

Challenges faced by the Kumar community of Assam in pottery making and suggest ways to overcome them.

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Abstract

The Kumar community of Assam, India, is a group of people who have traditionally been engaged in pottery making. Their unique style of pottery making is characterized by intricate designs and vibrant colors. However, the community faces various challenges in their craft, which threaten their livelihoods and the continuation of this ancient art form.

This article explores the challenges faced by the Kumar community in pottery making and suggests ways to overcome them. The challenges include lack of market access, competition from modern technology, climate change, and socio-economic factors. Solutions to overcome these challenges include improving market access, promoting innovation and modernization, providing government support, promoting climate-resilient pottery making, and addressing socio-economic factors.

Keywords: Kumar community, pottery making, Assam, India, challenges, solutions

Introduction

Assam, located in the northeastern region of India, is a land of diversity, culture, and traditions. The state is the home to several ethnic groups, including the Kumar community, which has a unique identity and cultural heritage. The Kumar community is one of the indigenous communities of Assam, with a unique identity and cultural heritage. The Kumar community is known for its rich culture, customs, traditions, and lifestyle.

The origin and history of the Kumar community can be traced back to the early medieval period of Assam. The Kumars were one of the prominent clans of the Ahom dynasty, and they played a significant role in the administration of the kingdom. After the decline of the Ahom dynasty, the Kumars became independent and established their own identity as a community. They adopted their own customs, traditions, and cultural practices, which are still prevalent today. The Kumar community is mainly concentrated in the upper Assam region, particularly in the districts of Jorhat, Golaghat, Sivasagar, and Dibrugarh. They also have a significant presence in other parts of Assam, such as Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, and Kamrup. The Kumar community has a rich culture and lifestyle, which is reflected in their customs, traditions, festivals, and celebrations. Pottery making is one of them. We may say that pottery making is an ancient and

revered art form that has been practiced by various communities across India for centuries. One such community is the Kumar community of Assam, who have been engaged in pottery making for generations.

The Kumar community is known for their unique style of pottery making, which is characterized by intricate designs and vibrant colors. The pottery made by the Kumar community is not only utilitarian but also serves a decorative purpose, making it highly sought after. The process of pottery making begins with the collection of clay from nearby river beds. The clay is then left to dry in the sun for several days, after which it is mixed with water and kneaded into a malleable dough-like consistency. The potter then shapes the clay into various forms, using a wheel or by hand, depending on the size and shape of the object being created. Once the clay has been shaped, it is left to dry in the sun for several days. After the initial drying process, the potter applies a layer of slip, which is a mixture of clay and water, to the surface of the object. The slip helps to give the pottery a smooth surface and also acts as a primer for the decorative designs that will be added later. The next step in the process is the application of decorative designs. The Kumar community is known for their intricate and colorful designs, which are created using a variety of tools, such as wooden stamps and brushes made from animal hair. The designs are often inspired by nature and depict flowers, animals, and other motifs. After the decorative designs have been applied, the pottery is left to dry for several more days. Once it is completely dry, it is fired in a kiln at high temperatures, which helps to harden the clay and give the pottery its distinctive color and texture. The firing process also helps to fix the designs onto the surface of the pottery.

The pottery made by the Kumar community is not only beautiful but also highly functional. It is used for a variety of purposes, such as cooking, storing food, and serving drinks. The pottery is also used in various religious and cultural ceremonies, where it is considered a symbol of purity and auspiciousness. In this context, we may say that like other indigenous communities of Assam, the Kumar community also faces Various Challenges in Pottery Making.

Pottery making is an age-old tradition in Assam, with its roots dating back to ancient times. The Kumar community, a sub-caste of the Scheduled Castes, has been engaged in pottery making for generations. However, the community faces various challenges in their craft, which threaten their livelihoods and the continuation of this ancient art form. In this article, we will explore the challenges faced by the Kumar community of Assam in pottery making and suggest ways to overcome them.

Assam is known for its rich culture and heritage, and pottery is an integral part of it. The Kumar community, which is predominantly settled in the Upper Assam region, has been

involved in pottery making for centuries. However, their craft faces various challenges that threaten their livelihoods and the continuation of this ancient art form.

