CHAPTER-6
THE TRADITIONAL LIFE AND ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE KAIBARTAS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important factors which determines the social status of any individual or community relates to the economic conditions. This can either hinder or further develop poor economic conditions which may lead to illiteracy, social immobility and loss of personal freedom. It is evident from history that the Kaibartas have gone on suffering under the disabilities of untouchability, social exploitation, ignorance, illiteracy and denial of basic human rights, because of poor economic conditions.

In the wake of Independence several constitutional safeguards and provisions, statutory protections and social legislations have been provided for the amelioration of Kaibartas and other weaker sections. These have relatively broken the age-old caste system. The traditional barriers to occupational mobility are rapidly crumbling down and many new fields of employment are being thrown open to the members of the depressed classes like the Kaibartas. The government of India has also provided innumerable liberal financial concessions and other welfare benefits to such communities. After enjoying such exclusive benefits the Kaibartas have failed to come out as a socio-culturally prominent, dominant and economically sound and affluent community. Rather in the real perspective we visualize a very dismal pathetic socio-economic status as a whole.
It is against this background, the present study tries to examine and evaluate the real economic conditions of the Kaibartas in terms of various economic activities associated with their traditional life. And such economic activities are discussed in terms of different economic parameters.

6.2. TRADITIONAL LIFE

The Kaibartas catch fish either in the individual fisheries or various other types of fisheries. These include Fishery Co-operative Society's fishery, Government fishery and mahaldar's (fishery owner) fishery. Poor transportation facilities have forced many of the Kaibartas to sell their catch at fishing sites losing tangible profit. Generally, most of the Kaibartas sell fish in the markets.

Fishing is considered to be the only important occupation by the Kaibartas of Kamrup district even though it is largely a seasonal occupation. Fishing developed from a trade once oriented towards subsistence to an occupation which has now-a-days become part of the market economy.

There are about 40 to 45 varieties of fish caught by the Kaibartas of the Kamrup districts. Generally some of the varieties are available only during the peak fishing season (mid September to mid May) while the other varieties are found all the year though in fewer quantities. Some of the varieties like Kanduli, Mirka, Bhakua, Sol, Borali and Chital are available only from mid September to mid May. The rest of the varieties are found all the year though in fewer quantities. The Kaibartas of the Kamrup district follow the Assamese calendar for various fishing activities (Sarma : 2010 : 42).
The Kaibarta women who are involved in fishing are known as pohari. In addition to their regular household duties they carry out fishing. They help in all the major fishing activities like catching fish, processing and marketing and ancillary activities like making and mending of nets, construction of bamboo gears (e.g. fishing baskets, traps, dip nets, etc.) They even take part in small scale fishing and use traps, dip nets, etc. They play a significant role in post-harvest activities like sorting of fish, sun drying of fish, freezing of fresh fish, smoking of fish, and so on. They also help in clearing weed, stocking fish in ponds, preparing feed and other day to day activities. The Kaibarta women are expert weavers and they weave cotton clothes and edi chadar (mulberry silk shawls) in their looms. The men folk too produce cottage industry items like japi (Assamese headgear), bamboo containers and agricultural and fishing implements. These are however mainly done in their leisure hours. Weaving is carried out not only for household consumption but also for commercial purposes. In the rural setting, almost all the Kaibartas know the art of net making but they cannot produce the same in a large scale due to financial constraints. But they make their nets by purchasing raw materials from the market. Carpentry, bee keeping and mat making are some other cottage industries found among the Kaibartas. Rivers, wetlands, marshy areas, and tanks are generally the sources of fishing in Assam but in recent times, the Kaibartas are facing problems regarding utilisation of fishing sources. Some of the Kaibartas of the study areas depend upon the secondary source for their fish. These fishermen either purchase fish from the middlemen or from the Bihari fishermen or sell those in the market. The middlemen exploit the needy Kaibartas.
The Kaibartas of Kamrup district do not feel it necessary to go outside of their locality for fishing. Every Kaibarta village are connected with either beel fisheries or riverian fisheries. On the other hand, in addition to above fisheries, the great Brahmaputra following from east to west of this district and its long bank has also given shelter to the entire fishermen of Kamrup district on both the sides of it south and north. A large body of fishermen, dealers and retailers have been earning their livelihood from fish trade and fishing in the fisheries.

The Kaibartas of Kamrup district neither have any daily routine hour to catch fish nor have any particular area of fishing. They are used to catch fishes whenever and wherever these are available. They continue their fishing all round the year in the rivers, beels, ponds, swamps and tanks. As regards catching of fishes, riverian fishing generally takes place all round the year. Some fishermen stay on the boat throughout the day and night and catch fishes whenever it is possible and move to that place whenever they feel secure. Such fishermen are known as whole time fishermen. The whole time fishermen visit their home weekly or fortnightly or on the day of special ceremony held at their home. On the other hand, a few fishermen catch fishes by staying in their own home. These groups of fishermen catch the fishes at day time or early in the morning. After catching fishes, they sell the fishes in the nearest ghat (temporary selling station on the bank of the river or beel) and return to their own home.

In addition to the individual family fishing units, joint trips are organised under the leadership of any one villager. Such fishing units are called thoras. A thora comprises of atleast eight members, who are drawn from a cross-section of the family fishing units of the whole village. It is with
the sheer motive of having a good individual catch that a joint fishing activity is undertaken. These fishermen carry their fishing operations in the beel about 3 and 4 kms respectively, away from the village. Generally, the fishermen start for the beel in the evening so as to arrive there in time. On reaching the spot, they fix the nets and go to sleep. Waking up at midnight they haul the nets, mend the holes if necessary and fix it again. When the net is fixed they take meals consisting of rice and fish either cooked at home or cooked on the banks of the waterbody itself. In the morning they haul the net and return to the shore with the entire catch of the two hauls. As soon as they reach the shore, the men go home for bath and dinner, while the other members of the household or group carry the catches home and hand it over to the womenfolk. They then spread open the used nets for drying and replace them with fresh ones.

In the beel fisheries, generally fishing take place in the winter season. The fishing which is done in the winter season (from November to February) is called fishing season. In the season the fishermen stay on the bank of the beel and for their staying they prepare temporary camps. The fishing is done individually or collectively as per the nature of the fishing materials, area of the fishing and the availability of fishes in the beel. They always take necessary care of their fishing equipments. That is why, at the eve of the commencement of the fishing by new equipment, the fishermen worship it at their own house. Rituals like Satyanarayan puja and Nam (singing spiritual song) is arranged at night by the male folk. Therefore, the equipments are properly washed out after the end of every day fishing. It is a compulsion on the part of the fishermen to make the equipment clean. There should be no blood stain and fish scales on it.
The Kaibartas who do not possess individual fisheries, they catch fish in the fishery owned by fishery co-operative societies which is auctioned by the Government for every three years. In Kaibarta villages of Kamrup, the working unit is usually the family (a man, his wife and their children) and this unit is frequently self-sustaining. In seasons when fish is found in plenty, each family serves as a small co-operative unit. The man (husband or father) along with his brothers and sons catch fish in the inland pool and bring home the catch. The women at home remove the fish from the nets. The sons or younger brothers of the fisherman then take the fish to the market to sell. When fish becomes scarce, it requires the coordinated efforts of several families. Womenfolk would attach baits to hooks and tie these hooks to coconut ropes. Two or three fishermen belonging to different families would then share a boat and carry these ropes and leave them in water either in the inland pool or in paddy fields, which are filled, with water. Later, fish caught is then equally distributed among the different members.

