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SERIES – 3

ASSAM

HANDICRAFT SURVEY REPORT :

BRASS METAL INDUSTRY OF NIZ HAJO

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FOREWORD

The Indian handicrafts are known the world over for their rich variety, grace, elegance and skilled craftsmanship. Nevertheless, a number of handicrafts because of their stiff competition with factory made products, non-availability of raw materials, exhorbitant increase in the manufacturing cost, lack of proper marketing facilities for finished products or due to a variety of other reasons have either become extinct or have reached the moribund stage. After independence, however, a number of schemes were introduced by different government agencies for their growth and development but still this sudden impetus have helped only a few crafts to flourish and thereby become spinners of foreign exchange for the country.

Despite the unique position being enjoyed by the handicrafts especially in the realm of national economy, the general awareness among the people in the country about our crafts and craftsmen had been deplorably poor. Nothing was practically known about the commodities produced, techniques employed for the manufacture of different objects, raw materials used, their availability, methods adopted for the sale of finished products etc. An attempt was, therefore, made in connection with the 1961 Census to study about 150 crafts from different parts of the country with a view to provide basic information or those crafts which were selected for the study.

At the 1971 Census, the study on handicrafts was not taken up but this was again revived in connection with the 1981 Census. There has been, however, some difference between the studies taken up in connection with the Censuses of 1961 and 1981. While the 1961 studies have covered both rural and urban crafts, the 1981 studies have focussed their attention only on traditional rural based crafts. That apart, the 1981 studies besides touching upon those aspects which were covered under the 1961 series, have laid emphasis on matters that are vital for the revival of rural crafts and thereby for the rejuvenation of the economy of the region particularly the villages. This is in consonance with the policy of the government to give due importance to the rural sector with focus on employment intensive strategy of development in which next to agriculture, the small scale industries and handicrafts play a significant role.

The formats required for undertaking the study were formulated by Dr. K. P. Ittaman under the able guidance of Dr. N. G. Nag, the then Deputy Registrar General. Social Studies Division. Dr. Ittaman who succeeded Dr. Nag as Deputy Registrar General, Social Studies Division co-ordinated the study undertaken in different States/ Union Territories by the Directorates of Census Operations. The reports received from the Directorates were examined by Shri M. K. Jain, Senior Research Officer with the help of Smt. Suman Prashar, Assistant Director of Census Operations and Shri Shyam Singh, Jr. Investigator. I am grateful to all of them for organising this study.

The present report is the outcome of a study undertaken on Brass Metal Industry of Niz-Hajo by the Directorate of Census Operations, Assam. I have immense pleasure in acknowledging the services rendered by Shri J. C. Bhuyan, Deputy Director and his colleagues in the Census Directorate for bringing out this publication.

New Delhi,

the 1st June, 1988.

V. S. VERMA

Registrar General, India

PREFACE

Handicrafts play a prominent role in the economy of Assam. Unlike other handicrafts, which are found more or less scattered in the State, Brass metal craft has comparatively very few pockets of artisans' concentration. Dhubri, Kamrup, Sibsagar and Cachar districts of Assam are the places where this craft is mainly to be found. Niz-Hajo, a small town situated about 31 kms. away from Guwahati, the capital of Assam, earns a place of distinction for its Brass-metal products.

The Director of Census Operations, Assam, 1981 had, with the approval of the then Registrar General, India, taken up the project of study of Brass-metal industry of Niz-Hajo. The schedules canvassed in the field survey were framed in this office and obviously, therefore, are not identical with those canvassed in connection with survey of other selected handicrafts.

The present survey reveals that the Brass-metal works, which had a glorious past, has now reached a stage of morbidity and stagnation. Shortage of raw materials at reasonable price, low production capacity, lack of adequate finance, competition with machine made products of cheaper materials, lack of new designs, exploitation of the poor artisans by the middlemen, absence of well-planned network of centres for marketing the finished products are some of the factors severely hampering the growth of the handicraft. However, it is heartening to note that despite an overall dismay this handicraft has not reached a stage of extinction and that there are craftsmen who believe that by practising the craft they are keeping alive a traditional occupation and a rich heritage.

The schedules devised for survey were canvassed in two sets of selected households. The first set consisted of those households where the craft is still practised by one or more members of the household and the second set comprised those households which once practised the craft but has now given up owing to various constraints. Utmost care was taken to elicit as much meaningful information from the respondents as possible. The analysis and observations are obviously based on data thrown out by the field-survey.

The field work was done by Shri T. D. Sinha, Statistical Assistant, Shri A. C. Deka, Assistant Compiler and Shri D. Gohain, Ex-Assistant Compiler under the guidance of Dr. S. K. Baruah, Investigator. The compilation and tabulation of data was done by Shri T. D. Sinha, Statistical Assistant, Shri A. C. Deka, Assistant Compiler and Shri S. Swargiary, Assistant Compiler. The report was drafted by Dr. S. K. Baruah, Shri T. D. Sinha significantly contributed in modifying the report as per suggestions received from the Social Studies Division in Registrar General's Office. Credit goes to Shri A. Singh, Artist for designing the cover page. Shri D. Das, Lower Division Clerk and Shri L. K. Das, Assistant Compiler typed the script for the press. Shri N. Bhattacharjee, Assistant Director edited the report.

We are much indebted to the Social Studies Division in Registrar General's Office for scrutiny of the draft report and providing us with very useful technical guidance and most valuable suggestions in improving the report.

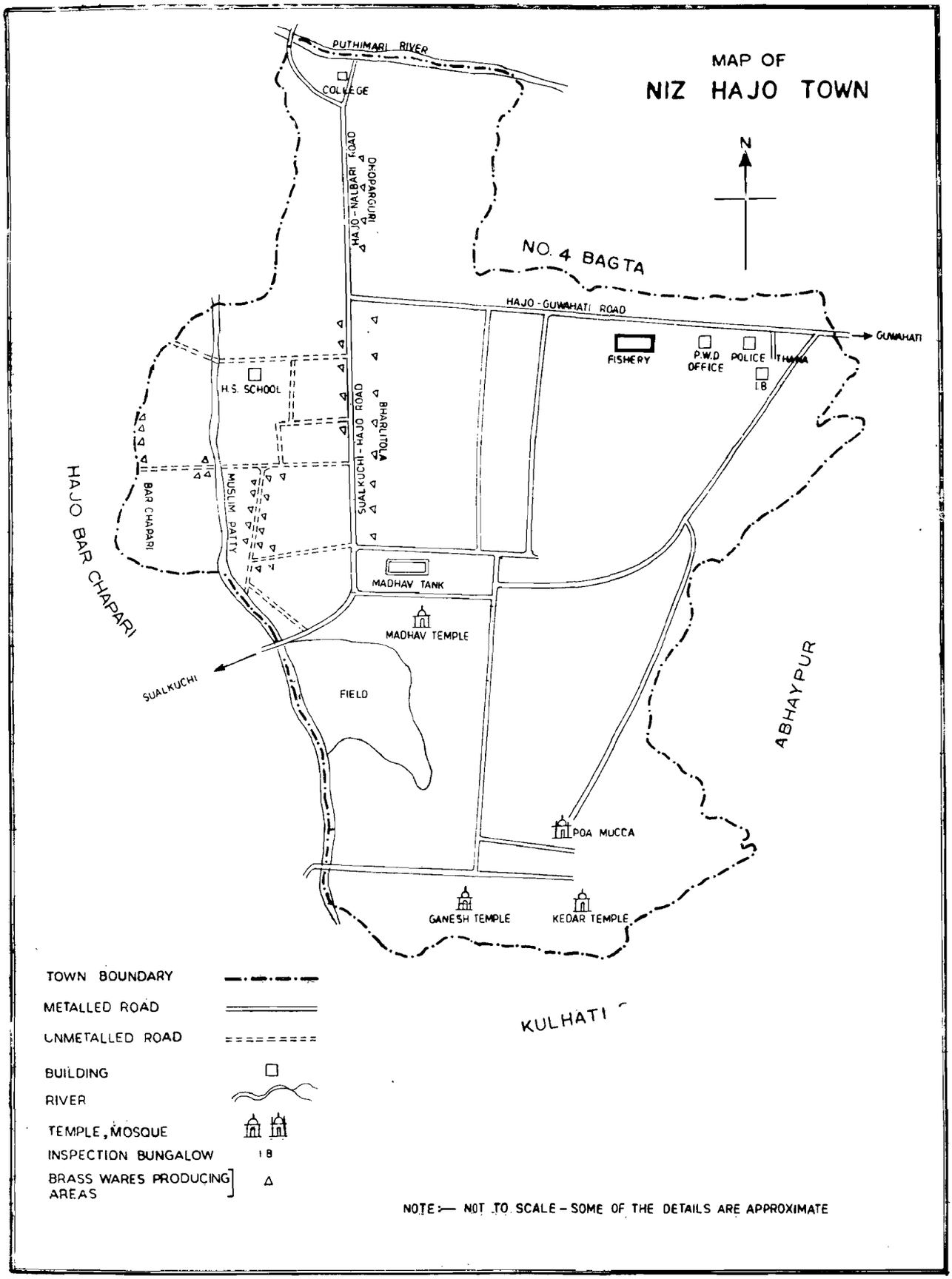
Above all, we express our sincere gratitude to Shri P. Padmanabha and Shri V. S. Verma, Ex-Registrar Generals, India for the unfailing inspiration received from them in conduct of the survey and production of this report.

J. C. BHUYAN

Deputy Director of Census Operations, Assam,
Guwahati.

Guwahati,

December 14, 1989.


MAP OF
NIZ HAJO TOWN
N
PUTHIMARI RIVER
COLLEGE
HAJO-NALBARI ROAD
DHOPAKUNI
NO. 4 BAGTA
HAJO-GUWAHATI ROAD
GUWAHATI
FISHERY
P.W.D OFFICE
POLICE
THANA
I.B
H.S. SCHOOL
BHAGLITOL
SUALKUCHI-HAJO ROAD
MUSLIM PATTY
BAR CHAPARI
HAJO BAR CHAPARI
MADHAV TANK
MADHAV TEMPLE
SUALKUCHI
FIELD
ABHAYPUR
POA MUCCA
GANESH TEMPLE
KEDAR TEMPLE
KULHATI
TOWN BOUNDARY
METALLED ROAD
UNMETALLED ROAD
BUILDING
RIVER
TEMPLE, MOSQUE
INSPECTION BUNGALOW
I B
BRASS WARES PRODUCING AREAS
NOTE :— NOT TO SCALE - SOME OF THE DETAILS ARE APPROXIMATE

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CRAFT

The Brass metal industry is one of the oldest surviving industries in India. Though the origin of brass metal industry is obscure yet its antiquity is established through various archaeological findings and ancient literatures. Brass images and artifacts unearthed in various excavations in different parts of India have proven the use of brass from very ancient times.

Brass metal industry is considered to be very important industry in India. Various articles made of brass are extensively used for religious and domestic purposes alike. Moreover, images of Gods and Goddesses made of brass are worshipped throughout the country. Thus, brass metal products are both of utilitarian and aesthetic value.

The brass metal industry occupies a very important position on the handicraft scenario of Assam. Its great antiquity is attested by many references in the religious literature and the ancient history of the State. Though the origin of use of brass in Assam for domestic or other purpose is obscure, yet evidences are there which speak about its use during the rule of the Ahom Kings[1]. It is believed that brass metal was used as early as during the dynasty of Varman (355-650 A.D.) and Salastambha (650-990 A.D.) in ancient Kamrup, known as Pragjyotishpur. There is also a strong reason to believe that brass metal made its appearance in this part of the country with the spread of Buddhism from Nepal and Bhutan where brass was mostly used for religious purposes. The famous book Charyyapada written by Haraprasad Shastry in the year 1904 also describes the use of brass for religious purposes in ancient Kamrup.

In addition to this, various idols of Gods and Goddesses of different periods discovered in different parts of Assam bear testimony to the early use of brass in ancient Kamrup[2]. Historians are of the opinion that brass had appeared in Assam with the invasion of a Mohammadan commandar named 'Turbuk' in the beginning of 16th century[3]. Whatever may be the assumption, at present the Brass metal industry in Assam is found to be concentrated only in a few places—the important among them being Niz-Hajo town and Guwahati city in the district of Kamrup and Sibsagar town in the district of Sibsagar. Besides these, this industry is also found in a few scattered pockets in Gauripur in Dhubri district and Silchar in the district of Cachar. But of all these places the major concentration of this industry is found in Niz-Hajo town.

Niz-Hajo a small town situated in the district of Kamrup is famous for brasswares for several centuries. 'Niz-Hajo' earns the distinction of being a religious place not only for the people of Assam but for the whole of India as well. The Hindus, the Buddhists and the Muslims alike regard it as a holy shrine. The famous 'Hayagrib Madhab', an ancient temple situated on the hill top of 'Manikut' venerated both by the Hindus as well as by the Buddhists. The famous mosque 'Powa-Mocca' is also situated on the hill top of 'Garurachal' very near the 'Hayagrib' temple. A vast number of Muslim pilgrims from different parts of India pay visit to this old mosque every year. Thus, 'Niz-Hajo' has been a unique meeting place of people belonging to different religions from time immemorial.

'Niz-Hajo' is situated on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. It is only about 31 kms. away from the Guwahati city, the capital of Assam. It covers an area of 4.01 sq. kms. and is surrounded by the river Puthimari and village Bogta No. 4 on the north, Kulhati No. 2 on the south, Abhayapur on the east and Hajo Barchapari on the west.

Niz-Hazo lies on a most advantageous position as far as road communication is concerned. It is well connected by motorable roads with most of the important towns in the Kamrup district. Most of the buses plying on the north bank of Kamrup district pass through this town. Therefore, bus communication from Niz-Hajo is available readily at an interval of almost every ten minutes. However, railway and the water transport are not very near to this town.

The total number of inhabitants of this town according to 1971 census[4] is 10,269 comprising of 5,359 males and 4,910 females living in 1,662 residential houses. The sex ratio being 916 females per thousand males. Its population is composed of Keot, Koch and Kalita all belonging to the Hindu castes and Moria sect of the Muslim community.

The manufacture of articles of brass metal in Assam is a household industruy and it has been

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[1] Pradeep Chaliha—"Purani Ashomar Pital Silpa"—an article published in *'Asom Bani'*—an Assamese weekly newspaper on 23rd January, 1981.

[2] S. K. Bhuyan—"Sargadeo Rajeswar Singha"—published by Assam Publication Board, 1975.

[3] S. K. Bhuyan—"Kamrupar Buranji"—published by Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam—1954.

[4] Figures are reported for 1971 Census because in Assam 1981 Census could not be held owing to disturbed conditions prevailing in the towns.

flourishing in the Niz-Hajo town since many centuries. Most of the articles produced are used for domestic as well as religious purposes. They generally make water pots, cooking and other utensils. The brass workers are mainly Mohammedans. In Assam, this industry constitutes a traditional occupation of a Muslim sect locally known as the 'Morias'. The 'Morias' are hereditarily brass workers. However, in the later years the Hindus belonging to different castes had learnt the art of manufacturing brasswares from the 'Muslim' and thus got themselves engaged in the brass metal industry.

HISTORY OF ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE CRAFT IN THE TOWN

It is very difficult to ascertain how and when brass metal industry first made its appearance in this little town. However, it is believed that the Morias who were the earliest group of Muslim war captive to settle in the Ahom kingdom in the 16th century were the original artisans of brass metal industry in Assam. They came to Assam during the invasion of the Muslim commander Turbuk and were taken as captive once they lost the war. Some of the captive happened to be artisans and expert in making brasswares. These captive artisans were engaged by the Ahom kings for making various kinds of brasswares. Gradually, the survivors of the captive and their descendants inter-mixed with the low caste Assamese Hindus, took Assamese as their mother tongue without changing their religion, resulting in a major social change. They made brasswares widely used by all sections of people in Assam for both domestic as well as religious purposes. Brasswares made out of brass sheet had been the monopoly of Morias since they came to Assam. Thus, Morias are known to be the hereditary brass workers in Assam. In the later years, Hindus, belonging to different castes had learnt the art and skill of making brasswares from these Morias and thus engaged themselves in the brass industry.

It is believed that the Morias of the Niz-Hajo town were brought by Ahom kings for making brass vessels for the famous temple 'Hayagrib Madhab Devalaya'. For their service the Morias were allowed to settle on a few acres of land belonging to the Devalaya without paying any tax or revenue. Instead they used to give brass vessels for the use of the temple.

Thus, since the Ahom period, the Morias inhabited in this town and took to manufacturing brass metal wares.

PARTICULARS OF COMMUNITY, CASTE AND TRIBES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CRAFT

As mentioned earlier, the Morias are the traditional artisans of brass works in Assam. They have practised the craft as their traditional occupation sinec many centuries. Morias are regarded as a section of Mohammadans of a lower social order. In is said that Morias are the survivors of the army of Muslim general 'Turbuk' who invaded Assam in the 16th century. The Morias have a history of their own Following is an extract from the 'Reprint on the Castes and Tribes of Assam from Chapter VI of the report of the Census of Assam, 1881' incorporated in the report 'Census of India, 1961, Assam, Volume III, Pt. V-A—Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes'.

"The native histories of Assam relate that in the spring of 1510 A.D. a force was sent into Assam by Gareshwar or the ruler of Gaur, a title which notwithstanding its Hindu etymology was commonly used in Assam to denote the head of the Musalman dominion in Bengal. The Commander of the force was a personage named Turbuk, who is still remembered by the Morias as their traditionary leader or king. He fought his war up the south bank as far as Koliabar, but reinforcements were sent down from upper Assam by the Ahom king and at Dikrai Mukh the Bengalis were surrounded and broken. Turbuk's head with that of his colleague Nawab Khushhal Khan was carried to Garhgaon and formed part of a chaplet of skulls exposed by the victorious Ahom on one of the hills near his capital. Turbuk's vanquished followers who escaped the slaughter were carried into captivity. They were employed at first in agriculture but when the harvest raised by the labour of nine hundred Morias came to be reaped, it was no more than six hundred puras of rice or 20 lbs. per man. Being next tried as wood-cutters, they brought in all kinds of wood that are useless for house building. As grass-cutters to the royal elephants they proved such a ludicrous and damaging failure that the term 'Hati Mahut' is a by-word against Morias to this day. At last when left to themselves they chose to be braziers and braziers they are still, though they frequently eke out the profits of their trade with a little agriculture[1].

Dr. Mohini Saikia mentioned in his thesis 'Assam Muslim relation and its cultural significance' that "Morias are regarded as a section of Mohammadans of a lower social order brought as captives from Turbuk's army, after the victory of the Ahom monarch Suhungmung in the third decade of the sixteenth century. According to traditions they were first employed as the keepers of the royal elephant and then engaged in agriculture. But as they were not found fit for any of these vocations, they were subsequently left to their own choice of professions and it is thus that they adopted the profession of braziers. W. Robinson does not at all consider them as a section of the Musalman people. He described them as a very impure tribe. The Morias being the earliest Muslim settlers in the eastern part of Assam, might have become adept in Assamese customs, manners and mode of life and like their Hindu breathren, they looked down upon the Musalman invaders of Assam most of whom

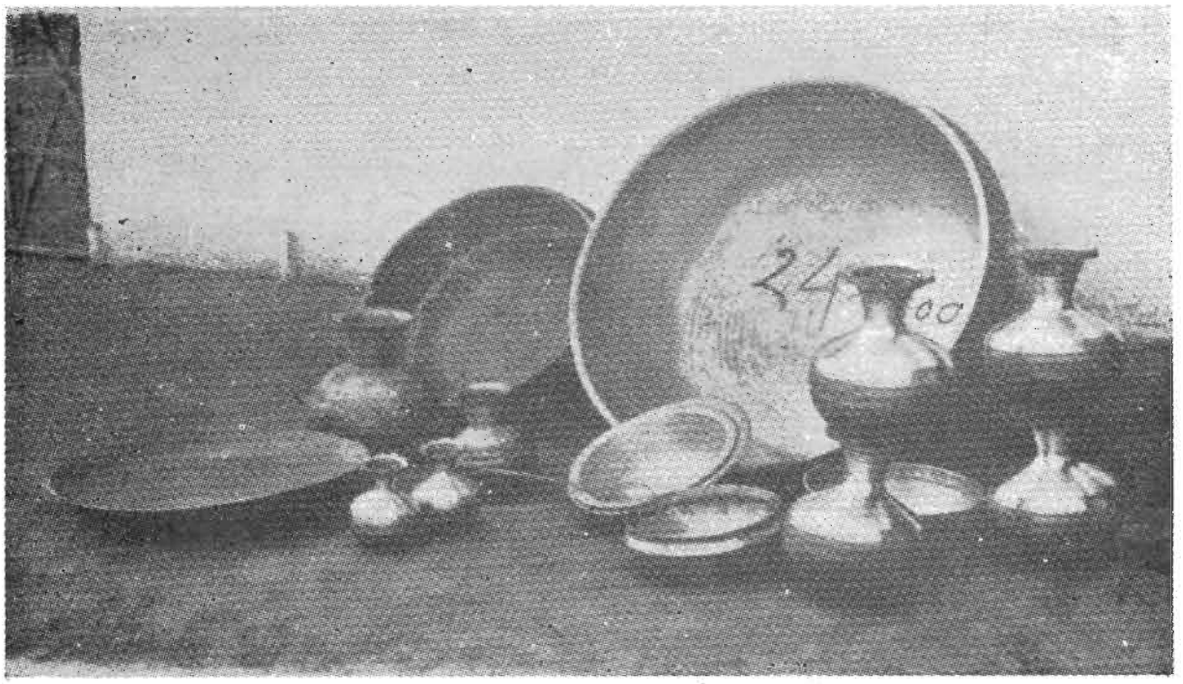
[1] E. H. Pakyntein—Census of India 1961—Assam—Volume III, Part V-A, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Page 36.



