CHAPTER-8
CONCLUSION

In the present study an attempt has been made to highlight the socio-economic and folk traditional aspects of Kaibarta community with special reference to the undivided Kamrup district of Assam. On the basis of both primary and secondary data including available literature of different authors of different times, the whole research work is prepared under eight chapters. The study envisages to comprehend the picture of society, economy, folklore and folklife of the traditional Kaibarta community of undivided Kamrup district of Assam.

The Kaibartas, one of the major Scheduled Caste Community of Assam, are found throughout the plain districts of Assam. They are fishermen by occupation. Generally, they are Saktas but in recent years a sizable section has become the followers of Vaishnavism, Krishna Guru and the cult of Anukul Thakur. In accordance with the social status accorded to them, they are the people who are labelled as untouchables and on the basis of the criteria of untouchability they are considered as one of the Sixteen Scheduled Castes of Assam by Constitutional (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 (a) Part-II under the provision of Articles 341 and 342. Though in Assam particularly in our study area untouchability is not so acute as is found in other states of India yet there is still the remnants of social evil of untouchability in disguised form between Scheduled Castes Kaibartas and other caste people. At present they are placed at a much lower economic and social status within the Hindu Society.
As regards its etymology, we have found an orthodox derivation of the word 'Kevarta' or 'Kaibarta' from the root 'ke' or 'Ka' meaning water and 'vrit' meaning exist (Ke + vrit). The term 'Kaibarta' has been derived from the word 'Kimvarta' consisting of two words viz. 'Kim', meaning ugly and 'varta' meaning occupation which prevailed in the 'Brahman' and 'Samhita' age. Thus we have found the derivation and the transformation of the word 'Kaibarta' or 'Keot' from the root 'Kimvarta' as follows:

Kimvarta>Kibarta>Kevarta>Kaibarta>Keot.

So those who live in water or following a degrading occupation like fishing are known as Kaibartas. In other words the Kaibartas are one of the fishing communities of Assam who (a) make net and boat, (b) rear fish and collect fish or other creatures of that species from water, (c) live by selling the collected things and (d) use water way for other profession. Due to Sanskritisation, there has been upward mobility of the Dom community in the Brahmaputra valley to the Nadiyals and then ultimately to the Kaibartas or Jal-Keots. So by 1931 the term 'Kaibartas' has been used as synonymous with the terms Dorns, Nadiyals, Jal-Keots to indicate untouchable section of the society.

In addition to vertical mobility, horizontal mobility has taken place among them at family level due to specialisation of their occupation. As a result of specialisation of the work assigned to them, there are as many as eight classification of the Kaibartas namely, Jalia, Teli, Mali, Halowa, Seoli, Neoli, Katharowa and Bhari. Though each of them involves in the same traditional occupations like fishing, yet each one has its own distinct traits. In this respect no vertical mobility has taken place, but there has been horizontal mobility among them.
As regards their migration, it has been observed that since time immemorial the Kaibartas have been immigrating to Assam from western states like Ayodhya, Mithila, Magadha and Gaur etc. In other words the original Kaibartas who are mixed of both Aryans and Non-Aryans came to Assam in the 4th century from west India, while the immigrants coming from erstwhile East Bengal and Bangladesh are said to Dravidian origin. During the Ahom rule Momaitamuli Barbarua brought some Kaibarta families including two Kaibarta merchant from Dhakuapara of Koach Bihar along with other castes and gave them permanent settlement.

Before and after the independence of India, there has been steady influx of the Kaibartas of Dravidian stock into Assam from Bengal because of its political instability, natural calamities and economic crisis. In later period the immigrants have came in the form of cheap labourers, rickshaw pullers, vegetable vendors, masons, carpenters and many other such vocations. They have settled in the 'char' areas and generally reside on the bank of the *beels*, ponds, and canals, near damp places or on the bank of the rivers and on the flood prone areas.

