled by the river Brahmaputra. The major river of this region are Bharalu, Kulsi, Digaru, Boko and Singra. All these rivers debouch into the river Brahmaputra.

The soil contains both residual and transported types. The clay which is basically formed by the weathering of igneous rocks is used by the potters for pottery making.

The area experienced a humid sub-tropical climate with sufficient monsoonal rainfall associated with wind, thunder-storm and stone fall. Besides, the existence of high land areas of Meghalaya plateau have greatly influence the climate.
The geo-physical background is followed by an ethno-historical background of the Hiras. This includes the origin of Hiras and their socio-cultural background. The origin and development of their craft is closely linked up with their ethno-history and therefore, this aspects is also discussed in details. Both the origin of the community and their products — the potteries are daubed with legends and stories. They claimed that they were originally brahmin who were later expelled or outcaste by the society. Subsequently, poverty and circumstances compelled them to accept Kumbhakara profession. Later, however, they were constituted as scheduled caste community. The womenfolk of the community are the potters. The males have never taken to pottery making.

With regard to their habitation it has been observed that Hira people used to live in compact form within a village. The houses are constructed by locally available thatch, reed and bamboo. The walls are plastered with a mixture of mud and cowdung. But now-a-days some of them, particularly, the rich class constructed tin-roof, concrete-wall houses.

Hiras are placed at a lower position then the Kumar in the social and caste hierarchy. In fact, the Hiras are endogamous caste group and they established affinal relationship only with Hiras. However, in regard to the marriage subsequent changes have been observed among them. These changes have exceptionally influenced their traditional occupation, marriage system and even their life styles.

Over and above, a review of the earlier workers on pottery by different scholars are incorporated into this chapter. While reviewing the works it has been found that pottery study in Assam was started in 1807, in which Hamilton in his book *An Account of Assam* referred about the Hira and the Kalita Kumar the two indigenous potter communities of Assam. He also mentioned that the
wheel was not introduced by the potters and they produce pottery by hand. He was also supported by Siack. However, many scholars referred in their works that ceramic study in Assam as well as North-east India is still in its infancy. This review also substantiated that no systematic detailed study on potters and potteries was done so far.

The third chapter is devoted to problems and methods. Under the coverage of problems the aims and objectives of the study have been incorporated and under methods, methods and techniques applied for collection of data have been subsumed. Besides, the field work — an essential component of this research is also included in this chapter. The aim of this research is to study the origin and development of Hira pottery. This also includes a detailed study of its makers — the Hiras.

Under aims and objects, the reason for selection of South Kamrup is also explained which is summerised below. Firstly, physiographically the area is located in a strategic position at the foothills of Meghalaya which, in turn, connected the South Asian mountain ranges. The countries located on those ranges including the Daojali Hading of Assam have a long drawn antiquity.

Secondly, the area under study is occupied by a diverse population which includes mostly the tribals and non-tribals. The tribals are the best consumers of the Hira potteries and in fact, the Hiras are producing potteries primarily for the tribals. Besides, the people of all religious sections who are inhabiting the area are also the consumers of Hira potteries.

Thirdly, many Hindu shrines, temples and satras, and the famous Kamakhya temple, the Surya pahar etc. are the important religious centres. This religious centres are very closely connected with the ceramic products.
Over and above, all important educational institutions which includes the Gauhati University, Guwahati Medical College, Assam engineering College, I.T.I, the capital of Assam etc. all are located on this south bank of river Brahmaputra.

Keeping all these in view South Kamrup may be considered as a nerve centre of Assam and North-east India as well. With all those discernible bearings South Kamrup is selected as field area for this research project.

As far as the techniques of data collections are concerned mostly interview and observation techniques are used.

In the field work, the entire South Kamrup which contains two sub-divisions with eight development blocks and twenty six Hira villages has been covered.

