

**POTTERY IN COLONIAL ASSAM: A CASE STUDY OF
SIBSAGAR AND LAKHIMPUR DISTRICTS**

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Declaration by the Candidate

I, Sri Manik Chandra Nath, solemnly declare that this thesis is my original investigation, work and understanding except where due acknowledgement have been made. To the best of knowledge, no part of this thesis titled "**Pottery in Colonial Assam: A Case Study of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur Districts**" has been previously submitted to this University or any other University or institution for any degree or diploma.

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This is to certify that Sri Manik Chandra Nath, a regular Ph. D. Scholar in Department of Surjya Kumar Bhuyan School of Social Sciences under Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University carried out his research work entitled "**Pottery in Colonial Assam: A case study of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur Districts**" under my guidance and supervision. The study is the result of his own investigation and all Sources are duly acknowledged.

The thesis as a whole or in part thereof has not been submitted for any degree or otherwise in this or in any other University.

Date: 31.07.2019

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Preface and Acknowledgement

The pottery industry in Assam is known to have existed since ancient times and it has still a living tradition. The pottery industry has been an indispensable part of the rural economy which is closely related with culture and day to day life of the potters of Assam. This industry became as an important representation of traditional crafts work in the life and economy of the Kumar people of Assam. The pottery industry fulfils the vital industrial needs in the advancement of the economic and social spheres and daily requirement of our life. A large number of workers are engaged directly or indirectly in the earthenware vocation as their means of livelihood. In fact, a modern industrial state without any diverse form of pottery is almost inconceivable. In Assam, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts still have a unique place with regards to the development of pottery industry. Pottery culture was practiced many centuries ago by some artisans and later flourished in the region and spread all over the state during the early days of Ahom regime. The demands and types of production had undergone extensively changed in later period. Both the districts have witnessed some active pottery industries situated at different places in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. The industry possesses vast potentialities for further development and product diversification but it is considerably handicapped by several drawbacks which hinder its balance and also proper growth. They are scantily equipped for the challenge. China ware, enamels, artificial wares etc. posed threat to their craft, their status and their very existence. In this connection, rather than ideal roadmap these problems have to be sort out or examined in detail and remedial measures be devised to modernize the industry. By improving production techniques, upgrading the quality of the finished products and acquiring soft skills by

the potters to face the competition posed by huge pottery industry in the state. The pathetic plights of Kumars were better to be exposed to the larger arena that may attract concern for both the development of their community as well as their individual Human Index Value. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this study to draw the background of a brief historical resume of its development, to examine the various aspects affecting the growth and development of the industry particularly after the Ahom regime, to bring to light the various hindrances and shortcomings faced by the pottery industry, to explore the prospects of its development in forthcoming days and to put forth some useful suggestions so that pottery industry could develop in a proper way to cope with the changed economic environment.

With the advent of the British, the entire economy as well as industrial structure of Assam had undergone a dramatic changed including the rural handicrafts as patronage of the great Ahoms ceased. At the initial stage of starting modern industries by the colonial power, the role of the entrepreneur was very important to introduce new techniques and market for local products. The economy of Assam has been traditionally based on agriculture and supplemented by the village handicrafts. As such the people were not exposed to any industrial development that had taken place in the rest of the state. The present study is purely portraying the historical as well as its economical aspect. Moreover, the study is based on the Kumar (term used for the potter class of Assam) of the two districts and their historical, economical and social upliftment in the society through the pottery industry has been exclusively examined here.

The pottery industry has been indispensable part of the rural economy. It is closely associated with the cultural and day to day life of the people of Assam. It also provides employment opportunities to a large number of the people of the region. But,

the technique and implements sound primitive. The development of pottery industry can shape and reshape the rural as well as urban economy of Assam to a great extent. The present study deals with the performance and problems of the pottery industry of colonial Assam with special reference to two districts, i.e., Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. Moreover, some suggestions have also been incorporated after studying the different aspects of development of the pottery industry of Assam.

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Last, but far from the least, I am indebted to R.D. Printers, Satmile-14 for undertaking the task of bringing out this volume in binding form.

Date:

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Place:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAKS: All Assam Kumar Sanmilani.

ADB: Ahomar Din by H. Barbaruah.

AGMC: Assam Government Marketing Corporation Ltd.

AKVIB: Assam Khadi and Village Industries Board.

AR: Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam.

ARTFED: Assam Apex Weavers and Artisans co-operative Federation Ltd.

ASIDC: Assam Small Industries Development Corporation.

ASAS: A Statistical Account of Sibsagar

Census: Census report of India (Assam).

CHA: Comprehensive History of Assam, ed. By H.K. Barpujari.

DHAS: Department of historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam.

DICC: District Industries Centre and Commerce.

H.H: Household.

HAG: A History of Assam by E.A. Gait.

IESHR: Journal of Indian Economic and Social History Review.

JARS: Journal of the Assam Research Society.

KVIC: Khadi and Village Industries Commission.

NEDFI: North Eastern Development Financial Corporation Ltd.

NEIHA: North East India History Association.

RB: River-bone Trade in the Province of Assam.

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CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

The pottery industry in Assam is known to have existed since ancient times. It is still a living tradition among many communities in the north eastern region of India. In Assam, the craft of making pottery can be traced back to many centuries. The pottery industry has been an indispensable part of the rural economy and day to day life of the people of Assam. The pottery tradition in the plains of Assam is sustained by the two potter communities namely the Kumars and the Hiras. They made earthen items like pot and pitchers, plates, incense stick holders, earthen lamps and many other decorative items. Further, the pottery tradition explains the religious, social and socio-cultural practices and other household activities of the past as the form and style of items inscribed symbols of composite practices.

Many potter communities have been found amongst the tribal groups of the people in the northeastern region. The Oniam is a Mao Naga tribes who practice pottery in the Senapati district of Manipur. They are still in a primitive manufacturing stage. The Naga made earthen pottery by hand along with the use of a wheel. Pots were produced in few villages, notably Vishwema and Khuzama of Angami tribes, Peron and Pulia of Zeliang tribe, Changki, Japo and Longsemdang village of Ao tribe, Tokkehimi and a few others of the Sema tribe, Wokha and several other villages of Lotha tribe and Sao of Khemungam tribe and in a considerable number of villages in Phom area. Among the Khasi peoples of Meghalaya also a traditional pottery making culture existing from the past. A large numbers of Bengali potters of Goalpara and Dhubri districts also practiced pottery making tradition in Assam.

The word “pottery” is derived from French word “Poetic” or Latin “Potium” which means “a drinking vessel”. Another reference of pottery has come into vogue from the name of the process of shaping wares by the potting process i.e., shaping wares by moulding or shaping wares by casting slip into moulds which is called the process of “potting” or probably “pottery”, has originated from the practice of potting. Gupta (1988) mentioned about the term “pottery includes many varieties of wares”, from the crudest vessels of pre-historic time to the most beautifully decorated porcelains, stone wares and earthenwares and many more. However, there is a distinction between the term “pottery”, “clay” and “ceramic” and the term “ceramic” which is supposed to be derived from the Greek word “Keramic” or French word “Ceramique”, meaning the art of pottery, is considered as pottery (Gupta, 1988). George Jackson, a noted British ceramic expert states that ceramic is a common practice to ground the ceramic products into the following main categories according to the similarities of its service, application, manufacturing method or raw material used as well as heavy clay wares or structural ceramics, refectories, special technical ceramics, pottery or white wares (Jackson, 1971). Pottery is one of the tangible creations of man and so, it has become an integral and inseparable component of his culture. Moreover, pottery is being considered as a mirror of the cultural patterns of a society (Jackson, 1971). Deo and Ansari (1977) stated that pottery is the alphabet of archeology as the archeologists have to depend solely on pottery for studying or researching the material culture of the site excavated when no other datable evidences are found. Further, Sinha (1969) explained that the social systems, religious designs and decoration and socio-cultural bearing practices and other household activities of the past are well connected with the pottery. So, pottery was found while digging, ploughing or in the surface regarded as an indication of an archaeological site

and it brought to light the evidence fruitful for the interested person. In India, the ancient clay seal of Bhaskar Varman painted on the art of clay modeling is renowned material evidence. Moreover, Bana (Harshcharita) mentions that among the presents of Bhaskara, were “drinking vessels” embossed by skilful artists, molasses in earthen pot and a cup of ullaka diffusing a fragrance of sweet wine. Pottery tradition in Assam dates back to pre-historic times. In the context of Assam, the words “pottery” or “potters” appear to be derived from the word “Kumbharkara” (potter) and “Kumbharkaragarta” (the potter’s pit) in ancient Assam. Singh (2003) stated that the word “Kumar” is derived from “Kumbhakara” meaning “maker of pots”. The word “Kumva” means “earthen pot” and “Kar” means “maker”.

Assam hosts the two indigenous communities-the Hiras and the Kumars that are engaged in the manufacturing of pottery in the Brahmaputra valley. The clay used by Hira potter for making pot is known as “Hiramati” whereas “Kumarmati” is used by the Kumar potters for manufacturing pots. The Hira are more degraded class than the Kumar. The Hiras are found mostly in the lower Brahmaputra valley where as their counterparts the Kumars are found in upper Brahmaputra valley.

The word “Kumar” in the Brahmaputra valley usually denotes persons of several caste groups mainly *Kalita*, *Keot* and *Koch*, who make articles of earthenwares. Thus, in Assam, *Kalita Kumar*, *Kumar Keot* and *Kumar Koch* etc. still retain in their old caste status by virtue of ancestral occupation.

The present work is on a study of the pottery industry in the plain districts of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam in general. The study deals with the presence of the pottery industry in Assam during the colonial period. A case study on the pottery industry of the two districts namely Sibsagar and Lakhimpur has been systematically conducted.

Geographically, Assam is situated on both the banks of the mighty river Brahmaputra and the Barak. The Brahmaputra is considered as a heartland of the whole North East India between 28° and 24° North latitudes and about 90° and 96° East longitudes, surrounded by hilly states of Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. China is to the North, Burma to the East and South, and Bangladesh to the West. At present, it has a total area of 78,438 sq km and the population amounting 31,205,576. The two large rivers flow throughout Assam. The Brahmaputra has its origin in Tibet and the other, the Barak flows throughout the Surma Valley. The geographical extent of Assam covered during the period of the study extended about 750 km in length with an average 90 km in breadth. The area of the study, i.e., Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts, is situated on the banks of the river Brahmaputra. Sibsagar was earlier known as Rangpur and Rongpur was earlier known as Meteka. The origin name of Sibsagar district was Sibpur. The famous Ahoms ruled Sibsagar for nearly six hundred years. The Ahom kings took keen interest in building different temples, dedicated to various deities and which were usually flanked by large tanks stand out as memorials to their glory in the district. Sibsagar, formerly known as Rangpur was the capital of the Ahom kingdom. During the Ahom regime, Sibsagar became the centre place of Assam and there were so many historical Dols, tanks and temples. The Siva Dol, Vishnu Dol, and Devi Dol are situated on the bank of the Sibsagar tank. Sibsagar is

famous for a cluster of Maidams, the Ahom age tumuli. The first Ahom king Sukapha, constructed his capital at Charaideo in 1253.

On February 24, 1826, the treaty of Yandaboo consolidated the British occupation of Assam. After the treaty of 1826, the British government in Assam incorporated a number of administrative changes such as the formation of districts. In 1839, the Sibsagar district was created in the upper Assam. The Sadar headquarter of Sibsagar was transferred to Jorhat in 1912-13. The undivided Sibsagar district comprised three subdivisions, namely Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat. In 1983 and 1987, the Sibsagar district was reorganized to carve out the Jorhat district and Golaghat district respectively.

The present Sibsagar district is situated between 26⁰45' to 27⁰15' North latitude and 94⁰25' to 95⁰ 25' East longitudes. The covering an area of 2668 sq.km out of which 2625.07 sq. km rural and 42.93 sq. km is urban. According to the Census of India 2011, the total population of Sibsagar is composed of 1,040,954 members of different ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliations and 90.44% people lives in rural areas of villages.

The name Lakhimpur was originated from the word “Lakshmi” and “pur”. It has derived from two words “Lakshmi”, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity (paddy is well known as *Lakshmi*). The word “pur” means full. Lakhimpur therefore means full of paddy or the place where paddies are grown abundantly. Other reference mentions that the word originated from Lakshmi Devi, the mother of Bhuyan Raja who was the descendent of King Arimatta.

The undivided Lakhimpur district was consist of Dibrugarh, Tinukia and Dhemaji. Its head quarter was at Dibrugarh. As per the Lakhimpur District Gazetteer (1976), the district was notified as Lakhimpur district through a proclamation issued by

then Governor General on July 1839. On 2nd October, 1971, the district was recognized with two sub divisions viz. Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur. Lakhimpur district is situated on the North-East corner of Assam and the district headquarter is located in North Lakhimpur. The present district of Lakhimpur is covered Arunachal Pradesh in North, to East Dhemaji district, to the South side of the district is Majuli, and to the West is Gohpur sub-division of Sonitpur district. Lakhimpur district has an area of 2277 sq km out of which 2240 sq km fall in rural and 37 sq km is urban. The district is located between 26^o48' and 27^o53' Northern latitude and 93^o42' and 94^o20' East longitudes. According to the Census of India 2011, the total population of the district is 1,042,137 numbers composed of different communities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Pottery is an age old indigenous craft of Assam. In the present work, an attempt is made to study different aspects of the pottery industry prevalent in Assam during the colonial period and to assess the impact of the pottery industry on the socio-economic class formation in the society. For the fruition of the purpose, a case study has been conducted of the two districts of Assam, namely- Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. Relatively isolated from the rest of India, documents show that the medieval Assam had a unique socio-economic structure. The simple village economy was more or less self sustaining though not entirely. A significant feature of the rural Assamese society was the fact that though primarily agriculturists, the people combined agriculture with other trades. Most of the people were self employed and manufacture items in their own homes for their own use. There was very little specialization in the production of industrial items except for a few. Pottery was one.

In the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, there are two distinct communities of potters, namely the Kumars and the Hiras, who are engaged in the manufacture of pottery items. The former uses the potter's wheel but the latter does not use the wheel at all. Both the communities use different kinds of clay for making the utensils and while the Hiras were predominant in the lower Brahmaputra valley, the Kumar, by and large, settled in the upper Brahmaputra valley. During the colonial period, the indigenous pottery industry stagnated and eventually decayed. The changing economic conditions moreover laid to the replacement of earthenware by imported enamelware and chinaware. The local industry was unable to meet the challenge and many potters had to give up their trade and rely solely on agriculture.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

There are a number of publications which refer to the pottery industry in Assam both in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Birinchi Kumar Barua (1969) in his book *A Cultural History of Assam (Early Period)* observes that the ancient relics and epigraphic records prove that the art of making pottery was fully developed in ancient Assam. He also mentioned that pottery in Assam was associated with specific castes or groups, i.e. the Kumars and the Hiras, the two principal communities engaged in this traditional craft of upper Brahmaputra valley.

Assam under the Ahom, (1992), by U.N. Gohain analyzed the pottery industry of Assam during the Ahom period and observed that there are two classes of potters the Hiras and the Kumars. The Hira shaped the vessels by hand without the help of potter's wheels; the Kumars use the wheel for the purpose of pot making.

A History of Assam, (2013), by Sir Edward Gait is an important source of the ancient history of Assam. This pioneering work throws light on the socio-economic as well as the political administration of the ancient period. The book tries to comparatively evaluate and explain the entire history of Assam. It provides us a careful examination of arts and crafts industry viz. weavers, spinners, gold-smiths, potters and workers in ivory, bamboo, wood, hide and cane of the region.

Ahomar Din (1st edition), (1981), by Hiteswar Barbaruah discusses the use of pottery during the Ahom period. It mentions that the utensils used in this particular period were made by the potters belonging to the Kumar community from the '*Kumarmati*'. He mentions that during the Ahom rule, the potters were divided into five 'classes' i.e., *Rajabhagiya*, *Biltitia*, *Devaliya*, *Sattriya* and *Rajahua*. The artisans belonging to these groups supplied articles to the royal household, high officials, Sattra and temples and for the use by people in general within Kamrupa respectively. He also observed that the raw materials used for making pottery were found 20 ft to 25 ft below the surface.

Census of India, Vol-I, Assam Report, Shillong by Sir Edward Gait, (1892) observed that there were two distinct communities engaged in the manufacture of pottery in the Brahmaputra valley i.e., the Hiras and Kumars. In his Census report Gait mentioned that the word Kumar was derived from "kumbhakara" which means 'maker of pots'. The word Kumar in the Brahmaputra valley is concerned with particular caste or sub-castes chiefly *Kalitas*, *Keots* and *Kochs* who are known as *kumar kalita*, *kumar keot*, *kumar koch*. However, his census covered only the lower Assam and the Hira potters but he did not cover pottery industry of the colonial period of upper Brahmaputra valley.

On the excavation at Ambari (Guwahati), an article in the Journal of University of Pune by M.K. Dhavalikar and Z.D. Ansari (1970) mentioned that the pottery and other antiquities discovered at Ambari belonged to two periods. The first period is 7th to 12th century A.D. and the second period is 13th to 17th century A.D. During their observation work, they found Kaolin pottery predominating in period-I and Chinese celadon and Muslim glazed pottery in the second phase. It has been proved from their study that the art of pottery was practiced in Assam from the ancient period.

The Potter and Pottery of Nalbari District, Assam: A Study in Ethno history and Ethno-archeology, (1992), (Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis), Guwahati University by Bandita Medhi, made an elaborate study of the present day ceramic tradition of Assam, thoroughly evaluated the ceramic pottery of Daojali Hading and successfully reconstructed the ceramic pattern and its evaluation in Assam from the pre-historic period to the present day. But, the study does not cover pottery and potters of the upper Brahmaputra valley.

Indigenous Industries of Assam: Retrospect and Prospect, by Priyam Goswami, (2005) observes that the potters and the earthenwares were common in every village. Almost all the potters were primarily agriculturists and took to the trade as a secondary occupation only. She also mentions about regular household items, like pitchers, plates etc.; Rings for walls, drums pipes and toilets which were also manufactured by the potters in considerable quantities. But the quality of their products was rather poor compared to the other parts of India. In course of time, the industry stagnated with little scope for improvement. Moreover, the changing economic conditions led to gradual replacement of earthenware by the imported enamelware and chinaware.

Assam State Gazetteer, Sivsagar District, (1967) recorded that pottery is a very ancient industry in Sivsagar district of Assam. Pottery industry is partially declining among the indigenous people because the younger sections of the community has neither been following the family trade nor introducing modern techniques. It viewed that the decline of the indigenous industry has opened scope for potters from Bihar and displaced potters from East Pakistan.

Assam State Gazetteer, Lakhimpur District, (1976) recorded that the pottery is an old industry. It was seemed that the percentage of persons engaged in making and selling earthenwares was not very large in the undivided district. The pottery industry was adversely affected due to growing supplies of ceramic, utensils along with decorated items which were supplied from outside of Assam. As such, the condition of the local trade deteriorated to a great extent in the district.

In *Handicraft in Assam*, an article published in North East India History Association (NEIHA) proceedings on Pottery in Assam by Krishnajyoti Handiqui, (2005) throws light on the pottery earthenware in Assam. He observed that the colonial pattern of economy demolished the traditional handicrafts in Assam. During British rule, many potters continued to run the vocation with their hereditary pursuits to make a meager livelihood. The condition of pottery industry deteriorated due to lack of finance, the general competition by the cheap manufactured commodities from abroad, lack of government patronage, market constraints, and lack of training facilities and traditional method of production in Assam.

Amalendu Guha, (1991), *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam; Society, Polity, Economy* lays stress on the economic condition of colonial Assam with “No famine, no

surplus” (Akalo nai, Bhaaralu nai) being the basic characteristic feature of medieval economy of Assam. He observed that during the colonial period the exchange system of economy also partly continued in barter system.

The Medieval Economy of Assam written by Amalendu Guha (eds.), (1982) in the Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol-I, T. Raychoudhary and I. Habib also mentioned the potters and pottery in India. He explained that potters made some articles for sale in the market and village potters used to go out with boat loads of their earthen wares for barter. The activities of potters were seasonal and during the off season they were associated mostly with agriculture. He also asserted that due to geographical isolation, political compulsion, lack of improved technology, limited monetary activities and lack of incentives for further demand were beyond the level of local consumption. Thus, craft remained underdeveloped in the medieval period of Assam.

The Back-ground of Assamese Culture by Rajmohan Nath, (1948) indicated that the pottery was a traditional craft in Assam. He observed that this ancient craft is still practiced in Majuli where some of the most significant traditional earthenware is produced. The Kumars inhabited in the southern part of the island on the bank of the Brahmaputra river where the soil, suitable for making pottery is found. Men and women, and even children are engaged in the craft from the past.

In *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol-IV & V, by H.K. Barpujari, (1976) mentions about the Kumars and the Hiras. The Kumars did not denote any particular caste or sub-caste but have been known as *kalitas*, *kochs* and *keots* who themselves or their ancestors made articles of earthenwares. The Hiras are different from the Kumar potters. He observed that the Hira potters used the handmade pottery and Kumar potters

used wheel or *chaka* to manufacture of pottery items. His reference to pottery crafts was limited.

In *Pottery Technique in Peasant India* by B. Saraswati and N.K. Behura, (1966) mentions that the Kumars (potters) of Assam belong to Kumar caste and are divided into two distinct categories, one is Kumar and another is Hiras. The Kumars are a standard class and the Hiras who originally made potteries from clay are degraded caste of the society. They tried to find out means for the development of the potters caste in Assam compared to other parts of the country.

In *A Comprehensive History of Assam* by S.L. Baruah, (1985), mentions that the art of making pottery has come down from ancient times in Assam. Old literatures, epigraphs, foreign accounts, excavations and manuscripts prove that handicrafts had played an important role in the daily life of the people in ancient Assam. But there has not been any detailed account on the pottery industry.

In *A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam* by S.N. Sarma, (1989) mentions that the Ambari excavation throws light on the pottery of medieval period of Assam. The profession of pottery was mainly practiced by the people of Kalita caste as it was not preferred by any other caste of Assam. The potters were classified into *khels* (groups) during the Ahom regime. He also mentions that apart from potters, there was another class of artisans who moulded idols of deities from clay. The book also indicates that pottery in Assam flourished throughout the Brahmaputra valley.

Assam in the Days of the Company (1826-1858), by H.K. Barpujari, (1963), narrates the successive stages in the establishment of British rule in Assam during the early period of colonial rule (1826-58). It throws light on the declining fortune of the

royal dynasty, Ahoms and their attempt for restoring dynasty, sovereignty as well as their relation with the foreign tribes. He also mentions the social and economic development during the British rule.

G. Myrdal, (1985), in his book *Asian Drama*, Vol-II, has pointed out that Indian craftsmen suffered a harsher fate in the colonial era. During the British period there was a colonial pattern of development in Assam which demolished traditional handicrafts and culture of the region. From his valuable observation it has been found that the handicraft of the region suffered a lot of problems and, potters and pottery became an injured class in the society.

In *Handicrafts in India*, T.M. Abraham, (1964) observed that when men were nomads, then pottery was impractical in their way of life. The production of pottery did not become important as substitute source of income until they took to cultivation in the hinterland areas. They gathered seeds and roots and became growers of crops. Time and experience brought out various forms of making of pottery. The pottery came into existence only when man settled and had spare time. He aptly mentions that manufacturing methods of pottery and earthenwares were very ancient in India and became a part and parcel of daily life of the people.

D.E. Arnold (1984), in *The ethno-archaeology of Pottery Production, Reviews in Arts*, states that Ceramics can reflect the changing culture of the people and its witnessed trends of an ever changing society. His comment on the seasonality of pottery making is relevant to Assam's climatic conditions. He points out that since pottery making is adversely affected by cool temperature, rain and high humidity, weather and climate can

also regulator mechanism preventing ceramic production and counteracting deviation from non-pottery activities.

Directory of Assam Handicrafts, (1978): The District of Industries, Government of Assam, has published a report on the pottery industry in Assam. In the report, it is expressed that pottery is one of the important crafts in Assam. This industry is mainly confined within a certain area as a village industry in Assam. The potters' earthen articles are closely associated with the socio-economic life of the people of the region.

M.K. Pal (1978), *Craft and Craftsman in Traditional India*, observes that pottery is an essential element that forms civilization, religious and social customs, economic condition and the technological advancement attained by the potters imprints on the finished products. The production of pottery involves mainly the recognition of clay, manufacturing process, design and decoration, baking and socio-cultural bearing in which the pot is manufactured, distributed and used. As pottery was introduced, lots of changes were taking place in the society. Hunting and gathering life was completely altered by settled and organised life. So, men were presented with lots of problems at the same time with challenges of production and reservation of agricultural harvests. Men needed vessels for various purposes such as cooking, milking, preserving and serving. Pottery provided handy and an effective solution for all these problems. It leveraged the development of civilization in the past and earthenwares continued its process of evolution.

H. D. Sankalia (1962), in *Indian Archaeology Today* states that most Indian historical sites began with a certain phase of microlithic culture and associated with pottery. Whatever be its origin, one cannot deny the fact that Indian pottery did not

become an important factor of human culture until Neolithic Man adopted it along with their sedentary way of living and subsistence pattern. He also notes that in addition to pottery, numerous human figurines of terracotta were found at Indus Valley sites.

L. Gogoi (1991), in *The History of the System of Ahom Administration* states that although the exact data when this craft came to be practised cannot be ascertained. It is believed to be the most ancient craft in Assam due to the fact that the methods used for fashioning the vessels by them till date are similar to those used by Neolithic man. Thus, in this study emphasis has been laid down not only in its technology and typology but also on the other hand socio-cultural information which includes social interaction, organization of production, spatial and temporal distribution, marketing etc. of the Kumars in Assam. It is assumed that this ethnographic study of ceramics may be sought for the solution of the technological, typological and many other related problems as regards to the growth and development of cotton industry in Assam since pre-historic period.

P. Goswami, in *Assam in the Nineteenth Century, Industrialization and Colonial Penetration*, (1999), states the impact of the late nineteenth century shift in Britain's industrial policy in India, and the colonial economic policy, by promoting the machine-made production (manufacture), stagnation of indigenous pattern of industries, village economy etc. The book focuses on the pattern of industrial development in Assam during colonial period as well as the decline of village handicrafts.

W.W. Hunter (Reprint, 1998), in *A Statistical Account of Assam* reveals the origin of Sibsagar district, the people of locality, handicrafts, industries and trade. It is an

important source for understanding the history of upper Brahmaputra valley and pottery industry as prevalent during the colonial period.

Priyam Goswami (Ed.), (2007), in *Changing Pattern of Economy and Society, (19th and 20th century North - East India)* deals with a range of themes like changing pattern of land ownership, industry and labour, demography and social change, missionary activities, gender and society, development and environment etc. She makes an attempt to examine the role of the economy of Assam as well as focuses on the changing pattern of industry in the recent period.

Trade and Colony: The British Colonisation of North East India by J.B. Bhattachajee, (2000) mentions that during the colonial trade under British domination overshadowed the indigenous crafts and as a result the industry was basically suffered. In this book provides empirical data of trade as a colony and vividly portrays a clear picture of various industries featuring import and export statistical data.

Mrinmoy Kumar Sarma, (2008), in *Traditional Crafts of Assam* mentions about the state handicrafts and industries. He tries to discuss the different crafts like cane and bamboo craft, brass and bell metal, pottery and terracotta industry of Assam. But his study is limited to lower Assam.

In Report on the Administration of North East India: (1921-22), R.B. Pemberton, (1984) describes about the various trades of colonial period, pottery being one of them. In his valuable report he states that pottery was one of a handmade craft in Lakhimpur district. It mentions of the establishment of such a factory in the region but no details have not been found in historical record.

Dambarudhar Nath, (2009), in his book *The Majuli Island, Society, Economy and Culture* also mentions about the socio- economic life of the Majuli in the upper Brahmaputra valley. In his book, he writes about the pottery industry. From his book, it can be understood that both the Kalita caste and the Kumar peoples of the Majuli are similar and dependent of age old pottery craft.

John McCosh, (1857), *Topography of Assam* records an account of contemporary Assam. In his account he discusses in details about political, social structure, climate, commercial products etc. of nineteenth century Assam. He describes the facts and views of political as well as socio-economic condition of common mass in the colonial period.

In *Economic History of Ancient India*, (1987) Radhakrishna Choudhary has made an attempt to study the ancient pottery in India. In his valuable work the author mentions that pottery showed the skills and efficiency in moulding and designing of earthen pots. There were villages of pottery and quite a lot of potter earned their livelihood from the pottery industry in the country and clay art was one of the very popular craftsmanship in ancient India.

Prabin Baishya, (1989), in his book *Small and Cottage Industries: A Study in Assam*, gives us some valuable insights for understanding the different crafts of Assam. In the book he tries to look into some important handicrafts which retain traits from the past. He reflects on pottery that this old craft is indigenous akin to the Kumar people of Assam.

In *Changing Cultural Mosaic of a Village in Assam*, (1995), D.B. Sharma wants to focus on the various crafts in Assam. In his book, he mentions that the Kalita caste of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam produce the earthenware. But his study is limited to the

particular villages of lower Assam. So, these studies also do not touch the upper Brahmaputra valley and its pottery industry.

K.R. Medhi, (1935), in *Journal of Asiatic Research Society*, Vol.III, wrote about the occupation of the Kalita people and their traditional pottery craft. He also mentioned that the Kalita acted as priests for the local inhabitants in the absence of the upper caste Brahmin during the medieval period. From his article informs us that the Kalita and the Kumars are same people. They made earthenwares to maintain ancestral occupation.

J.B. Bhattacharjee (Ed.), (1994), in his book, *Studies in the Economic History of North East India*, gave two chapters discussing the upper Brahmaputra valley. One chapter informs us about how the tea production was introduced in the Brahmaputra valley; change in pattern of trade and another is discussing the industrialization in the Brahmaputra valley (1881-1921). These two important chapters show us that during the colonial period, foreign penetration paralysed the local handicrafts as they were facing lots of problems. Tea, coal, and oil became favourite commodities of trade for the British. In these chapters also found that the import and export of various trades flourished in the time of the British. But discussion about the pottery trade of the Brahmaputra valley is not distinctly made.

In the book *People of India, Assam*, Vol. XV, Part-II, Edited by B.K. Bardoloi and R.K. Athappria, Anthropological Survey of India, (2003), throws light on the original caste of Kumar and *Kumbhakar*. The development of pottery and socio-economic life of the potters are distinctly discussed. The book sheds light on a few positive aspects of the pottery items. The process of making pottery is also highlighted but it fails to focus on the pottery in colonial period and around upper Brahmaputra valley.

In the book *Geography of Assam*, by A.K. Bhagabati, B.K. Kar and A.K. Bora, (2001), edited version a chapter on the industries of Assam has written. On their study, they divided the industries of Assam into different categories. They include pottery industry under the category of cottage industry. It can be said that pottery industry was one of the old indigenous industries of Assam.

In *Colonial Assam: Trade, Development and Dependence*, Lecture-VI, Lecture Series Publication, ICHR, (2007), Priyam Goswami attempts to elaborate the trade in colonial Assam and its important changes after the advent of the British. Initially her basic attempt was to focus on the tea plantation, oil, and coal industry in the upper Brahmaputra valley.

W.W. Hunter's (Reprint, 1998), in his book *A Statistical Account of Assam: A statistical account of the District of Lakhimpur*, highlights on the origin of Lakhimpur district, the castes and people of locality, handicraft industries and various trades practiced at that time. This book is a very important source of understanding the Lakhimpur district in particular and Brahmaputra valley in general that stood during the Ahom and colonial period.

In his book *Social and Economic History of Assam (1853-1921)*, Rajen Saikia, (2000), mentions about the socio- economic life of the people of Assam during the mid of colonial rule. After the advent of the British the socio- economic picture of the region had completely changed. The author noted that survival of pottery is yet another notable event from 1853 to 1921 of Assam and he also observed that the use of earthenware for a variety of purposes was common among the rich and poor alike. The pottery survived

primarily as a caste occupation. His book can help us better understand about the Kalita caste and the prevalent pottery industry of upper Assam.

