

Chapter 2

Genealogy of Hira Community

2.1 Background of the Kamrup District:

Assam is one of the states of North-east India. It is famous for its wildlife, diverse culture, and rich heritage, etc. Assam lies between E 80° 42' and E 90° 10' east longitudes and N 24° 88' and N 27° 10' north latitude. It is bounded in the east by Nagaland and Manipur and on the west by West Bengal. Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, and Bangladesh are on the south, and Bhutan and Arunachal are situated on the north side of Assam. Now there are a total of 33 districts in Assam. In ancient times Assam was known as Kamrupa which is referred to in the Epics, the Puranas, and other ancient Indian literature. Kamrup is one of the ancient districts of Assam. Kamrup district has a glorious past. First, 'Kamrupa' was mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Pragasti of Samudra Gupta. (Choudhury, 1987). Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang when visited Assam in the 17th century mentioned the name 'Ka-mo-lu-pa'. The mythologies of ancient Kamrup reveal that the word 'Kamrup' means the land where 'Kamdev' regained his 'Rupa' (form) after being burnt by the glance of Lord Shiva. Gait (1984) stated that Kamrup included Brahmaputra valley, Bhutan, Rangpur, and Coach Bihar in ancient times. Being the gateway of North-East India, the Kamrup district attracts many people from different parts of our country and outside the country. Kamrup district has its own Kamrupi culture and dialect.

Kamrup was also known as Pragjyotishpur till the Ahom conquest. The name 'Pragjyotishpur' was also mentioned in both Ramayana and Mahabharata. Bhattacharyya (1932) stated that Pragjyotishpur was the kingdom of Narakasura. Kakati (1948) opined that the name Pragjyotishpur derived from 'Pagar-juh-tic' or 'Pagar-jotich' which is an Austric phrase. The meaning of these words is 'region of hills'. From all those descriptions, it is clear that Kamrupa or Pragjyotishpur was the ancient name of Assam. But how and when the name Pragjyotishpur became 'Assam'

is still unknown. Different scholars provide different opinions regarding the name of Assam. Gait (1984) said that Assam's name was derived from the Ahom word 'Asama' which means "unequaled" or "peerless". At the time of Ahom king Sukapha, this term was first used by the tribals of Assam. Acharyya (1987) also opined that the present name Assam is not very old. It became popular after the conquest of Assam by the Ahom kings, a shan tribe from Northern Burma in the thirteenth century.

In the time of the British in 1934 first Kamrup district was formed (under Act II 1835). Gait (1984) said that because of some administrative purposes British divided Assam into four districts. These are- Kamrup, Goalpara, Darrang and Nowgong in 1834. At that time Kamrup District consisted of both Brahmaputra and Barak Valley.

In 1983 one smaller administrative part is separated from the Kamrup district- that is Barpeta district. Earlier Guwahati and Nalbari were the sub-division of the Kamrup district. But in 1985 Nalbari district is split from the Kamrup district and it was declared as a separate district. Then original undivided Kamrup district became three parts- Kamrup, Barpeta, and Nalbari. So, one of the ancient and glorious districts Kamrup became divided into some small parts because of administrative and political issues. Further, in 2003, the large Kamrup district has been divided into two districts- Kamrup rural and Kamrup Metropolitan District for some administrative purposes. Baksa District is also split from the Kamrup district in 2004.

Earlier Kamrup district had three Sub-division. These are- Guwahati, Rangia, and Pragjyotishpur. Though Pragjyotishpur was district first then declared as the sub-division.

Because of River Brahmaputra, the climate of Kamrup district is cold and most of the time of the year it receives rainfalls. River Brahmaputra divided the District Kamrup into two parts. The northern part of the river Brahmaputra is called 'North Kamrup' and the southern part of Kamrup is called 'South Kamrup'.

a) Population:

According to the 2011 census Kamrup (rural) district comes in 6th place based on population in Assam. It consists of 4.87 percent of the total population of Assam. The total population of Kamrup rural is 15,17,542 (2011 census). Out of those population, 13,75,148 people lives in rural areas and 1,42,394 lives in urban areas. Total male population is 7,78,461 and female population is 7,39,08.

According to the 2011 census, in Kamrup metro, the total population is 12,53,938 where a total of 2,16,927 people live in rural areas and 10,37,011 people live in urban areas. The total male population of the Kamrup Metropolitan district is 6,47,585 and the total female population is 6,06,353.

Total households in Kamrup rural is 3,11,114 (2011 census report). Where in the rural areas is 2,80,269 and in urban areas is 30,845. On the other hand, in the Kamrup Metropolitan district, the total number of households is 2,93,112. A total of 45,484 households are in rural areas and 2,47,628 are in Urban areas.

According to the 2001 census report, there are a total of 18,36,153 Hindu population, 6,25,002 Muslim population, and 44,257 Christian population in Kamrup district.

b) Location:

Kamrup district is lies between E 90° 39' and E 92° 12' 20'' east longitudes and N 25° 43' and N 26° 53' north latitude. This district is surrounded by Udalguri and Baska district on the north, Meghalaya on the south, on east Darrang and Kamrup metropolitan district, and west Goalpara and Nalbari District.

c) Administrative Division:

Kamrup district occupies 3105 sq. Km of the State. This district comes in 11th place in terms of area. It is situated in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. This district occupies 2 civil Subdivisions- Guwahati subdivision and Rangia subdivision; 7

Towns; 12 Revenue circles; 1068 revenue villages; 162 Gaon panchayats; 14 Development Blocks. It also covers 2 Statutory towns- Rangia and Palashbari; 11 Census towns. There is one Tribal belt in the Kamrup district under the Guwahati sub-division.

d) Economic Background:

River Brahmaputra is the lifeline of most of the people of the Kamrup district. Many people's economy depends on River Brahmaputra. Most of the people of the Kamrup district are engaged in agriculture. The agriculture of the Kamrup district depends on its monsoon rains. But tertiary occupation also plays an important role in the employment and economic growth of people. In Gross district domestic product, the primary sector has a 66% contribution and the secondary sector has a 20% contribution. According to the 2011 census, the total working population of Kamrup district is 8,42,253. Out of this 6,66,968 are male population and 1,75,285 are female population. The percentage of workforce participation is 33.4% in the district. While 24.6% are cultivators, 9% are agricultural labours, 5.6% are engaged in household industries and 60.8% do other work for livelihood.

e) Land:

Mainly the types of land in the Kamrup district are suitable for agriculture. The majority of the land is used for cultivation and agricultural purpose. In the district total Net area of agricultural land is 1.82 lakh hectares which are 42% of the total geographical area. The land of the district is also suitable for some kinds of fruits. There are different kinds of bananas grown in this district like cheni champa, malbhog, athiya, kachkol, monohar, jahaji, etc. Also, fruits like mangos, lemon, jack fruits, coconuts are easily available in this district because of the land's speciality.