Moreover, the aim of the study is to collect the first hand information with empirical observation. The field work was a long one and took almost two years to cover the entire area which is a vast one. Most of the potter villages are well communicated, therefore, the field work was conducted daily by taking the university as a base camp. Nonetheless, a few villages are located apart and due to bad communication the workers had sometimes to stay in the villages. The stay in the villages is essential for a thorough observation on the production processes of the craft.

Chapter IV has dealt with the study area — the South Kamrup. This area is stand on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. This south bank is colloquially known as Dakshin par and the north bank is known as Uttar par. These divisions are not a new one and have some historical relationships. In the days of the king of Prāggyotisha - Kāmarūpa both these banks of the river were known as Uttar kūla (north bank) and Dakshina kūla (south bank). This was also recorded in many copper plates.
The present study area covered two sub-divisions—Guwahati and Pragjyotishpur. The Guwahati sub-division contains seven development blocks with twenty-four Hira villages and Pragjyotishpur sub-division encompasses only one development block with two villages. It is also being stated in the same chapter that the Hiras are living in a same village along with other caste people, but all the Hiras are mostly clustered in a particular portion of the village which they call Hirapara or Hirachuba and they maintained some kind of isolation. This might be because of their inferior caste position in the greater Hindu caste system.

This chapter also dealt with the demographic setting of the Hira villages and their population distributions. These been tabulated in Table no -1.

In Chapter V the ethnography of the Hiras of South Kamrup has been presented. The total Hira population of the area is 3526 individuals. Out of this 50.34% are male and 49.66% are female. The sex ratio is 986 per 1000 male of Hira.

Basing of the size of the family they may be categorised into small (1-3) with a percentage of 20.75, medium (4-6) with a percentage of 59.94, big (7-12) with a percentage of 18.88 and very big (13+) with a percentage of 0.43. Besides, three types of families, viz- nuclear, joint and extended are found. The nuclear family with a percentage of 79.53 dominates among the Hiras of South Kamrup.

The marriage of the Hiras are traditionally endogamous and therefore, they select mate only from their own caste. However, now-a-days, they are acquiring mates from other caste groups and even sometimes from the tribals. The usual age of marriage is twenty one among the males and eighteen years
of age among the females. However, the highest number of married individual among the male is found in the age group of 31-35 and in case of female 26-30 is the age group in which the highest number of married females are found. Both widow and widower are present among the Hiras but the percentage of widow is higher than the widower. The divorce/separation is also present among the Hiras. It is found that divorce is basically, confined to female sex.

The educational status of the Hiras is very poor. In them, illiteracy dominates over the literacy. Among them, female illiterates are higher than the male. However, in the primary standard the female percentage is higher than male but in subsequent education it is decreasing in frequency. In the matric standard male frequency is higher (1.96%) than female (0.99%). In the higher education level only one individual with a post graduation has been found among them in the entire South Kamrup. In the area of technical education only one female is found who acquired a certificate of typist from I.T.I. They claim that due to their poor economic condition, they are unable to allow their progeny to pursue their studies.

The economy of the Hiras is not satisfactory. Nevertheless, to assess the economy of the Hira population has been graded into three groups. These are —(i) the full-time potters (ii) the potters with other income and (iii) the non-potters. Among them, the full-time potters only source of income is the pottery and nothing else. In them, even the males are also busy in collection of raw materials, preparation of clay, firing of the vessels and finally marketing the finished products. It is found that the highest annual income of full-time potters family is rupees twenty thousand.

On the other hand, the non-potters though primarily they were potters but at present they are not fashion the pottery, are mostly employed. They are
engaged either in government jobs or some other private sectors. However, they earn a good amount from this source which is sufficient for their maintenance. It can, therefore, be said that this is also the cause of giving up of pottery making. Besides, there a few families of this group acquiring cultivable lands and thereby increasing their earnings. In fact, this group of Hira population are economically better off and their highest annual income goes above rupees eighty thousand.