A Description Account of Assam by William Robinson, (1975), gives a detailed account of people, geography and climate, ethnicity and district wise history of Assam. He deals separately with various climatic conditions of Assam, geographical conditions, agriculture, manufactures, trade and barter system, professional classes and also analyses about various tribes of Assam. His book does not touch pottery industry in particular and upper Assam in general.

The book on *India's North East Frontier in the 19th Century* by Verrier Elwin, (1974), provides a detail report of the foreigners who entered to Assam. Elwin does not extensively analyze the proper account of the foreigners. The book remarked only some of the important foreign accounts but due to some unavoidable reasons he was unable to discuss about the trade, handicrafts, economy and indigenous industries which traditionally continued from past. So the book fails to give a detail report on pottery as well as rural handicrafts of Assam.

In *A Brief History of Assam* by N.N. Acharya, (1987), elaborates an account of Assam from the Ahom period to the Independence of India. In his book a series of chronological information of the political scenario of the state are neatly discussed under the headings like British rule in India, the territorial expansion of the British rule, the War of Liberation in Assam, socio- economic aspects of Assam etc. Apart from political aspects the book is silent on the various traditional crafts and industries of upper Brahmaputra valley.

In *Art of Medieval Assam* by Rajatanada Das Gupta, (1982) made a valuable contribution in understanding the pottery in Assam. The author mentions that during the Ahom period the art of pottery developed under royal patronage and commoners support. In the same sense, the pottery still has a very fine texture and is of pale pink or buff colour in Assam. The Kumars like other professional castes are more of a professional group than a real caste group in the state. He further mentions that anybody working in clay is grouped under the Kumar caste in Assam particularly in the upper Brahmaputra valley. They are potters most often by choice not by birth.

History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and North Eastern Frontier by L.W. Shakespear, (1914) is a valuable book that provides information on contemporary Assam basically the upper Brahmaputra valley. The book includes history of local kingdom and their religious system, administration, and also socio-economic aspects of the local people. It sheds light on the unknown zones of Assam. But it fails to focus on the rural pottery industry of the valley.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, (1980), in her book *India's Craft Tradition* has mentioned that the vast growth of the rural handicraft communities can be assumed by the fact that they were encouraged to live together in the villages. She tries to focus on the Indian handicrafts, especially industries but fails to attempt discussion on the pottery as well as other handicrafts of Assam and North East India.

Handicrafts of India by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, (1973), mentions about various handicrafts in India. She also tries to focus on the traditional crafts and industries and how these industries continued from past to present. The rural Indian society and indigenous crafts like pottery in Rajasthan, pottery in Himachal Pradesh and some parts

of Assam, bell metal in Gujarat, Kerala, basket wares and mat making, bamboo, cane etc in Assam and north-eastern states are discussed in the book. But her main attempt is to evaluate the handicrafts of nationwide repute. So pottery industry in Assam becomes not a part of it. Hence, northeast sector remains hub for research and study.

K. C. Gupta's, (1988) book on *Progress and Prospects of Pottery Industry in India: A Case Study of U.P.* surveyed the pottery industries of India primarily on the Uttar Pradesh pottery industry visiting every case. The author provides the progress and prospects of pottery industry as developed in India and various problems faced by the potters. He has investigated all the data related with the pottery industry in India. In his book, the production trends and the cost analysis as well as the problems faced by the potter workers engaged in the industry, including their wage structure, working conditions and social welfare have also been exhaustively examined. But the book does not focus historical development of the pottery industry in Assam.

Purani Asomor Silpa by B. Handiqui, (1959), mentions about the ancient handicrafts and traditional crafts in Assam. His book throws light on the different crafts and industries but it does not ably focus on the pottery prevalent in upper Brahmaputra valley of the ancient period.

In his book *Potteries in Ancient India*, B.P. Sinha, (1969), describes about the ancient potteries, its development and manufacture in India. The book offers a number of data on the ancient systematic development of the pottery industry. But the valuable book has not mentioned about the continuation of the pottery industry in Assam during the ancient period.

H. Borgohain, (1995), book *Handloom and Handicrafts of the Adis*, Directorate of Research; Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh is another work on pottery of the region. The author has made an attempt to examine the place of potter's craft in the life of the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. His work has noted that pottery is one of the most ancient crafts of the Adis. They make earthen pot by hand instead of using potter's wheel. The author has expressed the view that there is no record of origin of this craft in Arunachal Pradesh. It is seemed that pottery and earthenware were primarily used by the Arunachali people.

In his book *Traditional Crafts and Technology in Manipur*, John Mao, (1991) has expressed his view that pottery is believed to be one of the most important traditional crafts of Manipur as well as of north east India. It points out that there was development of pottery craft during the Neolithic period in this region. The people knew the art of making pottery by moulding earthen dough by hand and being baked on fire. He has further noted that pottery not only links time, it also links region, communities and religious beliefs of the region, particularly of Manipur.

In his article *Pottery in Assam: Historical Analysis*, Krishnajyoti Handiqui, (2003), Proceeding of North East India History Association, 23rd Session makes an attempts to elaborate the pottery industry. It adds that pottery industry bore inherent problems in its growth and development for several decades in Assam. In his article he describes that the present status of pottery industry in the Sibsagar district of Assam. It has been facing problems since past till present due to various reasons.

An *Economic History of North East India (1826 to 1947)*, by J.B. Ganguly, (2006) has highlighted presence of pottery products in the north east India, Manipur in particular. Pottery production maintained demand of cooking and other utensils made of

metals such as brass, copper, bell-metal, clay and even stone. During his study, he also noted that different kinds of pots such as cooking pots, pitchers and containers were also made of clay in Manipur.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, (2007), Vol-17, has also recorded that pottery in widest sense includes all objects made from the clay and hardened by fire, stoneware, porcelain and earthenware. The making of pottery is one of the oldest and widespread crafts in the world. It is rarely found among nomadic tribes, since potters are obliged to live within reach of their raw materials for production of earthenwares.

In her article, *Aspects of the Assam-Bengal Trade during the last days of the Ahom Monarchy*, Lopita Nath, (2001), Proceeding of North-East India History Association, 21st Session, states that the trade in different commodities and manufacturing goods in 1808-09 showed that bell-metal vessels of worth Rs. 1,500 had been exported to the neighbouring states. Thus, it is evident that the used of vessel in the region give the clear picture of the pottery industry in Assam.

The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India: An Historical Outline by D.D. Kosambi, (2008) mentions that the Indian villagers used very little metal. They rather needed pots, usually made of earth. In his book, he points out that potters must have been available in several parts of the country. He further mentions that pottery; tools made of stone, metal objects are made by man, therefore called artefacts.

Tribal Handicrafts: A Study of the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh, A. Mahanta and I. Konwar, (Eds.) by Krishnajyoti Handiqui, (2009), observes that domestic pottery is found in innumerable shapes and sizes among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. The art of making pottery items is one of the important crafts which is practised by a very few Adi villagers.

Further, he noted that in Arunachal Pradesh the pottery making practice has been disappearing gradually in recent times.

Assam District Gazetteer, (1978), Darrang District, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati is an important source of literature on pottery industry in Assam. It has come to light from the said Gazetteer that the pottery has lost much of its past glory in the district. The local pottery has been more or less replaced by superior clay or porcelain goods and metal utensils. Most of the traditional potters have left the trade and shifted to other places of the district as well as dispersed in the state for settling down and acquiring different occupations. Not much detailed and systematic study has been done on the proposed area in that particular research work.

RATIONALE:

As it is evident from the above review of literature and discussion that different work have been done on the pottery industry and indigenous crafts of Assam from past to present period. But a detailed study on the pottery industry of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts as prevalent in the colonial period has not been carried out. Therefore, the present study is undertaken to analyse the system of pottery and its impact upon the socio-economic status of the persons involving with this work during colonial period.

OBJECTIVES:

The proposed work is confined to the study of the pottery in colonial Assam and the Kumar potters of the erstwhile Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts. In a broader sense, it includes history of the Kumar and pottery industry, pottery in pre-colonial period, pottery in colonial period respectively. The following are the basic objectives of the study.

- i. To assess the socio-economic condition of the potters in colonial Assam.
- ii. To analyse the challenges faced by the pottery industry in colonial Assam.
- iii. To assess its impact of challenges on the potters of the Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The present study has of immense significance in the sense that the pottery industry has become an integral part of the economic life of the people of Assam from past to modern time. In different traditional and industrial crafts, particularly pottery and potter of the Brahmaputra valley, Assam, a large number of people were engaged. Their socio-economic condition was not very good from the ancient period to the colonial period. In Assam, the basic existing occupation of the Kumar community is the Kumar pottery industry because this particular class of people had neither fertile lands for cultivation nor any family base engagement. From this class of people less numbers of persons had been absorbed in government services owing to poor educational qualification. Most of the Kumar people which were engaged in pottery industry were living near various river banks of Assam. But, due to heavy erosion caused by floods forced them to migrate from their original places to other areas where it was quite difficult for them to run their occupation smoothly. As a result, their socio-economic status and rank sloped below the mark both at national and regional levels. There are several reasons for selecting these study areas- Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. The foremost reasons behind the choosing the above study in these areas because the district Sibsagar and Lakhimpur have a long history of pottery industry in upper Assam belt. Secondly, in both the districts have rich pottery industry that bore glory in

the past have lost most of its name and fame. Most of the Kumar people have gradually left their ancestral craft; a good number of people in these districts are still continuing their pottery making industry with unmindful of economic shift around them. Thirdly, the Kumar pottery in particular area is needed development of their socio-economic life for their very existence. Despite cultural hegemony and scientific advancement of the 19th century in Assam, the pottery industry is continuing in the same age old traditional system even facing multiple hardships. The craftsmen, ethnic composition, religious, socio-cultural aspects are also analyzed during the study. The development of pottery industry can reshape the rural economy of the region to a great extent. It has become a highly employment oriented venture and low capital investment industry in the particular districts. There is a lot of scope and opportunity for part time and full time employment of labourers in the entire production process of pottery making industry. So, it is high time to develop all round efforts for promotion of employment and engagement to revive this important and unique industry. The present study is an attempt to investigate the problems and prospects of the pottery industry of the two districts in particular and Assam in general. In addition, the study has put forward some remedial measures for reviving the status of pottery industry so that, this industry along with the Kumar people engaged in this craft has a future prospect.

METHODOLOGY:

In preparation of the present study both historical method and empirical observations have been adopted. Old literature, medieval Assamese chronicles (*buranjis*) and other relevant historical documents are extensively investigated and used. Particular reference may be made of the chapter on the historical aspect of the Kumar potters for which field investigation had been made along with the use of the evidence collected

from the existing literary and other records. Personal interviews have been made with some of the members of the Kumar potters of the two districts i.e., Sibsagar and Lakhimpur as a whole. A number of office bearers of various Kumar Associations like *All Assam Kumar Sanmilani*, *Government Reports*, *Village Organisations*, *Kumarjyoti Udyog* and other *Village Institutions* etc. aided in this hunt. Related information and necessary data have been collected from different libraries and museums. Field visits have been extensively conducted with structured and unstructured interviews in the Kumar villages of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. An attempt has been made to make the study rational and scientific.

DATA COLLECTION:

For data collection helps have been taken from different libraries such as

- i. State Archives & Record Room, Govt. of Assam, Dispur, Assam
- ii. Directorate of Historical and Antiquarians Studies, Guwahati
- iii. Krishna Kanta Handiqui Central Library, Guwahati University, Assam
- iv. ICHR, NERO, Guwahati University Campus, Assam
- v. The Central Library, KKHSOU, Patgaon, Rani, Guwahati, Assam
- vi. Lakshminath Bezbaruah Central Library, Dibrugarh University, Assam
- vii. Departmental Library, Anthropology Department, Guwahati University
- viii. District Library, Guwahati, Assam, and
- ix. District Library, Lakhimpur, Assam

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The study is subject to certain limitations. The pottery industry is mostly an unrecognized industry of Assam since the ancient period to the modern period. The pottery industry became a rural handicraft industry traditionally set in remote country sides. The primary data were collected from the Kumar potter villages in the Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. It is a well known fact that the pottery industry is run by mostly uneducated or less educated persons in general. It is also pointed out that the Kumar potters do not take any care to maintain records of production, consumption, investment and marketing. In this case, the collected primary data have been verified from different reliable sources in this research study. Proper care has been taken for the collection and verification of necessary data during the field study period. Despite all these limitations, the findings of the present study may be generalized for future prospects of the Kumar potters of Assam in general and Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts in particular.

ORGANISATION OF CHAPTERS:

The present study has been organized into five chapters including conclusion in the following manner.

- Chapter-I: Introduction
- Chapter-II: Pottery in the Pre-Colonial Period
- Chapter-III: Pottery in the Colonial Period
- Chapter-IV: Case Study of the Two Districts
- Chapter-V: Conclusion

Chapter-I is devoted as an introductory part of the study consisting details of the study, location and time frame, statement of the problem, review of related literature, objectives and significance of the study, a brief description of methodology and organization of chapters in brief.

Chapter-II deals with the pre-colonial pottery industry of Assam in general and the study on the Upper Brahmaputra Valley in particular. It also examines the various stages of development of pottery, structure and pattern of the pottery industry and potter class during the study period.

Chapter-III also deals with the colonial pottery industry and Kumar potters of the Upper Brahmaputra Valley. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the changing economy of colonial Assam and the challenges faced by the indigenous industry of Assam during the colonial period.

Chapter-IV deals with an in-depth case study of the two districts i.e., Sibsagar and Lakhimpur on different aspects of the pottery industry of Upper Brahmaputra Valley.

Chapter-V is a concluding part of the study, with a summary of findings of the entire study. The research work concludes with the major findings along with the summary of the all chapters in brief.

This chapter has illumined the fundamental work for the thesis by highlighting the research background. The concerned chapter has attempted to make a detail review of the literature of the pottery industry of Assam and India and also its international acclaim. After making an exhaustive review of literature, an attempt is made to find out the scope to understand the challenges of the current research work as no in-depth study on the pottery industry of the particular districts has so far been attempted. In this chapter, the

objective of the study as well as the rationale has been focused. The methodology followed for the investigation of the study has also been incorporated. In the last part of this chapter, a systematic chapter wise division has been made for the study.

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CHAPTER: II

POTTERY IN THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

Owing to geographical factors, Assam remained in isolation for a very long time. The economy in Assam during the pre-colonial period was as a whole, prosperous and developed in trade and commerce. Tavernier stated that the kingdom of Assam was one of the best countries in Asia, for it produced all things necessary for human subsistence without any need of foreign supply. Barpujari (1896) also mentioned that in Assam there were mines of gold, silver, steel, iron and a great store of silk. During the period of study, it was observed that agricultural products were sufficient. To meet the requirements of the people as well as industry and crafts were developed and a considerable volume of trade and commerce existed with neighbouring provinces (Gait, 1990). The art of pottery was very popular in ancient days in the region. Pottery was one of the most important industries that flourished from past in Assam. There was no denying the fact that potter's craft was the part and parcel of heritage and history of Assam. Pottery was mainly confined as a household industry in Assam. In the widest sense, pottery includes all objects made from clay and hardened by fire. The making of pottery was retained hundreds of years old traditional background in Assam. The *Kumali* and *Nidhanpur* grants mentioned highly of potter and potter pit of ancient Assam (Handiqui, 2012).

The medieval period was relatively isolated from the rest of India but it had a unique socio-economic structure. In the region, the simple village economy was more or less self-sufficient in nature. The local goods were available and easily fulfilled the requirements of the people. Agriculture was common to all and community ownership

of land was a basic feature of this agriculture based economy. Generally, the village was a self-sustaining unit and its autonomy was a significant feature of medieval Assamese society. In this regard, unlike in many other parts of India, Assam had a hereditarily attached occupation as well as many other trades. There was considerable flexibility in the social structure so far as the practicing of trade and handicrafts was concerned. Within this overall framework of subsistence, economy boomed with surplus resources, limited demands, the scope of trade and commerce was naturally restricted. Moreover, in the absence of a monetary economy, barter was the prevalent mode of transaction during the medieval period. The history of pottery industry was old. The making of pottery industry flourished since the ancient period with more maturity in the medieval. It was first started in China and later spread world-wide. Pottery was a very powerful tool for the interpretation of ceramic art which focus human skilled of artefacts. It was also considered one of the landmarks of the Neolithic revolution along with agriculture and the sedentary way of life. Pottery was a relationship with the rituals and practices pertaining to deities of Assam. The economic relationship of production and exchange and many other aspects of cultural behaviour were co-related with making of pottery items. Pottery was one of the tangible creations of the human race. Hence, it became an integral and inseparable component of the culture of human society. The development of agriculture, commodity production, trade and commerce and traditional crafts changed the peasantry of ancient period. In some cases, the pottery works were their means of subsistence; and to prevent further penury the artisans even exchanged their products with the royal and religious items since unknown times (Nagar, 1967).

Pottery was considered as an essential element in the formation of a civilization. It throws light on the food habits of the people; their religious and social

customs and also technological advancement attained by the people, besides their economic conditions. The historical study of pottery industry without reference to its social context remains unrealistic and unfruitful. The production of pottery was involved mainly the recognition of clay, manufacturing process, designs and decoration, firing and socio-cultural bearing in which the pots were manufactured, distributed and used.

The Kumar is an artisan caste group of Assam. The name Kumar was the correct form of “Kumbhakar” which has been derived from two root words “Kumva” meaning “earthen pot” and “kar” meaning “maker”. The Kumar was a caste of Nava Sakha groups. They were potters by profession. The word Kumar was derived from Sanskrit word “Kumbhakara” meaning one that makes pots as his primary hereditary occupation (Behura, 1978; Baruah, 1989). The word Kumar in Assam bore a wide connotation, as the word did not denoted persons of any particular caste or sub caste but it brought in its fold persons belonging to different castes namely the *Kalita Kumars*. The origin of the Kumar community was depicted in a mythical story mentioned in the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*. Bardoloi and Athappria (2003) stated that when Lord *Narayan* was reclining on his eternal bed two Gods *Brahma* and *Vishwakarma* were born out of his navel. *Vishwakarma* married *Ghritachi* and their descendents came to be known as Kumars. According to them they have migrated to Assam from the south and in due course of time they dispersed to various parts of Assam, although they were mostly scattered over the Brahmaputra valley. The Kumars considered Assamese as their mother tongue and used the Assamese script. They inhabit in the plains of the Brahmaputra valley where the climate was moderate to live in. In the Brahmaputra valley, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur were the main districts where the potteries were made locally by the Kumar potters.

Some of the pots, pitcher and utensils were sold in the weekly markets or *hats*. Trading of these materials was limited to local common people. The hilly people who lived in the neighbouring areas also exchanged and brought important pottery items from the Kumar potters. In *Kumarjyoti* (2008), an annual magazine of All Assam Kumar Sanmilani (AAKS) was mentioned that the art of making pottery items reached in a high degree of perfection and very often pottery was daintily prepared for the uses of the royal houses of the Ahoms. The word “Narahari” was also connected to “Kumars”. Some legends in *Karatiputhi*, *Adi-Zamal* etc. mentions that *Narahari* was the first person who made clay items with the use of a wheel. The *Deodhai Asom Buranji* narrates about the be-heading of three river-merchants i.e. *Sonari*, *Jayhari* and *Narahari* who carried out trade of pottery with Bengal with the permission of the Nawab there. It was believed that *Narahari Kumar* developed the pottery practised since the ancient period (Dutta, 2001).

In relation to the ancient potteries in Assam, it was found in the excavation at Ambari, Guwahati, brought to light a number of glazed, roulette and Kaolin potteries. It was thus opening a new vista of inquiry into Assam’s past. It has been noticed that there were four phases of the development of pottery. The earliest phase of roulette pottery shows similarities with those found at Arikamuendu near Pondicherry and later at Sisupalghar in Orissa belonging to the early centuries of the Christian era. The pottery of the second phase consisted of bowls and vessels of red, grey, and buff and made of kaolin mixed with other clay types. The third phase of pottery was Kaolin wares, the main forms being *lota* (water pot) and bowls. The fourth phase was marked by medieval glazed wares.

Barbaruah (1997) also mentioned that the potters in Assam were known as *Kumars (Kumbhakara)* as found in the early inscriptions of Assam. During Ahom rule, the potters were classified into *khels* or guilds. There were five categories of potters; those attached to the king's household; attached to the estates of the nobles (*bilatiyakumar*); attached to the satras, and to the temples and those allotted to the public. Barua (1969) stated that it was not known when the potter's wheel was introduced. Reference to the "Kumbhakara" was found in Bhaskarvarman's plates. In medieval chronicles, both the Kumars (*Kumbhakara*) and the Hiras were found and land grants testify to the existence of the two communities of potters. In *Vaisnava* literature also frequently mentioned that wheeling movements of the warriors were compared with the wheels of potters. The decorative motifs, floral and other ornamental designs were noticed in some early works of bell-metal and brass metal.

Sharma (1989) describes that the crystallization of the *Varna* and caste system which streamlined the division of labour in the society was an important factor for increase of production, to some extent, as the labourers belonged to different sub-castes among the *Sudras*. Bhuyan (1974) explained that the royal classes and the Brahmins were appropriators of the social surplus. The *Vaisyas* being agriculturists and traders were the main taxpayers, while the *Sudras* provided servile labour. It was seemed that for the production of household tools some of the tribal groups too worked. They were outside the *Varna system* to sustain fundamental needs for subsistence. The main factor behind the consolidation of state crafts was to maintained political and social stability; for a long period the royal apparatus formed a class of people to consume need-based earthenwares. No evidence has been found that the pottery manufacturer were limited to a certain class from tribal or non-tribal groups. In spite of this, the Ahom rulers

encouraged all the traders to continue the free trade to a limited extent. So, the people of the neighbouring territories could frequently exchange and import commodities ensuring that trade could be freely developed in the region. The social division was absent in the Kumar community. The surname of the entire community was Kumar. Their social position among the Assamese Hindu castes structure was middle of order. They were Sudras according to the Varna order. The Kumars were non-vegetarians. The head of the family was respected by all other members of the family. The women used to do household activities and look after the children. They also contributed to the family income by taking part in the traditional occupation of pot making and lending a hand in agricultural activities (Bardoloi and Athappria, 2003).

The Brahmaputra valley was more dependent on trade in the pre-colonial period than it had been earlier. The socio-economic structure of the economy and region, proceeding this period was basically subsistence oriented in nature. Tradition based economy in the period was preferred promoting traditional handicrafts. The royal patronage was adhered to rural handicrafts industries to fulfil their daily needs and wages. On the other hand, the Assamese people became self-sufficient and self-dependent which was the key role in shaping Assam's economy right from the early medieval times and developing various types of cottage industries. Therefore, pottery industry became an inalienable part of the state. To a great extent, a large number of people were dependent on small scale industries. It became their way of life rather than a mere source of earning. The old industries were not scanty in Assam. The people of Assam practised different professional vocations such as black-smiths, mat makers, boat makers, japi-makers, jaggary-suppliers, goldsmiths, potters and bell metal workers respectively. This highlights the existing socio-economic structure of those days. Some

professional artisan classes engaged in other traditional crafts such as manufacturing cotton cloth, weaving stuff, whereas some took to brass and bell metal, boat-making and ghani making as their subsistence income.

As similar to other professional artisans the potters and pottery industry became a part and parcel of the society during the pre-colonial period in the upper Brahmaputra valley. The pottery was retained its past glory of ancient period till medieval era. As a household product, it was used in ritualistic purpose from time immemorial. The pottery industry manufactured some common pottery items like earthen jar, pitchers, small pots, dolls and other vessels. In this connection, the Sibsagar District Gazetteers (1901) mentioned that the pottery industry had lost its past glory and it confined only to common pottery like earthen jars, pitchers and such other vessels. The centres of the pottery industry were situated at Garmur, Salmara in Majuli, Kumarpati and Kakodonga in Golaghat, Pengeri near Amguri and Arjunguri in Sibsagar district. The fine art of manufacturing old type bricks, earthen pipes and terracotta which once flourished in Rangpur (Sibsagar) is extinct today.

The profession of pottery was mainly practising by the people of the Kalita caste was taken up by many other castes. K.N. Phukan vehemently stated that Assamese potters produced various earthenwares, vessels and like other pitchers, pots, dishes, bowls, water vessels and many other household goods. The earthenwares were greatly used by the poorer sections because of their affordable cost. Religious institutions like the Satras and temples also used various types of earthen wares for offering *naivedyas* (oblation) to the deities as well as for the distribution of offerings among the devotees. Apart from the potters, there was another class of artisans who moulded images of deities from clay. They were generally known as *khanikar*. It was known from the

chronicles that the Ahom king, Pratap Singha brought some artisans from Cooch Behar to mould clay images of Durga and other deities. Prior to the colonial connection it was a principle with the Ahom regime that both the subject and the land were deemed to the property of the state. It witnessed inextricable confusion during the pre-colonial period of civil wars and terrific Burmese invasions. During this period, rice and mustard were abundantly produced. The state had an agrarian economic structure in the pre-colonial Assam. They were produced mainly for consumption and family household needs which continued with a slight change. The state economy during the Ahom rule was determined by the unique system of *Paik*. For administrative purposes, the population was divided into two categories agricultural workers and goods producers. Among the goods producer classes, the Kumar potter produced different kinds of pots for daily use.

It is also noteworthy that the socio-economic conditions of Kumars potters were not as good as other castes during the ancient period but gradually they occupied a comfortable position during the Ahom period. The geo-cultural factor, socio-economic growth helped them to develop their day to day life maintaining pottery productions. Assam is considered as a paddy producing state and the majority of population depended on cultivation. Therefore, the Kumars potters productions were not sufficient to earned money. Basically, the Kumars of Assam developed their socio-cultural condition after modernizing a few items of their pot-making system. During the pre-colonial period, the different potters of Assam among them the Kumars was taken some positive steps to transformed the pot-making process into a mechanism system more efficient source of earning money.

The pottery in the Ahom period was often coarse and handmade. The raw clays used in the Neolithic sites of India were pale grey or burnished grey, red, orange or pale

red, brown, black and cream-lipped. It was found in sites such as Brahmagiri, Sangana, Kallu and Nagarjuna Konda in the districts of Chitradurga and Bellary, Karnataka; Guntur (Andhra Pradesh), Piklihal in the Deccan, Kuchi in Orissa, Burzaham in Kashmir and Daojali Hading in Assam. The development of pottery industry during the Ahom period verifies that the people knew the art of making pottery by hand. They even painted and decorated their pottery with different designs. The pottery which was usually utility-based in nature mainly consisted of different types of bowls, jars, vessels while the burial urns was generally grey, having a globular body with a mouth. The study of this pottery thus brought into light an overall picture of a settled sedentary life in a very early stage of human civilization. Historically, the potteries sites were found during exploration and excavation in around *Sadiya*, *Bhishmaknagar*, *Rukmininagar*, *Malinithan* and from a few other places in the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh. In this connection, the pottery from the Sadiya frontier zone was noteworthy. The *Bhishmaknagar* pottery was wheel-turned and a large number of decorative pots of different shapes were noticed as a special attraction of this area. In this region, pottery was fine as well as coarse; mainly the red ware was prominent. It would be mentioned that *Bhishmaknagar* potteries gave a clear evidence of the wheel-turned pottery which had been found at Ambari excavation in Guwahati that dates back to the 10th century A. D. (Sankalia, 1978).

During the Ahom period, the royal households used pottery items for religious purposes and after their downfall the pottery industry in the Brahmaputra valley was greatly suffered. Then, some artisans used to make earthen images of *Biswakarma*, *Durga*, *Ganesh*, *Saraswati*, *Kali* in different parts of the state. The making of pottery at *Sarguwa* the capital of the Ahom kingdom during the rule of Sudangpha or Bamuni

Konwar (1397-1407) indicated that the usage of the word *Sarugaha* in the period was very scanty. Sarguwa is about 8 km away from the Sibsagar town in north and pottery was practised in olden *peghali bheti* from where broken earthenware has been found. It was believed that villages namely *Saraguwa Kalita Kumargaon, Saraguwa Srimantapur Kumargaon, Sonapur, Rupapur, Bhimpuwa Kumargaon* along with fifteen other *Kumar gaon* existed in this area. Another important place was *Rupahimukh*, sometimes called *Dikhow mukh* where Kumar clay was suitable for pottery making available on the banks of the Brahmaputra. Majuli island and *Rupahimukh* regarded as one of the most pottery productive places in Sibsagar district during the medieval period but when Brahmaputra took a new route through Sibsagar and Majuli, the erosion of the banks of the Brahmaputra highly hampered in the procurement of raw materials for producing pottery items. In spite of this, the Kumar clay in the Brahmaputra valley was very important for producing and extracting. It was already mentioned that the Ahom King Pratap Singha brought some artisans called *khanikars* from Cooch Bihar to make earthen images of Goddess Durga and other deities in the Ahom capital (Borboruah, 1981). This was his preference of qualitative production of clay work in the state.

Sukhampha, one of the Ahom King, also known as the *khora* or the lame Raja (owing to deformation of his foot caused during elephant hunting), fought with the Koch king Nar-Narayana in 1562 and lost the battle. A number of Ahom hostages were taken as prisoners by the Koch King Naranarayan, however, the hostages were freed. It was mentioned in chronicles that a number of Koch artisans accompanied the Ahom hostages on their returned journey. Amongst them some were potters skilled in the art of making images of Durga and other Hindu deities (Gait, 1963). The Ahom revenue system was specially strict towards the artisans, it could be elaborated that the artisan

paiks were exempted from serving the state with manual labour like the *kanri paiks*. The state, therefore, imposed a higher rate of taxes on them. It was obvious that all other artisans like the blacksmiths (*kamar*), potters (*kumar*), weavers (*tanti*) etc. had to pay taxes in terms of their produced or had to work for the king for about 3-4 months in a year, by producing such items in which they were proficient (Nath, 2002).

The Ahom rulers were reorganized the villages by settling various occupational groups to undertake different works required for day to day purposes for the welfare of the common people. For this reason, they even brought various professional groups from different places and granted lands in the Ahom kingdom. The Kumar potter was one of them and they produced different articles for the Ahom kings for worshipping Gods. King Pratap Singha (1603-1641) who arrived at Majuli in 1609 patronised this age old craft which was mentioned in *Changrung Phukanar Buranji*. The pottery articles were largely used in agrarian life of the people. The Kumar potters engaged in the traditional based industry which called as pottery. Different kinds of pottery and iron implements were used in agricultural works. Most of the pots were manufacturing by them into a certain standard size i.e., the bigger ones was called *kalah* and small one called *tekali*, some other articles used to measure agricultural items including jaggery, pulses, oil etc. It would be mentioned that the Ahom royal official Momai Tamuli Barbarooah introduced *Paik* system during the rule of King Pratap Singha. He was in charge of the village organization and collected twenty persons each from the *Dhekials*, *Malakhus*, *Jogis*, *Bhetuas* and *Mussalmans* as a *Dhekial* hundred. *Dhekial* in Golaghat district was an important place and many historical sites like *Rahdhala Pathar*, *Rahdhala Pukhuri*, *Maidams* (crematorium of Ahom kings) etc. was still there. Some people were doing clay crafts for common uses whereas Momai Tamuli

Barboroah established the Kumar potters along with others to producing goods for the greater benefit of the masses. The people from many nearby places of *Dhekial* (particularly from the *Gur Jagonia Mauza*) supplied *gur* (molasses) to the royal household. So, they were required earthen pitchers. The Kumar used to make long-necked earthen pitchers for them.