6.3. FISH TRADING AND ITS CRISIS

6.3.1. FISH MARKETING

Fish catching is not the sole objective of fishermen. Their objective is to earn profit by selling their catches in the market. Therefore, the concept of market is too important for them. Normally, market refers to a mechanism where buyers and sellers are there and their co-ordination makes the buying and selling possible. In olden days when the village economy was self-sufficient and there was no difficulty of marketing as the entire production was sold directly to the consumer or bartered. In the present day society, yet some of the fishermen and fisher-women exchange their product directly with paddy or other commodities at the time of harvesting.
But most of the fishermen sold their catches either in the local markets or to the fish traders locally known as *paikar* or *bepari*. Normally, after purchasing fishes, the *bepari* sells these in the local market or to the wholesaler locally known as *dalal* or *challani*, that is, one who export the fishes to different markets in the state. Generally, a small portion of fishes are kept for local consumption and the rest is supplied to the nearest towns. On the eve of some festivals major portion of fishes measuring one or two trucks are supplied to Guwahati for outright sale.

In Kairbarta villages of Kamrup district, marketing of fresh fish is done in two ways. If fish are auctioned by the society as a whole or privately, they are bought by the villagers as well as outside traders. Some villagers buy fish in wholesale and distribute them in small quantities to others by retail, keeping a small quantity for their own retail sale. Others buy small or large amounts of fish directly for retail and also barter fish for vegetables. If the village auction does not take place, fishermen take their produce to the market for retail or sell it to the traders on the banks itself. If they employ rickshaws to lift baskets or carry baskets to markets, they pay them daily wages.

Again those Kaibartas who sell only fish caught by them have to wait for their boats to come. As soon as the catch is brought home, it is given in charge of the women of the house. They sort out the saleable fish and one of the male members immediately takes it to the market. The entire quantity fish is carried to the market by cycles, rickshaws or auto-vans.

Fish traders also advance loans to the fisher folk and as a result the fisher folk are bound to sell the produce at the prefixed rates to the traders. Apart from fish traders, finance and credit are also provided by friends and
relatives and by professional money lenders from outside the community. Among the fisherman folk there is a group of persons who, having accumulated capital by fishing and fish marketing, act as financiers later on.

The Kaibarta women directly connected with fishing business, of late, are not in a position to pursue the fishing business because of various factors such as nearby marshy lands have become unfit for fishing, the local fish auction market is beyond their reach as men folk outnumber them and their educated sons and daughters generally do not allow them to catch and sell fish.

We found the following constrains, which the farmers are encountered while marketing their products in the local as well as in the district markets:

1. High price fluctuation.
2. Lack of adequate credit support.
3. Tough bargaining on price of produce.
4. High transportation cost.
5. Deficiency in facilities in the market yards.
6. Lack of shortage of facilities to keep unsold produce.
7. Absence of market information.
8. Superfluous of middlemen.
9. Malpractice in the market.
6.3.2. CRISIS OF FISH TRADE

The Kaibarta community of Kamrup district has faced a great crisis in their fish trade after independence. Because the fish trade of the district has gone out of their control on account of the following causes:

1. LOSS OF FREE SOURCES OF FISHING

First of all this has been because of the loss of their traditional free sources of fishing like rivers and beels, as these are controlled by government through the system of lease under which the fishing rights are given to the highest bidder who may be a person of any caste. Further the sources of fish like fisheries, beels, ponds are under the occupation of some schools, colleges, sangha and namghars. So some of the fishermen had given up their occupation of fishing due to shortage of the sources of fish and taken other occupations.

2. INFLUX OF NON-FISHERMEN INTO THE FISH TRADE

This is due to the influx of Non-Scheduled Caste people of both Assamese and Non-Assamese communities in pisciculture including the fish trade. These people have already captured the market of fish trading and fish rearing except in cases when fishermen themselves come forward and enter into the trade.

3. LACK OF SOPHISTICATED TOOLS

Due to lack of sophisticated tools for fishing the Kaibartas cannot catch fish much more than those bidders who use better and well-improved equipments for catching fish. Hence they are not in a
position to supply fish sufficiently to meet its increasing demand for
the increasing people.

4. SHORTAGE OF CAPITAL

After independence, the provision of the distribution of bicycle along
with aluminum drum among the fishermen has been made to carry
fish for sale through the villages. But in no way a bicycle and a drum
are sufficient to earn the livelihood of a family. So due to shortage of
capital they are not in a position to run their fish trade.

5. DEFECTIVENESS OF CO-OPERATIVE SYSTEM

Though after independence, for the betterment of the Kaibarias, the
sources of fish like rivers, beels, tanks, ponds etc were allocated to
them through co-operative system, yet the poor Kaibartas are not
beneficiaries through the co-operative firm due to its defectiveness.
In real practice the tactful rich Kaibartas received all advantages in
the name of co-operative firm. The president and the secretary
betrayed the ordinary poor fishermen and by placing a false
statement before them they continued their contracts. Even the poor
fishermen were deprived of the account submitted by the contractors
or mahaldars. As they cannot pay share money to the society, they
have to live with poverty as friend and companion.

6.4. SUPPLY OF FISHES

The neglected fishery sector exemplifies how we have perpetuated
our inability to harness the potential of assets endowed by nature. With
abundant water bodies and favourable geo-climatic conditions, Kamrup district of Assam should have been at the forefront of fish production, but the irony is that we barely manage to meet two thirds of our own demand - forget about exporting fish to other states. This is despite the fact that fishing has been a traditional practice in the district and large no. of people are engaged in the sector. The problem is - as has been the case in many other sectors-very little practical intervention has come from the Government's side towards realising the immense scope of this asset.

Although a number of Piscicultural Development Programme, such as, fish seed forming, development of beels and reservoir, providing assistance to the fishermen and extension services are under implementation in the Kamrup District through Director of Fisheries of Assam, Fish Farmer Agency, Fishery Development Corporation Limited and Fish Marketing and Processing Co-operative Federation (FISHFED). In spite of these development measures, the production of fish is inadequate to meet the demand in the district and for that matter in the state.

It is time of need to see that a relatively arid State like Andhra Pradesh has been a major fish exporter because of proper planning and committed implementation.

The beels or wetlands of the district, in particular, offer tremendous scope for scientific pisciculture. Scientific fish rearing and management of the beels can transform the wetlands into vibrant income-generating avenues, which would not just ensure sustainable livelihood to lakhs of people but also generate substantial revenue. The authorities need to identify the precise areas warranting intervention, ensuring at the same time active involvement of the fishing communities.
Also the respondents are of the opinion that the prevailing settlement policies of fisheries and the right and obligation of the settlement holders should be in favour of the fishermen. The fisheries should be leased for the fishermen permanently on rent basis like the settlement system of agricultural land and encroachment of fisheries other than fishing purpose should be stopped by some acts. Existence of brokers in the fishing sector who deprive the fishermen should be abolished.

The following have been observed to be the main causes for the shortage of fishes in the district:

1. Pesticides applied to agricultural crops pollutes the fishery for which quantity of fishes are decreasing.

2. Haphazard growth of brick kilns on the banks of the beels have polluted the water of this areas, thus, rendering these places not favourable for living of fishes.

3. The fisheries have not been scientifically developed and the boundary of the fisheries are not perfectly demarcated. As a result of which disputes have been a common phenomenon amongst the fishermen and the non fishermen.

4. Shortage of capital of the fishermen is another causes of shortage of fish product. Due to deficiency of capital the fishermen can not introduces the modern technology in the fishing industry.

