

Problems and Prospects of Potters: A case study of Chenga Development Block, Barpeta, Assam

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Abstract

Pottery played a significant role not only in our day-to-day life but also in religious practices and trade in Indian society. Pottery made by potters is eco-friendly. It is important for both economic and cultural aspects. So, in this regard, this study is an attempt to know the characteristic features of the potter community of the Chenga development block and their problem and prospects. The study is descriptive in nature. The study reveals that though the things made by potters have importance in our daily life, due to modernization and changing consumer preferences, nowadays they have faced various challenges in their occupations. And the potters of this region, they belong to scheduled castes communities.

Keywords: Pottery, Potter, Problems, Prospects, Community.

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Introduction

Pottery is the art of carefully sculpting clay to create various items. Pottery making in India has an ancient history that dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization. Pottery is a notable branch of art. In this industry, the potterer creates works of art with clay by means of their hand. Pottery is one of the tools for economic development of potters. Potteries that have been used in ancient times now also have importance and are still prevalent in Assam. From ancient times, pottery was an essential commodity for the Assamese people. Pottery can able to meet the demand for almost most of the things that are essential for our day-to-day life. In ancient times, rice cooking utensils such as bowls, jugs, jars, and charyas were made from clay. The use of clay vessels is also seen in births, deaths, and marriages associated with the life of Assamese society nowadays. Traditionally, there are three types of potteries: earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain. The potters of these regions are related to only earthenware.

In Assam, pottery is not just a commercial enterprise but also an integral part of the local culture. It provides livelihoods to many artisans and their families. The pottery-making skills are often passed down through generations, preserving the traditional techniques and designs. While modernization and changing consumer preferences have presented challenges, efforts are being made to promote and sustain the pottery industry in Assam, both at the local and governmental levels.

In Assam, there are two communities related to pottery, they are Kumar and Hiras. They are among the sixteen scheduled castes communities of Assam, and they used traditional handmade instruments in the pottery-making process. Although both Kumar and Hira communities are associated with this tradition as a means of earning livelihood, the earthen pots prepared by them differ from each other. Kumar is known for preparing earthen pot that is generally used in religious ceremonies, and they are also important for our everyday life. The role of women in making pottery is undeniable. They usually manufacture the potteries as per the demand of the locality. The common products are jhonga (pitcher), kalah, tekeli, ghata (round-bottomed water vessels of different sizes), charu (wide mouth bowl), mota (small round and wide vessel used for eating food), gilasa (drinking water vessel) and different kinds of lids and stands.

Hiras have to work hard to make pottery. They have to bring clay first. This clay is known as "Hira Mati". This clay has to be imported from the island beach near Guwahati.

About the Study Area:

Chenga development block is located in the Barpeta district of Assam, India. It is located 12 km to the East of the district headquarters, Barpeta.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the present study are-

- a) To evaluate the characteristic features of pottery workers in the study area.
- b) To study the problems and prospects of pottery workers and provide suggestions for their upliftment.

Methodology of the study:

The present study is based on both primary field surveys and secondary data. A structured questionnaire has been prepared for the collection of primary data. The survey was carried out in Chenga development block in the Barpeta district of Assam. The secondary data has

been collected from various government reports, books, and Journal articles. The study is descriptive in nature.

Characteristic Features of Potters in the Study Area:

From the field survey, the following characteristic and features are found among the potters of the study area.

- Pottery is a family-based industry.
- Pottery is a traditional handmade product. The pottery-making skills are often passed down from generation to generation.
- Both males and females are engaged in making pottery. The women are engaging in production process, and male members help them in the marketing.
- There are only two communities, that make pottery in the study area. The Kumar and the Hiras.
- Out of the total survey, most of the pottery workers are skilled workers as they have been doing this for a long time.
- Low investment in fixed capital and personal savings is main source of working capital.
- The illiteracy rate among females is higher as compared to male potters.
- Low levels of income, most of the pottery worker's family income is less than one lakh per year.

Problems and Prospects of Pottery workers in the study area:

Pottery is a primary traditional occupation of Kumar and Hiras, and these occupations pass from one generation to the next generation in their families. Because of these family-based occupations, their forefathers do not possess agricultural land. Due to this, nowadays, most of the households of the Hira community do not have agricultural land. On the other way, the income earned from pottery is gradually diminishing in society due to widely use of aluminum and synthetic plastic products. Now, they have realized that income from pottery making is not sufficient to maintain the families. So, occupational mobility is there in the study area, they are now shifted to other occupations.

Potters in the study area are suffering from various diverse problems. Some of the important problems faced by the potters in the study area are as follows:

- Main problem is related to raw materials necessary for the production of pottery.
- Lack of transportation or marketing problems to sell produced products. Since it is a family-based industry, most of families do not have transportation facilities. The men carry them on their shoulders and go to villages to sell them.
- Lack of capital is also another problem for potters. Who do not have own capital they need to borrow from relatives or from money lenders, or from microfinance financial institutes.
- Most of households do not have infrastructure for storage of the produced goods during rainy seasons. So, lack of infrastructure problem is there in the study area.
- Majority of the potters in the study area, they raise their own finance, to purchase the raw materials and attend to production, marketing and controlling labourers. The chief management problems, therefore, are those of planning, coordinating and controlling the various activities, which increase the competitive efficiency of the pottery workers.

Prospects of Pottery industry

Although so many problems are, there in the potter related to the production of pottery. Future prospects are there in the upgradation and improvement of the pottery industry, modern technical methods are to be applied for the acquirement of knowledge so that productivity and attraction of the products can be increased. Since it is an eco-friendly product and use of it does not harm our environment. So, awareness among the people needs to be increased to increase the attraction of people's demand for pottery.

Conclusions

Potters of the Chenga development block are characterized by family-based occupations, the use of traditional tools and methods of production, and the prevalence of illiteracy among the workers. From the study, it is found that although there are various problems and prospects for potters, the initiative should need to be taken by the government and non-government organizations for the upliftment of this potter's community. This could be the modernization of production technology, financial subsidy of government, skill formation and training, etc.

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