

Life on Waters: A Sociological Account of the Kaibartta Community in Juanshai Hoar (Kishoreganj)

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Abstract

This study has been organized to illustrate the lives and livelihood of the Kaibartta community in the Juanshai hoar (Kishoreganj) area from a sociological perspective. This community, in fact, has completed a very long journey throughout the history of human civilization mainly in two countries namely India and Bangladesh. Although this community is often regarded as 'primitive' and 'uncultured' by the outsiders, they have a rich legacy of culture and livelihood practices. Their noteworthy contribution for sustaining people's lives and their cultural legacy throughout the history has made the whole society indebted to them whether they are paid back with appropriate treatment or not. As has been noticed, the Kaibartta society is currently being subjected to diverse exploitations by the powerful segments of society. Their earnings, livelihood, culture, land and fishing rights- all are at stake. Though the claim for fishing rights over certain rivers that rightfully belong to the Kaibartta is a need of the time, their claims are falling on deaf ears on the part of the policy makers. Being the oldest fishing professional group and fisher-folk community in the country they had never been focused in any national level study or even had the local priorities. The study is inevitable for such a reason that the Kaibartta community is now in their stage of extinction despite their noteworthy contributions to the society.

Key Words

Kaibartta community, Fishing, Fishermen, Haor area, Exclusion.

1. Introduction

Some of the world's major river systems like the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna made the delta in which Bangladesh is situated. Besides these three main river systems, the country is over flowed with many other rivers, rivulets and canals. This crisscrossed lying network of the rivers and canals and the seasonal monsoon submerging floodplains recognized the

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country as a land of water and wetlands (IUCN BD, 2004; Rahman et al., 2002).

More than two-thirds of the country's land mass can be classified as wetlands according to the definition enunciated in the RAMSAR Convention- "Diverse, dynamic ecosystems such as mangrove forests, freshwater marshes, natural lakes, manmade reservoirs, oxbow lakes, fresh water depressions, fresh ponds and the tanks characterized the wetlands of Bangladesh" (IUCN BD, 2004).

This definitional view from RAMSAR Convention allows us to classify the haor¹ perfectly. Basically, the haor is one of the varieties of wetlands which is actually a water body remains full of water at least six to eight (6-8) months or more throughout the year. The northeast part of the country is signified with having this distinct type of landscape known as wetlands. According to Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development Board (BHWD), there are four hundred and fourteen haors while Water Development Board (WDB) estimated four hundred and twenty three haors respectively in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2010). The haor area covers over forty eight upazilla² of seven districts which is more than one sixth of the whole area of the country (CA, Aug 2011:59).

Not only for the geographical diversity but also for its economic, social, cultural and natural beauty, the haor has a great importance in the life of the people in our country. This haor along with its floodplains³ serves the nation every year with a huge amount of paddy, fishes and crops. It has a strong history of cultural roots in the fields of 'Jari', 'Sari', 'Bhatiali', 'Baul', 'Kiccha', 'Geet', 'Pala', 'Kirton' and so on. The two main occupations of the people living in the haor area are farming and fishing. Not surprisingly the occupational trends are very much integrated with their cultural and social life. For some fishing community like *Kaibartta*, *Rajbongshi*, *Jaladas*, *Maimals*, source of livelihood is considered as inherited from their ancestors as is their religions.

The study is narrowed down by exploring only on the *Kaibartta*⁴; a fisher folk community of the Juanshai hoar area who believe in Hindu religion. The main focus of the study is to explore the settlement history and livelihood pattern of the studying community *Kaibartta* as reported by the Key Informants (KI). And a special focus is given towards examining the role of selected social institutions and practices, like conflict resolution mechanisms, social structure, marriage, culture, internal governance etc.

Along with the main research objectives, this study tried to explore the dynamics of their profession 'fishing' as it is inherited from their ancestors. The study has also covered the investigation towards the nature and extent of access of the *Kaibartta* community to the mainstream social services notably health and education.