Choudhury and Medhi discussed about the origin of the Kalitas which was obscure, but since the beginning of the fourteenth century they were occupying a respectful status among the Assamese social life. There was no relationship between the original Kalitas in Assam and those who migrated from Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. The Kalitas in Assam were revered being caste Hindus whereas the potters of Orissa and Uttar Pradesh were treated as backwards tribes. Some Assamese scholars notably tried to prove that the Kalitas in Assam originated from the Alpine stock which migrated to eastern India before the Vedic Aryans invasion to the region. On the other hand, Baruah (1966) mentioned that the Kalitas although originally belonged to the Caucasian stock imbibed some Mongoloid traits due to the long association with Indo-Mongoloid elements. Historically, the Kalitas in Assam originally hailed from the land of the *Koltus* or *Kultuas* was living at the foot hills of the Himalayas near present Himachal Pradesh. References to the *Koltus* or *Kultuas* were found in the Puranas. The word Kalita is still found in the *Kalika-Purana* of the eleventh century and the principal Vaishnava works of the sixteenth century. The biographical works of the seventeenth century and royal grants of eighteenth century took note about the Kalitas in Assam as well. According to the *Katha-gurucharita*, there was a “Kalita desa” on the Himalayan foothills in the north eastern region where the ancestors of Gopala Ata lived (Bhabendranath Thakur). During the Vaishnavite movement many Kalitas were able to

alleviate their positions becoming eminent religious preachers and initiated allegiance of disciples as religious gurus. Some of them established Satras to propagate their faith among the villagers.

The prominent historian Barua (2003) stated about the Kalitas being agriculturalists by profession who practised various crafts and professions without seriously affecting their caste status. Thus, pottery, blacksmith, bell-metal craft, boat making were adopted as additional professions. The Kalitas used to perform the main or principal Hindu *samskaras* and *purifying* rites as prescribed in the *Smritis*. Therefore, the art of making pottery in Assam started in the ancient period. The use of colour and enamels like polish in the terracotta and clay items were found in different parts in Assam which indicated the existence era of a highly developed community behind the making of these objects (Saikia, 2004).

The disciple system in the Satras also reveals some important historical data about the Kumar potter in Assam. In this regard, Sri Sri Punia Satra draws an important evidence of performing arts and culture as well as pottery work during the medieval period. It was seen that among all the major populated Kumar villages there was a branch of Punia Satra and Dakhinpat Satra in Dakhinpat Ghat in Majuli. The Punia Satra was shifted from one place to another in the upper Brahmaputra valley and the Kumar people accompanied them. For example, in 1542 Sak viz. 1620 A.D. Parasuram Deva established the Punia Satra at Punia Bil of Ratnapur in Majuli and preached the Bhakti religion. In the same time, a few branches of Satra were also established at *Rupahimukh*, *Chinatoli*, *Mahimabari* which were some important places where the Kumar people settled during the early medieval period. On the other hand, the Kumar people who lived near the *Chinatoli* and the *Satras* in Majuli also helped in the making

pottery goods for performing religious rites. The erosion of the banks of the Brahmaputra compelled them to shift to Lakhimpur. Hence, the *Satra* was established at Lakhimpur. At the same time, one of the members of *Chinatoli satra* established a *Satra* at *Mahimabari* of Titabar. The establishment of the *Dakhin Pat Satra* too demanded pottery items. The Kumar potters at *Salmara* in Majuli used different methods for pottery making. The potters of Dakhin Pat Satra used the *wheel*, whereas, the potters of *Salmara* did not use the *wheel*. The Kumar potters of Salmara were fortunate enough to make the *Bardaba* (Big drum) of Sankardev. Earlier, the Kumar potters of upper Assam used Kalita as their surname; however, the Ahom rulers introduced the *rank* or *faid* system bearing *Bora*, *Bharali*, *Hazarika* etc. as their surname. The Kumar potters in Assam also used the Kumars *wheel (humor chak)* in the process of making pottery items. King Jayadhaj Singha invited Banamali Gosain of Koch Bihar and granted a large plot of land for the establishment of a *Satra* at Jakkhalabanda; the Gosain brought some Brahmin and potter families along with him. These Bengali Kumars used wheel to make pottery items and the Assamese Kumar imitated them. As a result, the Assamese Kumar learnt how to make pottery items by both wheel and hand (Hazarika, 2012).

Some places like Dharamtul and Dergaon were famous for making *charus* and *tekali*. Special types of long necked *tekalis* were made by the potters of Dergaon which was used as moulds for solidifying *gur*, letting hot and liquid *gur* to pour into such *tekalis* when it turned cool lumps *gur* was extracted in from such *tekalis* by cracking them. The Kumar potters of upper Assam also manufactured *nadias* i.e. basins for keeping sweets though it looked like *charus* with strong reams just below the mouth. The arts and crafts tradition of this region was much influenced by the Neo-Vaishnavism religion. As such many of the traditional Assamese customs diminished

and hence the diversity of pottery crafts had also been drastically reduced (Phukan, 1987). The socio-religious structure and tradition of pottery had attracted a few communities like *Kalita*, *Bora*, *Bhuyan* and *Koch*. In the Brahmaputra valley, the different ruling tribes were denominated like the Kacharis, the Chutias, and the Ahoms. The small chieftains of the Bhuyans in Lakhimpur played important role in the establishment of religious movement in Assam. This religious transition was called neo-vaishnavite culture. The period from the 15th century onwards was one of the most crucial phases of the ritualistic part in the history of Assam. Sri Sri Sankardeva brought some artisans from *Kopimukha* for making *Khul* i.e., a kind of cylindrical musical instrument (Rajkumar, 2000). The Kumar potters used to make earthen images during the medieval period. Under this circumstance, the potters made some earthenware for sale in the markets or *hats* and village potter used to go out with navigation boats for barter.

Das (1987) observed that various occupational groups inhabited medieval period. The Kumar was one of them who settled in the Brahmaputra valley, intermixed with the indigenous Mongoloid groups or different communities. They lost many of their original physical features owing to perpetual hard labour. There were several sub-castes like *Kamar Kalita*, *Kumar kalita*, *Kahar Kalita*, *Mali Kalita*, *Nat Kalita* were based on the profession chosen by them. It was seen that Kalita caste was sub-divided into different groups according to their professional crafts (Barman, ed. 2005). The reference to Assamese potters in the Census of India (1981) mentioned that the Hiras adopted a very ancient method of making pottery known as coil-building process (handmade technique), but the Kumar in Brahmaputra valley as well as the other parts of India manufactured pottery with the helped of a wheel. The majority of Assamese

castes were heterogeneous in origin and opened to infiltration from lower castes also. The composition of caste was also subject to rearrangement, as a result the general tendency of appraising the level of gradually upwards. The *Kalita* who had given up ploughing was mentioned as *Kayastha*. He sought to validate his claim by marrying his children within the *Kayastha* caste. The *Kalita* sub-castes were goldsmith *Kalita*, potter *Kalita*, *palki-bearer Kalita*. It was mentioned by Gait (1901) in his article *Manufacture of Pottery in Assam* that a group of artisans (potters) were brought from outside Assam by the Ahom kings and later the mechanism of this craft had been learnt by people from *Kalita*, *Koch*, *Keot* castes in Assam. Under the patronage of the royal regime, the Kumar potters shifted from one place to another to continue their age old crafts. As a result, the Kumars were settled on the banks of the river Brahmaputra.

Almost all the traditional arts and crafts in Assam were folk-oriented. The artisans and craftsmen of Assam imbibed their professional expertise from tradition handed down from generation to generation. Some of the folk arts and crafts were newly developed in medieval Assam. During the Ahom period, the folk arts and crafts were simple, unsophisticated and designed according to set patterns. Owing to this fact, the Kumar potters laid foundation of new ideas and techniques for the productions of arts and crafts. They portrayed their beliefs, religious rituals, and customs on their artefacts. Some of their arts and crafts were supposed to come from outside the region. On the other hand, some earthen or metal works were manufactured as *dunari* for carrying a small earthen lamp. The articles bore some similarities with *maihang*, *berakahi*, *bhortal*, *sarai*, *bhogjara*, *banbati* and many other types of earthenware of the neighbouring states. The Kumars were introduced wheel around 6th century A. D. and concentrated to extend their pottery making traditions that stuck since time immemorial.

The potter's wheel was exclusively operated by the males and thereby the process became a holistic revolution spreading earthenwares far and wide.

Due to a shortage of historical data, a detailed understanding of the art of pottery making in the upper Brahmaputra valley was scattered. At the advent of the Ahom, the economy of the state flourished with good condition. From the epigraphic and literary evidence of the early part of medieval period, it was found that the upper Brahmaputra valley was known for several minor craft works which developed during the period of study like brick-making, boat-making etc. At the same time, pottery was also used for preserving and storing, keeping and cooking. Pottery was likely to become a profitable industry compare to other industries in Assam. From the geographical point of view, Nath (2009) mentioned that Majuli was a nerve centre of both Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts . The river island Majuli became the central hub of pottery production because there were some efficient potter villages with a good numbers of items being sold in the nearby villages. The main occupation of the three villages of *Salmara*, *Chinatoli* and *Dakhinpat* was only pottery making. They sold earthenwares in different places of the nearby districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Sibsagar (Hazarika, 2012). Barter system was the cheapest mode of transaction of pottery goods among the different caste and the villagers. The Brahmaputra valley witnessed the development of different phases of pottery making process throughout the centuries in the region.

There were different terminologies used for categorising pottery items in upper Assam and lower Assam depending on the use of the potter's wheel. In upper Assam, the smaller earthen pitchers (*tekali* in Assamese) were still used in the ceremonial bathing of the bride and groom in the marriage ceremony (*panitola* ceremony). The ceremony of groom proceeding to the bride house (to solemnize the ritual) was known

as *Dunori*. In Lower Assam, it was known as *sahasrabati* or *sahasradhar* and also as *Dunori* in some places. It was used for storing rice while an earthen lamp was lit over it to ward off evil forces. The Kumars made big earthen containers known as *Dabar* to store clothes that protected it from insects. These were round in shape and about 3 to 4 ft high with a one foot wide lid. This type of container was known as *Japa* or *Japakata* in upper Assam (Hazarika, 2012). In lower Assam, the Kumar soil was kept to get protected from scorching heat and known as *Matir gat* whereas in upper Assam it was known as *Khulani*.

In the early part of medieval Assam, there was a political turmoil. The upper Assam was ruled by the Chutias, the Ahoms and the Kachari kings. They were mostly feudal in character and imposed taxation on a class of people who developed the clay work in continuation with agriculture (Kalita, 2008). There were three methods of making pottery in the early period of medieval Assam, among them one was to make the shape of the item with straw, then covering the shape with clay and burning in fire. After burning, the items were taken out, then they were shaped with bamboo reeds, inside of the bamboo shapes were filled with clay and left to dry in sunlight. After the moulds dried, it was burnt in fire, as a result of which the desired item came out. There is no doubt that these methods were primitive in its implementation. Moreover, making of small pottery items by using hands was popular prior to the use of the wheel and a few Kumar villages still practising same methods in Majuli, Khetri and Gotanagar areas in Kamrup. Their descendants retained the art of making small earthen objects with hands, not using the wheel (R. Saikia *cited the opinion of Pradip Chaliha*). These pottery making methods indicated that pottery earthenware was a very old and

traditional craft industry in Assam. Gradually, it became as an occupational crafts among the Kumar potters in the state.

The historical evidence indicates that wheel-made pottery in Assam was introduced when people from different parts of India particularly from northern India and Gangetic valley migrated to Assam. It was noted that during the Ahom regime, Ahom Kings were brought some potters from outside Assam and introduced the techniques of pottery making on wheel. The Kalita and Koch castes were trained by these potters. In fact, these potters were arrived in the state when the tribal and probably the Kumar and the Hira were already at doing pottery work in different parts of undivided Assam (Gohain, 1995). These local potters were not accepted the wheel because it had been introducing from the outside. The local traditional potters used their traditional methods to manufacture different types of pottery items. This tendency also prevalent among the Kumar potters in Assam. Although, there was a lot of new and popular methods introduced by potters from Bihar and other states yet the Assamese potters did not accepted in this methods. But, at the same time one could not deny that the Kumars of Lower Assam partially applied the wheel method like the other potters in India (Pal, 1978). The Assam Buranji by H. Dhekiyal Phukan gives a list of castes. It noticed four classes of the *Kalitas*, viz; *Bar-kalita*, *Saru-kalita*, *Kumar-kalita* (potter) and *Mali-kalita*. The first was considered superior to other *Kalitas*. In Assam, there was seemed that no distinction of castes from profession and each caste or tribe practised all the arts which were well known in the country. They were farmers, traders, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, carpenters, extractors of oil, potters, weavers, dyers etc. but they had not adopted the art of shaving, washing or bleaching, working in leather or of making sweetmeats, butter or ghee.

Old literature, epigraphs, foreign accounts, excavations and manuscripts proved that boats played an important role in the daily life of the people. Most of the Kumar potters were engaged in different profession as like as boat making (Baruah, 2005). The art of building boats reached high position during the days of the Ahoms and the very peculiar feature of the trading system was used of different vessels (Dutta, 2001). During the break from their pottery making works, they were opted boat making to earned alternative income. From the study, it was found that both the pottery makers and the boat makers are colloquial terms (Choudhary, 1987). Due to scarcity of raw-material in their locality the Kumar potters of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts brought pottery items from *Salmora* in Majuli which were carried on boats (Goswami, 1986). There was some evidence shows that the *Nao-sulliyar* (boat builders) were guilds of musketeers who belonged to the Kumar artisans. Under untoward circumstances, the *paiks* were later reorganized into professional *khels* like boat-building, bow-making, iron smelting etc. with members of the same or allied profession, which needed their closed settlement in a particular locality. This subsequently brought a peculiar character to the villagers in the period of under study. There were *paiks* of the same caste, whereas the artisans and professional classes were members of some specific caste groups (Nath, 2002).

The various literary records have shown that in all the branches of industry like weaving and sericulture, ivory, wood, clay, cane, bamboo and pottery, the methods of working in the other parts of the region was same. In the pre-colonial period, there were independent rulers in Assam, a number of old industries flourished in the state. During the Ahom rule, cottage industries got the royal patronage from the kings and nobles and naturally the propagation of such industries constituted one of the important features of

the cultural life of the Assamese people. The old industries were not scanty. It was found in historical sources that the sufficient production became as high standard of industrial efficiency that the people boasted in early times. It was stated that the industries were highly developed in the Ahom period. It also mentioned that the weavers, spinners, goldsmiths, potters and workers engaged in making ivory, bamboo, wood, hides and cane was manufactured different goods for used among the people in the region. From examining the origin and development of ceramic traditions in Assam was attached to *Daojali Hading* of North Cachher Hills and considered as an important place of pottery. The excavation exposed three types of layers; the first and third was the sterile layer, the second included Neolithic Celts, grinding stones, querns, mealing troughs and mullers besides pottery. It is found that there were three types of pottery such as cord impressed ware, stamped impressed ware and brick-red ware. In the study of different pottery centres in Assam, it was seemed that these manufacturing items became a household as well as trade goods. The experts have tried to identify more specifically the major traits during the period. The historical and socio-cultural substratum was left different races since early times; which intrinsically involved find out the historical factors of economic subsistence of particular communities. The Kumars of the different villages in the river line areas were found in the district of Sibsagar, *Rupahimukh Kumar* village was one of them in the medieval period. There were different socio-religious practises among the Kumar people who involved in their professional production. The Kumar potters were sold their products by barter system or even for cash that formed a synthesis of different racial strains in the society.

The indigenous industry became a source of household income and the artisans of different occupations opted the barter economy and gradually it prevailed during the Ahom period. The units of weight system such as *ser*, *poa*, *adher* were used for huge amount or quantity. For example, pulses like *matimah*, mustard oil, lime, and powdered brick were weight by *a dhol* (a hollow wooden drum) and *kalah* (pot). The chronicles mentioned such units of measurement while recording the expenditure incurred in connection with building of the royal palace at Gargaon in the year 1758 A.D.; *Jaggery*- 5432 *kalah* (big earthen pot), *refined lime*- 9750 *kalah*, *mustard oil*-148 *kalah / dhol* etc. were used to denote the weight that a man could carried. On the other hand, the used of units for smaller denomination indicates smaller volume of goods were used in the internal trade of the state. It noted that the bigger unit *dhol*, *dang*, *kalah* so on were found to be used in upper Assam.

The upper Brahmaputra valley was considered rich in terms of raw materials. The local *hats* or market were provided ample opportunities for sold pottery items and development of pottery industry as well. But in real sense, the rate of growth and performance of pottery was unsatisfactory due to some relevant factors. It was found that the pottery was very simple and the raw materials (clay) was available everywhere. The expert potters became craftsmen as easily as they became smiths. A few potters are still found in different regions which were involved with their families for producing pottery items by wheel-made. They were also travelled from village to village, place to place for providing the supplied the local goods. The potters like many other craftsmen got emancipation from the restrictions of territorial society which made possible by the surplus production of the agricultural economy. The ceramic tools demanded a permanent site and a stable environment in order to flourish, hence floors opened for

settlements (Sankhalia, 1978). The household articles were supplied to the royal household, high officials, Satra, temple and for the use of people in general within Ahom royal houses. The Kumar potters produced various earthen vessels and wares to meet such demands. Majuli, originally named “Majali” was made a hub of cultural centre in the state where vaishnavite monasteries were established by the followers of Sankardeva. The vaishnavite movement during the medieval period also encouraged the Kumar potters to manufacture earthen pots.

The pottery was a common figure in every village. Almost, all the potters were primarily agriculturalists. They took trade only as a secondary occupation. Apart from the regular household items, like pitchers, plates etc., rings for wells, drums, pipes, toilets items were also manufactured by the potters in considerable quantities. However, the quality of pottery production was rather poor. Significantly, the local potters were not keen to make any improvement in the quality of their products (Gupta, 1988). The reason was that since the religious observances of the Hindus required earthen pots to be occasionally destroyed their pots. The thin flimsy pottery of the province (priced $\frac{1}{2}$ *pice* to 3 *pice* per ware) was served for different purpose. In this regards, there would be no demand for any superior quality and expensive pottery items. While the studying British records, it was noticed that most of the data was organized on the basis of revenue districts which existed at that time. Hence, for a study of the Ahom system, it would be prudent to take special cognizance of the district of Sibsagar in particular and the districts of upper Assam in general, as these had the highest concentration of the productive class of artisans (Kakoti, 2014).

In upper Assam during the initial part of the Ahom regime, the Kumar were traditionally engaged in the pottery industry opting it as their professional job. Sibsagar

and Lakhimpur districts were became as a prime places for the production of different types of earthenwares, which found on rare evidence. Though, the Kumar community tried to raise their economic position through the age old pottery industry. They felt themselves that their social and economic status was not raised or equal with the general people in the state. They occupied a high position, which was even higher than that of the Kumars who manually manufactured pottery by means of hand. The Brahmin performed the religious rites and rituals for them. It was examined in the observation during the Ahoms period that the potter communities in upper Assam garnered the core of *bhakti* rituals and as the uses of pottery tools was a must. They performed the religious rites with the help of Brahmin and people accepted food and drink that were served on pottery items made by them. The pottery items were also used for cooking purposes along with religious ceremonies. The pottery industry in the state was not very encouraging. Local pottery had mostly been replaced by the superior clay or porcelain goods, as utensils made of other materials and plastic goods were imported into the state from outside. The profits of the industry were meagre and most of the traditional potters were bound to leave the trade and shifted to other lucrative occupations.

There has been a venture attempted to study the pre-colonial pottery industry and the Kumar villages which considered pottery as their ancestral profession in the upper Brahmaputra valley. The Ahoms used the acculturation and assimilation process to substitute administration, society, revenue etc. particularly in an economy that covered the fulfilment of daily needs of human beings (Baishya, 2009). In both the banks of the Brahmaputra valley, covering Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts, most of the Kumar potters developed their pot making industry into a great extent due to availability of raw materials, want to dry fire wood for burning the raw products,

abundance of woods for making of boats, selling, marketing and preserving facilities for products in the different places of the region. Even, the tribal peoples were preferred their materials to be exchanged through the barter system. The Kumar potters were sold their pottery items by middlemen system till the formation of sale centres. The members of the Kumar families were engaged in practising different works. They were trained as workers since childhood being born in potter's family. There were also internal trade transactions including common people and the hilly tribes, those who were linked with rituals, cattle-herding people who needed to preserve milk in the pots, linked with tanti groups for keeping clothes etc. These activities were carried out through barter system.

Bhattacharya (1988) opined that in the medieval period the Kumar potters were belonging to the lower class status that produced potteries either by manipulation of hands or wheel. The Kumars in Assam belong to one of the sub-castes among the other professional communities. Originally, the Kumars might be simply an agriculturist class but further they were divided into a distinctive sub-caste in the later period. They were settled near the paddy fields, homesteads, ponds, mounds, refuge lands, and other provisions for productivity required a self-contained rural life. The villages of Salmara, Dakhinpat and Chinatoli on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra and Kakilamukh on the south bank were the largest villages in Sibsagar district. Likewise, Rupahimukh, Jajhimukh was formed the larger pottery manufacturing places in the district. Some places like Chinatoli, Salmora Dakhinpat in Majuli, Rupahimukh in Sibsagar were the original places of the Kumar in upper Assam. It was seemed that the Kumar people went to one village to another by boat or by a raft made from the banana tree. The people went to the markets by boats on particular market days during the rainy season, lands being submerged under water, the potters were used boats for business and

someone filled the hole of the boat for distempering, which is how the place came to be known as Salmora. The village Salmara was well known for the boat making business as well as pottery.

With regards to the Kumar villages of Lakhimpur district was found that a multitude of the people migrated from Chinatoli, Salmora in Majuli and also from Nimatighat. Due to some unknown fact they were shifted to Majuli. Female potters of all families in the Kumar villages were taken pottery industry as their substituted daily income. Compared to the total number of female potters, male potters were very few in number and engaged in the industry only for a period of three or four months in a year. Besides, the making of earthenwares in small sizes like toy lamps and other small pots were producing by them. Similarly, their daughters and sons were also helping mothers in household activities as well as the making of pottery works. Both daughters and sons also showed significant initiative to continue their age old crafts. The Assam chronicles throws sufficient light on this aspect suggesting that at least during the Ahom period, the pottery industry or crafts flourished in all parts of the Brahmaputra valley. The Ahom state provided economic basis opportunity through wet rice agriculture. It also subjugated people from the very beginning of their political domination. Later on, the common masses were converted into a surplus producing machinery in the interest of the state. The early part of medieval Assam the Ahom was undoubtedly economically very strong and highly concentrate of wealth by giving opportunity to continue the local handicrafts industry in the state.

The socio-cultural fabric of the valley was enriched by the presence of different professional community contributed by supplying daily need-based articles and consumed some subsistence requirements. The social structure revealed two divisions in

the Hindu caste system; Brahmins and Sudirs (Non-Brahmans). The Sudirs are further sub-divided into several castes groups such as *Kalita, Kayastha, Ganak, Kaibarta, Hira, Kumar, Jogi, Keots* etc. The Kumar were artisan classes brought from outside and settled in the valley. By all means, it entailed a long process of sustained arduous labour with the orientation to work. Apart from raising insights in this study many other vital problems needed to be resolved for which one needs an intensive investigation of the socio-economic life of the Kumar potters in the areas under study. For this purpose, an intensive survey of the demographic and economic traits of the Kumar community of all the villages located in the districts of upper Assam had been done so far. Their technique of land reclamation, unique system of labour utilization and use of efficient implements of the areas under study reveal what made them successful. The Kumar potters were dispersed over many districts of Assam and their root traces back to Aryan culture which had been spread across the valley of Brahmaputra in the ancient period.

The Ahoms encouraged them to use their simple handmade method of making earthenwares meant for issue of common necessary items for royal and religious purposes (Dutta, 2001). The period, therefore, witnessed a high yield and advancement for those sections connected with religion, art and crafts in the society. The numbers of Kumar villages located on the river-banks were brought under Ahom control for functional income and established through royal patronage in medieval period. The *paik* system, the Ahom was generated a steady income from taxes and tributes by exercising control over internal trade. The discourse derived from the surveyed Kumar households revealed some major indicators and the demographic and economic conditions featuring demographic traits in Ahom period, structure of family, literacy

level, economic status, occupational pattern, landholding, housing and also economic differentiation yielded results too.

A few sections of the potter community was assigned the task of supplying articles to the royal household and other state requirements; another section supplied articles to high officials; some were assigned to Satras (monasteries) and temples, and lastly those who made articles for the use of people in general (Barpujari, 1993). The articles of common use made by the Kumar potters were cooking vessels (*charu*), cups of different sizes (*mola*), small pots (*tekali*), and jars (*kalah*), small cups (*chaki*) or oil lamps, pipes and drums. Some of the pots and jars particularly those for the use of the royal household were often decorated with paintings. The pottery industry and handicrafts industry remained undeveloped on account of the lack of incentive for further demand beyond the level of local consumption. Such a situation was bound to occur in a state which pursued a policy of subsistence economy in which all efforts were directed towards producing goods just enough for local needs. The increasing number of people which were slow during the period, none the less impeded the growth of crafts and industries (Barpujari, 1993). It was also found that the urban centres of the Brahmaputra valley and even the temples of the state provided facilities to the Kumar potters for sold and exchange their pottery items through shops, houses and other amenities etc. The cities were decorated with wide perspectives, tools from clay throughout which the kings as well as the feudatories used to demand inscriptions of their names.

Under the study period, the foremost communication and trade system was run by the Kumar potters through boat. The banks of big rivers with full of boats were used for the purpose of trade and transportation. The simple earthenwares and utensils of daily use were made in almost every village in Assam. They made with simple clay on the traditional potter's wheel and baked in their traditional ways. The items commonly included pitchers and pots for storing water, cooking vessels, earthen mugs, plates and cups for drinking and eating objects for religious and ritual purposes and pots for growing plants. There was great variation in shapes and forms in different regions. The craftwork was so widespread that difficult to listed the places, forms and shapes. The artistic products were made with plain clay and glazed ceramic pottery by craftsmen in the regions. The ancient tradition of pottery or terracotta was flourishing in Assam in general and Sibsagar and Lakhimpur in particular. The pottery objects included figurines of Gods, Goddesses, items of daily use and decorative pieces. The pots were generally shaped on potter's wheels and after that they were decorated. The figurines were made by hand. In some areas in Assam, the potters manually moulded clay dough to make earthenwares without applying wheel. Some changes had been incorporated in the composition of the family when these substitute sources of income got a momentum in the contemporary uses in time and space.

The potters used different indigenous methods and techniques decorating and glazing earthen pottery. The pots and utensils were also decorated with designs of flowers, figures and geometrical patterns in bright colours. It was assumed that a threat hindered the existence of the terracotta craft and the pottery work in Assam. The Kumars were mostly employed in the traditional unorganized occupation of pottery. Throughout the state their traditionally identified secondary occupations were

agricultural activities, animal husbandry and pisci-culture which were primary in nature. Besides these weaving, net-making, rope making, basket making, boat-making were also their supplementary occupation. In many cases, the craft of pottery making became secondary in structure while trade and commerce and services were hereditary in nature.

In the Kumar villages of Chinatali, Salmara, Dhakinpat, Modaibill and Biringabari gaon in Majuli, the pottery industries were situated where clay and raw materials were easily available along with the trade routes. The products were distributed to the surrounding villages as well as important and big market centres such as Lakhimpur, Arunachal Pradesh, Sonitpur, Jorhat by boat and walking place to place. On the other hand, Dibrugarh, Sadiya-Saikhowa ghat in upper Assam of south bank, Lakhimpur and Dhemaj in north bank had been important market centres for indigenous earthenwares. In these centres, the potteries of Majulial production were highly sold in the markets. These potters were testified particular products like pitcher, flower pots and ordinary cooking pots that were available there. The potters also directly sold their wares on different big markets on market days by plying sheltered boats. The natural division of land, drawn by nature herself kept the hill tribes isolated from one another. The communication between the hilly place and the plains was not easy and therefore the Kumar potters were facing some difficulties for selling their manufacturing goods. In the midst of bewildering diversities there was at times unity which laid both the hill people and the dwellers of the plain to fight together against their common enemy. This perhaps explained the fact that no imperial invaders could conquer the land until the end of British colonialism (Rajkumar, 2000).

Some common features were shared by the Kumar and other community workers in Assam. There were some similarities in primary occupations like agriculture, pottery, weaving and tertiary, carpentry and secondary trade and commerce in nature. The study revealed that in the present state of Assam, which may be divided broadly into two river valleys, the Brahmaputra valley from Sadiya in the northeast to Dhubri in the west and by its tributaries on both sides of its bank and the Surma valley watered by the Surma still continued some important business through both the rivers. After a long period, the Kalitas gradually came to be known as Kumars in Assam. They chose land as their first choice of livelihood, keeping alive pottery industry. After the fall of the Pala dynasty the wealthiest and most powerful groups of people in the country were the temple builders known as *Kalita Kumar*. They mostly came from the Deccan side and settled in this state (Sharma, 1996; Medhi, 1992). They extended the kingdom to the west up to the Subansiri river and included the present North Lakhimpur sub-division and a portion of Majuli and the richest paddy growing area of Jorhat division. The socio-cultural and religious practises bore the pottery, production resources, clay, water, tempering materials, fuel etc.

The socio-economic condition of the Kumar potter was not as good as other castes during the study period, but geo-cultural factors and the socio-economic growth in medieval Assam perhaps might helped them to improved their day to day life through pottery industry. Assam being as a much paddy producing region made the majority of its people to depend on cultivation; therefore the Kumars production of pottery as a culture or system was not sufficient as a way of living for the poor potters. Generally, the Kumar potters in Assam could improve their socio-cultural condition after pot-making system took as their wage earning income. It was hoped that in the medieval

times new industrial methods and technology transformed the pot-making methods into an innovative money earning source among the Kumar potters of Assam. As far as residential patterns were concerned in the upper Assam had very various settlement patterns. The residential areas of upper Assam were concentrated in one place and the settlement was strictly maintained on the basis of caste. The houses of each caste were built close to one another and clustered together. In the Kumar villages, the housing condition of the people was very poor due to erosion led by flooded river. They lived in a very deplorable condition because of their abject poverty. They inhabited thatched houses including single tin roofed ones. The roofs and walls were made of bamboos, thatches and ikora i.e. walling reeds. These houses made along with a separate kitchen which built well and the walls could be easily broken.

The Kumar potters in the region began to adhere to pot making as a primary occupation that too in an isolated landmass detached from the mainland areas in the past. The potters of the upper Brahmaputra valley had remained fully engaged throughout the year in making pots since the ancient period. In this regard, it might be mentioned that the trade through river routes began with the emergence and flourishing handmade pottery is indicative of a long societal past. Thus, this hand-made craft industry became a rural tradition continuing from the past to the present.

In the pre-colonial period, among the different groups of the people in the society was practising of Saktisim which followed by the potter communities in Assam. To survive and have secure economic life, the Kumar potters felt the need of engagement in their pragmatic clay works. It was accredited by significance of proportional development of production, urbanization, monetary, market etc. Among these, the considerable emphasis was made on the level of production in the dynamics

of the overall economic scene. The Brahmaputra valley in the heartland of the state has many small rivers continuously flow through the pottery areas which relates to production, surplus and distribution of pottery items.

The economy of the early period of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam was essentially an agrarian economy. It was yet to flourish. The use of coins as a medium of exchange was limited. Therefore, the Kumar potters and their production suffered a lot of problems. It noted that the economic condition and technology in the pottery craft ensured a steady supply of production which allowed uses in the various festivals during the period. Religious traditions in the ancient period in Assam showed that these contemporary practises, rites and rituals were very much helpful for manufacturing of pots and clay goods for worship. The Kumar potters made their goods in the sense of daily worshipping Gods and Goddesses. For hundreds of years, the centre places of riverside areas were made into capitals of trade and marketing. They were known for their clay works from simple planters to spectacular urns, fountains and statues of saints. Not far from the past, one of the more revered firms produced majestic plaques for decorating the entrance/arch of religious places like the *temple, namghar, satra* etc. kept attraction in the different local artisans. Sometimes as per belief, during the inaugural ceremony of any institution of the state the people publicly used to hold a pot with water in front of the gate just to pose a cheerful gesture for the onlookers.