The Kaibarta fishermen of Kamrup district are maintaining their folk-culture inspite of socio-economic changes. They have their own caste base folk narratives in the form of folk tales, legends, myths, cult song, ballads, proverbs, rhymes, riddles, charms, blessing and counting. But most of these are similar to other oral narratives current in the district of Kamrup. A few narratives under the head of legend and ballad have been represented here which give a legendary, mythical and ballad oriented importance of this community. The folk-customs of the Kaibarta community of Kamrup district of Assam are broadly guided by the Hindu doctrine with other
fishermen Kaibartas of Assam. Also, the indigenous folk traditions have remarkable impact on their socio-cultural and religious life. The Kaibartas observe pujas of different nature which may be divided into two heads, namely, purely personal and social or collective. Personal pujas are performed as per own routine but within the social system or scriptural rule and the social pujas or festivals (as mentioned in the fifth chapter) are performed as per the calendar day of sacred books. These pujas and festivals develop the professional activities, integrity, unity and brotherhood among the people of this locality.

One of the most interesting and fascinating aspects of material cultures of Kaibarta community is its art and craft. These are weaving, pottery, fishing equipments, cane and bamboo works etc. In the age of globalisation and standardisation, the life style of the Kaibartas, in general, is helping these arts and crafts to survive the thrust of the changing times. But this help is not at all enough for them. Ignorance, illiteracy and conservative attitudes of the people connected with their arts and crafts are standing in the way of modernisation and expansion of material culture in the Kaibarta society. Due to ignorance, outdated tools and old methods of production are used in these arts and craft and thus have not been able to keep pace with other sectors of the economy. Although their mind is folk based that is reflected through their arts and crafts, they fail to adopt newer and scientific methods of production due to shortage of capital, scarcity of raw materials and absence of proper training facilities and thus produce old designed traditional goods. The Kaibartas' heritage seems to be unusually rich in the field of dramatic and semi-dramatic institutions of purely folk types and also in that of ritualistic dancing with the help of musical instruments of a mimetic nature. In the cultures of women folk, mimetic
acting and dancing seem to have an important place. The important dances and acting of the fishermen Kaibartas of this district are ritualistic in nature and are connected with their chief religious and social festivals.

In a nutshell, a more deeper look into the oral literature may reveal socio economic tension which have not been observed at this stage except the presence of strong notion of fatalism. However, fishermen are part of the larger agricultural villager and their folklore also represents agrarian spirit with some exception of fishermen's rituals. In the folklore of fishermen, narratives and other verbal genres centering round fish has been observed. Therefore, there are two levels of fishermen's folklore. One is general folklore and the other is specially fishermen's lore. Here also economic life has given birth to a specially designed folklore which may be termed as fishermen's lore.

It is noteworthy that expenditure incurred for festivals, puja ceremonies and rites de passage come next to food and dress for which maximum money is spent. This shows that the Kaibartas are more tradition minded and theirs is not a market oriented community.

Being entirely a fishing community, the Kaibartas are never self-sufficient. They had always to rely on their neighbours not only for the necessities of life like food and clothes but also for the marketing of fish. They have thus lost many of the basic features of the little community as discussed by Redfield (1955). The growing processes of interaction through communication networks, marketing centres and other institutions have introduced to them the features of 'peasantry'. On the one hand, they are part of the regional peasant culture and on the other, they are linked with
the mainstream of the nation through commonly shared mythology, growing inter-regional contacts through markets.

The Kaibartas of the study villages carry out their fishing operations following the Assamese calendar. They catch fish in the beels and rivers with the help of various nets and traps. Joint trips are also organised by them. Some of the Kaibartas own individual fisheries also. They even catch fish in the fisheries owned by Fishery Co-operative Societies. They sell fish either caught by them or purchased from others.

