

## Chapter 2

# SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE TRADITIONAL SWARNAKARS IN SILIGURI

### ***2.1 Introduction***

It is significant to observe that the traditional *swarnakars* identify themselves with the hereditary occupation that they pursue. Their work is to transform raw gold into beautifully designed jewellery. A sociological study on the life of the *swarnakars* must begin with an account of their social and economic backgrounds. In Chapter 1, I have already mentioned that a large majority of those who are in the jewellery business in Siliguri represent the traditional caste, namely *swarnakar* (goldsmith), but in recent years many from other castes too have taken up this business or craft as their livelihood. I have also mentioned that the traditional *swarnakars* in Siliguri are largely the migrants from different parts of the neighbouring districts, states and countries; they have come to Siliguri to tap its business potentials. I have divided the respondents (102 in total) into three distinct categories based on their concentration in different parts of the city and the nature of their work.

I have arranged the chapter into two sections: (1) social background of the traditional *swarnakars* where I have included caste background, levels of education and family background and (2) economic background of the traditional *swarnakars*, which includes nature of the business, a period of the business, a position held by the family members in business, duration of work and income of the family. Finally, the chapter discusses how the changing jewellery market impacts the life of traditional *swarnakars*. Largely speaking, much of the social life of the *swarnakars* depends on the economic activities that determine their “class” position in society.

### ***2.2 Siliguri: A Hub of Migrant swarnakars***

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Siliguri was a small town, compared to Jalpaiguri, which was bigger and greater in importance (Ghosh 2017). Over a few decades, Siliguri gained importance overshadowing the presence of Jalpaiguri. Migration, particularly in the post-Independence decades, expansion of trade, locational advantage, better communication network are the factors that contributed to the shift of

focus on Siliguri. This increase in population is the effect of continued migration of people over the decades. The refugees from Bangladesh, Yangon (Burma) (Das 2011), and immigrants from Nepal, along with migrants from the neighbouring states and districts have contributed to the faster growth of Siliguri.

There are stories about the beginning of gold jewellery trade in Siliguri. One of my respondents, named Mr. P Sharma, brings up the date when a Nepali businessman travelled through Darjeeling to this place for trading jewellery made up of gold. He targeted the local inhabitants of Siliguri by providing proffer in form of loan by keeping their gold jewellery as a liability.

Many other respondents have told me that there was no permanent jewellery shop in Siliguri since this place was used for transit purpose but not for settlement. Due to this, in the initial phase, there was no appropriate market, until it became the junction point for transportation to different places, far and near. Gradually there emerged a trade pattern as many jewellers from the various places (Calcutta, Jalpaiguri, Chalsa, Alipurduar, etc.) travelled to Siliguri twice a week to provide loan to local inhabitants on interest and for selling jewellery. This practice of giving and taking a loan is known as *Bondokio* system and the form of business is called *Sudher byabsha*.

According to the account of Mr. J Saraf, aged 42, a small *swarnakar*, who heard it from his father, in the early decades of twentieth-century money lending was the major business. Alongside money lending, the gold loan market had flourished with the initiative of the pawnbrokers, who used come down to Siliguri from Chalsa, Malbazar, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri.

Mr. B Kr Gupta, aged 51, middle *swarnakar*, a senior resident of the city said: “*Some people from Jalpaiguri came to Siliguri for selling gold jewellery. After getting down to Siliguri, they travelled on foot to the different paras (localities) for persuading the local inhabitants to buy their product (gold jewellery)*”. In this way, the *swarnakars* advertised their product by impelling the local people of Siliguri to purchase their product (gold jewellery) from them. He continued by saying “*as the local inhabitants get an opportunity for easy accessibility in purchasing gold jewellery at the doorstep; they never had any question regarding the purity of gold they are receiving from them.*”

*They have accepted all forms of gold jewellery with no shilly-shallying”* (Ghosh 2017:10).

Like him, several traditional *swarnakars* and consumers have provided a similar account of gold jewellery promotion done by the traditional *swarnakars* during that period. They also gave accounts of how the jewellery traders in those days influenced the minds of the local inhabitants to generate faith in them and their gold jewellery product. They said that the consumers (local inhabitants) were satisfied with the gold jewellery received from the vendors as they used to get authentic money receipt from jewellery vendors. This authentication of the receipt was further validated by the jewellery shop mentioned on the top of the money receipt. Most of the gold jewellery vendors had their shops in Jalpaiguri, Birpara, Darjeeling and Dooars regions but not in Siliguri. Matigara *haat* was an open market where gold jewellery vendors and pawnbrokers had their outlets. This easy accessibility of them for the consumers had influenced the consumers to believe on them; and on the other side, the consumers who had to take a trip to those previously mentioned places had verified the jewellery shop over to those places. In this way, the consumers (local inhabitants) in Siliguri built their trust upon traditional *swarnakars*. In those days, therefore, Darjeeling market, Matigara *haat* and Jalpaiguri Town and not Siliguri, were the main centres of the gold jewellery trade. A major section of the *swarnakars* sold their jewellery products by carrying them over to the Matigara *haat* (Ghosh 2017:12). It was the junction where the buyers and sellers of gold gathered for purchasing gold ornaments or for getting loan. Siliguri gradually became the most important business town in North Bengal due to the new railway lines that linked Siliguri town with the rest of the country. It also gained importance as the *gateway* to Darjeeling hills, the whole of North-East India, Nepal and Bhutan. The traders of varied denominations set up their business in growing Siliguri local market. *Swarnakars* (gold Jewellery vendors and pawnbrokers) from different places used to visit weekly to Siliguri for selling jewellery and providing loans to the inhabitants. Among them, those who had their business thriving had established their family jewellery business in Siliguri market. Setting up of new jewellery business did not require huge money in those days (a contrast to the present-day situation) because, in those days, the consumers depended on traditional *swarnakars* for designing, types and style of jewellery; and the price of gold was much low compared to the present-day price, which is controlled by the international market. With the rapid growth of

population and the rise of living standard, the demand from jewellery has grown. With the rapid growth in demand for jewellery, many erstwhile moneylenders had established their jewellers retailing shops in Hill Cart Road and Seth Sri Lal Market and Khudiram Pally. Some of the prominent jewellery retail shops, thus set up, were Chanaram Jewellers, Gopal Jewellers, Harish Dutta Jewellers, Nani Gopal Rai Jewellers, and Bharat Jewellers. They were the oldest and popular jewellery shops in Hill Cart Road, as stated by Mr. S Ray (owner of Art Jewellers), middle *swarnakar*. Siliguri thus had its jewellery market by the middle of the twentieth century.

With the rise of Siliguri jewellery market Matigara market and Jalpaiguri market lost their pre-partition glory. The devastating flood of 1968 in Jalpaiguri had a disastrous impact on the socio-economic life of the inhabitants in Jalpaiguri town. To overcome this economic crisis, Jalpaiguri inhabitants moved to Siliguri town—a few of them were jewellers (Ghosh 2017). The immigrant *swarnakars* and *karigars* from Jalpaiguri town had bought land in Siliguri for settlement. They also motivated their close kin and caste fellows to set up their business in Siliguri. Few of them took jobs as *karigar* in the shops of the traditional *swarnakars*. The local traders and *swarnakars* employed them because they were specialised in the craft of making ornaments. This is how a community of *swarnakars* evolved in Siliguri. Similarly, migrant *karigars* from Alipurduar and Coochbehar district also found a place in Siliguri jewellery market over the period.

Refugees from East Pakistan/Bangladesh moved to Siliguri between 1970s and 1980s in large number, escaping communal attacks and atrocities of the Pakistan militia. For a living, the *swarnakars* and *Karmakars* having cash had set up their hereditary business (gold jewellery business) in Siliguri, and those who were financially weak continued to work as *karigars* in the shops of the *swarnakars*. The refugee *swarnakars* boosted the Siliguri jewellery market in a big way. They were skilled and experienced in the trade and they knew the nuances of Bengali culture. With such cultural capital, they gradually overshadowed the non-Bengali jewellery traders. The patterns, style, and types of jewellery they crafted were in line with Bengali tradition. Their proficiency in making gold jewellery encouraged more *swarnakars* to continue their caste-based hereditary business in Siliguri. Because of the “take over” of the jewellery market by Bengali *swarnakars*, traditional Bengali designs on gold jewellery became the style and trend of the local inhabitants. The arrival of the non-Bengali traders (Bihari, Marwari

and Nepali) had added a new cultural dimension in the jewellery designs. The qualification for entry into this trade is a skill, which they can learn informally while working in a workshop under the experienced craftsmen. Those who want to set up their own business, however, require some cash, a shop and some knowledge of business, which are in most cases inherited from a family business, since it has been the caste occupation of the *swarnakars*. After learning the skill for making jewellery the *swarnakars* also learn the business tricks and the communication skill. Many among the migrant workers came without much education or capital; they were, however, absorbed in the business as *gold karigar* or *patrawala* or *dye wala* or *polish wala*.

Thus, the known traditional jewellers of Siliguri are not the native of this place but are the groups of jewellers and artisans who have come from different places; they do not constitute a homogenous caste or community. Hence, the *swarnakars* in Siliguri are mostly internal and international migrants.