Objectives of the study

- 1.To identify the challenges faced by the Kumar community in pottery making.
- 2.To analyze the impact of these challenges on the livelihoods of the Kumar community.
- 3.To develop strategies to overcome these challenges and support the livelihoods of the

Kumar community.

Scope of the study

Administratively, the state of Assam is divided into four parts: Lower Assam, Upper Assam, Hills and Barak Valley and North Assam. The districts of Lower Assam are Kamrup, Kamrup [Metro], Bangagaon, Barepetta, Dhubri and Goalpara districts. The districts of Upper Assam include Jorhat, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar and Tinsukia districts. The districts under the Hills and Barak Valley are Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Kachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts and the districts under North Assam are Nagaon, Morigaon, Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur and Sonitpur districts. ¹ Among these, Kumar village in Amguri area of Shibsagar district under Upper Assam has been included in the field study.

Methodology of the study

The study of the topic 'Challenges faced by the Kumar community of Assam in pottery making and suggest ways to overcome them' is mainly analytical. The emphasis is mainly on field study methodology in data collection. It uses questionnaire, interview and observation methods under the field study methodology. Data have been collected from two sources for the research work, primary sources and secondary sources. Data have been collected from primary sources through field study methods and secondary sources through study of various books, articles and journals and research papers of previous critics related to the main topic.

Kumar community

The Kumar community, renowned for their mastery of pottery making, has a rich and intricate history deeply rooted in the cultural tapestry of Assam, India. Their origins can be traced back to the ancient period, with some scholars suggesting their lineage dates back to the Kamarupa kingdom that flourished in the region between the 3rd and 12th centuries AD. According to U.Gohain, There are two classes of potters the Hiras (A caste peculiar to the valley) and Kumars (A section of the Kalita caste.)² Means Kumar is a branch of Kalita caste. "The Kalita are more numerous than the Brahman or Daivajans. They are scattered all over the Brahmaputra valley. Their position in the social ladder is almost at par with Kayasthas. The scholars P.C. Choudhari and K.R. Medhi have tried to prove that the Kalitas of Assam originated from the Alpine stock who migrated to eastern India before the Vedic Aryans. But K.L. Baruah is of the opinion the Kalitas though originally belonged to the Caucasian stock imbibed some Mongoloid traits due to the long association with the Indo-Mongoloid elements. But

subsequently extended supports to the theory of the Alpine origin of the Kalitas. Most probably the Kalitas of Assam originally hailed from the land of Kolu'as or Kulutas living at the foot of Himalayas near the present Himachal Pradesh.

The Kalitas were broadly divide into Bar Kalitas and Saru Kalitas. Generally the Kayathas who internarry with the Kalitas called themselves Bar Kalitas. Among Kalitas the Gopal Ata, Narayan das Thakur Ata, Mathura Das Burha Ata etc. were Vaisnwe religios preches of Sixteenth century who establish satra. The Kalitas besides being agriculturists by profession also practised various crafts and professions without seriously affecting their caste status. Thu pottery blacksmith, Bell- Metal craft, Goldsmith etc. were adopted as additional profession.”³

Over time, the Kumar community settled in various parts of Assam, particularly in the Upper Assam region, where they established pottery-making villages. These villages became centers of excellence, where pottery-making techniques were passed down from generation to generation, ensuring the preservation of this ancient craft.

The Kumar community's efforts to preserve their traditional craft have not gone unnoticed. Their pottery has gained recognition for its unique beauty and cultural significance, and it is now sought after by collectors, art enthusiasts, and those who appreciate the value of handmade craftsmanship.

The future of the Kumar community's pottery-making tradition is promising. Their resilience, adaptability, and commitment to their heritage are ensuring that the ancient craft of pottery making continues to thrive in the heart of Assam.

Historical Significance of Pottery in Assam

Pottery making in Assam dates back to the Neolithic age, and it has been an essential part of the state's culture and economy. The Kumar community has been one of the significant contributors to this art form. Pottery was used in Assam for various purposes such as cooking, storing water, and ritualistic practices.