"Sarai"—an exquisitely beautiful product of Niz-Hajo.



A few of the finished products.



Brasswares for common household use.



A few art wares.

were Mughal by blood. They were consequently also held in contempt by those Muslims of Mughal stock who came and settled in Assam in later periods. It was probably of them in particular that Shihabuddin Talish, the Chronicler of Mirjumla, said that they were Musalmans only in name and they knew nothing about Islam.

Regarding the origin of the term Morias, it is generally held that it has been derived from the Assamese word 'Maria', from the verb 'mar', to 'beat' and particular section of the Musalmans is so called because they, having taken to the profession of braziers, fashion their wares with the skilful use of their hammers on the alloy[1]".

E. A. Gait mentioned in his article "The manufacture of Brass an Copperwares in Assam" published in the Journal of Indian Art and Industry that "The manufacture of brass utensils on the other hand, enjoys the distinction of being the only industry of the sort which is appropriated by a particular caste. It is the traditional occupation of the Morias who have a very peculiar history. The Assam Buranjis (historical narratives) state that they are the descendants of prisoners captured by the Ahom kings during Turbuk's unsuccessful invasion of their territory about 1506 A.D. These prisoners it is said were at first employed as grass cutters of the state elephants, but proved so useless that they were soon employed instead as cultivators but at this work also they proved utterly useless. They were then left to their own devices with the result that they adopted brass working as a means of earning a living and on this occupation they are still exclusively employed. Cases in which Morias have taken to agriculture are very rare[2]".

IMPORTANT BRASS METAL CENTRES WITHIN THE STATE AND OUTSIDE THE STATE

Making of brassmetal wares is in vogue through out the country since very ancient time. It is one of the popular traditional industries of India. Brasswares are used as traditional household utensils by all sections of people. Images of Gods and Goddesses and various other kinds of articles used in performance of religious rites as also those which represent the cultural heritage of Assam are manufactured by the artisans. Over and above articles of decorative value are also made in various production centres.

The following places occupy a position of pride in manufacture of brasswares : Aligarh, Benaras, Mirzapur and Muradabad in U.P., Jaipur in Rajasthan, Pune and Nasik in Maharastra, Ahmedabad in Gujarat, Nellore and Madurai in Tamilnadu. The States of Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal also accommodate centres of brass metal industry.

Unlike other crafts like Basketry, handloom weaving, etc. which are found scattered throughout the State, brass metal craft has very few pockets of concentration of artisan in Assam. Niz-Hajo town in Kamrup district on the north bank of Brahmaputra is famous for production of brass metal articles. The craft is practised in this town since a very long period. Besides Niz-Hajo town, Muslimpatty in Guwahati city and Amingaon town also in Kamrup district, Mathadang in Sibsagar district have small concentration of artisans engaged in this craft. A small number of artisan engaged in this craft are also to be found in some scattered units in Gauripur in Goalpara district and Silchar in Cachar district.

DIFFERENT ARTICLES PRODUCED

Brasswares manufactured by the artisans of Assam has local demand among all sections of the people. Because brasswares play a vital role in the performance of socio-religious ceremonies as well as domestic works all over the state. Traditional household utensils are of various sizes and shapes—these are Kalah, Charia, Thali, Tau, etc. commonly used by all sections of the people. Articles such as Dhupdani, Chaki, Nagara, Sarai, Dunari etc. are used in various religious ceremonies. Over and above Kalachi—an oblong pinnacle placed on the top of temples is also manufactured by the artisans of Assam. Following is a brief description of the main brasswares manufactured by the artisans of Assam.

BRASSWARES FOR HOUSEHOLD USE (Fig.-3)

1. Ghagori—	A decanter shaped vessel with an ornamented top used for keeping and carrying water.
2. Kalah—	Pitcher or water pot.
3. Tau —	A brass vessel used for cooking.
4. Charia—	Oval shaped utensil used for cooking food and also as wash basin.
5. Kharahi—	Oval shaped perforated vessel used for washing rice etc.
6. Thali—	A large and deep cooking vessel
7. Heta—	A ladle.
8. Karach—	A ladle.
9. Chamoch—	Spoon.
10. Khanti—	A kind of ladle used in cooking.
11. Lota—	A small water pot used for drinking and holding water.

[1] Dr. Mohini Saikia—"Assam Muslim Relation and its cultural significance", Luit Printers, Naharani, Golaghat (Assam) 1978. Page 140 & 141.

[2] E. A. Gait—"The Manufacture of Brass and Copperwares in Assam"—published in the Journal of Indian Art and Industry, Vol. II, London, 1897.

ART WARES (Figs. 4 & 2)

1. Sarai— A platter or a brass tray. (Fig. 1)
2. Bata— A small tray used for offering betel leaf and nut and other articles.
3. Dunari— A small platter with cover used for ceremonial purposes.
4. Idols— Various kinds of idols of Gods and Goddesses.
5. Kharu— A kind of bracelet used by the women.

BRASSWARES USED IN PERFORMANCE OF RELIGIOUS RITES

1. Dhup-dani— This is used for burning incense stick.
2. Dhuna-dani— This is a special kind of pot used for burning incense (Dhuna).
3. Gacha— A stand with one or more lamp.
4. Chaki— A lamp. This is used in burning a wick immersed in inflammable oil.
5. Nagara— A musical instrument used at the time of 'Nam-Kirtan.'
6. Doba— A large drum.

Besides the above mentioned articles the artisans also make a variety of other articles like replica of birds and animals and articles of decorative use as and when specific order for these are placed with them.

It is difficult to estimate the total number of artisans engaged in this craft in Assam. However, according to the survey conducted by the Directorate of Industries, Govt. of Assam, in 1980 there were about 150 artisans engaged in this craft throughout the state. Majority of these artisans are found in Niz-Hajo town. Moreover, major centre of production of brass articles are also concentrated in Niz-Hajo town. As mentioned earlier, this craft is the traditional occupation of Morias of Assam. It is obvious, therefore, that this industry is found particularly in the place where Morias inhabit. Besides Morias a few Hindu artisans belonging to various castes practise this craft. However, Morias are believed to be the original brass workers in Assam making a variety of wares used by a large section of population both in rural and urban areas of Assam.

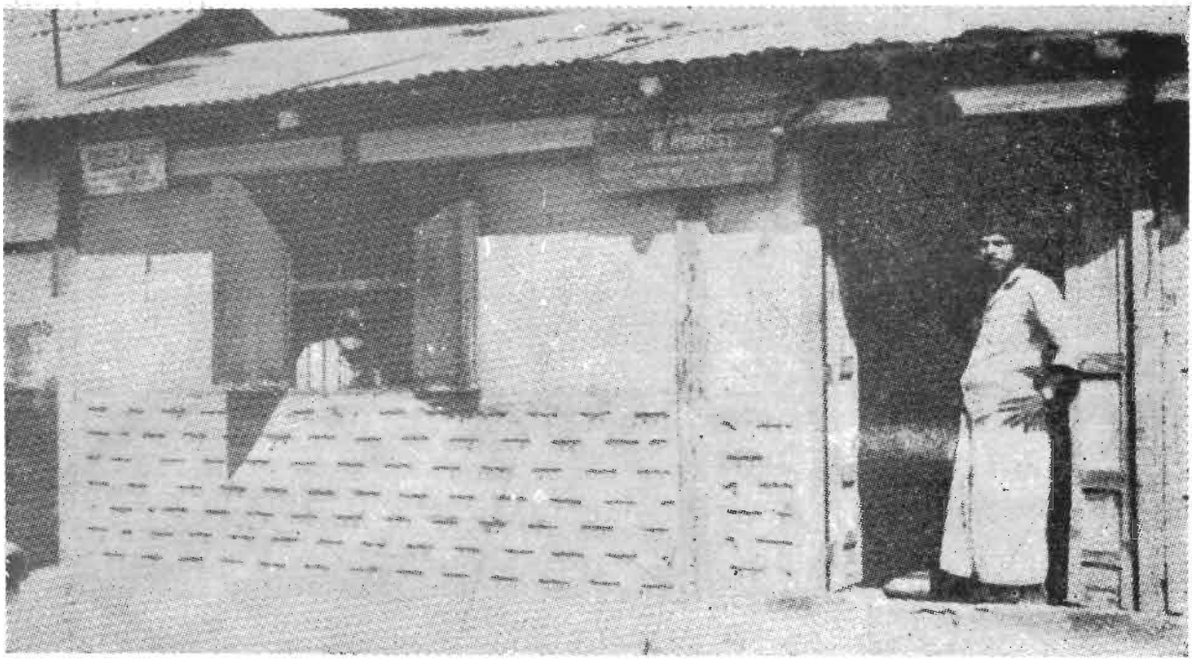
It is well-nigh impossible to arrive at any reliable estimate of the total quantity of products of brass metal in the state as a whole. Our field survey reveals that the braziers neither maintain any account of the quantity of raw-materials used in production of various articles nor keep any record of the number of articles produced by them. As the braziers themselves, almost as a rule do not sell the product to the ultimate buyers, they can not furnish any correct account of ultimate sale price of the products. It needs mention here that the braziers are paid labour charge only by the traders in brass metal products who normally themselves supply the rawmaterials to the artisans. The brazier is, therefore, primarily concerned with the labour charge he receives depending on weight, size and type of product and the craftsmanship that goes into the production of an article.

The product of brass metal is raw material oriented. Buying the raw-materials and making the ware is normally resorted to only when some one places an order with an artisan. Otherwise majority of the artisans work for traders on wage basis. Due to poor economic condition majority of the artisans at present engaged in making brass articles has to depend upon the local traders of mahajan for financial support. Thus, this industry is solely controlled and managed by the local traders. Unless local traders engage them on wages basis, it is almost impossible for the economically distressed artisans to run the industry. Thus, traders' position in this craft is unchallengeable and also very essential. Generally the traders ask the craftsmen to manufacture only a particular variety of articles by supplying raw materials required for the purpose. The artisans get only minimum labour charge for making the articles. Thus, bulk of the product is taken away by the traders supplying the raw material and they take away almost the entire benefit of profit gained by selling the product at a considerably high price, giving only minimum wages to the artisans and thus depriving them of their due share of profit.

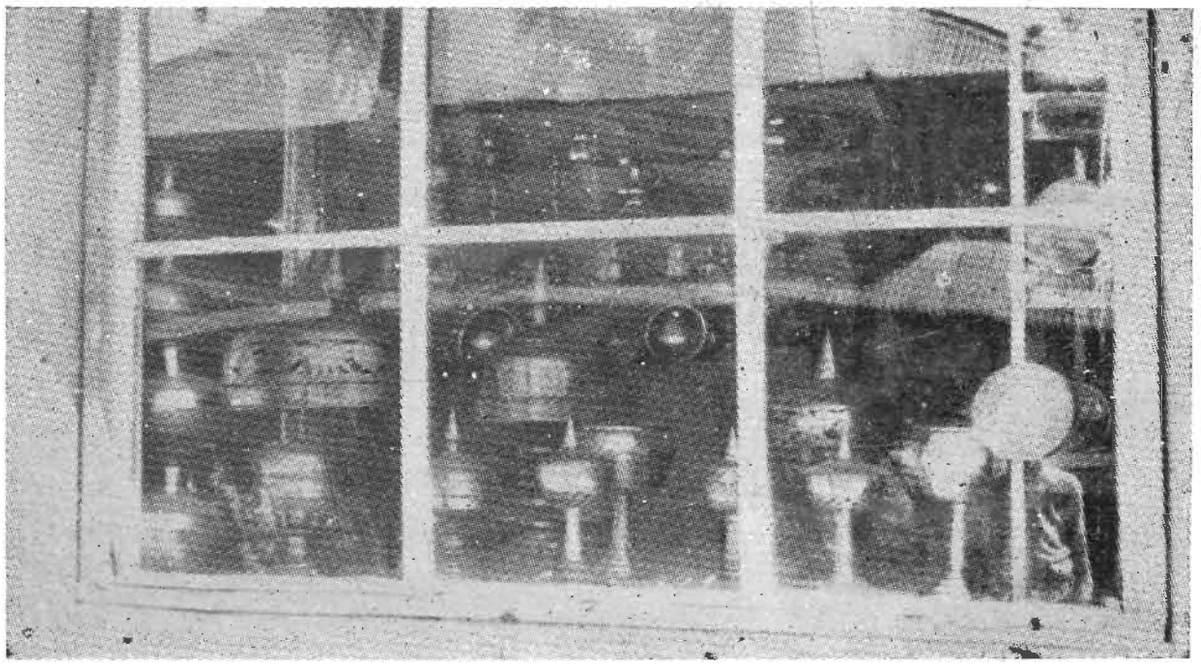
The condition of the brass metal industry at present is far from satisfactory. The development of this craft is lagging behind due to many reasons and short comings. High cost of raw-material, non-availability of ideal marketing facilities, exploitation of the poor artisans by local traders or mahajan are some of the serious impediments to its proper growth. Moreover, the traditional craft is also facing stiff challenge from the cheap aluminium and stainless articles. Now-a-days people prefer to use cheap utensils made of aluminium rather than the costly brass utensils. This certainly hampers the production of brasswares. Unless appropriate supportive measures are taken immediately there is a grim prospect of this industry losing its existence in not too distant future.

CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY

A very disheartening fact about this craft is that no proper co-operative societies are functioning for the



Hajo Brass Utensils Workers' Industrial Co-operative Society Limited.



Display of decorative brassware in a shop-window.

common benefit of the artisans. Co-operative societies can play a very beneficial role by discharging multiple duties of providing adequate finance and raw materials at reasonable price and proper marketing of the finished products at a deserving price. Though the state Govt. have encouraged establishment of co-operative societies linked with brass metal industry, yet much remains to be done by the societies for the actual benefit of the artisans. However, the Govt. of Assam have taken keen interest in developing this traditional craft. Training programme and seminars for the benefit of artisans engaged in this craft have been held. The Govt. of Assam sponsored several training programme in this town to train the local youths to learn the art of making brasswares. Under this programme young people are provided training under a master craftsmen for a period of six months. The cost of such training is borne by the District Industrial Centre. The District Industrial Centre also, from time to time, arranges seminars in which the craftsmen, officials, local youths are invited and discuss about the development of the craft for the benefit of the local people. Bank financing of the poor artisans has also been arranged. Besides, they have also encouraged artisans to diversify their products.

It is felt that given due incentive and care this age old industry will revive to play a vital role in uplifting the socio-economic condition of the artisans and definitely bring back to its fold the disenchanted herd of artisans who have opted for other forms of livelihood and will regain its past glory and flourish in the days to come. At present a co-operative society registered under the name "Hajo Brass Utensils Workers Industrial Co-operative Society Limited" is functioning in Niz-Hajo town (Fig-5). But unfortunately the co-operative society has so far failed to render any beneficial assistance to the artisans of brassmetal industry.

The society was established in the year 1952 in the Muslimpatty locality. The management of the society rests with an executive committee headed by the President. The Secretary of the society besides doing the job of a manager on a fixed pay of Rs. 450/ per month also looks after general activities of the society. A Salesman and a Chowkidar drawing the salary of Rs. 330/- and Rs. 50/- per month respectively are the employees of the society.

There are altogether sixty share holders subscribing to shares valued at Rs. 50/- each. The majority of the share holders of this society belong to Muslim community.

The main functions of this co-operative society is to procure raw materials from the market and supply them to the artisans for making various kinds of specified brasswares. The artisans after manufacture of the wares supply them to the society for sale of the finished products.

The artisans get only making charges for each item they manufacture as per weight of the articles. The articles thus procured by the society are sold in the market. Besides brasswares the society also deals in various kinds of silverwares and bell-metalwares which are procured from different sources.

The society also arrange training for the new entrants in the industry. The Govt. assistance in this regard needs a mention here. Besides, the society also gives loan to the artisans for running this industry. The amount of loan advanced to the artisans varies from Rs. 100/- to Rs. 300/-.

The society at present is accommodated in a rented house. It has reported having a working capital of Rs. 1,03,000/- (Rupees one lakh & three thousand) only. It has also received loan from Govt. from time to time. In 1986-87 received a loan of Rs. 12,000/- which included Rs. 1,000/- as subsidiary. The society purchased goods worth Rs. 3,22,976.52, and sold product worth of Rs. 3,87,400.54 in the year 1986-87.

The main problem faced by the society at present is shortage of working capital which compels it to pay however reluctantly, a very nominal sum to the artisans as labour charges for making brass metalwares casing serious discontent among the artisans.

Enquiry reveals that there was also a co-operative society in the name of "Brass metal Industrial Co-operative Society" at Bharalitola locality. This society was established in 1957 and dealt mainly in brass metal wares. But at present this society is found to be in a morbid state. The reason as reported is financial constraints and indifferent attitude of the members towards the society.

CHAPTER - II

CRAFTSMEN IN THEIR SETTING

As stated earlier, Niz-Hajo town, lying on the northern bank of river Brahmaputra in the district of Kamrup covers an area of 4.01 sq. km. The annual rainfall of the town is 1,335.0 mm. and the maximum and minimum temperature recorded are 38.0°C and 7.0°C respectively[1]. The town is well provided with medical and educational facilities having one health centre, one higher secondary, two secondary, two middle and twelve primary schools. There are also two recreational centres. The town is also having a bank within its area. Moreover, as the town is situated only a few kilometers away from Guwahati city, the people of Niz-Hajo town can utilize all the facilities which are available in Guwahati city. Niz-Hajo town is the principal brassware producing area in the State of Assam. This little town is famous for its various kinds of brasswares which once drew buyers mainly in the form of pilgrims from different parts of the State.

The principal artisans of this industry in this town are Morias. They are the traditional braziers of brass in Assam. They have been practising this craft for many generations. This is the only source of livelihood of the Morias up till now. They have inherited the skill in making brasswares from their forefather. They have neither any cultivable land nor any other subsidiary occupations other than this craft. Thus without exception the Morias of Niz-Hajo practise this traditional craft as the only source of livelihood.

Besides the Morias, a small percentage of Hindu residents of this town particularly belonging to Koch, Keot and Mali are found to practise the craft since long past. It is believed that the Hindu artisan learnt the art of manufacturing various kinds of brasswares from the Muslim (Morias). They too have inherited this trade from their forefathers. The articles produced are same as those made by the Morias. However, the majority of the Hindu artisans have cultivable land. Thus agriculture and brass metal industry are the main stay of their economy. But it is disquieting to note that recently many of the Hindu artisans have given up practising this craft reportedly owing to lack of adequate capital, shift of choice of customers from brass metal wares to other cheaper material made articles and non-remunerative price of the finished products.

Due to the above reasons younger generations disfavour practise of this craft. It is observed that in the recent years the entire lot of youngsters among the Hindu artisans have left the traditional profession in search of other profitable jobs, resulting in inevitable decay of this craft which was once a flourishing industry amongst the Hindus of the town. It is gathered during the survey that till a few years back majority of the Hindu households of this town derived their livelihood primarily from brass metal work but unfortuntaely that is not the picture to be obtained now.