The main justification of conducting this study is that it is on such a community that is mostly neglected in the society. Being the oldest fishing professional group and fisher-folk community in the country they had never been focused in any national level study or even had the local priorities. The study is inevitable for such a reason that the *Kaibartta* community is now in their stage of extinction as it is traced by the historical and statistical sketches.

2. A Profile of the *Kaibartta* Community

This study is focused on illustrating a sociological account of the *Kaibartta* community in the haor area, so it should have an overview of the previous studies at first. As an insignificant number of studies have been noticed about the *Kaibarttas*, to fulfill its research objectives, this study thereby, deliberately intends to depend on the empirical data.

Though some literature are found which contains the features of their livelihood, but most of them are novels without any academic flavor. It is to say that there have been found no academic work or research paper on *Kaibartta* community except H. H. Risley's publication. This work is performed focusing on the north-western part of Indian subcontinent in 1891. In recent years, some academicians attempted to study on the fisheries sector, but no one except Rahman et. al focused on livelihood of any traditional fishing community. In 2002, Rahman et. al studied on Barman caste, another fishing community beside Brahmaputra river.

Since 1936 to date, about eleven novels have been published in Bangla, while only five of them focused and illustrated on the livelihood patterns of the *Kaibartta* community. The list includes so far as- Char Kashem (1949, Amarendo Ghos), Bidrohi Koibarty (1969, Sotyen Sen), Somudro Bashor (1986, Shamsuddin Abul Kalam), Podmar Polidheep (1986, Abu Ishaque), Koibartya Khondo (1994, Mohashweta Debi), Gonga Ektu Nodir Naam (2001, Shaymol Gongopaddhay), Podma Nodir Majhi (1936, Manik Bondhopaddhay), Titas Ekti Nodir Namm (1956, Adoita Mallabarmen), Gonga (1957, Somoresh Basu), Gohin Gang (1980, Shadhon

Chottwopaddhay), Abogahon (2000, Ghonoshem Chowdhury) etc. There are also numbers of papers, articles, books and literature on the fisheries sector as a whole. Most of those studies were on management and impact issues where socio-economic and political threats and natural calamities as well as climate change impacts have got the priorities. So, this study is the first of its kind to be focused on *Kaibartta* community of the haor area.

In fact, as a particular sector for livelihood earning and cultural practices, fisheries sector has its great role constructing the ways of living and heritages. *Kaibartta* community is the main actor of this field and they bear a long traditional livelihood practices on fishing throughout the history. Such a practice and historical dependence on fish and waters made their life distinct from any of the other groups in the society. It was found a very little attempt to study about this particular community but it demanded for. Reviewing such available studies on the *Kaibartta* community has made the way to move forward with the scope of further investigation through field work as well as comprising it with secondary data.

3. Methodological Considerations

This study has been conducted using a qualitative approach. The whole research work depends on both the secondary and primary data sources. Literature reviews from the published books, relevant articles, journals, documents, internet, newspapers and documentaries are the sources of secondary data. As the nature of the research demands for an in-depth study, an intensive field research has been conducted. In this context, along with the filed level surveys some research methods, like key-informant techniques, intensive interviews, focus group discussion and observation methods are followed to collect primary data. Data collected from household interviews, in-depth interviews, focused group discussions (FGD), non-participatory observations and lastly from secondary sources are sorted down according to a time and subject chronology. In most of the cases the responses from different informants and sources are cross-checked to ensure validity.

4. Study Area

This study is carried out in Ahsanpur, a *Kaibartta* village in Juanshai haor area situated in the district of Kishoreganj. The Juanshai haor area is comprised of several villages, namely Ahsanpur, Guradara, Gupinathpur, Baroichara, Dilalpur, Kaimerbali, Humayunpur, Boali, Shibpur, Purakanda,

Koidubi, Sapanta, Bangalpara, Chowdanto, Kazirkhala, Keoarjur, Dhaki, Singpur, Aynargup etc., where the members of the *Kaibartta* community live in clusters.