The pottery was a unique art celebrating great beauty. It was made using high technical skills by the Kumar potters of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts. In the Indian context, it was obviously found that there were many functions observed in the household lives of its people. In India and particularly in Assam the prefix “Bara Mahat Tera Puja” (thirteen rituals throughout twelve months) was commonly used. The

different ceremonies and functions of our society were used pottery items and most of the potteries were supplied by the Kumar potters of the study area. A close coordination of these functions was essential because of their complementary relationship with the Kumar potters.

In the pre-colonial period, the Ahoms were paid considerable attention for the development of the pottery industry in the Brahmaputra valley. Besides, many other things, concerted efforts at certain important pottery centres were met to improve the old and to develop new manufacturing techniques and processes with the ultimate objective of modernizing the industry. It was founded on sound economic system. It was an interesting phenomenon among the Kumar potters to have economic differentiation with respect to income. Earning differed among different groups of people i.e., backward castes, different occupational groups and different landholding categories and households. The main causes of their economic differentiations were poverty, disparity in income, inequitable distribution in means of production, occupational differences and disparity in development of infrastructure facilities among the Kumar potters of the concerned two districts.

The pot-making was mainly undertaken by the people of the Kalita caste during the medieval period of Assam. During the Ahom rule, the potters were divided into five 'classes' i.e., *Rajabhagiya*- those attached to the king's household, *Biltitia*-attached to the estates of the nobles, *Devaliya*-attached to the temples, *Rajahua*-those allotted to the public and *Satriya*-attached to the Satras (Barbaruah, 1981). The artisans supplied articles to the royal household, high officials, Satra, temples for the used of people in general within the districts. The profession of pottery, though mainly practised by the people of the Kalita caste, could be taken up by any other caste. The potters of different

parts of Assam produced various earthen vessels and wares like pitchers, pots, dishes, bowls, water-pots (lota), dishes with a leg (*ban*), jars (*mathiya*) and many others household goods.

Many potters closed down their traditional pottery industry and took up other professions during the later Ahom period. In spite of this, some potters continued their pottery craft in link with hereditary pursuits to eke out a meagre livelihood. The condition of the pottery industry was deteriorated during the pre-colonial period due to lack of finances, general competition by the cheap manufactured commodities imported from abroad. On the other hand, the lack of royal patronage, market constraints, lack of training facilities and out dated traditional methods of productions was the root cause for declining the age old industry in Assam. A few designs and techniques of the ancient pottery and medieval pottery were amalgamated to bring out new designs to meet the challenge. The prolific discovery of the ritualistic pottery (wheel-made) was rich in historical context (along with the varieties of Brahmanical sculptures at Ambari). The findings show that the pottery products supported the socio-cultural complexities denoting its utilitarian aspect. This aspect of pottery could be locally equated with the Kumars, the Hiras and other tribal potter communities of the medieval period. The pottery making among the Kumars was a feminine activity like the other potters and the tribal potters in Assam.

It also indicated that the Ahom kings brought some potters from outside state. They were introduced few techniques of pottery making system which relate to the wheel. The persons from Kalita and Koch castes were trained by those potters. These potters arrived in different parts of the state. Probably, the Kumars and the Hiras were already active at pottery work in different parts of the region. The local potters were not

adopting the wheel as it introduced from outside. In addition, the local traditional potters were not encountering any force or pressure to restrict outside earthen products. This tendency was still prevalent among indigenous potters in Assam. Although, a lot of new and popular types of earthenwares were introduced by Bihari and other potters but the Assamese local potters did not accepted their manufacturing methods. At the same time, one could not deny the fact that the Kumar of lower Assam partially applied the wheels like other potters of India (Ghosh, 1981). The aforementioned factors mentioned here that the techniques of making pottery are hand-made and wheel-turned. It developed independently by keeping pace with the socio-cultural, economic and environmental conditions which linked with each other to develop interrelationship with the indigenous artisans. Therefore, to visualize the overall development of pottery industry in the state was very difficult.

The goldsmith, blacksmith, weavers, brass-metal workers were played a significant role in the socio-cultural and economic life of the people in the medieval period. These handicrafts industries were continued their manual works to producing various goods. The wheel-made pottery associated with settled life related to agriculture in some form. The invention of the potter's wheel in ancient period connected with the earthenwares. The Kumar potters of Assam were the true representative of wheel-made pottery tradition. These potteries were distributed across the banks of the Brahmaputra from Majuli in the east to Goalpara in the west. In this connection it could be ascertained that pottery tradition was still alive in various districts of upper Assam with a long cultural heritage. The Kumar pottery was being an elemental material culture always provided means to understood social, cultural, economic and technological attainments in the Assamese society. On the other hand, the Kumar pottery produced

numbers of pots within a short span of time to fulfil local needs. The Kumar potters had no visual technology can be termed as a mechanical symbol. These mechanical symbols were preserved by the artisans in their lifetime and subsequently these were inherited by their next generation. The artisan just converted the inherited Kumar pottery form into ceramic objects. The Kumar pottery thus existed as an integral part of the Brahminical institution in different satras and religious institutions. Through, the involvement of their product in ritualistic purposes. It was noted from myths that the Kumar artisans among the Kumar villages associated some legends with the technique of pottery production. The local people believed that Goddess *Padma*, the creator of *Kumarmati* (soil used in Kumar pottery) directed Lord Brahma to create the Kumar, who made pottery for religious purpose. The *chak* (the potter's wheel) symbolised the identity and status of the Kumars. The study of Kumar pottery in the particular two districts revealed that technology acted as a vital and active force in shaping the social conditions as well as the social identity of the Kumars. The identity of the Kumar community did not remain in isolation; it was bound to become an integral part of the traditional socio-economic system. The Kumars laid marks in the medieval society with producing various types of pottery earthenwares by wheel made method.

The clay used by the Kumar artisans was sticky and almost black. The adhesive quality of the clay made it easily pliable. The Kumar potter in upper Assam most commonly used burnt husk as tempering material. The burnt husk was also added to maintain purity of pottery instead of using other non plastic and non-scored materials. The clay preparation process of the contemporary potters in Assam was diversified. It would be mentioned that the basic component of ceramic production of the Kumar contained some important principles. Pottery making was a traditional occupation of

groups of people who transmitted their skills orally from one generation to another. Scholars clearly stated two different opinions regarding the method of making pottery adopted by the Kumar potter. The first group of scholars led by N.C. Sarma opines that most probably, the Kumar came to learn the methods of shaping pots in the early period of Ahom rule. They shifted to different places to settle and earn their livelihood. In the medieval period, the potters were travelled from village to village for selling pots in different sizes which could be used for keeping milk or sticky curd (*atha doi*) to be used during Bihu and marriages. It is worth mentioning here that Nath (2009) stated that many traditional arts and crafts related industries were flourishing in the upper Brahmaputra valley since the ancient period. Among them wooden, bamboo, cane and silk works were popular in the region. But, the traditional craft of pottery was still practised and became the most prominent one. The expert potters in the vocation of pottery making were called the Kumars. They formed a class of the old residents in the Brahmaputra valley. The majority of Kumar potters were settled in the southern parts of Majuli island where soil was suitable for making of pottery. The raw materials (*Kumarmati*) were available ranging depth right up to 20ft in the Brahmaputra river. The craft gradually lost its reputation and very small margin of profit was derived owing to certain factors which had decreased its importance in the society (Nath, 2009).

The study of pre-colonial period in the Brahmaputra valley reveals that the Kumar potters used some old methods to producing pottery items. The whole process of pottery making consisted of few application in different techniques at every stages. The Kumar potters were manufacturing their articles in different form. These steps were mentioned in the following.

They first collected the fine white sand or clay (*Kumarmati*). It preserved for making of pottery items then started clay dough, making of *tapal*, *gol* and *dan*, finally given shape to make earthen potteries and preparing the *bhati* or furnace for baking earthen items and subsequently encased on soft platforms made of straw. This method helped the potters to manufacture earthen works. In the first stage, the adult male potter used to bring the white sand from the local river-base and store it near the house or courtyard in gara (trench) for preparing the final pottery.

In the second stage, the collection of the *Kumarmati* in the month of January and March (*Magha- Phagun*) was done with the help of *kodal* or spades, basket and khan or flat long wooden pieces. The making of pottery began with the worship of earth with betel- leaf and nut and agarbatti (incense sticks) for successful completion of their earthen work. The experienced potter would verify the colour of wet clay and start to give it a new shape.

In the third step, the Kumar potters kept the clay in the gara for making a layer of white sand in the pit. Both men and women participated in putting the clay up to certain level. Then, they made another layer of clay in the same way and thus the process of making one layer upon another took place in a continuous process. During the process, the local soil and jute bags were used to cover the clay. It took some time to attain its final shape.

The fourth stage was called the *matikhunda* or melting the clay. Clay was prepared by the women potters for making earthenwares. They used spade to break the lump of clay into fine pieces and water was sprinkled for making it soft. Then clay soil

was trashed uniformly with the help of gayen and mixed with water and white sand for preparing the suitable clay for making pottery items.

In the fifth stage, the Kumar potters became ready to produce the earthenwares. The Kumar potters brought *tapals* from *gara* to the courtyard for making small *gols* and disc-shaped plates, *chak* with pressure and movement of both palm and hands. They used wheel or *chak* for making pottery; some potters also used *dan* to manufacturing clay work. Thus, rigorous pain was taken by the Kumar potters in the process of making pottery goods in this stage.

In the final stage, after the used of the wheel or *chak*, the pottery vessels were put to mound the fire place or safely preserved in a particular place to be entirely fired. The earthenwares remained for a few days in the burning place and after that the female potters would colour the vessels. Depending upon the amount of available fuel the number of raw pots were decided to be baked on fire. Generally, the work was done at an interval of seven days. These earthen pots were sold in the market and the Kumar potters would earned some money for their livelihood.

The pottery industry was one of our ancient traditional household economic activities and it constitutes a very important sector of the state. The industry was an indispensable part of our rural economy. It also provided income and employment opportunity among the different caste groups in the medieval period. The products of different types were produced by the potter to be sold and used for domestic purposes along with use of religious purposed. A detailed list of different types of pottery used in Assam which was mentioned in the book *Pottery in Assam* by K. Handiuqe as depicted in the following table:

Table -1: Traditionally Uses of Pottery Items (Handique, 2005, pp.6-9)

<i>Sl No</i>	<i>Pottery Items</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
1.	Adhali or Adkalah	A small Pitcher
2.	Akashbanti	Lamps used in marriages and Diwali
3.	Akathia	A vessel for cooking rice and curry, the bigger size is known as the Dukathia
4.	Burmala	A bowl with a rim in curds and sugar are kept, the smaller size is called Mala.
5.	Bhuriki	A bin for storing gains. The larger variety is known as the Mathia.
6.	Chakali	A flattish and shallow vessel for cooking curry. The deeper type is known as Paticharu.
7.	Chaki	An Earthen ware lamp lit with mustard oil and a wick.
8.	Charakdan	A hollow of high cylinder used as a lamp stand.
9.	Chilim	An earthen ware funnel for smoking tobacco or hemp, it also used as Bhang-khuwa for smoking.
10.	Charu	A vessel for used cooking rice among the poor family
11.	Daskathia	A vessel for cooking for two or four persons
12.	Dama or Daba	Earthen ware vessels for making drum by stretching hide over the month
13.	Dhupdani	A stick of fire

14.	Gacha	A lamp stand shaped on the wheel and often decorated with appliqué ornaments
15.	Jui-dhara	A fire stove or baked clay
16.	Kalah	A decanter shaped vessel for storing liquid or semi-liquid substance like gur, oil, milk also water. Its usual capacity is four to five gallons.
17.	Khampti-haria	A special vessel for kept over a pot of water in which water is boiling. These are made by Assamese potter for khamti people.
18.	Mala	A similar sized charu for religious and ritualistic uses.
19.	Mala-Charu	A small tray-like vessel for distributing eatables or prasada during festivals.
20.	Mathia	A large oval-shaped vessel with a narrow mouth and is used for storing grains and clothes.
21.	Mridanga	It is known as the khol. It is also called as long drum
22.	Nad-pat	These are terracotta well-rings.
23.	Nadia	It is basin used for storing sweetmeats. Though shaped like a Charu it is stronger and has a rim.
24.	Nagara	A musical instrument like a small size drum.
25.	Piala	It is a shallow khola with a wider mouth called as Beria or Deg.
26.	Sarai	It is raised tray for offering food to idols or to respectable persons.

27.	Tekali	A small size kalah is used for storing water.
28.	Thali	It is a huge vessel which is used for cooking during feasts or for boiling sugar-cane juice for preparing gur.

It was already mentioned that the pottery industry was mainly a household industry among the traditional industries of the medieval Assam. This industry was provided full time occupation to the artisans who produced potteries as commercial goods. Most of the products were sold in the markets and only a small percentage of the products used in domestic purposes in the state. The Kumar potters came to know about the quality of clay from the foot prints left imprinted in wet soil during the rains which retained the same shapes when it got dried up. This curious incident made Kumar potters to realise on clay and given shaped in wet condition, retained the same even after dried off. The earliest pots were shaped limiting to baskets, gourds and other vessels of wood and stone of pre-agricultural times. Basketry might have preceded pottery as there exists some closeness between the methods of manufacturing pottery by coiling similar to and that of basketry (Mirmira, 1987).

It is clear from the foregoing study that though only a few poor artisans practised pottery from past to medieval period. It was retained its glory of being one of the most ancient industries of the districts. Pottery industries were flourishing due to the dedication bore by poor Kumar potters. Among traditional vocations pottery industry had a gradual decay due to political insecurity resulted by the downfall of the Ahom kingdom that laid to the disruption of the old social order. The patronage of kings and nobles often leveraged the growth of pottery industry. On one hand, due to lack of such

patronage pottery had slow development in the region. On the other hand, the advent of British rule into Assam brought the impact of western culture to be nailed upon the lives and habits of the native people. Impact of industries from the west and competition of machine made goods coming from the west along with the British iron rule led to the decay of pristine industries specially pottery industry.

The pottery industry was gradually transformed. The basic structure and functions of traditional production of the Kumar potters in the upper Brahmaputra valley specially in the Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts radically changed. The change in society and individual life of the Kumar potters in Assam laid to deterioration of pottery industry as well. They maintained an eco-friendly relationship with nature. Pot-making methods always used a natural way and thus no pollution in the state and the country had been seen. The rapid growth of pot-making had a positive effect on the environment paving road map for a better society. Nevertheless, concerned study reveals that there were some shortcomings of the industry - lack of financial help or provision of facilities to the potters, absence of technological development and proper markets during that period. The Kumar potter strictly followed the traditional pottery making techniques and maintained division of labour on the basis of gender. The stronger the person was heavier the burden had been laid upon his shoulder. To sum up, it would be a positive outcome of studying the pottery industry for ushering its future needs. The Kumar potters of upper Assam who inhabited the region since the pre-colonial period turned the petty pottery craft into a profitable occupation both in the rural and the urban areas of Assam respectively.

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CHAPTER-III

POTTERY IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Pottery was one of the oldest crafts in the world in its widest sense. Pottery includes all objects made from clay and hardened by fire (*“Encyclopaedia Britannica,”* 1996). Abraham (1964) mentioned that the production of pottery became important only when people took to cultivation. They preserved seeds and roots in the pottery items and became growers of crops. Time and experience brought out various form of making of pottery. In this chapter an attempt has been made to study circumstances that led to the development of pottery industry in the hands of the Kumar potters in the colonial period and favourable conditions for the pottery industry kept on changing tremendously was examined extensively. The making of pottery industry and status of Kumar potters dramatically underwent accordingly some changes in the Ahom period and afterward the colonial rule in Assam had been noticed. The colonial rule victimised the poor Kumar potters. Under the colonial power new industries had grown up in all the sides and corner of the state. Every society tends to change in the wake of a new political as well as economic domination under a powerful ruler. Similarly, the colonial period marked the economic control by the British in Assam. Consequently, the rural and local handicraft industries were set up in different parts of Assam excepting the pottery craft on the ground that it yielded less profit. This period has been taken because it covers colonial Assam and therefore provides ample scope for study of the self sustaining economy of Assam which transition into a colonial economy and the resulting consequences and impact on society.

Pottery had been practised in the north eastern part of India and specially in Assam revering its age old sanctity. It was one of the famous rural based industries in the state. The age-old tradition which had been handed down from generation to generation played a vital role in maintenance of the socio-economic and cultural life of the Kumar potters of Assam, particularly in rural areas. The establishment of British rule in Assam brought modernization and technology led mechanism, transforming every sphere in the society. The emergence of new mode of technologies altered the out dated Assamese handmade pottery industry and provided an impetus for the evolution of the modern society. The pace of technological reform and change in traditional arts and crafts of Assam was however very slow. During the colonial period, the pottery industry remained stagnated in all sides and corner in the state due to implementation of different machine made goods brought from outside Assam. The foreign goods were supplied and manufactured by the British businessman or their stake holders. Even, the bearer of native prestige took pain in the making of pottery in the region and thereby virtually played an important role in manoeuvring the utility of rural based traditional society.

It is out rightly clear based on historical records that the community based way of life of the potters in the state bear the glorious fame of the traditional arts and crafts of Assam. The glory of the craft reached its zenith under the patronage of Ahom rulers as mentioned in the earlier chapter. With the advent of the British Raj in Assam, 1826 A.D., the indigenous crafts faced tough competition from the machine made products and gradually lost its past glory. In this period new industries were set up by the colonial power like oil, tea, coal, timber, iron, brass-metal factories giving a huge setback to the indigenous pottery industry as well as local handicrafts. Before the

coming of the British in Assam, the pottery was only a household craft and limited artisans pursued these traditional crafts. Due to lack of market facilities and bazaar the pottery goods were purchased or sold through the boat ways in different parts of the village. Moreover, there were no enterprises or entrepreneurs in the upper Brahmaputra valley to extend the market for its products. The development of industrialization had tremendous impact on the rural handicraft industry in Assam. The pottery industry in Assam provided self employment and elevated the standard of living of the Kumar potters. The aspiring rural and urban people comprised the work force of the industry. Moreover, pottery industry was playing a vital role in the lives of the people who were living by the river side by providing employment. In the upper Brahmaputra valley there was link between various big or small pottery factories. Thus, making of pottery items became a self sustaining trade for the Kumar potters in upper Assam. The traditional pottery marked no change despite the modernization brought by the colonial power.

During the medieval Assam, trade and commerce played an important role in the economic development of the Brahmaputra Valley. The nineteenth century was a specially significant period in respect of trade and commerce. It witnessed the collapse of the Ahom monarchy, which had ruled Assam for over six centuries and the entry to the British, who had stepped into filling the political void in the kingdom. The change in from the old order for the new was characterized by a complete overhauling of the administrative machinery, which heralded far-reaching political, economic and social changes in Assam. During Ahom rule, the village economy was self-sustaining. Monetary economy was unknown and trade was carried out through the barter system. Within the overall framework of a subsistence economy, where surplus was limited,

scope for trade and commerce was naturally restricted. The trade and commerce of the Brahmaputra Valley in the first quarter of 19th century has been aptly summed up in an official report-

The Assamese had very few wants, they lived principally upon rice and were cloth in their own silks and cotton and none of them had ever been traders nor are they now, nor had they any other domestic manufacturers. The trade of the province was consequently confined to the sale of such articles as would procure for them the salt of Bengal and the few luxuries and necessaries they wanted, not obtainable in their country. (Dasgupta, 1985, p.239)

In Assam, handicraft and handloom industries were basically popular among the common people specially in the upper Brahmaputra Valley. Pottery was once the simplest yet the most versatile of all arts. It was the simplest because of its being primitive and versatile because of its abstract nature. Historically, it was one of the first handmade arts. It is worth mentioning a new craft had been added during last half of the 18th century which had created a completely new dimension in the field of pottery industry. During the study, it has been found that a potter community migrated from East Bengal and settled down in the Western part of Assam. Later on, they were recognized as an indigenous potter community of the state. This community of potters were called Pals who settled down in the Western Assam i.e., Asharikandi in Dhubri district.

The local handicrafts in Assam were neglected under the colonial regime and the Assamese craftsmen suffered a harsh fate during that era. It was also observed that most of the Kumar villages used wheel for production of potteries. Their old traditional

technique almost became unpopular among their children; therefore the new generation of Kumar people did not preserve this craft either as primary or secondary means of livelihood. The Kumar potters were still practising the pottery trade in a small scale. Of course, the economic conditions of the Kumar potters were not satisfactory. Generally, the Kumar potters made their pottery on wheel which was primarily a masculine craft. The female contributed their share by giving a helping hand in making pots. The occupational mobility had been taken up by the male potters who switched to excel in the profession. The economically handicapped male potters and widows also took this industry as a mean of subsistence. The potters were lived in the rural areas in different groups. The presence of the potters in a particular place depended mainly on the availability of good quality clay (*kumarmati*) favourable for the smooth running of the trade. In some cases, during the colonial era, the potters had to buy special clay from other places as all types of clay were not suitable for the preparation of pottery goods i.e., utensils. Such clay was found specially in the alluvial tracts. The quality of clay was not similar in all the places of the region. In lower Assam (Barpeta and Kamrup districts) clay was highly sandy while in Sibsagar district it was exceptionally good for the manufacturing of the pottery items. In the upper Brahmaputra valley, blackish clay locally known as *Kumarmati* or *atha letia mati* was used by the Kumars. The name is derived from the Assamese word *atha* owing to its gum like sticky nature.

The earthenwares used for domestic purposes were generally sold in the daily market or in the *hat* (weekly market). Pottery industry tasted least development due to adoption of old and odd method of manufacturing yielded minimum profit and so the British paid no attention. The potters used to supply loads of earthen pots by boat as it was safer and easy to trade thereby through the upper Brahmaputra Valley.

The River Borne Trade Reports from 1880-81 to 1898-99, mention that the main items of imports into Assam were cotton twist and yarn (European), cotton twists and yarn (Indian), cotton piece goods (European), cotton piece goods (Indian), gram and pulse, gunny bags, manufactured leather, beers, spirits, liquors, brass, iron, kerosene oil, fruits, coconut and other oils, opium, paper and pasteboard, *ghee*, salt and sugar. While the exports from Assam were coal, cotton (raw), jute (raw), stick lac, husked rice, brass, linseed, rape and mustard, castor, silk (raw), lime, tea seed, tea, rubber, ivory, oranges and potatoes. As data has found from the report it was seen that during this colonial period the maximum numbers of items imported and exported to the region which resulted the rural industries and indigenous peoples were suffered a lots.

Hunter account sated that the Kumar potters as well as Assamese people of Sibsagar were not trading people and nearly everyone raised enough on his own holding to provide for the wants of his own family and if he fell short of anything, he generally borrowed from his neighbours. For salt, they went to the market or *hat*. As the demand for grain rose in the district for the consumption of the people themselves, there was no excess for export. There were no fairs or markets in Sibsagar similar to those held in lower Assam and whatsoever trade was done in the district was in the hands of Marwari merchants. Gradually, the imports comprised of mainly salt, oil, brass, utensils, opium, exports consisted of tea, silk, mustard seed and cotton. Corroborating this, Allen (1915) observed that the Assamese have no commercial aptitude, and the natives of Sivasagar have allowed the whole of profits of the wholesale and of a large portion of the retail trade to be absorbed by the foreigners (p.191). The principal men of business are the

Keyas; the astute Marwari merchants whose shops are to be found at three headquarter towns.

There is referenced to attempts made by certain Assamese persons to establish *hats* (market). For instance, Maniram Dewan established a *hat* at Arjunguri of Sibsagar. In 1881-82, four *hats* were held in the district of Sibsagar of which the *hat* at the *sadar* station was daily and the rest bi-weekly. In every garden had a shop where the labourers could purchase almost everything that they were needed. The local supplies were obtained from numerous weekly markets held in different parts of the district. The most important of these were at Nazira, about nine miles southeast of Sibsagar and at Mariani and Titabar in the Jorhat subdivision (Hunter, 1998). The Muhammadan traders also sold their goods in the market centres like as furniture, hardware, yarn, utensils and thread from Bengal.

Thus, within a few years of British occupation, the pattern and nature of trade and commerce in the Brahmaputra valley underwent tremendous changed. The development of modern industries, like tea, coal and oil created new demands and new markets in the global economic map. The volume of trade increased spectacularly but the nature of that trade changed dramatically. Assam once an exporter of finished products became an importer of finished goods and an exporter of raw materials. Monetization of the economy resulted in an increasing emphasis on cash crops and markets developed within the various communities and along the trade routes in response to the growing demands.

According to Hunter clearly mentioned that the Kumar in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts manufactured vessels using wheel since past to present, like other

Kumar potters of Assam. In both the districts, a few Kumar villages practised their ancestral industry. Only people of five or six villages were practised pottery making as their primary occupation. Many villages of Kamalabari, Baghchung, Kaliapani, Selenghat, Gaurisagar, Amguri, Demow, Dikhowmukha, Dakhinpat, Salmora and Kamarbandha took the pottery making craft as the secondary occupation. Another point is to be noted that out of these villages only a few villages practised pottery industry as a primary source of daily income otherwise majority of potters switched to cultivation deeming it more rewarding than their traditional pottery making industry.

In the upper Assam, trade was handled by the colonial merchant as well as outside businessman. Hunter stated that there was only one fair in Lakhimpur which was established by the government at Sadiya. Annually hill tribes assembled there to receive government presents and bring down with them skins, musk-pods, wax, bamboos and cane mats to barter for salt, beads, ironware, cooking pots etc. The Sadiya fair was used more as a means of maintaining political communication with the neighbouring hill tribes, rather than as a channel of distribution for articles of trade. Important *hats* were located at Tengakhat, Nagaghuli, Chabua and Dangori. Although the major trade was in the hands of Marwaris, few Muhammadans traders were active in Sadiya, Doomduma, Margherita, Jaipur, Khowang and North Lakhimpur. Most of the frontier trade was transacted at Sadiya and North Lakhimpur in which the cultivator could dispose of their surplus products, through barter. The principal imports were rubber, ivory, wax and musk.

During the colonial period the social position of the Kumar potters toppled down. The Kumars were actually a sub caste belonging to different castes whose ancestors are remembered to have made pot or pottery articles using wheel which was

already mentioned in the earlier chapter. In the social hierarchy, the Kumar potters rank was almost similar to ordinary Kalitas. They were generally distributed all over the state but particularly majority of Kumar people settled in the Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts. So, the title Kumar is based on occupation rather than ones genealogy. It may be mentioned here that the undivided Sibsagar district was the centre of different industries, pottery being one. From the study, it could be mentioned that Kumar potters did not belong to any other caste group than the Kalitas in the entire district. Hamilton (1987) says that many Kalitas were engaged as black-smiths, goldsmiths, coppersmiths, carpenters, garland makers and barbers etc. The Census Report of 1891 gives the numerical strength of the different sub-castes of the Kalitas as *Big kalita* 47,388, *Little Kalita* 6,522, *Potter Kalita* 4,081, *Florist Kalita* 505, *Dancing Kalita* 2,602, *Barber Kalita* 2,137 and *Unspecified* 159,371 respectively. The Census Report has revealed that the artisan Kalitas are similar to the *Potter Kalitas*. Andrew Cantile mentioned that a Kumar like other sub-caste can attain a higher social status on becoming agriculturist by renouncing pottery making considering it to be uneconomical. Many people of Kumar community of the two districts became mainly agriculturalist for fear of losing their very existence. In fact, these people now do not have any connection with their age-old traditional and inherited pottery industry except the Kumar potters. During the pre-colonial and colonial period the Kumar potters of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts retained their old method of pottery production using the wheel. In fact, the wheel symbolized their identity. Saraswati (1979) has pointed out that the method and techniques of pottery making was developed in South India through the ages and later spread to the Eastern India i.e., Orissa, West Bengal and Assam respectively. There are many similarities as far as the method and techniques of pottery making was concerned,

but the Assamese potters basically the Kumar potters used unique methods which had been not found in other parts of India.

The colonial trade with the neighbouring state were flourished in all part of the region. The Kumar pottery products were also sold by the potters in different part. In the same time, British continued internal and external trades with the principal imports from the frontier tribes into the Brahmaputra valley were agricultural products, some minerals and forest products. These were wax, musk, chillies, ginger, pepper, *munjit*, limestone, oranges, coal, blankets, amber, ivory, potatoes, cotton, rubber, smelted iron, rhinoceros horn, cattle, sheep, yarns lac, birds, monkeys, small shaggy ponies, betel nuts, honey and boats. Except rice, the chief exports to frontier tribes were products such as cotton twist, cotton piece goods, and silk cloth, glass other kinds, brass and copper, iron other silver, metals, oils, opium, brass utensils, beads and false pearls, salt and glass. In the case of external trade with Bengal, imported items were mainly finished goods and the exported items were raw materials. Imports included cotton piece goods, gram and other pulses, manufactured leather, metals, kerosene and other oils, salt, *ghee*, dried fruits, coconuts, sugar and *gur*, tobacco, ganja, linseed, paper and pasteboard, gunny bags, brass paper and pasteboard beers, spirits, liquor, dyes and tans, dressed hides of cattle and castor oils. Small quantities of betel nuts, chillies, *jowar* and *bajra*, small quantities of cotton (raw) were also imported from western Bengal. Exports from Assam were mainly tea, jute (raw), cotton, silk, rubber, mustard and rape seeds, mats, lime and shell lac, wax and tea-seed, brass (wrought), linseed, *til*, castor, timber, husked rice, dried fish, paddy, oranges, potatoes, brass, raw hides of cattle, ivory, stone and coal.

In the Brahmaputra valley, local handicrafts industries were continuing as bell-metal, weaving, pottery, goldsmiths, bamboo craft etc. but in spite of these industries

the discovery of tea, coal, oil, minerals and timber made it as an important area for commercial exploitation and the fertility of agricultural land, induced the company gradually to maximize the revenue. However, the predatory raids of the hill men on the plains continued and the colonial government embark on a policy to bring them under control. To expand their business, British passed the border line permit, through which it restricted the entry of the plains people into the tribal hills and thus minimized the contact between the hills and the plains. The British government took the initiative to bring the tribes to the annual fairs, which were regularly held along the foothills. By the new trading system the British power controlled local markets.

The pottery production in this period was categorised many divisions in upper Assam as mentioned below: Firstly, the items used for domestic purpose; secondly, items used for religious and ceremonial purposes and thirdly, toys and decorative items which were basically used for interior beautification. As mention here, in general, items for domestic purpose were consumed by the Kumar potters. The following key items were largely used by the Kumar in domestic purposes for cooking and storing as follows-

- i. *Kalah* (pitcher for carrying and preserving water)
- ii. *Molacharu* (wide mouthed cooking vessel)
- iii. *Ghati* (pot for carrying liquid)
- iv. *Tekali* (small pitcher for preserving goods)
- v. *Mohajani* (storage vessels for liquour)

Apart from these items, the Kumar potters also used different vessels for daily use. The Kumar potters generally produced earthenwares for ritualistic purposes and some of these items were also used for utilitarian purposes as followed as under below:

- i. *Kalah*- for storing water
- ii. *Ghat or Tekali*- miniature vessels used for ritualistic purpose
- iii. *Chaki*- earthen lamps used for both temple and household shrines in some specific ceremonies
- iv. *Gocha*- lamp stand used for domestic as well as ritualistic purpose
- v. *Sahashradhara*- multi hold lamps usually required in the temple and marriage ceremonies
- vi. *Dhupdani*- incense burner used for domestic and ritualistic purpose
- vii. *Nagara*- musical instrument used in the temple for community prayer
- viii. *Chilim*- traditional earthen pipe used for smoking tobacco.