However, the Muslim artisans are still found adhered to this industry. Even the educated youth are also found practising this craft. But majority of them lament that brass industry is no longer a profitable industry as before. They have to struggle for their existence because of a gradually diminishing demand of brass articles. Over and above big traders or Mahajan take the major share of the profit from the poor artisans. But it is encouraging to note that despite these heavy odds majority of the Muslim households still cling to this craft and consider this to be the main source of income.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN OF THE ARTISANS

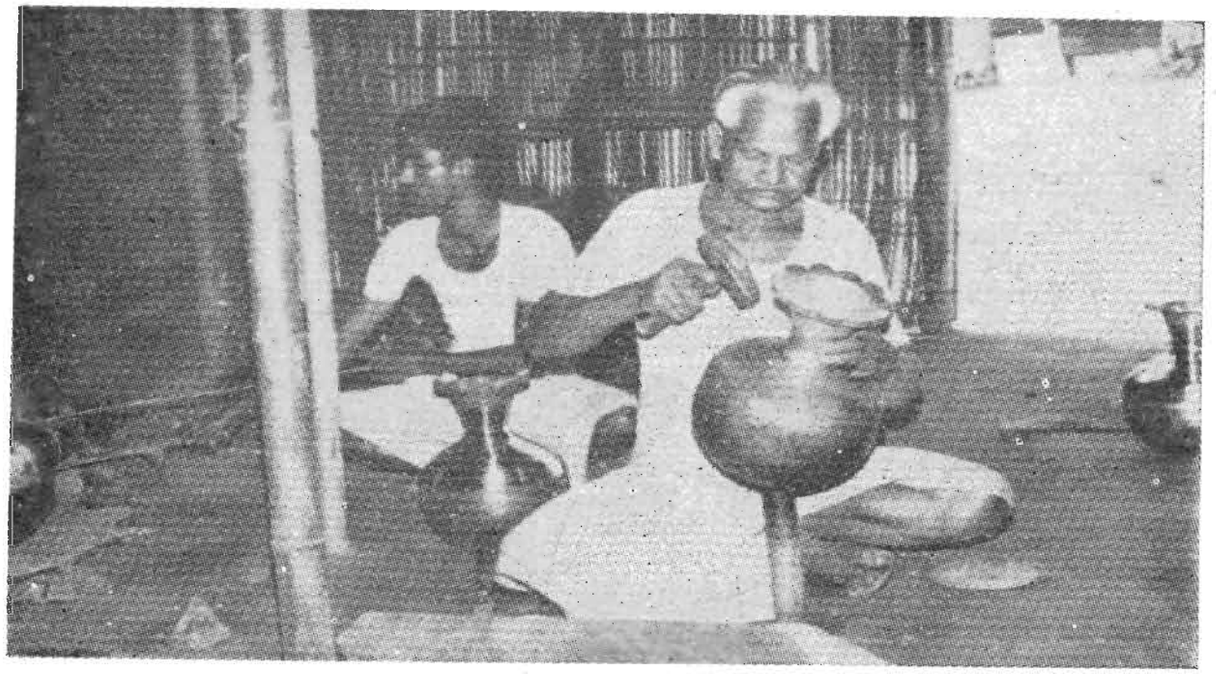
The Morias who are the principal artisans of the craft dwell in a compact manner in a separate hamlet or 'para' in the town. It is situated on the western side of the famous temple Hayagriv Madhab and is known as Muslimpatty. This Muslimpatty is the nerve centre of brass metal industry of Assam. As one passess through this locality one can always hear the sound produced by the constant beating of the metal sheet by the artisans. The Morias of this locality claim to be the original settlers in Niz-Hajo town and living here since generations. (Figs. 7 & 8)

The settlement pattern of the households in Muslimpatty is very simple. Houses are built in a lineal pattern all along on both the sides of a motorable road. There are almost as many residential houses as the number of houses. Houses are more or less of the same pattern. Majority of the houses are built in a very unplanned manner. Most of the houses are constructed on an insignificant plinth. In general, houses are made of mud and cement foundation, having walls made of reed and split bamboo, plastered with mud and cow-dung. In a few cases brick and cement are also used. Roofs are made of C. I. sheets. The pillars and beams are made of bamboo and wood. Houses are generally dark, ill-ventilated and with low roof. In most cases kitchen is found to be separated from the main dwelling house. Bath rooms and latrines are not to be commonly found. The compound of adjoining houses is not clearly demarcated. The area is conjested because houses are constructed without leaving any

[1] Source : "Census of India, 1981, Series 3—Assam, Part X-A, Town Directory, Page 32".



Younger generation among the Morias busy in their workshop.



Hindu artisans at their workshop.



space in between them. There are no drains or sewerage in the locality to carry away the rain water or discharge from the households. The workshops are usually found inside the compound of the dwelling house. A few households use a part of the dwelling house or a portion of verandah as workshop. In some cases small bamboo structure with thatched roof is used as workshop. In general, the locality is not very clean. Except the co-operative store, no other shops are found in this locality. But main bazar of the town is not very far from this locality. A Maszid is also found in the locality.

The Hindus, who practise the brass metal craft reside mainly in 'Bharalitola' locality situated on the northern side of the 'Hayagrib Madhab Devalaya' (Figs. 9 & 10). It is one of the oldest locality of the town. Besides this locality, a few Hindu artisans who have recently shifted from Bharalitola are also found in Borchapari and Dhuparguri localities.

The residential pattern of Hindu artisans is also very simple. However, their living condition is slightly better than that of the Morias. Houses are located on both sides of the main road, the entrance facing the road. It is observed that the houses are constructed without any proper plan or architectural design. The locality is conjested because houses are constructed without leaving sufficient space in between two houses. Most of the houses are constructed on an insignificant plinth built either of cement or mud. The walls are made of reed or split bamboo plastered with mud and cowdung. In a few cases walls made of brick and cement are also found. The post and pillars are made of wood and bamboo. The material of roof of a majority of houses is C.I. sheet. In recent years a few R.C.C. houses also have been built. In most cases kitchen is separated from the main house. Latrines and bathrooms are also constructed at a little distance away from the main dwelling house.

In an overwhelming majority of cases a corner of the house or a portion of the verandah is used as the workshop. A few households construct a small bamboo structure in their compound for use as a workshop.

The main shopping centre of Niz-Hajo town is not far from this locality. Shops selling sundry articles are also found in the locality. Besides small industry like iron fabrication works, bakery, pharmacy etc. are also found in the locality. In fact, it is felt that within a very short time the market area of this locality will form a single spread with the main bazar area of the town.

Besides Bharalitola locality, there are two other localities in which a few Hindu artisans are found. They are Dhuparguri situated in the extreme north of the town. The other locality is newly formed and is known as Borchapari which is an extended portion of the town on its western side. There are only a few Hindu artisans residing in this locality. The survey reveals that Hindu households who practise brass works have migrated to this locality from Bharalitola.

TABLE II.1

Distribution of population in the surveyed households engaged in the craft by religion, caste/tribe/community

Name of locality	Religion	Caste/ Tribe/ Community	Number of households engaged in the craft	Number of persons in the households engaged in the craft	Mother tongue of head of the households	Total population of the surveyed households engaged in brass metal industry		
						Person	Male	Female
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Borchapari	Hindu	Koch	1	2	Assamese	11	5	6
Dhuparguri	Hindu	Koch	1	3	Assamese	10	4	6
		Kumar	1	1	Hindi	5	3	2
Bharalitola	Hindu	Koch	18	25	Assamese	121	71	50
		Keot	1	1	Assamese	6	3	3
Muslimpatty	Muslim	Moria	38	55	Assamese	239	123	116
Total			60	87		392	209	183

It has earlier been stated that Morias far outnumber the craftsman belonging to other caste or community. In the present study also the majority of the households belong to Morias, who are follower of Islam religion. They live in a separate hamlet or para known as Muslimpatty. Among the Hindu artisans who reportedly practise this craft for generations, majority inhabit in the Bharalitola locality which is one of the oldest locality of the town.

A plausible explanation for Muslim artisans being in absolute majority is that despite many odds they through generations have clung to this craft as the prime source of earning livelihood whereas, the Hindu artisans have chosen agriculture as alternative means of economically productive activity and have gradually given up practice to the craft owing to adversities like high price of raw materials, non-remunerative sale price of finished product etc.

The table further shows that mother tongue of head of all the surveyed households except one in Dhuparguri locality is Assamese. The lone household that reported Hindi as mother tongue of its head has migrated from Uttar Pradesh and settled in this town about four decades ago. It is interesting to note that sons and daughters of this household have returned Assamese as their mother tongue which clearly indicates that they have completely mingled with the main stream of socio-cultural life of the local Assamese populace.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE CRAFTSMEN

An attempt is made in this Chapter to study the demographic profile of the craftsman of selected households which are engaged in making brass-wares of various kinds.

TABLE II.2

Distribution of surveyed population by age-group and marital status

Age-group	Never married			Married			Widowed			Total		
	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
0—4	37	17	20	—	—	—	—	—	—	37	17	20
5—9	58	27	31	—	—	—	—	—	—	58	27	31
10—14	68	33	35	—	—	—	—	—	—	68	33	35
15—19	45	31	14	5	—	5	—	—	—	50	31	19
20—24	21	14	7	8	—	8	—	—	—	29	14	15
25—29	12	12	—	23	12	11	—	—	—	35	24	11
30—34	7	7	—	24	6	18	—	—	—	31	13	18
35—44	—	—	—	37	22	15	—	—	—	37	22	15
45—54	—	—	—	21	14	7	1	—	1	22	14	8
55—69	—	—	—	12	9	3	7	2	5	19	11	8
70+	—	—	—	3	3	—	3	—	3	6	3	3
Total	248	141	107	133	66	67	11	2	9	392	209	183

It is seen that out of a total surveyed population of 392,209 are males. The Sex-ratio is thus calculate to be 876 females per thousand males.

The table also depicts that an overwhelming majority (63.26%) of the total population is never married, 33.93% are married and only 2.81% are widowed. There is not a single divorced or separated person in the surveyed population. Number of married males and females are more or less the same. No male below the age of 25 years and no female below 15 years of age is found married, which indicates the absence of child marriage in the population. However, exactly 80% of the population in the age of 25 years and above are married and an absolute majority of them is in the reproductive age-group.

Below is a table showing the composition of households by number of members and age of head of the households.

TABLE II.3

Distribution of households by age of head of the household and number of members

Age of head of the household	No. of households	Number of households having members				
		4	5	6-7	8-9	10-12
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Below 20	—	—	—	—	—	—
20—29	6	1	1	3	1	—
30—39	15	4	4	4	3	—
40—49	19	2	4	10	3	—
50—59	12	—	1	3	7	1
60 and above	8	—	3	2	1	2
Total	60	7	13	22	15	3

The table II.3 depicts that the number of members per household is not at all high. The average size of a household is between 5 and 6 which represents the average size of an Assamese household. The highest percentage (36.67%) of households belong to size-group 6-7 followed by those in the size-group 8-9 persons (25.00%). It is interesting to note that not a single household reported having less than 4 members. Further, it is seen that the highest percentage (31.67%) of households reported age of their head as between 40 and 49 years and the lowest (10.00%) having head in the age-group 20-29 years.

The following table shows the distribution of households classified by religion and educational level of head of the household of the surveyed population.

TABLE II.4

Distribution of households classified by religion and educational level of head of the household

Religion	No. of households by sex of head of the household		Educational level of head of the household				
	M	F	Illiterate	Literate without educational level	Primary	Middle	Matriculation
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Hindu	22	—	2	3	8	8	1
Muslim	38	—	8	12	13	4	1
Total	60	—	10	15	21	12	2

The table II.4 shows that a vast majority (83.33%) of head of surveyed households is literate. Among the literate head of households the highest proportion (42.00%) reported having passed Primary level examination followed by 30.00% reporting just literates without having attained any educational level.

WORKERS AND NON-WORKERS IN SURVEYED HOUSEHOLD

According to the concepts adopted for the census the work force consists of all persons who are engaged in economically productive activity. Such participation may be physical or mental in nature. Works involve not only actual work but also effective supervision and direction of work. The definition of a worker as adopted for 1981 census is a person who works for more than 183 days in a year in one or more than one activity.

Following table shows the distribution of workers and non-workers classified by religion, sex and broad age-groups.

TABLE II.5

Distributions of workers and non-workers classified by religion, sex and broad age-groups

Age-group	Worker/ Non-worker	Hindu			Muslim			Total		
		P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
All ages	Worker	40	40	—	63	63	—	103	103	—
	Non-worker	113	46	67	176	60	116	289	106	183
0—14	Worker	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	Non-worker	60	32	28	103	45	58	163	77	86
15—34	Worker	20	20	—	34	34	—	54	54	—
	Non-worker	36	13	23	55	15	40	91	28	63
35—59	Worker	15	15	—	26	26	—	41	41	—
	Non-worker	9	—	9	16	—	16	25	—	25
60+	Worker	5	5	—	3	3	—	8	8	—
	Non-worker	8	1	7	2	—	2	10	1	9

The table II.5 throws some light on the rate of participation in the economically productive activity by the surveyed population. It is observed that a very low percentage (26.28%) has returned themselves as workers. It is interesting to note that not a single female worker is found among the population. Thus, females constitute the major non-working population.

A look at the age structure of the working population indicates that 52.43% and 39.81% of the workers, who incidentally are all males, belong to the age-group 15-34 and 35-59 respectively. The table reveals absence of child worker.

It is to be noted that while 72.64% among the male non-workers are in the age-group 0—14 years ; a much lower percentage (46.97%) among the female non-workers belong to this age-group consisting mostly infants and school-going children. However, it is a common experience to see elderly females engaged in domestic works alone and as such not treated as workers because they do not fulfil the criteria to be treated as workers. Further, it is interesting to observe that not a single male in the age-group 35—59 returned himself as a non-worker.

During the survey we came across a few females, mostly widows, who are engaged by the artisan for some insignificant works connected with practice of the craft. However, they are reportedly not at all regular workers and do not satisfy the conditions to be treated as a worker.

Following table (Table No. II.6) shows the distribution of workers by industrial categories.

TABLE II.6

Distribution of workers in Niz-Hajo Town into nine Industrial Categories

Source: 1971 Census

Industrial category of workers	Number			Percentage		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Cultivators	605	604	1	25.24	25.95	1.45
2. Agricultural labourer	111	110	1	4.63	4.73	1.45
3. Livestock and allied activities	131	128	3	5.47	5.50	4.35
4. Mining and Quarrying	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. (a) Manufacturing and repair etc. Household industry	164	147	17	6.84	6.31	24.64
(b) Manufacturing and repair etc. Non-household industry	171	171	—	7.13	7.35	—
6. Construction	65	65	—	2.71	2.79	—
7. Trade and Commerce	698	677	21	29.12	29.08	30.43
8. Transport, Storage and Communications	52	52	—	2.17	2.23	—
9. Other services	400	374	26	16.69	16.06	37.68
Total workers	2397	2328	69	100.00	100.00	100.00

It is seen from the table that among the main workers, the highest proportion of workers is engaged in Trade and Commerce followed by those, who returned their occupation as cultivators. The table also depicts that a good number of persons are engaged in manufacture and repair in the form of both household and non-household industry.

NATURE OF RELATION OF MEMBERS TO HEAD OF HOUSEHOLDS

The composition of the household with regard to nature of relationship of members to the head of the household is shown in the table II. 7.

TABLE II.7

Households classified by nature of relation of member to head of the households

	Nature of relation of members to head of the household	No. of households	No. of members
	1	2	3
1.	Self, spouse, unmarried sons and daughters	40	241
2.	Self, spouse, unmarried brothers with or without unmarried sons and daughters	2	12
3.	Self, spouse, married son, son's wife with or without unmarried sons and daughters	5	41
4.	Self, spouse with or without unmarried son/daughter and widowed mother	5	36
5.	Self, spouse with or without unmarried son/daughters, unmarried brother and widowed mothers	1	6
6.	Self, spouse, unmarried brother/sister with or without unmarried sons and daughters	1	9
7.	Self, spouse, married brothers, brother's wife, unmarried brother with or without unmarried sons and daughters and widowed mothers	1	8
8.	Self, spouse, brother's wife with or without unmarried sons and daughters	1	9
9.	Self, spouse, unmarried brother with or without unmarried sons and daughters and widowed fathers	1	8
10.	Self, unmarried brother/sister and widowed mothers	1	4
11.	Self, spouse with or without unmarried sons/daughters and wife's widowed mother	1	7
12.	Self, spouse, married son, son's wife with or without unmarried son /daughter and daughter's son	1	11
	Total	60	392

It is observed that an absolute majority (66.67%) of the surveyed households are nuclear families consisting of head of the household, his wife and unmarried sons and daughters, who constitute almost an equal proportion (61.48%) of the surveyed population. A large variety of other types of families are also to be found but those comprise a most insignificant proportion.

MIGRATION STATUS OF THE HOUSEHOLDS

It has been observed during the survey that majority of the heads of both Hindu as well as Muslim households are non-migrant, who reportedly were born in this town. Thus, it is evident that almost all the artisans are original dwellers of this town. However, one migrant household was found in the Dhuparguri locality. The head of this migrant household was brought to this town from Benaras City by the co-operative society in the year 1949 to teach the local artisans the process of moulding the brass metal. In course of time he settled down in this town and chose an Assamese woman as his consort.

ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE HOUSEHOLDS

The economic condition of the craftsmen belonging to both the religious groups who take brass industry as a main source of income is far from satisfactory. It has been observed that most of the artisans are poor and live almost from hand to mouth. Among the Moria artisans, this craft is the only source of livelihood. They do not have any other subsidiary occupation. However, as earlier stated among the Hindus many of the artisans have cultivable land and thus they take agriculture as a subsidiary occupation. In general, the standard of living of both Hindu and Muslim artisans is not at all satisfactory.

In the absence of any written record it is difficult to say when and how this craft came into being in this part of the state and more particularly in this town. But there is no denying the fact that this industry is an age old traditional industry of this town, the knowledge of which has been handed down from generation to generation.

NON-PRACTISING HOUSEHOLD

During the present survey an attempt has also been made to study a few households which once practised this craft, but are not practising now with a view to ascertain, whether, at present the craft is flourishing or declining. Among the Muslims there are only a few households who do not practise this craft but on the other hand a large proportion of the

Hindu households who once practised this craft as a source of income have at present given up practise of this craft due to many constraints. An attempt is made here to find out the main cause for abandoning the craft as a means of livelihood by the selected households. For this purpose data were collected from 15 number of households belonging to both Hindus and Muslims, who once practised this craft, but are now engaged in other economic pursuit. The following table shows the population of selected non-practising households by sex, age-group and material status.

TABLE II.8

Distribution of population of non-practising households by age-group, sex and marital status

Age-group	Never married		Married		Widowed		Total		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	T
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0—4	2	2	—	—	—	—	2	2	4
5—9	7	7	—	—	—	—	7	7	14
10—14	6	7	—	—	—	—	6	7	13
15—19	4	1	—	—	—	—	4	1	5
20—24	—	—	—	5	—	—	—	5	5
25—29	3	—	—	3	—	—	3	3	6
30—34	—	—	4	7	—	—	4	7	11
35—44	—	—	8	—	—	—	8	—	8
45—59	—	—	3	—	—	—	3	—	3
60+	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	1
Total	22	17	15	15	—	1	37	33	70

It is observed that the males marginally outnumber the females. Again, it is seen that the proportion of never married males is higher than that obtained among the females. There being only one widow, the proportion of married females is obviously higher than that among the males. Further, it is noted that while all the never married females are below the age of 20 years, 3 out of 22 never married males are in the age-group 25-29. All the married males and females belong to age-group 30-59 years and 20-34 years respectively.

TYPE OF FAMILY:

It is observed that an overwhelming majority of the households have nuclear type family which is composed of head, spouse and their unmarried sons and daughters.

The following table II.9 shows the distribution of non-practising households classified by age of the head and number of members in the household.

TABLE II.9

Distribution of non-practising households classified by age of head of the household and number of members

Age of head of the household	Number of households having member			
	2	4	5	6—7
1	2	3	4	5
Below 20	—	—	—	—
20—29	—	—	—	—
30—39	1	3	4	—
40—49	—	1	5	1
Total	1	4	9	1

The table reveals that 60.00% of the non-practising households surveyed by us reported having 5 members each followed by about 27.00% having 4 members each. Almost equal proportion of households reported their head to be in the age-group 30-39 and 40-49.

TABLE II.10

Number of workers and non-workers in non-practising households classified by caste/tribe/community and broad age-group

Name of Caste/ Tribe/Community	Total population			Number of workers and non-workers																			
				All ages				0-14				15-34				35-59				60+			
	P	M	F	Workers		Non-workers		Workers		Non-workers		Workers		Non-workers		Workers		Non-workers		Workers		Non-workers	
				M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Koch } Hindu	22	13	9	7	—	6	9	—	—	4	4	3	—	2	4	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Keot } Hindu	4	2	2	1	—	1	2	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Moria Muslim	44	22	22	10	—	12	22	—	—	10	11	4	—	2	11	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	70	37	33	18	—	19	33	—	—	15	16	7	—	4	16	11	—	—	—	—	—	—	1

WORKERS AND NON-WORKERS IN THE NON-PRACTISING HOUSEHOLDS

Table II.10 shows the distribution of workers and non-workers by broad age-groups obtained in the non-practising households. It is observed that as in the case of members of practising households a very low percentage (25.71) of population in the non-practising households too is recorded as workers. Further, similar to that obtained in case of practising households not a single female returned herself as a worker as also that none in the age-group 0-14 years is a worker. About 61.00% of the male workers are in the age-group 35-59 years and the rest in the age-group '15-34 years.