Nevertheless, potters with other income is another section of Hira who consider pottery making as secondary source of income. They are primarily engaged in some other kinds of jobs. In them, males are mostly engaged in blue collar job and also some other petty business. Even the women of this group are also practising in weaving, endi spinning etc. This way they make some extra income besides pottery making. However, their annual income raising up to eighty thousand. The analysis of economic pursuits of the Hiras justify that both the non-potters and the potters with other income groups economically very sound than the full-time potters.

A comprehensive analysis of the pottery has been presented in Chapter VI. This includes — the technology of pottery production, morphology, analysis and distribution of types.

The production of pottery among the Hiras is typically a feminine activity. They make pottery by hand without using any kind of mechanical device. The basic techniques for making pottery are coil building and pressing. The male, however, help women in collecting resources for ceramic production, transporting and marketing the products. But they never fashion the vessels.
The implement used by the Hiras for making potteries are very simple. The major implements are the beater, anvil of varied sizes and shapes, wooden pestle, wooden spade and scraper.

The essential raw materials for pottery making are the clay, sand and fuel for firing. The clay used by the Hiras for pottery making is known as Hiramati. The Hiramati is available usually at a depth of one meter or more in the low lying or marshy areas. In South Kamrup, clay fields are located within the reach of the potters almost in all the villages. The potters collected clay before the advent of the rain particularly in the winter and preserved it in their courtyard. They used this clay for the entire season/year.

Sand is used as tempering material to make the clay pliable. The quantity of sand necessary for a lump of clay depends upon the quality of the clay. This although they accomplish traditionally/conventionally but their long drawn experience in terms of preparation of clay for pottery making is also counted in this realm. They either collected sand from the river/stream bed or purchased. The common firing materials which used for baking the pottery are the firewood, cowdung, thatch, stubble and straw. In the olden days these raw materials are plentifully available and only the potter had to collect it. But now, all these resources have to be purchased which increases the cost of production. Although government has allotted clay field for the potters but they are to pay royalties to the government even for the sand and firewood.

Hiras take much care for the preparation of clay. With the separation of unwanted materials, clay lump has been slicing down by slicer and than allowed to dry. Thereafter these are pulverised into powder by using pestle. This is followed by the sieving of the clay. Then required quantity of water is added to it to make the paste. The clay is kneaded with foot for several times. After being
kneaded, the whole lump is transformed into several conical heaps. Now, the clay is ready for pot making. In the preparation of clay males are also helping the women, if when necessary.

This is followed by the fashioning of the vessels. For fashioning they apply two main techniques, viz- (i) the coil building and (ii) pressing. The large size potteries are made by coil building and beating. Only the small potteries like shallow basin with pinched lip (Chaki) and net sinker (Guli) are prepared by pressing technique.

The morphology of the pottery produced by the Hiras is also described in details in the same chapter. They produce different types of potteries with various shapes and sizes. Generally, they manufacture their traditional types. But demand plays a vital role for determining the type, shape and size as well as the quantity of the pottery one has to be produced. It is observed that nowadays they manufacture some specific types, which could be considered as innovative types like Kerahi, Kamandalu, Kerosene chaki etc.

Hiras mostly manufacture utilitarian types which are seldom used for rites and rituals. Some particular types of pottery are copiously made and few others are occasionally produced. It has been observed that out of twenty eight types only one-fourth is manufactured copiously and rest three-fourth is being fashioned occasionally by the potters.

Chapter VII deals with the analysis of the demand and marketing.

Demand and marketing are the two vital and indispensable components of the craft. In fact, these two jointly control or regulate the ceramic industry. Demand, by far, is the only factor which works as amplifier for both promotion and demotion of the craft. When demand increases the production of pottery
must have to be increased and vice versa. Besides, many scholars revealed that when demand for the ceramic vessels is considerably growing or increasing, potters intensified their production and eventually they became full-time potters. This is very true particularly in the case of tribal fringe Hira potter villages of South Kamrup. Darisatra, a village, surrounded by the tribals and the immigrants is a village of full-time potters. This is possible because both the tribals and immigrants demand assorted types of potteries for diverse purposes. Consequently, both the sexes of the Darisatra potters engaged themselves in the ceramic trade by producing varieties of potteries and there by earn their livelihood by selling the products which is the only source of their income.