5. The prevailing settlement policy of fisheries, the rights and obligations of settlement holders are not conducive to the fishermen.
All the policies adopted by the government have been found going in favour of the middlemen.

Problem areas such as dispensation of information, technology linkage, institutional finance, etc., ought to be addressed at the earliest. Long-term planning and efficient execution will be imperative to bring about positive changes in the sector. The College of Fisheries, Raha and affiliated by Assam Agricultural University, which was set up two decades back to promote research and ensure extension facilities to the fish farmers, has been seriously hamstrung by infrastructure and other constraints. Low productivity has been a persisting bane of the fishery sector but experts believe that scientific management of the beels can double fish yield per hectare. The low productivity ensures that the fishing communities do not get adequate returns for their toil. In recent years, liberal central assistance has been coming, and the government should ensure that the funds are actually utilized to revive the sector.

6.5. DEMAND FOR FISHES

At a time when several Indian states have multiplied earnings and job opportunities in the fisheries sector, Assam is yet to see a change of fortunes even though it possesses abundant water bodies and favourable agro-climatic conditions.

Fish production in the Kamrup district of Assam is witnessing a gradual rise, but demand continues to overrun output, according to well placed sources in the Forest Department. The gap is filled by fish brought in from states such as Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, the requirement
for which is increasing. Sources revealed that the District Fisheries Department has not been able to raise production due to several factors, including its failure to educate and empower fish farmers in a required way. At present, in Kamrup district, proper support from the department has been found wanting with posts staying vacant for years. Also, officers are in dual charge, for which they are unable to do justice to either of their assignments. Moreover, seed constraint continues to be a challenge for the department, and inability to acquire those in time has impacted on fish farmers. Delayed acquisition of fish seeds does not contribute to any substantial increase in production. The lack of extension machinery has affected the promotion of new technology and identification of existing limitations, among fish farmers who would otherwise be willing to embrace new models to boost growth.

Incidentally, the department has been slow in developing new models in the state to attract fish farmers in large numbers. As Saha observes, successful models are crucial because they motivate people to adopt new knowledge and technologies (1970: 49). Experts believe that the department should review the work taking place in the College of Fisheries, which was set up to stimulate education and research, besides acting as an extension facility. More than two decades after it was established the institution suffers from inadequate infrastructure and other bottlenecks, which has limited its optimum efficacy.

In order to promote the fisheries sector the department had planned Matsya Mitras, a body of trained resource persons. The novel measure saw the creation of a few hundred Matsya Mitras, but the numbers are now considered inadequate to serve all the fish farming regions of the state.
Fish constitutes an important item of the daily meals of the non-vegetarian people living in the district. *Mach-bhat*, that is, fish and rice is the common word used by the people of these states. Except some religious vegetarian, most of the people of this district take fish in their principal diet. In order to meet the demand of 95 percent non-vegetarian people of the district, about 60 percent of fishes are imported from outside Assam.

It has been observed that though there exists some ready markets in Kamrup district to absorbed the fish supplied, large number of fisheries having potentiality to employ the human resources in a large scale and redundant manpower, yet many people of this district belonging to the fishermen community have been suffering from serious unemployment and under employment problems.

6.6. OWNERSHIP AND LEASING OF FISHERIES

In Kamrup district, all beels and rivers are properties of the State Governments. While most of the fisheries are under the control of the Revenue Department, some of these are under the control of the Assam Fisheries Development Corporation Limited (AFDC). AFDC limited is entrusted with the responsibility of the development of beel fisheries. Fisheries are normally sold through public auction by the Deputy Commissioners of the district for a period of five years. Some important beels and river fisheries are disposed of by the State Government directly on the basis of recommendation and direction of the Director of Fisheries Development Corporation Limited through a tender system for a period of five years to the highest bidder. Scheduled Castes Fishermen Co-operative Societies are allowed 10 percent concession over the highest bid, but most
of the beels and rivers are captured by individual non-fishermen lessee through the fishermen co-operative societies or by Scheduled Castes fishermen giving them handsome benefit under the table. So, the lessee charges high amount of share from the fishermen on their fishing. The lessee collects their revenue from the fishermen at the time of selling of fish at the selling centre (ghat).

That is, leasing of fisheries at different places in the district is controlled by the powerful group. As a result of which the actual fishermen are deprived of hiring the fisheries, get lower prices for the fishes they catch while the consumers pay high for the same. The fishermen have to pay the lion's share of their earnings form fishing to the lessee.

So the fishermen of Kamrup district are not receiving the due share of income from fishing in the fisheries. In spite of a large amount of revenue collection from the fishermen, most of the fishermen co-operative societies have become defaulter. The reasons of it have observed to be the mismanagement by the Executive Committee of expropriation of co-operative society's fund by the non fishermen capitalist. But earlier there was a time when no rent was imposed by the authority upon the natural fisheries.

6.7. OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN

In order to have a true picture of the occupational pattern of the sample households, occupation has been classified into primary and secondary or subsidiary occupations. By primary occupation we mean the occupation from which the maximum of income of a household is obtained.
On the other hand, the occupation which augments the total income of a household but not exceeding the income derived from the primary occupation are considered as secondary or subsidiary occupation. From table 6.1, we observe that among the 140 households surveyed 71 households (50.71%) have fishing, 31 households (22.14%) have cultivation as their primary occupation. The remaining 14 households (10.00%) have wage earning, 5 households (3.57%) have manufacturing, 7 households (5%) have trade and commerce and 12 households (8.75%) have services as their primary occupation.

Further, out of the 140 households, 83 households (59.28%) have secondary occupations and the remaining 57 do not have it. In the secondary occupational pattern 35 households (42.17%) have fishing, 23 households (27.71%) have engaged as wage earner, 10 households (12.05%) have engaged in agriculture, 9 households (10.84%) have engaged in manufacturing and 6 households (7.22%) have engaged in trade and commerce.

**TABLE 6.1**

**DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY PRIMARY AND SECONDARY OCCUPATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Occupational pattern</th>
<th>Primary Occupation</th>
<th>Secondary Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>50.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Cultivation</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Wage earner</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Trade and Commerce</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>140</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus Table 6.1. reveals that though the sample households are basically earning their livelihoods from the traditional occupation of fishing, yet now-a-days there has been diversification of their occupation from fishing to other economic activities for a multiplicity of reasons given as follows:

1. Dual handicap in traditional occupation viz. social disability and economic deprivation.

2. Hatred towards the fishing by others.

3. Shortage of sources of fishing like beels, rivers etc.

4. Increasing tendency for upward mobility among them through sanskritisation, education and change of both life style and caste titles.

Traditionally, fishing is carried out as a caste occupation in the Kamrup district. But of late due to various factors, this fishermen community has to perform their avocation under constraints. Fishing, as an occupation is both uncertain and expensive. For a fisherman, the returns for the investment are out of his control. Many of them in the study villages do not like to stick to their traditional occupation. The educated section among them does not despise their traditional profession, but they prefer jobs in Government organisations. They have revealed that if suitable jobs are not available they are ready to take fishing as main occupation provided Government facilities such as transportation and marketing are made available.