Attempt has also been made to elicit information about the different types of occupations adopted by the workers. Table II.11 prepared from surveyed non-practising households shows the distribution of workers according to their present occupation

TABLE II.11

Distribution of workers in non-practising households according to their present occupation

Traditional Occupation	Total No. of Workers	Number of Workers by Age-group										
		15-34 where present occupation is				35-59 where present occupation is						
		Same as col. 1	Different			Same as Col. 1	Different					
			Driver	Office Peon	Clerk		Clerk	Field Asstt.	Business Stationery	Office Peon	Driver	Business Grocery
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Brass metalwares making	18	—	1	4	2	—	4	1	1	3	1	1

Table II.11 shows that all the 18 male workers of the non-practising households are engaged in works other than their traditional occupation. The Table also shows that a vast majority of the workers are engaged in govt. services.

The following table shows the distribution of non-practising households having members with necessary skill to practise the craft but are actually not practising the craft at present.

TABLE II.12

Distribution of non-practising households having members with necessary skill to practise the craft but not practising classified by educational level of head of the household.

Educational level of head of the household	No. of households	No. of households having no member with necessary skill	Number of households having members with necessary skill to practise the craft but no practising the same den to	
			Present employment is more paying.	Lack of time and manpower
1	2	3	4	5
Primary.	5	1	3	1
Middle .	5	1	2	—
Matriculation.	3	—	4	—
Higher Secondary/P.U.	2	—	3	—
Total :	15	2	12	1

It is observed that 92.31% of the non-practising households having members with knowledge or skill of making brass metal wares reportedly have given up practies of the traditional craft as according to them their present occupation pays them much more than they would earn from practice of the traditional craft. Further, it is interesting to note that head of all non-practising households are literates which enable them to earn employment elsewhere specially in Govt. services.

The reasons for giving up practising this craft as could be elicited from the respondents are recorded in the Table II.13.

TABLE II.13

Households reporting reasons for giving up the craft classified by occupation of head of the household

Occupation of head of the household	No. of households	No. of households having given up the craft since					
		5—9 years due to			10—19 years due to		20+ years due to
		Death of the craftsmen	Present employment is more paying	Lack of time and manpower	Present employment is more paying	Lack of time and manpower	Present employment is more paying
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Clerk	4	1	—	—	2	—	1
Office Peon	6	—	4	—	1	—	1
Field Assistant	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Shop Keeper .	2	1	—	1	—	—	—
Driver	2	—	1	—	1	—	—
Total	15	2	5	1	5	—	2

The table II.13 is self explanatory and hardly calls for any elaboration. However, it can be pointed out that opportunity of better employment which in its turn brings better economic prosperity is reportedly the prime motivating factor for not practising this craft.

SERVICES AVAILABLE TO THE CRAFTSMEN IN AND AROUND NIZ-HAJO TOWN

As mentioned earlier (Chapter-I) there is one co-operative society in Muslimpatty locality. This society supply raw materials to the artisans and place orders to make different brass articles. The society also buy articles from the craftsmen.

There is also a bank in the town which provides loans to the craftsmen. But the craftsmen being poor and uneducated do not like to approach the bank for loan out of apprehension and ignorance.

The Govt. of Assam sometimes arranges training classes to local youths under a master craftsmen to learn the art of making brasswares.

CHAPTER - III

PROCESS OF LEARNING

The town Niz-Hajo is famous for various kinds of exquisite brasswares bearing ample testimony of the excellent craftsmenship in manufacture of such articles since very ancient times. This town has a long tradition and heritage in producing brasswares. The males of this town through generations have natural talent and skill in manufacture of brass metal wares of various shapes and designs. The Morias known as traditional artisans of brass in Assam are inhabited in this town for many centuries. They have been practising this craft as their traditional occupation since time immemorial. Besides the Morias there are Hindu artisans who too have been practising this craft as their traditional occupation for many generations. However, due to many constraints the Hindu artisans have gradually given up practise of this craft. It is to be noted that there are now a few old and renowned artisans who manufacture various kinds of brass wares. Their talent and artistic skill is known all over the state of Assam.

Morias are believed to be the original settlers of this town. They produce brasswares of various sizes and shapes, usually meant for domestic use. Their products have great utility and are beautifully shaped. It is used by all sections of people. Various articles of brass required in the Hindu temples are also manufactured by the Morias. Except this brass industry, Morias do not have any other vocation to augment their family income. They have inherited the craftsmanship from their forefathers. Every youth of this community knows the art and technique of making brasswares. In fact the Morias are born and grown up in the surrounding of this metal industry. And as a natural corollary the menfolk are drawn towards this craft and out of sheer inquisitiveness have their first lesson in the craft in their very childhood and gradually grew up to be expert craftsmen. It is a common sight to see a son sitting beside his father and helping him in many ways in manufacture of various brasswares. It is really very difficult to find a male member in the Moria society who is not adapt in making brasswares. It is interesting and encouraging to note that even educated youth do not hesitate to practise this craft. Many educated youth were located during the survey, who practise this craft as a source of income. Besides actual practice of the craft a few educated youth help their father in running this traditional industry in very many other ways. In fact they proud proclaim their association with this traditional occupation. Though at present artisans have to face ups and downs in this industry yet they are generally disinclined to give up practising this craft.

Like the Morias, the Hindu artisans living in this town also have been earning their living from this craft since long back. They too have inherited this trade from their learned forefathers. Hindu artisans besides making articles of domestic use also manufacture various kinds of articles required during performance of social and religious ceremonies. Majority of Hindu artisans produce article such as sarai, dunari, ghat, kalashi etc., which are used during socio-religious ceremonies. They are expert in making these kinds of articles.

According to elderly persons of the town the Hindu artisans learned the skill of making brasswares from the Morias who are the original artisans of brasswares. The Hindu artisans also take this as their traditional occupation and also encourage their sons to take up this craft as a main source of livelihood. Thus in the past father used to pass on the knowledge and skill of making sundry articles from the brass metals to their sons. It was once a very flourishing household industry among the Hindus of Niz-Hajo town. But it is really sad to learn that many of the Hindu artisans have gradually given up practise of this craft. Besides even those who still practise this craft do not cherish the idea of their sons or younger generation to take up this craft as a source of income. Many reasons can be attributed to this which will be discussed later.

MODES OF ACQUISITION OF SKILL

The male is the main architect of this industry. Because it is through him this industry passes from one generation to another.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to study the process of learning by the amateur artisans and also to draw biographical sketches of some of the expert artisans belonging to both Hindus as well as the Muslims (Morias). The Table III.1 prepared from the survey data shows the distribution of persons engaged in this craft and how they received training to become expert craftsmen.

TABLE III.1

Distribution of craftsmen classified by relationship with head, the person from whom training received and period engaged in the craft.

Period engaged in the craft	No. of persons engaged in the craft	Number of persons engaged in the craft who are related to head as					
		Self, who receive training from			Son, who received training from	Brother, who received training from	
		Father	Father's Brother	Brother	Father & Father's Brother	Father & Brother	Brother
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Less than 5 years	15	—	—	—	13	1	1
5—9 years	19	7	1	1	8	2	—
10—19 years	19	61	—	1	1	1	—
20+years	34	34	—	—	—	—	—
Total	87	57	1	2	22	4	1

It is evident from the table that almost the entire lot of males engaged in this craft had learnt the skill and art of making brasswares from their fathers. This obviously indicates that this traditional occupation is being handed down from one generation to the next through father. This is a custom of this religion. Because it is a common feature of this town that a boy grows up in an environment where father, uncle and other relatives are engaged in making wares from brass metal. A father usually engages even his school-going minor son in producing the brasswares in their leisure time. Sons thus slowly acquires the habit of making various kinds of wares and become skilled artisans as they attain youth.

Enquiry has also been made during the survey to assess whether training received from father or elderly persons is deemed to be adequate for smooth running of the industry. For this purpose, a table is prepared from the survey data to assess whether training received by the persons engaged in this craft is enough or whether the persons desire to receive better training.

TABLE III.2

Assessment of training received by the persons as related to the period engaged in the craft and intentions to receive better training.

Period engaged in the craft	No. of persons engaged in the craft	Number who consider the training received as		Number in favour of		Remarks
		Adequate	Inadequate	Receiving better training	Not receiving better training as modern technique is not introduced so far	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Less than 5 years	15	11	4	9	6	Persons shown in column 6 reported that further training is not necessary as in their opinion such training is necessary only in the event of introduction of modern and sophisticated methods of production. However, some of the craftsmen opined in favour of better training for diversification of produce to meet popular demand for articles other than those traditionally prepared by them. They also welcome the idea of introduction of modern machinery and other equipments for speedy production and better finish of the products.
5—9 years	19	11	8	10	9	
10—19 years	19	13	6	8	11	
20+years	34	29	5	7	27	
Total	87	64	23	34	53	

Table III-2 shows that 73.56% of trainees have considered that training received is definitely adequate to run this industry. However, about 26.44% has considered training received by them inadequate. Moreover, 39.08% of the trainee has liked to receive better training for running this craft. But 60.92% of trainee are in the opinion that further or better training is not necessary as because uptill now modern method of manufacturing process is not introduced in this craft.

Thus it is observed from the survey that all the craftsmen of this town inherited this occupation or trade from their forefather. They became expert skill workers of this craft by virtue of their having acquired experience after working as apprentices in the workshop with their ancestors.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF SELECTED CRAFTSMEN

Biographical sketches of selected craftsmen among the Hindus and Muslims are presented below to throw some light on various aspects of the craft. For this purpose a few craftsmen in the town under survey belonging to following categories are selected from each of the two religious groups.

(1) Category I —Master craftsman
(2) Category II —Very Old craftsman.
(3) Category III —New entrant or Amateur craftsman.

Following craftsmen are selected for this purpose from among the Muslim (Moria) artisan.

1. *Md. Rumsa Ali (Expert craftsman) :*

Md. R. Ali is expert artisan of brasswares in the town. He is 48 years old and is born and brought up in Niz-Hajo town. His father's name is Late M. Ali and his mother's name is Late J. Bibi. Brass metal industry is the traditional occupation of this family. They have practised this craft for many generations and earned their living from it.

Md. R. Ali is married and father of two sons and three daughters. He is illiterate. He started making various kinds of brasswares from the age of 14 years. He learnt the technique of making brasswares from his father, who was also an expert artisan. He is known all over the town for the fine and well shaped brasswares meant for domestic use produced by him. His product's have great demand. He usually manufactures articles like tou, kharahi, kalah etc. He is ranked one of the best and expert braziers of the area.

The brass metal industry is a traditional occupation of his family. He always encourages younger generation to take up this craft as a source of livelihood. He proved this by engaging one of his sons in this industry. This is the only source of income to the family. He has no other subsidiary occupation to augment the family income. He works from dawn to dusk in his workshop. He usually works on wage basis *i.e.*, he obtains order from Mahajan (dealers in brasswares) to make certain kind of brasswares. His monthly income varies from about Rs. 500/- to Rs. 700/- depending upon the volume of order he receives. He has not faced any serious problem in running the industry except in the matter of procuring the raw materials. Due to very high price of raw material he always has to lean on Mahajan for supply of the same to run the industry. Otherwise, he himself could have procured the raw material for making the articles and in which event his share of profit would be much higher. He is of the opinion that unless appropriate steps are taken immediately to remove the unscrupulous Mahajans from this industry the future of this age-old craft is bleak. He desires that Govt. should step forward with pragmatic schemes for improvement of this craft and thus save it from extinction.

2. *Md. I. Ali (Old craftsman) :*

Md. I. Ali is 65 years old and still practising this craft as the prime source of income. He is born and brought up in this town. His father's name is Late S. Ali who too was an expert craftsman. Brass metal industry is the traditional occupation of this family. Md. I. Ali started making brasswares from the age of 16 years. He acquired knowledge and skill of making brasswares from his father. His family survives solely on income from practice of this craft.

He has acquired special skill in manufacturing vessels like tou, kharahi, thali etc. for household use. He also makes 'Doba' a kind of drum used in temples and on occasion of religious congregations. He has a great reputation all over the district for this product of him.

He is married and father of three children. He is illiterate. Like other artisans he also manufactures brasswares on wage basis. According to him high price of raw-materials renders it impossible for him to pursue the craft independently. At present, he works 6 to 7 hours a day. His income varies from Rs. 600/- to Rs. 700/- per month.

He did not report facing any serious problem in practice of the craft. However, he complained about difficulty in procuring raw materials required for this industry. In his opinion the middleman or Mahajan takes the major share of profit accrued to this industry and give only small share to the artisans. He too is of the opinion that in order to give the artisans a remunerative price for his products the middleman should be removed from this industry. Besides, he desires that the Govt. should arrange supply of raw-materials at a reasonable price so that they can run the industry without much hindrance.

3. *Md. Amir Khan (New entrant in the craft) :*

Amir Khan is a new entrant to this craft. He is about 18 years old and born and brought up in Niz-Hajo town. His father's name is Md. I. Ali who is also an expert brazier of brass. Brass industry is the

traditional occupation of his family. They are original residents of the town.

After passing the high school leaving examination Amir Khan started practising the craft independently. At present he manufactures utensils like tou, kalah etc. on a wage basis. This is his only source of income. He earns about Rs. 600/- to Rs. 650/- per month depending upon the volume of order he receives.

According to Amir Khan this traditional industry is facing serious problems like high price of raw-materials, existence of Mahajan or middleman in the industry and lack of proper marketing facilities of the finished products. He is of the opinion that it is none too soon for the Govt. machinery to come forward with proper plan for a prospective development of the craft. Shri Khan is critical about the damaging role played by the middleman and seeks immediate removal of them for the betterment of lot of the actual makers of brasswares.

Following craftsmen are selected from among the Hindus of Niz-Hajo town.

Shri Kumud Athparia (An expert craftsman) :
(Fig.-11)

Shri Kumud Athparia is an expert and well-known craftsman of the area whose reputation for products of brass such as Sarai, Dunari and Kalashi spreads much beyond the district of Kamrup to which Niz-Hajo belongs. People from various distant places of the state come to him for placing order for making 'Kalashi' which is placed on the top of 'Math' and temple. Besides, he is also a specialist in making 'Sarai' of various designs and 'Dunari' of various sizes. These two articles which symbolize the cultural heritage of Assam are much in demand. He also makes exquisite figure of animal like Rhinoceros, Peacock etc. He is known for his artistic skill and this can be judged by the varities of brass articles designed and produced by him. In fact, Shri Athparia can be ranked without any ambiguity as one of the best artisan of brass in the area. His products always excel those made by others both in design and craftsmanship.

Shri Athparia is born and brought up in Niz-Hajo town. He is 60 years of age and has read up to class II. His father Late Kunja Ram Athparia was also an expert artisan. Making of brass metal wares is the traditional occupation of Athparia families.

Shri Kumud Athparia learnt the technique of making brasswares from his father. He started making brasswares when he was only 16 years of age. He developed a keen interest in this craft from his very childhood and started making brass articles of various designs and shape. Sarais and Dunaris of various exquisite designs made by him have earned him great reputation and are in good demand from the buyers.

Brass industry is the only source of income of his family. He has no other subsidiary occupation. His income from practice of this craft varies from Rs. 800/- to Rs. 900/- per month. He usually makes brasswares on specific orders for the same and seldom works on wage basis. The Govt. of Assam ran an apprenticeship training scheme under the supervision of Shri Athparia who trains local youth in the art of making brass articles. A group of local youth has already completed training under him. Shri Athparia received a remuneration of Rs. 700/- per month for this training programme. Shri Athparia uses old fashioned tools, equipments and method in manufacturing various articles. In his opinion, special training in modern method of manufacture is essential for the development and satisfactory progress of the craft.

He is at present not facing any significant constraint except in the matter of procurement of raw-materials. In his opinion inhibitory price of brass sheets stands on way of procuring the metal of the desired quality. He complains that local Mahajan (dealers in brasswares) have posed a big hindrance to proper development of this craft.

Shri Binod Nayak (a new entrant) :

Binod Nayak is a new entrant in the craft. He is born and brought up in this town. He is 18 years of age and a student of Higher Secondary classes. His father's name is Bhadreswar Nayak who was also an expert artisan of brasswares. The brass metal industry is the traditional and sole occupation of their family. Shri Nayak has acquired the knowledge of making basswares from his father. He used to help his father since the age of 14 years. At present he manufactures 'Kalah', 'Sarai' etc. He says that this industry has suffered a serious set back owing to the entrance of unscrupulous Mahajan who have monopolised supply of the raw-materials. These Mahajans earn undue profit from this industry by giving only a nominal wage or making charge related to the weight of the articles manufactured. He desires that state administrative machinery should assist the poor craftsmen of this area by way of providing raw materials at a reasonable price. Shri Nayak expresses serious apprehension that unless proper steps are taken immediately, the future of this old and traditional industry which once had a prosperous business, is gloomy.

Shri Ashoke Hatkhowa (Master craftsman) :

Shri Ashok Hatkhowa is an expert artisan of the town. His fame has spilled beyond the boundary of the town. He has produced a large variety of articles meant for domestic use as well as for use on the occasions of religious functions. He has also intro-



Shri Kumud Athparia—the famous brazier of Niz-Hajo.

duced new designs in this craft. He is the architect of many of the newly designed brasswares such as Sarai, Table light of varying sizes and small decorated 'Kalah'. People from various parts of Assam come to him for 'Kalashi' which is placed on the top of a 'Math', 'Temple' and 'Namghar'. In fact, he possesses skill of the highest degree in making 'Sarai' and decorated brass articles. Shri Hatkhowa can be ranked without hesitation as the best young artisan of the area.

He is 38 years of age, married and has passed the High School leaving examination. His father Late J. Hatkhowa, a local resident of this town, was also a skilled artisan of brasswares. Shri Ashok Hatkhowa acquired the knowledge of making various kinds of brasswares from his father. Shri Hatkhowa, opened a shop-cum-industry of brass in the town in 1982, which is known as 'Hatkhowa Kutir Silpa Udyog'. He has engaged 10 artisans in this industry which mainly produce Sarai, Kalah, Charia, Tou, Bata, Kalashi and various other decorated brass articles. He procures raw materials from Guwahati and supplies the finished products to various parts of Assam. This industry, besides producing articles, also supplies raw-materials to artisans other than those in its fold for making brasswares, against payment of making charges alone.

Shri Hatkhowa also conducted master craftsman training under the sponsorship, District Industries Centre, Kamrup district—a State Govt. Organisation. He has already trained a few local youth under this training programme. For this he got Rs. 600.00 per month as consolidated pay during the tenure of the Scheme. Besides this Shri Hatkhowa has to his credit installation of a new polishing machine for the purpose of polishing the brass articles.

According to Shri Hatkhowa, an enterprising man who has instilled many new ideas for proper development of this craft, this industry will flourish again, if the Govt. come forward with adequate schemes. He desires that a new technique should be introduced to produce articles at a cheaper rate so that it can compete with other machine made metal articles.

Shri Nandalal Das (Old Craftsman) :

Shri Das is one of the oldest craftsman of brass among the Hindus. He is about 60 years of age. He is born and brought up in Niz-Hajo town. His father's name is Late Padma Ram Das a resident of this town. His father too was a brazier and depended solely on this craft for a livelihood.

Shri Das has been practising this craft since the age of 18 years. Brass metal industry is the traditional occupation of this family and the only source of income to them. Like all other artisans Shri Das too has acquired the knowledge of making brasswares from his father. He used to assist his father to run the industry from his childhood. At present, he usually manufactures 'Kalah'. He also works for Mahajan on payment of labour charge basis. His monthly income varies from Rs. 500.00 to Rs. 600.00. He said that he will continue to be engaged in the industry as long as his health permits him. He did not report encountering any serious problem in running this industry. According to him this industry has already suffered a lot because of unethical behaviour of local Mahajan or traders. He said appropriate steps should be taken immediately to rectify the damage done to this industry by these traders and to ensure non-interference by the unscrupulous traders in future. He suggests that Govt. should supply raw materials to the artisans so that poor artisans can run the industry smoothly. He does not hesitate to say that he does not want his son to be engaged in this industry which according to him is no longer a profitable business.

CHAPTER-IV
MANUFACTURING PROCESS

PLACE OF WORK

Brass metal industry of Niz-Hajo town is primarily a household industry. All the households practise this craft in their own residential compound. No separate place or workshop is required to run this industry. It is observed that an overwhelming majority of the artisans of Niz-Hajo town use part of their dwelling houses as workshop. In most cases the artisans use a corner of the katcha varanda of the dwelling house as the workshop. In a few other cases a separate bamboo structure is constructed in the compound of the dwelling houses for accommodating the workshop.