f) Forestry:

In Kamrup district forest is playing an important role in the day-to-day life of the people. The majority of the people collect firewoods, bamboo, thatch, etc. from the

forest to cook food or build their houses. There are different types of tree species in this district i.e., sal, sundis, tik, gamari, nageswar, bansom, kokoi, etc. It has 23 reserved forests under three forest divisions of the district. These are Kamrup East, Kamrup West and Kamrup North. The district has a total of 1,22,905.105 hectares of forest land excluding the unclassed state forest.

g) Industry:

Kamrup district has a good industrial record. According to one district report, there is a total of 676 industrial units in the Kamrup district. And these are the only registered unit which includes food products, wood products, etc. There are a total number of 14,776 SSI units in the Kamrup district which means almost 30% of Assam. Most of the industries of the district are engineering, agrarian type, and chemical industries. The forest industries are mainly in Palash bari, Sualkuchi, Hajo, and North Guwahati. According to the District Industries and Commerce Centre data, there is a high potential of Industrial growth exist in Kamrup districts as it already has different industrial sectors.

The climate of the Kamrup district is very good for sericulture. There are different types of silk available in the district. Muga silk, Pat silk, and Eri silk of Assam are some of the popular silks in the world. In sericulture mainly women do rear and spinning. It also provides different job opportunities for different categories of people. In their free time also, people practice weaving and spinning. Around 420 villages in the Kamrup district are practicing sericulture work. Sualkuchi is famous for its silk and weaving industry. For the people of the Sualkuchi silk industry is their traditional handicraft. They are following this craft from generation to generation. This provides engagement among the people of Sualkuchi. The fishery industry is also growing in this district. These fisheries can be registered or unregistered. For fishery, people use beel, river, swamp, pond, dead rivers, canals, tank, etc.

h) Roads:

Connectivity plays a major role in the economic and social growth of a society. The connectivity system includes roads, airways, railways. The total road length in District Kamrup is 2,450 km. There are a total of 192 km of national highway and 73 km of state highways and 1,670 km. of rural roads in the district. This shows that access and availability to 44 good road connectivity in the district are comparatively low. Kamrup district has three national highways. These are- NH-37, NH-52, and NH-31.

i) Air and Water Transport:

Guwahati, the headquarter of Kamrup District has its international airport. It helps the people of the state to connect with the rest of the country. From the pre-independence time, water transportation plays an important role in import and export. By the end of the '60s also people used water transportation for the exportation of tea. But in the post-1971 period, the water transportation and shipping facilities gradually closed as access via Bangladesh was denied. However, now in Kamrup District, there is an IWT deport port at Amingaon. Which plays a vital role in cargo handling and transshipment of bulk goods and tea transportation. There are also regular ferries are available in the district.

j) Power & Energy:

Power and energy are some of the basic factors which affect the Economic Development of the people of a particular area. According to the 2001 survey report conducted by OKDISCD, 77.65% of people of Kamrup district have a power supply, while 75% of people have a domestic connection. This indicates that 25% of the people of the Kamrup district don't use electricity for lighting. They have other sources. The district needs 15 MW for the power supply but it only has 12 MW. This difference shows the inadequacy of the power supply. One of the important reasons for the inadequate power supply is the slow pace of rural electrification.

k) Human Development Index:

In terms of health, knowledge, and the performance of the standard of living in Kamrup district is good. According to one district report of Kamrup conducted by OKDISCD, Kamrup's HDI value is 0.574 (2nd rank) where the state average is 0.407. District-wise, in terms of income Kamrup district, is in 1st place, in terms of education it is in 3rd place, and in terms of health, this district is in 7th place. According to the Human Poverty Index of 1999, Kamrup district has 17.44% of poor people. The district is estimated to be 0.642 in terms of gender development issues in 2001 which is far above Assam's average of 0.537. It occupies 4th place in Assam. But the women in the Kamrup district, face more challenges in development than men.

2.2 Geographical Background of the South Kamrup:

South Kamrup is the southern bank of the River Brahmaputra. South Kamrup consists of some villages of both Kamrup rural and metropolitan districts. South Kamrup is lying between E 91° 01' and E 92° 15' east longitudes and N 26° 15' and N 26° 30' north latitude.

It is bounded in the east by Morigaon and on the west by the Goalpara district. Meghalaya Hills is on the south and River Brahmaputra is in the north.

The region has diverse geological features from hilly areas to plain areas. The plain areas of South Kamrup are mainly flood-prone. From the topography of this region, it is known that more than three-fourth of the area has hills. And the rest of the region is covered by rivers, beels, marches, and forests. The hills of this area are connected to the River Brahmaputra with the ranges of Shillong. Chakardew, Chagalhari, Burha parvat, Dakhala, Gobardhan, Mailata, Basistha, Sona Pahar, Ghogua, Bornihat, etc. are some of the hills of south Kamrup which are connected to the Meghalaya (Sarmah, 2001).

a) Water Bodies:

In South Kamrup, there are numerous water bodies or water channels where water remains every time of year. There are many rivers and lakes which are locally called 'beel' found in south Kamrup. There is a total of 56 beels in the Guwahati Subdivision of South Kamrup. These beels have different types of fish in them. Many villagers earn their livelihood by fishing in those beels. Apart from this, the Hira community people also collect the clay for earthenware making from those beels. Deepar beel is the largest among all the beels of South Kamrup.

Also, there are many Rivers in this part of the State i.e., Bharalu, Kalashi, Digaru, Boko, and Singra. Besides all those Rivers or tributaries and sub-tributaries of the River Brahmaputra, it also has different water channels like small streams which directly drain to those tributaries and sub-tributaries. These rivers are originated from the Meghalaya and debouch into the river Brahmaputra. Because of the earthquake, many damages have been created from time to time. And a result of that many marshes, beels, and water bodies are formed. In 1987 also earthquake caused many damages in the entire Assam. One of the examples of this is the Chandubi beel of the Kalashi river. Chandubi areas also have many low-lying tracts, several marshes, swamps, and beels as a consequence of that Earthquake.

b) Flora & Fauna:

There are different types of flora found in south Kamrup because of its tropical monsoon-type climate, rainfall, and different types of soil. This region is mainly rich in orchid species. There are mainly three types of flora found in south Kamrup- tall trees, intermediate bush, and ground grass or weeds. The tall trees are mainly found in the hilly areas or near the hilly areas. There are many valuable kinds of wood or trees in this area- sal, agar, shegun, sonaru, gamari, bonsom, etc. These trees' demand is very high and helps in the economic development of the district. Most of the part of south Kamrup is covered with bamboo trees. There are also different types of beautiful trees and flowers found in this part of Assam.