The Kumar potters produced a few other pottery items for religious purposes besides these ritualistic items. The decorative products and toys were specially moulded by the women folk of the potter families. These items were later polished and painted. Some of these were either sun-baked or fired. Some toys had the red ochre either all over the body or on the selected parts of the body. Some had designs made with white coating in thick lines or combination of both. The toys with human figure were very common in upper Assam. In some areas, generally the figure of a women with a child or without child are found in plenty, on the other hand, the decorative toys with animal figures like elephant, horse, buffaloes, dogs, cats, *deers*, birds etc. were found in the upper Assam during the colonial period. Even some toys with animal figures had riders on their back adding to their attraction as children's toys. Although, mould were not

used to make toys, in few cases toys were shaped with the help of *saach* (dice), such as boat on wheels, monkey on wheels, ashtray and fishes were shaped in dice.

With the coming of the British the entire economy of the state was gradually changed and the absence of demand of indigenous craft helped the foreign products to capture the market as well as daily life of the people in Assam. The local pottery industry remained stagnant due to the inadequacy of capital investment and slow growth of income. The pottery industries were neglected to make way for new enterprises which were entirely European in nature and profit oriented. Thus, the traditional economy of Assam was totally disrupted and new pattern of economy resulted in considerable growth but at the cost of indigenous industries. Hence, the pottery industry in the upper Brahmaputra valley suffered extensively. In the same time, the local crafts that dealt with bell-metal, copper, brass and earthenware like as pottery suffered from the brunt of colonial exploitation. Like many other states of India, Assam had the vast provinces with decaying handicrafts industry.

The different forms of pottery were used as household production that located exclusively within the potters houses during the study period. The wheel was discovered during the Neolithic period probably with the development of transport system. The wheeled pull cart was ably utilised by the domestic animals. Since domestic animals were available the use of wheeled vehicles had become popular in the province (Herksovit, 1974). Further, it was stated that when the utility of the wheel for pottery making became apparent, this activity became male task owing to hard toil. These are some generalised statements about the origin and development of pottery industry in Assam particularly in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts was quite different to comparison other parts of country. As a matter of fact, in order to look into the pottery

industry in upper Assam, it is desirable to examine the socio-cultural, economic and religious aspects, utility etc. with which the artisans connect themselves during the process of pottery making in the past.

Despite availability of the machine made products specially utensils of different shape and size were imported from neighbouring states in large scale. The pottery industry in Assam, particularly in the latter half of the period under study was degraded. Besides, the growth of modern industries revival of the traditional industries was considerably significant. In fact, the share of rural industries in providing full time occupation in the rural sector had become insignificant in the colonial period. The rural based industries collapsed and the natives were compelled to settle in local areas with agriculture as the primary occupation. Amongst others, lack of technical improvement and tough competition were two major factors responsible for the state of underdevelopment of the traditional industries, specially pottery industry which could not attract labour or capital. As a result, by the end of the colonial period, the rural base industrial economy was sharply divided between the capital intensive plantation and the subsisting agriculture sector with traditional industries (Guha, 1991). Under these circumstances, lack of income generating avenues put pressure on pottery industry to merely make day to day household goods, particularly since commercialization in that sector was very limited. However, in order to understand the extent of underdevelopment or decay of the industries and its impact on the pottery industry in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam examination of its annexure with the British rule was a responsible factor.

In Assam, the brass-metal, bell-metal and copper vessels continued to be manufactured even Kumars too made pottery earthenware for consumption and needs of daily life. Due to non-availability of raw materials Kumar potters in the two districts faced problems. So, the dark clay was used by the potters as it was usually found in the banks of the streams. The wheel was used for rough-shaping of all articles except well-rings and flat or saucer-like utensils. There was equal division of labour between men and women of the family. Women mostly without wheel manually conducted the final shaping and polishing of earthen pots (Gait, 1998). The product was mainly rough in texture. It was obvious that these products could not retain their market-share being incompetent in facing the Bengal pottery as well as the cheap substitute brass utensils. Gait (1998) also rightly observed that the articles which are still manufactured in the Assam consist of cheap utensils of common daily use, the making of which requires no special skill and on which the cost of freight places imported wares bear disadvantages as compared to those made locally. Although apparently the demand of native products was greater locally, the low level of technology or skills, as referred to by Gait, indicates lack of improvement in the methods of manufacturing over the time. Whereas three quarters of a century before Hamilton had referred to as metal casting, that particular branch of skill was no longer used. They worked on the supplied metal with very ordinary tools. He further stated that more intricate work on enamelling was done in neighbouring states during the colonial period. The available trade statistics of Bengal of the year 1908-09 showed that it as a leading export item, along with stick lack, raw cotton, ivory, bell-metal vessels, iron hoes and Indian madder etc. Bhattacharya (1982) is clearly stated that the technology involved in the pottery industry was quite low which underwent very little change and a limited supply of

pottery production, to some extent; account for the widespread use of wooden or bamboo-made tools, utensils became popular among the different people. Popularity of iron goods used among the people also caused degradation of the age old industry in the two particular districts of Assam. Like the rest of Eastern India the use of metals was mostly restricted to the shaping of artisanal tools. As a result, the scale of production was limited, particularly in industries like gold washing, iron smelting, salt manufacturing and pot making industry. There was not much scope for the development of such indigenous industry. Blacksmiths, basket makers or the potters carried on their crafts essentially at primary level during the colonial period. Thus, technology acted as the determinant of change in the production organisations. None of these industrial features appear to have qualified for ushering in any form of higher production organisation. It has been noted generally that there was an increase in the commercial activities in the Brahmaputra valley and some places of both districts following British annexation but unfortunately the pottery industry remained in the same level of production in the areas.

Gupta (1988) mentioned that the manufacturing processes in pottery industry were simple and lasted for shorter duration and involved low cost. Hence, more current capital was not required to the manufacturing processes. The production process of pottery items by the Kumar potters involved different steps in the colonial period in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. The first step of manufacturing of potteries was the preparation of clay which became the basic component. It passed through different steps as accordingly these are the followings:

Cleaning: Cleaning means the unwanted and foreign particles are removed from the clay (*kumarmati*).

Pulverizing (grind, smash): In this stage, the slices of clay are pounded thoroughly.

Mixing: After pulverizing come actual making of clay. The soil used for pottery making is sticky and non-pliable. It made easily pliable, sand and husk also mixed in an appropriate proportion.

Levitation (pitch): In this stage, the clay powder is mixed with water and the clay is allowed to absorb the water, so this mixture is kept there for a few days.

The implements which are used by the Kumar potters of the two districts during the surveyed period were found as simple and easily available. These are the followings- Wooden mortar (*Khundana*): It is a beating tool used by the Kumar potters for crushing the raw materials. It has been found that all the Kumar potter families of Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts used wooden mortar to produce their products.

Wooden beater (*Pitan*): It is a beating tool made by wood or bamboo. It is also an important tool of production. The wooden beater is locally known as *pitan*. It has been found in both the districts of the study areas..

Bamboo sieve (*Chalani*): Locally, it is known as *Chalani* or Bamboo Sieve and used to separate the unwanted materials from the raw materials. It also used by the potters of the two districts of upper Assam.

Scraper (*Chachani*): *Banhar Chanchani* is locally known as Scrapper. Among the Kumar potters of the study area scrapper is spun out of thin bamboo wands. The scrappers were used to scrap off the unwanted clay from the body of a leader hard pot.

Anvil (*Athali, Afari*): Anvil or *athali* is a tool made of clay is known as *Baliya* in Assamese. It used for hammering the pottery utensils for giving it a proper shape. The pottery households of the surveyed districts use anvil for making pots.

Polisher (*Majani*): The Kumar potters of the two districts as well as of upper Assam used the polishers to make some fashionable items. This polishing method was also used in all the pottery factories or households in Assam.

Cotton cloth (*Fatakani*): During the manufacturing of pottery items cotton cloth were generally used by the Kumar potters as smoother. The cotton cloth was well known locally as *Fatakani*.

Gunny bags (*Basta*): Gunny bag (jute bags), locally called as *Basta* which widely used to keep the pottery products. In the small unit of pottery production used this bag for preserving their items.

Wooden plank (*Takta*): The wooden plank was called as *Takta*. Wooden plank used as stand for the display of finished pot items. This product was easily found in the pottery production centres of upper Assam.

Goswami (2017) stated that colonialism has had a tremendous and far reaching influence on the contemporary world. The colonial penetration in Assam and the neighbouring hill areas was accompanied by sweeping political, economic and social changes resulting in a radical transformation of the region within a very short time. It

had been seen in isolation that many of the changes were positive. But the overall colonial framework cast underdevelopment that accompanied imperialist forces. The former autonomy of the villages was eroded; indigenous crafts declined; the introduction of monetary economy and systematic revenue maximization led to escalating poverty while industrialization resulted in dramatic demographic changes. Along with all these changes, some improvements in transportation and communication network which broke down the isolation of the provinces, both physically and metaphorically, and opened them up for new forces, ideas and thoughts to percolate. The cumulative impact of all this was immense and far-reaching. In the colonial period the economic structure of Assam was rural based society and in fact agriculture was the prime occupation combined with other trades. There were many references to weavers, spinners, blacksmiths, potters, goldsmiths and workers engaged in ivory, wood, dyes, hide and cane. Almost, the people were self employed and manufactured their products at home, generally for their own use. There was little specialization and indigenous crafts formed an integral part of every household. Spinning and weaving, for instance, were a part of every work meant for women irrespective of caste or class. Similarly, the extraction of mustard oil and jaggery from sugar cane was generally carried out in individual households. The little specialization that did existed in the production of goods like bell metal, utensil, pottery and gold jewellery. Some of the notable industries dealing with cotton, gold washing, silk and iron-work were important during the Ahom period. The blacksmith or *Kamar* were mostly *Kalita* and *Koches* (Bhuyan, 1987). In other words, the role of the pottery industry in generating gainful employment opportunities and utilization of the available natural resources for the economy and man power planning of the state was still missing. The most important reason for the

unsuccessful performance of many pottery units was that the concerned entrepreneurs rather than choice were forced by the pressure of unemployment to choose such a field in which they were not well equipped. As such, the lack of enthusiasm and spirit to acquire the joy of success made such unit an ultimate loser.

However, the position of pottery industry in the pre-colonial Assam as presented in the earlier chapter. It can be delineated, as in other parts, in pre-colonial Assam, history shows that the upper Assam partially subscribed to its tradition, either by reinforcing it or by presenting it as uniquely able to accommodate and absorb variety. During the study period, availability of the source-materials was not enough for detailed understanding of the wealth of the states in northeast India. The information about household materials, production of earthenware, extraction of clay and redistribution of necessary crafts via barter system, economy in the early part of medieval period was enshrouded in uncertainty. To define the pottery of this period, the scholars use the both theoretical and historical approach of understanding to focus on the economic as well traditional growth of the pottery industry. To survive the security of the economic surplus, people felt the need of society and envisaged by it to pragmatic solution. It is accredited by the significance of favourable development of productions, urbanization, monetary, market, feudalism etc. Among these, considerable emphasis has been placed on the level of production in the dynamics of the overall economic scene. The Brahmaputra valley is the heartland of the state of Assam, where many small rivers continuously flow through the hills supplying opportunity for transportation with the local trade.

In the colonial period, Sibsagar was essentially a rural district of prosperous hamlets in the upper Assam. The people gained their livelihood, either entirely or partly, from cultivation or by working as labourers in the tea gardens and a very few natives of the district took up trade as a means of livelihood, little patches of durable land were cultivated by themselves and from this their household wants were supplied (Hunter, 1998). In the Dikrong valley near Sadiya town, numerous debris of earthen vessels were found, these remains totally differ in shapes from those used by other inhabitants of Assam but closely resemble the earthen wares of Gangetic India. It can be stated that a well developed pottery industry flourished and lasted for a period of hundred years in Assam. It was typologically and also technically different due to its resemblance with the north Indian pottery. It was made by turning wheel. In absence of ethnic sister descendants, it could not be ascertained whether the trait was indigenous or the potters were imported to Assam from the Gangetic belt of India (Choudhury, 1987). In the book *Asomar Lokkala* mentions that the use of clay wares was prevalent in Assam from very ancient times. These potteries were used mainly by the people living in the plain areas. Potteries are found to be used for religious as well as domestic purposes. Though pottery associated with the Hira and the Kumar spread over many places in Assam, some villages or localities distinguish themselves from the former two groups depending on method of pottery works i.e. wheel made and handmade. It is also worth mentioning of Roy (1988) that the traditional handmade pottery arrived into northeast India especially Assam from South Asian Island via littoral countries of Southeast Asia, Vietnam and Korea. This cultural trade originated somewhere in Polynesia and from there it migrated to Southeast Asia and then to Assam. The potters, blacksmith and goldsmith are the professional artisans of Assam. Both the Hiras and the Kumars were

exclusively engaged in making pottery from the medieval period to the colonial period. It is also pointed out that there was a distinct difference in the technique, use of raw material and also shape of various earthen wares made by these two groups. In Assam, there were two classes of potters the Kumars and the Hiras, each forming a separate ring partially done before the next is added, and when manufacture of a whole lot of vessels is complete, they arrange the vessels in a heap with grass in between to which they set fire and thus bake the clay (Baruah, 1986). According to Bose (1980) and his research team took keen interest in surveying the pottery industries of India and also undivided Assam. They divided India into three pottery zones and Assam was included in southeast zone. They surveyed certain selected areas of Goalpara, Tezpur, Sibsagar etc. but unable to give a true picture with regards to the growth and development of pottery industry in Assam. Das (1986) argued that the pottery making among the Hira community is a women's job. The Hiras could not take recourse to cultivation as only a few potters had cultivable land. Due to their poor economic condition majority of them could not afford to educate their children. Most of them left school to help their parents in running their ancestral profession.

The demand for durable pottery among the tea garden labourers was considerably high. The prices surged between 3 and 8 *annas* per ware for quality products. In fact, boatloads of pots, mainly cooking pots and pitchers made their way frequently from Bengal to Dibrugarh. There were also many instances of potters from Bihar having set up profitable business outside the tea gardens catering to the needs not only of the tea garden labour population but also of the neighbouring villages. The Assamese potter, apparently unmindful of the economic shift around them, let the opportunity slip. He had no one to blame but himself for his economic backwardness.

Phukan (1994) stated that the art of making pottery had reached a high point of perfection during the colonial period of Assam. It had become as a household industry and occupied an important place among the handicrafts. This oldest craft was hereditary and practiced by Kumar communities. The Kumars used wheel for making of pots and the Hiras made pots by hand without the wheel. The clay, fuel and other materials for pottery were available in the state. They made the commonly used articles *charu, Kalah, tekali, tipa, mala, ban, sarai, jaka, tau, nadia* and many other household articles (Rajguru, 1998).

With the coming of the British, the entire economic structure of Assam had undergone a drastic change. The earlier *khel* system which had involved payment mainly in the form of labour did not foster a money economy (Gait, 1901). The industrial growth in Assam was too little for the indigenous enterprises and capital that left it conspicuous. Several factors were responsible for the emergence of such worse situation. One of the primary causes was drain of wealth from the province. It has been mentioned that from ancient times the people of Assam had enjoyed a self sufficient village economy. Thus, there was an absolute dearth of accumulated capital among the local people; the Assamese potter could not embark upon new industrial ventures so long as their capital was being depleted by the British policy. On one hand, in the absence of indigenous competition, foreign capitalists monopolised the economy of Assam. On the other hand, growth and development of new industries also made the local manufacturing factories of the region like pottery to suffer. At the initial stage of colonial period, the starting of modern industries and the entrepreneur played a very important role. The economy of Assam had been traditionally based on agriculture and supplemented by village handicrafts. The fast growing material development of modern

industries initially hampered the local products as well as pottery industry in the upper Brahmaputra valley.

The indigenous arts and crafts industry faced lots of problems due to the advent of the British exploitation and penetration of Assam. In the same time, owing to the down fall of the Ahom monarchy the local indigenous business groups shifted from one place to another for the safety of their indigenous products. The new technology and innovation under the colonial power was one of the main reasons of disliking for local handmade articles like earthenware. Likewise, the colonial ruler wanted profit within a very short time. So, they emphasised to manufacture machine made goods for the local market. Pottery being handmade as well as long lasting item was cunningly ousted from the market by the vested British. Rather, it made them indifferent in reviving this old and ancient craft in the particular region.

The pot making industry was as an inherited and traditional craft of their own but in those days its practice was confined to a few families only. In fact the craft was declining among the Kumar potters not only in upper Assam but also in all the parts of Assam. The reason pointed out is that young generation was not interested in the industry because of low status of the Kumar potters in social hierarchy. It was observed that a very few male and female potters among the Kumar community were employed in the particular pottery making industry. Other than colonial period, in the pre-colonial the handicraft was primarily an activity which flourished with the support of the kings. They promoted the art with the motive to demonstrate their cultural superiority. The survival was possible only when the handicraft items became utility products along with its artistic quality. It became an integral part of the cultural tradition of a society. A few handicrafts of Assam are traditionally cluster-based. Silk, Muga of Sualkuchi, Kamrup,

and bell-metal works of Sarthebari, Assamese ornaments of Nagaon and Jorhat and also pottery only are a few which connected with handicrafts. In Census Report of 1891 revealed that the numerical strength of different sub-castes of Kalita were mentioned as '*potter-kalita*'. By this, perhaps they meant the *Kumar-Kalita* or Kumar as such. Like *Sonari-Kalita*, *Dulia-Kalita*, the Kumar are also a functional sub-caste of *Kalita* and are separated on the basis of occupation. As they engaged themselves in the production of pottery, as a sub-caste of *Kalita* they are called the *Kumar-Kalita*.

Cantlie (1984) mentioned that Kumar like other sub-caste could attain higher social status on becoming agriculturist by giving up their occupation. Considering the pottery making industry as a less profitable occupation many people specialized of making pottery of the Kumar community of the upper Assam became agriculturist by giving up their traditional and inherited craft. It has been found that the Kumar potters sometimes searched for more cultivable land for better agricultural operation and shifted from their villages to settle permanently there. It was also found that these people have connection with their age-old traditional and inherited craft. A notable feature of the Muslim potters in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, contrary to Assam, is that Muslims generally do not practice pottery making. However, there is only one group of Muslims, known as Moria who still work with brass. This Moria community live in Muslim village at Hajo. It was a fact that some of them are the users of ceramics, particularly poor people used pitcher (*kalah*), for carrying water and storage, small pitcher (*tekeli*) for preservation of food stuff and bowl (*charu*) for cooking (Saraswati, 1979). The production of pottery in Assam was a continuance process. It has played the role of stalwart of tradition as a whole. The indigenous potteries produced by the Assamese potters show persistence and continuity of the old tradition. In Assamese society there is

not a single ceremony, rites and rituals where pottery is not used. It was almost impossible to think of rites without pottery items in Assamese society. Specific potteries were used for specific rite or ritual. The selection of wheel-turned potteries by the Kumars for all religious function was not based on their technical improvement but determined by their hierarchical position in the Hindu social system. From time immemorial the Kumar potters manufactured earthen wares venturing around the traditional Hindu religious institutions. The method and techniques developed in South India had developed through the ages and spread to Eastern India i.e., Orissa, West Bengal and Assam. Though there are some similarities with regards to the methods and techniques of pottery making the Assamese potters had some special patterns of manufacturing the earthenware (Saraswati, 1979). The potteries were exchanged or sold either for cash or for kind in colonial period. The Kumar potters used boat as a medium of transport in the stipulated period for trading or selling their products in the near hats or markets. The potters crossed several ghats such as *Bonoria Chapori*, *Uttar ghat*, *Teliatoga ghat*, in Sibsagar district via river Disang. The potter also delivered the pottery items in different local hats or shops at Sapekhaiti, Sonari and Borhat in cash or kind. In Sibsagar district, Kumar potters went to the other side like *Dikhounukh* via river Dikhou and covered several ghats viz. *Dikhou ghat*, *Matia ghat* and *Bolia ghat*. The potters were dependent on the river ways to sell potteries. The potteries were required for various purposes like making *pithas* (cakes), for observing death ritual and utilitarian purpose. Moreover, the potteries made by the Kumars were handmade and more durable than those made by wheel. The local people of different villages used potteries for the purposes like marriage, *annaprasanna* and other ceremonies as well as religious purposes held in the Satras and Namghars.

There were 22 active factories in the province during the year 1921-22 as such sugar factory, petroleum, railway etc. in different parts of Assam but only one factory was established and made operative their products in Lakhimpur district of upper Assam. The trade report between the province of Assam and neighbouring states of 1921-22 revealed that the total registered trade of Assam declined and foreign trading company were increased in numbers. The report also indicated that export goods were limited and import items increased day by day.

Table No-2: Ethnical Division of the People in Sibsagar District under colonial period

Sl. No.	Agricultural Castes	Number
1.	Aguri	203
2.	Basiya	225
3.	Boria	3,517
4.	Kaibrata	2,159
5.	Kalita	26,973
6.	Kurmi	498

Source: ASAS, Vol-I, p.237

The table given above indicates that the people in Sibsagar district of upper Brahmaputra valley were divided into many ethnic divisions of different agricultural castes. Under this category, Kalita people had majority during the colonial period as study of the period shows. The potter class belonging to the Kalita caste had continued their hereditary occupation in Sibsagar district. The Kalita Kumars still continues the oldest crafts industry in the different locality in the aforementioned district.

Table No-3: Artisan Caste in Sibsagar District under colonial period

Sl. No.	Name of Nationality, Tribe or Caste (Artisan Caste)	Number
1.	Bhaskar (stone Cutter)	04
2.	Kamar (blacksmith)	866
3.	Kansari (brazier)	20
4.	Kambhar (potter)	804
5.	Laheri (lac-worker)	01
6.	Sonar (goldsmith)	105
7.	Sunari (distriler)	581
8.	Satradhar (carpenter)	1145
9.	Teli (oilman)	169

Source: ASAS, Vol-I, p. 238

Hunter (1897) revealed that the different artisan castes as well as the pottery making community of Sibsagar district during the colonial period. In the same account, it was found that various professional groups like the *Kamar* (blacksmiths), *Kumbhar* (potter), *Sonar* (goldsmiths) come under artisan castes. In addition, the indigenous craftsmen like *teli*, *kamar*, *sonar* and *kumar* potters produced their handmade products either for their personal use or sell them in the hats or markets. Here, we have found that the Kumar i.e, *Kambhar* (potter) in colonial period were not superior to other artisan caste. It shows that even underrated the pottery industry flourished in the region during the colonial period.

A Statistical Account of Sibsagar district of Assam by Hunter quoted from Mr. C. F. Magrath's District Census of Sibsagar shows that there were different castes groups like Traders (trading caste), Superior caste, Pastoral caste etc. under the agricultural castes. The Kalitas became a part of that caste. The report showed that in Sibsagar 26,973 people belonged to the Kalitas. In the same report it indicated that in an artisan caste like *Kamar* (blacksmith), *Bhaskar* (stone cutter), *Kansari* (brazier), *Kumbhar* (potter), *Sonar* (goldsmith), *Teli* (oilman) had firm ground in the vocational society.

The social condition of the manufacturing classes was same as that of the peasantry; and indeed most of them combined agriculture with their trade, with the exception of the workers in brass, who formed a distinct and separate community, and depended almost entirely upon the trade for their livelihood. There is no well marked distinction between capital and labour in Sibsagar, manufactures being mostly carried on by people voluntarily in their own houses. Study of the period, reveals that there were no fairs or markets in Sibsagar, similar to those held in lower Assam. Hunter in his account stated that in Lakhimpur district the braziers formerly manufactured cooking and other domestic utensils of well amalgamated metal, and of a handsome shape, but this trade now may be said to have almost died out, the cheaper imported brass vessels in common use throughout Bengal having quite superseded the Assam manufacture which though of better quality was very much more costly. The overall picture of pottery in the Brahmaputra valley particularly in Sibsagar district at the time of the colonial penetration shows that the pottery industry was a household craft for self consumption and sometimes for the market.

Table No-4: Ethnical division of the People in Lakhimpur District under colonial period

Sl. No.	Agricultural Castes	Number
1.	Deori	29
2.	Basiya	03
3.	Boria	823
4.	Kaibrata	975
5.	Kalita	3406
6.	Kurmi	209

Source: ASAS, Vol-I, p. 306

A Statistical Account of Lakhimpur district of Assam by Hunter quoted from Mr. C. F. Magrath's District Census of Lakhimpur revealed the data depicting different caste groups like traders (trading caste), pastoral caste etc. in the agricultural castes. The report showed that in Lakhimpur 3,406 peoples were belonged to the Kalita caste. In the same report it is shown that artisan caste like *Kamar* (blacksmith), *Rajmistri* (mason), *Darji* (trailor), *Kumbhar* (potter), *Sonar* (goldsmith), *Teli* (oilman) were in less numbers in the district. On the statistical data it has appeared that Potter (*Kumbhakar*) produced their pottery items for the daily uses during the colonial period.

Table No-5: Artisan Caste in Lakhimpur District

Sl. No.	Name of Nationality, Tribe or Caste (Artisan Caste)	Number
1	Darji (trailor)	02
2	Kamar (blacksmith)	413

3	Rajmistri (mason)	21
4	Kambhar (potter)	173
5	Satradhar(carpenster)	14
6	Sonar (goldsmith)	59
7	Sunari (distriler)	09
8	Teli (oilman)	114

Source: ASAS, Vol-I, p. 308

In the above Statistical Account, it was found that there were various artisan castes *Kamar* (blacksmiths), *Kumbhar* (potter), *Teli* (oilman) in Lakhimpur. The indigenous craftsmen like *teli*, *kamar*, *sonar* and *kumar* potter produced their hand made products either for their personal use or to sell in the hats or markets. Rural product items were brought by the people from long distance in the limited number sell trade centres. The local potters of the two districts always faced some problems running their craft but in spite of this, the Kumar potters of the upper Brahmaputra valley continued manufacturing pottery items.

Magrath (1921) in his separate census compilation for Lakhimpur gives the details of the numbers of the various races, tribes and castes found in the North Lakhimpur subdivision. The numbers are included in the general data which has been shown marking Lakhimpur. The total numbers of Kalita people were 2,555. As an agricultural caste it was higher than any other caste; likewise the *Kumbhar* (potter) were about 12 during the 1921-22 in Lakhimpur district.

There arose a situation when, by the beginning of the twentieth century, capital, labour, enterprise, trade and craft were all represented by the outsiders. As a result,

industrialisation led to an increased pressure on the land (Goswami, 1999). Thus, it was clearly evident that the colonial power adopted no favourable policies to continue the traditional arts and crafts industry in Assam. The potters faced other problems during this specific period such as poor communication of roads and transports system. Most of the potters lived in villages situated along the bank of the river of the surveyed areas. Developed transport and road facility which was essential for the rapid development of pottery industry was missing. Pottery items as well as the raw materials required for the growth of the industry were transported through boats, *thela* (pull cart), chariots and bicycle in Assam. It was seen that due to lack of transport and good communication facilities, it was impossible on the part of the potters to sell their manufactured products in outside markets. The occurrence of flood in monsoon season every year disconnected the pottery village from neighbouring places which in turn seriously affected the pottery market and its production. In the same sense, the pottery production also suffered due to the natural calamities like earthquake, dry season, soil erosion etc during this period.

The design of the pot and pottery goods were not polished one in the colonial period. The lack of creativity of pottery items were found particularly in rural areas of Assam. This was also one of the reasons why pottery products did not find a good market in the state. The artisan failed to adopt new methods of production and thus produced old and outdated pottery products marked with traditional designs. It is also mentioned that other caste used to adopt making pottery in the past. Even today, like Bengali, Hira, Moria etc. hail in Assam. The British brought some Bihari potters who also developed pottery industry and produced different clay goods and sold them in the footpaths of the market place mainly in Jalukbari and Maligaon areas of Guwahati in the colonial period. It meant pan traditional that clay procured from the bank of the

Brahmaputra near the Salmora in Majuli and Rupahi-mukh at Sibsagar be used as raw material for the pottery industry during the time. The British did not have interest to develop such type of industry supposedly backward in outlook. Clay was also brought from distant places because suitable clay was scanty. Sometimes all the potters of a village or a number of villages procured clay collectively from the same clay deposit. They usually divided the work among themselves while some persons had to dig out clay; the others would carry it over from the mines. For the transportation of clay some of the potters used bullock-carts while others used boat for carrying clay manually. Some members had to carry the goods on their heads or backs because they could not afford to own bullock-cart.

Table No- 6: Percentage of Total Working Force in the Brahmaputra Valley, 1901-

1931

<i>Year</i>	<i>working force as % of total population</i>	<i>Cultivators</i>	<i>Agricultural labour</i>	<i>Manufacturing Mining and</i>	<i>Plantation</i>	<i>Trade</i>	<i>Professionals</i>	<i>Unclassified</i>
1901	38.5	69.0	0.7	3.2	14.2	4.2	1.0	8.7
1911	49.5	70.4	1.6	2.8	14.7	4.8	1.1	5.0
1921	46.0	72.2	2.1	2.2	15.2	4.8	1.6	1.9
1931	45.2	69.8	1.7	2.3	15.6	4.0	1.3	5.3

Sources: Censuses of India 1901, 1911 and 1921 and Census of India 1931 Report on

Assam Subsidiary Table IV, p. 139

The Census Report of 1881 reveals that out of total population in the Brahmaputra valley, the majority people had no definite occupation though they were engaged in agriculture as their primary income. The proportion of persons who returned to agriculturist vocations from other specified occupations ranged in the high per cent. In 1911, the number of people dependent on agriculture in the Brahmaputra valley was 877 per mile. The proportion was divided district wise, Sibsagar recorded maximum with 916 per mile followed by Nowgong with 911. Nowgong was remarkable in being dependent on agriculture though it was not a major tea district. The number supported by ordinary cultivation in the province was 761 persons per mile according to the Census of 1921. The people was dependent upon agriculture including non-cultivating proprietors, cultivating owners, tenant cultivators agricultural labourers, and labourers associated with special crops like *pan* vine, tea and fruits and vegetables could be shown mirroring the proportion of earners ranging from agriculture to total earners in Assam. The account revealed that pottery and other crafts became secondary earning source among the particular groups.

Pottery was a pristine vocation but the percentage of persons engaged in making and selling earthen wares was not very large in the undivided district of Lakhimpur. In Census Report of 1901 and also Allen revealed that 200 persons were found engaged in this profession and the 1961 census reveals that there were two pottery co-operatives comprising only 25 workers. Altogether 177 persons were engaged in pottery and related clay works. The growing popularity of ceramic and aluminium utensils adversely affected the pottery industry and the condition of the trade deteriorated to a great extent. The principal centres of the industry in the undivided Lakhimpur district were Dibrugarh, Madarkhat, Margherita, Tinsukia and Chabua.

In the colonial period, pottery manufacturing industries depended on two forms of capital investment as used by the Kumar potters in the upper Brahmaputra valley, one was fixed capital and the other was working capital. The relative proportion between fixed and working capital required in an enterprise varies from industry to industry, state to state and place to place. It was difficult to lay down any simple rule for the determination of the proper amount of working capital and fixed capital for any business or industry. There were some essential factors for having an over-all view of the needs that affect the fixed and working capital. The fixed capital was the core of the business or the industry, required for purchase of fixed assets e.g., for purchase of land and buildings, plant and machinery, equipment, furniture and fittings, tools and implements etc. In the pottery industries of the two districts which run on cottage and small scale basis require a very small amount of fixed capital. On the other hand, working capital was required for the purchase of raw materials and stores, for financing outstanding goods supplied and for providing the necessary funds for paying wages and meeting the day to day requirements of the Kumar potter. The pottery industry required a great amount of working capital to purchase the raw materials, to pay the wages of labourers etc. The different types of pottery industry therefore had different financial requirements. In the undivided Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts small and rural pottery industry works since colonial period was limited, and so there was less need of fixed capital.

The colonial penetration into Assam and the neighbouring hill areas was accompanied by sweeping political, economic and social changes resulting in a radical transformation of the region within a very short time. Many of the changes were positive, when seen in isolation, but when viewed in the overall colonial framework, it

is apparent that they were part of the general process of underdevelopment that accompanied imperialist forces. The former autonomy of the villages was eroded; indigenous crafts declined; the introduction of monetary economy and systematic revenue maximisation led to escalating poverty while industrialization resulted in dramatic demographic changes. Goswami (2017) distinctly reveals that during the colonial period the entire economy of the state was controlled by the British and its cumulative impact on all the indigenous industries was immense and also far-reaching.