The workshop or workshed used for manufacturing brasswares is locally known as 'Chali' (Fig. 12). The workshop required for the brass work is of non-descriptive type. It requires a very limited space. Generally the workshop is made of mud floor, thatched roof and with or without wall. It is interesting to note that there is not a single well furnished workshop in the town. There are also a few common workshops in the town in which more than one artisan assemble for work. This common workshop is usually made of a thatched roof resting on a few bamboo posts. In general the workshops present a poor and unsatisfactory picture of the tools and materials kept in a disarranged fashion and lack of hygienic condition.

Following Table prepared from the data collected during the survey shows the distribution of craftsmen classified by broad age-group, place of work and duration of engagement in the handicraft in relation to head of the household and other members.

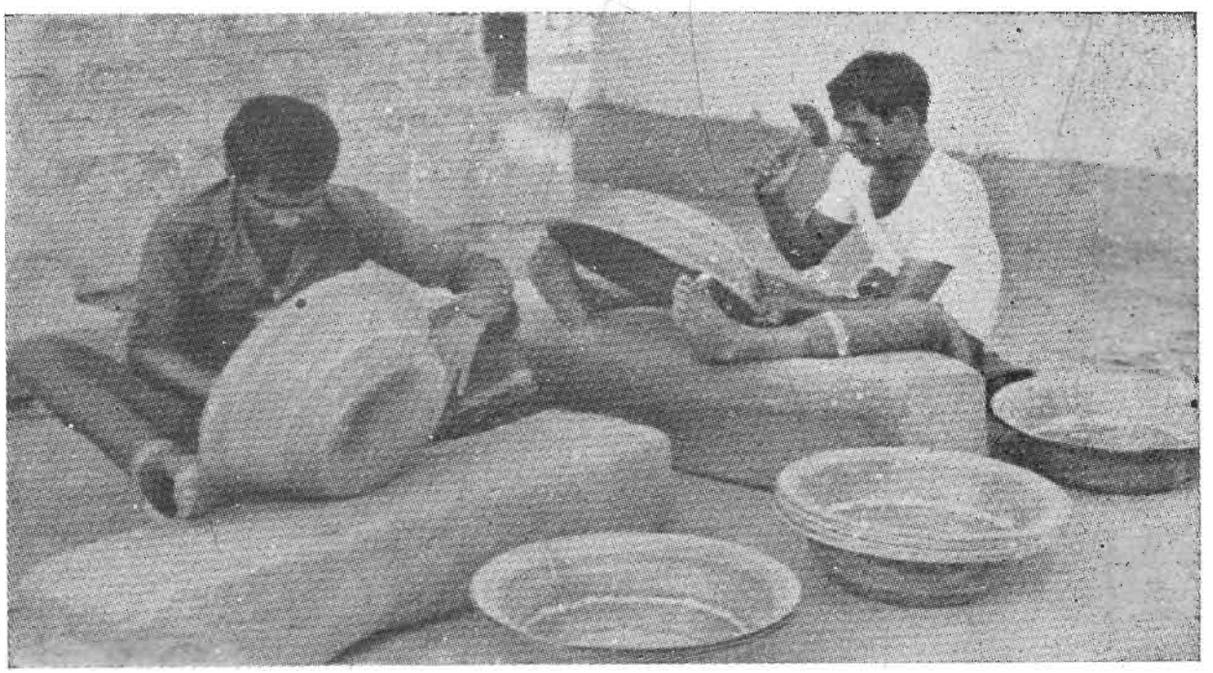
TABLE IV.1.

Craftsmen classified by broad age-groups relation to head of households, place of work and duration of engagement in the handicrafts

Age-group	Duration of engagement in the handicrafts	No. of head of households engaged in the craft	No. of persons other than the head of households engaged in the craft	Place of work			
				Within the residential compound			
				Owned solely by the household where		Owned by the household jointly with other households where	
				No. of head of household engaged	No. of persons other than head of household engaged	No. of head of households engaged	No. of persons other than those in the surveyed house holds engaged
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
15—34	Less than 5 years.	—	19	—	15	—	4
	5—9 years	9	15	5	10	4	5
	10—19 years	4	2	4	1	—	1
	20+years	—	—	—	—	—	—
35—59	Less than 5 years.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	5—9 years	—	—	—	—	—	—
	10—19 years	13	4	10	1	3	3
	20+years	26	1	23	—	3	1
60+	Less than 5 years.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	5—9 years	—	—	—	—	—	—
	10—19 years	—	—	—	—	—	—
	20+years	8	—	8	—	—	—
	Total	60	41	50	27	10	14



A common workshop for more than one household in the Muslim patty.



Manufacturing of Tau.

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It is observed that out of a total of 101 artisans 60 or 59.41 per cent are head of households themselves. It is to be noted here that the excess of 14 workers over those shown in Table III-1 and Table III-2 in the previous chapter of this report is precisely owing to the fact that these 14 workers belong to households other than those covered by the survey but were found working in the workshops located within the residential compound of the surveyed households of the artisans.

The Table IV-1 reveals that while almost equal proportion of the artisans belong to age-groups 15-34 (48.52 per cent) and 35-59 (43.56 per cent) a much lower proportion (7.92 per cent) returned their age as 60 years and above.

As regards duration of engagement in the craft it is found that the highest proportion (36.65 per cent) reported the duration as 20 years and above and the lowest (18.82 per cent) less than 5 years whom the latter belonging to age-group 15-34 alone.

PURITY AND POLLUTION ASSOCIATED WITH THE CRAFT

The survey reveals that there is no purity and pollution associated with the craft. It is a male dominated craft and is practised by the male-folk only. No religious ceremony or any social functions is observed either before starting or completion of work by the artisans of Niz-Hajo town. Artisans belonging to both Hindus and Muslims practise this craft all the year round. There is no particular season for manufacturing brasswares. However, it is gathered during the survey that both the religious groups remain absent from manufacturing during the pollution period observed after the death of any member of a family. Other than this, there is no other reason for which craftsmen refrain from manufacturing. Thus in strict sense of the term there is no purity and pollution associated with the craft.

RAW MATERIALS

As stated earlier the production is raw material oriented. Brass sheets is the main raw material required for this craft. Brass is an alloy of Copper and Zinc. In India brass is more popularly known as 'Pital'. Since ancient days this alloy is used for casting various types of cooking vessels, utensils and articles used in performance of religious rites and also cheap ornaments. But it is interesting to note that in the state of Assam casting as a method of making various brass articles out of this alloy has never been adopted. Since time immemorial the artisans of Assam manufacture various household utensils and other articles by simply beating the brass sheets. However, recently this casting method has been introduced by an artisan who has migrated to Assam from Uttar Pradesh. But so far moulding method has not gained any popularity among the local artisans. The artisans of Niz-Hajo town still use the traditional and old method of manufacturing brass articles *i.e.* by beating the brass sheets or circles.

Thus, brass sheets and circles constitute the main raw material required for the manufacture of brasswares. These are available in the market at Guwahati. The brass sheets are produced in the rolling mills. Artisans of Niz-Hajo usually used to procure the raw materials from Guwahati city which is only 31 Kms. from the town. The cost of brass sheets per kg. at present varies from Rs. 70.00 to Rs. 75.00. The survey reveals that only a few of the artisans purchase raw materials from Guwahati city because of its better quality as well as competitive price. The survey revealed that due to high cost of brass sheets, majority of artisans compulsively work for the traders or 'Mahajan' on payment of labour charges. In such cases the traders give the raw materials to the artisans and order them to make only particular variety of articles paying the conversion charges per kg. of the raw material which varies from Rs. 8.00 to Rs. 18.00 depending on the size and type of product.

The production and progress of this industry has been hampered due to shortage and high price of raw materials. The artisans under co-operative societies however can procure brass sheets at a slightly cheaper rate than in the market from the society. The society also orders artisans to make articles by supplying raw materials giving only making charge proportionate to weight of the articles manufactured.

The other subsidiary raw materials required for manufacture of brasswares are borax, sulphuric acid and pine. The 'Pine' is a local name, a mixture of copper powder and powdered brass. This mixture is used for soldering purposes *i.e.* joining various parts of brasswares.

The main fuel used in this industry is coke. Some artisans also use charcoal which is available locally at the cost of Rs. 10.00 to Rs. 12.00 per kg.

DIFFERENT METHODS OF PRODUCTION

The method adopted for making various kinds of brasswares by the artisans of Niz-Hajo town is the "Beaten metal work". This beating method is very old, traditional and heriditary. The artisans of Niz-Hajo inherited the knowledge of this method of manufacturing brasswares from their fore-fathers. Generally sons of the local artisans work as apprentice under their father and thus the skill is carried down from generation to generation. All the artisans of Niz-Hajo irrespective of caste and religion have adopted this beating method for making brass utensils and other articles. As stated earlier the casting and moulding method is not practised by the artisans except one who has migrated to Hajo from Uttar Pradesh. Though he has introduced casting process recently, it is yet to gain popularity among the local artisans. However, it is noticed that the lower portion of a vessel known as 'Tali' is manufactured by casting process by a couple of artisans only.

THE BEATING PROCESS IS VERY SIMPLE AND CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING STAGES

1. Shearing :—This is the first stage. The brass sheets to be used for making brasswares are sheared into desired sizes. At first the outline of the ware to be produced is marked on the sheet and a circle is drawn roughly corresponding to the size of the vessel intended to be made. This making or circle is drawn with the help of a small chisel locally known as 'Cheni' and a hammer. Sometime brass sheets are cut out with a pair of snipper or scissors locally known as 'Kati'. Generally the brass sheets are cut into 2—3 portions. They are bottom, middle and upper portion.

2. Forging and shaping :—The next stage in manufacturing process is forging and shaping of the brass sheet. In this stage the sheets earlier sheared are heated on a burning furnace so that it can be easily hammered into desired shape and size. When the brass piece becomes red hot it is picked up with the help of a 'tong' and placed on the surface of the anvil or stake locally known as 'Nia' and then beaten into desired shapes or sizes with the help of a hammer. The brass piece is usually hammered round and round over a stake. This process is repeated until it takes a definite shape.

When the brass sheet is to be shaped into a dish or bowl, it has to be hollowed or raised. When the brass piece is to be raised, it is placed in a standing position on an iron slab which has a groove in it, then hammered with a mallet round the edge till a side is raised. The raising is also done with specially shaped hammers on a suitable stake. Hollowing is done by hammering the brass piece on the top in concentric circles with a bossing mallet resting the sheet on a wooden block or stake. The metal sheet is required to be heated frequently so that it can take the desired shape easily. For shaping flat wares the outline of the ware is marked first on the brass sheet and then the pieces are cut from the sheet accordingly with the help of snippers. The brass sheet is then heated and beaten over a stake with hammers of different sizes until it takes the desired shape (Fig. 15).

3. Soldering :—Soldering is the process of joining parts of metal with a fusible alloy called 'Pine' (solder). As earlier stated, for soldering brass, an alloy locally known as 'pine' a mixture of powdered brass and copper powder is used. Various parts of a brassware or vessel are joined or soldered with 'pine' which has a melting point lower than that of brass. When this alloy is melted it easily adheres to the surface of the metal to be joined.

After obtaining various sizes or shapes of different parts of a vessel (Fig. 16 & 17) or ware through the beating process, comes the process of soldering. This is done in the following way. First of all, the surface of the metals to be joined is thoroughly cleaned with the help of a cloth and the different parts of a ware to be joined are properly arranged (Fig. 14). Then the soldering material 'pine' is applied to the parts to be joined and borax locally known as 'Suaga' is smeared over the edges of the parts to be joined and the surface is heated. As a result the solder melts and flows into the joints. Then it is allowed to cool down and the excess of flux is washed off.

4. Polishing :—The process of soldering is followed by cleaning and polishing of the brasswares. The finished products are at first rubbed with sand and then washed with soap (Fig. 18). It is also cleaned with dilute sulphuric acid and sometimes the products are cleaned with tamarind or lime. The finished products are also polished by hand operated 'lathi' locally known as 'kunda', which makes the wares glossy and attractive and thus enhances the prospect of fetching a good price for the same (Figs. 19, 20 & 25).

5. Filing :—The next process is to remove the rough surface from the brassware. This is known as filing. The 'Reti' or filer is used to file off the rough surface from the newly made brassware. This task is normally assigned to the unskilled workers.

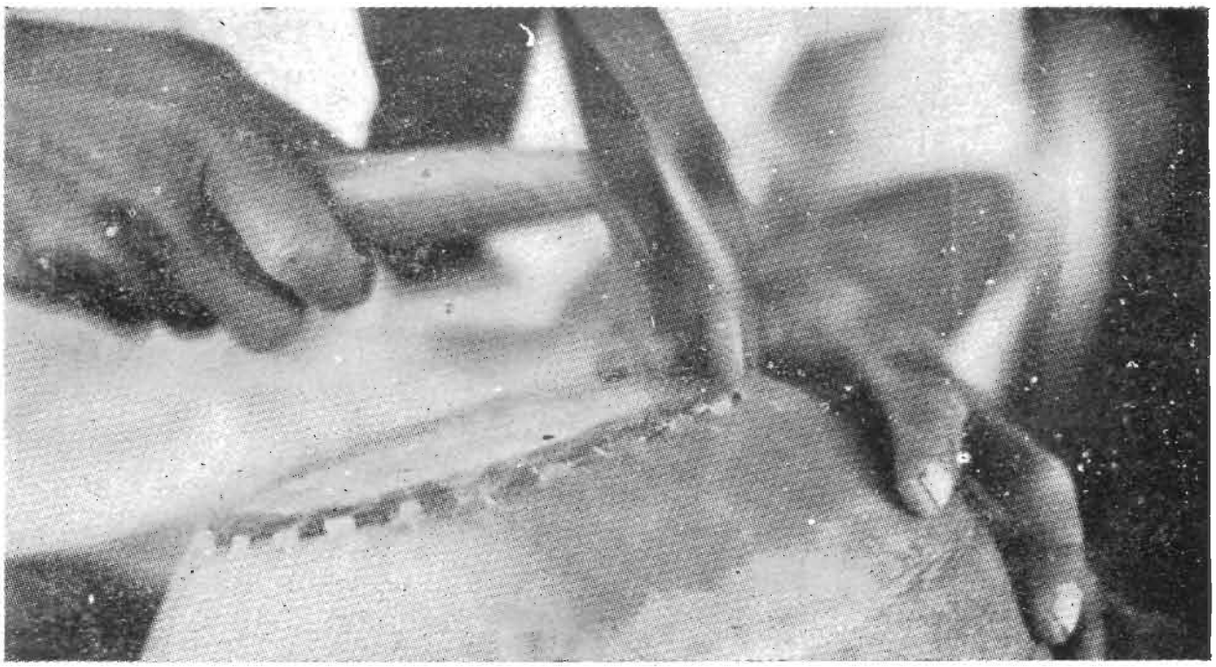
6. Scraping :—After filing, the wares have to be scraped for making their surface smooth. This process is known as scraping or chiselling. It is done with the help of a chisel and a hammer in the following manner. The artisan holds the brassware between his two feet and with a chisel in one hand and a hammer in another slowly and steadily scrapes the surface of the wares. But now-a-days this is done with the help of a manually operated lathi (kunda). The brassware to be turned fixed with shellac at one end of the spindle. The lathi is worked with a strap rotating the spindle in both clockwise and anticlockwise directions. This operation requires two persons, one for revolving the wheel and the other for scraping the wares.

After this the brasswares obtain a fine shape. Sometimes concentric circles are also made on the ware after scraping to add more to its beauty.

CASTING AND MOULDING PROCESS

Casting (dhalai) is one of the oldest, cheapest and popular method of manufacturing brass articles. This method is practised throughout India by the artisans in manufacturing various kinds of brass articles. It is interesting to note that this popular method of manufacturing brass articles remained unknown to the local artisans till late seventies of the present century.

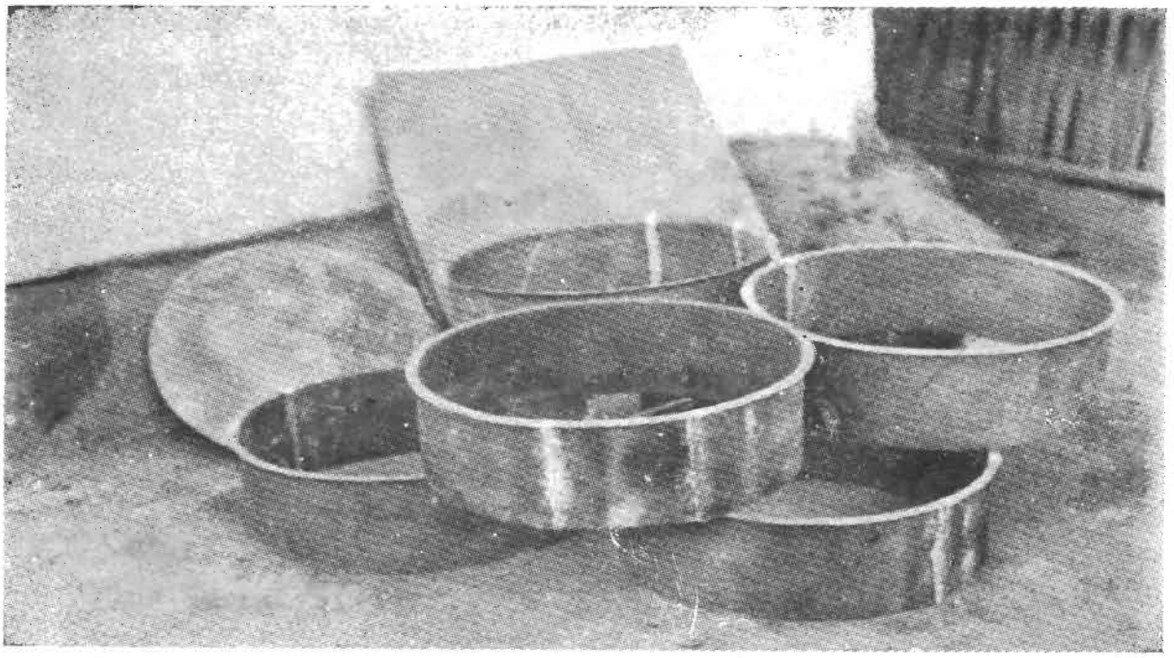
This casting method has been introduced in Niz-Hajo town by an artisan who has migrated from Uttar Pradesh. As stated earlier, he was brought to this town for imparting training on casting method to the local artisans. Though this method of manufacturing brasswares has not gained any popularity among the local artisans, yet a few local youth, who acquired the knowledge of casting method from him



Fixing the "tali" on bottom of a brassware.



A Kalah-pitcher is being made.



Finished parts of brassware to be joined at a later stage.



A widow engaged in polishing a brassware with sand and soap.



A young boy helping in polishing the brassware.



Another view of polishing.

are found to practise this method for manufacturing various kinds of articles. The artisan who has come from Uttar Pradesh has since permanently settled down in Niz-Hajo town and started his own business.

The common articles manufactured by casting are ladles locally known as 'Heta' or 'Karach', spoons locally known as 'Chamuch', 'Khanti' a kind of ladle used in cooking etc. Besides these, the most common article produced by this method is the bottom portion of a 'Kalah' known as 'Tali' (Figs. 21 & 22). A few images of Gods and Goddesses are also made by this method.

Raw material required for manufacturing brass articles by casting method is mainly old and worn brass articles. This process is very simple and is described briefly belong :

The main tools required for this purpose are furnace, crucible (locally known as mohi) tongs, hammer, clippers, pliers etc.

Small pieces of brass to be melted for casting are put in a heat resistant vessel known as crucible which is made up of clay or graphite. This crucible is usually 'U' shaped.

The crucible is then placed inside the furnace. Usually coke is used as fuel for the furnace. The temperature in the furnace is raised by occasionally forced blast from a bellow. Borax in small quantities is added to the metal in the crucible for removing the impurities which float on the surface and can be removed with the help of a long spoon.

Once the contents in the crucible is melted it is taken out with the help of a long tweezer and the melted metal slowly poured through small aperture in the moulds which are arranged in a row on the floor.

TOOLS AND IMPLEMENTS

Tools and implements used by artisans for manufacturing different kinds of brasswares are simple in nature and consist mainly of anvil, a pair or more of tongs, chisels, files, sledge, different kinds of hammers and furnace with a bellow (Fig. 23).

(1) *Furnace* :—For heating the brass sheet, a furnace locally known as 'bhati' is required. The furnace is very simple and it consists of a hearth for holding combustible coke and a bellow for blowing air under slight pressure. The furnace is an extremely simple device and is made by digging a hole in the katcha floor of the workshop. The below is made of goat skin (Fig. 24).

(2) *Aphar* :—The mouth of the bellow is known as 'Aphar'. This is simply a hollow dug in the floor of the workshop.

(3) *Anvils* :—Locally known as 'Niyari' or 'Nia'. It is an iron block fixed on the ground on which metal is forged. It usually stands with the top face about one foot above the ground. The height is attained by resting the anvil on an iron or wooden box. Anvils are used for beating the brass sheet.