The geographical nature and the natural resources of this distinct area, the 'haor anchol', supported the historical existence, culture and livelihood patterns of the rural population. Historically, this area has a large number of fishermen, most of whom are professionals and traditional fisher-folks. Once, this place was considered to be one of the most productive fisheries of the region. But due to the wrong development interventions, policy changes, overfishing, siltation, inadequate rain falls, low water flows, water pollution, climate changes and other manmade factors the fish productivity has declined drastically in recent years and most of the traditional fishermen⁵ have become seasonally unemployed.

5. Views from the field

Kaibartta is such professional fishing groups who have been preserving two of the main pillars⁶ of Bengali socio-economic and cultural structure historically. They are a waterborne caste and professional fisher-folk community who sustained their life and livelihood over the years with distinct social features and different culture from the mainstream.

5.1. Etymology

There are very little scope to take a fruitful attempt to trace the origin of the *Kaibartta* community within the existing historical literature and documents. It can be identified to some extent their nucleus as the Dravidian root but their original features and professional characteristics are refined by a slight infusion of Aryan blood. However, the type exist at present in Bangladesh is distinctly an intermediate one removing equally the extreme types of Aryan and Dravidian races (Risley, 2012).

Regarding the etymology of the word *Kaibartta*, there has some different opinions. Some consider it was derived from *Ka*, water and *Vartta*, livelihood, other group say the derivation is from *Kivarta*, a distortion of *Kimvarta* (Risley, 2012). *Kimvarta* means a person following a low or degrading occupation (Kanjilal, 2012). The early form of the word 'Kaibartta' was *Kebartta*. *Ke* means water, *Bartta* means home. *Kebartta* were used to indicate a community who do business as well as live on waters.

5.2. *Kaibartta* in the Haor Area

Kaibarttas are the first inhabitants in the haor area (Baker, 1995). Most of the respondents reported and many others agreed that the villages they are living in were established at least 450 years ago. They guess it was about 1600 years ago when their ancestors shifted to this place from the other parts of the haor area. At that time they were not only a fishing community, but also the hunters. The characteristics of the haor area were also different than the present one. According to the respondents, there were trees and deep forests in the past where they see only waters with the passage of time. The changes were happened through an earthquake thousand years back.

From that time the depressions were made and the area was preparing to take the shape of haor. Gradually the forest resources were in decline, where the water products were in increase and the inhabitants started to maintain their livelihood depending on the fishes and aquaculture. In later periods there was an inflow of population from the nearby places. They developed different forms of ties with the indigenous people who used to live there already. It has been assumed that the ancestors were the followers of Buddhism and also before that they did not certainly follow any mainstream religion but some customs and rituals usually known as 'Laikik Dhormo' (Baker, 1995). In the later periods many of them were influenced by 'Chaitayna Ideology' and 'Shohojia'. Till today many of the fishing groups in *Kaibartta* community is found to carry the Baishnav faiths as their core beliefs. The Hinduism in that fishing community spread after the fall of Buddhist regime.

5.3. Livelihood Pattern

5.3.1. Occupation

The *Kaibartta* community has mainly two types of professional stream, cultivating and fishing. The *Haliya Kaibartta* cultivates the land and engages them into other agribusiness. The *Jaliya Kaibartta* maintains their livelihood mainly depending on the water. In the past they themselves made fiber, while their wives spin them, prepared nets and ropes. They used these nets and ropes for their own catches as well as manufactured for extra income. Today, there are sophistication and technological development in this fisheries sector. Now these fishing items are made in the factories. However, there are some nets like '*Kuni Jaal*' which are still made manually and it is yet the task of '*Jele Nari*'.

5.3.2. Catching and Selling Fish

Haor area is famous for its vast water-bodies containing huge amount and great varieties of fishes. Depending on these huge amount and great varieties of catches, a large amount of fishes are exported to the local and international markets. Fishermen also try to continue their livelihood exchanging their catches. Now-a-day, however, there is no fishing zone left free for the *Kaibartta* community. They cannot catch fishes without paying proportionally to the parties. They have to pay to the local political elite. Moreover, they are bound to sell fishes in a lower price to them, from whom they actually took lease of the water. If anyone disagrees, he has to be punished.