It has been observed that there has been a significant change of their family system from joint family which existed in the recent past in our sampled households to a nuclear family due to factors like economic hardship and development of ideology of individualism and materialism. Although number of nuclear families are more, joint families are also prevalent amongst them. Now, most of the people of the study areas have been found to prefer nuclear family. Still family traditions govern the behaviour of Kaibartas. The elder as a part and parcel of the family even today, play the role of informal family counselors. The Kaibartas are patrilineal. They are monogamous and they practice caste endogamy. Premarital sex relations are strongly disapproved among them. Incompatibility between husband and wife, conflicts between mother-in-law and daughters-in-law and sisters-in-law and between married brothers sometimes result into dissolution of marriages among the Kaibartas. The kinship system of the Kaibartas of the study villages is bilateral.

In this study, first hand data on the nature of socio-economic and socio-cultural life of the Kaibartas have been collected from surveyed villages. It has been found that although this district has a number of beels
and rivers, the Kaibarta community enjoy very little economic opportunities and sociologically occupy the lowest rank of the caste order. This condition is also reflected in their educational achievement. The community has very little land because they were totally dependent on fishing and daily wages. All these indicate the economic backwardness of this community. With the rise in the level of education, there has been a gradual decline in the number of fishing population. The educated Kaibartas are leaving their traditional calling of fishing in preference to non-fishing jobs.

Occupational change has differentiated the Kaibartas from one another in their social as well as economic status. This change has also contributed to the emergence of new dimensions in the field of social and economic relations. Marital status of the Kaibartas in the study areas have undergone a change i.e. inter-caste marriage is taking place between the Kaibartas and other castes.

The discussion on economic life of the Kaibartas of the study villages indicates a number of difficulties and disadvantages that are present in the traditional occupational pattern of fishing including shortage of capital, difficulties in transportation and marketing of their catch etc. As they are still practicing traditional methods of fishing, income from it is uncertain and the return has always remained poor. Not all fishery co-operatives among them are functioning in desired ways. Due to the want of money, many of them have not been able to purchase modern fishing accessories to replace their traditional ones.

With respect to occupation it has been observed that there has been occupational mobility of them from traditional occupation to non-traditional occupations like jobs, services, business etc. The main causes of their
occupational mobility are non-availability of the resources of the fish, shrinkage of fishing area in recent years due to rapid urbanization and industrialisation, non-availability of cultivable land, uncertainty and insufficient income from fishing, government's take over of the fisheries, influx of non-fishermen and non-local mahaldars in pisciculture including fishing trade, shortage of capital and malfunctioning of the Fishery Co-operative Societies.

Since fishing is their traditional occupation, the forefathers of the present generation of the Kaibartas do not pay attention to occupy agricultural land and to-day the Kaibartas in a changing occupational status are facing acute shortage of land. Apart from lack of operational holding, in the field of agriculture they have suffered from lots of problems like frequent floods, soil erosion, frequent change of the course of the rivers, loss of agricultural land within the embankments etc.

Most of the Kaibartas do not possess individual fisheries and the low lying and marshy lands near the Kaibarta villages are gradually drying up as a result of that they have to depend on the Fishermen Co-operative Societies which manage the major beels and rivers and thus regulate income of the fishermen. But affluent people of other castes and ethnic groups involve themselves in the affairs of the co-operatives by investing capital in the shares. As a result, it does not remain exclusively a fishermen's affair. The capitalist section of this region coming from either the caste of decadent zamindars or neo-rich traders invest in the co-operatives by supporting their representatives within the fishermen society. Consequently profits are drained off from the fishermen community.
Therefore, the fishery development has to be conceived in terms of socio-economic relationship prevailing in this district.

Majority of the Kaibartas are living below the poverty line and their living conditions beggar description. Many of the households do not possess the house sites even and most of the families have a few *kathas* of house sites clustered together. Educationally they are backward and because of poor economic condition, the drop out in the primary stage is conspicuous.

The Kaibarta women are expert in weaving but due to poor purchasing power, they are not able to earn substantial income out of it. Although there is scope of improving the economy by undertaking various cottage industries and the menfolk possess all the skills, yet due to non availability of raw materials at cheaper cost, the Kaibartas are not in a position to earn anything tangible from the cottage industries.