There are different kinds of anvils used by the brass artisans for manufacturing different kinds of brass articles. Some of the important anvils locally known as Belmuri, Dheka and Chatuli are described below :

(a) *Belmuri* (Large anvil) :—It is a large anvil made of iron, shaped like a short, thick, flat-topped tent peg. The diameter of the top is about one-third the whole length. The pointed end is driven into the ground through a hole in a small board for holding it into position during the hammering it receives. The wooden board prevents the anvil from being driven too far into the ground.

(b) *Dheka* (Double anvil) :—It is a middle sized anvil. The shape of this anvil is like the head of a hammer except that it is thinner, longer and has one end pointed which is driven into the ground.

(c) *Chatuli* (Small anvil) :—It is a small sized anvil. It is a bar of iron shaped like a tent peg with a flattish head. The pointed end of this instrument is driven into the ground and the article to be manufactured beaten into shape on the top.

(4) *Hammers* :—The other important item of tools is a number of hammers of varying sizes and weights which are used in the various stages of work in manufacturing different kinds of brasswares. The hammer locally known as 'Haturi' have different shapes (working end) and are fitted with wooden handles. There are also different kinds of hammers such as light hammers and heavier hammers. Heavy weight hammers or sledge are locally known as 'Bar-Haturi'.

There are different kinds of small hammers with various shapes and sizes used in manufacturing brass articles. Some of these locally known as 'Saru Garu', 'Patmara', 'Galmara', 'Mathani' etc. are described below :—

(a) *Saru Garu* (Hammer) :—It is a medium sized hammer. One side of this hammer is curved and chisel shaped and the other end slopes straight to around head. The handle passes through a hole in the head.

(*b*) *Patmara* (Hammer) :—This is a middle sized hammer shaped like a pick axe but with chisel shaped end.

(c) *Bar haturi* (Large hammer) :—It is a big hammer. It is large and heavier than Saru Garu. The flat end of this hammer is hexagonal in shape. This hammer is used only in heavy work.

(d) *Gal-mara* (Small hammer) :—This hammer has a long and pointed end. It is used for hammering the interior of utensils into which ordinary hammer cannot reach. This particular hammer is required in manufacturing 'Kalah'.

(e) *Mathani* (Small hammer) :—It is another kind of small hammer used in manufacturing brasswares. One end of this hammer is short and the other is flat and compact.

(5) *Tongs or Sarah* :—Tongs are locally known as 'sarah'. Tongs aremade of steel and are used to lift the heated brass sheet from the furnace. There are also different kinds of tongs used by the artisans. A few important tongs locally known as 'pan-sarah', 'pat sarah', 'akara sarah', 'bezimukhia sarah', 'gal sarah' and 'kumari sarah' are described below :

(a) Pan sarah :—This is a short tong.

(b) Pat sarah :—This is a flat tong.

(c) Akara sarah :—The front part of this tong is bent

(d) Gal sarah :—This is a curved tong.

(e) Bezimukhia sarah :—This is a long and pointed tong

(f) Kumari sarah :—This is a heavy and stout and straight tong.

(6) *'Snipper' or 'Kati'* :—Snipper is locally known as 'kati'. This is used for cutting the brass sheet. (Small clippers or scissors used for cutting out strips from brass sheet is known as 'kati').

(7) *'Chisel' or 'Cheni'* :—Chisels are locally known as 'cheni'. This is a small wedge shaped chisel with no handle used for cutting the brass sheet.

(8) *'Bagi'* :—This is kind of small chisel, the mouth of which is bent and is used for cutting rings and decorating the brass articles.

(9) *'Reti' or Files'* :—Files are locally known as 'reti'. They are made of high carbon steel. The file has a series of teeth at an angle which cuts on forward stroke. They are used for removing extra pieces of metal adhering to the surface and for polishing purposes. It is also used for making the surface smooth and even. There are different kinds of 'Retis', used by the artisans.

(10) *'Mohi'* :—It is a small earthen pot used for melting purpose.

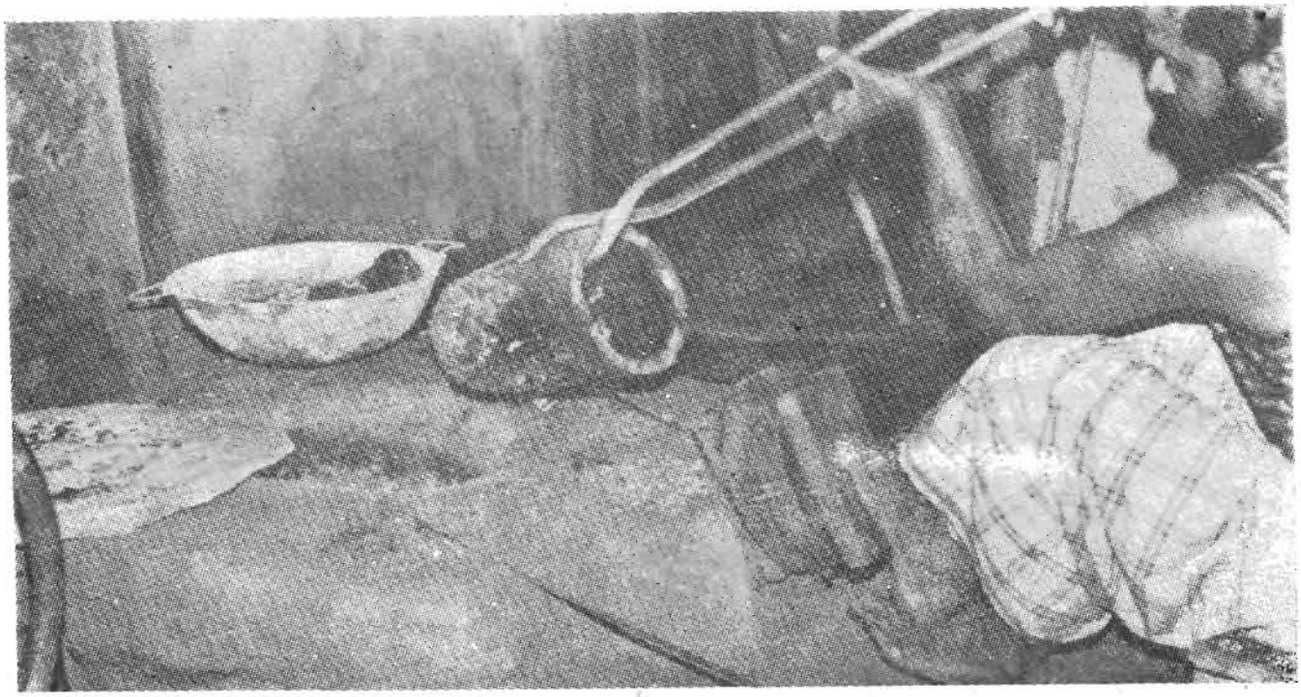
(11) *'Nowra'* :—A small wooden pot used for keeping water.

(12) *'Kunda'* :—It is a manually operated lathi. It is used for scraping the brass vessels. The brassware to be turned is fixed with shellac on one end of the spindle. The 'Charakh' or 'lathi' can be worked with a strap rotating the spindle in clockwise and anticlockwise directions. The hand drawn lathi requires two persons to do the job, one for pulling the strap and other for scrapping the revolving vessel with a scrapping chisel. This is a very simple device. Generally the lathi consists of a rod of wood inserted at one end into one of the posts of the house and other into a peg driven into the ground. Articles which are ornamented by rings cut into the brass are fixed on the rod with lac and turned.

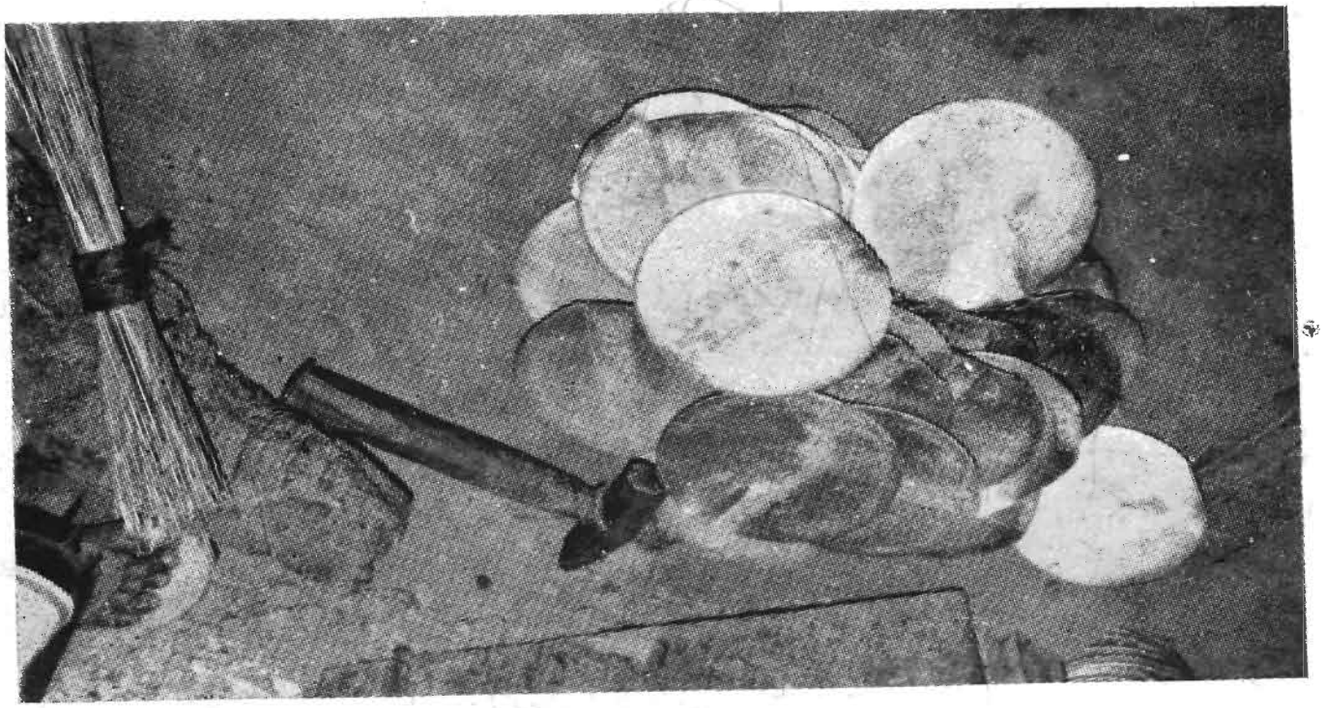
DESIGN USED IN THE CRAFT (Fig. 26)

Design used by the artisans are simple and traditional. The most common design to be found is concentric circles on a 'Kalah' (Pitcher). It is interesting to note that only a few skilled Hindu artisans design their products. These artisans have their own distinctive designs of artistic expression. Most of the products such as 'Sarai', 'Dunari' etc are designed in a manner which signify cultural and traditional heritage of the Assamese. These artisans also make figures of animal such as 'Rhino', 'Peacocks' as also figures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses such as 'Dasa Avatara'. In some articles floral designs are also used. I recent years a few Hindu artisans are found to manufacture designed articles like 'flower vase', 'dhoop dani', 'dhuna dani' and decorated miniature size 'kalah' etc.

It has already been mentioned that the artisans are found not to take any care to maintain even very rough accounts of different articles manufactured by them. They also never keep any record of the quantity of raw material receive by them from the traders against specific order for manufacture of sundry articles of brass metal. As the entire episode of sale of brasswares is predominantly governed by the 'Mahajan' or merchants who are the same set of persons supplying brass sheets to the artisans and as the braziers are in no way involved in this aspects of brass-metal industry they are found not equipped to answer our query about the consumption pattern of the different articles manufactured by them. An attempt to gather information about the volume of sales of brasswares from a few traders engaged in sale of such articles alongwith other sundry materials proved abortive as they could not furnish any reliable account of sale of brasswares. However, to our query about the quantity of brass sheet the only raw material used in manufacturing brasswares normally received by an artisan during a month, the respondent as prompted by his memory, returned a figure of about 100—130 kg. a month, but in absence of any



Casting of "tali" or bottom of a pitcher.



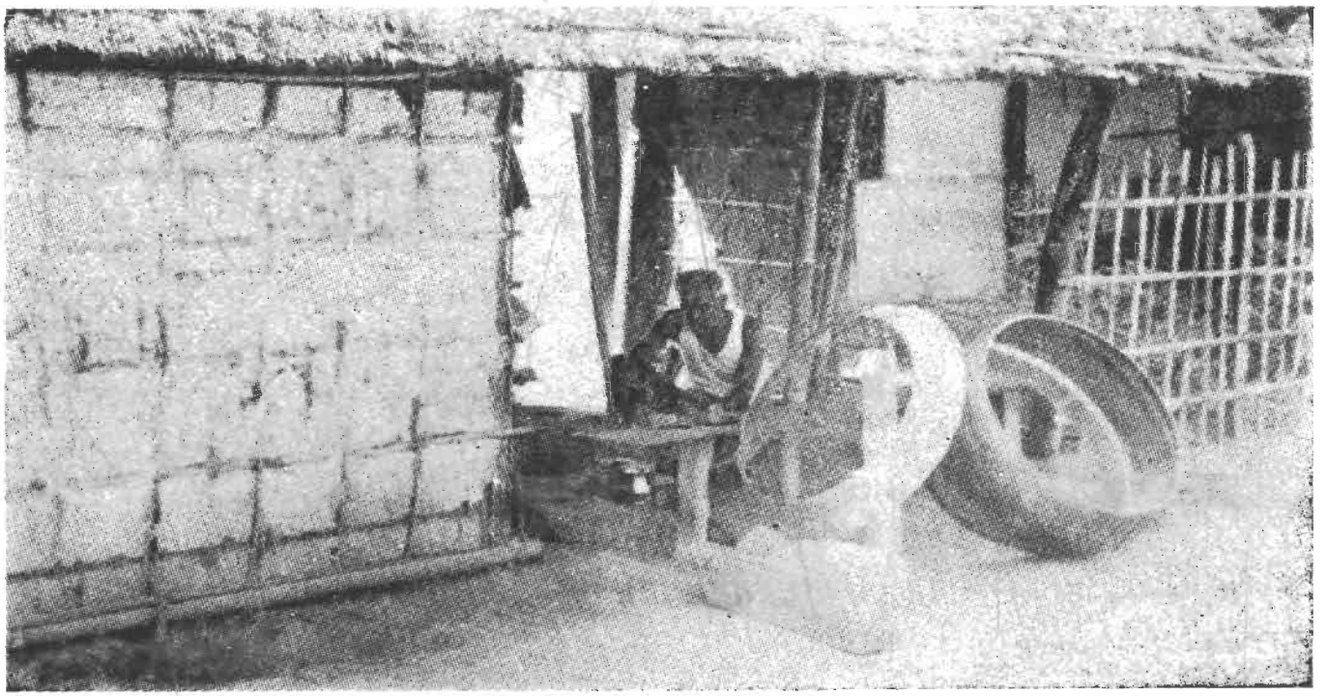
'Tali' of different sizes.



Tools and implements used by the brazier.

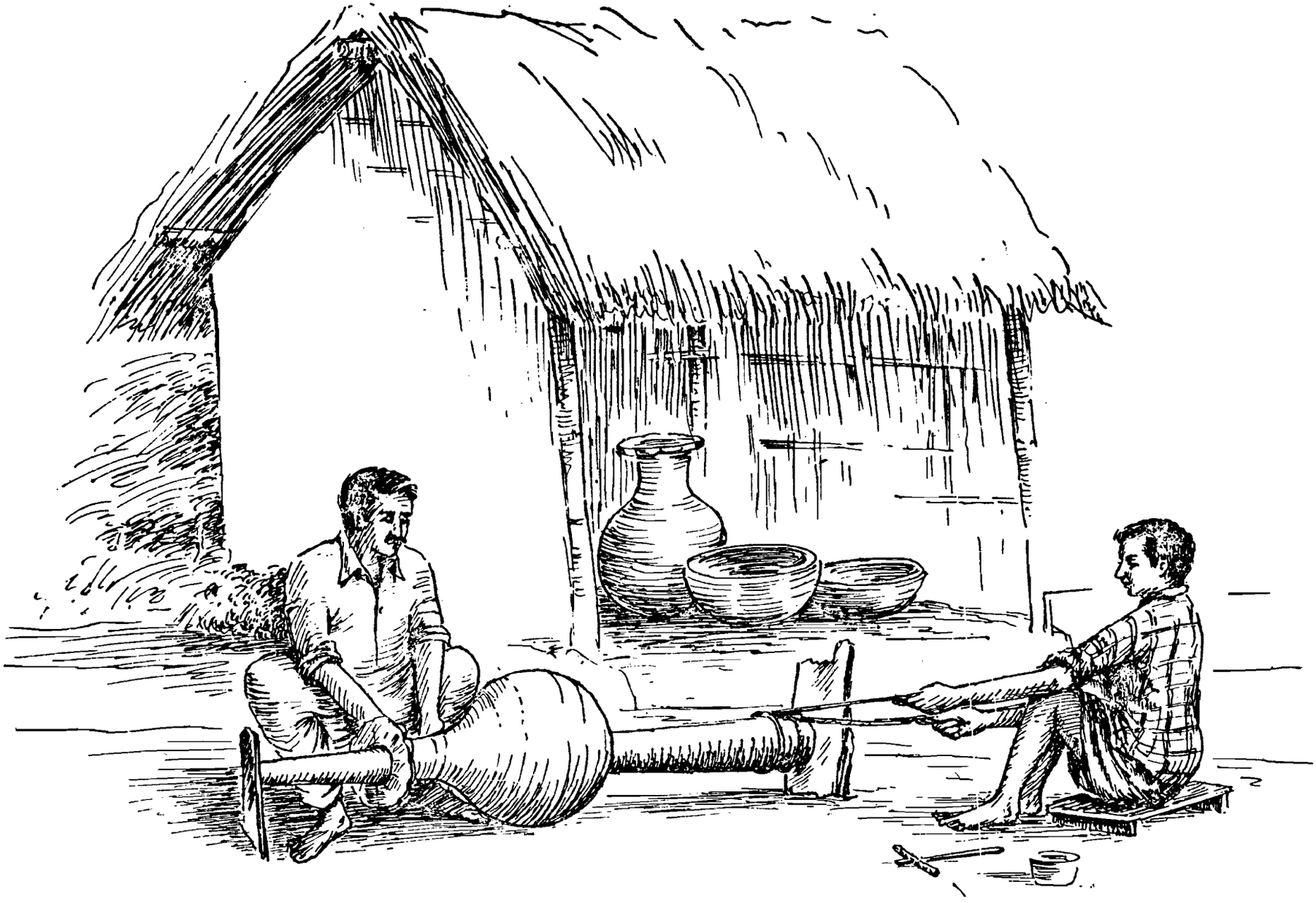


Two old artisans with years of experience at their workshop.

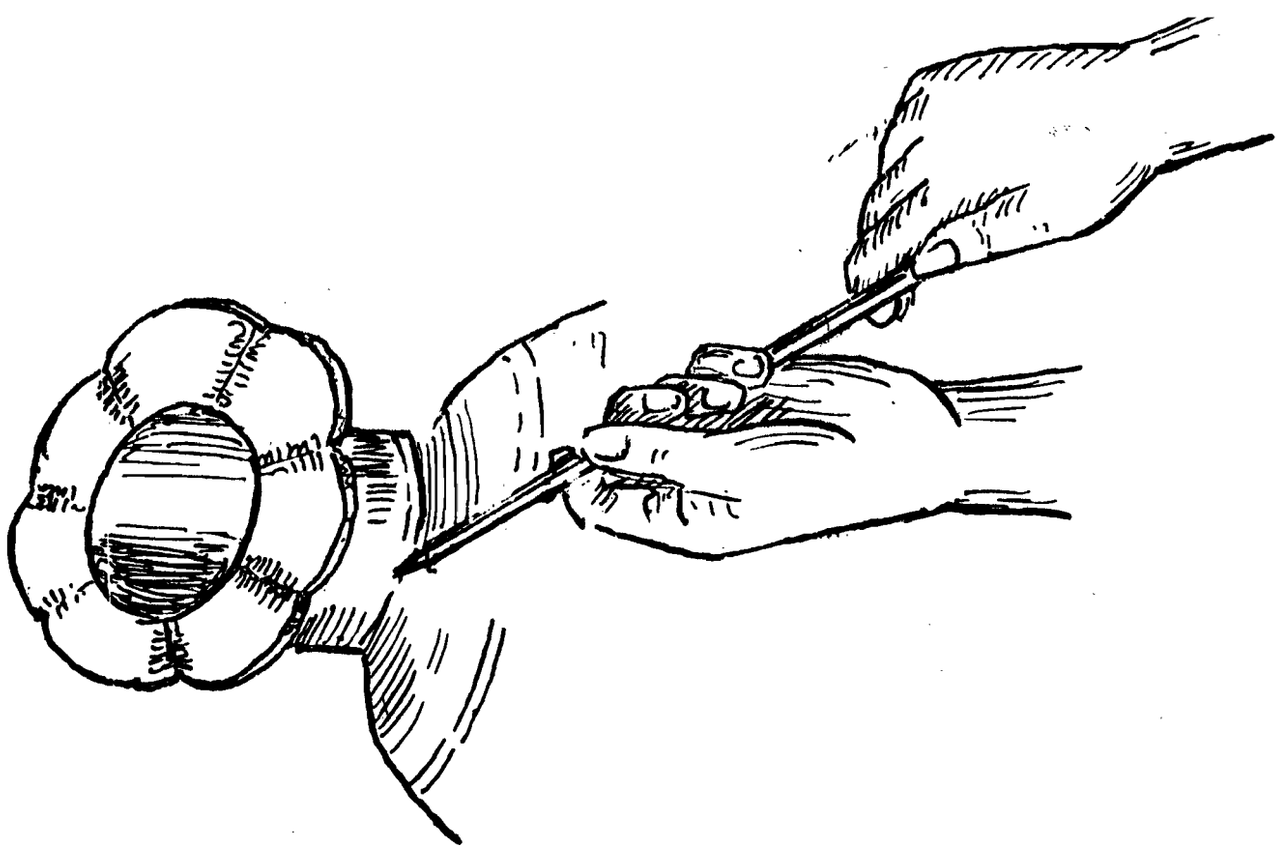




Heating of brass sheet in "Bhati"—the furnace.