In off-peak seasons, when the fishing decline gradually, people have to depend on the other sources for fishes. There are some professional 'Ferrywalas' (vendors) who buy and sell cultivated fishes. All the respondents have reported that this is happening because of recent scarcity in fish production in the haor area as well as increasing demand for the growing population. Still, an increasing price hike of the captured fishes is noticed across the country as it attracts more customers comparing with the cultivated fishes

5.3.3. Dwelling

The typical houses in the *Kaibartta* community consist of two houses, one for their own living and another for cooking and cattle. Some wealthy people have separate houses for guests and another for worship as 'Thakur Ghar'. The house they use for their own living is measured as 22 feet long and 12 feet wide and the other house as 12 feet long and 8 feet wide. Most of the houses are made with tin as roof and bamboo sheets for walls.

Like all other typical *Kaibartta* villages, Ahasanpur, the study area, is situated by the bank of a river named *Ghurautra*. As the village is adjacent to the river bank, the houses have been built where the line of the river ended. This made them easier to go to the rivers for fishing and other tasks as well as vulnerable to the natural disasters like flood, river erosion etc.

5.3.4. Daily Life of the Fisherwomen

The *Kaibartta* women are the first to wake up early in the morning in the community. The first thing she does is to clean the house yards and spray 'holy water' mixed with cow dung or sometimes touching with gold and

silver. Cow dung symbolizes the blessing from gods and gold and silver as blessing for wealth. She starts her day with some daily rituals. She cooks breakfast and generally all the members of a household take breakfast together. After taking breakfast, she sits for processing fishes to make 'shutki', feeds the cattle and chicken, takes care of vegetables in the yard etc. Generally they make a 'Dangi,' a structure for processing and drying fishes to make 'shutki', but for family purposes they just dry fishes in their tin roofs. When she completes all these household chores she arranges items for cooking. If she gets some time before lunch, she cuts cotton and makes or repairs nets. A fisherwoman actually runs a household farm as well as a family. She has to manage two things simultaneously, one is her family and other is a small agricultural farm within the home.

5.4. Social Institutions

5.4.1. Marriage

As previously said, generally *Kaibartta* are divided into two groups, such as, cultivating (*Haliya*) and fishing (*Jaliya*) community. However, this separation does not make any significant transition in their caste system. Inter-marriages are allowed between these two groups with some certain conditions. Girls from the *Haliya Das* family can be married to *Jaliya Kaibartta*, but if a *Haliya* man marries a girl from the *Kaibartta Das*, his family is deemed to be guilty of a misalliance and descends one step in social estimation (Risley, 2012). However, at present these divisions are rarely found in the *Kaibartta* community. They all bear the equal identity whether they do separate jobs (between cultivating and fishing) or continue both. They equally share the same culture and habitats bearing the same identity as *Das Kaibartta*.

There are two types of marital system in the *Kaibartta* society, 'Namonta' and 'Cholanta Biye'. When the bridegroom goes to the girl's home with traditional musical team and come back with the bride, it is called 'Cholanta Biye'. When the guests go to the girl's home keeping the bridegroom left in his home and come back with the girl and finally make the arrangement of their marriage in the boy's home, it is called 'Namonta Biye'. Previously, in the *Koibartya* community practices of the widow marriages rarely happened. However, during the field visit a lot of flexibilities are noticed in this context.

Likewise, in the past marriage was solemnized following the caste directions and caste provisions needed to be maintained strictly. As has been mentioned by the respondents, however, some flexibility can be noticed in the marital practices. Girls and boys are now married off in reasonable adult ages, though still significant numbers of child marriages are found. The parents from the bride's side also need to pay a large amount of '*joutuk*' and gift item to the bridegroom's family while the marriage is performed.