Demand of the pottery varies from place to place. In Dimoria block, for example, the demand of Kalah (pitcher) of variable sizes and shapes is highest and therefore, this type is invariably produced by most of the potters of this block. On the contrary, potters of the Boko block produce a lowest number of pitcher. The production of another pottery type — the Pat charu (frying pan) is found highest in Chamaria block. This is because the village is surrounded by the people of minority communities who used this pottery for diverse purposes. Therefore, demand control basically the production of potteries.

By and large, demand of the ceramic vessels is declining in a faster rate and thereby the craft is shrinking away. In fact, for this not a single reason/cause is responsible and neither potters nor the consumers are individually could be blamed. This is however, based on varied grounds. The most noteworthy among these is that the attachment of the potters (Hiras) to the craft is waning rapidly. The young generation becomes more job interested and is influenced by their caste reservation quota system. Thereby, they are not happy with their craft which generates low income. Besides, they consider the craft as a dirty or filthy one.
Furthermore, the appearance of fashionable, portable, durable as well as cheap metallic, plastic, plastic fibre substitutes for ceramic vessels, decrease the value and demand of the potteries. Over and above, the non-availability of the resources, escalation of the cost of production, negligence of the consumers and limited marketing potentialities combinely accountable for deterioration of the demand of the ceramic craft in the South Kamrup.

On the otherhand, marketing of the products have linked up both the manufactures and the consumers. Moreover, markets are the places which signify the demand of the potteries. Therefore, better marketing facilities with commendable number of consumers inspire the potters to count the vocation with professional and entrepreneurial zeal.

Marketing facilities for the potters in the South Kamrup is inadequate, in true sense. Because most of these are weekly markets and are located far away from the Hira villages. Moreover, these are not well communicated and hence potters have to spend a lot of money for transporting their product. Furthermore, the demand of the consumers is not uniform and is mostly controlled by the seasonal elements. So, they are unable to assess the nature and status/character of the saleable products and the sale prices. More so, because their demand in the market is heterogeneous. Often times, they are to sale the product at a very low price which even does not cover their cost of production.

In South Kamrup, a number of marketing channels have been utilized by the potters for marketing their products. The common processes are — (1) direct sale at residence (2) peripatetic sale (3) local market (4) mutual contract (5) paikari system (6) bartar system and (7) jaota system. At present though the potters are utilizing all these but most common channel is the local market.
These markets are mostly the weekly market and the potters manufactured potteries keeping in pace with the consumers of a particular market area.

Chapter VIII is devoted to another important aspect of the study — the patterns of occupational mobility among the Hiras. The occupation which is organically linked with growth and development of a community is an integral factor in the make up of a society. Every society has its own occupational pattern which constituents of their culture.

Hiras of South Kamrup are traditionally a potter community whose primary occupation is the pottery making. But now the Hiras of South Kamrup present a picture of multiple types of occupation. At present, diverse types of occupation like pottery, cultivation, wage labour, masonry, carpentry, weaving, fishing, transport operation, govt. and non-govt services, business etc. have been observed in all the blocks in the study area. In most of the blocks the mobility of occupation has been started in the FF generation except Boko, Chamarla and Chhaygaon blocks.