Scrapping and polishing of brassware with the help of Kunda—manually operated lathe.



Designing a Kolah with a Chisel.

recorded data the accuracy of the figures returned by the artisans is anybody's guess. We have time and again said that an artisan receives only the cost of labour for making different articles and this is a variable factor depending on the size, weight and the degree of craftsmanship involved in manufacture of an article.

As regards seasonal variation in quantum of production it is gathered that except in the peak of the rainy season lasting for about 3—4 months in a year during which the production shows a downward trend the production is carried out more or less in an even scale during the rest of the year. As the improvised workshops for manufacture of brasswares cannot normally withstand the onslaught of heavy rains the artisans withhold production during such time. It need be reiterated that the various phases in production of brasswares is mostly carried out in open air.

CHAPTER - V

MARKETING

An attempt is made in this chapter to find out the marketing facilities and cost of production of the articles manufactured by the artisans of Niz-Hajo town.

It is extremely difficult to give even crude estimates of output of this industry in Assam because the brass metal industry is a household industry run primarily by the family members and the artisans who are engaged in this craft do not maintain any record of the quantum of articles produced.

This is a raw material oriented industry. Majority of the artisans produce the materials for the Mahajan or traders who supply the raw materials on payment of labour charges only. The result is that the traders artisan link is very strong and the traders are in the directive position. In fact, due to ever increasing price of brass sheets as also non-availability of raw materials locally have forced the artisans to wholly depend on the Mahajans or traders for practice of the handicraft. The traders on obtaining the finished products sell the same at different outlets in and outside the State. Since the sale of finished product is almost monopolised by the traders, it goes without saying that the margin of profit in such transaction is also determined by them at their own sweet will which however could not be ascertained from the cryptic reply obtained from them to our query in this regard.

As regards sale of finished products in the *hat* and *melas* (fairs) it can be said that here-to the Mahajans or merchants play a pivotal role. However, it is gathered that the co-operative society functioning in Niz-Hajo also procures brasswares from the artisans against advancement of raw material and payment of making charges only and arrange sale of the product in fairs held in connection with holding of literary and cultural conference as also in the stalls of the industrial exhibition. However, no reliable accounts of volume of sale of the products through such channels could be obtained.

The Mahajans who dominate the scenario of brass metal industry of Niz-Hajo can be termed as the intermediary between the producers and the consumers. It is the Mahajans or traders who give raw materials to the artisans and themselves procure the bulk of the finished product and sell the same at different markets. The only Co-operative Society functioning in the town also procure and sell only a small proportion of total products. However in absence of information about the quantity of products obtained and sold by such agencies no such data could be presented.

The terms and conditions normally laid down by Mahajan are that (i) it is obligatory on the part of the artisans to hand over the finished products to the Mahajan from whom they obtain the raw materials, (ii) the Mahajan pays only the labour charges which varies according to size, weight, design etc. of the product and lastly (iii) the artisans are required to produce different articles *e.g.* 'Kalah', 'Tau', 'Charia' etc. as stipulated by the Mahajan.

There are a couple of artisans in Niz-Hajo town who manufacture some art ware by purchasing the brass sheet themselves from the market on their own on against specific orders. But it is distressing to note that though they are capable of producing these art wares in large scale, they are unable to do so due to lack of proper facilities for display of their products and non-availability of adequate marketing facilities.

Adequate marketing facilities is a very important deciding factor for the upliftment of any industry. As the whole market of the brasswares is dominated by the traders or Mahajans, the poor artisans are unable to sell the products on their own which compels the artisans of Niz-Hajo to surrender their lot to the rich traders and to resort to making the brasswares as asked for by the traders against receipt of labour charges only.

Another factor responsible for giving up of producing brasswares at their own will is the high cost of transportation. Easy and cheap mode of transportation is a vital factor for development of any industry. But it is unfortunate that the principal marketing centre of brass metal products of Niz-Hajo town is located at Guwahati which is connected by only a motorable road resulting in a comparatively costly transportation of the products. Poor artisans are thus unable to bear the high cost in transporting their products to the marketing centre and have perforce to remain unsatisfied in making the brasswares as directed by the traders for labour charges only without in any manner getting themselves involved in ultimate sale of the products.

Cost of production :—We can hardly attempt to do any gainful analysis of the cost of production and margin of profit earned by the artisans of Niz-Hajo town as time and again we have said that an overwhelming majority of the artisans are reportedly engaged by the traders in manufacture of brasswares on payment of labour charges only and that the craftsmen are in no way involved in disposal of the products. Though the survey reveals that a couple of artisans are engaged in manufacture and sale of art-

wares on procurement of raw material by themselves yet in absence of any recorded accounts of expenses on procurement of raw materials and sale price of the articles manufactured by them, no worthwhile analysis of cost of production and margin of profit can be attempted. However, we resort to a hypothetical analysis of cost of production and sale price of the product as narrated by the artisan.

The cost of production of brasswares includes, cost of raw materials *i.e.*, brass sheets and other subsidiary raw materials plus making charge. The making charge varies proportionately with the size, design and weight of brass used for production of a particular item. The type of articles manufactured also determines the making charge to a certain extent.

The cost of raw materials and subsidiary raw materials as prevailed during the days of the survey required for manufacture of various kinds of brasswares is shown below :—

	Material required	Cost	Remarks
1.	*Main Raw-material—*		
	Brass sheet	Rs. 70.00 per kg.	Brass sheets are now-a-days produced in the rolling mills in Guwahati.
2.	*Subsidiary Raw-materials—*		
	(a) Borax	Rs. 16.00	Locally available
	(b) Sulphuric acid	Rs. 9.00 per 750 ml.	—Do—
	(c) 'Pine' (Soldering material)	Rs. 8.00	This is a mixure of powdered brass and copper locally known as 'Pine'.
	(d) Charcoal (only fuel)	Rs. 10.00 per kg.	Locally available.

The cost of production of a brassware weighing one kg. 'Kalah' as narrated by the artisans, is shown bwlow :

Value of one kg. of brass sheet	Rs. 70.00
Cost of fuel, sulphuric acid and borax approximately 10 percent of the cost of brass.	Rs. 7.00
Making charge (including wastage of brass) . . .	Rs. 14.00
Total .	Rs. 91.00

The average sale price of a brassware ('Kalah') is estimated to be Rs. 94/- to Rs. 96/- as against Rs. 91/- being its cost of production. We must however hasten to add here that the calculations are very rough and based on figures supplied by the artisans. It is also to be reiterated that the sale price of brassware varies according to its design and shape.

It is to be noted here that most of the artisans reported that the bulk of the trade in brass metal wares is owned and managed by a few rich businessmen belonging to a particular community and residing in Guwahati some of whom own brass metal rolling mills where brass sheets out of old and worn out brass articles are produced. These sheets are provided to the artisan by these traders with an order to make different type of articles on payment of labour charges only at a significantly low rate. Thus the opinion of the artisans these businessmen ultimately make large profit as they acquire the brass sheet directly from the mill at a rate significantly lower than the market price of the same.

We now try to assess the average monthly production of brasswares by the surveyed households.

The survey reveals that the average production per household varies from 100 kg. to 130 kg. of brass articles in a month and the making charges they receive varies between Rs. 8/- to Rs. 14/- per kg.

Thus the average total production of the 60 surveyed households may be calculated as below :

Average consumption of material— $60 \times 100 = 6,000$ kg.
Average cost of material (brass sheet)— $6000 \times$ Rs. $70 =$ Rs. 4,20,000
Average making charge of wares— $6000 \times$ Rs. $11.00 =$ Rs. 66,000/-.

Thus reportedly brasswares worth about Rs. 4,86,000/- are produced by the surveyed households in a month. It is to be reiterated here that almost the entire quantity of brass sheet is supplied by the traders and the artisans receive labour charges only.

The making charge and the time taken in manufacture of a few common items of brasswares are indicated below :

Name of articles manufactured	Making charge	No. of days required	Remarks
1.(a) Kalah (Charachi or Hazeli)	Rs. 14.00 per kg.	1 day	Making charge is paid as per weight of the main raw material which generally varies between 1 kg and 2 kgs. The design and shape of the ware produced also determine the making charge to some extent.
(b) Kalah (Matia)	Rs. 8.00 per kg.	1 day	—Do—
2. Charia	Rs. 8.00 per kg.	1 day	The weight varies between 1 and 3 kgs.
3. Kharahi	Rs. 8.00 per kg.	1 day	Generally weight varies from 1/2 kg. to 5 kgs. and above.
4. Tau (a) Big size (Fig. 13)	Rs. 14.00 per kg.	1 day	—Do—
(b) Small size	Rs. 8.00 per kg.	1 day	—Do—
5. Sarai	Making charge is always twice the cost of the brass sheets used.	Approximately 5 days required for making a Sarai of average size.	It is of various sizes.
6. Kalachi	1/3 the cost of brass used.	7 to 10 days	It is of different sizes and used as pinnacle in the temples.

The making charge for the articles produced by moulding procers is as shown below :—

Articles manufactured	Making charge
1. Karach	Rs. 12.00 per kg.
2. Khanti	Rs. 12.00 per kg.

In case of idols and other articles there is no fixed making charge. The volume of labour put in and the number of days required for the purpose determine making charges in such cases.

PLACES OF SALES OF THE BRASSWARES

As earlier stated Guwahati is the principal marketing centre of brasswares. From Guwahati it is

distributed to different trading centres in and outside the State. Besides Guwahati, there are also a few shops at Niz-Hajo dealing in various kinds of brasswares (Fig-6). Thus, Niz-Hajo and Guwahati are the main trading centres of brasswares.

As mentioned earlier, the Mahajans place order with the craftsmen for manufacture of various kinds of brasswares and except in exceptional circumstances the craftsmen do not produce brasswares at their own. The whole production is order-based and is handled by the big merchants or 'Mahajans' who provide the braziers the brass sheets and other raw materials and give the braziers only the making charges. The finished products are then collected by the Mahajan and disposed off at a considerable high price. Thus, most of the articles produced in Niz-Hajo find their way to the ultimate buyers or actual users of the wares through Mahajan or local traders. Besides the shops dealing with brasswares, there is also a co-operative society in Muslimpatty in Niz-Hajo town. This society too supply raw materials to the artisans for making various kinds of brasswares. The articles thus produced are procured by the society and sold through various outlets. Over and above, the fairs and festivals observed in different parts of Assam in different seasons provide market for the brasswares of Niz-Hajo.

PROBLEM IN DISPOSAL OF FINISHED PRODUCTS

Enquiry has also been made during the survey to elicit information about the problems faced by the artisans in disposing off the finished products. The survey reveals that there are at present no acute problem faced by them in disposing off the finished products because the artisans have almost unanimously expressed their financial incapability to buy the raw materials and work independently and they usually manufacture articles which are ordered by the Mahajan. Without specific order artisans seldom make any articles. And that is why, they find no problem or difficulty in disposing off the finished products which is monopolised by the traders.

The only palpable problem faced by the artisans of Niz-Hajo is the low rate of labour charges they receive from the traders for making brasswares which is not deemed sufficient to meet the ever increasing cost of living.

CHAPTER - VI

CRAFT AND EMPLOYMENT

Brass metal industry is one of the oldest and traditional crafts practised in Niz-Hajo town. This industry always plays a pivotal role in moulding the economic life of the townsmen in general. Brass artisans of this town belonging both to Hindus and Muslims practise this craft as a household industry run primarily by the family members in a workshop located in their own dwelling houses or compounds.

The Morias are believed to be the original braziers of brass in Assam. All the households belonging to Morias practise this craft as their only source of livelihood, the knowledge of which is transmitted from one generation to another notwithstanding the fluctuating economic viability of the craft. Besides, the Morias, the original Hindu residents of the town belonging to Keot, Koch, Kalita and Mali castes also practise the craft from time immemorial. Thus, this craft has a tremendous socio-economic impact on the life and living of the people of Niz-Hajo.

It is extremely difficult to say anything for certain about the origin of this craft in Assam. During our survey none of the respondents could positively say when and how this craft came into being in this state. However, there are reasons to believe that this craft was brought to this part of the country by the Morias.

During the reign of Ahom Kings the makers of brasswares were a set of people professing Islam religion and in Assam they were known as Morias. They were brought to this town in the long past for the purpose of making brasswares for use in the famous temple Hayagrib Madhab. Morias were allowed to settle on a few acres of land belonging to Devalaya without having to pay any tax or revenue, instead they used to make brass vessels for the temple. Since then they settled in this town and have earned their living by making various kinds of brasswares. The Hindu inhabitants of this town belonging to different castes learnt the art of making brassware from the Morias.

People of this town believe that this traditional craft crept into this part of the country almost simultaneously with its coming into being. The Morias reported this craft as their only source of livelihood with no other occupation whatsoever to augment their earnings. But the Hindu artisans have cultivation as their subsidiary occupation. However, it is observed that majority of the Hindu artisans themselves do not cultivate their own land instead they give it to others for cultivation in lieu of share of crops or money. It is extremely difficult to arrive at any reliable estimates about the number of households among both Hindus and Muslims that were engaged in this craft in the very beginning. However, information as could be elicited suggest that all the households particularly of the Morias without any exception have been practising this craft as the prime source of livelihood from the time beyond the reach of their memory.

ORIGIN OF THE CRAFT IN THE TOWN

Informations as could be gathered after repeated enquiries and discussions with the knowledgeable persons in the selected households under survey about the origin of the craft in Niz-Hajo is presented below in Table VI.1.

TABLE VI-1

Distribution of households reporting period of introduction of the craft in the town classified by broad age-group of head of the household.

Broad age-group of head of the household	No. of surveyed households engaged in the craft	Number of households reported about period of introduction of the craft in the town as	
		Before 1900	Period not known
1	2	3	4
15—34	13	9	4
35—59	39	28	11
60 and above	8	—	8
Total	60	37	23

The Table VI.1 depicts that about 61.67 per cent of the total surveyed household reported introduction of this craft in this town even before the dawn of the present century and the rest pleaded total ignorance about the same.

Further, it is gathered that majority of the surveyed household have been practising this craft for more than last 30 years.

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS AND PERSONS ENGAGED IN THE CRAFT DURING DIFFERENT DECADES

An attempt has also been made during the survey to find out the number of households and persons engaged in this craft during different decades. All the respondents mostly elderly persons irrespective of their age have reported engagement of 10 or more households with 20 or more craftsmen in this craft in this town throughout last several decades which definitely establish the fact that brazing of brasswares is a chronologically old craft practised in this town.

Its antiquity can be adjudged by studying the method adopted and the type of tools used for manufacturing various kinds of brasswares. But it is extremely difficult to give any definite date of existence of brass industry in Assam in the long past, because no systematic survey on this craft has so far been undertaken and as such it is felt impossible to give chronological account of growth and development of this industry. However, various archaeological finds, e.g. brass images of Gods and Goddesses of tenth/eleventh century A.D. establish that this is one of the oldest surviving handicrafts.

Description about various musical instruments used in temples and on occasions of performance of religious festivals contained in the literary creations of poets of the pre-Sankara era exactly confirm with those made of brass and being anexed in the latter decades for similar purposes and leads to the obvious conclusion of existence of brass made articles even in pre-Sankara era.

During the Ahom reign (1228—1826 A.D.) making of brasswares was a popular craft. Various articles made by brass were to be found in houses irrespective of rich or poor. This handicraft received due patronage of the Ahom Kings, who engaged the braziers for production of various kinds of brasswares for use in places of worship. During the Vaishnava period also household equipments such as 'Kharahi', 'Tau', 'Chariya', 'Sarai', 'Kalah' etc. were mostly made of brass.

The craft did not get due patronage during British and post independent period. On the contrary it lost much of its past glory during those days when cheap machine made articles of alluminium, iron, etc. started appearing in both rural and urban markets throwing a great challenge to this craft. People started showing distinct inclination towards use of cheaper metal-wares at the neglect of utensils made of brass or bellmetal. This had adversely effected the economic condition of the braziers. Because brasswares produced by the artisans had to face stiff competition with the machine made articles of cheaper materials. Gradually mounting price of brasswares was deterrent to the growth of this craft and the common household items made of brass which were once most popular among the general populace yielded place to machine made wares of cheaper materials.

After independence this industry did not show any definite sign of improvement and as a matter of fact the condition of this traditional craft further deteriorated and *consequently* the economic condition of artisans engaged in this craft was also far from satisfactory. The demand for brasswares gradually diminished. But braving such on adverse situation the artisans of Niz-Hajo town clung to this craft as their traditional occupation.

During 1960 and 1970 though the Government and other organisations stepped forward with various developmental programmes yet this craft did not show any perceptible sign of improvement. On the contrary, this industry sufferred further set back because markets in both rural and urban areas were filled with machine made cheap articles. Thus during these decades the condition of artisans did not improve at all and many poor artisans, mostly belonging to Hindu community, gave up practising this craft due to low profit derived from this industry. However, it is heartening to note that majority of the artisans belonging to Moria community steadfastly adhered to this traditional craft though they could hardly earn their livelihood from its practice.

In the present decade too this industry has not shown any signs of development. It is no longer a flourishing craft as before. The various schemes undertaken by the Government and other organisations for development of this age-old craft have failed to bring about the desired level of development of this craft. Due to shortage and high price of raw materials the artisans are facing serious problem in running this craft. The condition of the poor artisans are deteriorating day by day and are becoming increasingly dependent on the traders for their survival. There are many reasons for the decaying condition of this craft. The entrance of unscrupulous traders, exhorbitant price of raw materials and inadequate marketing facilities are some of the important and serious factors responsible for the retarded growth or decay of this traditional craft and it is apprehended that unless proper steps are taken immediately to revamp this traditional craft from its present morbid stage, this will gradually vanish from the handicraft scenario of the state of Assam.

Information as could be gathered during the survey regarding any change in the number of households and persons engaged in this craft during the last four decades is presented in Table VI.2 below :

TABLE VI.2

Reasons reported by households for variation in the number of households and persons engaged in the craft during last four decades classified by broad age-group of head of the households.

Board age-group of head of the household	No. of surveyed households engaged in the craft	Number of households reported reasons for	
		No substantial increase in the number of households and persons engaged in the craft during the last four decades	
		Educated persons are not interested in the craft	Less profit in return of labour
1	2	3	4
0—14	—	—	—
15—34	13	2	11
35—59	39	11	28
60+	8	2	6
Total	60	15	45

It is observed that the entire lot of respondents belonging to different age-groups informed that there has not been any perceptible increase either in the number of households engaged in this traditional craft or in the actual number of artisans during the last four decades or so which is well within their memory. An absolute majority (75.00 per cent) of the respondents narrated non-profitableness as the prime cause for more and more households not being attracted to this craft. Besides educated persons in the present decade are not at all interested to adopt brazing as a means of livelihood. It is observed that though a few educated youths, particularly among the Morias, still practise this craft, yet they are not satisfied. According to them, acute problem of unemployment has forced them to practise this craft and they are in constant look for better job opportunities.

EMPLOYMENT

Brass metal industry in the days of its glory, played a very important role in the economy of the artisans community and despite many ups and downs this industry through different decades has provided employment to the descendents of the braziers' community. Thus this industry practised by the Morias and Hindu artisans of Niz-Hajo town has a certain extent solved the problem of unemployment among the males of both the community. Particularly all the adult Moria males know the art of making various kinds of brasswares and actually practise the same. The survey reveals that there are many matriculates and college students among the Morias who practise this craft as their source of livelihood. However, less profit derived from this craft in return of their labour make them disinterested in practising this craft and that is why it is reported that most of the young artisans are looking for alternative lucrative job.