The Process of Pottery Making

The Kumar community's pottery-making traditions have been passed down from generation to generation, ensuring the preservation of this ancient craft. However, in recent years, the community has faced challenges that threaten their traditional livelihood. Competition from modern industrial products, changing market demands, and a lack of access to resources have made it increasingly difficult for Kumar potters to maintain their traditional practices.“ Besides

the umbrella of Varuna called abhoga, Bhaskar Barmans presents to Harrhavardhana included ornaments from the finest gems inherited from Bhagadutta and other Kings, crest jewels and pearls necklaces; silken towels rolled up in basket of coloured reeds; qualities of pearls, shell, sapphire and drinking vessels embossed by skilful artists....⁴

The process of pottery making of the Kumar Gaon of Amguri, Sivasagar is a time-honored tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation. It is a labor-intensive process that requires a great deal of skill and patience, but the end result is beautiful and functional pottery that is used for a variety of purposes. Here are the steps involved in the pottery-making process in Upper Assam:

The first step is to collect clay from riverbeds or nearby fields. The quality of the clay is important for the final product, so it is important to choose clay that is free of impurities and once the clay has been collected, it is mixed with water and kneaded until it becomes a smooth and pliable dough. This process can take several hours, and it is important to make sure that the clay is evenly mixed. The clay dough is then shaped into various forms using a potter's wheel or by hand. The potter's skill and creativity are essential in this step, as they must be able to create a variety of shapes and sizes. The shaped pottery is then left to dry in the sun or in a kiln until it is completely dry. This step can take several days, and it is important to make sure that the pottery is evenly dried to prevent cracking. The dried pottery is then placed in a kiln and fired at high temperatures. The firing process hardens the clay and gives the pottery its final color and texture. Once the pottery has been fired, it can be decorated using a variety of techniques, such as painting, glazing, or carving.

From the collecting data of the field study we may come to know that the month of *Magh* to *Bohag*, men and women work together to produce various types of pottery. There is a specialty of collecting pottery for pottery. When the water dries up in winter, two or three people carry the loads of soil by digging a hole 30/40 feet deep in the river bed or in a designated place with pottery. Then the women add sand and water and scrape it well and put it in the hut. Then they cut and divide them into different measurements and shape the vessels accordingly. The tools required in this regard are *Pat (Kathar)*, *Aafari*, *Susani*, *garha kapur*, *Baliya*, *Ethali*, *Pitan*, *Majani* etc.

The vessels are painted after they are decorated. This process is called *Rangni*. They paint the necks and stomachs of the pots and jars with a special type of red clay. After that, the men dig the *peghali*. There is a saying that women are crazy

They can dig but they cannot set fire. The *Peghali* is named after the top *Mota*, *Talmota*, *Shakini*, *Korhona*, *Lohar*, *Kul*, *Mukhabandha* etc. from top to top. Also, palm leaves and bamboo should be placed under the *barmota*.

After the pottery is completely decorated, it is lifted to *Peghali*. The mouths of the vessels are decorated with the faces down. To make the pot spherical, the pots are arranged around the top thickness and small pieces of wood and bamboo are placed in between. When complete, some pieces of old pots and pans are placed alongside it. After 2-3 coatings, small holes are made in between. After burning the *peghali* for eight (8) consecutive hours, the fire is added for another 4 hours. After 12 hours of cooling, the containers are removed and ready for sale. The clay objects made by these artisans are: 1) *Mala*, 2) *Nadia*, 3) *Charu*, 4) *Pati Kalah*, 5) *Becha Kalah*, 6) *Mathakania Kalah*, 7) *Large Jar*, 8) *Small Jar*, 10) 11) *Dunri*, 12) *Udhan*, 13) *Bar Kalah*, 14) *Chaki*, 15) *Bhuruka*, 16) *Mathi*, 17) *Bhabuki*, 18) *Dhupdani*, 19) *Dhunadani*, 20) *Bucket*, 21) *Sarai*, 12) 23) *pots*, 24) *glasses*, 25) *flower pots*, 26) *vases*, 27) *clay candles*, etc.