### ***2.3 Categorising the Traditional swarnakars in Siliguri***

Traditional *swarnakars* are those who are directly or indirectly involved in the jewellery business. They are those categories of people who are functionally dependent on their family business (hereditary business) and, those who acquire the skill through training for making jewellery (non-hereditary business). People engage themselves in the trade in various capacities and therefore the *swarnakars* could be divided into three following categories, namely, *karigars* (manufacturers of gold), *small swarnakars* (owner-cum-maker of gold jewellery), *Middle Swarnakars* (owner of the gold jewellery shop).

- ***The karigars*** are the makers of gold jewellery; they are the skilled artists; they are the ones who give art to gold, thus add “value” with their skill and artistic sense. The *karigars* who have it as caste occupation start learning the skill in their adolescence. They start working as an apprentice under-skilled and experienced *karigars* from the family or in a jewellery shop and master the art in a few years. After years of guidance from family members or training received from the experienced *karigars* they turn out to be skilled workers and many of them end up in setting up their own business. The *karigars* generally work on instructions from the shop owners who pass on the design placed by the customers. However, the design comes to them as a concept and they work out the details. They work on the specified size and weight of the ornament but

work out the micro details all by themselves. Thus, they implement a concept into making a piece of art, the success of which depends on the acknowledgement by the customer.

Out of 102 case studies, 45 are *karigars* who belong to Bengali, Bihari, Marwari, and Marathi communities. Bihari *karigars* have learnt their skill of making and refining gold jewellery from the local *swarnakars* after coming to Siliguri. They have learnt to fabricate gold jewellery from their fellow community members who have their shops in different parts of the city. Besides, a few Bihari *karigars* have said that they have learnt the finer points of the art from the local Bengali traditional *swarnakars*. The Bengali *karigars* working in Siliguri have come from other parts of North Bengal—Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Moinaguri, Birpara, Balurghat and Coochbehar. These *karigars*, who had their roots in East Bengal, follow their traditional caste occupation. Being refugees and having no other skill or education these *karigars* found a livelihood in their caste occupation while adjusting at a new place amidst many odds. The *karmakars* or *swarnakars* in Siliguri work with a sense of community, both at the workplace and in social life.

Asked why he does not set up his shop, Mr. R. Karmakar, aged 37, a small *swarnakar*, a Bengali *karigar* working in one of the jewellery shops in Hill Cart Road, said: *“I do not have enough cash for setting up of retailing shop nor do I afford to set up my gold jewellery manufacturing workshop. I simply do not have the capital nor someone to guide me in this.”* Again enquired that if he had ever thought of having jewellery shop in his name. Mr. Karmakar replied, *“I have never thought of having a shop of my own.”* He continued saying: *“We are karigars, we neither have the educational on the necessary knowledge which one needs for running a jewellery business. My family is dependent on my income, which I earn by working as a karigar; I also draw pride in my skills. I do not want to disturb this arrangement”*.

The *karigars*, work as wage labour under the surveillance and guidance of the traditional *swarnakars*. Many *karigars* work side by side in the workshops owned by business houses. Some of these *karigars* had the experiences of working in places like Alipurduar, Bagdogra, Islampur but they have come to Siliguri because they get more

work to do here. Some *karigars* have their manufacturing shops. They take orders from the local jewellery shops.

- **Small *swarnakars*** are those traditional jewellers who are continuing their caste-based hereditary occupations (*swarnakar/ sunar/ sonar* by caste) over two generations in Siliguri, having set up their small-scale shops, where they make the ornaments all by themselves. Besides, there are some retail jewellery shop owners in Bidhan Market, Karibari Road, New Cinema Road, who run their shops, which they have inherited but it is not their caste occupation. Mr. K. C. Pal, aged 58, small *swarnakar*, has a jewellery shop in Bidhan Market, who had earlier worked as a *karigar* for Bidhan Jewellery in Siliguri. He runs his shop and continues working as a *karigar* in his shop. He is a petty-bourgeoisie *swarnakar* who doubles his role as both owner and worker. I have found that the gold jewellery shops in Bidhan Market, Kalibari Road and New Cinema Road are predominantly petty-bourgeoisie *swarnakars*.

Out of 102 case studies, 36 traditional *swarnakars* have dominated the Siliguri jewellery market in these aforesaid clustered areas. They largely belong to middle and upper-middle class. They run their manufacturing units mostly by employing *karigars*; the size of the workforce varies depending on the size of business. All the small *swarnakars* have their manufacturing unit, behind their shops. The owners are all experienced in both making and selling. Their *karigars* work under their supervision. Sometimes, their *karigars* are not skilled enough to make a particular design. In such a situation, they give the task of making the jewellery to gold jewellery making workshops located in Khudiram Pally, Hill Cart Road near Venus more and Kalibari Road. Mr. V Kr Prasad, aged 41, Small *Swarnakar*, who has his shop in Hill Cart Road, has inherited his business from his father Mr. G Prasad. He does not have his jewellery-making unit; he buys ready-made jewellery from the workshops specialized in making jewellery.

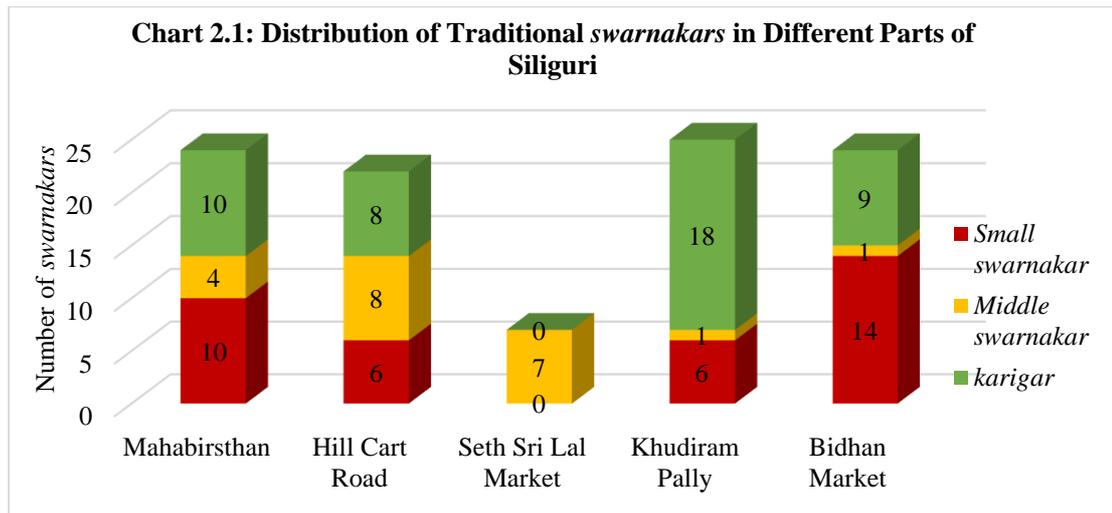
- **Middle *swarnakars*** are those *swarnakars* who principally hold the hereditary family business over three generations or more. They are all migrants from Yangoon, East Bengal, Jalpaiguri, Assam and Burma; some follow their caste occupation while some follow the business of their ancestors. Their business is bigger in scale and turn over.

Out of 102 case studies, 21 of middle *swarnakars* who have religiously maintained their hereditary jewellery business over several generations. They have upgraded their jewellery business into a corporate business structure where they have recruited specialized workers for respective departments for trading their jewellery business. They run their business with a larger number of staffs, such as 3–4 salespersons to attend the customers. However, in all cases the members of the owner-family are present in the shop to look into every aspect of their business, from keeping accounts, supervising the sale, attending the customers' grievances, to the recruitment of and payment to the workers. The younger generations of these business families are educated and they have a huge reserve of experience, which is passed from one generation to another. Some of them even have formal training, management degree that helps them run their business on modern terms. They are familiar with the governmental policies; upcoming technologies; the market rate of gold; global competitions; and change in consumer demands, jewellery fashion, and so on. They adjust their business and marketing strategies to survive in the jewellery market.

Generally, the owner of small (*swarnakars*) jewellery shops manage their business themselves with the help of a couple of *karigars*; they do not need managers. The middle *swarnakars*, however, run their business by employing managers, who can deal with the customers professionally. These managers need to have education, experience and skill in excelling in their job. It found that 36 of small *swarnakars*, 21 of middle *swarnakars*, 45 of *karigars* have decided to take up this occupation as their careers. From this, it is analysed that the ratio of the *karigars* is more than the other categories of the traditional *swarnakars* in Siliguri because they are mainly belong to the Bengali and Bihari community who have immigrated to this place for means of earning a living (Chattopadhyaya 1987:475). They are the dominating group in terms of several jewellery workshops available in Siliguri. They are the gold jewellery *karigars* who have learnt the skill of making jewellery from the small *swarnakars* and the senior *karigars* who are working in various *karkhanas*. The next dominating categories are small *swarnakars* who have started their jewellery trade after the formation of Siliguri market. Siliguri Jewellery market came into existence by the middle *swarnakars* who have developed their business far ahead from other categories of the *swarnakars* in Siliguri.