Our study reveals that traditional fisherfolk of the study villages spend more time on fishing, and comparatively less time on secondary occupations than non-fishermen. Thus, the traditional caste occupation has
still a bearing on the present occupational trend, though mainly in terms of the engagement in fishing. In this context G. Myrdal states that:

*With industrialization, modernising forces tend to accelerate the movement of people from one status to another. Moreover, such movement begins to increase keeping pace with population growth, urbanisation and secular education. The democratic set up of a country and the economic changes also favour this trend of movement (1971:119).*

It is evident from our study that those Kaibarta villages which are situated within the periphery of city have represented a higher rate of changing pattern of occupation from traditional to non-traditional compared with those villages which are situated within the periphery of villages. This is because of the fact that the villages being situated within the periphery of City, most of them find jobs of one kind or the other in the various urban and industrial concerns of city. The large number of saw mills, rice mills, flour mills, biscuit factories and plastic companies have engaged a good number of young Kaibartas as unskilled and semi-skilled personnel.

### 6.8. INCOME PATTERN

For the sustenance of any community, apart from other factors, generation of income of the members of that community also play a vital role. But in case of the Kaibarta community of Kamrup district we get a dismal picture. The Kaibartas also do not maintain any record of income, nor they have regular fixed monthly income. The income of the fisher folk varies from season to season, from month to month or even from day to day. In general, daily earning of the traditional Kaibartas do not amount to a
big sum except on occasions of *lucky catches*. Besides being highly irregular and extremely fluctuating that is it may fall to zero or sometimes it happens to be abnormally high income on a *lucky day*. Kar refers that:

*The general experience of social researcher in the collection of data on the total income of the population is not encouraging. Very often it may not be possible to rely entirely on the stated figures relating to the total income of a family from all possible sources. The problem becomes more acute when no genuine counter checks are available for the purpose. The respond may be quite honestly ignorant of the actual income of the family or may deliberately mis-state them (1981:28).*

Inspite of the above limitations, an attempt has been made to get a general picture of the annual income of the Kaibarta households of Kamrup district and we have graded the sample Kaibarta households into five categories on the basis of their annual income viz.:

1. Extremely poor (Rs. Less than 4,000/-).
2. Very much poor (Rs. 4,000/- to Rs. 6,000/-).
3. Very poor (Rs. 6,000/- to Rs. 8,500/-).
4. Poor (Rs. 8,500/- to Rs. 11,000/-).
5. Rich (Rs. 11,000 and above).

And demarcated the poverty line at Rs. 11,000/- as annual family income. This technique is normally followed by the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) in implementing the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).
Our study reveals that out of the total sample households, more than 60 percent are below poverty line, while less than 40 percent belong to the rich. The intensity of low income is due to their socio-economic backwardness arising out of both economic factors like lack of economic and natural resources at their command, inequalities of income and wealth, low productivity, little paternal estate, unfavourable market and defective govt. policies and non-economic factors like fatalism, conservatism, casteism, religious ideas and joint family structure.

6.9. EXPENDITURE PATTERN

Similar to income, it is very difficult to ascertain the expenditure of the Kaibarta people as they do not maintain any proper accounts of their expenditure. In order to get an idea about the economic condition of the fishermen households of aforesaid villages of Kamrup district under study, it is necessary to collect the data on expenditure from the informants which have been given by the fisher folk from their memory. It is also considered
appropriate to throw some light on the annual expenditure pattern of the concerned households.

It is found from our study that the highest expenditure is incurred on food by every surveyed households. The next item of expenditure is found to be dress and ornaments. It is observed that the fishermen are usually getting no chance to spend much on other goods and services due to their low level of income. The boys and girls have the habits of spending their money more in their dresses and ornaments than in other goods and services. The next item of expenditure after dresses and ornaments is found to be festival and ceremonies. This is because the the Kaibartas are used to observe the festivals, pujas and other ceremonies all the year round due to their interest and belief on cultural heritage. After festivals and ceremonies the next item of expenditure is found to be housing and then education and health. A dismal picture is found that an extremely low percentage of expenditure is incurred in education by the surveyed households. This indicates that the Kaibarta households are not yet conscious about getting education for their children. Apart from that only a small percent of income is incurred on health and medical services, which indicates that they are not health conscious people. They alternatively use folk medicine as it is within their reach because of their poverty. Moreover, a portion of expenditure is incurred on smoking, drinking liquor and other heads.

It is also important to note that except the last two categories of income i.e. Rs. 8,500 to Rs. 11,000 and Rs. 11,000 and above, rest of the income groups spend their entire income on food and clothes. These categories always spend more than they earn and they are always in debt.
Thus, the analysis of the annual income and expenditure of the fishermen households under study clearly points out that the Kaibartas are living amidst stark poverty.

6.10. SAVING BEHAVIOUR

The Kaibartas are well aware that their fishing economy can be maintained at a workable level by means of capital accumulation and investment. Capital outlay is required for repairing the implements, especially nets and for buying new equipments. One of the sources for the flow of capital include their occupation itself. They have to look for profit and have capacity for saving. Secondly, they depend on the village council or Raij for borrowing money. Fish traders also give loans to the fishermen. The people prefer taking loans from private moneylenders than from the Government, for they feel secure with the former, even if they fail to pay the installments.

In the fishing economy, capital is recognised in the possession of various fishing appliances and accessories, which are individually owned property. Capital is required to purchase these implements. The Kaibartas can hardly afford to make any saving when fishes become scarce in the riverine region. Like their income which is uncertain, their expenditure is equally unplanned. They never store anything, yearly, monthly or even weekly, except firewood in some households. Whenever foodstuff or any such item is exhausted, some quantity of it, depending on the cash at hand, is purchased. Articles of clothing are bought during festivals and whenever needed. Daily items of expenditure like sugar, tea, vegetables and fruits are purchased daily or once on two or three days. Daily expenses include the
money spent on biscuits and other eatables, betel leaves and nuts, bidis and so on.

It is seen that the amount that they earn are often not enough to meet their expenditures. This compels them to borrow money from different sources as mentioned above. For calculating the expenditure on food articles, the quantity and value of the food items consumed by them in a day were collected (as they fail to recollect the expenditure incurred by them for a full month). Except the two Bihu festivals during the months of Magh (January - February) and Bohag (April - May) there is a near uniformity in the pattern of food consumed at different months of the year. Except fishes all other food items are purchased from the local markets. As regards expenditure on entertainment, some of them possess television sets, while most of them own a radio. Luxury goods include soaps, hair oil, face powder, etc. Clothing also required heavy expenditure. Purchasing of allopathic medicines also incur expenditure in case of illness. Ceremonial expenditures are involved in the holding of various religious functions in the household from time to time and also for the performance of the annual community festival of Narayan Puja. They also consume tobacco, betel nuts and country liquor. Books, papers, slates, pencils, and school/college fees are the major expenditure involved in education.

The income and expenditure account for a year shows an access of expenditure over income. The households dependent exclusively on fishing have deficit family budgets than those who have subsidiary occupations other than fishing. Birth, death, puberty, marriage, illness etc. are occasions which mostly imbalance the family budgets. Our study reveals that out of
140 surveyed households only 19 nos. of households (13.57%) are in a position to save something.

6.11. BORROWING BEHAVIOUR

Capital is considered to be the engine of all economic activities like consumption, production, investment etc. So due to scarcity of capital no economic activities can be accomplished properly. So constant deficiency of capital inevitably forces them to resort to loans.

As most of the Kaibartas are taking loans for unproductive activities from which nothing is generated, so in order to repay the previous loaning amounts with interest they have to take another loans and ultimately it creates a situation of debt trap for such Kaibarta families from which they cannot survive.

As Anita Abraham observes:

*Unemployment problem, low productivity, traditional methods of fishing and vagaries of nature, extravagance in festivals and ceremonies and sudden medical problems are some of the major causes of indebtedness of fishermen community (1985 : 69).*

Our field study reveals that out of 140 households, the number of households having indebtedness is 99 (70.71%) while debt free households are only 41 (29.28%).