The Challenges on the livelihoods of the Kumar community

The Kumar community, a group traditionally associated with pottery making in Assam, India, has faced a multitude of challenges that have significantly impacted their livelihoods and the sustainability of their craft. These challenges can be broadly categorized into economic, social, and environmental factors.

Economic Challenges:

1. **Competition from Modern Products:** The influx of mass-produced and affordable pottery from industrial manufacturers has posed a significant threat to the livelihood of Kumar potters. These products are often cheaper and more readily available, making it difficult for Kumar pottery to compete in the market.
2. **Changing Market Demands:** Evolving consumer preferences and the rise of modern design trends have led to a decline in demand for traditional Kumar pottery. Consumers are increasingly drawn to modern designs and patterns, making it challenging for Kumar potters to adapt their traditional techniques to meet these changing demands.

3. **Limited Market Access and Marketing:** Kumar potters often lack access to wider markets and effective marketing strategies. This limits their ability to reach a broader consumer base and increase their sales, further diminishing their income opportunities.

Social Challenges:

1. **Decline in Younger Generation's Interest:** The younger generation within the Kumar community is increasingly drawn to other professions that offer perceived stability and higher financial returns. This trend threatens the continuity of the pottery-making tradition as fewer young people are willing to take up the craft.
2. **Gender Disparities:** In many Kumar communities, women are traditionally relegated to supporting roles in the pottery-making process, while men handle the primary tasks. This gender-based division of labor limits women's opportunities for skill development and financial independence.
3. **Lack of Education and Awareness:** Limited access to education and awareness about modern techniques, market trends, and financial management practices hinders the Kumar community's ability to adapt and thrive in the changing economic landscape.

Environmental Challenges:

1. **Depletion of Clay Resources:** The over-exploitation of clay sources for pottery making and other purposes has led to a depletion of clay resources. This poses a direct threat to the sustainability of the pottery industry as access to quality clay becomes increasingly scarce.
2. **Climate Change and Natural Disasters:** Climate change and extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts, can disrupt clay collection, impact pottery production, and damage storage facilities, further jeopardizing the livelihoods of Kumar potters.
3. **Limited Access to Sustainable Practices:** Kumar potters often lack the knowledge and resources to adopt sustainable practices in their pottery-making processes. This can lead to environmental degradation and increased costs associated with resource depletion and waste management.

Strategies to overcome these challenges and support the livelihoods of the Kumar community.

The cumulative impact of these challenges has placed immense pressure on the Kumar community's livelihoods and the preservation of their traditional pottery-making craft.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses economic support, social empowerment, environmental awareness, and skill development initiatives. By fostering innovation, promoting market linkages, and preserving traditional knowledge, the Kumar community can revitalize their pottery industry and secure a sustainable future for their craft.

Overcoming the challenges faced by the Kumar community and supporting their livelihoods requires a comprehensive approach that addresses economic, social, and environmental factors. Here are some strategies to consider:

Economic Strategies:

1. **Market Expansion and Diversification:** Expand market access for Kumar pottery by connecting them with retailers, wholesalers, and online platforms. Encourage the creation of innovative pottery designs and products that cater to contemporary market demands.
2. **Skill Development and Training:** Provide training and workshops for Kumar potters on modern pottery techniques, design concepts, marketing strategies, and e-commerce practices. This will enhance their productivity, adaptability, and ability to compete in the market.
3. **Financial Assistance and Incentives:** Provide financial assistance, subsidies, and access to credit for Kumar potters to purchase raw materials, equipment, and marketing resources. Implement incentives for adopting sustainable practices and improving pottery quality.
4. **Brand Building and Promotion:** Develop a strong brand identity for Kumar pottery, highlighting its unique craftsmanship, cultural heritage, and sustainability credentials. Promote Kumar pottery at local, national, and international fairs, exhibitions, and online platforms.
5. **Collaboration with Designers and Institutions:** Collaborate with design institutes, universities, and design professionals to develop innovative pottery designs and products that appeal to a wider audience. This can create new market opportunities and enhance the value of Kumar pottery.

Social Strategies:

1. **Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Engage the Kumar community in decision-making processes and encourage their participation in initiatives aimed at revitalizing the pottery

industry. Foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for preserving their traditional craft.