## 2.4 Distribution of Traditional *swarnakars* in Different Parts of Siliguri

The jewellery market in Siliguri was first setup in Hill Cart Road, the heart of Siliguri, and from there the business spreaded into the areas of Khudiram Pally, Bidhan Market, Mahabirsthan, Seth Sri Lal Market and lately in Sevoke Road. Negligible number of small *swarnakars* owning small jewellery shops can be traced in some other parts of the city.



Source: Primary Survey, 2015-18

Note: Total Number of Traditional *swarnakars* is 102

For my study, therefore, I have selected traditional *swarnakars* from their dominant areas like Hill Cart Road, Khudiram Pally, Bidhan Market, Kalibari Road near New Cinema Road at Mahabirsthan, and Seth Sri Lal Market.

The oldest cluster of traditional *swarnakars* was at Hill Cart Road. Initially, both before and after Independence, a small number of Bihari *sonars* and Bengali *swarnakars* had set up their usury business or “*sudher byabsha*” in this area. A section from these early traders, in course of time, had set up their middle-scale gold jewellery shops in Hill Cart Road. Out of 102 case studies done in Hill Cart Road, 8 middle *swarnakar* and 8 *karigars* were from this area. The reason for an equal percentage of middle *swarnakar* and *karigar* is the presence of *karkhanas* and gold refinery. The percentage of middle and small *swarnakars* are unequal in Hill Cart Road where only 6 small *swarnakars* are in the process of upgrading their jewellery business by accepting the module of a corporate structure onto their business. It is found that few of the small *swarnakars* and *karigars* failed to maintain their family business and resulted in closing down of

hereditary jewellery business. *Karigars* in this area, moreover, works in gold refinery workshops and manufacture gold jewellery for wholesale markets. Interestingly, there are few *karkhanas* where Bihari *karigars* manufacture silver jewellery for the consumers and supply those silver jewellery to small and middle *swarnakars* after getting a contract from them. It is observed that the small and middle *swarnakars* have discontinued in making silver jewellery and they prefer purchasing ready-made silver jewellery products from the *karkhanas*. The reason behind this rejection is that they prefer trading and dealing with gold as the profit margin is high compare to that of silver.

Mahabirsthan Market is one of the adjoining markets of Siliguri that is dominated by small *swarnakars* and *karigars*. This Kali Bari Road and New Cinema Road used to be the second clustered area after Hill Cart Road where the *swarnakars* from Bangladesh, Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar and Alipurduar had set up their gold jewellery business. Chart 2.1 shows that Kali Bari Road and New Cinema Road in Mahabirsthan Market is dominated by the 10 small *swarnakars*' shops; followed by *karigars*, and only 4 middle *swarnakars*. Like, Hill Cart Road, this area also has three *karkhanas* and one gold refinery. It is observed that 46 small *swarnakars* and middle *swarnakars* in this area follows the traditional model of running their business where only three hierarchical division of workforce are detected .i.e. owner who plays the role of manager and cashier, salesmen who were mainly the members of the family and lastly, the *karigars*. An informal relationship among the workers are built on the faith of humanity that binds them to work interdependently.

The third clustered area is Seth Sri Lal Market where the numbers of traditional *swarnakars* are comparatively lesser than the other clustered areas in Siliguri. Over here, middle *swarnakars* are the only one who are running jewellery retail store in this area. Out of 21 middle *swarnakars*, seven of them are from Marwari Community who are ruling the area with their retail gold and diamond jewellery for last fifty years.

The fourth clustered area is Khudiram Pally where the *karigars* or the manufacturers of the gold and silver jewellery are the domineering groups of this area. They are comprised of 18 of the total traditional *swarnakars* in Siliguri. This place has become the hub of the *karigars* where more than 870 *karigars* are working in this place, said by

Mr. P Roy (Ex-President of Khudiram Pally Association), aged 47, middle *swarnakar*. He said tentatively there are 300 jewellery workshops run by the *karigars* in this area. Chart 2.1 shows that the percentage of small *swarnakars* and middle *swarnakars* are relatively low from the percentage of *karigars* are concerned .i.e. 6 small *swarnakars* and 1 middle *swarnakar*.

The fifth clustered area is Bidhan Market where the leading group to run the jewellery shops are small *swarnakars*. They consist of 14 followed by 9 *karigars* and 1 middle *swarnakars* out of 102 case studies in Siliguri. It is found from the case studies that all the small *swarnakars* in this area had some connections with the particular middle *swarnakar* situated in this area (i.e. Bidhan Jewellery Works).

Mr. K Roy, aged 45 says, “*My father worked as a karigar in Bidhan Jewellery Work. He learnt the skill for making jewellery from them and had established his individual business 16 years back. Then he established 4 shops for me and my brothers. I am the elder son so I am continuing my father business but my brothers had separately established their shop with the help of my father*”.

Mr. L Karmakar, aged 71, a small *swarnakar*, says, “*I am the owner of this shop. I have learnt the skill of making jewellery by myself. Only Bidhan Jewellery Works and I used to dominate the jewellery market in this area. I am happy to hand over my business to my grandson*”.

It is also evident that each cluster is comprised of small *swarnakars*, medium *swarnakar*, and *karigars*. Each clustered area is dominated by one leading group of traditional *swarnakars* i.e. small *swarnakars* are superseding in Kalibari Road and New Cinema Road in Mahabirsthan and Bidhan Market; Middle *Swarnakars* are governing in Seth Sri Lal Market and Hill Cart Road; and lastly, the *karigars* are ruling the Khudiram Pally area.

### ***2.5 Social Background of the Traditional swarnakars in Siliguri***

The traditional *swarnakars* came from various social environments having a unique caste background, from distinct community and from diverse geographical locations. Despite this diversity, these *swarnakars* act in cooperation to sustain their hereditary

business of retailing, manufacturing and wholesaling of gold jewellery product. The social background of each category of traditional *swarnakars* is outlined below in details.

### **2.5.1 Social Order of the Traditional *swarnakars***

The social order of the traditional *swarnakars* is recognized by their hereditary occupation instead of their prescribed caste-based occupation. The caste-based social order “not only prescribes ... a hereditary occupation but also discourages his attempts to surmount the occupational barriers” (Driver 1962). Flexibility in picking out and accepting a fresh mode of life after involving themselves into this occupation is observed since the sixteenth century, where many castes have accepted different caste occupation by excluding their prescribed caste occupations (Ghurye 1950:15-17). Agriculture, for instance, is common as an occupation for every caste groups. This flexibility in choosing caste occupation is not a recent phenomenon; rather it is an effect of British capitalistic rule over India that has dissolved the caste system in terms of economic activity. To some extent, caste continued to play its role in the cultural life of the people in this century, .i.e. in the case of marriage (endogamy). It is observed that individuals from different caste background had accepted *swarnakars* as their family occupations. Chart 2.2 shows that out of 102 case studies, 29.1 per cent of people from *Karmakar* Caste (caste-wise they are blacksmith) became the dominant group to continue this occupation, followed by 19.6 per cent from *Bihari Sonar* (Bihari goldsmiths) and 19.6 per cent from *Kumhar* Castes (Caste by pottery) who has accepted the work of goldsmith as their hereditary occupations. The third highest percentage is 4.9 per cent of *swarnakars* castes. Other than the *swarnakars* and sonar groups, a higher rate of occupational mobility is observed among *Karmakar* and *Kumhar* caste (who falls apart from other thirteen caste groups) for choosing this occupation as a means for living. They are traditionally associated with this occupation for more than three generations. Occupational mobility are also witnessed among the other caste groups such as Agarwal, Brahmin, General, *Karmakar*, *Kayastha*, *Kulin*, and *Namasudra* (expects *Bihari Sonars*, *Sonars*, *Maratha Sonars*, and *Swarnakars*). They have succeeded in maintaining and continuing the work of goldsmith as their family occupations over three generations that ultimately turned out to be as their hereditary occupation. Presently, caste by *Karmakar* (blacksmith) accepted this occupation as their caste occupations as for several generations they are attached with this occupation