5.4.2. Religion

Generally, the *Kaibartta* community conforms to the basic ceremonial observance of Hindus. One of the *Kaibartta* folklore tells a story in what way the supreme God made man out of the dirt of his ear. Man is later saved by this God from a gigantic fish. Afterwards, they were given a goddess horse to be the primary deity. But unfortunately the horse died! The community believes he/she can receive salvation only through worshipping this goddess (Joshua Project, 2009).

However, in most of the areas they belong to the *Vaishnave* sect with a guru as '*gossain*' and their '*purohits patit*' or '*barna*' Brahmins (Risley, 2012). They have so many pujas and religious festivals throughout the year. *Jaipalani*, *Gonga Puja*, *Monosha Puja*, *Shitala Devir Puja*, *Gram Devetar Puja*, *Hirali Puja*, *Bipodnashi puja*, *Chandi Puja* etc. are the main festivals in the *Kaibartta* society.

5.5. '*Hajarki*', Instance of Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism

The *Kaibartta* community has developed their own ways to resolute the conflicts arise in the everyday life. '*Hajarki*', for example, is one of the tools to resolute conflicts within the *Kaibartta* community. '*Hajarki*' is a group of people representing all clusters to maintain order within the *Kaibartta* society. Literally, it means a collective body of thousand people. In order to regulate the whole community, usually this body arranges formal '*shava*' (formal sitting). The whole community, thereby, has a great respect to this authoritative body. Sometimes, they address this formal meeting as '*Thakur Shava*'. The word '*Thakur*' means God. While sitting in this '*shava*', this group takes decisions in the name of God. The members of the *Kaibartta* community, consequently, regard this as the God's decision. Practically, '*porohits*', the religious leaders and the social elites try to

resolute any disputes as well as formulate new regulations in the society by participating in the '*shalish*' (formal sitting).

5.6. Access to the Mainstream Social Services (Notably Health and Education)

Through field research it is unveiled that the members of the *Kaibartta* community, actually, do not face any discrimination in accessing to the mainstream social services like health and education. As they have claimed while they are asked that the overall state of the social service sector is very poor in the haor region. There is no health complex in the nearby places. They have reported that the Upazilla Health Complex is too far from their village and is not ready to provide quality health services.

Likewise, the communication and transport facilities are extremely difficult in the haor area. During in-depth interviews (IDI), key-informants' interviews (KII) and focused group discussion (FGD), most of the respondents have reported that irrespective of their identities they get services from the authority based on the available facilities in the '*haor anchal*'. In other words, they are not being discriminated as they are from the *Kaibartta* community. The lack of facilities as well as the adverse communication system in the haor area converts this community as a socially excluded group in comparison to the peoples of the other parts of the country.

Additionally, many of them have reported that sometimes they are deprived and discriminated on the ground of their poor economic status. It is very usual, the respondents have conveyed, the power and authority in the current discriminatory social system resides always in the men of social and financial capitals. Consequently, in comparison to the powerful and wealthy elite class, the members of the *Kaibartta* community do not get mainstream social services in due proportion.

Health services in the *Kaibartta* villages are as poor as in the haor area itself. They have to depend on the village doctors for their primary health care. During field research the only village doctor in *Ahasanpur* village was interviewed. While asked, he described his life journey and the story of being in such profession. Though he was born in a *Kaibartta* family his parents decided to make him educated. He attended the schools and studied till class ten. He sat for Secondary School Certificate (S.S.C) exam but

could not pass. Then he did not continue his study and managed a work in a dispensary. He has attained the experiences of 3-4 years to deal with medicines. After that, he thought himself capable enough to provide primary health services to the village people. He, thereby, started his career opening his own dispensary in the village. This feature is not so different from any of the other villages in the haor area.