With the coming of the British, the entire economy as well as the growth of rural handicrafts industries in the state had undergone a sweeping change. At the initial stage of establishment of modern industries by the British, the role of the entrepreneur was very important in introducing new techniques and market for local products. The economy of Assam had been traditionally based on agriculture and supplemented by the village handicrafts industries like pottery, brass, and other industries of Assam. As such, the people were not exposed to any industrial development that had taken place in the rest of the state. Due to change in economic system and new industrial set up in the Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam, the pottery industry had faced lots of challenges in running their pottery products. The volume of trade increased by leaps and bounds, the significant factor to take into account was not the volume but the pattern of the trade and the nature of the goods that were exchanged. Within a few years of British occupation, the self-sustaining village economy of Assam completely collapsed making way for a capitalist economy, where trade, commerce and industry were all controlled by outsiders. So, although the Brahmaputra valley was undergoing far reaching changes in certain spheres, and the volume of trade increasing, the economic condition of the general people did not improve at all and in fact, in most cases deteriorated.

In the study areas it has been found that the poor rate of capital formation was considered one of the major problems in the growth of industries in the state. The rates of savings in the two districts were very poor during the colonial period particularly among the Kumar potters. The level of per capita income being very poor, the saving potential among the Kumar potters was also low. Hence, there was low capital formation which posed big hurdle on the path of industrialization of the pottery manufacturing industry in the Brahmaputra valley. Thus, from the above, we may arrive at certain conclusions in this chapter. The internal trade in the districts of Brahmaputra valley was both wholesale and retail business carried out at weekly, bi-weekly, annual, and occasional markets. The majority of the business was entirely in the hands of Marwaris along with Bengali and up-country shopkeepers and the Assamese traders had a little share in it. The people usually sold items like raw silk, mustard and rape seeds, tea, raw cotton, lac, utensils, decorative pottery items, bamboo mats and hides and bought finished products such as cotton piece goods, salt, gram and other grain, kerosene and other oils, opium and hardware. The waterways were the main routes of communication and in the internal trade country boats were generally used.

It might be said that for removing industrial backwardness of Assam are, by no means, exhaustive. Coordinated efforts on the part of the government and the public are necessary for creating a congenial environment for the growth of industry in the state. While the government should provide adequate incentives to the upcoming entrepreneurs to set up various industrial projects, the people of the state should come forward to reap maximum benefit from the policy of economic liberalization adopted throughout the country.

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CHAPTER-IV

CASE STUDY OF THE TWO DISTRICTS

The pottery manufacturing tradition played a vital role in socio-economic life of the potters in Assam. Assam has its own tradition of the pottery manufacturing culture from the past. The pottery in Assam bore popular form of traditional utilitarian items. The period of study revealed that the pottery production centres were flourished in undivided Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts in the Brahmaputra Valley. The pottery industry centres were disintegrated during both the pre-colonial and colonial period. These industries were confined to the fertile banks of the mighty river Brahmaputra. The undivided Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts became the centre of pottery as well as the Kumar in the upper Assam. Under the study areas, only the Kumar were practising this craft since ancient times. As per the earlier documents available and field study revealed that only the Kumar potters were manufacturing pottery items in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur district during the colonial period. The Kumar were an endogamous caste groups and thus had a higher position in the caste hierarchy. The Kumar is called as the *Kalitas* which holds a high position in Assam. The Kumar potters were agriculturalist. They speak Assamese and had distinct socio-cultural, religious and economic characteristics. Similarly, they were the wheel using potters. The clay used to prepare earthenware by hand was coarse. They manufactured different kind of pots or vessels using two techniques i.e., coil-building (strip method) and pressing. The pottery production among the Kumar was basically a masculine occupation. The male potters used to collect clay (*kumarmati*) and also transport and sell their products in different markets. The pottery items were sold in the local markets, small *hats* and daily or

weekly markets in the different parts of the two districts. It was mentioned in the earlier chapter that some pottery production units were seasonally shifted with their tools and equipments from place to place due to the heavy erosion caused by the flooded river.

There was a great chance of development of pottery during colonial period as local initiatives since it involves local raw materials, local workers and local market. There was ample scope for the development of pottery industries based on resource and traditional skills available in the study areas during the colonial period but the colonial ruler did not take any interest to do so, rather they stressed upon machine made items.

Sibsagar is a historical place of Assam with ancient and vivid cultural heritage. This famous historical place was an embracement of a tradition of flamboyant art, architecture, sculpture, monuments, tales, mythology and history. Among other crafts, pottery was one of the important crafts which spread all over the district. The Kumar potter in the district was adopting traditional methods and technique for pottery production. The Kumar potters have been producing the earthen wares in this particular area since remote past to till the present.

The history of Sibpur as an administrative centre can be traced to the fact that the British colonial power built Sibpur or Sibasagar town on the bank of the Sibpur tank (Barpukhuri) dug by the Ahom king Siva Singha in 1733 covering of 114 acres sanctifying its honour. There were not many dwelling houses in the native town and most of these were in dilapidated state. The bazaar which ran along the banks of the Dikhow river was simply a collection of grass hut (Hunter, 1906). Sibpur town was also known as Rangpur among various other names in the ancient times. It was a historic town of Assam being the capital of the mighty Tai-Ahom kingdom. Sibpur

district in upper Assam is located between $21^{\circ}45'$ to $27^{\circ}15'$ North latitude and $94^{\circ}25'$ to $95^{\circ}25'$ East longitudes covering an area of 2668 sq km. The district shares its present boundaries with Dibrugarh district in the East, Jorhat district in the West, river Brahmaputra in the North and the states of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh in the South. The district is one of the foremost leading tea and oil producing centre in Assam. The population of the district consists of different ethnic, linguistic and religious people. The important towns of the district are Sibsagar (districts headquarter), Sonari, Nazira, Simaluguri and Lakua. Sibsagar town is the nerve centre of entire district as well as the neighbouring districts. People from various parts of the country frequently come here as tourists. Pottery was one of the traditional crafts works running in the district from past with different handicrafts. The production of pottery was used for domestic purpose in the districts of upper Assam during the colonial period and earlier. The important pottery centres in the district were *Nazira, Demow, Sapekhaiti, Simaluguri, Sonari, Amguri, Charaideo, Nimonagarh* and *Santak* (Allen, 1906).

The origin of the name of the district Lakhimpur traditionally is associated with a Goddess *Laksmi* Devi. There are many historical accounts which shows that a king named Laksminarayan ruled over the particular area during the 14th -15th century A.D. King Laksminarayan was likely to build a town in his kingdom and named the place as his name. The district took its name from the town of Lakhimpur, originally selected as its headquarters, when Lakhimpur district was first formed in 1838 by the East India Company. The undivided district of Lakhimpur extending along both banks of the river Brahmaputra in the northeast corner of the state of Assam, was between latitude $26^{\circ}50'$ and $27^{\circ}90'$, longitude $93^{\circ}46'$ and $96^{\circ}10'$ and covered an area of 4926 sq. miles or 12,758 sq. kilometre (*Census of India*, 1951). The Lakhimpur district since early times formed

as a part of Assam has been the connection of many traditional cottage industries. The few references were made to recognized different handicraft industries of ancient Assam in many ways. Besides the exquisite artistic products, cane and bamboo works, pottery, silkworm, ivory, ornaments were some of the fine specimens of craftsmanship of early Assam. The representative features of the undivided Lakhimpur district was the brass and bell metal industry. According to Allen mentioned that the metal industry of this area producing utensils and bell-metal plates fitted with stand was well developed. The cottage industry reached a high degree of perfection which was acknowledged by Muhammadan (Muslim historians of the Muhgals) chroniclers by paying eloquent tributes to the skilful weavers, spinners, goldsmiths, potters, and artisans who excelled in metal, ivory and wood works. According to the Ahom Buranjis, the pottery, ivory, brick making, silk, goldsmiths, weavers and spinners were some of the important industries of Assam during the Ahom period (Allan, 1906).

To make an assessment of the pottery industry in the two districts, it was desirable to examine the mode of living, custom, beliefs etc. by whom the artisan subjected themselves in the process of pottery making. The mode of living, beliefs, custom and practices constituted the culture of a society. These main factors combined or individually determine the nature and courses of development of pottery industry. It has no doubt that the pottery industry and culture helped to determine relationship with socio-economic life of the potters in the past. The present study carried a historical look as well as socio-cultural value in finding the nature of the pottery industry in the past. At the same time, it would be explore the similarities between pre-colonial and colonial pottery in Assam. The present work throws light on the pottery industry and Kumar potters in the colonial period on one hand and present day pottery tradition and

industrial perception on the other hand. The selection of two districts for study was mainly because it had a past glory of making pottery since remote past. Before making historical and technological study in detail, it was essential to look into the life, culture and society of the Kumar potters including their work as potter, pottery and socio-economic conditions interlocked with each other.

To make an understanding of pottery industry and their pottery production in the particular districts of Assam was needed to examine various social organizations where Kumar potters supplied pottery items for ritualistic purpose since very early period to colonial period. It was based to develop their handicraft industry. The *Kumar* considered as *Kalita*. In fact, most individuals using the surname “Kalita” in Majuli belong to the category of *Kumar-Kalita* caste. The *Kumar-Kalita* used to inhabit in the Southern part of the island on the bank of the river Brahmaputra because the soil was suitable for making pottery. The Kumar potters were shifted from their ancestral place to take shelter either on the nearby embankments or in the interior areas of the island due to the erosion in the mighty river Brahmaputra. As a result, most of the displaced Kumar potters lost their traditional profession of pottery making by engaging in other vocations (Nath, 2009). Pottery items were used in specific ritualistic and utilitarian needs of different society. In other words, pottery was associated with sacred values and the demand of their production reciprocated the number of ritual cycles of the Hindu religion together with the number of families observing the same ritual.

The Kumar potters used wheel as well as handmade techniques to fashion pottery items by using the anvil. The pottery products were used in the socio-religious or socio-economic system since ancient to medieval period. So, the social positions of the Kumar potters in the particular two districts were thus good. The Kumar potter with

regards to their social hierarchy was treated as indigenous castes group of Assam. Their occupational involvement with the ritual and economic life of social system was made them settle around the river land areas. It was seen from the present study that the homogeneity in beliefs and ideas, among the traditionally driven rural societies enabled the potters (who are peasant at the same time) to stay closed to sites which were served as most significant outlet for their pottery items. The traditional as well as economic necessity was the factor that enabled rural centres to operated or manufacturing pots during the colonial period. So, the Kumar potters relation with urban and traditional society during the past was much more complex than that of today. The pottery production was affected by the limited availability of suitable clay which was known as *Kumarmati* (potter clay). It was stated earlier that the Kumar pots were manufactured to supply the needs for the ritualistic observance of people which are also limited in occurrences besides being conditioned by the ritual cycles of the traditional society. So, the productions in large number of pottery items by several families were reduced due to transitional change after the advent of the British administration.

The social position of Kumar potter was apparently in parity with the Indian caste system where birth alone determined the occupation as well as the social hierarchy. The Kumar had been producing pottery by partial beating and that too by the both male and women used as means of performing in the religious rites in various functions. One third of the population engaged themselves in pottery making industry with their age old method and techniques in colonial period. It was observed that the numbers of female potters always helped their counterparts to run the pot making process successfully. The female potters were moulded and shaped pots where the male potters engaged in transporting, marketing and collecting the resource materials for the

craft. The maximum number of the male workers belonged to the age group was found in different age. The study revealed that among the Kumar, the male were mostly engaged in their traditional craft work. The Kumar potter could shape to his wet clay in various forms. The potters could pinch out small bowl or build up a large vase with his skilled hands. Each type of pottery includes a range of size, proportion and subtle variations in its profile. Singh (1979) stated that the pottery is the most sensual of all arts. Flower vases used for arranging flowers, bowls while serving and tea cups while drinking, allow us to touch, to feel and handle these objects. Another exotic quality of pottery unique was its art forming which also handled carefully while using. The Kumar potters were performing of various socio- religious ceremonies as well as day to day life with manufacturing pottery goods. They used earthen vessels for carrying, keeping, storing and many more domestic purposes. Apart from this, some poor families were used earthenwares for cooking as well.

It was found that generally male potter used wheel and women never touch the wheel at that time when the pottery was manufactured. The Kumar always made pots mostly by wheel and rarely using hand. So far as, the technologies were concerned the Kumar potter was different pottery making techniques from other groups of potters in Assam. Therefore, unlike many other potters of the country, Kumar potter was usually used age-old manufacturing process and methods. Despite all these diversities, the Kumar potter castes possess certain common features like as they speak Assamese language, peasant potters, and share certain rites and customs in the same manner; likewise they shared same socio-cultural, economic and religious characteristics. It was found that the pottery production was confined only to the Hindus and particularly to the Kumar potters in the study area; non-Hindu people never produced pottery in

Assam. In the recent period, the production and utility of pottery was dropping off. The most of the Kumar potters were shifting to other jobs as well as engaging as full time cultivation. Owing to huge plot of cultivable land, the Kumar potters were putting pottery making as secondary occupation. In fact, maximum numbers of potters had finally given up pottery making culture due to extension of cultivation and agricultural practices. The young educated persons were seeking for some modest jobs and even prefer to daily wage works. They expressed their grievance that pottery making was not worthy at all for maintenance of their basic needs. The gradual decreased value and demand of the most of the earthen vessels yield them no sustenance, in return posing a great economic setback for them as well as the industry. The making of pottery was associated with wheel and the male potters took some important steps to collection of clay up to the marketing of the manufacturing products. Females potter did not totally abstain themselves from the craft although they never touch the wheel which was considered to be sacred. They helped the male potters in the entire process of pottery making. The Kumar potters had many offshoot potters in the state. It was found in different parts of the state that the socio-cultural aspects of societal hierarchy of both the Hira and the Kumar specialized in the same craft, under no circumstances they considered themselves as equals. The Kumar considered as superior than the Hira and vice versa. Further, both the groups practised agriculture along with their pottery craft. They were endogamous caste as their social status was not uniform all over the region. Although, they was followed the same occupation, language, religion, culture and even same ecological setting still considered themselves to be exclusive. The Kumar potters went to different market places via the river Brahmaputra to sell their products. The barter trade was prevalent among the rural villagers in the region. The potters used to

supply all kinds of potteries for the whole year to the peasants and in return acquired requisite quantity of paddy for harvesting and cultivation. The potters were on economic voyage; their means of livelihood remained stagnant. Therefore, to fill up the loss the women potters took up the craft of pottery making till their husbands returned from trade. During the period, the pottery made by the female gets ready for trading and selling. This process was maintaining economic balance in the Kumar family without causing major change in socio-economic sphere. Therefore, the nature of their economy was also responsible for the transformation of the Kumar from wheel made to handmade producers. In the colonial period, the establishment of Brahminical Satras in different parts of Assam was favoured for pottery industry; the Kumar potters invited priests for performing religious rites in their houses. In addition, the Brahmins priests were accepted water from the hands of the Kumar. It can be mentioned that this system was prevalent only in the rural areas, where the Kumar was still attached to their own traditional craft as a source of their livelihood. The utility of pottery items in different stages of the rites and rituals, functions and ceremonies of the society was decreasing in a very alarming rate due to the low cost goods being available in the neighbouring areas. It was totally wiped out and replaced by synthetic modern materials like machine made utensils. Due to this the Kumar potters seek some alternatives work for their sustenance by keeping aside their age-old traditional craft. Similarly, it was found that during the colonial penetration in the region the arts and indigenous crafts in the society suffered a lot.

However, Phukan (1987) is very aptly pointed out that owing to the influence of Neo-Vaishnavism, many of the traditional customs and handicrafts had diminished from the society as a result of that the used of the pottery crafts had drastically been

reduced. Although the wheel is there, women never use it. In this context, Herskovits (1974) also stated that almost wherever pottery is produced with the help of potter's wheel, men make it, but where it is made by hand, it is the women's job. As women are the real potters and not the men, wheel became an ineffective implement for them and the craft transferred from the potter wheel to hand. There were purification rites among the Kumar potters living in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. Before starting the making of pottery during the month of Bohag (April–May) they undergo purifying rites. After completion of purification of wheel the potters started for manufacturing pottery goods. The Kumar potters of *Rupahimukha*, *Dikhowmukha*, *Bijoyagar*, *Barpathar*, *Salmara* in Majuli, Golaghat were engaged themselves in cultivation as well as wheel made pottery. These potters collected clay (*kumarmati*) from the river Brahmaputra, bank of river *Dhansiri*, *Dikhow* and the open field- a few miles away from their villages.

The clay and raw materials were easily available in *Chinatali*, *Salmara*, *Dhakinpat*, *Modaibill* and *Biringabari gaon* in Majuli. The Kumar of Salmara sold their pottery products in the surrounding villages and small market centres in Lakhimpur, Arunachal Pradesh, Jorhat, Golaghat etc. On the other hand, Dibrugarh, Sadiya-Choikhowa ghat of Upper Assam in south bank, Lakhimpur-Dhemaji in north banks had always been important market centre for indigenous earthenware. The *Majulial* (made in Majuli) pottery was high demand in the different markets. Particularly items like the water pitcher, flower pots and the ordinary cooking pots were generally available. The potters also directly sold their earthenwares in the different small *hats* by sheltering the boat. The pottery items were mostly traditional household and religious items like *kalah*, *sarai*, *kharahi*, *tou*, *thali*, *jug*, *glass* and some fancy items

as *phuldani*, *dhunabati*, *dhupdani*, *lighting lamp*, decorative birds and animals etc. sold in the market. The earning of the potters depends upon the demand of their items and also supply of raw materials. On the other hand, the trader link, market potentiality of products, rate of items as well as weather conditions compelled them to render the longevity of the service.

It mentioned here that the *chak* (Chakra) or wheel had its own original past history was closely associated with the Kumars of Assam. There was various stories enshrouding the origin of wheel and it varies from place to place. The Kumar potter claimed that the wheel or *chak* was given to them by the Lord Krishna or Gosai, to produce pottery for worship and other religious purposes. Besides this fact, they also claimed that it was the Sudarshan Chakra- the denticulate saucer used by Lord Krishna to kill the Ashuras and other unholy persons. It was found that the manufacturing *chak* was well connected with the Lord Krishna. Yet another story was linked with the *chak* or wheel. In ancient days, as per the legend, the potter's wheel used to rotate automatically. One day a man kicked it and the wheel stopped rotation. The potters then went to Bhagavan and told him what had happened. Then Sankar Bhagavan gave them a stick and asked to rotate the wheel by using that stick. He also took off a portion of his waist string and asked them to separate the vessel from the wheel with that string. The wheel became very important part of the Kumar potters family. The momentum to the production of the potter isolates them from the other group of potter- like the Hiras. The Kumar potters considered the wheel as very sacred divinity. The *chak* or wheel was worshiped by the Kumar potters daily. By worshipping the wheel, they narrated that it gave them work and their bread for subsistence therefore reverence to the wheel worshipping was considered very essential. The Kumar potters observed another

ceremony/festival in Bohag (new Assamese month that falls in April-May) that was considered as a period of ceremonial impurity. During the festival, they were detached of vessel from the wheel with the help of chord (musical instrument) which is compared with the detachment of umbilical cord of a newly born baby and the entire month of Bohag was considered as a period of impurity.

Gohain (1992) mentioned that the wheel and the working process of the artisan locally called *Kumar* used a wooden wheel with a diameter of about 3ft. The wheel which was placed on top of a pointed wooden stick stuck firmly in the ground and rotated horizontally. A well kneaded lump of clay was then placed on the rotating wheel which the potter moulded into the required shape with his fingers. The semi-finished clay-wares was then sun dried and placed in a mould, a hollow basin seven and a half feet long and three and half inches deep was used for given a finishing shape with a smooth stone being held against the inner surface as it rotated on the wheel. Finally, it was sun dried, polished and put in the kiln. The work was shared by both the men and the women of the household. The men collected the clay, firewood, stacked the wares in the kiln, and shaped the vessel while the women did the polishing and finishing (Gohain, 1992). In mediaeval period, the temple used potteries for offerings to the worshipping God and Goddess in the two districts which pottery items were made by the Kumar potters. In the royal kitchen or *Changmai sal*, cooking was preferably done in earthen vessels (Handique, 2005). Pottery industry was scattered all over Assam. Some places like *Teok*, *Dharamtul*, *Dergaon* and *Golaghat* in Sibsagar district (Allen, 1906), *Modarkhat* and *Tinisukia* in Lakhimpur district (Allan, 1906), *Biswanath* in Darrang district (Allan, 1905) in upper Assam also had been manufacturing potteries since ancient period.

The Kumar potter was regarded pot making as their inherited craft and introduced techniques other than their traditional one. This concept has manifested in other sphere of their social life too. Although, the Kumar potter make some socio-cultural harmony among the different castes and inter-change of new ideas and techniques in their pottery goods. The use of wheel in the production of pottery making among the Kumar potters became as inter-dependant. Indeed, the used of wheel accelerates the quantum of production and women technical aid essential to gave a final shape in particular varieties of pots. The utility as well as marketing demands were met by the potter, gradually the manufacturing and technological aspect had changed, in order to produces varied types. It had become a subsidiary occupation among the Kumar potters. Major part of the works of this industry was entrusted to women, who had to devote most of her time in this craft, besides her participation in other daily duties. It had become a prerogative and traditionally inherited occupation for both sexes. The economic and technological nature of this craft plays the key roles in the development of division of labour between the male and the female. The economic relations between both the sexes are balanced. The agricultural work and pot making run separately and independently by the Kumar potter of Brahmaputra valley. Their involvement in agricultural practice affects the pottery industries in two districts during the rainy season. In the rainy season, the agricultural work was started. So, in this period the making of pottery occupation was difficult to carry out because of heavy rain and drying and firing of the pots became impossible. The male potters were also busy in agricultural activities. As a result, the Kumar potters could not make pottery in regularly. In wet season, the clay beds become immersed under water and the collection of the pottery clay during this period remains suspended. In order to avoid this situation,

the clay was stored up before the rain starts and the industry remains somehow operative. On the other hand, the winter season was very suitable period for pottery manufacturing. For a certain period of dry winter the flow of manufacturing pottery in the markets become regular and continuous process. Sometimes heavy demand for their products makes them overburdened with this pottery work. It was implied that potters should produce pots in excess when flow of transaction becomes less and when they get more leisure time. It may help them to maintain the uniform flow of their produce during rainy season too, although during this season the demand for their produces is lean. So that, the people of different place sometimes unable to observe ritual tradition and only those rituals which are unavoidable was celebrated. Pottery made by the Kumars circulated primarily within the traditional society which still follow the classical tradition consisting of ancient social beliefs, value system, social codes etc. Consequently, the production of Kumar pottery in response to the ritualistic demand of their traditional customer is still in great demand. These ritualistic demands are defined the specific sets of pottery as parts of their ritual performances. The Kumar potter worked with his clay and wheel are predetermined by the dictation of the necessities of ritualistic traditions. For their economic necessity, potter was responded to all these ritualistic traditions. Hence, the pottery making was limited and creating new designs or a fuller display of the aesthetic sense. The traditional mode of production was hazardous and exposes the potter to economic hardship in as much as they lose the customer. It is worth mentioning that the pottery items did not undergo recognizable change in the colonial period. The ritualistic dish, close mouthed vessels and other types of pots were survived. The nature of utilization of their products afford to possible diversification as their products were more need-oriented and useable among the different sections of

population for domestic purpose. The important part of production of pottery remains a prerogative for the women participation, excepting in firing and disposal was considered. Moreover, the craft work was not a fulltime occupation for their women in addition it entrusted with their daily household duties. The male potter generally exposed themselves to the changing nature of market and economic confrontation with other potters who were trying to put their produced items in circulation in the same market. As a result, the choices of traditional pottery product shifted towards the new metallic goods with a comparatively durable and cheap items produced by the immigrant potters. The economic loss as a result of confrontation with other potters may either be compensated by increase in the quantum of production with reduced sale price at competitive rate or by subjecting themselves to complete assimilation of the exotic types produced by the immigrant potters. All the earthen wares except the very large vessels, toys, a few ornamental wares and some special articles, such as pipe-bowls and water goblets are fashioned on the wheel (Dobbs, 1895). The pottery seems to have been purely oriental in style and delicate in design; resembling true porcelain more than any ware produced in the particular areas of the study.

It has been found that the handmade or wheel made potters of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of upper Assam used for making potteries were very simple and the early method of manufacture was still continued. The used of implements for manufacturing pottery goods are as follows.

- i) *Pitani* (beater): The first tool used in pottery making is called *Pitani* (Beater) locally known as *Pitani* which is made of wood. Its implementation solely depends on its quality and maintenance. It has two parts - the body and the handle. As regards to its variety; beaters of different size, shape and weight

have been recorded from different parts of India. Functionally, there are three types of beaters, one is used for enlarging the vessel, another is used for smoothing the surface of the vessel, and the third for making impression on the pot (Saraswati and Behura, 1966). All the three varieties of beaters are available in the stipulated two districts of upper Brahmaputra valley.

- ii) *Boluwa* (Anvil): Anvil or *Boluwa* is made of clay or stone and used for beating/shaping the clay lump/unfinished pottery. The stone anvil is collected from the river bed and slightly made convex.
- iii) *Beating Base*: the beating base is divided in to two types at the time of making pots; one is called *Athali* (a concave and heavy disc made of clay) another is *Afai ghuruwa tokta* (small piece of wooden board having a thickness of 1 to 1½ inches).
- iv) *Majoni*: It is made of clay, a short duck head handle. The small concave disc with beaded shape/design is used for levelling the vessels
- v) *Rukani* (Scrapers): The *rukani* is made of thin bamboo wands and used to scrape off the unwanted clay from the body of a head pot
- vi) *Pani mola* (Small earthen pot): This earthen vessel is used for preserving water nearby the potter. This small earthen pot is extremely necessary while making a pot; sometime the potter uses broken vessels for this purpose.
- vii) *Afari*: It is a flat circular vessel.
- viii) *Chirakani / fotakani* (small piece of cloth): During the manufacturing of the pots a small piece of cloth is used. The surface is moistened with the cloth soaked with water to maintain surface tightness at desired level. The potter

also uses the piece of cloth for shaping the rim of the vessel in the manufacturing period.

ix) *Chalani* (Bamboo sieve): A circular strainer made of bamboo is used for separating the impurities and foreign materials present in the clay. This method is necessary for making certain pottery types.

x) *Salvari*: It is made of clay and is used for fashioning the vessels at a later stage.

All the implements together are known as *Sal*.

It has been found that the upper Brahmaputra valley Kumar potter used some other tools for manufacturing the different potteries.

- i. *Khana*: Wooden spade is locally known as *Khana*. The length of this implement varies from 1.5 meters to 2 meters, its breadth is about 15 cm and thickness is about 2cm. It is used for digging the muddy clod from below the surface of the earth. The local carpenter manufactures this implement for the potters.
- ii. *Khikali*: Sometimes the clay is also taken out from the clay pit with a rope which called *Khikali* (plastic rope). The clay taken out by rope gives spiral shape in the clay. While cleaning the clay, the potter use iron blades, sickles or wires for slicing the clay lumps so as to chalk out the unwanted particles from its *Kartan* (slicer). It is made of either iron or bamboo. The iron blades are bought form the market but the bamboo blades are prepared by themselves.
- iii. *Pasi*: *Pasi* (carrying basket) is another implement used by the potters. If the distance is long from clay yard it is carried in bamboo baskets.

The raw materials are also very important for the production of pottery items. To make pottery goods, clay, water and fuel for firing are essential. Saraswati and Behura (1966) also mentioned that the manufacturing of pottery is universally based on a very simple method. The surface treatment is one of the techniques used to make the clay. To restrict the porosity of the vessel it is essential. The term surface treatment is used by the potters instead of finishing and decoration. The Kumar potter used various terms for the method of techniques like slip, treatment, polishing, burnishing, painting, etc. Arnold (1988) stated that clay, when moist is malleable and attains plasticity, which can be given any desired shape. It is simply let dry in the sun and become leather hard as it is so called. A comparatively small amount of extra heat tend to turn the clay hardened because of chemical changes taken place in the clay structure due to firing. Even same applies to regain the original stage, in whatever way it is being treated either physically or chemically. In fact, this is the paradox behind the theory of making clay vessels. Clay once baked in fire will retain its form and colour for centuries together with its entire inherent characteristic. The pottery clay is a type of clay which has considerable plasticity and at the same time can be so treated as to maintain a desired shape while burning it. The finest of all pottery clay is *Kaolin* or 'china clay' which is used for manufacture of the finest porcelain. In all cases the pottery clay need most careful washing and grading of material and constant check of its composition and physical properties. It was a fact that potters do not have the scientific knowledge about the quality of the clay they use for pottery making. Therefore, their perception of the clay quality may be limited to their experience gathered traditionally. For the selection of clay the Kumar potters used their traditional method which they perceive or inherited from their forefathers and they were done so

behaviourally. The potters clay (*kumarmati*) for making pottery was not available everywhere. In this regards, the potters used certain special kind of clay for producing pottery items which was only available in certain specific localities of Assam, and whatever may be the distance or cost of transportation they were bound to afford to collect the raw materials. The raw materials of manufacturing tools were scarce. Therefore, the Kumar potters were lived in the river banks areas where they easily collected their raw materials. An experienced Kumar potters could easily identify the respective types of clay by touching it or by a simple test of their own. They took a small quantity of clay and mix it with a little water, make a roll with hand and observed it carefully. By this process they understood the quality of clay.

It has been found that in the two districts of the study areas there were four types of clay or raw materials recognized by the Kumar potters of upper Brahmaputra valley; they are as below:

- a) *Balia mati* (sandy clay) which is slightly sandy. It is found 4-5 feet below surface.
- b) *Boka mati* (muddy clay) which is found 10 to 15 ft below surface. It is bluish.
- c) *Alotia mati* (sticky clay) which is blackish is also known as *Kumarmati* is found 50 feet or more below surface. *Alotia mati* contains mud and sand.
- d) *Lodha mati* (clay) slightly brownish retains excessive plasticity, found 40ft below surface.

The Kumar potters of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts were selected the four varieties of clay according to the type of potteries which they want to made pottery goods. The Kumar potters were generally avoiding *Lodha mati* (clay) as it cracks easily and hence not suitable for making pottery. They preferred another three steps. These steps were *lodha* steps, post step and *ghati* step. In this operation at least six men were involved, two men at the *lodha* step, two at the post and two men near the clay. The clay was relayed hand to hand. The collection of clay was very risky and hazardous. There were instances of men dying by falling as they go deep below. Several families got together for the collection of clay in particular areas. It took the whole day for collecting the clay. The collected clay was dragged out being hung by rope which weighs about 10-20 kg per *khep* (trip). The clay so collected was dumped in an area near the source and different families earmark their respective areas with a rope and from that area they carried clay to their homes for making pottery items. Sometimes after digging out the clay, instead of depositing clay, they directly carried the clay to their home either in a hand pulled cart or in bamboo baskets by both males and females. There are no disagreements among them in the procurement of clay. Sometimes the same type of clay used in manufacturing different types of potteries. In this respect, the quality of the clay determines the product. However, the suitable type of clay is most important and salient resource of pottery manufacturing, it is also considered as a primary environmental factor. The Kumar potters of *Salmara*, *Cinatoli*, *Dikhowmukha* applied their own traditional method for selection of clay. The clay was easily available in the particular villages. It was found in certain localities which were only few kilometres away from the potter's village. However, they have given first preference to the quality of the clay and the question of distance arises afterwards.