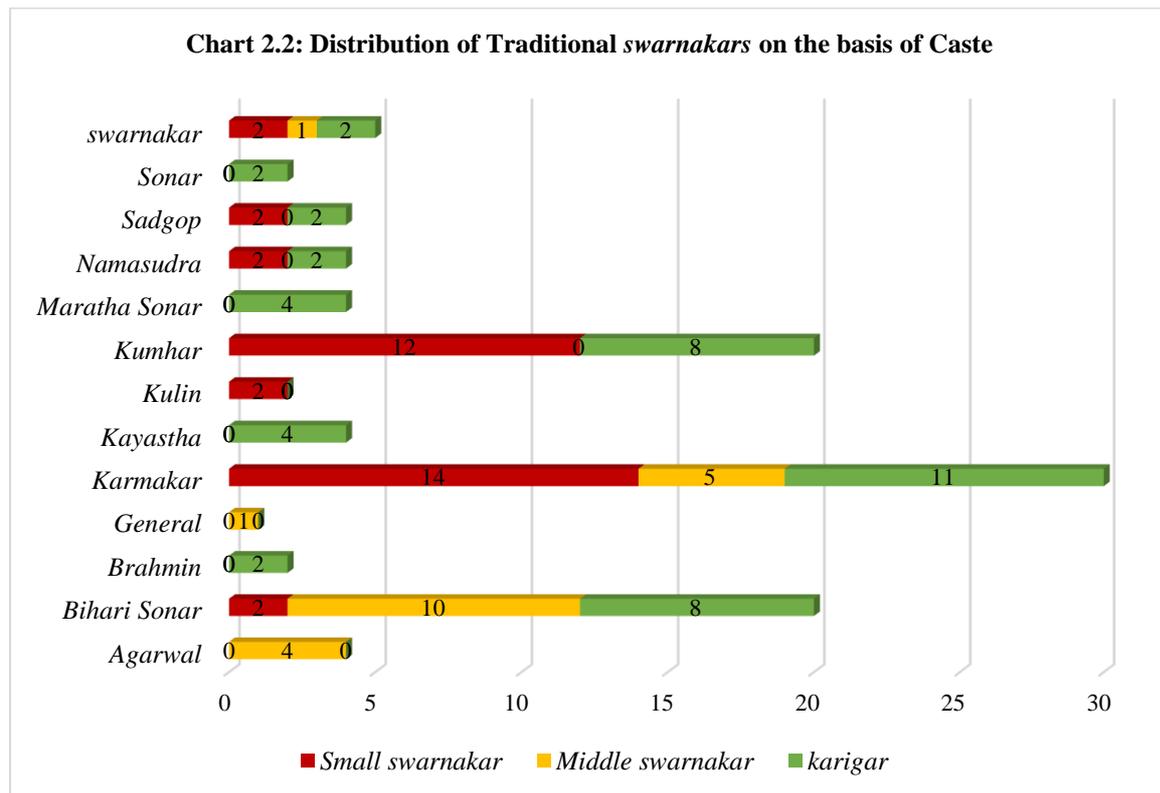
and this has become their hereditary occupation. For this reason, they identify themselves as 'Caste of goldsmith' or *swarnakars*. For example, one of the respondents Mr. S Karmakar, aged 45, a small *swarnakars*, replied, "*it's my hereditary caste occupations. My grandfather had a shop in Bangladesh*". While taking information about his caste he identifies himself as, "*Karmakar, my surname*". When I cross-examined him that *karmakars* are blacksmith or ironsmiths but not goldsmiths. He replied as, "*it is the same thing. We also make jewellery. We identify our self as not less than swarnakars, karmakars are swarnakars, and there is no difference between us*". In Siliguri, maximum (30 per cent) of traditional *swarnakars* belong to the caste of *karmakars* who are continuing this jewellery business in all the clusters of Siliguri market. On the contrary, the *kumhar* caste (potters) identifies themselves as caste of potters. They have accepted this occupation because they have learned the skill of making jewellery from previous generations.

Findings of the data reveals that the middle *swarnakars* in Hill Cart Road are the Bihari sonars who have migrated from Yangoon and have successfully preserved their caste-based hereditary occupation by upgrading their jewellery shop into corporate model to administer their business. They are the first in Siliguri to manage a divisional structure of business by involving their family members into the business and to hold the responsibility for each segmented part of the jewellery business.

Mr. V Prasad, a middle *swarnakar*, aged 27, said he has done specialization on jewellery trading, designing and marketing. His grandfather is the head of the business who is the bursar, and he and his father deals with the customers. He also looks after the manufacturing department of his business.

This shows that middle *swarnakars* are distributing the workload among the family members to supervise their recruited employees and *karigars* working in jewellery shop. Side by side, Maratha sonar has adjusted themselves into a gold refinery and few of them have turn out to be the gold bullion in Siliguri. Data examined that the *Karmakar* caste holds the highest social order among other caste groups where 13.7 per cent are managing jewellery business as petty bourgeois, 4.9 per cent are as middle *swarnakar* and 10.8 per cent are involved as *karigars*. Second largest is the Bihari

sonar/sonar, who are working in *karkhanas* and working under small *swarnakars* and middle *swarnakars*.



Source: Primary Survey, 2015-18

Note: Total Number of Traditional *swarnakars* is 102

### 2.5.2 Educational Level of the Traditional *swarnakars*

The social mobility of an individuals are regulated by the degree of educational knowledge attained by them through conventional teaching where schooling plays a crucial role for the social growth of an individual with a purpose to achieve an economic growth. Education widens the scope of an individual where they can involve themselves in diverse forms of social situations that would helps them become a self-assured person. For traditional *swarnakars*, learning the art for making gold jewellery and knowing the business is mandatory for them, as carrying out their hereditary business is obligatory. Column Chart 2.3 clearly shows the formal educational level of traditional *swarnakars* in Siliguri, where the length of the column indicates the measured value of the traditional *swarnakars* who have attained formal educational credentials from a recognised institute. It is found that *karigars* are educational

backward than small and middle *swarnakars*. Out of 102 traditional *swarnakars*, 14 *karigars*, 6 small *swarnakars* and 2 middle *swarnakars* have dropped out from primary education. The reason behind dropping out at primary level is the absence of parental support and lack of encouragement to pursue school education.

Mr. L Pal, aged 71, a small *swarnakar* says, *“Involving my children into this occupation for learning the skills for making jewellery, at an early age, making them experts in handling jewellery business. Getting educational knowledge will help to make people grow in terms of knowledge but that is not going to help in our family business. Staying with me in business has made them a proficiency in holding the business. But we didn’t apply the same thing with my grandson. In this generation, educational status and economic status is important so my grandson is both managing his master degree in MBA and also learning the skills of family business.”*

Mr. H Sonar, aged 51, a small *swarnakars*, emphasises that proficiency in creating a flawless gold jewellery needs daily practices. So, for practising and learning the skills from *karigars*, knowing the business skills and to be with be his father at jewellery shop was his daily routine. Visiting jewellery shop has become compulsory for him rather going to school. Curiosity for learning more about the family business was arise in this process, which lead to school dropout.

The maximum school dropout are seen in the middle school (Class 5-Class9) where 44 out of 102 traditional *swarnakars* have left their school without completing Secondary (Class 10). Among them, 24 *karigar*, 18 small *swarnakars* and 2 middle *swarnakars* belong to this category. *Karigars* are the one who mostly left schooling after Class 4 and few of them has not given their Class 9 examination. These two middle *swarnakars* are old people who visits his jewellery shop run by his son and grandson. They were the first generation people who have started this business. The reason for school dropouts is the indifferent attitudes towards studies and prioritizing this occupation over schooling. According to the findings, around 64.70 per cent of traditional *swarnakars*, who were unable to achieve the degree of Class X.

Mr. R Dutta, aged 32, a small *swarnakars*, says, *“I still remember, every day my grandfather took me to this shop. During those days it was the chance to move out from*

*the home to meet many people in the shop. Karigars who were working in our shop, provided me with jewellery making tools to teach me the process of making jewellery. When I was a kid, I used to play with those tools and tried to copy their activities for making jewellery. This regular visit has developed an interest to get into the family business. I started practising with bronze, then silver and lastly with the soft metallic gold. It feels so good when I see my craft has taken a beautiful shape. I started giving more time in crafting jewellery and developed an interest in learning the skills for making people work, dealing with the customers, etc.”*

This is the reason for which he started bunking his school for visiting his family jewellery shop to learn the craft of making jewellery, which is why he planned to receive formal education till class 8 and to join the family business. The Chart 2.3 shows that two small *swarnakars* had successfully completed secondary education (Class 10) because their parents have supported them to study till secondary education so that they can apply for a government job. It is an option their parents want them to protect them from future complications in maintaining the family jewellery business as during those days their parents had countered with several complications in sustaining jewellery business. On the contrary, small *swarnakars* with graduation degree are those who belonged to the present generation. They are the young owners who have inherited their respective family business from their father. From Chart 2.3, it is noticed that 8 small *swarnakars* out of 102 traditional *swarnakars* are petty-owners who have received a proper formal education as they understand the necessity of getting this degree. Hence, they are educationally forward from the *karigars* and other small *swarnakars*.