Nevertheless, all the Hiras of the study area whatever be their occupational mobility, they consider pottery making as a primary occupation, of course, with a variation of percentages of production. It may be mentioned that these potters are peasant potters and therefore, cultivation is also practised side by side. Pottery is being a feminine occupation, male members are free to go for any kind of occupation. This, perhaps is the fundamental cause of their occupational mobility. Besides, the present status of the craft is also highly linked up with the occupational. In fact, the archaic technology associated with lesser marketing potentiality and declining demand dismayed the generation to carry out their traditional occupation. Consequently, they are going for either white collar or blue collar jobs.
9.2 Conclusion:

In this research — ethnography, ceramic products and occupational mobility of the Hira potters, particularly of South Kamrup region have been comprehensively and intensively studied and dealt in this dissertation. The result has been derived from the work and finally conclusion has been drawn on the basis of analysis of data by extrapolation and interpolation. Moreover, on the basis of field observation Hira potters in the context of South Kamrup, a few suggestions for overall development of the craft and the Hira community as a whole are forwarded. In fact, this section is a specific one and dealt with the major issue of the ceramic tradition of Hiras. Therefore, instead of making any conjectural interpretation, deduction are drawn primarily on the basis of data and observation.

However, Daojali Hading potteries are the testimony to the fact that ceramic production in Assam commenced in the Neolithic period. The designs and methods of manufacturing of the potteries found at Daojali Hading are also present among the indigenous potters of Assam and the hill tribes of Northeast India as well. The evidences discussed in the main body of the dissertation lead to belief that fabrication of pottery started in the Neolithic period and continued till today without any major break and change.

In Assam, the wheel turned potteries are primarily found in the historical period. The handmade potteries though introduced in the Neolithic period also persist in the historic ages too. The archaeological excavation reports justified that in the medieval period, in addition to shape and size, lustrous design and decorations were also applied particularly on the wheel turned potteries. Even then the people of that period were unable to evade the handmade potteries, rather they were using these along with the wheel turned potteries. Though some
copper plates and ancient scripts, vaguely mentioned about the potteries but curiously the historical records seldom documented potteries and their makers. Nevertheless, the above facts substantiated that both handmade (Hira) and wheelmade (Kumar) pottries co-existed since the early historical period, if not earlier. In fact, such trend of growth and extension of both wheelmade and handmade potteries parallelly, still persist among the present day potters of Assam.

In South Kamrup, the pottery craft is practised by two indigenous potter communities with different caste hierarchies and technologies. They are the Hiras and the Kumars. The Hiras belong to the scheduled caste community whereas the Kumars are attached to other backward classes. In the production of pottery, each group uses separate techniques and methods. The Kumar used wheel and in contrast, the Hira moulded vessels by hand. Even the implements used for pot making are different. Kumars use wheel for fashioning vessels and Hiras for the same purpose use beater and anvil. Although both these communities are endogamous but never established marital relationship with each other. Each community consider oneself higher than the other, in terms of caste and social position.

The constellation of Hira potters in South Kamrup is not a recent phenomena. They are living in this region since time immemorial. The craft, in addition to their makers withstand annihilation because they achieved a good feedback from the consumers. Hence, South Kamrup is still well known for the Hira population and their traditional handmade potteries. Moreover, the region comprises a mixed population of both tribals and non-tribals. As a matter of fact, formerly South Kamrup was dominated by the tribals. After the formation of the state Meghalaya a majority of them become the citizen of Meghalaya,
However, though politically they were parted with their neighbours but for all purposes like social, religious and economic, they managed to maintain good relationship with their neighbourly brethren. The creation of Meghalaya, however, have no impact on the potters as well as their customers—the tribals. Consequently, the pottery production and consumption is not erratically declining. Still, Meghalaya tribals have purchased or exchange potteries from the weekly markets in Assam particularly from the Hira potters.

The study substantiated the facts that the majority of Hiras are occupying the tribal fringe areas as they get considerable responses from the tribals. Secondly, in those areas the tribals are not producing potteries by themselves but they need vessels for varied purposes. Also, they are very selective in terms of the quality of the products and for that matter Hira potteries are the preferred one for them.