Pottery articles were largely used in agrarian life in colonial period of Assam. During the Ahoms, the royal houses and officials engaged potters in this craft work which called Kumar. The pots manufactured by them were of certain standard sizes, the bigger one called *kalah* was used to measure some other agricultural items including *jiggery, pulse, oil* etc. It is being observed that *Kumarmati* was located in low lying and marshy areas. The Kumar potters were aware of the clay sources in the particular region. In case of Salmara in Majuli, Kumar potters supplied *Kumarmati* (potters clay) to the different parts of upper Assam, especially during the time of celebration of *Bhaona* (drama) in the Satras since ancient period. They even supplied *Kumarmati* for making idols of Gods and Goddesses during *Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Saraswati Puja* and *Viswakarma Puja* to different parts of Assam. In the recent days, the demand of raw materials increased due to demand of making different types pottery items. For making potteries in different pottery industries in Assam some important production process was applied. There are certain processes which were adopted by the Kumar potter in the two districts. These were cleaning, mixing and kneading (Saraswati and Behura, 1966). The preparation of clay was the basic component of making pottery items.

The Kumar potters of upper Assam used a few steps for manufacturing pottery is described below: the first step was called cleaning. The cleaning of the clay was generally done at home. The clay was dug up from the bed in the form of large clods in soft and wet condition and the process continues for several times until the clay becomes like a paste of required consistency. Then a round ball was made called *matir loda* (clay ball). The second step was called pulverisation. The clay was then pulverized with the help of wooden pestle. After that potters sieve the clay by bamboo sieve or *chalani*. The third was mixing followed by pulverisation. In order to make the clay

pliable and to lessen the stickiness, the potter mix non plastic material or tempering material like sand. The proportion of mixing tempering material solely depends on the stickiness of the clay. Nevertheless, the Kumar potters had done it beautifully. Usually, mixing process is done either on clean courtyard or on a bamboo mat. After that, they conserved these in a corner of their courtyard. Kneading was the fourth and the final stage of preparation of clay. The amount of kneading was dependent upon the personal choice of the potters. The potters knead either by hand or with bamboo strip on a bamboo mat or on a wooden plank. They were kneaded by hands for several times and are followed by the sprinkling of the well dried husk ash (*tuh*). In order to preserve its softness and wetness, the potters cover the prepared clay with wet gunny bags. After being kneaded the whole lump of clay sliced into several conical chunks. These chunks placed separately on a wooden platform or dried earthen platform. The clay was finally ready for making vessels. The other element used in the manufacturing potteries was water. The water as prime element of production of pottery items along with other resources of pottery industry was equally important. Water was the most important source in many parts of Assam to produced earthenwares. The potter got plenty of water from the pond, river, *beels* (bogs) or any other natural sources throughout the year. The tempering material used by the Kumar potters for preparation of vessels was basically the sand. Generally, the sand was available locally in all the parts of upper Brahmaputra valley in particular and Assam in general. In fact, while beating, the Kumar potter has to use sand for shaping the vessels properly. It was difficult to assess the exact proportion of sand they mix up with the clay. By and large, Kumar potters traditionally or conventionally rely on approximate estimation of preparing the clay. However, they were achieved the skill by experience.

The method of colouring the vessels and pots were done by adopting the following steps by the Kumar potters in upper Assam. Among the Kumar potters, the colouring material is known as *Gerumati* (colour soil) usually a reddish kind of soil. It is primarily used by the Kumar potters of Assam. This is called *Gerumati* as *Rangamati* or *rang diya mati* among the Kumar potters of Sibsagar district. They collected it from their neighbouring river beds. It was available mostly in dry season particularly in autumn (*Khorali*). However, they had needed a small portion of quantity of *Khayar* to mix with the *Rangamati*. The potters prepared a solution of *Gerumati* by mixing water as needed and then they were applied to the vessels appropriately. They collected the colouring material once in a year and preserved for the whole year. The firing materials were used during the last part of the manufacturing method. The Kumar potter used firewood, paddy strove, thatch, husk, bamboo, stubble ashes, dried cow-dung and false grains. The potter occasionally used roots of wood and bamboo as firewood obtained from the forest reserve. Generally, they did not have to purchase firewood. The paddy, husk and paddy false grains were collected from the nearby villages in exchange of pots. The stubble and cow-dung also collected free of cost from the nearby field and households. The ashes obtained from burning firewood in every household. Additionally, they were collected paddy and strove during winter and preserved these items in a corner of their courtyard for using in the entire season. The paddy husk was also one of the essential firing materials. The potters purchased it from the rice mill by paying some amount of cash as there was no fixed price rate. In the study reveals that though the required materials were obtained free of cost, they had to face difficulties in terms of procurement. At times these were not so easily available. In the recent times all elements are not easily available. So, the potters purchase all important materials to

continue their age old crafts industry. The potters therefore face lots of hurdle to manufacture these items.

By the fashioning of the vessels Kumar potters produced varieties of pottery in response to the demand of quality items. Primarily two types of implements were used for making vessels; the beater and the anvil. The process of fashioning the vessels involved beating and pressing techniques. In the upper Assam, the male and female potters were produced pottery by their skilled hands and fingers. The techniques in fashioning the pottery items vary from type to type. In this connection, the participation of male in different economic pursuits and his departure from his traditional occupation did not cause any crisis to the superstructure of the pot building tradition and its functions. To overcome the problem of economic condition, structure of the potters, the women took to these possessions. The process of beating involved several stages; in the beginning of first stage potters try out a preparatory phase for the neck and the base formation. They took a sizable quantity of clay to be detached and determined by the size and shape of the neck to be prepared. Finally, they were made potteries for their need. After this process, potters were started into making some thick and round clay plates with their hands or by using the beater. The numbers of clay plates was equal to the number of rectangular plates, which was meant for the formation of neck. The second stage mainly includes the formation of neck (*galbanua*) an annexation of a base to it (*talilagua*). In this way a rough shape of a pot was obtained and this process locally known as *Tali lagua (mending)*. A number of pots of these shapes were manufactured within a day. After this, the potters were giving shape to the rim rotating on the clay base known as *Teka*. The rim was produced by the fingers and wet piece of cloth. The Kumar potters fondle the edge a little. A small roll of clay which joined and the rim or

circle was fashioned. The shape and any kind of ornamentation on the circle designed as per the demand and choice of the consumers. The size, thickness and shape of the rim vary from vessel to vessel. This process was called locally as *Kandia*. The next stage was the formation of belly or body (*Pat banua*). The pot attained leather hard condition when it became hard then it soaked with water to make the surface soft. The process of beating needed involves several stages. The thick portion of the lower body was gently beaten with the beater, while the anvil hold from inside with the right hand and it was rotated on the *Athani*. By doing so, the wall of the pitcher was enlarged and it took time which ranges from 1-2 hours. In the meantime, the potter selected another pot for identical operation which also took about 20 minutes to initial shape to each pot. An expert Kumar potter would do it within half of the usual time. In the fourth stage, final shape to the pot was made the surface of the pot smoothened by using a piece of cloth. This was a most important stage of the formation of vessel when it was crack or fissure appears on the pot, the Kumar potters had to repaired or discard the vessel. It was smoothed or slipped by a piece of cloth soaked in muddy water after it exposed in the sun for drying. The process by which the *Bhog charu*, shallow bowls was manufactured peculiar methods. A number of bowls was made out of the prepared clay. In a day, a potter would usually produce 40 to 50 plates then they exposed to the sun for some hours. By applying this process it made the plates harder than the previous ones and finally, these clay plates was found on the flat and circular basket. During the manufacturing of these types of items, the rotation of the basket was easy and to produced smooth surfaces of the bowl. Pottery items were placed under direct sun shine for drying. The pressing method was the simplest one that could easily be applied by hand. It was found that most of the earliest pots were made by this method and it has

still applied even today in many parts of the North East India. This method of pottery manufacture was practised by the potters of upper Brahmaputra valley in *Salmara, Dakhinpat, Chinatoli, Dergaon, Modarkhat, Biringabari gaon*. These indigenous potteries were popularly known in Majuli as *Majulial* pottery. It was used for making miniature pottery like earthen lamps which locally known as *chaki or banti*. The required amount of clay from the already prepared clay was taken depending upon the size of the pot to be made. For the making of an earthen lamp, a small quantity of clay was taken and a depression is generally widened by exerting pressure by the finger skilfully. The fingers are often moistened with water kept in a bowl. Finally, it was prepared by the pressure of thumb and the first finger then the lamps are allowed to dry in sun shine. The final stage of pottery production was firing of the manufacturing vessels. The right proportion of tempering material, preparation of clay, thickness of the pot and beating etc. was fully developed at the time of firing. The process of firing started within the collection of firing materials. The necessary raw materials for firing was firewood, bamboo split, paddy-straw and ash, dry banana leaf, dry cow dung, etc. when the raw materials were ready then the vessels dried properly. The Kumar potters arranged the vessels for firing. In the upper Brahmaputra valley, the process of firing was locally known as *Pagdia*. Firing was controlled depending upon the maximum quantity of vessels to be burnt. In Salmara of Majuli, the Kumar potters had no specific fire place for firing the vessels. The potter burn the vessels in the *peghali* (kiln) in a separate place allotted in the village specifically meant for that purposed. The Kumar potter was also informed that they also burnt the potteries in a open ground. The necessary firing material was available in sufficient quantities in their villages and it was kept on burning for one to three hours. The pottery items were left into a cool down

after the fire-place was examined thoroughly. The potteries which was not properly burnt these were kept separately and refired in the same manner. The Kumar potters of different places had followed two important steps in firing raw potteries called smaller vessel firing and bigger firing process. The smaller vessels on open firing, potter burn 40 to 60 vessels at a time. They prepared a fireplace and over its base some firewood and splits of bamboo were systematically arranged. The space between two pots was filled up with small piece of firewood, dry cow-dung, husk or straw. One of the essential factor as regard to the arrangement of the vessels was the shape of the heap. The Kumar potter arranged the vessels in such an order so that the shape of the heap will be pointed at the top one. Finally, the potters heap it by sprinkling some husk and ash and set the heap on the fire. During the afternoon or in the evening time, the vessel continued to burn for 4-5 hours or even sometimes it took throughout the whole night. After completion of firing, this was allowed to cool down totally. In the next morning they had taken out all the pots from the fire place. After that, they sort out the pottery as fully baked, practically baked, and cracked or damaged. In fact, they kept separately the partially baked pottery which was to be baked once again. The bigger vessels fired in a large numbers on an open place. In this process, the Kumar potters of upper Brahmaputra valley arrange a large circular bed of dry paddy straw and place other firing materials as mentioned earlier. At this stage, potters burn different types of vessels ranging from 200 to 300 at a time and it was needed a considerable spacious ground mostly available outside their courtyard. First, large types of vessels like big *kalah* (pitcher) were placed on the ground by keeping their mouth inwardly towards the midpoint, medium sized vessels like *tekeli* (small pitcher), *mola* (Shallow bowl) so on laid circularly with their mouth facing towards the centre. The *charu* (big bowl) was

also placed vertically between the large vessels. The small sized vessels like *gocha* (lamp stand), *chaki* (earthen lamp) was arranged above the big vessels. The vessels filled up with dried cow dung, husk, dry stalk of tree, piece of wood etc. Such sequence of arrangement of the pots gave a domical view. The entire heap was covered with broken pots, potsherds along with thatch (roofing made of straw or reeds). Finally, paddy husk or ashes were sprinkled over the heap of pots. Generally, the process started on the dry and clear sunny days in the afternoon and last for around 7 to 8 hours for baking a large heap. In the course of firing specially after three hours the potters took out ashes gathered in between two pots by a piece of bamboo split. In fact, this gave new impetuses to the fire as the straw and other materials were started burning again. This process is called *Bhatti diya* (hitting-up). This firing system needed the manpower and manual work which was done for finishing the vessels. So, the male and female as well as young children also participated in this process. But, most of the potter families were presently had a nuclear family structure hence more expenditure required for paying off the wages to labourers. Thereby, this process restricted the baking of huge quantity of potteries at a time. The status of the potter household and pottery units of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts which were run by sole proprietorship or through joint family from the colonial period of Assam till now.

The pottery production and consumption were primarily rural base industries in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur district of Assam. The traces into urban industries were missing as the urban consumption or rural consumption was not clearly visible. The Census of 1921 included information relating to the industrial and economic condition of the people with special enquiry on the position of cottage industries of the province. Notwithstanding, the plenty of natural resources in the region only 205,000 persons or

about 2.5 percentage of the total population in the province were supported by cottage industry according to the Census report of 1921 (Census of India, *Report on Assam*, 1921). The industries in the pre-colonial Assam existed in the form of cottage as well as artisanal. The cottage industry in Assam included handlooms and spindles, cotton hand grinding machines, oil ghanis (pressing mills), sugarcane mills, brass and bell metal work shops, potter and carpenter workshops, black smithies, daily establishment of commercial sewing machines and tailoring shops. The Census of 1921 shows that except handlooms and spindles the numbers supported by the other industries were small (Report of Census, Assam, 1911).

Assam had received a negligent treatment during the British regime under the study period. The British government established new modern industries in different part of the state and destroyed traditional handicrafts industry. The modern tools and large capital investment in different handicraft industries, the workshop of the craftsmen turned out to be an injured class in the state. Similarly, British government did not make planned for the development of handicrafts. Although they set up a separate department of industries for the growth and development of indigenous industries in 1918 but the department had totally fail to take positive new policy for the development of glorious traditional handicrafts of Assam. In the British period most of the artisans continued handicraft like as Kumar potters of upper Assam with their hereditary pursuits which passed by tradition from father to son in the state. With the introduction of new tool, machines and methods there has been a lot of changes in the traditional pottery work specially from the establishment of a modern economy in the colonial period of Assam. (Handique, 2012)

The British period was a highly profit orientated and the local handicraft industry faced lots of hurdles in the state. In 1951, the government of India was started new process for development of handicrafts industry with launching of the first five year plan in the country. In 1952, All India Handicrafts Board was set up to study the problems and prospects and to take positive steps for the development of handicrafts in India. It has observed that millions of people possessing traditional skills and knowledge of traditional techniques still make a living by producing handicrafts products of different parts of the country. Similarly, the pottery industries in India have a big role to play for social, cultural and economic development of the state. In Assam, the important handicrafts industries are cane and bamboo, brass metal, bell metal, sital pati, ivory works, pottery, doll making, toy making, jewellers and stone carving. The large number of artisans engaged in the handicrafts and abundant raw materials sources in Assam and it drawn to its sustainable development of the state. Moreover, the pottery industry is playing a prominent role in the preservation of traditional skills, knowledge and culture heritage of the entire state.

The pottery industry is highly labour oriented. It is seen that a few numbers of pottery industry were running their production in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. The post independence period is encouraging to set up Assam Khadi and Village Industries Board (AKVIB) in 1953. The Board has been implementing various programmes for development of handicrafts industries including pottery which generating rural employment and for upliftment of basic economic structure of rural area of Assam. The Board has also provided necessary assistance to the artisans for promotion of pottery industry in Assam. The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) was established in 1957 and main objectives was to promoted and supported to

handicraft industry in India particularly cane and bamboo works and other thirty major village industries. The KVIC was a main commission to make some positive work in the North Eastern Zone on handicrafts. The commission is also playing an important role for the expansion and modernization of village industries in the state of Assam. Another important corporation was established in 1958 known as Assam Government Marketing Corporation Ltd. (AGMC). The main objective was promotion the marketing items of handicrafts and small scale and cottage industries in the state. The corporation during the last decade dedicated towards the modernization, preservation and patronage of traditional crafts of the region by encouraging and assisting the expert artisans. The corporation has been recently transferred to the Sericulture and Weaving Department of Assam. To established sale emporium for various handicraft products at different parts of Assam a new co-operative society was set up by the government. This co-operative is known as Assam Apex Weavers and Artisans co-operative Federation Ltd (ARTFED) in 1977 at Guwahati. The ARTFED has taken various positive steps to promote wood crafts, cane and bamboo items, brass metal items, decorative textile craft etc. through regional and national markets.

The District Industries Centre and Commerce (DICC) were started in 1978 to develop handicraft industry in state level, district level, village and rural sector in Assam. This industry has key emphasised in the growth of various small scale industries and handicrafts units in all districts in the state. In 1962, the state government of Assam was established Assam Small Industries Development Corporation (ASIDC) at Guwahati. The corporation has been playing an important role to accelerate the process of growth and development of handicrafts industry in Assam. They opened up a number of various types of handicraft units under its own management and also gave some

financial assistance to continue their age old traditional industries in Assam. In recent year, a financial agency was set up known as North Eastern Development Financial Corporation Ltd (NEDFI) to make awareness among the people about the prospects of industrial and handicrafts sector utilizing traditional resources. On the other hand, NEDFi has formulated some project to upgrade traditional industries with special reference to the cane and bamboo industry in Assam. This organization also helped local industries by giving financial loan to develop their handicrafts. Although, all these organization has taken various agenda, worksheet, project, awareness programme and promote marketing system but the pottery as well as traditional handicraft industries were not growing well due to a few shortcomings in the organisations in Assam.

During the British period and thereafter the slow development of pottery industry as well as different industry was gradually develop in our state. The numbers of handicrafts industry has been playing an important role to accelerate the process of development of handicrafts industry in the state as well as economy of the region, among them a few industries are found in the upper Assam in 1995-96. Although, there is a huge potential for the growth of handicrafts industry in Assam but problems faced by this industry is always going against its growth and development. But, the pottery industry in the handicrafts sector is mostly in un-organised sector in the state. It may be mentioned that almost every household in the rural areas are connected with handicrafts in the state. The pottery products are mainly used in their traditional life in different part of Assam. The pottery industry as well as different handicrafts industries are not only provide employment and income opportunities but also form a prominent element in cultural and social unity of the people of the state. The data regarding district wise

handicrafts units and artisans in upper Assam have been presented in the following table.

Table-7: District wise Handicrafts Units and Artisans in Upper Assam

Sl.No.	District	No. of Handicraft Units	Percentage	No. of Handicraft Artisans	Percentage
1.	Dhemaji	183	0.60	576	0.57
2.	Dibrugarh	728	2.40	2736	2.72
3.	Golaghat	664	2.19	1752	1.74
4.	Jorhat	870	2.87	2645	2.63
5.	Lakhimpur	1415	4.66	4727	4.71
6.	Sibsagar	223	0.74	884	0.88
7.	Tinsukia	452	1.49	1301	1.30

Sources: Assam, Handicrafts at a Glance, NER, office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textile, Govt. of India, Guwahati, 2000.

Table No-8: District wise list of Kumar Population figure in Upper Assam

Sl. No	Districts	Populations	No. of Villages
1.	Tinsukia	4000	10
2.	Dibrugarh	35000	25
3.	Dhemaji	18000	15
4.	Lakhimpur	20000	33
5.	Sivsagar	30000	35
6.	Jorhat	42000	55
7.	Majuli	20000	15

Sources- field visit and AAKS, General Secretary

The above mentioned table shows that 10 no.s of Kumar villages with a population amounting 4000 in Tinsukia district, followed by Dibrugarh with 35,000 in 25 villages; Dhemaji and Lakhimpur with composite population of 38000 in about 48 villages respectively. The foregoing table shows 35 Kumar villages having a population amounting 30,000 in Sibsagar district, followed by Jorhat with 42,000 in 55 villages; whereas Majuli homes 20,000 in 15 villages respectively.

The total number of Kumar potter villages consists 570 in Assam and population of this caste group is around 10 lakhs. The majority of the village is located in the rural areas in the different districts of Assam and they also lost their inherent culture due to the changing environment. From the primary source data the researcher has found that the Kumar potters are settled by riverside areas for manufacturing their pots. Furthermore, maximum number of the Kumar potters gave up their culture of pot making. In the study area i.e. the undivided Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts have many potter villages mentioned below:

Table No-9: District wise list of Kumar Villages in Upper Assam

Sl. No	Name of the District	Name of the Villages
1.	Tinsukia	Kapahtoli, Dhala, Hahekhati, Pagram, Tingrai, Digboi (Town), Filbari, Rupai , Tinsukia Nagar, Doomduma Nagar etc.
2.	Dibrugarh	Dolonikur, Gergeri, Kawaimari, Bhagamur, Bhagamur Tiniali, Jokai Songaon, Jokai Saraighat, 2 No. Bharalibari, Jokai Bhurbhuri, Puberun Krishipam, 1 No. Bharali, Jokai Ban Kumargaon, Goroimari, Khowang

		Chariali, Blockgaon, Moran, Romai, Dibrugarh Town etc.
3.	Sibsagar	Gourisagar, Amguri , Sargowa, Deogharia, Kheranipathar, Madhupur, No.1 Rupapur, No. 2 Rupapur, Sonapur, No.1 Bhagyapur, No. 2 Bhagyapur, Botamari, Rupahimukh, Nazira, Arjunguri, Misajan, Sibsagar, Namti, Moran Town, Gajali, Dimow Town, Saraguri etc.
4.	Jorhat	Bhitar Kakila, Gariabhaga, Meleng, Chenajan, Satai Chinatoli, Kaliapani, Balama, Tiok, Jajimukh Bhakatgaon, Jajimukh kumargaon, Phukanbari, Bezarsiga, Chinatoli Hatipam, No.1. Kawoimari, Kachagaral, Dholi, Tingirimara, Charaibahi, Ujani Garamur, Namani Garamur, Napam, Dagachuk, Dhekiakhowa, Garakhiadol, Kaligaon, Kathalbari, Hujungpara, Jagduar, Sungi, Jorhat Town, Mahimabari, Nagadhuli, Doklagia, Moriani Town, Vellowguri, Bekajan, Gopalpur, Pubalinagar, Balijan, Sungi, Mellow, Titabar Town etc.
5.	Majuli	Salmara, Chinatoli, Dakhinpat, Mudoibil, Bangaon, Bagoriani, Bhakatgaon, Silikhaguri, Besamara, Kamalabari Town, Bhekulimari etc.
6.	Golaghat	Kumarpati Ward No.2, Dhekiajuli, Adhalichuk, Bochakumar, Kumarbondha, Kakodonga, Bokakhat,

		Molai Kumargaon, Sarupathar, Dergaon, Sagargaon, Bhitara Kakila, Golaghat Town etc.
7.	Dhemaji	Moderguri, Bishnupur, Silali, Sisi Bhangidia, Aktai Naharani, Simenchapari, Dhunaguri, Silapathar, Garubondha, Dhemaji Town etc.
8.	Lakhimpur	Bormuria, Lilabari, Gopisali, No. 1, Pachnoi, Chinatolia, Nowboicha, Jahing Rangajan, Ahuchaulgaon, Panigaon, Kakatitup, Borchapari Balibheta, Rantijan, Kandalipur, Chengamari, Gosaipukhuri, Gaonmoroia, Dhunaguri, Amguri, Jugalpur, Ghansarai, Chandrapur, Kutuhaguri, Dolpata, Madhupur, Amtola, No.1 Azarguri, No.2 Azarguri, Gosaipam, Solmari, Lakhnabari, Paschim Laluk, Gogamukh, Chauldhuwa etc.

Source- Field visit and All Assam Kumar Sanmilani, General Secretary (AAKS)

Table No-10: District wise Educational Profile of Kumar community

EDUCATION SCENARIO										
Sl. No	District	Child	HSLC	HS	BA	MA	TECH.	DR. & ADMI	Up to X	Illiterate
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Tinsukia	2130	3040	2280	1520	450	5	5	7005	3900
2.	Dibrugarh	12875	21600	13564	9521	4210	35	6	34661	4003
3.	Sibsagar	13852	23451	15986	10354	5214	162	9	37668	4132
4.	Jorhat	14079	28235	21546	13520	7612	459	12	27042	2124
5.	Majuli	6615	9450	7087	4725	2356	125	17	19490	4000
6.	Golaghat	5278	8750	6851	5420	2586	254	10	10232	3597
7.	Dhemaji	5029	9520	7569	2586	2118	125	10	10562	3438
8.	Lakhimpur	6951	14895	10524	8564	3256	254	15	9561	2586

Sources- field visit and AAKS, General Secretary

Table No-11: District wise list of Socio-Economic Profile Kumar Community

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF KUMAR COMMUNITY IN UPPER ASSAM							No. of Village
Sl. No	District & Sub Division	H.H	Population of the Kumars				
			M	F	T	Voter	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Tinsukia	3040	7825	375	15200	10336	8
2.	Dibrugarh	17520	44210	43390	87600	59558	12
3.	Sibsagar	17632	48976	48000	96976	65943	22
4.	Jorhat	20110	50550	50000	100550	68374	24
5.	Majuli	9450	24232	23018	47250	32130	31
6.	Golaghat	7540	19535	8347	37700	25636	15
7.	Dhemaji	7320	18323	7605	35928	24431	10
8.	Lakhimpur	10321	25323	4329	49652	33763	12

Sources- field visit and information by AAKS, General Secretary

Table No-12: District wise list of source of Income of Kumar peoples

SOURCE OF INCOME							
Sl. No	District	Agriculture	Business	Service	Potters	Boat-making	Others
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Tinsukia	10640	1520	760	456	353	1471
2	Dibrugarh	61320	8761	4383	2534	1521	9081

3	Sibsagar	61782	9625	5256	7589	4568	8156
4	Jorhat	60259	10986	8935	7862	4520	7988
5.	Majuli	17350	2540	3568	11325	8523	3944
6.	Golaghat	21658	7586	3689	1250	208	3202
7.	Dhemaji	20110	4895	3548	1052	1542	4781
8.	Lakhimpur	28654	6987	4867	1026	2548	5570

Source- Field visit and information by AAKS & Kumarjoti, General Secretary

Table No-13: District wise Name of Villages of Traditional Pottery Industry

Sl.No	District	Pottery Villages	Boat Making Villages
1.	Tinsukia		Kapahtoli
2.	Dibrugarh	Bhagamur Block, Dolonikur, Jokai etc.	Jokai Bhurbhuri, Jokai Ban Kumargaon, Romai etc.
3.	Sibsagar	Amguri, Saraguwa, Rupahimukh, Arjunguri, Nazira, Bhimpara, Diroi Deogharia etc.	Rupahimukh, Bhimpara, Saraguwa etc.
4.	Jorhat	Kakilamukh, Nimati, Meleng, Jhajimukh, Teok, Rajabari, Charaibari, Kathalbari, Tingirimara, Dhalai, Garakhiadol, Satai Chinatoli, Kakodonga, Mahimabari, Nagadhuli etc.	Nimati, Kakilamukh Balijan, Sungi, Mallowpathar Jhajimukh etc.
5.	Majuli	Salmara, Chinatoli, Dakhinpat, Bagoriani, Bhakatgaon etc.	Salmara, Chinatoli, Dakhinpat, Bagoriani, Bhakatgaon etc.

6.	Golaghat	Kumarpatty, Kumargaon, Sarupathar, Dergaon etc.	Dergaon Kumargaon etc.
7.	Dhemaji	Moderguri, Sisi, Dhenukhana etc.	Moderguri, Sisi etc.
8.	Lakhimpur	Nowboicha, Amguri, Jugalpur, Chandrapur, Rantijan etc.	Amguri, Khaga, Jugalpur, Chandrapur, Rantijan, Chengamari etc.

Source- Field visit and information by AAKS & Kumarjoti, General Secretary

The Kumar potters are practising their traditional pottery craft from past among them only 27.50% potters continued their inherent work. This is followed by daily wage earner, government service holders and cultivators respectively. The number of person engaged in other occupation like business etc. was practically negligible. This shows that the occupational diversity among the Kumar is very less as more than the working population are doing the job of making pottery in the particular districts of upper Assam.

It is noticed that despite competition from outside market, the local pottery products had a place in the local *hats* or markets in Brahmaputa valley. However, the Kumar potters were not organised enough and without financial aid they unable to manufacture quality pottery items in the two districts. So, these potteries were not good or find any profitable market. The Kumar potters in upper Assam sold their earthen pots to the local dealers, who in most cases were local traders or Beparis. It noted that the metal workers in Sibsagar district was practically obliged to work for Marwari traders who used to provide the manufactures with the metal, most probably the imported sheets (River Traffic of Sibsagar district mention figures of imported metals), to the Morias who were engaged in manufacturing of utensils. This was often sold on credit

and on the understanding that the manufactured utensils would be sold to them at reduced rates (Gait, 1896). Majority of the workers in different handicraft industries faced some problems in production of their products. In this connection, pottery, brass and copper utensils suffered from the same disadvantages as the Kumar potters had, that of being bound to the middlemen and not in direct contact with the market and the actual consumers. In some cases between the Mahajans and the artisans there was also a class of middlemen Beparis who brought the money from the Mahajans and took back the finished pottery article to him. In either case, the profits of the industry went very largely to the Mahajans and the middlemen Beparis. It was estimated that on an average a pottery worker did not earn more than Rs. 3 to Rs. 7 per month which was barely sufficient to meet his livelihood expenses, the depressed ones being more in debt. The pottery production was depended on the local labourers or potters thus the indigenous industry remained as it was, or rather the reasons for which they could not attract any investors, was attributed by the pottery industry due to the shortage, dearness and unwillingness to work of the local labour for limited profit of their production. An important factor contributing towards the shortage of labour was its relatively small in numbers in the Brahmaputra valley. The statistical account of the districts of the Brahmaputra valley by Hunter suggests that except in other parts of the valley the number of labourers was insignificant in the two districts Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. The limited labourers and the limited production was one of the main causes for the underdevelopment of the pottery industry in the particular two districts of Assam.

Table No -14: Pottery Used In Rites and Rituals

<i>Sl No</i>	<i>Name of the ceremony</i>	<i>Types of pottery</i>	<i>Nos</i>	<i>Procured</i>
1	Pohanbiya	Ghat Chaki Charu Dhunadani Dhupdani	1 2-11 2-3 1 1	Kumar
2	Ganani	Ghat Chaki Dhunadani Dhupdani	1 1 1 1	Kumar
3	Annaprasana	Ghat Chaki Charu Dhunadani Dhupdani Gilas	1-3 7-13 4-6 1 1 As required	Kumar
4	Surakarana	Ghat Chaki Dhunadani Dhupdani Tekali	1-3 15-20 1 1 1-9	Kumar
5	Upanayana	Ghat Chaki Dhunadani	1-3 15-20 1	Kumar

		Dhupdani Tekali Charu Gilas	1 9-11 5-10 As required	
6	Toloni Biya	Dhunadani Dhupdani Tekali Charu Gilas	1 1 1- 1-7 As required	Kumar
7	Subha Bibaha	Dhunadani Dhupdani Tekali Chaki Ghat Sahastra Mala Dorali Charu Gilas	1 1 5-6 1-10 1-4 5-9 1 5-9 As required	Kumar
8	Mitta Sanskara Savadahana	Kalah Ghat Dhupdan Charu Chaki	1 2 2-3 2 2	Kumar
OTHER CEREMONIES (HOUSE HOLD LEVEL)				
9	Brahmabhozon	Ghot Chaki	2-6 10-15	Kumar

		Tekali	1	
		Dhupdani	1	
		Kalah	As required	
		Charu	”	
		Gilas	”	
10	Puja path (Sakam)	Ghot	1	Kumar
		Chaki	2-5	
		Tekali	2	
		Dhupdani	1	
		Dhup	1	
		Kalah	1-3	
		Charu	As required	
COMMUNITY AND HOUSE HOLD LEVEL				
11	Visha karma puja	Ghot	1	Kumar
		Chaki	2-3	
		Dhuani	1	
		Dhunadani	1	
		Tekali	1-3	
		Kalah	1-5	
		Charu	5	
12	Durga puja	Ghot	4-5	Kumar
		Chaki	50-100	
		Dhupdani	5-11	
		Dhunadani	5-10	
		Tekali	7-11	
		Kalah	5-10	

		Charu	20-50	
13	Kali puja	Ghot Chaki Dhupdani Dhunadani Kalah Charu	1 10-100 1 1 1 5	Kumar
14	Lakhimi puja	Ghot Chaki Dhupdani Dhunadani Kalah Charu	1 1 1 1 1 1	Kumar
15	Kali puja	As in Durga puja		Kumar
16	Dipannitta (Dewali)	Chaki	As required	Kumar
17	Saraswarti puja	As in Lakhimi puja	As required	Kumar
18	Bihu	Chaki Malacharu Doi-Tekali Pot-Charu	Quantity of The pottery shall be fixed by the observers themselves	Kumar
19	Guru tithi	Chaki Malacharu Doi Tekali Pot-Charu	Quantity of The pottery shall be fixed by the observers themselves	Kumar

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Chapter-V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters an attempt has been made to identify the pottery prevalent in the colonial period of Assam and a case study has been done in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts. Under the study, the Kumar potter villages were randomly selected from both the districts of Assam. In this process, the primary data were collected from different government as well as other authentic sources. The secondary data were collected from author's interview with informants also vehemently consulted and adopted to summarise the problems faced by the Kumar potters as found during the research.