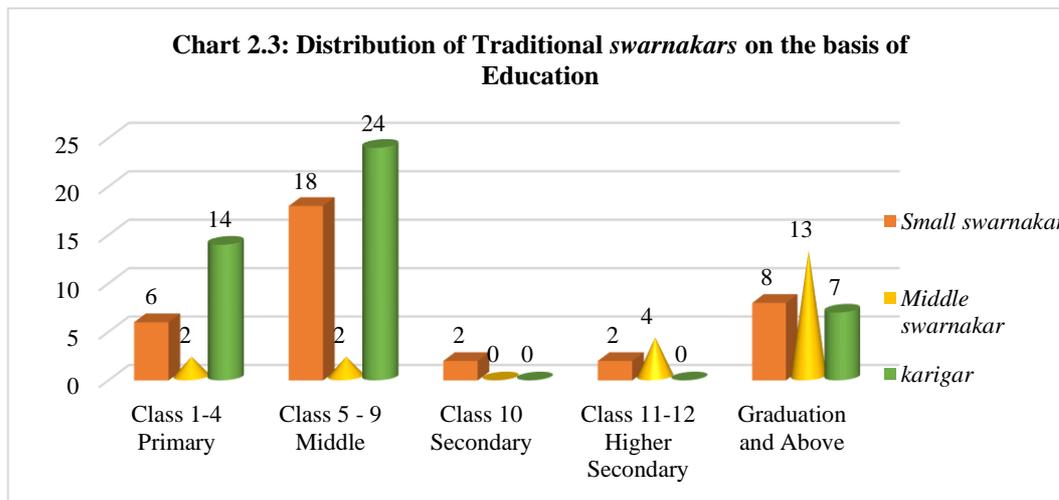
Among the middle *swarnakars*, 13 have completed Class 10 (Secondary) and four have successfully qualified achieved Class 12 (Higher Secondary) degree. The percentage is higher than small *swarnakars* in terms of formal way of receiving educational qualifications. In support of this, the social and economic status of middle *swarnakars* are placed into top-rank because they are the originator of the jewellery business and commercial activities in Siliguri. They have migrated to this place from Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Bidhan Nagar, Bihar, East Bengal (presently known as Bangladesh) and from Yangoon (Burma). Their jewellery shops used to dominate Siliguri jewellery market before the entry of the branded corporate jewellery showrooms in Siliguri.

At long last, the backbone of the jewellery industry is the gold jewellery makers or *karigars*. They acquired the skill for making jewellery from the experienced and learned *karigars*, either from their ancestors who were engaged in this business or from the small *swarnakars*. For learning the techniques of designing and manufacturing jewellery, a formal educational certificate is inessential so it observed that 22 *karigars* from 102 traditional *swarnakars* in Siliguri had discontinued studying at school after ensuing Class 4 (Primary Level). Their reason for school dropout is similar to that of small *swarnakars*. They have a casual behaviour towards their education as they do not have any awareness, lack family support to pursue education, and most importantly, they have to work as a financial assistant to support a family. They have seen that involving this occupation needs the craftsmanship in making jewellery where formal education is not required so they joined up to this occupation. Till present, to engage in this occupation as a *karigar* a school certified degree in manufacturing jewellery is not mandatory. Only things that matter is to keep on practising the hand skill for making different types of jewellery. This practice of manufacturing jewellery makes the *karigars* proficient in this artwork. They became popular for their hand skill not by their educational certificates.

Mr. C Deb, aged 49, a small *swarnakar*, says “*those jewellery shop owners who had their hereditary business in Siliguri feels to involve oneself in the business rather than wasting time in education*”.

For these reasons, the educational levels of the *karigars* are less. These *karigars* commonly migrate from the neighbouring areas like Bihar, Raiganj, Bidhan Nagar, Mathabhanga and some other adjoining places. They had a similar opinion like Mr. C Deb of discontinuing formal education. Other than these *karigars*, there are few young *karigars* and small *swarnakars* who had completed their graduation from Siliguri College and Surya Sen College, Siliguri. I have collected information that nearly 7 *karigars* and 8 small *swarnakars* out of 102 traditional *swarnakars* had completed graduation degree. Their reason for acquiring higher education is that they know the value of education and they do not want to work as *karigars* like their fathers working in Khudiram Pally, Hill Cart Road and Mahabirsthan. Although they work as a *karigar* but at the same time, they are making an effort to crack miscellaneous competitive exams- like school service exams to improve their social and economic life. For them,

learning the skill of making jewellery is a skill they have learnt for a compulsion to look after their family along with their father but they have a different plan for better life. Therefore, they aspire for a better job that may give them a status, money and good health.



Source: Primary Survey, 2015-18

Note: Total Number of Traditional *swarnakars* is 102

Again, the Bihari sonars caste and other castes have migrated to this place for its advantageous geographical location. They were involved in the commercial business of trading, transportation and wholesale business other than their caste occupations. Few Bihari sonars, *swarnakars* and other traditional *swarnakars* have discontinued their caste/family occupations, said by Mr. U Prasad, a *karigar*. This change in the mind-set of traditional *swarnakars* is the effect of National Strike 2012 where several small *swarnakars* and *karigars* have allowed their children to take a risk of choosing different occupation than continuing their caste/family-based business as a primary occupation. They are changing their views by inspiring new generation to respect their family traditional business by continuing it as a means of secondary occupation rather than selling off the business to others or by locking down the business. The value of pride to have a jewellery business is a symbol for status hierarchy so they do not want a complete shutdown of their hereditary profession. This thought is the gateway to involve themselves into diversified occupation by inspiring their children to pursue higher education. This shows that the techniques of learning the skills for making jewellery products, dealing with the consumers, managing jewellery business involve the process of socialization, where the children unconsciously depend on their family

values, ideas, attitudes and behaviour to accept their father's occupation/trade. Durkheim's theory of "collective representation" throws some light on the process of socialization where the family members collectively create and formulate the mind-set of the children to take up their hereditary business as a career or to go for diversified occupations. In this process, the culture plays its role in choosing one's occupation and socialised them not moving out of this industry. Thus, the traditional jewellers do not have any degree or certificate course regarding jewellery designing, manufacturing jewellery or any kind of degree regarding management but they have a deeper knowledge of the design, process, equipment, marketing strategy, business strategy related to the production, reproduction of the jewellery only through socialization.

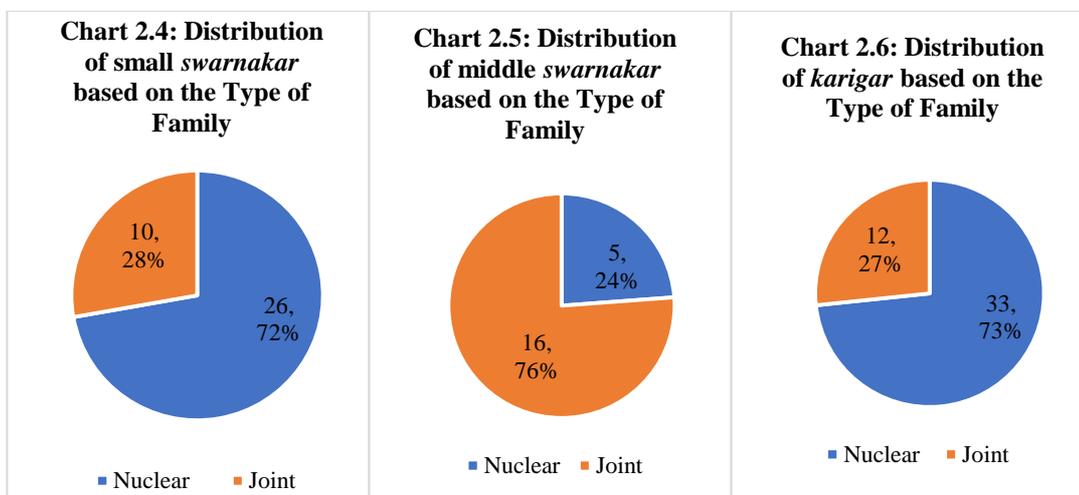
### **2.5.3 Family of the Traditional *swarnakars***

The structure of Indian family is joint family (Mandelbaum 1959, Gore 1965), and joint family is the seed of the family business that cultivate common values and vision for all the family members in order to run the family business successful. A sense of collectivity and rationality has strengthened the true bond of the family members to share their roles and responsibility for the growth of the business. But with the rise of individuality and egoism, the structure of the Indian family has changed into a nuclear family where the husband, his wife, and his unmarried children stay together in a common household having a separate source of income from previous generations. Even though the nature and type of the family have marked a change, the value and vision for choosing a hereditary business is the rational choice to have individual ownership of the business. Siliguri city has pulled inhabitants from different localities for comfortable living and provide them options for a better job opportunity where young energetic individuals from non-caste groups (other than caste by goldsmith) have learnt the handiness for making gold jewellery after working under the authority of jewellery workshop. These categories of workers were formally less educated people who get an opportunity to earn for his family. It is observed that 64 out of 102 traditional *swarnakars* are living in a nuclear family and 38 of them have succeeded in keeping their joint family unbroken. The majority of small *swarnakars* and *karigars* are living in a separate household in the form of the nuclear family compared to middle *swarnakar*. Thus, the nuclear form of family structure is most prevalent among the traditional *swarnakars* in Siliguri.

Mr. K Roy, aged 36, a small *swarnakar*, shared his life experience of how a joint family broke into a nuclear family with each brother having a jewellery shop of their own. His father was merely a *karigar* in Bidhan Jewellery Works, and later he and his father started their own jewellery business in Bidhan Market besides Bidhan Jewellery Works. Three of his younger siblings learnt the craft of making jewellery from him and cooperatively worked together to hold the business strongly. This has helped them to gather enough investment for expanding their business. Eventually, the things changed when his father decided on setting up of separate jewellery shop for each son before their marriage. This led to the formation of nuclearization of the family as well as a separate source of earning and economic stability for them. The rationale for this decision was to avoid future conflicts among the brothers, which may arise due to joint business.