Due to very limited demand of its products and for want of proper marketing facilities, this traditional craft has been showing signs of decay and a desperate struggle for its survival in the recent years. Though artisans of Niz-Hajo still practise this craft as the principal source of income yet they have perforce started looking for subsidiary occupations to augment their earnings to meet the ever increasing cost of living.

There is reasonable scope for rejuvenation and development of this craft which however calls for proper training and due incentive from various quarters. If practised in a proper way it can still be used as a gainful employment generating tool. In the opinion of the responsible members of the surveyed practising households for the proper revival of this traditional craft adequate financial help should forthcome from Banks and other Govt. agencies as also proper marketing facilities for the finished products are essential. Moreover attempt should be made to eliminate the middleman or Mahajan from this industry who grab major profit giving only minimum to the craftsman who by their hard toil produce the wares. It is noticed that scope of market for brass metal in Assam is limited. Besides whatever limited market for the brasswares exists at present is exploited by the middlemen or traders.

A very disheartening feature is that this industry is still practised in a most traditional manner with outdated tools and equipments. So far no proper or scientific method has been adopted to develop this craft. The improvement of this craft cannot be achieved if modern technique of manufacturing is

not introduced. The present production technique offers less scope to increase the production rate substantially or to compete with the goods from outside Assam both in quality and price. Therefore, it is high time to introduce modern scientific technique so that production can be increased alongwith quality and price of the products which in its turn will generate potentiality for further employment in this craft.

The growth and development of this craft can be achieved only through organisation of the craft on a commercial footing with a proper network for steady supply of raw materials at reasonable prices and an expanding market for the finished products which would ensure a sale price appropriately compensating the cost of raw materials and labour put in manufacture of the brasswares. Such an act will definitely generate employment opportunities for the youths.

This industry immediately needs proper technology, finance, training and guidance to the artisans. Moreover artisans should be provided with raw materials and better marketing facilities. Besides artisans should be brought under common cooperative fold so that this industry can flourish again. Growth and development of this traditional craft will definitely help in generating employment among the educated youths of the town and fill up the economy of the town in particular and the state of Assam in general.

ATTITUDE AND OPINION OF THE PRACTISING HOUSEHOLDS

Information as could be elicited on enquiry made during the survey to know the opinion of the craftsmen of the practising households whether they consider this craft as a source of gainful employment is embodied in the following table.

TABLE VI.3

Households reported about the craft as a source of gainful/not gainful employment classified by religion, caste/tribe/community of head of the household

Religion, caste/tribe/community of head of the household		No. of households engaged in the craft	No. of households considering the craft			
			Not as a source for gainful employment	Source for gainful employment provided		
				Adequate quantity of brass sheet (main raw material) is supplied at a reasonably low cost, necessary finance is arranged and appropriate marketing of the output is guaranteed	Improved technical facility in manufacture of the wares	Remarks
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Hindu	Koch	20	7	13	6	Figures in columns 4 and 5 are not mutually exclusive.
	Keot	1	—	1	—	
	Kumar	1	1	—	—	
Muslim	Moria	38	11	27	14	
	Total	60	19	41	20	

It is seen that only 19 out of 60 surveyed households (31.67 per cent) do not consider this craft as a source of gainful employment at all. But an absolute majority of the respondents expressed a note of optimism in saying that they consider this craft as a source of gainful employment provided due care is taken to remove certain lacunae now acting as hindrance to its proper growth. In their opinion this industry can still provide employment among the younger generation if it is run with systematic planning. Majority of the artisans consider that proper finance, scientific manufacture and organised market are sina-quana for future growth of the industry and that Govt. and other agencies should come forward with proper plans and programmes so that the industry can run smoothly and provide gainful employment to the younger generations and this help solve the unemployment problem even in a meagre scale.

ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE CRAFTSMEN

As mentioned earlier the economic condition of the practising households is not satisfactory. Majority of such households are very poor and they can hardly manage two square meals a day from their meagre earnings from practice of this craft. Not a single household has reported any improvement in their economic status from pursuit of this craft. Frustration wrought written large on their faces could easily be read. They consider that lack of adequate finance and absence of proper market are the main causes of the languishing condition of this industry. In order to eliminate their perennial

poverty urgent steps need be taken to provide them with loans, steady supply of raw materials and an organised market for speedy disposal of finished products at justified prices as also remove the unscrupulous traders from the arena of brass metal industry.

During the survey an attempt was made to gather the opinion of the heads of the practising households regarding their willingness or otherwise about their sons to hold the cue from their fathers in practice of the craft. Information as could be gathered on this count is reproduced in the table VI.4.

TABLE VI.4

Opinion of head of households about engagement of their sons in the craft with reasons thereof classified by educational level of head of the household.

Educational level of head of the household	No. of households engaged in the craft	No. of households wanting their sons to adopt the same occupation		No. of households not wanting to have their sons engaged in the same craft due to	
		as a source of income as well as to keep alive the traditional craft	To keep alive the traditional craft	No more gainful	Disproportionately less income in return of labour and time
1	2	3	4	5	6
Illiterate	10	—	—	7	3
Literate without educational level	15	6	—	7	2
Primary or Junior basic .	21	14	7	—	—
Middle	12	4	8	—	—
Matriculation/Higher Secondary	2	1	1	—	—
Total	60	25	16	14	5

It is heartening to note that an absolute majority (68.33 per cent) of the surveyed households irrespective of the educational level of the head of the households opined in favour of continuation of practice of the craft by their descendants and a good number of them desire so far specific reason of upholding the past glory of this craft and do not want any break in the tradition. However, quite a few households disfavoured their sons taking to brazing as a means of livelihood as in their opinion this is no longer a lucrative occupation.

Interestingly enough all the illiterate head of households desire their sons to adopt any occupation other than practice of their traditional craft.

Informations were also gathered during the survey from the younger generations about their choice of practice of this craft as a source of livelihood. Majority of them reported that they do not like to adopt this craft as a source of earning. However, at the same instance they reported their liking to practise this craft just to keep up the tradition. The table VI.5 prepared in this respect is reproduced here.

TABLE VI.5

Households reported their younger generations taking/not taking interest in the craft with reasons thereof classified by religion, caste/tribe/community of head of the household

Religion, Caste/Tribe/Community of head of the household		No. of households engaged in the craft	No. of households reported about their younger generation taking interest in the craft due to		No. of households reported about their younger generation not taking interest in the craft due to
Religion	Caste/Tribe/Community		Could not avail of better employment opportunity	Only to learn the traditional craft	Their consideration of the craft as no longer a gainful employment
1	2	3	4	5	6
Hindu	Koch	20	6	2	12
	Keot	1	—	—	1
	Kumar	1	—	—	1
Muslim	Moria	38	10	3	25
	Total	60	16	5	39

It is observed that an absolute majority (65.00 per cent) of the surveyed households reported that members of their younger generation consider brazing as uneconomic and as such are not inclined to adopt this as a means of livelihood. Out of the remaining 35.00 per cent of the respondents almost the entire lot reported that it is under compulsive circumstances that the younger ones in their families show interest in this craft and very few cherish the idea of upholding glory of this once prosperous craft.

Opinions about satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the craft had also been collected during the survey from practising households belonging to both the communities. Majority of the practising household show absolute dissatisfaction because this craft is no more profitable and lucrative as before. Another factor contributing to their dissatisfaction is the role of middleman in this craft. But curiously enough at the same breath they have also expressed satisfaction in being involved in this traditional craft and take pride in keeping alive the traditional occupation of their forefather.

It is heartening to note that majority of the households belonging to Morias even now practise this craft as their only source of income inspite of many odds suffered by them. Even educated youth of this community have taken keen interest for development of this craft. But, on the contrary it is noticed that only a few youths among the Hindu artisans are actively engaged in this craft. Survey reveals that even the aged persons belonging to this community do not favour practise of this craft as a source of income. Low profit is stated to be the main reason for this. As such many of the original Hindu craftsmen of this town have gradually shifted to diverse other occupations.

ATTITUDE AND OPINION OF NON-PRACTISING HOUSEHOLDS

Almost the entire lot of non-practising households considered for survey offered a single reason for giving up practice of the craft. In their opinion the profit derived from practise of the craft never commensurates the time, labour and money spent for the same. However, they did not hesitate to add that exploitation by unscrupulous traders also has caused exasperation among them ultimately deciding against practice of this age-old craft. But it could be discerned that even the lot of non-practising households cherish a desire that this once prosperous but now decaying industry should be rejuvenated at least to keep alive the traditional craft which once brought so much name and fame to its artisans.

CHAPTER - VII

CONCLUSION

There is no definite source of information about how brass made its first appearance in India. In the opinion of some it came from either Egypt or erstwhile Persia. Persians know brass as 'Royeen' which is akin to the word 'Royee' in Sanskrit meaning brass. Many others think that brass came to India from Nepal and Tibet. Opinions may differ about the place of origin of brass and the country which imparted the technical knowledge of making brass to the Indians but there is no ambiguity about the fact of its coming into India many centuries ago.

Ancient literature and history speak of Assam's association with the handicraft of making brasswares since very olden days. In Assam it is practised as a household industry which claims a rich heritage and have products with distinctive designs. However compared to others, brass metal craft has relatively few pockets of artisan concentration places in Assam, Dhubri, Kamrup, Sibsagar and Cachar districts of Assam are the places where this craft is mainly to be found. However, Niz-Hajo, a small town in Kamrup District, about 30 kms. away from Guwahati, the State Capital emerges as the principal production centre of brass metal articles.

Niz-Hajo town has another distinction of having the famous temple of Hayagrib Madhab, a religious shrine of the Hindus and the powa—Mocca—most hallowed by the Muslims. Thus, it is an ideal meeting place both for the Hindus and the Muslim. Pilgrims converging in this town in great numbers used to contribute to growth of brass metal industry by their purchase of the exquisite products of local craftsmanship. However, the situation has undergone great changes and the patronage once received from the pilgrims is no longer to be found.

It is very difficult to say when and how this handicraft made its first appearance in Niz-Hajo. In the absence of any systematic survey of this craft or any recorded history of the same, it is anybody's guess as to when this craft came into existence in this part of the country. It is however believed that sometimes in the 16th century the Ahom Kings brought Morias the original makers of Brass Wares in Assam to this place for making various brass articles for use in the temple of Hayagrib Madhab. Since then the people belonging to this particular community who profess Islam as their religion have been engaged in practice of this handicraft which once enjoyed a prosperous business. At a later date the menfolk among the Hindu inhabitants of the town picked up the technical knowledge of making brass wares from the Morias. It is through many generations that both the Morias and the Hindus of this town have been engaged in this handicraft as a principal source of livelihood.

The present survey reveals that without any exception all the Moria households have accepted this craft as their sole economic activity while among the Hindus a few households belonging to different castes practise this craft and quite a good number of them have switched over to other means of eking out a living. However, there is no denying the fact that the respondents reported practice of this craft by their forefathers since a time beyond the reach of their memory. The antiquity of this handicraft can be adjudged by a study of the method of production and various tools and implements used by the artisans. The principal method adopted by the craftsman is 'beaten metal work' which is undoubtedly a traditionally old method for shaping various kinds of brasswares. Though a comparatively modern technique of manufacture of brasswares by casting or moulding has of late been introduced by an immigrant artisan yet this method has not yet gained any measure of popularity among the braziers who are still found to steadfastly clung to the chronologically old method of production.

The workshop without any exception is found located in a part of the dwelling house. Normally a corner of the 'Kutcha' verandah is used as the workshop. In a few cases however, a separate bamboo structure locally known as 'Chali' located in the compound of the dwelling house is used as the workshop where the furnace using charcoal as the only fuel is placed.

The production of brasswares is normally carried more or less on an even scale throughout the year except during the peak of monsoon season lasting about 3/4 months when the production is interrupted as the makeshift workshop cannot withstand the onslaught of heavy rainfall.

The production of brasswares is a raw material oriented industry and it is found that an overwhelmingly majority of artisans depend solely on the Mahajans or traders who supply brass-sheets—the principle raw materials to them for manufacture of brasswares as stipulated by the traders. It is obligatory on the part of the braziers to produce only those articles as dictated by the supplier of raw material and to handover the produce to the traders in exchange of payment of labour charges only. Thus, the artisans normally do not produce any article on their own.

The survey reveals that no purity or pollution is associated with practice of this handicraft. However,

artisans belonging to both the religious groups of Hinduism and Islam reportedly abstain from work during the period of pollution observed following death of a member in the family.

The artisans of Niz-Hajo manufacture a variety of brasswares that have household use as well as use for religious purposes. The products bear no significant designs or decorations and are essentially traditional in their shape and design. However, in a spirit of competition with machine made articles of alluminium, plastic, stainless steel etc. which have appeared in the market with all their attractive designs and glitter, a few enthusiastic artisans have recently introduced modern designs in their products.

Brass metal works in its days of glorious past immensely contributed in moulding the economic profile of the town. It is lamentable however, that this industry no longer flourishes and has reached a stage of morbidity and stagnation. There are many factors which can be attributed for the present decaying condition of the craft. High cost of raw-material, inadequate marketing facilities, lack of proper publicity, want of cheap modes of transportation of finished products, challenges posed by other cheaper metal made articles are to be jointly held responsible for the present sorry state of this handicraft. The unethical behaviour arising out of the ever increasing greed and lust of the unscrupulous middleman-locally known as Mahajans—has also contributed in a great measure to a rapid fall of this once thriving industry. The artisans also advanced limited or declining demand for brasswares and consequential low productivity as other significant factors contributing to a slump in this industry. All the above factors acting in a vicious circle have given rise to the present crisis in this industry.

In the opinion of the artisans non-availability of raw-materials at a reasonable price is the greatest hindrance in smooth-running of the industry. The economically vulnerable craftsman cannot afford to buy the main raw material *i.e.* brass sold at a high price and thus are left to the mercy of the mahajan who supply the raw-material only against specific orders for manufacture of brass articles and pay the artisans only a nominal amount as labour charges for making the wares and themselves arrange disposal of the finished products and in this process more often than not deprive the poor artisans of their due share of the fruit of their hard toil and this destroys all incentive in the actual makers of brasswares. The exploitation of the poor artisans by the traders is virtually eating the root of this industry. This malady calls for immediate cure.

Absence of an organised and well planned net work of centres for marketing the finished products is considered to be a stumbling block to a healthy growth of this household industry. The survey reveals that the artisans are exposed entirely to the mercy of the local traders or 'Mahajan' for disposal of their products whose activities are totally detrimental to the interest of the craftsman. The only remedy lies in the Govt. stepping forward to assume the responsibility of proper marketing of the finished products keeping constantly in view the promotion of interest of the poor braziers. Craftsmen on their part also need to form co-operative societies to achieve a common platform to safeguard their interest because it is only through concerted effort through co-operative society that the craftsmen can have a steady supply of raw materials at competitive price and also can dispose off their wares at a price that amply commensurates their capital investment and labour put forth in making the brasswares. This will definitely act as a fillip to the decaying industry. For survival of this age-old craft the role of a co-operative society can hardly be over emphasized. It is lamentable that in Niz-Hajo a co-operative society functions without providing any material benefit to its members.

To meet the challenge thrown out by the machine made articles of cheaper materials the braziers should immediately conceive innovations in their products to draw prospective customers' attention. They should also shun the outdated method of production with almost primitive tools and equipments and introduce modern and scientific instruments for a much rapid production in larger numbers which would definitely result in more economy in production and consequentially better margin of profit to the artisans. The braziers also need to give a serious thought to diversifying their products to have a wider market for their products catering to the varying choice and need of buyers. In a word due emphasis need be laid on development of the craft purely on a commercial basis.

It is most encouraging to note that the State Govt. has laid maximum emphasis for encouragement, development and revitalisation of traditional handicraft alongwith other sector of industries. The District Industries Centres (DIC) have organised workshop and provided technical guidance to the artisans in its measure to encourage the younger generation to adopt this craft which will definitely help solve the unemployment among the youth albeit not in a very large measure.

A Technical Committee constituted by the Directorate of Industries in the Govt. of Assam had recently examined various aspects of bell-metal and brass metal industries of Assam. The Techno-Economic Survey Report (1987-88) is now being actively considered by the State Govt. The recommendations of the Committee for an all round development of these handicrafts are as follows: (1) Opening of raw material depot at the production centres, (2) Setting up of non-ferrous rolling mills, (3) Revitalisation of Common Facilities Service Centre, (4) Providing Workshop-cum-residence for the artisans, (5) Modernisation and diversification of the industry, (6) Training and Supply of modern and scientific tools and equipments, (7) Exemption of bell-metal and brass metal products from Sale-tax as enjoyed by the Khadi and Village Industries, (8) Provision of Credit & Finance etc.

It is suggested in the report that for supplying basic raw-materials to these units the Govt. should make an endeavour to get them from the various first hand sources so that the artisans can get these raw-materials in their door steps as and when required and thus the exploitation by the mahajan is eliminated. At the request of the State Govt. the Mineral and Metal Trading Corporation of India Ltd.—a Govt. of India undertaking has recently opened their office at Guwahati and it is hoped they will soon establish warehouse too at Guwahati and that the basic raw-materials required for this industry will be easily made available to the artisans.

Training to artisans will be provided through expert craftsman both inside and outside the State. After the Completion of the training artisans will be provided with assistance as per the New Industrial Policy of the State Govt.

The State Govt. is negotiating with various financial institutions for making adequate fund available to the artisans on liberal terms and conditions. The other recommendations of the Expert Committee are being implemented in a phased manner.

It is worthwhile to recollect here the measures suggested by the Small Industry Extension Training Institute, a Govt. of India undertaking which conducted a comprehensive Survey of Assam Handicrafts at the instance of the Directorate of Industries, Govt. of Assam, for development of brass metal industry of Assam which were incorporated in their report published by the end of 1982. According to them (1) The scope of market in Assam for brass metal utensils is limited. Whatever market potentiality for the existing range of products manufactured by the artisans that now exists is exploited by the traders or middlemen. In view of the fact that a variety of brass metal products are imported from Calcutta, Muradabad and Punjab to meet the buyers' demand within Assam, a diversification of products to share this demand within the state need be attempted. (2) The present production technique offers less scope to substantially increase the production rate to compete both in quality and price of brass metal wares imported from outside the State. (3) The raw-materials need of the artisans engaged in the craft justify the establishment of a re-rolling mill at Guwahati or any suitable nearby place to ensure smooth supply of good quality raw-material to the craftsmen and thus break the monopoly of the traders as the principal suppliers of raw-materials. The role of a trader as a market distribution inter-mediary may be acceptable but his role as the supplier of raw material should always be curtailed. (4) The art metal work has a high market potential and with the stepping up of production by sophisticated techniques, proper marketing of the articles in a much wider market will call for diversification of the products.

The Institute suggested active participation of the Assam Govt. Marketing Corporation (AGMC), North-Eastern Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corporation (NEHHDC), All India Handicraft Board (AIHB) and State Directorate of Industries in sorting out the problems that plague the brass metal industry of Assam and providing necessary succour to revitalise the craft. They suggested that (1) The best among the artisans with inherited skill alone need be picked up and sent for training in modern method and technique of production to the training centres of All India Handicrafts Board at Bangalore or some other place like Penbarthi in Andhra Pradesh. A training centre with improved tools and techniques may be established at Niz-Hajo. (2) The AGMC and NEHHDC should be in constant touch with the craftsmen at the production centre and assume the responsibility of marketing the products. They should also regularly monitor the demand position of the brass metal wares and keep the artisans informed accordingly. What is needed is perceptive analysis of the consumer needs and then conveying the same to the artisans, who left to themselves, would be quite unaware of buyers' needs and (3) The existing Design Centre of the Directorate of Industries in close collaboration with other promotional agencies should act as the source of new designs to be adopted by the artisans for a prospective sale of the wares.

All said and done, the Brass Metal industry of Niz-Hajo which was once a flourishing industry is now not in prosperity. However, various steps are being undertaken by the appropriate authority for revitalisation of this craft which will definitely bring more and more craftsmen into its fold and besides substantially improving the lot of the existing craftsmen will help in solving the unemployment problem to certain extent. But, it is no denying the fact that Govt. assistance alone cannot bring forth the desired economic revival of the industry. The products of brass metal industry should receive due patronage from the people as well but for which no amount of developmental measure will yield the desired result as in the ultimate analysis the success of any productive industry depends on the final disposal of its products.

It is most heartening to observe that despite an overall note of dismay this traditional industry has not gone out of production and that there are craftsmen who still hold in great esteem the knowledge of making brasswares handed down to them by their forefathers and who believe that by practising the craft they are keeping alive a traditional occupation and a rich heritage and thus take great pride in it.

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