This last chapter embodies conclusion is drawn upon the major findings, categorical analysis, suggestions and innovative approaches during the research. It may be mentioned here that the findings are relevant in portraying the Kumar villages, although they shed considerable light on the pottery industry in Assam in general and Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts in particular.

Each of the two district, as noted before, has certain distinctive socio-cultural and to some extent historical features. It has already mentioned that the two districts i.e., Sibsagar and Lakhimpur at one point of time covered vast areas during the British period. The development of pottery industry in the two districts and its present position with all its relevant aspects has been thoroughly examined in the preceding chapters. Now, it would be desirable to give in brief conclusions of the study. It is also desired to bring all the important problems of the industry into light and give suitable suggestions, with a view to development of the pottery industry and to put some sound basis for

further research. The study of the pottery industry attracted widespread attention during the last couple of decades in the region. The academicians, historians, and research scholars put interest to search and know about the past history of different handicrafts in Assam. In the less developed or developing countries, pottery was considered not only as an index of economic development but also important factor for sustainable livelihood. Pottery was a process of social change and it triggered changes in the internal as well as external society of the countries, states and districts. The pottery can regarded as a key indicator of change and development leading to transformation in socio-economic and cultural lives of the Kumar people in the upper Brahmaputra Valley as well. This industry was conceptually assumed to consist three components viz, demographic, economic and social condition. The social and economic factors were important but demographic factor was the crucial one. On the onset the pottery industry is regarded as one of the ever changing venture on ones our day to day life. Both the pottery and the Kumar was two sides of a coin and both are inseparable in their origin. The pottery industry had been adversely affected by the changes occurred in ecology, economy, and socio-cultural system which resulted the slow growth of its development gradually in relation to its production. Due to the impact of modernization, commercialisation, and technological developments, pottery industry had been faced a tough challenges for survival. This trend had broken-down the traditional values and behaviour pattern of the Kumar community.

So far as historical or archaeological data were concerned, it revealed that since the Stone Age the hilly area of Assam was played a vital role to exchange the goods. All the sites were representing the Stone Age had found in the hills of Assam and other

neighbouring states of the northeast India. This region was regarded as an abode of living from pre-historic time.

In examining the origin and development of ceramic tradition of Assam, the Daojali Hading of North Cachar Hills may be taken for historical studies. Though, it was away from Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts, Daojali Hading became the only pottery yielding stratified site in Assam. Thus, in the absence of any such nearby historical site it would at least helped the researchers to reconstruct link between the dispersed ceramic sequences of Assam from past to present.

In the earlier chapters, pottery industry of Assam with reference to Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts has been analysed based on data collected from the field survey. An attempt has also been made to identify the problems as well as the performance of the pottery industry of the selected two districts. Now, a summary of the findings of the present work and also a few suggestions based on these findings are presented in this chapter. It is to be noted that the findings, suggestions, and outcome of the research work are relevant in connection with the pottery industry of Assam as well as the two selected districts.

The first chapter Introduction deals with the outline of the whole research work in a very brief manner. From the early period of the human society, potteries form a valuable place depicting culture and economic traits of the people. It had also been known as the prime craft bearing the imprint of many cultures and civilizations and preserved by experienced and skilled potters. Pottery is one of the age-old arts professed by the potters as a matter of common place. The chapter mostly discusses about the meaning, definition and conceptual meaning of the Kumar and pottery in comparison to

other states. In this chapter, we have included the broad objective of the research work, statement of the problem, review of the literature, methodology and significance of our study. The chapter wise organisation of the research work has been made in this chapter. It comprehends an overall idea about the two districts as well as the pottery industry prevalent in the study areas during the colonial period.

The second chapter has attempts to defining the origin, history, development of pottery industry in Assam. In the chapter, pottery in the pre-colonial period of Assam has discussed vehemently, in this connection, the pre-colonial period was attempted to define the history and development of different pottery industry in Assam. The term Kumar and its relationship with the pottery industry were also mentioned in this current chapter. The word *Narahari* was also well connected to *Kumar*. The ancient potteries of Assam and excavation of different sites discussed here. The original development of Kumar potters, pottery in comparison to neighbouring states carried out. The history of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts and the socio-economic condition of the upper Brahmaputra Valley were thoroughly mentioned and pottery industry under the royal regime was examined. It indicated that the pottery industry was a considerably good condition in medieval period which was patronised by the Ahom kings in this region. In the pre-colonial days, the pottery industry in Assam was purely of a religious utility and primarily concerned with religious functions i.e., worshiping of Gods, Brahminical rites, promoted the pottery production in customs. As a result, the used of pottery items in different rites and religious ceremonies gradually increased leading to high demand for the pottery products. In this circumstance, the Kumar potters were settled in the Ahom kingdom and manufactured different types of pottery items. The worshipping the God and Goddess in the temples, celebration of the religious ceremony at home garnered

used of earthenware made by the Kumar potters during the Ahom rule in the state. In the later period of the Ahom regime, the imported finish products took the same position with the local pottery goods. The different types of pottery products were imported to Assam from Orissa and Bengal for domestic used as well as religious purposed. A caste or a community was generally defined with name depending on its occupation which accordingly called the people who opted the occupation of making pottery were known as *Kumbhakara* or potters. It has already mentioned in the earlier chapters that those two communities 'the Hiras' and 'the Kumars' in Assam basically involved in making of earthenwares. It was observed that these two communities had mutual inter-dependency in the economic sphere at village level and had good communication in an interesting way. It is already examined that pottery products of Hira potters were not sold for ritualistic needs, but only for utilitarian uses. In our field survey, it was found that there were some other potteries goods which kept by the Kumar as lucky charms for economic gain. As a result, both communities were maintaining economic adjustment for their production. Further, the occupation, mobility, economic and income status, raw materials and implements used, cost and sale, demand and marketing, types of products, leading factors behind the influencing pottery trade and future prospects of pottery industry as well as Kumar people would included in the foregoing chapter.

The foregoing third chapter has examined the historical development of pottery industry in the colonial period. Under the observation, it has found that the historical development of pottery industry was an essential key factor to find a clear understanding of the Kumar potters of the selected areas of two districts. The Kumar potters became an integral part within a social and economic fabric knitting the

composite way of life in the colonial period. But, unfortunately the pottery had not received proper treatment in the hands of the British government. The poor standard of living and economic penetration by the colonial power had radically forced many of the potters to choose other craft works. Simultaneously, a few of them gave up the ancestral pottery industry in the entire state. The raw materials as well as rural based economy had suffered a lot; manufacture of the pottery items thus collapsed. The British power transformed rural handicrafts industry into modern machine made industry in order to control the market system under their rule. Various local handicrafts industries had suffered from the new machine made goods which were supplied from the outside Assam in colonial period and these goods occupied local *hats* or markets. It was observed that in spite of rich tradition the pottery industry had not been able to fully develop as an alluring profession due to lack of proper infrastructural facilities in Assam as a whole and Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts in particular.

By the beginning of the twentieth century and British proclamation over the state had radically changed the socio-economic fabric of our society. The capital, labour, trade and handicrafts were controlled by outsiders. As a result, industrialisation laid to an increased pressure on the land and local craft industries in Assam. Thus, it had clearly evident that the colonial power adopted no favourable policy to promote the traditional arts and crafts industry in the state. The potters faced many problems during this specific period like as poor communication and transport systems. Most of the Kumar potters were lived in villages situated in the bank of the river mighty Brahmaputra. The trade based pottery industry demanded proper transport and communication facilities in one hand and on the other hand, the pottery items as well as the raw materials required for the growth of the industry were transported on boats,

thela, chariots and bicycle etc. It was impossible to sell their pottery products due to lack of transport and good communication facilities in outside markets. The occurrence of floods in monsoon every year disconnected the pottery villages from neighbouring places which in turn seriously affected the pottery market and productions. In the same sense, the pottery production also suffered due to the natural calamities like earthquake, dry season, flood etc. in the colonial period.

Under the study, it was thoroughly examined all aspects of pottery industry namely productions, utility, cultural, economic, religious values and over and above its existence from the pre-historic period to the colonial period. On the basis of this analysis, the following conclusion has been drawn in this chapter. Keeping in view, the changing situation of the pottery industry and socio-cultural, socio-economic aspect of the Kumar potters had comprehensively changed its pristine status. Local enterprises, modern finished products, rapid industrialization adopted by the British power occupied an important role in the economic progress of the state at the cost of native pottery. Therefore, the Kumar potters and their pottery industry were forced to settle in the rural villages and adopting outdated methods for manufacturing pottery earthenwares. It also observed that the other craft works like bell metal industry, brass metal industry, bamboo crafts, goldsmiths, blacksmiths etc. developed their techniques and methods of production but the Kumar potters retained the old pattern of pottery making system.

The fourth chapter deals with a case study of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts and the development of pottery industry from pre-colonial period to colonial in Assam. The chapter exclusively discussed on socio-economic aspects of the Kumar potters and the pottery industry in the state. The pottery industry had been playing an important role in the economy of Assam under the study area. Even, though a few large industries were

developed during the concerned period. The traditional pottery industry still has been struggled hard to maintain their status, providing a good amount of income and generating employment opportunity in both the urban and the rural areas of the region. It was found that the pre-colonial and the colonial pottery bore its pristine form and tackled all types of problems in the underdeveloped Assam natively. Although, the heritage of pottery industry in Assam was very rich but the industry remained handicapped due to so many problems. Under the study, it has found that weaving, textile, jewellery, pottery, wood working, stone carving, doll making, ivory, bell metal leather works, cane and bamboo works etc. are very important crafts in Assam. The crafts of Assam had received a negligent treatment during the colonial period in Assam. The artisans also faced various financial problems to run their traditional works. Sivsagar district Gazetteer (1967) expressed the view that the decline of the indigenous industry has opened up scope for potters from Bihar a displace potters from East Pakistan. On the other hand, Rajatananda Das Gupta (1982) undertook an important study to discuss the pottery in the medieval period of Assam viewed that art of making pottery was known from very past with a glorious craft work. Rajen Saikia (2000) has discussed the importance of pottery industry in the British period of Assam and stated that during this changing period colonial power had not taken any further step to modernize this traditional handicraft industry in Assam. In short, it can be say that pottery had not received proper treatment in the hands of British power in Assam. It also examined here that some technique were adopted by the Kumar potters of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts to modernize manufacturing pots.

The preparation of clay as the basic component of making pottery items by the Kumar potters of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts has been analysed. In this method, the first step is called cleaning. The clay is dug up from the bed in the form of large clods in soft and wet conditions and the process continues for several times until the clay becomes pasty of required consistency to make it spherical dough called *matirloda* (clay ball). The second step is called pulverisation done with the help of wooden pestle. After that potter sieve the clay with a bamboo sieve or *chalani*. The third stage involves mixing followed by pulverisation. In order to make the clay pliable and lessen the stickiness, the potter mixed non plastic tempering materials with sand. The pottery manufacturing centre were mostly traditional household and religious utensils like *tou*, *thali*, *jug*, *kalah*, *sarai*, *kharahi*, *glass* and some fancy items such as *phuldani*, *dhunabati*, *dhupdani*, *lighting lamp*, and decorative birds so on. These processes of making pottery were adopted by the Kumar potters in the region. The manufacturing of earthen pots, jars, images, and dolls had undergone a considerable decay among the indigenous people like the Kumar. It is now practised by a few numbers of people in the Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. In the undivided Sibsagar district, Amguri, Sonari, Sapekhati, Mukalimuria Satra (near Dergaon), Gaurisagar, Demow, Kamarbandha, Jorhat and Salmara in Majuli many of them continued manufacturing pottery products. The pottery products were becoming as a primary utility among the Kumar potters of undivided Lakhimpur districts. Some centres of pottery industry were situated in Dibrugarh, Madarkhat, Magherita, Tinsukia, Jamugurihat and Chabua in colonial period. The craft provided full time occupation to the Kumar potters who produced on commercial scale. Most of the pottery products were sold in the markets or

hats and only a small percentage of items were used for domestic purpose in the specific region.

Four types of clay (raw) materials has been found in the two districts of the study areas which were recognized by the potters of Upper Brahmaputra Valley as- a) *Balia mati* (sandy clay) which is slightly sandy b) *Boka mati* (muddy clay) with bluish hue c) *Alotia mati* (sticky clay) also known as *Kumarmati* was blackish. *Alotia mati* contained mud and sand d) *Lodha mati* (clay) slightly brownish retained plasticity procured from 40ft below the river bed.

It has been found in the case study areas that the implements used for manufacturing pottery items by the Kumar potters of the Upper Assam were as follows- *Pitani* (beater), *Boluwa* (Anvil), *Athali* (a concave and heavy disc made of clay), *Afai ghuruwa tokta* (small piece of wooden board having a thickness of 1 to 1½ inches), *Majoni*, *Rukani*, *Panimola* (Small earthen pot), *Afari*, *Chirakani / fotakani* (small piece of cloth), *Chalani* (Bamboo sieve) and *Salvari* etc. The first kind of tool was wooden *Beater* locally known as *Pitani*. Its implementation solely depended on the quality of raw material. The main frame had two parts-the body and the handle. Anvil or *Boluwa* was made of clay or stone and used for beating/shaping the clay lump or defected pottery. The stone anvil was collected from the river bed and its *Beating Base* was slightly convex. The beating base was further divided into two types at the time of making pots; one was called *Athali* (a concave and heavy disc made of clay) the other *Afai ghuruwa tokta* (small piece of wooden board with thickness of 1 to 1½ inches). *Majoni*, a short duck head handle was made of clay. The small concave disc with beaded shape/design was used for levelling the vessels. *Rukani* (Scraper): made of thin bamboo wand (flexible rod) was used to scrape off the unwanted clay from the body of

a head pot. *Panimola* (Small earthen pot) was used for preserving water nearby the potters. This small earthen pot was extremely necessary while making; even broken vessels were used for this purpose. Next *Afari* a flat circular vessel would be used. During the manufacturing of the pots *Chirakani* / *fotakani* (small piece of cloth) was used. The surface was moistened with such cloth soaked with water to maintain desired hardness of the surface. The potter also used the piece of cloth for shaping the rim of the vessel. *Chalani* (Bamboo sieve), a circular strainer made of bamboo was used for separating the impurities and foreign materials present in the clay. This method was necessary for making certain pottery types. *Salvari* made of clay was used for fashioning the vessels at a later stage. All the implements together were known as *Sal*.

The present study tries to see the associative relation between the Kumar potters and the pottery industry of the study areas. The field observation revealed that there were positive as well as negative impacts of modernization towards the pottery and Kumar potters of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. The making of pottery goods was by and large mostly common in every household particularly in the rural areas of the study areas and thereby regulating its economy. In fact, pottery industry had always been a basic activity of human society. It is to be noted that Kumar potters produced potteries using the primitive ways and its growth and development were thus limited. The Kumar potters had been creating aesthetic form of handicraft items. These pottery items were entirely oriented to locally available raw materials which bearing the imprint of many cultures, races, traditions. Thus, the composite civilization had been preserved by the experienced Kumar potters of Assam. It has also examined that the pottery industry was practically declining among the indigenous potters because the younger section of the Kumars neither had interest in following the family trade nor

tried to introduce modern methods of production. So, the decline of the industry had opened up scope for potters from outside specially from Bihar and displaced potters from present day Bangladesh.

In the fourth chapter, also mentioned that the different methods, tools, raw materials, markets or *hats*, pottery items etc. used by the Kumar potter in the particular districts has been discussed. The traditional pottery industry had been faced a lot of challenged specially because of the establishment of a modern economy in the colonial period of Assam. In this connection it can stated that the technique of craft may have changed with the invention of new tools. Its prevalence may have decreased as industry became mechanized; the status of the craftsmen may have changed being a part of a large industrial policy. But the apparently inimical development could not influence pottery. It sustained its production sticking to its essential manufacturing methods, not because of its superior machinery, but essentially for its unique goods. It is to be noted that pottery industry of Assam had received a negligent treatment during the British regime. The establishment of modern industries by the British government destroyed traditional handicrafts of Assam. The colonial power did not frame any plan for development of pottery industry, yet it must be admitted that in 1918, a separate department was created for the growth and development of other indigenous industries in Assam. The department failed to implement the new policy in preserving glorious traditional handicrafts of Assam. With the use of modern tools and large capital workers engaged in the workshops of the pottery industry turned out to be an injured class. In the British period, most of the artisans as well as local handicrafts industry like pottery survived by following ancestral tradition in Sibsagar and Lakhmpur districts and Assam as a whole.

The chapter has drawn some problems and prospects of pottery industry of the region. The field survey revealed that the Kumar potters were facing problems while conducting their works. It is seen that the condition of pottery industry deteriorated during the colonial period due to lack of finance, the general competition due to abundance of cheap manufactured commodities from abroad, lack of government patronage, market constraints, and lack of training facilities and use of outdated traditional methods of pottery production.

Problems: The poor infrastructural facility was one of the root causes of underdeveloped pottery industry in the region. Inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor transport and communication facilities hampered the growth of pottery industry as it could not cope with the fast moving industry during the colonial period.

The colonial government from the very beginning of their rule had not taken any favourable policy towards the development of pottery trade in Assam. The lack of capital was one of the reasons behind the slow pace of Kumar pottery industry in the study area in colonial and post-colonial period. Merchants were reluctant to come forward for investing their capital in Assam because the colonial power had its own vested motive in impeding the economy and exploited the resources for their own profit. The problem had been aggravated in the later colonial era. Geographical isolation and higher cost of production had also been responsible for confining the industry in the remote areas of the study sites. So, the Kumar pottery industry had been identified as a backward indigenous industry.

The industrialization had also suffered a lot during the colonial period. Owing to the dearth of technical personnel in the state, it was impossible to venture into setting up any industry. So, the state had to depend on experts of other states for setting up of such industries.

Lack of industrial credit was also one of the major causes of suffering incurred by many industries of Assam. The availability of credit facilities was an essential prerequisite for the development of pottery industry. Entrepreneurs required credit on easy terms for launching their industrial projects. But the credit facilities in Assam were not up to the mark. The problem was more complicated for the small and medium scale industries of the state. Even the role of banks and other financial institutions was not satisfactory. They never extended financial support to the poor potters on easy terms for setting up industries.

Natural calamities, political unrest, social instability caused much harm to the pottery industry. The capital investment in the industries was limited owing to the frequent occurrence of natural calamities such as earthquake, flood, drought etc. Such investment risk posed a great hurdle in the path of industrialization in the region. The high cost investment discouraged the pottery industry in the state. It is noteworthy that high cost structure mainly attributed to the existence of the higher price level in the state in comparison to other states.

Another major problem in the path of development of pottery industry was the lack of proper arrangements for the marketing of manufactured products during the colonial and post-colonial period of Assam. In the absence of adequate marketing facilities the small industries of the state had to bear additional cost of transport for selling their products outside the state, which resulted in paying higher unit cost of

production and administrative cost. In this regard, it has been observed that the pottery industry in the state always remained old fashioned.

There were other causes that had been stagnated the pottery industry of the region. During the colonial and post-colonial period, Assam has been plagued by various forms of agitations and insurgency problems which have seriously affected the growth of the industrial sector. It has revealed the unpleasant truth that the major and minor industrial houses of the study areas have been paying huge amount of money to the extremists to buy peace for their own survival. As a result, the small scale industries have been unable to raise their competency with the machine made industry of Assam.

The present study of the Brahmaputra Valley shows that Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts faced various problems and challenges in the production of pottery items. The Kumar potters involved in the industry indicated five major challenges and problems. These are finance, irregular and insufficient raw materials, shortage of markets, lack of trainee manpower and lack of equipments.

Poor finance poses a major problem in the production of pottery. The dearth of current capital is a common problem among the Kumar potters. A number of pottery units are sold to buy raw materials meant deduction from own capital. In fact, the potters are financially weak and depend largely on the village money lenders that entrap them in tangles of complex interest.

The insufficient and irregular raw materials impede in the production of potteries. The Kumar potters of the study area are totally dependent on the raw materials brought from the banks of the river Brahmaputra. Because of the non-availability of the quality raw materials, the finished products lack quality. Due to flood and long rainy season, the Kumar potters face major problems in collecting their raw materials from

the riverside. So, the pottery industry became a seasonable business since the colonial period in Assam. Therefore, the income of pottery industry declined. Poor marketing is another major threat to any production system. From the Ahom period to the colonial period the pottery goods were not made available in the market as the Kumar potters used their goods for domestic purposes. In the Ahom regime, Kumar potters sold pots and pottery items in royal houses for religious purposes only. During the colonial period, the Kumar potter needed a comfortable market to sell their manufacturing goods. But due to shortage of market facilities pottery items failed to imprint its mark.

Lack of trained manpower is one of the major problems that hurdle the manufacture of pottery industry. The Kumars produced pottery deeming it as their ancestral profession and adopted the outdated traditional methods of production. The lack of training facilities led to degradation of the craft. Good and attractive design plays an important role in flipping the selling rate of pottery products that enchant the rich class. Lack of up-to-date design of products posed basic problem during the discussed period. It is also observed that at that time pottery units of the surveyed areas were produced engraved with traditional designs particularly depending on demand of temple items and holy earthenware.

Lack of equipment and modern technology was another problem in the production of pottery. As the Kumar potters used ancient methods or techniques to make pottery items they failed to maintain high quality. Moreover, illiterate potters would not operate the standard tools and equipments. Some efforts were taken to induce momentum in modernising pottery production of the state particularly in the two districts by importing of machine for production from other states. But that efforts were gone in vain due to non acceptance by the Kumar potters.

In the Brahmaputra valley particularly Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts, the Kumar potters took some remedial measures to uplift the pottery industry that was stated in the earlier chapters. With a view to boost the economy of the state, some positive steps should be taken for ensuring industrial development of pottery. The following measures may be suggested for revival of pottery industry in particular and development industrial environment of Assam in general:

In order to ensure industrialization in Assam immediate steps should be taken for the development of infrastructural facilities as early as possible. The government should ensure top priority to develop the power sector, in particular, as power is the first pre-requisite for setting up of any industry including the pottery craft. Similarly, transport and communication facilities should also be developed. The Government may encourage private participation for accelerating infrastructural development in the state.

In order to help in the growth of industries there should be adequate credit flow to the state. In this respect, the public sector banks, private sector banks and other financial institutions should extend their helping hand. Government should make provisions for getting industrial credit by the potters on easy terms from banks and other financial institutions.

The state Government has a big role to play for accelerating the pace of industrialization in the state. The government must provide active support both for the promotions of new industries and the expansion of the exiting industries of the state. Various incentives in the form of subsidies and tax exemptions may be provided for the promotion of new industrial units and also for revitalizing the sick industrial units.

The government should make arrangement of marketing facilities for the industrial units of the state so that they do not have to depend on markets of other states to sell their products. Such steps would go a long way in reducing cost of accruing more profit by the entrepreneurs.

As a measure to remove industrial backwardness of Assam, the state government should try to set up export oriented industries so as to diversify its industrial base. For this purpose, the state government may explore the possibility of foreign market in collaboration with the small scale industries in return it would guarantee up to 100 per cent pay back of the small scale industry units of the state. In order to accelerate the pace of industrialization, entrepreneurs should be encouraged to set up non-conventional industries like fruit processing, vegetable processing, spice processing, aquaculture, etc. to develop our rural based industry in Assam. Moreover, the government should initiate periodic review of industrial policy in tune with the ethos of liberalization, privatization and globalization.

On the basis of findings of this study and overall discussion, the following suggestions are forwarded for growth and development of pottery industry in Assam:-

- **Availability of Raw Materials:** The pottery works primarily depends upon the raw materials. The availability of quality raw materials helps the potters to continue their inherent craft work in future. It would be very fruitful for Kumar potters if they adopt modern methods for collection of raw materials and preserved it for long time.
- **Mechanisation of Pottery Industry:** Mechanisation is one of the important factors for development of pottery industry in Assam. It has

found that the Kumar potters of Assam are still used the old techniques for manufacturing pottery goods. They should replace the old method and adopt modern methods for productions earthenwares. They should used micro electrical motors in the wheel for easy manufacturing the pottery items. This would quicker the production of greater numbers in a short period. Machine made pottery products are likely to have a better finish than handmade pottery.

- **Designs of Production:** The designs of the pottery production are also important requirements of modern market. The pottery productions are traditionally old designs from past to present in Assam. It should be very important to create new designs and traditional design should be replaced by producing attractive, fashionable designs to manufacturing earthenwares. Then the demand for pottery wares is bound to increase among the customers which would help to survive this age-old industry.
- **Develop smooth marketing network:** The potters should develop effective marketing system for selling their pottery goods. This improved marketing network helps the pottery producer to earn their income in high. Product publicity is very important factor in attracting potential customers. Some efforts should be made to promote the indigenous products, through exhibitions, workshops, seminars, stall in various air ports, railways stations, bus stations, commercial centres, in front of big market etc.

- **Infrastructural development for Pottery Industry:** Good infrastructure is a precondition for any industry to grow and prosper. The infrastructure related to pottery production like production machine, store rooms, electric supply, water supply and good transport facility etc. should be developed. This kind of infrastructure would only help the pottery industry to survive in the modern competitive market. So, it is the responsibility of government to facilitate the potters of Assam by providing the required adequate infrastructure for pottery industry.
- **Credit Facilities:** A credit facility is another important factor that has to be looked at in respect of pottery industry. The majority of Kumar potters have very little awareness of the various incentives and promotional schemes that are offered by the different government funding agencies and banks. So, steps should be taken by concerned government agencies to make aware the Kumar potters about the various credit facilities available under government subsidy and also educate them how to avail these facilities for improvement of their production. The State Government and the Gramin board should take special efforts and give more funds to revive the historical clay crafts in Assam.
- **Training Provisions:** The potters should be trained in respect to use of modern technology in pottery production. This kind of efforts not only helps to increase the pottery production but also attract the young generation to involve in this craft. Without the involvement of new generations and introduction of new technology in pottery production, design and marketing, the future of the pottery industry is appeared

uncertain. So, training on how to use modern technology in the entire process of pottery industry and entrepreneurship development among the new generations potters are the most essential things to do for the secured future of the pottery industry.

- **Exposure:** The Kumar potters are lack of exposure because they were lived in the rural areas in Assam and silently doing their business in rural areas itself. As a result of that they are deprived from the much needed exposure to the outside world. So, they have to visit different handicrafts fair, handicraft centres etc. in the country so as to expose themselves through their creations which would help them to acquaint with the new processes, designs, new techniques and new ideas in general.
- **Set up an Organisation:** The pottery industry is considered as one of the unorganised industry in Assam. The Kumar potters were individually practising pottery work in different parts of Assam. It is necessary to make an effort to organise the Kumar potter under an umbrella to raise their various demands. The different pottery units should be register under the government society as a whole then it will be easy to work collectively for development of pottery industry in future.
- **Government policy:** The central and state government should take some necessary scheme for development of pottery industry in Assam. There are various government agency and departments to look after the handicraft industry in Assam. Some of them are- the Small Scale Industry, Handicraft industry, Khadi Board, Marketing Corporation, District Industries and Commerce etc. should take a statistical survey for

development of pottery industry. The government must provide active support for promotions of new pottery industries and expansion of the existing pottery industries of the state. For providing funds, loans, credits for promotion of new industrial pottery units and also revitalizing the sick individual pottery industry of Assam. It will help to make good quality of earthenwares and upliftment the pottery industry in Assam in future.

Conclusion:

In the conclusion it may be mentioned here that the climatic condition of Assam is very favourable for pottery industry. The present study clearly identifies the fact that the manufacture of earthen pots, jars, images, dolls etc. are undergoing a considerable decay. The Kumar potters are now practising the craft at industries in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. The immigrant potters came from West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar and settled in the region. Their versatile pottery items were comparatively more decorative and better than the Kumar pottery. So their earning was higher than the local Kumar potters. So, the indigenous potter groups were bound to confine their industries in and around rural base. It has been found that the competition between the two rivals favoured the immigrant potters being producers of sophisticated items. During the field visit, it has been observed that the quality of immigrant potters' clay items was finer as they adopted the glazing method while making potteries. The wheel with radial flat disc enabled them to produce more pottery with better finishing touch. So, this is a humble effort to study the pottery industry in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts in this summary of thesis. The pottery industry in the state has great potentialities and holds out a promising future, assuring a prosperous life for the pottery

workers particularly for Kumar potters in Assam and it opens up a gateway for future research in this field. The conclusion arrives at the present study in the context of pottery industry in colonial period of two districts namely; Sibsagar and Lakhimpur may be generalized in pottery industry as a handicraft work among the Kumar potters in Assam though there may be limitations of present study for such claim. Therefore, further study in this area covering a wide universe based on a definite approach is required to understand the pottery industry and the Kumar potters in our state as well as regional and national level which are left to future prospective researchers in this area for innovative results.

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Glossary of Terms

- Anna Prasan: First rice giving ceremony of a child at the age of six months
- Agrahayan: Eighth month of Bengali calendar, middle of Nov. to middle of Dece.
- Balti: Bucket
- Banak Mati: Reddish soil used as natural colouring agent
- Banbibi: Goddess of forest
- Baran Chhoba: Pot used in marriage rituals
- Bara: Detached head of *Dakshin* ray, the tiger god
- Baro Chubri: Big basket
- Bastu Puja: A ritual associated with agriculture in West Bengal
- Bastu Pujar Ghat: Pitcher used in Bastu Puja
- Boki: Pointed iron rod
- Bole: Support giving stone used in terracotta manufacture
- Chak Majhi: Second next to village headman in Santal traditional political system
- Chalnara: Large pot used for making ritual offerings
- Charak Mela: Fair which takes place during the end of Bengali year associated to Lord Siva
- Chata/Chachna: Sieve like thin sheet of bamboo
- Chaitra Sankranti: Last day of the Bengali Calendar year, middle of April
- Chandi: Goddess of wrath often with multiple meanings associated with various local forms
- Chitai Pithe: Pan cake made of rice
- Chubri: Basket
- Dakkineswar/Dakshin Ray: The lord of south, also the tiger god

Darko/dwar ghat: Pitcher used in household rituals

Debi ghat: Pitcher used in worship

Do-aansh mati: Soil with equal sand and mud content

Dhunuchi: Incense-pot

Dipasan: Lamp stand

Dugi: Smaller form of tabor

Ela Mati: Reddish-orange soil used as natural colouring agent

Entel Mati: Clayey soil having less sand content

Gad Mati: Yellowish clay used as a natural colouring agent

Gala: Lac

Ghat(s): Pitcher

Gramdevata: Any local village God and village spirit

Haat: Bi-weekly market

Jaherthan: Sacred grove for Santal God

Jaistha: Second month of the Bengali calendar, middle of May to middle of June

Jarasandha: Local village God

Jhuri: Small basket

Khol: Musical instrument having two sound producing ends

Kodal: Spade

Kolke: Bowl of hookah

Kumor: Traditional clay workers by caste in West Bengal

Laya: Village headman in Santal traditional political system

Madal: Local tribal drum

Magh: Tenth month of Bengali calendar year (January-February)

Majhari chubri: Medium sized basket

Manasa: Goddess associated with serpent cult

Manasa Chali/Bari: A form represented by several serpent hoods and a few integrated figurines used in ritual purpose

Manasa Ghat: Pitcher accompanied by serpent hoods

Manat: Vow

Marangburu: A Santal God

Graphic Representation of Origin and Development of Pottery in Assam