Assam is famous for its bio-diversity nature. So, in fauna, there are many animals found in South Kamrup. One mostly found animal in South Kamrup is the monkey. Some of the popularly known animals of South Kamrup are buffalo, elephants, leopards, bears, pigs, swamp deer, spotted deer, barking deer, etc. In south Kamrup there are both poisonous and non-poisonous snakes, etc. are also found.

c) Climate:

Like the other regions of Brahmaputra valley, the climate of South Kamrup is mainly the "monsoon rainfall" type. It receives more rainfall and high humidity in a year. The average annual rainfall in this part of Assam is 1500 mm to 2600 mm. Overall, in South Kamrup, the weather is sub-tropical. Tropical monsoon-type climate reduces the temperature in summer and creates foggy winters. In spring and autumn, this region receives moderate rainfalls. Climate is also different in the hilly areas and plain areas. Plain areas' humidity is high and hilly areas climate is sub-alpine type. The climate of South Kamrup mainly depends on -River Brahmaputra, the south border of Meghalaya, etc. And this is the reason that every year south Kamrup had to face the problem of flooding because of the River Brahmaputra. Rainfall of this region raises the level of water of the river, lake, beels, etc., and overflows its banks.

d) Soil:

The soil quality of South Kamrup is different from the other places of Assam. There are many marshes and low lands found in this part of the state. The soil quality of south Kamrup is suitable for growing different crops. Alluvial soils are mainly found in this part of Assam. There are two types of Alluvial soil. One is young Alluvial soil which is gray or molted-grey in colour. And another one is old Alluvial soil which is dark greyish brown in colour.

2.3 Demographical background of Hira Community in Assam

The demographic background is very essential to know the exact scenario of the demographical aspects of Hiras in Assam. According to Sorokin (1959), "one of the

main factors of social change is the demographic factor. Therefore, the study of different variables like birth rate, death rate, marriageable age, and other related parameters are necessary to know the demographic pattern of a community". This includes the population, sex ratio, rural-urban composition, and literacy, etc.

Table:2.1

Demographic Profile of the Hira community of Assam

Area	Hira Population (Including Institutional & Houseless population)			Hira Households
	Male	Female	Total	
Rural	23,917	23,503	44,447	10,837
Urban	3,943	3,910	7,853	1,992
Total	27,860	27,440	55,300	12,829

Source: 2011 Census report.

According to the 1991 census, there was a total of 49,336 Hira Population in Assam, 2001 census report shows that Assam has a total of 55,106 Hira population. And lastly, there is a total of 55,300 Hira population in Assam as per the 2011 census (table: 2.1). So, we can see that the Hira population is increasing day by day. In Assam total scheduled caste population is 22,31,321 (2011 census). Here 2.48% is the Hira population. There are a total of 27,860 male and 27,440 female members of the Hira community in Assam according to the 2011 census report.

From the above table: 2.1, it is found that out of 4,95,475 Scheduled Caste households of Assam, 12,829 are Hira households.

2.3.1 Rural-Urban Continuum:

According to the 2011 census total scheduled castes population living in rural areas in Assam is 18,25,761 and 4,05,560 in urban areas. In the Kamrup district total Scheduled caste population living in rural areas is 88,975 and in the urban area is 18,852. In the context of the Hira Population in Assam data from the table: 2.1 show that 44,447 people are living in rural areas. Where 23,917 are male and 3,943 are

female. And 7,853 Hira people are living in urban areas in Assam. Where 3,943 are male and 3,910 are female. (2011 census).

So, this indicates that most of the Hira people live in rural areas, and only a few Hira people are living in urban areas. Also, the no. of total Hira households living in rural areas is higher than the total no. of households in the urban areas. There is a total of 10,837 Hira households in rural areas and on the other hand, only 1,992 Hira households are in urban areas. And all those Hiras are migrated from the rural villages in search of employment, education, or a better lifestyle. The above table: 2.1 also reveals one important fact that the total population of Hira males is higher than the total population of Hira females in Assam.

2.3.2 Literacy:

Literacy is one of the most important factors for a nation's development. It indicates the ability to read and write. It is also a medium to understand, interpret and communicate by using some written different contexts.

Table: 2.2

Literacy Among the Hira Community in Assam

Area	Literacy					
	Illiterate			Literate		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Rural	5,932	8,684	14,616	17,985	14,846	32,831
Urban	665	917	1,582	3,278	2,993	6,271
Total	6,597	9,601	16,198	21,263	17,839	39,102

Source: 2011 Census Report

The 2011 census report reveals that in Assam total no of illiterate Hira people is 16,198 that is 29.29% of the total Hira population of Assam where more than half of the people 14,616 are from rural areas and only 1,582 is from urban areas as shown in the table: 2.2. But the in Assam total no of illiterate Hira people is 16,198 which is comparatively higher than the total no. of illiterate people and 70.70% of the total Hira

population. Here 32,831 are from rural areas and 6,271 from urban areas. So, the total no. of both illiterate and literate Hira people is higher in rural areas as compared to urban areas.

Data also indicates the total no. of illiterate Hira males Hira 6,596. Out of this 5,932 is from rural areas and 665 are from urban areas. On the other hand, the total no. of illiterate Hira females is 9,601. 8,684 from rural and 917 from urban areas. The total no. of literate Hira males in Assam is 21,263 and female is 17,839. Out of the total no. of literate Hira males, 17,985 are from rural areas and 3,278 from urban areas, and regarding the literate Hira female, 14,864 are from rural areas and 2,993 from urban areas. One thing is clear from the data that in the matter of illiteracy number of the female is higher and in the matter of literacy number of the female is lower. So it can be said that the Hira females are more educationally backward than the Hira males in Assam.

2.4 Details of Hira villages in South Kamrup:

The majority of Hira people are found in the Kamrup district. For the present study, South Kamrup is preferred. It is on the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra. There is a total number of 1166 villages in South Kamrup and 221 scheduled caste villages. Out of 221 villages, there is a total of 26 separate Hira villages. Locally these villages are known as 'Hirapara' or 'Hirachupa'.