The socio-cultural organisations could have played important role in improving the socio-economic condition of the Kaibartas but these are not functioning properly in the study areas. Inspite of having large number of fishery resources, fishermen manpower and also the demand for fishes in this state, the fisher folk are not self sufficient in fish production. Owing to the shortage of proper employment and income 72.86 percent fishermen households in our study areas are in debt and they have to pay a high interest from their disposable income. As a result the entire Kaibarta society have been suffering from acute poverty which further creates a vicious circle of poverty.
So far as economic differentiation is concerned, it has been observed that there has been economic differentiation either between the different landholding categories or income groups or occupational groups or between the poor and the rich Kaibartas because of lots of causes namely poverty; disparities in income, wealth and opportunities; inequitable distribution of means of production; occupational differentiation and disparities in the development of the infrastructure facilities.

It has also been observed that inspection of the L.P. schools is not done regularly and in many schools the teacher come late in the study villages of Kaibartas community. Unless inspection is regularly done no fond hope or promise of better education will serve any useful purpose. Besides most of the schools do not possess the basic paraphernalias such as desk benches, black-boards, maps etc. In the flood affected areas the schools remain closed during flood and even after flood for a considerable period as the school buildings are damaged. The Kaibartas are getting some help from the allocations under Scheduled Caste Component Plan, but the impact of the various development schemes is yet to be felt. The infrastructural facilities are far from adequate. Most of the road linking the Kaibarta villages are katcha fair weather roads. Drinking water by public distribution system is extended to a negligible number of Kaibarta villages.

From our study, it can be established a two way relationship between the Kaibarta community and environment. On the one hand, Kaibartas are the worst polluter by way of distributing the domestic waste to the environment in unhygienic manner; utilising the katcha latrines in a congested environment of the village; increasing population in an unsustainable way by not adopting any family planning manner; living in
dam surrounding; not following sustainable fish, fishery and fisherfolk management programmes and fueling the wetland crisis. On the other hand, there are sufficient evidences to show that the Kaibartas are the worst sufferer. For instance degradated environment have serious consequences on their health and hence reduce their productivity and making them poorer still. Also fishing ground have suffered extensive degradation over last couple of decades due to increase in population and industrialisation mostly and it affect the sources of income of the Kaibartas.

On the basis of the observations derived from the study the following suggestions can be recommended in order to uplift the economic conditions of the Kaibarta community:

1. The age old methods of fishing are admittedly very ingenious. The Kaibartas must try to acquaint themselves with the up-to-date knowledge about the habits of fish, especially their seasonal migration and with the results of the scientific experiments carried on the fishing techniques. The Kaibarta fishermen would be immensely benefited if they are induced to take advantage of the various types of insurances.

2. Fishing sources like vast wetland resources should be managed and developed upto its maximum carrying capacities to mainly produce fishes. Importance should be given to different management techniques for open and close beels. The open beel's connecting channels should be strengthened, effectively maintained and invariably provided with a sluice or lock gate, furnishing controlled ingress and egress of water and fish stock. The marginal areas of the open beels should be developed into culture fisheries by appropriate embankment constructions in the dry season. The
deeper central portion of the open beels should be used for capture fisheries. Methods of fish culture by appropriate gears for the operation of capture fisheries should be standardised. Close beels should be developed into strong culture fisheries in which full advantages should be taken of the macro vegetation feeding and fish including Grass carp and Silver carp.

3. Provision should be made for revitalising and registering the Fishery Co-operative Societies among the Kaibartas. These societies should be given the right of fishing sources like beels, rivers etc. at a reasonable price so as to reduce the influence of the Mahaldars over the sources of fishing. There should be regular visit of the fishery officers to the Kaibarta villages having Fishery Co-operatives so that the problems faced by the Fishermen are sorted out expeditiously. More evaluation studies should be made in respect of the beneficiaries so that the real needy people are not deprived of the facilities.