In few decades back, the parents in the *Kaibartta* community would send their children to '*Maa Gonga*' rather sending them to '*Maa Shawrashawti*'. As the *Devi Gonga* helps them survive with fishes and water resources on which their main professional activities and livelihood depends, they prefer and sometimes feel obliged to send their children to rivers. Now a day, this trend has been changed radically. In many of the *Kaibartta* families '*Devi Shawroshawti*', the Goddess of Education, has been getting more preference than *Devi Gonga*. The state of access in the education also bears the same feature as the health sector. There is a primary school in the village where the children can study up to class five. Through an interview with a primary school teacher, it was known that there were 47 children attending '*Somaponi Exam*'. As the challenges and threats in their old accustomed profession are in increase, the education is being considered as one of their tools for gradual transition to the mainstream society. However, a tension works whether to leave their ancestor's divine profession or face the unbearable cost of reality.

6. Discussion

This section summarizes the research findings and observations combining both the primary and secondary data followed by a conclusion part.

6.1. Social Exclusion

Being gradually excluded from accessing to the mainstream social services and facilities, the members of the *Kaibartta* community have identified themselves as the socially excluded group. As has been noticed, their social exclusion is not due to their belongings to a lower caste as *Kaibartta* community, but for their poor economic status in the society. Historically, most of the *Kaibartta* people are lived on hand to mouth. They basically depended on daily fish catches and its exchanges and rarely prepared for any fixed savings and property. The days passed, socio-economic variables changed over time and they could not but continue their traditional livelihood practices. The economic importance of land and fisheries in the

haor area increased over time and for this reason the political intervention, influence and domination also increased. They, thereby, gradually lost their free access to the water-bodies and faced challenges in terms of income opportunities. Thus the threat to their daily income opportunity made them vulnerable day by day and they found themselves as the members of a socially excluded group increasingly.

6.2. Erosion of Social Capital

Social capital refers to the social bonds, norms and networks that enable people to solve common problems while they live in a society (Ref?). It is reconciled through kin networks and group membership in the society. The social bondage in *Kaibartta* community is facing increasing threats and norms are changing day by day due to outsiders' intervention. The networks are being loosened gradually. Social capitals and conflict resolution mechanisms like '*Hazarki*' deemed to be disappearing gradually.

6.3. Shift in Gender Roles

There has been a shift in gender roles in the *Kaibartta* community since challenges are ahead. Like other societies of the haor area, gender roles in *Kaibartta* society have been changed over time. Women usually do only the household works and some fishing activities, but now a day they are not limited to their households. There has been a significant decline in fish catches over the last few years. It affected activities calendar and gender roles in the *Kaibartta* families. Women often did fish processing along with their household chores but never joined in the farm activities. The outside farming or fishing activities were fully completed by the *Kaibartta* males. As the fish catches fall down drastically there is not much work for fish processing (like fish-drying). The unemployment and poverty stroked over the whole community. Now a day, women from many *Kaibartta* families often have to go to the paddy fields for earning their livelihood, especially during the harvest. The workload and burdens on the *Kaibartta* women are increasing day by day.

6.4. Weak Governmental Institutions

Within the *Kaibartta* community the strong presence of any governmental institutions is hardly found. Likewise, the presence of any governmental service providing bodies or their allies is rarely found in the studying

community. They have to suffer a lot due to adverse infrastructure. Consequently, if they need to get support from the local 'thana', hospital or other governmental bodies for an emergency, often they have no access to these services since reaching to the destination is subject to crossing a huge distance of more than two or three (2/3) hours journey.

6.5. Absence of Credit and Investment Capital

As the *Kaibartta* people are frequently stroke by common vulnerabilities and other mal-factors they lack from capital accumulation. They do lack in credit and investment capital for absorbing further shocks and transcending their present economic status. They do not have access to the formal credit flow or financial institutions like borrowing money from banks or other authoritative institutions.

6.6. Lack of Information on national Circumstances, Opportunities and Needs

Though the internal linkage and neighborhood relationships are much closed, there are still lacks of access to information on the national circumstances. This made them deprived from getting other opportunities and expressing their needs. There were found none of the households which had an access to the current local or national newspapers. Many of the houses had a television set, but they had to watch only BTV for their news and entertainments. Most of the houses still even cannot afford that facility.