Table: 2.3

Name of the Hira Villages of South Kamrup

Blocks	Villages	Total No. of Households	Total Population (Approx.)
Boko	Darisatra	60	300
	Sakhati	5	30
	Total	65	330
Chamaria	Chamaria	45	211
	Total	45	211

Chayani	Amranga	7	32
	Menepara	9	25
	Ozapara	5	19
	Palashbari	20	95
	Pally notun Basti	15	80
	Total	56	251
Chaygaon	Belguri Nepali Para	10	40
	Tarigaon	44	190
	Total	54	230
Rani	Azara Hirapara	35	215
	Azara Naopara	30	200
	Barbari	10	35
	Dhupguri	25	190
	Gargarha	20	60
	Lankeswar	40	160
	Majirgaon	30	150
	Sikarhati	20	90
	Total	210	1095
Rampur	Dhantola	55	250
	Satpakhali	50	311
	Sontola	50	200
	Bor Tezpur	40	200
	Total	195	961
Dimoria	Jharikuchi	70	310
	Maloibari	20	90
	Total	90	400
Chandrapur	Tintukura	10	50
	Thakurkuchi	6	30
	Total	16	80

Source: Field Report

Table: 2.3 shows the details of all Hira villages in South Kamrup. From the data, it is found that the South Kamrup has 7 blocks which consist of 26 Hira villages. Boko block of South Kamrup has two Hira villages- Darisatra and Sakhati, Chamaria block has only one Hira village- Chamaria, Chayani block consists of five Hira villages- Amranga, Menapara, Ozapara, Palash Bari, Pally notun basti, Chaygaon consists of two Hira villages- Belguri Nepali para and Tarigaon, Rani block has the highest number of Hira villages. These villages are- Azara Hirapara, Azara Naopara, Barbari Dhrpguri, Gargarha, Lankeswar, Majir Gaon, Sikarhati. Rampur block has two Hira Villages- Dhantola and Satpakhali and Chandrapur block consist of two Hira villages- Tintukura and Thakur Kuchi.

2.5 Demographical pattern of the Surveyed Hira Villages:

The researcher already mentioned that the total population of South Kamrup is 8,11,805 (according to the 2011 census). There are a total of 1166 villages in South Kamrup and 26 Hira villages. Six Hira villages are selected from South Kamrup- Hirapara (Azara), Darisatra, Dhantola, Satpakhali, Tarigaon and Chamaria.

Table: 2.4

Demographical Pattern of the Surveyed Villages

Blocks	Name of the Villages	No. of Hira Households	Total Hira Population (Approx.)
Boko	Darisatra	60	300
Chamaria	Chamaria	45	211
Chaygaon	Tarigaon	44	190
Rani	Azara (Hirapara)	35	215
Rampur	Dhantola	55	250
	Satpakhali	50	311

Table 2.4 shows the demographical pattern of the surveyed Hira Villages of South Kamrup. Darisatra is known by the name of the satra (religious place) of this

village. It comes under Boko block. Darisatra village is in Kamrup (rural) district. This village has a glorious history. Most of the people of this village engaged in Agriculture. The industrial sector is still yet to develop in this village. Villagers are not properly aware of education. Electricity, drinking water and transport facilities are also required to develop in this village. There is a total of 60 Hira households in this village. The total Hira population of Darisatra is 300 (Approx.) (table: 2.4).

Chamaria comes under Chamaria block. The village code of Chamaria is 302990 (2011 census report). Chamaria village is famous for the 'Chamaria Satra'. This village also comes under Kamrup (rural) district. It is approximately 25 k.m. away from Amingaon, the district headquarter. The total area of Chamaria village is 103.59 hectares. The total population of the village is 2,227 and the total number of households is 503. There is a total of 45 Hira households in this village. But at present, only 11 households' primary occupation is earthenware making. The Hira total population of Chamaria village is 211(table: 2.4).

Tarigaon comes under Chaygaon block and Kamrup (rural) district. The village code of this village is 302934. It is approximately 50 k.m. away from Amingaon, the district headquarter. The total area of Tarigaon is 116.6 hectares. It has a total of 1,967 population and 387 households. The total male population is 1,001 and 966 is the female population. Palash Bari is the nearest town to Tarigaon. There is a total of 190 Hira population and 44 Hira households in this village (table: 2.4).

Azara Hirapara village is adjacent to Guwahati city. So the impact of social change on the earthenware culture of the Hira community in this village is remarkable. This village comes under the Rani block and Kamrup metropolitan district. There is a total of 215 Hira population and 35 Hira households in this village (table: 2.4).

Dhantola village is known as potter's village. The majority of the Hira people are still practicing their indigenous culture in this village. It comes under Rampur block and Kamrup (rural) district. This village is a part of Bhagawatipara. According to data

from the field, there is a total of 250 Hira population and 55 Hira households in this village (table: 2.4).

Satpakhali is a rural area. It comes under the Rampur block and Kamrup (rural) district. The code of this village is 303222. The total area of Satpakhali village is 376.92 hectares. The total population of this village is 4,597 out of which 2,336 are the male population and 2,261 are the female population. There are a total of 946 households in this village. The total Hira population of this village is 311 and the total Hira households in this village are 50 (table: 2.4).

All these six sample villages are essentially in rural areas. But the condition of village Azara (Hirapara), Chamaria, and Darisatra and the condition of the people of these villages are better than the rest of the three villages- Tarigaon, Dhantola, and Satpakhali. Azara Hirapara village is adjacent to Guwahati city and communication is also good between the Azara and Guwahati. It is a semi-urban area. So Most of the people of Azara engaged in different jobs in Guwahati. Also, most of the students of Azara study in different schools and colleges of Guwahati. For official work also people of Azara need to come to the Guwahati. And about Chamaria village, it is situated near to the 37 no. the national highway which is running through Assam. So we can see a slightly different picture in terms of the way of living of the people of this village, their socio-economic condition, etc. Now people of this village are trying to adapt some new patterns of lifestyle as compared to earlier. Regarding Darisatra, this village is famous in the South Kamrup because of the Satra (Religious place) which is also known as Darisatra. People from different places of Assam come to this religious place which is influencing the inhabitants of this village. So these are the reasons that the village Azara Hirapara, Chamaria, and Darisatra are a little bit developed as compared to the rest of the three villages. The communication system is comparatively better in these three villages. But the condition of Tarigaon, Dhantola, and Satpakhali villages are very miserable. Communication system and transportation are worse in these three villages than rest of the other three villages.

2.6 Origin and Development of Pottery:

Pottery is an ancient craft of Human Civilization. It is the ancient invention of the human. It is like a mirror of a society or community. It is an important part of our culture. Pottery reflects the emotion of feelings of a craftsman. Generally, the vessels made by some special clay or ceramics are called 'Pottery' and the figures or human statues are called 'Terracotta'. Deo & Ansari (1977) said that "Pottery is the Alphabet of Archaeology".

Potters of all over the world are practising pottery from generation to generation. Firstly, ceramic pots show the culture of a group of people as it reflects the changes that occur in their culture and society. On the second point, cultural contact can lead to similarity among the group of people. Marketing the pots, exchanging, shifting from one area to another area is the main reason for this cultural contact. And the absence of cultural contact can differentiate the style. On the third point, the different environment also creates differences and similarities in the ceramics (Arnold, 1989).

From the time of civilization, people are habitual of different types of pottery and this is continued to till this modern era. Different kings or royal families of different countries were interested in pottery ware since ancient times. But from when and how people started the use of pottery is still unknown. Different scholars have given different opinions.