4. The State Fisheries Development Corporation should assure the fishermen for the economic viability of the development of fisheries by giving financial help. The socio-economic status of the Kaibartas engaged in production of fish should be sought to be improved by the Department of Fisheries, if necessary by providing them subsidies on inputs. The State Fisheries Development Corporation and The National Fund for Fishermen should be fully gear itself to the proper development of fisheries and fishermen. For removing the shortage of capital in the field of fisheries and fishermen societies, there should be special branches in the Nationalised Banks to link up the fishermen having suitable land either of their own or of the govt. in their locality for creation of water resources for fish culture and to extend financial assistance as subsidy by the govt. both for high cost of inputs technology and renovation work of beels, tanks and swamps.
5. As income and employment are the backbone of a household and also for the community and nation, the prevailing settlement policy of fisheries and the right and obligations of the settlement holders should be in favour of fishermen. The fisheries should be settled for fishermen permanently on rent basis like the settlement system of agricultural land or the lease system given to the tea estate owners. The beels should be provided in lease to the lessee for a long period, say for a period of 10 years by fixing the lease money value in terms of productive potential of each beel so that they may enjoy incentive to construct beel's development infrastructure. Also the encroachment of fisheries for other than fishing purpose should be stopped by introducing some strong acts. Moreover Bank should supply capital through the concerned department to the fishermen at the time of settlement or leasing of beels and rivers.

6. The ceiling surplus lands should be allotted to the landless and marginal landholders of the Kaibartas as homestead land or as operational holding along with necessary funds for improvement of lands so that they could boost up their economic standing. But the right of transfer of land should be restricted so that they could not transfer them at will. Yarn at subsidised rate may be supplied to the weaver womenfolk at the village. The menfolk also possess skill for making nets, bamboo and cane products. Due to poor economic condition most of the Kaibartas are not in a position to purchase the raw materials. Raw materials like nylon yarn, bamboo and cane, 'Takau' leaves etc., may be provided at subsidised rate. Necessary marketing facilities may also be provided eliminating the middlemen.

7. The Vicious Circle of Poverty is unbreakable, if drastic measures are not taken. So, the deadlock should be broken by widening the size of growth. This can be done by changing policies of the Government and introducing some development schemes through perspective
and regional planning for the development of backward communities like fishermen. These can help in generating and increasing their income and ultimately increase in income will help for improving educational, infrastructural and health care facilities for the Kaibarta Community.

8. For removing the unemployment problem, the 'Reservation of Vacancies in Services and Posts Act 1978' should be effectively executed by the Central and State Government. Backlog of vacancies of Scheduled Castes should be filled up through special drive every year and acquiring of fake Scheduled Castes certificates should be checked jointly by the government agencies and Scheduled Castes organisations. Moreover the Kaibartas should be given self-employment training courses free of cost to provide subsidiary engagement. In order to promote self-reliance as speedily as possible the fishing industry should be given more importance.

9. In order to check high rate of growth of population, they should be advised to follow anti-natalist population policy. To make it successful, they should be taught about the economic benefits of a small family norm. Urgè for a high standard of living and decent life will force them to have a small family for which automatically growth rate will decline among them.

10. Economic development does not merely depend on economic resources, it also depends on popular attitudes and aspiration of the people. The fishermen are more or less fatalists by conviction. They are poor not only in economic overheads but also in social overheads like public health, medical facilities, attitude towards traditional occupation, awareness of welfare measure, inactiveness of the socio-cultural organisation, non-response to the prohibitionary measure, low social status due to caste system, social hierarchy, religious beliefs, entry of other communities in fishing industry and
absence of research facilities in this field. So, improvement of non-economic factors mentioned above is also most essential with the improvement of economic factors for alleviating poverty among the fishermen.