As far as the family system of Hiras is concerned, it has been observed that although traditionally they are the followers of joint family system but gradually it is disintegrating and instead, nuclear family system is dominating. The reason behind this, as they projected is the economic hardship and development of the ideology of individualism, which resulted in the fragmentation of the joint and extended family systems. This enhances and in fact, intensify the formation of nuclear family.

In the marriage system, although Hiras are customarily endogamous but now-a-days this system has undergone a significant change. The new generation are now deviating from their traditional code of practice and has drawn marital relation with other castes beside their own. This study reveals that at present Hiras acquire mate from other caste groups like Kaibartas, Namasudras, Kalitas etc. They also draw marital relationship with the tribals. This corroborated the
fact that their strong belief in castism has gradually declining. Perhaps, the improvement of the educational standard of the community, inspire them in elimination of old belief in castism.

On the basis of the economic standard and variation, this craft community could be graded into three groups, viz- (i) the full-time potters (ii) potters with other income and (iii) non-potters. The study visualised that the full-time potters group who does not have any other economic resort for subsistence except pottery making, become poor due to marginal income from the pottery. In them, males are busy for collecting raw materials, preparation of clay, firing of vessels and marketing of the finished products. So, they are unable to improve their economic condition. The basic reason of their economic stagnancies is their confinement to the production of traditional types of potteries and their archaic technology, which may be counted as the major impediment of their economic prosperity. On the otherhand, the two other groups i.e. potters with other income and non-potters are economically better off than their fellow full-time potters.

The production of pottery among the Hiras is confined only to the womenfolk. The womenfolk with their intrinsic dexterity give artistic shapes and designs to the vessels. But the male Hiras never make pottery. This convention is as old as the community itself. Therefore, a significant question arises as to why the male Hira abstained from pottery making? With the question in mind, a cross-section of Hira potters of different blocks of South Kamrup have been interviewed. They informed that they never consider pottery making as a worthy work for their sex. They regarded it is as disrespectful and contemptuous work as females are totally involved in it since long. Therefore, this may be the basic cause of their refraining from pottery making.
The involvement of women perhaps necessitate the use of beater and anvil instead of wheel. This could be authenticated with the fact that even the Kumar females who are making a few types of pottery, always apply the beater and anvil technique and, though wheel is there, they never use it. In this context Herskovits is worth referring. He opined that "Almost everywhere that pottery is produced with the aid of a potter's wheel, men make it, but where it is made by hand, it is women's work." (Herskovits, 1974:140). Therefore, as women are the potters and not the men, wheel became ineffective for them.

As has been referred earlier that when females are busy with the production of the vessels, the males, particularly of the full-time potters, engage themself in other segment of the craft i.e. collection of raw materials, firing of vessels and more specifically with the selling of the finished products. Usually, they sale the vessels in the weekly *hat* and other markets. Besides, they are also making peripatetic sale which demand a long walk with their load within a day. This type of work is only possible for the menfolk because of their physical constitutional make up. Therefore, the craft of pottery production among Hiras is a joint and co-operative venture where both husband and wife subscribe to the maintenance of the craft as well as the family.

Traditionality and simplicity of technology and typology of the ceramic products of Hiras stand on their way in the development as well as the survival of the craft. Because, conventionally produced vessels do not bear neither decoration, painting nor design or any other embellishments. Many of the potters even produce clumsy, ugly and unattractive vessels. Perhaps, they might either have no aesthetic sense or they entirely ignore this aspect which by far, lessen the commercial significance of their products.
Though Hira produces assorted types vessels but these are not produced copiously. The study revealed that out of twenty eight types only seven types of vessels are copiously produced and the rest twenty one are occasionnally made. The basic reason for this is the heterogenous demand of the consumers. Consequently, potters are reluctant to produce abundantly all types of potteries. Rather, they are very selective in this regards and in fact, their production is demand-prone.