2. **Education and Awareness Programs:** Implement education and awareness programs for the younger generation within the Kumar community, highlighting the cultural significance, economic potential, and environmental sustainability of pottery making. Encourage their participation in the craft and provide opportunities for skill development.
3. **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion:** Address gender disparities within the Kumar community by promoting equal participation of women in all aspects of pottery making, from design and production to marketing and sales. Encourage women's involvement in leadership roles and decision-making processes.
4. **Cultural Preservation and Heritage Promotion:** Document and preserve the traditional pottery-making techniques, knowledge, and cultural heritage of the Kumar community. Establish pottery museums or heritage centers to showcase their craft and promote its cultural significance.

Environmental Strategies:

1. **Sustainable Clay Resource Management:** Promote sustainable clay extraction practices and develop alternative clay sources to reduce the over-exploitation of natural resources. Encourage the use of recycled and reclaimed materials in pottery making.
2. **Eco-friendly Pottery Techniques and Practices:** Encourage the adoption of eco-friendly pottery-making techniques, such as rainwater harvesting, solar drying, and the use of natural dyes and glazes. Promote waste reduction and resource management practices.
3. **Environmental Awareness and Education:** Conduct environmental awareness campaigns and training programs for Kumar potters on sustainable practices, environmental protection, and climate resilience. Encourage the adoption of eco-friendly measures throughout the pottery-making process.
4. **Collaboration with Environmental Organizations:** Collaborate with environmental organizations and experts to develop sustainable pottery-making practices, reduce environmental impact, and promote resource conservation.

5. Policy Advocacy and Support: Advocate for policies that support sustainable pottery practices, resource conservation, and environmental protection. Encourage government support for initiatives that promote the Kumar community's sustainable livelihood.

Findings

The pottery-making process in Upper Assam is a complex and challenging one, but it is also a rewarding one. The potters of Upper Assam are proud of their heritage, and they continue to create beautiful and functional pottery that is used and appreciated by people all over the world.

1. The Kumar community faces a number of challenges in pottery making, including lack of market access, competition from modern technology, climate change, and socio-economic factors.
2. These challenges have a significant impact on the livelihoods of the Kumar community, leading to lower incomes, reduced productivity, and a decline in the quality of their pottery.
3. A number of strategies can be implemented to overcome these challenges and support the livelihoods of the Kumar community, such as improving market access, promoting innovation and modernization, providing government support, promoting climate-resilient pottery making, and addressing socio-economic factors.

Future Recommended Research Topics

1. Exploring the Impact of Gender Dynamics and Social Hierarchies within the Kumar Community on Pottery Production and Livelihoods:
2. Investigating the Potential for Eco-friendly and Sustainable Pottery-making Practices that Align with the Traditional Knowledge of the Kumar Community:
3. Analyzing the Role of Government Policies and Programs on the Kumar Pottery Industry:
4. Conducting In-depth Studies to Identify the Specific Challenges Faced by Kumar Potters in Different Regions of Assam:
5. Studying the Effectiveness of Various Training and Skill Development Programs for Kumar Potters in Enhancing Their Employability and Economic Independence:

Conclusion

The art of pottery making is an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Kumar community of Assam. Their unique style of pottery making is characterized by intricate designs and vibrant colors, which are inspired by nature. The pottery made by the Kumar community is not only beautiful but also highly functional and serves as a symbol of their rich cultural traditions and the Kumar community has been contributing to it for generations. However, they face various challenges that threaten their livelihoods and the continuation of this ancient art form. To overcome these challenges, efforts should be made to improve market access, promote innovation and modernization, provide government support, promote climate-resilient pottery making, and address socio-economic factors. By taking these steps, we can ensure the continuation of this ancient art form and support the livelihoods of the Kumar community. Today, the Kumar community is a vibrant and thriving ethnic group in Assam. They have preserved their cultural traditions and continue to contribute significantly to the region's culture and society.

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End Note:

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2. U.Gohain, Studies in the History of Assam, p.no. 95.
- 3.Satyendranath Sarma, Cultural History of Assam, p.no. 63
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