11. Provision of infrastructural facilities in respect of safe drinking water, medical, hospitals and dispensaries, marketing etc. should be made available to all particularly the Kaibartas. They should be provided with certain infrastructure facilities like cold storage, fish-caning machineries etc. So that they can take an industry out of it as it has been done in Kerala and other coastal regions.

12. It is felt that the Kaibartas of the study villages at present require improvement of education. Though the awakening to the importance of education has already started among them, the drop-out rate is still high. High expense in education is a major problem for the entire community. Special scholarships should be granted so that deserving poor students can study. Moreover, parents should be made aware of the existence of fishery training centres and fish farms so that they can send their children to receive training. They should be made conscious of the fact that not only experience but also education is necessary to make one a good fisherman.

13. Evils like drinking, smoking ganza and gambling, although socially prohibited, are still continuing particularly among the youths of Kaibartas. And it has been observed that a good amount is spent on such items, even depriving the family of the essential items of food. The voluntary agencies like Mahila Samities and Youth Club should take steps to stop such evil practices.

14. Growth with social justice should be the motto of Economic Planners for the development of backward communities like the fishermen Kaibartas which would be in the tune of socialistic pattern of society.
Gunner Myrdal’s concept of the relationship between social inequalities and economic inequalities is to be taken into consideration while dealing with the development of the fishermen community. The socio-cultural and socio-economic attitude of the people of Kaibarta community should be changed by removing the socio-economic obstacles with the help of social justice.

15. Special privileges and safeguards for Scheduled Castes may be able to remove the socio-economic inequalities of the fishermen community which is already provided by Indian Constitution through ‘Directive Principles of State Policy’, which though not enforceable by the court, should be applied by the state in making laws for the development of backward communities. This will help in the physical development of backward communities, in utilisation of both the man-power and natural resources. At present various agencies of Government are adopting welfare measures for the weaker sections including the Kaibartas. But most of the Kaibartas are unaware of the welfare measures earmarked for their socio-economic development. Therefore, due publicity should be given to these measures in the rural areas to create awareness among rural poor communities like Kaibartas. Every development programmes related to the Kaibartas undertaken by various development agencies should ensure people’s participation and co-operation for its proper implementation.

16. With the change of time, all traditional culture and customs of Kaibarta community are undergoing changes and degenerated. To stop such degeneration and to keep these dying folk cultural forms alive with its original flavour researchers, performing artists, socio-cultural organisations as well as the govt. agencies should come forward with a positive attitude, otherwise the originality of the traditional Kaibarta community will be destroyed with the destruction of their traditional cultures and customs.
17. The Kaibarta community need a mini socio-revolution within their societies to cultivate better socio-economic patterns basically necessary for economic upliftment. So they should try to develop themselves culturally in arts, fine arts, architecture and literature. Establishment of Sports Club, Sanskritik Sanghas, Sakha Sahitya Sabha etc. in their village will certainly help them in their development process.

18. To create environmental awareness among the Kaibarta community spread of environmental education is necessary and this must be a joint venture between concerned govt. department, local village communities and voluntary agencies. Pollution of the fishing grounds by releasing the untreated or partially treated domestic and industrial effluents should be strictly prohibited.

As conclusive remarks it can be so summarised that successful implementation of these suggestions by the authority concerned will help in uplift of the socio-economic conditions of the Kaibartas so much so that they may come at par with other people of the society. It is the proper time to change the attitude of common people of our society towards the agony and miseries suffered by the traditional Kaibarta community so that efforts should be raised to abolish the inhuman prejudices raised against the underprivileged the Kaibarta community of the society. It is our strong belief that drastic change in social customs, rituals, marriage and burials, worship and taboos, sanctification etc. side by side with educational and economic uplift would only be able to do-away with untouchability and social ostracism. To draw conclusion about the Kaibartas a broad-based scientific research is a necessity. It is expected that the researchers in future would try to remove the lapses of the present study through their wide ranging
investigations. Thus, this is however a modest beginning in this field, which
would certainly build up foundation for future research and betterment of
the social aspects of the fishing community.