Hiras are facing marketing predicaments. Though they usually go to the weekly markets for selling the potteries but they are unable to achieve good amount in terms of profit. This was a query as to why they are unable to achieve the requisite profit? Empirical observation and enquiry reveal that the morphological imperfection or deficiencies, in addition to lack of embellishment repel the consumers from purchasing Hira potteries particularly for aesthetic purposes. Consequently, the non-tribal population seldom purchase these potteries even for domestic use. Rather they prefer the substitutes which are mostly cheap, durable and at the same time having lot of ornamentation including shape, designs and decorations.

Besides, Hira potteries are never used for religious purposes. But usually the non-tribal customer who basically use pottery for religious purposes seldom purchase Hira pottery. As a matter of fact, the tribals who primarily use these for domestic purposes are the regular and almost permanent customers. In addition, the fragmented marketing facilities negate consideration of pottery making as a economically profitable assortment for the Hiras. This has afflicted them with poverty. Subsequently, to combat with this (poverty) they look for some other sources of income. If the later vocation become more advantageous and at the same time more remunerative, they finally abandoned the craft. In fact, this is how the Hiras are skiving off their age-old traditional craft—a family heirloom.
Though Hiras are basically the peasant potters but they hardly have sufficient own agricultural land. Many of them practise it on hired land as share cropper. But they are unable to subsist fully on agricultural products and hence they resort to some other occupation. In this, pottery production provide them a strong support. Since women are the potters among them they earn some extra money through it, which in turn, help the family tremendously for their maintenance. But the non-potters and part-time potters with some source of other income like service, business etc. are economically affluent than the full-time potters. This in fact, indulged the potters to go for some other vocation preferably a service by keeping aside their ceramic craft.

Although pottery making is a primary occupation of Hiras but at present their patterns of occupation have undergone appreciable change. These changes may be accountable for the initiation of the occupational mobility among them. The study visualised that a major part of the population has accepted other means of occupation besides pottery making for their livelihood. Majority of Hira population are interested to achieve the jobs either white collar or blue collar. In fact, Hiras are growing weary of pottery making profession because of its economic non-viability. This brings flexibility to their traditional occupation. To earn their livelihood, particularly the males prefer any kind of occupation irrespective of choice, standard etc. and the only aim in this is to earn money. The reason of occupational mobility among them though mainly economical but more precisely the improvement of educational standard made them interested for white collar jobs in particular. In fact, the educated section refused to do any low graded work and, in this pottery making is one of the kind. Besides, the pottery production as they feel comprises indecent, filthy and hard work. Furthermore, the decreasing demand of the ceramic vessels associated with low income make them disinterested for the craft.
The study of the generation-wise occupational mobility shows that the craft of pottery has significantly been declining from forefather's generation to the present generation almost in all the blocks except three blocks, viz — Boko, Chamaria and Chhaygaon. It is seen that about ninety to cent percent of Hiras engaged in the craft in the F.F. generation. This is abruptly decreasing in F. generation and tremendously decreasing and sometimes almost non-entity in the responded generation. However only in those three blocks as referred above, the production continued at the same rate upto the F. generation and the occupational mobility start in the respondent generation only. The reason as it appears in those blocks also is primarily economic. Because most of the potters of the survey area are of the opinion that their earned income from pottery is not sufficient or enough to maintain their family. These create occupational hazards for the potters and circumstances compelled them to look for some other occupation. Besides, the cost of production is also enormously increasing. But they are unable to enhance the price of the potteries which is not possible for them because of dirt cheap substitutes. Above all, the cost of living staggeringly increasing and it is difficult for them to cope with their low income of the craft. In consequence, the Hiras of respondent generation are mostly disinterested with the craft.

Although at present many changes have taken place in Assam and its environs, in addition to the society as a whole and even in the industrial sectors including ceramics, diverse morpho-technological changes and upliftments have taken place, yet none of these changes have influenced Hiras to modify their ceramic morphology and technology.

