

## **Tracing Kaibarta Migration in Barak Valley of Southern Assam**

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The Kaibarta community of Barak Valley in Southern Assam, as one presently finds them, is essentially a migrant community. They came and settled in parts of Barak Valley across different points in time mostly after the Partition. One striking feature with regard to their post-migration settlement is the choice of place – the locations where the community has settled in. It can be seen that the Kaibartas are almost inevitably settled in places that are not just far off from ‘centre’ but are also places that are not really deemed fit for human habitation – wetlands, chars etc. Their place of settlement seems to reflect the socio-economic status they have been ascribed with. The Kaibartas have been essentially a community of the ‘fringe’. But a noticeable shift in this status can be discerned of late as the community stakes its claim in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres of the Valley. At the same time, the community also seems to be on the move as people continue to migrate from their earlier settlements in the fringes to more pronounced locations but at the same time, they never seem to be in the mainstream either. This tussle of visibility makes the Kaibarta community precarious as the people seem to be on a continuous move. Their internal migration across the valley spans around the different wetlands and char areas which are also ecologically critical. It could be subtly understood that the Kaibarta community, even though relegated to the fringe, are drivers of change in various ways. Through their landscaping of physical places or through their steady inroads in the socio-political and cultural spheres of the Valley, the Kaibarta community is a makes for a cogent study of how migration and post- migration settlement can impact and influence the socio-political, cultural and even the ecological markers of a place in concern.

This paper would try to look into the migration patterns of the Kaibarta community in Barak valley. In so doing, the paper would also seek to understand the historical origins of their migration and would particularly focus on how the settlement of the Kaibarta community has re/shaped the socio-political and ecological underpinnings of the Valley.

Keywords: Kaibarta, migration, socio-politics, ecology