Cox (1970) described that in the Palaeolithic period, people started to make pots before using the stone. In that period children liked to make small pieces of the clay and then from those small pieces to small pots as clay is an easily available natural raw material. So, people used different potteries to show their emotions and feelings. It is assumed that in the Middle-Stone age also people practised different types of pottery. It is mainly the time between the Palaeolithic and Neolithic ages. During this time people follow Cord-Imprinted style pottery. Later in the Proto-Neolithic period also this type of pottery was found. This type of pottery is known as the oldest pottery tradition in South Asia in the period of 7,000 to 6,000 B.C. (Bellwood, 2015).

The neolithic period is known as the New Stone age. In this period people made some stoneware or tools by polishing or grinding the stone. At first, people only used bone and stone tools. But with time people learned to make potteries for storing their accessories. At present, those people who made stone and bone tools do not exist but the potters exist (Sarmah, 2001). According to Herskovits, (1974) "First potter's wheel was identified in the Neolithic age". He also stated that "though the wheel that is used by potters is not mentioned in the outside of the literature of Europe and Asia. But people from different places produce pottery with the help of potter's wheel".

In the time of the Neolithic period in India, people started to give importance to ceramic pots and thus it became an essential part of the human culture as people were adapting to the sedentary lifestyle. So this confirms that the Indian pottery industry mainly developed in the Neolithic period. First, in the Neolithic period, people started to use clays for making potteries. They made different clay pots for storing water, agricultural goods, etc. (Sankalia, 1962). Potteries of this period were relatively thick and different in colour. There are some pieces of evidence that the different types of potteries and arts are found in different caves. People used different types of colouring clays for making pottery. Morgan (1963) in his study explains that pottery making is closely related to sedentary. It is the main characteristic of one of the cultural evolution-Lower Barbarism. In India also when people started living in a settled area then the demands of potteries were raised.

Some of the civilizations which inspired and developed pottery making are-Chinese, Mesopotamian, Roman, Babylonian, Phylidia, Greece, Sindhu, Islamic, etc. (Das, 2011). Earthen potteries are made in India from very ancient times. From these ancient potteries, people can know more about their ancient culture. So, it is very important to preserve those potteries for the future generation. In India, potters are living in almost every village. In the different periods of human civilization, people are using pottery for different reasons. The different times and spaces result in some similarities and varieties among the ceramic pots based on their styles, colour, size, etc.

At first, people used their hands to manufacture different pots. Later people learned about the pottery-making wheel between 6000 and 4000 B.C. In Mesopotamia, People first started to use potters' wheels to make potteries. In Mesopotamian civilization people first started to live as a village or community. And this might help people to realize the necessity and importance of the ceramic pots and potter's wheel. In the Chalcolithic period of Mesopotamian, Halafian pottery was one of the famous and sophisticated potteries.

From the Egyptian civilization also, many examples were found of potteries. Das (2011) wrote in this book that from 5000 B.C. to 3200 B. C. people used different types of potteries. Because later different ceramic dolls were discovered in the palace of King Niuserre. There were different types of ancient Egyptian pottery. The sophisticated Egyptian potteries were manufactured by the Naqada III (the last phase of Naqada culture) in the period c. 3,200 to 3,000 B.C. The Egyptian faience is a famous ceramic craft in the world.

There was also evidence of pottery was found in Lahuradewa and Indus Valley Civilization. In the development of pottery, the influences of the Islamic period were also very important. Mainly the Islamic potteries were influenced by the Chinese potteries. Islam artisans imported necessary ceramic and minerals for making pottery wares from China. Some of the important types of potteries from the Islamic period are frit ware, lusterware, and some of the special tin-glazed potteries (Nelson, 1966).

Harappan civilization also played an important role in developing the pottery craft. Ghose (1960) stated that the techniques of making pottery with both hands and wheels were developed in this period. The famous pottery of that time is red and black malwa and jorwe wares. It is said that in the Sunga, Kushna, and Gupta period the decorative and beautiful potteries were developed. In the late Medieval period also, there was evidence of pottery's existence. Some painted potteries were collected from that period.

Pottery making is also famous in Indian culture. Since the different periods, the people of India are making potteries. Turkic kings invited potters from Persia, Central

Asia to India during the Sultanate period. So, some of the examples of Persian and Indian mixed potteries were discovered in Gujrat and Maharashtra (Kapoor, 2002). In India, the Terracotta craft is very famous. In the time of the Gupta period, people used to make large stone and metal sculptures. Even in ancient times women used to make different clay figures for different religious ceremonies.

Bengal is famous for its beautiful art and crafts. The traditional clay pottery of Bengal is one of the best crafts in the world. In Bengal, potters are practicing pottery since almost 1500 BC. They practiced different types of pottery ware. These are- Black and Red ware, Northern Black Polished ware, Rouletted ware, Amphorae, Black Slipped ware, Knobbed ware, etc.

There are also some religious beliefs about the development of pottery. Sharma (1990) explained the story behind the first creation of Pottery in his study. He stated that the need for a pot was always there to keep things. Even from the beginning of Earth, there was a necessity for these things. It is believed that in the time of war between the Gods and Demons, they got many precious things from the ocean. One of the precious things was one type of special drink which makes people immortal. So they needed something to store this special drink. Then Vishwamitra took out some spirit or 'Kala' from the bodies of each god and created a pot and that was the first pot in the world. Later the word 'Kala' became 'Kalasha' (In Sanskrit). But a single Pot could not be enough for the world. It is one of the important objects of domestic life. So thus, a different class of potters or artisans came who makes pots. Russel and Hiralal (1961) said that in the marriage of Lord Shiva in Kreta yuga earthen pots were needed for the ceremony. Then one Brahmin named Kulalka was ordered to make pots. Lord Bishnu gave him the Sudarshan to use that as a pot-making tool. After that Kulalka made the pots for the marriage of Lord Shiva by using the Sudarshan of Lord Bishnu as a wheel. Since then his family became known as Kumbhar or the pot maker.

Some of the scholars give their opinion that the idea of pot-making was developed among the people from the Basket and other natural things. Scott (1954) stated that there are some similarities between the techniques and methods of pottery

making and basket making. So the idea of pottery might be coming from basket making. Wu (1938) wrote that in China the idea of pottery comes from the basket in the pre-historic period. China is famous for its pottery making. There are many unique examples of potteries found in China from the pre-historic period. Herskovits (1974) also said that in some places potters use baskets for making earthen pots. First, they spread the clay all over the basket and thus give the clay the desired shape. Matson (1965), said that pottery is a child of basketry. So there is a possibility that the idea of pottery making process comes from basketry. In ancient times different things like the basket, wooden vessel, stone pots influenced people to manufacture pottery.

In northeast India also, pottery making has come from basket making. Nowadays in many areas, potters still use the basket for making pottery. In North-east India people use the basket for many purposes. So it is closely related to pottery making. Pottery and basketry are a part of the life of people in North-East India and they are interrelated.