The fisherfolk take loans either from organised sources or from unorganised sources. In the organised sources we can include Nationalised Banks, Rural Banks, District Rural Development Agencies, Scheduled Castes Development Corporation Limited, District Industrial Centre, Primary Co-operative Societies etc. In the unorganised sources of loans we include
private financier such as Kabuliwala (who came from Kabul, a place of Afghanistan) and mahajan, fish traders, relatives etc. Since most of the Kaibartas are illiterate they hesitate to move to organised sources of borrowing since there involves a lot of paper works. So they normally like to borrow from unorganised sources compared to organised sources although such unorganised sources charges a high interest rate in between five rupees to ten rupees per month. Sometimes they have to borrow money against some valuable mortgage securities.

There are another type of small interest free loan is taken for the purchase of productive equipment, such as, nets, boats, repair of nets, pay the rent to the mahalder (lessee). These type of loan are given normally only by the relatives or friends to the people who can be trusted. The fishermen instead of giving their interest offer fishes for consumption. Moreover, the fishermen sometimes take substance credit. An important reasons of taking substance loan are due to shortage of income, irregular pattern of income and to meet the daily needs.

There are different purposes for which loans have been raised by the Kaibarta borrowers. Of these, house construction; purchase of land, fishing and agricultural inputs etc. are productive. Our study shows that out of 140 households, 83 constituting 59.28%, have taken loans for unproductive purposes like family maintenance, marriages, health purposes etc.

There is extreme poverty in the fishermen villages of this district. Thus the rural fishermen are borrowing a heavy amount of loan from different sources regularly for meeting their requirements. So, the debt passes from generation to generation. Although they borrow every year, they are not in a position to repay their loans regularly either because the
loan amount is large or their fishing production is not sufficient enough to enable them to repay their past debt. Thus the debt of a fishermen gradually increases leading to the problem of high degree of indebtedness. Thus D. Bora quite correctly observes that- The fishermen community is born in debt, lives in debt and dies in debt (1997 : 23).

6.12. ECONOMIC STATUS

Economic status of a person can be denoted by any one of the following three forms:

1. Self dependent or earner
2. Semi dependent
3. Complete dependent

The socio-economic status of a community could be better understood if the economic status of different persons belonging to that community are brought under consideration (Agarwal : 1961 : 9). Hence, in this study, members of every surveyed households have been included in three categories as mention below:

TABLE 6.3

ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic status</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self dependent</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39.25</td>
<td>24.92</td>
<td>32.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi dependent</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.28</td>
<td>19.38</td>
<td>13.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete dependent</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51.46</td>
<td>55.69</td>
<td>53.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From table 6.3, we can deduce that out of 702 members of the sample households 229 (32.62%) are self dependents, while 98 (13.96%) members and 375 (53.42%) members are in the category semi dependent and complete dependent respectively. However if number of the two categories self dependent and semi dependent are taken together, then it is found that 46.58% of the total members of the households are earners either marginally or fully. The remaining 53.42% of the members turn out to be non-earners. Our study also observes that about a third of the total population of the sample households has to support more than 53.42% of their family members. One main earning member in each family is the basic characteristic feature of the average Kaibarta households of Kamrup district, where out of 140 households surveyed, 90 (64.29%) households have only one main earner in each, while 10 (7.14%) households have only two main earners per households and only 5 (3.57%) households have four main earners. It is important to note that most of the semi dependents hardly contribute anything for the financial support of the family as their earnings are negligible or casual. They mostly spend their earnings exclusively for meeting their own expenses.

6.13. UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM

Unemployment is a chronic problem almost common to each and every economies of the world. *Unemployment is a phase where people fit to work and willing to work donot get work at the prevailing wage rate after due efforts* (Myint : 1977 : 79). In a developing economy like India, the nature of unemployment sharply differs from the one that prevails in industrially advanced countries. In our country apart from unemployment
there is a problem of underemployment. Underemployment is a phenomenon where people are employed but they are not satisfied with their jobs as they are not getting jobs according to their capabilities.

The problem of growing unemployment continued to a matter of great concern among the Kaibartas of Kamrup district. Inspite of have huge fishery resources, the demand for fishes and available human resources, the economy of Kamrup district largely remains backward and underdeveloped as these natural and human resources have not yet been exploited thoroughly. Against the back-drop of increasing poverty, slow pace of economic development and very high rate of population growth, the unemployment problem has assumed chronic and complex in character among the Kaibartas of Kamrup district.

Further, the incidence of unemployment is more pronounced in the Kaibarta inhibited areas of Kamrup district since it characterised by under-employment, disguised unemployment and seasonal unemployment.

The fishing sector of Kamrup district is over populated. The number of people of fishing community is increasing day by day in unsustainable manner, and the fishing grounds are decreasing at a increasing rate. It ultimately results in over population of fishing sector. It is clear from our study that although the existing resources of fishing sector of Kamrup district cannot feed all the fishermen associated with it, but due to lack of any alternative employment opportunities and just to show that they are employed, they are engaging themselves in fishing activities. In actual practice their marginal productivity is either nil or negative. Such fishermen are in the category of disguised unemployment. Apart from that since fishing operation is seasonal in nature, so the fisherfolk get employed in the
fishing season and become unemployed in non-fishing season due to lack of alternative options. And they are in the category of seasonal unemployment.

Also there is a section of Kaibartas in Kamrup district which are engaging themselves in fishing and agricultural activities although their education pattern cannot suit such avenues. Since they cannot find any job which is suitable to their educational pattern, therefore they are employed in such avenues. Such persons are in the category of underemployment. No doubt, they are working, but they cannot put their highest productivity as they are not happy with their earning sources.

So, a huge no. of Kaibartas of Kamrup district are falling in the category of under-employment, disguised unemployment and seasonal unemployment. So Govt. have to ensure the productivity of such Kaibartas either by developing the fishing sector or creating some alternative job opportunities to such Kaibarta youths.

In this regard, the Government of India has constituted a high power committee under the chairmanship of Prime Minister to review the progress made in recruitment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in central services. In Assam, an Act was also passed in 1978 with 20 point roster to employ due members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in government jobs. But this employment policy has not been so much effective. On the other hand, existence of broker and middlemen in the fishing sector has deprived most of the fishermen for getting proper employment in this sector.
Entry of fake scheduled castes from general category of people has been deprived them from the advantages provided by the reservation system. Heavy pressure of population among the fishermen households and primitive methods of fishing are responsible for colossal rural unemployment and underemployment in the Kamrup district. Although a no. of unemployment alleviation programmes like TRYSEM, NREP, JRY etc. are there from govt. counterpart but all such programmes fail to touch the depth of unemployment level prevailing among the Kaibartas of Kamrup district.

6.14. INCIDENCE OF POVERTY

Economic vicious circles are in operation among the Kaibartas of Kamrup district and as a result poverty has become both cause and effect in the Kaibarta community of Kamrup district. "The Kaibartas are poor because they are poor"-- Indicates a true economic scene of that community. The intensity of poverty has made these vicious circles unbreakable in that community.

Nurkse explains the idea of vicious circles of poverty in these words:

It implies a circular constellation of forces tending to act and react upon one another in such a way as to keep a poor in a state of poverty (1973 : 147).