6.7. Distortions to Agricultural Markets

The *Kaibartta* community depends on the agricultural sector in a broader sense whether it is cultivation or fishing. The fisheries sector has faced huge decline in recent years in terms of fish production and catches. This made the *Kaibartta* community vulnerable in many aspects of their socio-economic life. And distortions in the markets of agricultural products made them more vulnerable in dealing with their recent shocks.

6.8. Increased Exploitation and Vulnerabilities

Factors such as distortions in the commodity and agricultural market, limited income opportunities, political intervention, decline in fish catches etc. have made the *Kaibartta* community more vulnerable to sustain their livelihood and fight against the shocks. They are being employed in many

of the fish cultivation projects in closed water-bodies like pond, 'dighi' etc. This transition actually made them just a water-laborer but not a fisherman. It broadens the scope of being exploited by the capitalist entrepreneurs.

6.9. Forced Displacement and Threats of Extinction

It is not much to say that the *Kaibartta* community is the worst victim of all the changes happening in the haor area. They have lost their fields to the political and capitalist elite of the society. They are no longer enjoying the free access and fish catches in the water-bodies like hoar, 'baor', 'beel', river etc. They have to pay and collaborate with the powerful people in the society and agree with the dominance of politically powerful bodies to earn their livelihood from the water sources. They have already become segregated from their long accustomed profession.

Moreover, the *Ahasanpur* village, where the study was conducted, was found to be very close to the river *Ghurautra*. Some parts of this *Kaibartta* village are gone into the river by erosion and the some others are waiting. These segregations from the professional sources, for example limiting access to the water-bodies and such natural process like river erosion, made the life and livelihood difficult to survive for that community. Many of the people already have been the victim of forced displacement and find no way but left their profession searching for other sources of survivals.

7. Conclusion

As the study reveals, glorious is the history of the *Kaibartta* and tremendous is their effort to survive. The culture they preserve the custom they follow, the rituals they practice and the principles they believe- are embedded in a high level of ethics and morality. Notwithstanding their rich culture and heritage, the *Kaibartta* are subjected to diverse and intense forms of discriminations and deprivation. The cumulative effect of these exclusionary processes has been the fact that their whole life and livelihood is under threat of extinction today. It is unlikely that the *Kaibartta* will be able to face this formidable challenge of survival and maintenance of their life and culture all by themselves. They will require support and cooperation from all the relevant quarters.

Notes

- 1 A back swamp or bowl – shaped depression located between the natural levees of rivers and may consist of a numbers of 'beels'. Haors are flooded annually during the monsoon and they remain under water for several months of the year. When they drain out during the post monsoon months, some permanent water bodies or 'beels' remain in the deepest parts of the haor. (IUCN BD, 2004)
- 2 The lowest tier of formal administration.
- 3 Floodplains are low lying plains contiguous to rivers, forms mainly of river sediments and subject to flooding. The main difference between a Haor and a flood plain consist in their period of water retention, which, for the haor is 7-8 months, while its 4-5 months for the floodplains (Rahman, et al, 2002).
- 4 A fisher folk community of Hindu Casts. They earn their livelihoods through fishing which is inherited from their ancestors as a destined profession as they think themselves. The distinctions between other professional bodies and themselves is nothing but they think it as an embedded task upon them with their religion, while others only think it as just a means of earning livelihoods.
- 5 The traditional fishermen mainly belong to Kaibartta, Jaldas and Majhi castes of the Hindu community. They inherit the profession from generation to generation, as envisaged by the social hierarchy within their community. However, also a large number of professional fishermen of them are Muslims. Although, not determined by social custom, the Muslim fishermen also inherited their profession from their forefathers (IUCN BD 2008).
- 6 Since the food habit for most of the Bangladeshis comprise mainly with rice and fish, farmers and fishermen are considered as the main contributors for supplying these two important items.

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