Singh (1979) said that in the ancient period, people used their hands for making pottery. And because of accidental firing, people came to know that fire made the earthen product stronger and unbreakable and their shape remains the same for a long time. Childe (1956) said that copying the shape and size of fruits might have been a recurrent practice of many earthenware manufacturing areas. The idea of pottery might have developed in the mind of the people from the shape and size of the different fruits.

In Assam also people are manufacturing pottery from ancient times. Choudhury (1959) stated that in Assam first pottery was found in Dah Parbatia, Tezpur, and Sadiya. On the basis of designs and architectural style of those potteries, it is assumed that these are from the 5th and 6th century A.D. These excavations discovered many terracotta style pottery like the human statue in a sitting position, etc. It is said that those potteries are from the period of Bhaskara Varman. So, it can be said that in the time of Bhaskara Varman pottery industry in Assam was developed. But it is unknown whether those potteries were made by Assamese potters or potters from the outside of

Assam. There was also mentioned the word 'Kumbhkar' (Kumar) on the metallic board in the periods of the next generation kingdom from Bhaskar Varman. It proves the potter's existence in ancient times.

An archaeological report said that the pottery-making wheel was found in the early historical period in Assam after the people from different states of India came to Assam. In the 7th and 12th Century A.D. first pottery makers (Kumar) were found in Nidanpur and Kaumuli. So, from this report, it is expected that Kumar might have been found in the early historical period.

According to the archaeologist, the first pottery of Assam was discovered in the Daojali- Hading of North-Cachar hills. Here Goswami & Sarma (1963) mentioned about discovering some earthen crafts in Daojali-Hading in the united district of Mikir and North-Cachar Hills, Assam. And people believed that that was the first discovery of pottery from the Pre-historic Neolithic period. Sharma (1966) and Sankalia (1974) stated that in the Neolithic period, first-time pottery was witnessed in the N.C. Hills district of Assam. So it can be said that from the pre-historic period people are practicing pottery making. Regarding those potteries of Daojali-Hading, Medhi (1990) said that those potteries have many similarities with the potteries of Southeast Asia. But it is not easy to say an exact time or era when pottery took birth and developed in Assam. There are only a few scholars, who wrote about the origin and the development of pottery of ancient Assam systematically.

We can find different potteries from the historical times on the old temples also. G. S. Dutt (1938) described the temple potteries and said that usually there are two types of pottery- 1. Figure sculpture 2. Temple architecture-related sculpture. Potters from ancient times very beautifully manufacture those potteries on the walls of temples. Each pottery tells some stories of historical times. But there is not any valid cultural history about the potteries.

Dhavalikar (1974) reviewed that some types of special vessels- Cornucopia came to Assam in the 4th Century with Samudra Gupta when he came to attack Assam.

In Assam, there are also some stylish and expensive ceramic potteries with some beautiful impressive cut designs on their surface. Those unique and rare ceramic potteries are from historic and prehistoric periods. For making those potteries artisans use one type of Kaolin mix clay. Kaolin mixed clay is reddish-brown in colour and kaolin clay is white. After firing also, the potteries don't change their colour. He also said an interesting fact that this kaolin mixed clay-making potteries still exist in Assam's Lakhimpur district. Potters from Lakhimpur give different cut-design on it to decorate. These potteries have some similarities with the potteries from Hastinapur, Rajghat, and Kausambi (Sankalia,1981).

The morphology of origin and development of pottery differs from place to place, culture to culture. So, it is hard to give one definite conception of the origin and development of pottery making. Here different scholars and archaeologists have provided different descriptions of the origin and development of the pottery industry in Assam. And it is still unknown that when and how the idea of pottery making has developed. But from all those studies and reports, we can assume that ceramic pot making took place in the Neolithic period in Assam. Then as time passed in the different periods, the pottery industry adapted different colours, designs, decorations, sizes, types. Still, in Assam, both Hiras and Kumars are practicing earthen pot making from generation to generation.

2.7 Origin and Historical Background of Hira Community:

The researcher has already mentioned that there are two potter communities in Assam who manufacture earthenware- Hiras and Kumars. Hira Community is one of the artisan communities of Assam that manufactures earthenware. They are the indigenous pot makers and the native people of Assam. There is not any occupational caste group found outside the Assam named Hira. They are maintaining their indigenous craftsmanship by using some unique techniques. Earthenware making is their home-based cultural occupation. Although it is an employment-oriented culture

Hira people practised it as a passion than an occupation. They are mentally, physically, and emotionally involved in this indigenous culture.

Assamese Hira community is different from the other potter communities of India. Their whole process of earthenware making is natural and rural. They don't follow the techniques and methods of pottery making used by other potters. From collecting the clay for earthenware making to firing those products Hira artisans use pure rural and natural methods without using any kind of scientific or technological method. Hiras use their hands to moist and shape the clay. They use natural tools like stones, a wooden beater for earthenware making. Their pot-making techniques by using hands are considered as one of the earliest and oldest techniques. But since when and how they started to make earthenware is still unknown.

In the dictionary the meaning of the word 'Hira' is -a) one type of simple class of people who make earthen pots. b) Kumar Community of lower Assam who practises earthen pot making. c) one category of lower-class people who make earthen products. d) one category of lower-class Kumar who make earthen products (Sarma, 1991, p.12).

Generally, Hira Earthenware is a feminine activity. In Assam, Earthenware making is a craft in which women artisans can fully participate. Hira women can engage in the pot making in their free time also. From the girl children to the elderly women of the Hira community, everyone follows Earthenware culture. It is a customary law for every Hira female to know how to make earthenware. And they become experts in this craft-making culture by gradual practice. But the male members help them in collecting raw materials and marketing the products. Why Hira males don't manufacture earthenware is still unknown. Some people say that earlier earthenware making was considered dirty and messy work. So, male members of the Hira community let the women manufacture it (Goswami, 2010). But this story doesn't have proper evidence.

Hira earthen products are mainly famous in rural areas of Assam. The design of daily used Hira products is the best example of art and craft. The Earthenware of Hiras is famous for its unique design and colours. The need or demand of Hira Earthenware is mainly based on the need of the different sections of the individual as Hira craft is more need-oriented.

For marriage or other religious ceremonies, Hiras have their own priest which is called Hira Bamun, they serve the Hira people only. General brahmin doesn't consider Hira priests as equal to them or never perform marriages with the Hira brahmins. They considered Hira brahmins as lower in status than the upper castes priest. General Brahmins treats them as 'untouchables'. They don't drink or eat in the house of the Hira people.