A poor Kaibarta man may does not have enough to eat, being under fed, his health may be weak, being physically weak, his working capacity is low, which means that he is poor, which in turn means that he will not have
enough to eat, and so on. A situation of this sort relating to a community as a whole, can be summed up as the vicious circle of poverty.

The basic vicious circle stems from the fact that the total productivity of poor Kaibartas of Kamrup district is low due to deficiency of capital, market imperfections, economic backwardness and underdevelopment. However, the vicious circles of the Kaibartas of Kamrup district operate both on the demand side and the supply side. The demand side of the vicious circles is that their low level of real income leads to a low level of demand which in turn, leads to a low rate of investment and hence back to deficiency of capital, low productivity and low income.

Again low productivity among the Kaibartas of Kamrup district is reflected in low real income. The low real income means low saving. The low level of saving leads to a low investment and to deficiency of capital among the Kaibartas. The deficiency of capital, in turn, leads to a low level of productivity and back to low income. Thus the vicious circle is complete from the supply side.

It is important to note that the low level of real income among the Kaibartas of Kamrup district reflecting low investment and capital deficiency is a common feature of both types of vicious circles. So, the economic backwardness among the Kaibartas is the root cause of their vicious circle of poverty.

6.15. GENDER DISPARITY

The Kaibarta villages can be characterised by deep unequal sharing of adversities between women and men. Gender inequality is prevalent in
every sphere of life in the village. Biases prevail between sexes in nourishment, ownership of properties, household responsibilities, education and access to basic facilities.

6.15.1. UNEQUAL ACCESS TO FOOD

The female children were found to be more nutritionally deprived than the boys. Although at birth, girls are no more undernourished than boys, the society's unequal treatment and discrimination between male and female children makes the undernourishment of girls over boys a common phenomenon in this traditional Kaibarta society. The psychological ground for son preference is that boys will grow up to join them in fishing and earn money for them while the girl will gradually get older only to add to their responsibilities and harden. Moreover, due to lack of nutritional knowledge, they think that male children require more nutrition than females. Moreover, the girls get married mostly between 10 to 15 years. After marriage they are encumbered with such an amount of responsibility in their own household, husband, children and other relatives in the husband's house, which is not at all commensurable to their physical or mental maturity. They usually have their meal after feeding everybody in the family. This practice, which they observed from their mothers, is largely responsible for the maternal undernourishment and the consequent low birth weight of their children.

6.15.2. OWNERSHIP INEQUALITY

In traditional Kaibarta societies, the inequality towards females over their ownership of property is a significant issue. The Hindu Law of Inheritance in India completely deprives the females of even basic assets such as homes and land. The absence of claims to property does not only
reduce the voice of women, but also makes it harder for them to engage and eventually prosper in commercial, economic and even some social activities (Kuznets: 1979: 83).

6.15.3. HOUSEHOLD INEQUALITY

The family arrangement in the Kaibarta village is invariably unequal in terms of sharing the burden of housework and childcare. The males remain engaged in fishing and nonfishing activities for 8 to 10 hours a day, while the housewives are busy for almost 15 hours a day on the average, maintaining the entire household. Even then, the society shows utmost reluctance to recognise their selfless sacrifice to the family. Rural women in India have long been an unrecognised contributor to economic productivity (Thirlwall: 1999: 59). A Kaibarta housewife may often be subjected to physical punishment by the husband for minor faults or squabbles. Even if housewives earn some money through income-generating activities like poultry raising, milk cow rearing etc. in many cases, they do not possess the freedom to spend the money for themselves or even for something of their own choice.

6.15.4. EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

In the Kaibarta villages girls have far less opportunity of schooling than boys. The fishermen have a positive attitude about educating their male children. But female education beyond primary level is still unthinkable among the fishermen. It is largely due to early marriage and lack of social security for female children.
6.16. LAND HOLDING PATTERN

Out of the four factors of production viz. land, labour, capital and organisation, land is considered to be the base for economic development of any community. Since fishing is their traditional occupation, the forefathers of the indigenous Kaibartas of Assam did not pay attention to occupy land and they were always happy at abundance of fishing resources of this area. Today the Kaibartas in a changing occupational status are facing the acute shortage of agricultural land. Table 6.4 shows the land holding pattern of the Kaibarta fishermen of Kamrup district of Assam.

**TABLE 6.4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of households</th>
<th>Total area of land possessed (in acres)</th>
<th>Total area of land under cultivation (in acres)</th>
<th>Total area of land under homestead (in acres)</th>
<th>Total area of land under fishing (in acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>42.08</td>
<td>20.40</td>
<td>18.50</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>48.48</td>
<td>43.96</td>
<td>7.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table 6.4 shows that the total area of land possessed by sample households is estimate at 42.08 acres out of which 20.40 acres are under cultivation. The total area of land under homestead has been found 18.50 acres. The average land holdings per households estimated to be 0.13 acres. It has been found that out of 20.40 acres of land under cultivation, 8.20 acres of cultivable land has been kept on mortgage, which is locally known as *bandhaki*.
On the other hand, only 3.18 acres of land used for fishery, although they are traditional fishermen. Therefore, the most of the Kaibarta community of this area is completely dependent on natural fisheries lying in their surroundings, which are given on lease to Fishermen Co-operative Societies or individuals. For such reasons no person can individually improve the fishery resources available in the locality.

There are many reasons for their landlessness which are as follow:

1. The Kaibartas on the banks of the rivers have become landless because of violent erosion.

2. Due to their poverty they fail to buy land for agriculture or for construction of houses. Again they do not know how to save because of their illiteracy. So for want of capital, they fail to buy land or other required things at the usual price.

3. Theft forefathers migrated from one place to another for their convenience in fishing and they never felt the necessity of having land. So, their future generation has become landless.

6.17. CULTIVATIONS

Along with the occupation of fishing, they also depend upon agriculture. History tells us that the Kaibartas have contributed a great deal to agriculture from very ancient times. They possess low lands as they live usually beside the rivers, pools, beels etc. Out of the study areas, only 22.14 percent of the Kaibarta population considered cultivation as their primary occupation. For many reasons they cannot develop their agricultural activities, which are mentioned below:

1. They cannot pay attention to agriculture because of their contemporary settlement in a particular place.
2. The fisheries have been separated from the rivers because of frequent floods. As a result the number of fishes diminishes and so their income decreases.

3. Some areas of agricultural land of the Kaibartas fall within the embankments. So, they have to lose the agricultural land and because of erosion, such land is quite unfit for agriculture in the winter season also.

4. They cannot collect the seeds after the damage caused by floods because of their poverty. In flood prone areas though the government makes arrangements of loans or free supply of seeds for them, yet these are not available in proper time.

5. The agricultural crops of the Kaibarta farmers have to suffer from pastes because of the damp places on the bank of the rivers. So their labour goes in vain.

6. As the water from the field goes along the river and water level goes down in the winter, the harvests usually come down.

7. Due to lack of operational holding they cannot apply the scientific methods of production. They have little land both for homestead and operational holding.

6.18. COTTAGE AND SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES

The Kaibartas, particularly womenfolk are expert weavers. They weave cotton clothes and Endi chadar in their looms. A few Kaibarta men in our study villages produce cottage industry items like Japi, bamboo containers and agricultural and fishing implements but these are not, in organised sector. They do it mostly in their leisure hours. It may be mentioned that almost all Kaibarta households have their indigenous bamboo & cane products. Similarly all the Kaibartas particularly in the study areas know the art of net making but due to financial problems they can not produce the same in a large scale. Most of the Kaibarta households in the
study areas make their nets by purchasing raw materials from the market. Only very few (1.76%) families received Govt. assistance to run their cottage industries and others arrange their own finance or taking loans from other sources.