Similarly, Mr. T Roy, aged 46, a small *swarnakar*, has set up his separate jewellery shop in Mahabirasthan two years back as because he felt his elder brother was not sharing the profit of the jointly owned family business to him. After 24 years of the joint family business, he separated himself and to have his shop.

In the Marxian term, the nuclear family carry out ideological functions for capitalism, which is based upon the private ownership of the business where an individual will only think of themselves (nuclear family) but not for the socio-economic function of the family as a whole. Similarly, it is happening in Siliguri city. Interestingly, it is found that separation in business is not separating themselves from the roots of the business. They keep the family pride by keeping 'identical shop name' for new jewellery shop, such as Ajanta Jewellers and New Ajanta Jewellers, Sachindra Jewellers splits into New Sachindra Jewellers in Mahabirasthan, Bidhan Jewellery Works (Bidhan Market) splits into Bidhan Jewellers (Hill Cart Road), Jashomoti Jewellery Store (Hill cart Road) splits into Jashomoti Jewellery Palace (Khudiram Pally) and Jashomoti Mahanam Jewellers (Khudiram Pally).



Source: Primary Survey, 2015-18

Note: Chart 2.4 Total Number of small swarnakars is 36 out of 102 Traditional swarnakars

Chart 2.5 Total Number of middle swarnakars is 21 out of 102 Traditional swarnakars

Chart 2.6 Total Number of karigars is 45 out of 102 Traditional swarnakars

Thus, all these above three charts show that the percentage rate of nuclear family is higher among *karigars* and small *swarnakars*. Total 33 out of 45 *karigars* are living in nuclear family as they have migrated from neighbouring areas by keeping their family behind in a search for a suitable labour-intensive job in Siliguri. Among them, few have set up their manufacturing shops and have kept several *karigars* under them. These recruited *karigars* are their distant kin members or trustable neighbours from the place of residence.

Mr. A Ali, a *Karigar*, aged 37 says, “I came to Siliguri for work. I have learnt the art of making jewellery from Mr L Saha, *karigar* who had his ‘*deserbari*’ at Islampur, who was my neighbour. He works as a jewellery maker in Khudiram Pally manufacturing workshop, brought me here to work with him. I was uncertain about the type of work but he the person who trained me the process of making jewellery. During those initial days, I had to bear own daily expenses so were unable to bring my parents to me and even my parents do not want to stay away from *deserbari*. After two years of hardship, I have offered for partnership in jewellery making workshop. It has given me a feeling of settlement. I got married and brought my wife with me. I send money to my parents and my elder brother is taking care of them.”

Therefore, staying in a nuclear family is not a choice for them rather it is their parents who do not want to leave their roots to settle in a different place. Most of the cases it is found that they cannot afford to bear the expense of all the family members and some of their wives stay with his parents to look after them, few of them personally does not want to come to this place. These are a few reasons for a higher percentage of the nuclear family (see Chart 2.6). The pie chart 2.5 also shows that 16 middle *swarnakars* (15.7 per cent out of 102 traditional *swarnakars*) are continuing their hereditary joint family business for more two generations. They are the most affluent business people who were able to hold a dominant position in the market. They are popularly known for their hereditary jewellery business, and they provide training to the unskilled manual workers to learn about manufacturing gold/silver jewellery. They were the pioneer to hold their joining family business for more 40 years.

The data presented in Table 2.1, represents that 66.7 percentages of the family have accepted small family norms, which constitute a maximum of four members. It is the outcome of migration of people to this place as this occupation has given them a possible way to live their life for better earning and living. This increase in the size of family members occurs due to the involvement of kin members into their family because there was nothing left for them to fall back on their homeland and to continue family occupation. On the contrary, it is observed that four families of middle *swarnakars* had a family size of more than eight. They are the ones who ascribed their family occupation for decades and maintain their joint family business.

**Table 2.1: Classification of Traditional *swarnakars* based on their Number of Family Members**

Number of Family Members	Types of <i>swarnakar</i>			
	Small <i>swarnakar</i>	Middle <i>swarnakar</i>	<i>karigar</i>	Total
≥4	26	5	37	68
5-8	10	12	8	30
>8	0	4	0	4
Total	36	21	45	102

Source: Primary Survey, 2015-18

Note: Total Number of Traditional *swarnakars* 102

Table 2.2 shows that maximum of the traditional *swarnakars* (38.2 per cent) fall under the age category of 46-60 years. The mean age of traditional *swarnakars* is 44.22 years. For small *swarnakars*, 77.8 per cent of them fall into the category of 31-60 years. For

middle *swarnakars*, majority of them fall under the age 46 and above years age category who constitute 52.4 per cent; and 55.5 per cent of *karigar*s fall into the category of 15-45 years of age.

**Table 2.2 Classification of Traditional *swarnakar* based on Age categories**

Types of Traditional <i>swarnakars</i>	Age Group Compositions				Total
	15-30	31-45	46-60	More than 60	
Small <i>swarnakar</i>	2	14	14	6	36
Middle <i>swarnakar</i>	4	6	9	2	21
<i>karigar</i>	11	14	16	4	45
Total	17	34	39	12	102

Source: Primary Survey, 2015-18

Note: Total Number of Traditional *swarnakars* 102

**Table 2.3 Mean Age of Traditional *swarnakar***

Type of Traditional <i>swarnakars</i>	Mean Age in Years
Small <i>swarnakar</i>	48.94
Middle <i>swarnakar</i>	43.43
<i>karigar</i>	40.80

Source: Primary Survey, 2015-18

Note: Total Number of Traditional *swarnakars* 102

## ***2.6 Economic Background of the Traditional *swarnakars* in Siliguri***

It has been perceived throughout the history that for living life human being always engage themselves in some form of economic activities in bringing about some forms of ‘means of subsistence’ (Thompson 1996:175) for surviving. This action of the human has created social division of labour where an individual generates mean of subsistence not only for own-self but also for the others to generate the same ‘means’ together for living a common life. This generating means-for-subsistence has increased social differentiation when everyone participates in making a coarse product. This social differentiation has shaped individual consciousness that they depend “on the material conditions determining their production” (Thompson 1996:175). Therefore, the economic condition of the traditional *swarnakars* is going to determine the social

position they hold in Siliguri area. Karl Marx has stated, “the totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society”<sup>1</sup>.

### **2.6.1 Family Business of the Traditional *swarnakars***

In *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argued that family has lost its basic functions with the rise of capitalism (Joseph 2005:27)<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, the traditional caste-based hereditary jewellery business has passed through layers of fragmentation—from joint family ownership to nuclear form of ownership and finally to a one-person household. The family business is disseminated from the single-family business unit into multiple separate units depending on the number of children in the family. Breaking up of family business into several individual businesses has increased individual ownership of the jewellery business in Siliguri. This fragmentation of family jewellery business is observed more in the areas of Bidhan Market Road and Hill Cart Road. Inclusion of people into a non-heritable occupation is mostly observed among the makers of gold jewellery in Siliguri. The craft of making jewellery is no longer a caste-based hereditary occupation rather it is a family-based hereditary occupation. It is observed from the column chart 2.7 is that in total there are 46 (45.1 per cent) traditional *swarnakars* who are continuing their family-based hereditary jewellery making occupation whereas 56 (54.1 per cent) of traditional *swarnakars* have started their career by involving themselves into jewellery business in Siliguri.

When considering the types of traditional *swarnakars* it is evident that the majority of the *karigars* 36 (80 per cent of the *karigars*) are in new this field and only 9 of them are continuing their hereditary business. One of the direct reasons for this huge disparity could be attributed to the economic growth of hereditary *karigars*, which help them to open their jewellery shop and becoming *small swarnakar* and *middle swarnakar*. Upward intergenerational mobility is observed among the *karigars*. The second major reason behind the majority *karigars* falling into a non-hereditary category is their migration from various places in search of a job, which made them take up this occupation. A common pattern was observed that Small *swarnakars* in Siliguri works

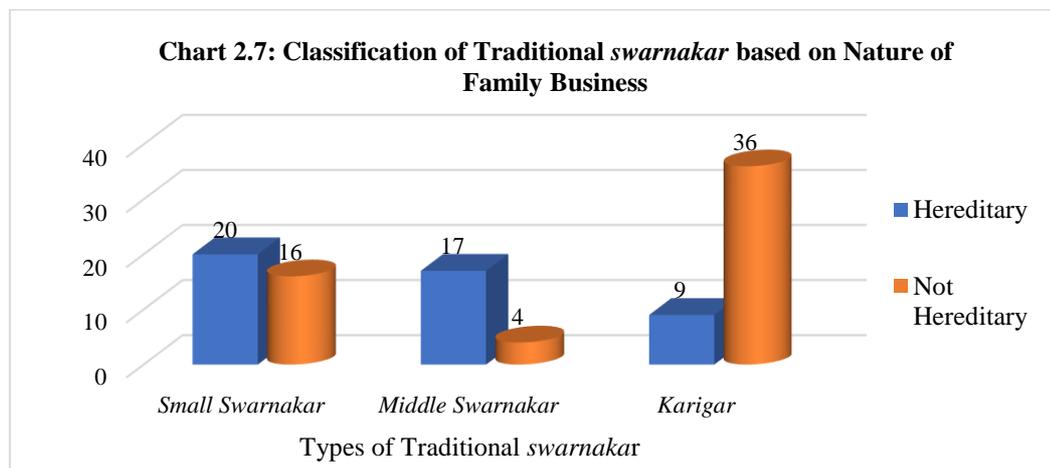
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<sup>1</sup> Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859), Selected Works of Karl Marx, page 113, Retrieved September 13, 2020