Customary laws play an important role in every field of the life of the Hira community. And they still follow those laws. Hiras have their own traditional customs and beliefs regarding earthenware-making culture. During the earthenware-making, Hira women wear the same cloth every day. They don't practise earthenware-making culture for one month during childbirth and at the time of menstrual period also Hira women stop making earthenware. Hiras don't practice earthenware for 11 days after the death of their close relatives. In the time of Ambubachi also artisans avoid pot-making activities for three days. This is their religious belief because the door of every Hindu religious place is also closed in the time of Ambubachi. On Vijaya Dashami, the last day of Durga Puja Hira women doesn't engage themselves in Earthenware making activity (Bondopadhyay, 1961, p.6). All these customs show that they considered this culture as a sacred thing. Earthenware culture is like worship to God for them. Hira women also follow some traditional folk songs. These songs are famous among the Hira community in sample villages. They perform these songs in their ceremonies, functions, religious programmes, etc.

Hira community comes under the Scheduled category with the other Scheduled caste like Kaibarta, Chandal, etc. In Assam, among the sixteen scheduled caste

communities, Hiras numerically take the 5th position. Hira community is an occupational scheduled caste community. In the social stratification, Hiras occupy a lower status than the Kumars. Das (2011) stated that two potter communities, i.e. Hira community of Assam and the Turkaha community of Bihar are considered as the lowest in the social stratification among all potter communities of India. He also mentioned that in Assam Hira community occupies a social position as lower as the goldsmith, Dhobi, Kaibarta, Sweeper, and Chamar community. Hiras also hold a lower position than Kumars. Kumar community has a socially higher position than the Hira community. They come under Other Backward Classes. Kumar never makes any affinal relationship with Hira community people. Chattopadhyay (1990) stated that "At present in Assam the craft men who make earthen pot are divided into two categories, Kumar and Hira. Hira is regarded as inferior to Kumar. Womenfolk and handmade pottery differentiate the Hiras from the Kumars." But Hiras never consider themselves as equal or lower than Kumars. Also, they don't prefer marriage with the Kumar community people. According to them, the Kumar community is lower than Hiras. Because they have a belief that separating the vessel from the parent lump of clay with a cotton string practised by Kumar is an impure job. According to Hiras, this is like cutting a naval cord or umbilical cord after a child is born. So Hiras called them 'Naikata Kumar'.

There are also many differences between the Hiras and the Kumars based on techniques of earthenware making. Instead of using the wheels, Hiras use different-sized round stones and a wooden beater for making earthenware. The quality of the vessels made by the Hira potters is better than the Kumars. Because it is thicker than the earthenware made by Kumars. But it needs more time to complete than the Kumar earthenware. Hira earthenware making is a female job and Kumar earthenware making is a male job. But their females also help the male members in making earthenware by using beating techniques like Hiras. So, women artisans from both communities use this technique for making earthenware. But male members of the Kumar community don't use beating techniques. So somewhere there are also some technological similarities between these two potter communities.

Kumars are found all over India. But Hira is an Assamese potter Community. They are only found in the Lower Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Hiras live in a separate site of the village near the stream or river which is known as 'Hirapara' or 'Hirachupa'. And they are following this tradition of living near the river or stream till now. They mostly live in rural areas. It is known from the field study that Kumar and Hira always live around each other. There will be always a Kumar village near the Hira Villages. This is because of the need for their products. Hira earthen products are mainly utilitarian and Kumar products are the ritual ones and the utilitarian ones. The Hira earthen products are not used in religious functions in most of the places of Assam. The reason is still unknown. Maybe because Hiras are considered ritualistically lower. According to some people, Hira earthenware making is mainly a feminine job and Hira women manufacture earthenware, so they are considered impure. And this is one of the reasons that Hira earthenware is not used in religious ceremonies. Some people think that because of the beating technique they used for making earthenware, people don't want to use them in any religious ceremonies. But in this opinion, it cannot be considered because Kumars also use beating techniques. But these opinions differ from place to place and village to village. Sharma (1999) said that the main reason for not using Hira products in religious ceremonies is their lower social status. He also added that Hira people themselves do not prefer Hira earthen products for religious ceremonies. Das (2011) also stated there is a traditional belief that the demon blood is mixed in the Hira clay. And that is the reason Hiras don't make products for religious ceremonies.

But no one knows about the proper or definite information about the origin of Hiras. Also, how and from where Hiras adapted this handmade technique and method of earthenware making is still unknown. In 1838 Mount Gamari wrote that Assamese potters don't know how to use the potter's wheel. Because he saw the potters were using their hands for making pottery. In the Assamese culture, earthenware has a very important place. People of Assam are using earthen products since very ancient times. Some scholars have also given their opinion on the originality of the handmade Hira earthenware culture. Sharma (1967) in an archaeological report, said that the

handmade pottery tradition is being followed in Assam since the time of the Neolithic period.

In the census report 1861, some information was found about the Hiras. There it was mentioned that Hira and Chandal have the same position in Assamese society. But they don't prefer to marry or eat together. In the census report 1881 also, Chandal and Hira were categorized in the same Scheduled caste group. But at present Chandal and Hiras are two different communities in Assam. The Chandal caste group is found in many places in India. They are considered equally lower and impure as Hiras. This might be the reason that many scholars grouped these two sub-castes into one category.

B. C. Allen (1905) wrote that Nadiyal, Kaibarta, Jaliya Kaibarta, Namasudra, Chandal, Hira, and Baniya community is considered as the lowest castes in the social stratification. Though chandal and Hira are two different caste groups, but some people called Hiras the potter Chandal. Some scholars like Siack (1833), Gait (1891), and Hutton (1986) stated that the Hira is the sub-caste of Chandal. But the traditional occupation of the Chandal is different from the Hira community. Chattopadhyay (1990) called Hiras the same as 'Hadis'. He also added that Hiras left their original occupation and adapted the occupation of Kumars. Hadi community is found in Odisha. Traditionally the Hadi's main occupation was sweeping, drum-beating, etc.

Sarma (1991) in his study mentioned the two other sub-castes who belong to the Scheduled castes category. One is Cadal and another one is Tokar. They did fishing and manufactured earthenware. But from where they migrated to Assam is not mentioned there. Barua (1887) also in his book 'Assam Buranji' discussed these two scheduled caste communities. He mentioned the presence of these communities in Assam. The social status of Hiras is also as same as the Cadal and Tokar. According to him, some of the artistic works are discovered in the temples and the religious places of the medieval period made by Hira or Cadal. And they were also the servitor of those temples. Goswami (2005) stated that earlier potters were engaged in agriculture

and pottery making was their secondary occupation. Medhi (2011) in her study mentioned that the Hira people are from the clan of Basistha. But there is not any surety about this.