6.19. HEALTH, FAMILY PLANNING AND WELFARE MEASURES

The Kaibartas of the study areas cannot pay attention to health, as they have to struggle hard with their basic problems. So the main cause of their health deterioration is the lack of these basic needs. But health is wealth. So for sound health, delicious food, wholesome climate, cleanliness, and sanitary facilities etc are of great importance. The government has made, of course, some provisions of health care for the S.C people like PHC, pure drinking water etc. As a result, to some extent there has been a change of the health condition of the Kaibartas in the Kamrup district.

Adoption of scientific methods of family planning is of paramount importance to reduce the abnormal growth of population which definitely stands in the way of all round development of the people. We tried to elicit information as regards impact of family planning among the Kaibartas. The heads of 73.5% families opined that family planning is useful and small family is a happy family. The heads of 26.5% families, however, could not agree to the small family norm. They argue that creation is not within the competence of human beings and a child comes to this earth with two hands. If opportunities are given to the locals, population explosion will be no problem.
Although a great majority supports family planning as many as 82.03% of families are not accepting any family planning measures. Only 17.97% of families have accepted the family planning methods.

By and large the Kaibartas of the study areas are not aware of the various welfare measures adopted by government for the welfare of the scheduled castes. There are 42.57% of families who have 'heard' about such policies of government while 57.43% of the families are not aware of any such government measures. As regards enjoyment of such facilities 17.38% of families have been benefitted by government welfare measures.

6.20. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The Kaibarta villages of the Kamrup district become inundated by floodwater almost every year during the rainy season. This causes serious problems by disrupting road communication with the town and by spreading various infectious diseases. In recent years, the rainy season often comes late. As a result, breeding activities and spawning, success of various fish species are greatly hampered. This, in turn, results in poor recruitment of fish to the stocks and subsequent scarcity of fish for catching. This compounds the fishermen's hardship.

6.21. CHANGES IN SOCIAL SPHERES

It is noticed that with the rise in the educational level, the percentage of fishing population to the total employed population seems to decline.
It is clear from our study, that there is a correlation between education and occupation. The number of men employed in fishing as against the total number of employed men varies inversely with their educational level. Majority of the men engaged in fishing are illiterates. Next, are the men who have had primary education. Those who have studied upto seventh standard form another fishing category. On the other hand, the position is reversed so far as the non-fishing occupations are concerned. In the study villages, illiterates are not found to have pursued non-fishing occupations. Persons having secondary education and beyond are found to be engaged in non-fishing professions, as he feels that fishing as an occupation does not suit an educated person like him. Even his parents believe that being exposed to a different life-style in school, it is impossible for him to stand the tough life of a fisherman. One of the reasons for the change-over from fishing to non-fishing occupations is avenues of employment in various factories and companies in and around city or town. Thus, it is seen that with the rise in the level of education, the percentage of fishing population to the total employed population has decreased.

The social life of the Kaibartas has also undergone certain changes. They are now more inclined to live in small familial units thus leading to the separation of joint families. In the study villages, there has been an appreciable change even in the marriage system. Inter-caste marriages are now readily accepted by these villagers. In the selection of mates, due importance is nowadays given to individual choice. Moreover, there is an increase in the age of marriage of both boys and girls in the study villages. Change is also noticed in the observance of ceremonial uncleanliness. Taboos related to birth and death pollution and of menstruation impurity are
less stringent than earlier days. Now the delivery of a baby takes place in a hospital or maternity home but not at home.

There is a noticeable change in the standard of living among the Kaibartas, as a result of their contact with city. The adoptions of urban occupation by the younger Kaibartas carry with it the rudiments of a new socio-economic order with a resultant increasing inequality in income. Increasing acquaintance with the city life has created the tendency of a new outlook and world-view. Some of these young urban occupation holders seem to realise the unique importance of education and they seem to lament for their failure to go in for higher education. Even in some of the study areas Kaibarta youths have formed the 'Yuvak Sangha', a non-government youth agency, aimed at the upliftment of the rural poor. Through this Sangha, various rural development projects have been undertaken to improve the socio-economic condition of the rural poor. In recent years, a noticeable change has taken place in the life of the Kaibartas of the study villages.

Even among the fishing implements, there has been replacement of materials in recent days. Regarding the materials and fibres from which accessories such as floats, sinkers, head rope, foot rope, and netting are fabricated, synthetic fibres such as nylon, polypropylene have almost completely replaced natural fibres and materials such as cotton, hemp, wood and clay. The replacement of cotton by synthetic fibres has taken place without much assistance from government agencies. It has increased the efficiency of the traditional gillnets to a very large extent, due to the fact that synthetic fibres are less visible than cotton ones, apart from other
advantages such as easier handling, hardly any need for preservation, durability and less weight.

6.22. BLUE REVOLUTION

India has made remarkable progress in the development of fishery sector in past 60 years. India's fish production from 7.5 lakh metric tonnes in 1950-51 has increased manifold and stands at 6.67 million metric tonnes at present, where inland fisheries growth rate is 6 per cent in turn contributes around 55 per cent of total production. This sector occupies an important status in the national economy. It is a means of valuable foreign exchange earner and provides employment to millions of people. It is also instrumental in providing sources of livelihood for a large section of economically backward and resource poor fishing communities like the Kaibartas of the country. According to recent livestock census there is around 14.48 million fisher population in the country. This sector contributes 1.04 per cent to the total GDP and 5.34 per cent to the GDP from agriculture and allied activities.

Known as sunrise sector fishery has recorded faster growth as compared to agriculture and livestock. Carps contribute as much as 87 percent of the total aquaculture production in India. This is achieved by combining mainly culture practices with strong traditional knowledge and by applying scientific strategies in management. The quality fish seed is the main input for fish farming practices which determine the overall production scenerio of fish. In the year 2001, the Government of India urged all the states as well as Union Territories to observe July 10 as National Fish
Farmers Day in order to commemorate the historic and momentous event of achieving the induced breeding of crops first ever in India 10th July, 1957. It is generally difficult for fish farmers to know the quality of fish seed from outer appearance. The seed producers take this advantage and sell poor quality fish seed to the farmers resulting in lesser production. The term quality fish seed refers to prescribed species, standard size, healthy, able to grow fast in pond environment and disease resistant. It is reported that the seed producers generally use the same stock for breeding purpose year after year resulting in breeding and production of poor quality seed. The seed produced from collected breed stock from natural sources such as rivers, tributaries, beels etc is reported more than 17 percent growth and more than 28 percent survivality than that of seed production from pond reared fish. However, standard sized fish seed of quality fingerlings at right time is yet to achieved uniformly throughout the State. Of course the fish production trends in the state is gradually increasing. With a view to address some of the constraints attributed to inadequate fish production in the State the Government has recently taken up several measures with holistic approach. One of the important measures is enforcement of Assam Fish Seed Act, 2005, first of its kind in the country for production as well as availability of quality fish seed. As per the Act, it is mandatory for all seed producers, growers, importers, exporters etc to register their names and must obtain licence from the concerned District Fisheries Development Officer. The massive awareness programme on quality fish seed is the need of the hour. As Sanjay Sarma expects:

*The fish seed producers, growers and distributors have to be organised extensively to illustrate the importance: of quality fish seed for higher fish production and to accelerate the 'Blue Revolution' in the State (2010 : 4).*
Without availability of quality seed at the farmers door step at the right time and eco friendly methods for fish farming, Blue Revolution will be a far cry.