(<https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Selected-Works.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Marx and Engels stated in *The Communist Manifesto* that “The bourgeoisie has torn from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduce the family relations to a merely money relations”.

as a petty-bourgeoisie because they are the one whose previous generations work as *karigars* in Siliguri, among them 20 (55.55 per cent of small *swarnakars*) are continuing their hereditary business. Then the Middle *swarnakars* has an opposite scenario when compared with the *karigars*, consists of 4 (19 per cent of the middle *swarnakars*) non-hereditary occupation. They are predominantly those rich Marwaris who have set up their jewellery showrooms in Siliguri without having any family history of the jewellery business

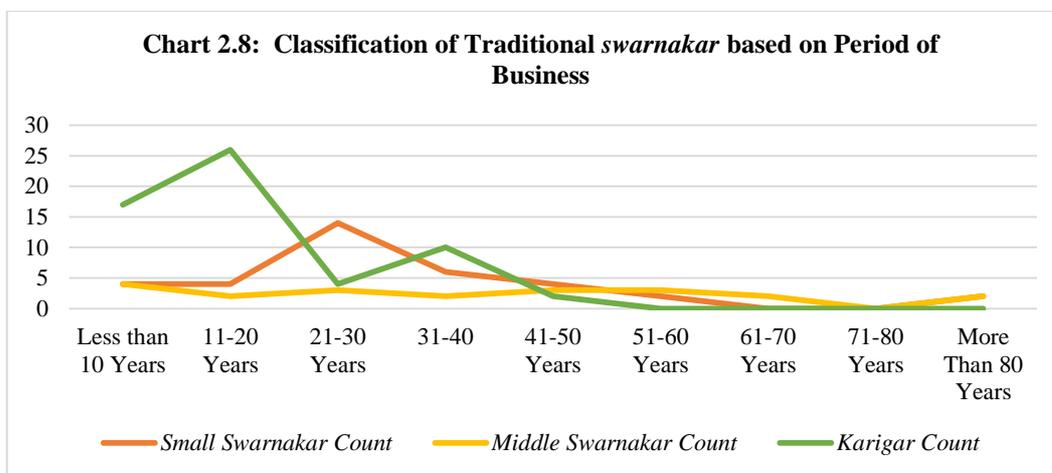


Source: Primary Survey, 2015-2018

Note: Total Number of Traditional *swarnakars* is 102

### 2.6.2 Period of Business of Traditional *swarnakars*

It is found from the study that 4.3 per cent of traditional *swarnakars* are continuing their jewellery business for more than eighty years (R P Jewellers established in 1877 and Brinda Prasad Saraf in the year 1910). They are balancing their respective family business by producing new trendy jewellery on one side and the other side, few of them have preserved their traditional business ethics to strengthen their hereditary jewellery business. Jewellery business at persistent is the product of dedication towards the family jewellery business. Line Chart 2.8 gives a very vivid picture of the duration of a particular occupation over years or generations. The business period of *karigars* is shorter compared to the small *swarnakars* and middle *swarnakars*. As 17 *karigars* are there in this occupation for less than 10 years and 12 *karigars* are in business from 10-20 years that constitute the major section of 64.44 per cent of *karigars* having a shorter period of the business.

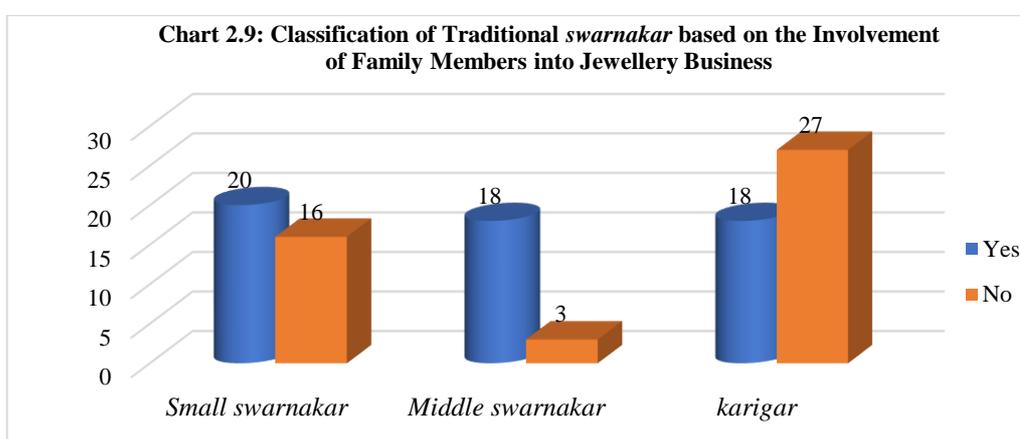


Source: Primary Survey, 2015-2018

Note: Total Number of Traditional *swarnakars* is 102

### 2.6.3 Position Held by the Family Members in Jewellery Business

*Swarnakars* are those people who have their joint ownership family business. They are the makers of gold jewellery so all the members of the family learn the skill of making jewellery from their family members. Learning the technique of making different types of jewellery is a part of the socialisation process within the family. As it used to be a hereditary joint business, there is a probability of family member plays some role in running the business. From Chart 2.9, it is found that in this contemporary society, 56 (54.9 per cent of traditional *swarnakars*) families involved their kin into jewellery business irrespective of their family structure where the wife/ son shares little responsibility for managing the jewellery business.



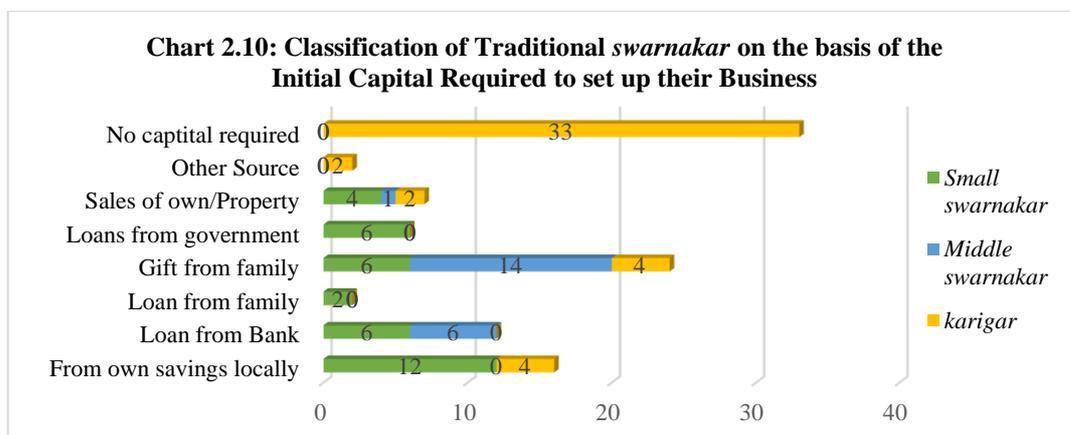
Source: Primary Survey, 2015-2018

Note: Total Number of Traditional *swarnakars* is 102

#### **2.6.4 Initial Resources Required for the Establishment of Jewellery Business**

A perfect plan is required to set up a business but to implement the plan into reality financial assistance is essential for it. *Swarnakars* and *karigars* owned family business where all the members worked together to run their limited structural organization. Functional diversification is closed among the family members where people are not specialized on the type of works they do rather all the male members in family are engrossed in multiple works related to jewellery making and selling. It is the efforts of all the family members particularly the male members, who have joint ownership of the jewellery business. As the majority of the jewellery business in Siliguri is a hereditary business, so the column Chart 2.10 shows that 24 traditional *swarnakars* are continuing their family jewellery business as a legacy that means the previous generation has passed down the business to the present *swarnakar*. It is followed by 33 traditional *swarnakars*, especially the *karigars* who are new to this occupation and are working as a worker on others business or jewellery workshop does not require any capital for business as they do not own any business of their own. Traditional *swarnakars* who learnt the skills of making jewellery by working as a *karigar* in jewellery workshop or under the small and medium *swarnakars* set up their separate jewellery business for the last two generations. While setting up of business they have taken loans from the government, bank and have also sold their property to establish their jewellery business. It is found that 12 small *swarnakars* had established their separate jewellery shop from their savings. This highlights that by establishing separate business of their own these small *swarnakars* have become so independent and economically rich that from their saving they have established their separate jewellery business. Interestingly, it is found that with a majority 14 middle *swarnakars* are continuing their family business so they have received this business as a gift.

The concept of “Financial Capital and interest” formulated by Marx can be used to explain this phenomenon. It expresses that the amount of money received from the family members or governments or any other persons for the business is used to generate surplus value where the interest of the loan should be paid back to those financial capitalist leaders and the rest amount for the producer itself.