Despite plenteous advantages of a wheel in pottery making and at the same time government is also offering them easily pliable pinion wheel with
subsidy, why Hiras are not using the wheel? This question was also within the parameter of this survey. However, the empirical observation with personal involvement and participation of the researcher reveal that they are still inflexible as far as their caste tradition and positions are concerned. In fact, Hiras do not consider the Kumars as their contemporary, in terms of their profession as well as caste status. Because Kumars detached a completely fashioned pot from the wheel by a thread and for this they were being counted as naikata kumar (cutter of naval cord) by the Hiras. This act of Kumar is considered by the Hiras as very disgraceful and desecrate one and hence repudiated Kumars for all purposes including their profession — the wheel turned pottery making.

The physical capability or competence of the Hiras for using wheel cannot be doubted due to lack of evidence. However, an Anthropological studies on the four caste groups, viz — Hiras, Jogis, Kumars and Kaibartas conducted by Das et.al. shows that there are differences among them. They opined, ".....it is seen that the four caste groups under study— Hiras, Jogis, Kumars and Kaibaratas — are showing more or less marked differences in the distribution of anthropological characters. They differ from each other in anthrometric measurements, and indices, in behavioural traits, in the frequency of finger ridge patterns, and in the distribution of ABO and PTC taste sensitivity phenotype and gene frequencies, thus in almost the whole set of anthropological variables, which could be considered in this study." (Das et. al, 1986 : 247) They further opined that "The reason for these anthropological dissimilarities among these four caste groups, all of which occupy lower positions in the Hindu caste hierarchy, must be seen in the fact that they are endogamous, which means that there are no marriage contacts and hence gene flow among them." (Ibid)
The above two statements justified that the Hiras have some genetical variations and isolation with Kumars and others. This does not speculate about the physical competence or deficiency of the Hiras which dissuade them from using the wheel. Hence, to establish this specific aspect, a separate study has to be conducted. Therefore, this will not be perhaps proper to comment at this juncture that Hiras are physically unfit for manipulating the wheel. The only logical justification in this regard will be their tradition bound biasness and aversion to the low status due for wheel use as they opined.

At present the pottery craft and in this Hira pottery in particular, have faced a stiff competition from the immigrant potters in one hand and cheap, durable and well decorated substitutes on the other. Under the above circumstances Hiras will be forced to give up their traditional age-old handicraft, if appropriate amenities and resources are not provided. If the economic condition of the Hiras has to continue at this dreadful rate, very soon they will be forced to give up their age-old traditional craft and the country will lose a very important handicraft industry which is exceptionally linked up with the cultural and technological evolution of the country. Therefore, rightful measures have to be taken up to upgrade the quality of the products and technique of production.

However, on the basis of field study and personal experience and observation at the time of conducting the survey, it is felt necessary to offer the following suggestions.

It has been observed that the potters have to face a lot of problems in regards to the procurement of raw materials. The non-availability of clay and high price of firing materials may be one of the cause of most of the Hiras for abandonment of the craft besides others. Therefore, in order to maintain the craft the potters have to receive clay and firing materials at free of cost:
Potters should be motivated to acquaint themselves with new designs and decoration. Necessary training should be imparted to them for manufacturing of commercially viable vessels at low cost. Benefit should be percolated to the poorest potter's family of Hiras under the provision of the scheduled caste component plan.

It is learnt that the youngster of Dharamtul village in Nagaon district have taking pioneering plan for the development of the craft. The Dharamtul potters have started a craft industry keeping in view the demand of the consumers. This in fact, enhances the marketing potentialities. They are able to capture the market in wide ranges and earn good amount of money. It is reported that the youth belonging to Hiras are giving training and grant-in-aid so that they may depend entirely upon it. Therefore, government and other agencies should motivate the Hiras to go for such training and necessary financial assistance may be given to them as seed money for developing such cottage industries. Besides, giving facility of making the pottery in decent way may make the young generation interested and thereby the age-old craft can perhaps be saved against oblivion.