In order to make fish production a sustainable venture not only for contributing towards the country's growth but also for protecting the traditional fishing communities like the Kaibartas, a long term strategy needs to be adopted. This strategy should emphasize not only on technical feasibility and economic viability, but also on approach for environment friendly and social acceptability.

6.23. DEVELOPMENT OF FISHERY SECTOR IN ASSAM

With its vast water resources suitable for pisciculture, the Fishery sector is considered as an important economic activity in the socio-economic context of the State of Assam. The State Fishery Sector has made consistent growth during the 11th Plan period registering an average growth of 6.4% in fish production. Fish production in the state has reached the level of 232 million kg in 2010-11 compared to 219 million kg in 2009-10. It is observed from the statistics of the last few years that the State has encouraging prospect in fish production as well as in employment generation through fishery sector. The Fishery Department of the state is proposed to activate the Marketing Wing of the Department to serve the producers and consumers in a manner so that maximum return goes to fish farmers while the consumer gets the commodity at reasonable rate. It is therefore proposed to strengthen the fish marketing activity under the scheme through Self Help Group (SHG). However, there is considerably large gap in between demand for fish and production of fish in the State.
The Department of Fishery of the State has undertaken various measures to meet the requirement of the shortage by enhancing fish production and productivity as mentioned below:

- Horizontal expansion of area through construction of new pond.
- Reclamation of low lying areas & derelict water bodies.
- Development and sustainable management of wet land/beel fisheries, pen and cage culture.
- Integrated fish farming.
- Species diversification.
- Improvement in quality of fish seed and regulation on fish seed production through Assam Fish Seed Rules, 2010.
- Conservation of fish and fishery resources through intensive sensitisation programme and implementation of Assam Fishery Rules.
- Commercialization of indigenous fishes for entrepreneurship development.
- Infrastructure development through establishment of feed mill, hatchery, hygienic fish market for remunerative price for both producers and consumers etc.
- Development of model Fishermen/ Fishery villages.
- Initiation of organic Fish Farming in the State with provision of certification.
❖ Strengthening of extension networking through "Para fishery extension workers" etc.
Sivasish Thakur remarks –

Government has been making a number of positive interventions for sustainable development of this sector and to meet the ever increasing demand for fish (2010:04).

The focus is on bridging the gap between the demand and supply of fish. The fish seed production and its marketing are also regulated under the provisions of newly framed Assam Fish Seed Rules, 2010 to ensure quality fish seed to the farmers. The Assam Fisheries Development Corporation Ltd. has been making effective interventions in the beels/wetland which has resulted in increasing the productivity in the beels to a considerable extent with maximum of 1600 kg/ha/yr. This has also benefited the local communities like the Kaibartas around the beels by raising their living standard.

For Enhancement of the Fish production in the State the following Schemes/Programmes are implemented in the State during the last five years:

1. FISH SEED FARMING/WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Quality Fish Seed is the basic inputs for profitable fish farming. One of the main focuses of the Department is production and distribution of quality fish seed. Under Women Empowerment Programme women beneficiaries are imparted with required training and provided with inputs for rearing of fish seed to produce fingerlings in
the backyard ponds as part time employment to provide additional income to their families.

2. EMPLOYMENT GENERATION PROGRAMME:

A. CHIEF MINISTER'S SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT GENERATION PROGRAMME: This newly introduced program aims at generating employment and increasing fish production through development of water areas and scientific fish farming managed by SHGs.

B. EMPLOYMENT GENERATION SCHEME THROUGH SHG UNDER FISHERY EXTENSION SERVICE: The aim and objective of the scheme is to engage the unemployed youth of the locality in fish farming where low-lying areas are available.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF FRESH WATER AQUACULTURE THROUGH FFDA

The scheme aims at development of individual ponds through involvement of fish farmers by providing them with financial assistance in the form of subsidies and bank loans.

4. RECLAMATION OF DERELICT WATER BODIES

The objective of the Scheme is to reclaim the derelict water bodies for enhancement of fish production and to provide employment to the rural unemployed youth.
5. FISHERIES EXTENSION AND TRAINING
The aim and objective of the scheme is to impart training to the fish farmers on scientific fish farming and publication of training manual to popularise scientific fish farming among fish farmers.

6. NATIONAL WELFARE FUND FOR FISHERMEN (Centrally Sponsored Scheme)
   A. SAVING-CUM-RELIEF: The objective of Saving-cum-Relief scheme is to provide financial assistance to the fishermen during the lean fishing period.
   
      B. FISHERMEN'S INSURANCE: Under the scheme, fisher folk licensed, identified or registered with the State Government could be insured for Rs 1.00 lakh against death or permanent disability and Rs 0.50 lakh for partial disability.

7. DEVELOPMENT OF BEEL AND OPEN WATER FISHERIES [State and Central Sponsored Programme (SCSP)]
The objective of the scheme is to develop small beels and open water fisheries within SCSP areas followed by community based management.

8. RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND
This is a programme under NABARD for infrastructure development in the rural areas contributing towards agriculture growth, rural connectivity and other social sector development.
9. ASSAM AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS PROJECT (AACP)

The objective of the project is to increase competitiveness amongst poor and marginal farmers/communities dependent on fish farming as primary and secondary income.

10. RASHTRIYA KRISHI VIKASH YOJANA (RKVY)

This Scheme aims at holistic development of Agriculture and allied sector by constructing new ponds, development of low-lying areas, beels/wet lands, fresh water prawn farming, kuchia culture, establishment of fish feed mills, hatcheries, development of Departmental Farms etc.

11. NATIONAL FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT BOARD (NFDB)

NFDB is established as a nodal agency to work towards blue revolution with a focused attention basically aimed at fish production in the country.

12. ASSAM FISHERIES INVESTMENT FACILITATION CENTRE

For facilitating easy access to institutional credit to the prospective fish farmers and fishery entrepreneurs, the Assam Fisheries Investment Facilitation Centre, a Single Window System was established.

13. ASSAM MATSYA MAHOTSAV

Assam Matsya Mahotsav is an annual Fish Festival cum Awareness Program organised with the objective of creating mass awareness on various aspects of scientific fish farming, role of various stake
holders in the development of the Fishery sector in the State and various initiatives undertaken by the Department, Assam Agriculture University, Indian Council of Agriculture Research Institutions and other academic institutions.

14. MATSYA MIITRA

Educated unemployed youths are given short duration training for 15 days in the Fishery College, Raha on various aspects on fish farming and allied subjects. The Matsya Mitras provides the required extension services to the fish farmers on the spot besides helping them in scheme preparation for Govt/Bank assistance.

15. FRESH WATER PRAWN HATCHERY

With a view to popularize and encourage prawn farming and to make prawn seed available in the State, the Department has established one Fresh Water Prawn Hatchery, in the Meen Bhawan Complex at Guwahati.

16. STATE FISH LABORATORY

A State Fish Laboratory has been established at the Directorate Complex, Guwahati under RKVY for testing of Soil and water quality parameters. Additionally the laboratory will also extend support to farmers for investigation on fish health and hygiene.
17. **LIVE GENE BANK**

Under this programme, conservation through breeding and propagation of local endangered economically important fish species has been taken up for future use and research.

Although there are a number of state or centrally sponsored schemes / projects to develop fishermen, fishing communities and fishing infrastructure in the state, still our study villages hardly received any fruits out of it, which implies that these schemes / projects are not effectively implemented and monitored in the state and discriminatory attitude is also shown in allocating the funds of such schemes / projects.

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