Source: Primary Survey, 2015-2018

Note: Total Number of Traditional swarnakars is 102

### 2.6.5 Duration of Work of Traditional swarnakars

Traditional swarnakars in Siliguri occupied themselves in work for 9 to 10 hours per day, but the karigars starts their day by reaching workshop in the morning around 8:30 am. The workshop is generally opened either by the shop owner or by the senior-most karigar, who is entrusted with the responsibility. If the owner, especially small and medium swarnakars or the senior karigar arrives late, the rest of the karigars have to wait in front of the workshop, on the road. On most occasions, they have to wait for 20 to 30 minutes before the workplace is opened.

In the words of one of the respondents Mr. R Karmakar, aged 41, karigar, who is working distinct under a jewellery shop owner, says, “I come to the workshop within 8:30 am or else the shop owner gets angry. But when he comes late, I have to wait for him outside the shop and this is not fair”. On the contrary the small swarnakars or the karigars who have their shop they maintain their schedule of work. For example, Mr. U Prasad opens his workshop around 8:00 am to 8:30 am during the summer season and; after 10:00 am in the winter season. He is punctual about his timing. He thinks for every business a routine should be followed. This routine form of work helps maintain and run the business properly. The customers would know about the availability of time to visit his workshop. Even now when he has a less customer inflow, he opens his workshop on time without fail.

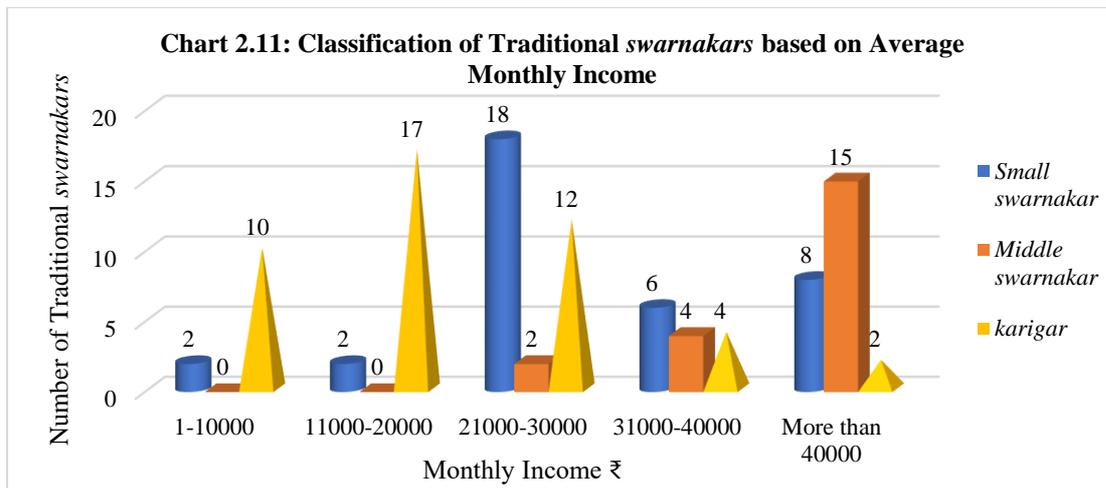
He said, “It became a habit to open the workshop on time. Although the present scenario is different from the past scenario where I used to get a good inflow of works to do now

*I seat ideal, read the newspaper, wait for flying customers/ jewellery shop owners to come. But I am punctual about the duration of my work”.*

Thus, the perspectives of the *karigars* get changed when they work in someone else’s workshop and when they work in their own workshop, the duration of work also changes. The working hour is long and the *environment* within the workshop is unhygienic, to say the least; the *karigars* get completely exhausted and fatigued by the end of the long working day compared to small and medium *swarnakars*. In general, they are expected to work for 10-11 hours a day. By the end of the day the *karigars*, in general, lose their energy and concentration. Small *swarnakars* come 30 minutes to 1 hour late after their *karigars* open their shops and they again take break nearly for 2 to 3 hours from 2 pm to 5 pm. Their duration of work is much less than the *karigars*, managers, and salesman. On the other hand, middle *swarnakars* visit their shop only for 1 hour in the morning and 3 hours in the evening. Their duration of work is flexible because they have decentralized the works among the *karigars*, salesman and manager who have been specially recruited for maintaining and managing the jewellery shop. Visiting time for the shop for them keeps changing. Therefore, the closing time of the workshop is not fixed, and it varies with the varying workload and seasons. The duration of work is fixed for the *karigars* or the employees such as managers including salesman and salesgirls; but not for the owner of the jewellery shop i.e. small *swarnakars* and middle *swarnakars*. The duration for staying back at the shop by the small *swarnakars* is from 11:00am to 1:30 pm. Then they go back home for lunch and came back to the shop at 5 pm. Till 8 pm, the owner of the small *swarnakar* jewellery shop keeps his shop open, whereas the middle *swarnakars* usually stay in their shops in the morning for one hour and return in the evening around 6 pm and stays till 8 pm. On the contrary, middle *swarnakars* assigned their work to their manager of the shop so they spend a lesser amount of time in the shop as compared to the small *swarnakars*, *karigar*, salesmen and salesgirls. However, the time of closing the shop varies from area to area. It is found that at Khudirampally area and Bidhan Market they try to close the shop around 8 pm, at Hill Cart Road and Seth Sri Lal Market they close the shop before 8:30pm, and at Kalibari Road and New Cinema Road the shops are closed at 8:30pm to 9:00pm.

### 2.6.6 The Income of Traditional swarnakars

It is found from Chart 2.11, 32 (31.4 per cent) traditional *swarnakars*' net income is in between ₹21000-30000 per month consists of 18 are small *swarnakars*, 2 are from middle *swarnakars* and 12 are from *karigars*. It is realised that the middle *swarnakars* who had recently started their jewellery trade in Siliguri for last 4 years, their net monthly profit range between ₹21000 and ₹40000. Again, 24.5 per cent of traditional *swarnakars* earn more than ₹40000. The economic position of the small *swarnakars* and *karigars* is much less than middle *swarnakars*.



Source: Primary Survey, 2015-2018

Note: Total Number of Traditional *swarnakars* is 102

### 2.7 Summary of the Chapter

Identifying the traditional *swarnakars* in Siliguri is the core purpose of this chapter. They are the one who has brought an opportunity for the non-caste sections to take this occupation as their career. Siliguri is best known as the commercial city of North Bengal that has seen gleams of massive migration from various parts of neighbouring districts and countries. The history of the jewellery business in Siliguri date back seventy years. During that time, a countable number of traditional *swarnakars* from Bengali and Bihari community had their jewellery business and one Punjabi Khatri caste (Seth) family had '*sudher-bepsha*'. The study has been conducted on traditional *swarnakar* primarily based on Interview Schedule where I have used open-ended questions for qualitative analysis where all the respondents are free to give their opinions, I have also made several tables, a chart for quantitative understanding of 102 traditional *swarnakars*.

First, to make it simple and to recognize the traditional *swarnakar*, they are categorized into three categories based on the nature of work they perform or they are occupied with. Those three categories are *karigars* (makers of gold jewellery), small *swarnakars* (running jewellery business for two generations) and middle *swarnakars* (running their hereditary jewellery business minimum for three generations).

Second, it is found that the hub of Siliguri jewellery market is not concentrated at a specific market area, therefore four different locations in Siliguri metropolitan areas. Among those locations, the concentrations of the *karigars* are found in Khudiram Pally, small *swarnakars* in Mahabirsthan and Bidhan Market and Middle *swarnakars* in Hill Cart Road and Seth Sri Lal Market.

Third, it is obtained from the quantitative data that 55 out of 102 traditional *swarnakars* are continuing their caste-based hereditary occupation. The flexibility in choosing diverse occupation has made uneducated or less educated and economically depressed persons to involve themselves in this occupation, because for making gold jewellery only the knowledge for the craft making is required. It is found that 66 per cent of traditional *swarnakars* are class X dropout and 7.8 per cent were class XII dropout. These are due to the lack of educational interest, lack of family support and the tendency among parents to push their children to the workforce for generating family income. Therefore, the people who know the art for making jewellery or those who think this occupation give better living are in demand for the traditional *swarnakars*.

Fourth, the motive for involving themselves into jewellery work at an early age is to get accustomed to their hereditary family jewellery business by contributing themselves in work (middle *swarnakars*) and for supporting the family financially small *swarnakars* and *karigars* engage themselves in this occupation. Then again, it is found that except middle *swarnakar* (76 per cent lives in a joint family), the other two categories of traditional *swarnakars* preferred to inhabit in a nuclear family (small *swarnakars* 72 per cent and *karigars* 73 per cent) and the mean age of traditional *swarnakars* is 44.22 years.

Fifth, the craft of making jewellery has become family-based hereditary occupation rather than caste-based occupation. Even though it is observed that the majority of those

who have accepted this occupation belong to the *karigar* category, it is only the middle *swarnakar* who are conserving their hereditary family business for several decades in Siliguri, followed by small *swarnakars*. For this reason, they have received this business as a ‘gift from family’. Other than hereditary occupation, few of them have started their business by taking a loan from the bank and by investing on it from their savings.