One report from the census of India (1981) stated that in North-East India among some of those tribal, handmade pottery has been found. They used to make earthen potteries with their hands. And some of them are still following this tradition. But their raw materials are not the same as Hiras. So, it is believed that Hiras might adopt this type of art from those tribal people. Barua (1986) assumed that the people from the Hira community married the tribal girls in ancient times. And the tribal girls carried the tradition of making handmade pottery with them when they came to the plain area. And they started to practice handmade pottery by themselves without the help of their husbands. Thus, Hiras adapted the techniques of handmade earthenware. Among the Hira community also it is still a feminine craft. As a result of the marriage of a tribal girl and a lower caste Hira boy, earthenware making became the culture of the Hira community. And Hira women are continuing this culture. By describing the pot-making technique of the tribes like Nagas, Mills (1933) stated that the women made pot among them. But according to the Hira community, this story is not true and their origin has nothing to do with tribal people.

According to Sarma (1985), Potters were categorized into five important groups during the Ahom period. They served different types of people. The first category of potters made pottery only for the family of Ahom kings, the second type of potters made pottery for the noblemen of the society, the third one served the Satras, the fourth category of potter manufacture potteries for temples and the last type of potters are those who produced potteries for the general people. At that time, the potters who made pottery without using wheels were considered impure by society. But the potters who use the wheel to make earthen products were earned a respected place in society. In the book “Manufacturer of Pottery” Gait (1901) also discussed the potters of the Ahom period. He mentioned that in the time of Ahom kings, they invited different artisans from the outside to train the people about handicrafts. So, it is also possible

that many people of Assam adopted the skills and techniques of making Handmade pottery during the training. And in course of time sub-caste like 'Hira' is developed.

Different scholars highlight different stories about the origin of the Hira community. Das (2011) mentioned in his book that in 1938 Sharma in 'Paschim Hindu Parichay' revealed some mythological information about the origin and history of the Hira community. About 500/600 years back one Brahmin named Mahendra Mahapatra from Katak district of Orissa came to visit Kamakhya Temple in Nilachal Hills of Assam along with his wife Hira Devi and a group of people. They were from the clan of Basishta. They stayed in the house of a Panda (Priest). His name was Ratikanta Sarma. During those days in the temple, they were blessed with two sons. Because of happiness, they decided to stay in Assam and perform Puja in Kamakhya Temple. They named their sons Katyayan and Gopal Chandra. That brahmin couple was attracted by the mesmerizing beauty of Nilachal Hills. But after a few years, both Mahapatra and the panda died. At that time their sons were also very young so Hira Devi had to face many economic hardships in life. She could not go back to their original home and at that time because of poor communication. So she started to earn money in Assam for their livelihood and started begging from the people. One day when Hiradevi went for a bath she found a piece of shining clay-like Hira (Diamond) on the bank of the river Brahmaputra. Then she tried to shape the clay into a different shape with her hands. She made many different types of earthenware with the clay without any cracks. The clay was very glutinous and flexible. Then she started to learn how to make pottery from her neighbouring Kumar village. To make the earthen pots stronger, harder and marketable she started to burn those pots with the help of her two sons. So this special glutinous clay become known as 'Hira Mati' or 'Hira Clay' as her name was Hiradevi. When their sons grew up because of their financial problems the wife of the Brahmin could not afford to perform the sacred thread (Laguna) ceremony for their sons at their proper age which is a primary custom among the Vedic Brahmins. So they were treated as outcaste by the Brahmin community. After the death of Hiradevi, the elder son Katyayan continued their mother's earthenware-making business. After some years he fell in love with one Brahmin girl named

Parvati. Then the local people of their areas forced them to leave their place. So they came to the Bahati village of Goalpara and continued their mother's business. At that time, he could not introduce himself as a Brahmin because he did not have the sacred thread (Laguna). As they made earthen potteries by using the Hiira clay so the villagers named them 'Hira Caste'. Since that time Hira people are manufacturing Earthenware in Assam till today.

The same story was also narrated by Das (1986) and Baruah (1986). But there are some differences found in those stories. According to Das (1986), the Hira people were made outcastes by the Vedic brahmin community. As they were practicing earthenware-making work, the people from the brahmin community did not allow Hiradevi to perform Laguna (sacred thread) ceremony for her sons though they were also Vedic Brahmin. According to them, only lower castes people do this type of dirty earthen work. So eventually they were forced to shift to the village Bahati, Goalpara. In the story explained by Baruah (1986), it is found that after the Brahmin couple died, one of their sons earn a livelihood by doing fishing and another son continued his mother's earthenware-making culture. The son who earned a livelihood by fishing was known as Namasudra and another son who earned his livelihood by making earthen vessel was known as Hira. But these stories don't have any historical authenticity.

From these stories, one interesting fact is found that the Hira community was originally the Brahmin people. But their poor condition and situation of their surroundings forced them to adopt potter's profession. This is the reason that they were outcasted by the Brahmin community of Assam. They were treated as untouchables and now they come under the Scheduled caste category. But at present Hiras are not considered untouchables. One thing that is also common in the above-mentioned stories is that the caste name Hira and the name Hira clay originated from the name Hira Devi, the wife of the Brahmin Pilgrim. Hira Devi was the inventor of their handmade techniques of earthenware making. In those above-mentioned stories scholars mentioned about their economic hardship and poor financial condition. And

still, this potter community is facing many financial crises in the surveyed villages. Their economic condition has not been improved till now.

Earlier every Hira people had a 'Hira' surname. As time passed by some of the Hira people started to write 'Kumar' as a surname also. Now in the present time, people from the Hira community have many surnames like Hira, Kumar, Pathak, Doloi, Bora, Bharali, Thakuria, Medhi, Hazarika, Nayak, Das and Kakati, etc. (Das, 2011).

The Hira people are considered as the 'Sudra'. In the social hierarchy, Sudra has the lowest place. In the Hindu social system, people are divided into two categories. One is 'Dvija' and another one is 'Sudra'. It is believed that the people who come under Dvija, are born twice. The first time they are physically born and the second time they are born when they get the Vedic education. The upper-caste Hindu people – Brahmins, Kshatriya, and Vaishya come under 'Dvija'. But the people of lower caste come under the 'Sudra' category in the Hindu social hierarchy. They are mainly an occupational caste group. Hira community might be also created by this social system (Sharma, 1991). Hiras got their official acceptance after the 'Government of India Act 1935' found the term 'Depressed Class'. And then they are considered as "Scheduled Caste" along with another 15 Assamese scheduled castes communities in the Scheduled Caste order 1950 modified by Scheduled Caste Modification Order 1956. Hira people are one of the important Scheduled caste communities of Assam. They are found in the lower Brahmaputra valley of Assam. According to the 2011 census, there are only 2.48% Hira people in the total Scheduled caste population of Assam.

From the Field survey, it is known that not a single Hira people know about their originality or history. How and When they came to Assam or started to live in South Kamrup they don't have any idea. They only know that they are living in South Kamrup from their forefather's times. According to them, they are the original inhabitant of south Kamrup.

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