

'Beyond the Lens of Peasantry': Theoretical Basis of 'Fishantry' as a Distinct Social Domain (Part 1)

Apurba Krishna Deb (Corresponding author)

Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship

Government of Manitoba, Western Region- Brandon

1129 Queens Avenue, Brandon, MB, R7A 1L9, Canada

E-mail: apurba.deb@gov.mb.ca; apurba_deb2003@yahoo.com

C. Emdad Haque

Natural Resources Institute

Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Earth, Resources and Environment

University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 2N2, Canada

E-mail: haquece@ms.umanitoba.ca

Received: August 2, 2013 Accepted: December 31, 2013 Published: January 9, 2014

doi:10.5296/ijssr.v2i1.4887

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijssr.v2i1.4887>

Abstract

Historically, fishers have been embodied among rural primary producers, and they have been largely overlooked in efforts of anthropological and political theorizing of the peasantry. This article, which is the first part of a study, takes up the challenge to analyze the theoretical basis and argues in favour of why fishers do deserve a separate analytical treatment. We observed that, despite some commonalities, interactions, and dependencies between fishers and peasants as rural inhabitants and professional groups, fishers exhibit distinct characteristics in terms of their socio-political dimension, culture, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), production relations, adoption of technology, local institutions, and resource governance. We, therefore, assert *fishantry* as a distinct social domain that deserves a separate analytical framework relative to peasantry. Empirically, the attributes of fishantry are more visible in small-scale fisheries in developing or least-developed societies. In part two of this study, which will be published in the next issue, we present the analysis pertinent to the independent

existence and the social relations of fishers in the fishing communities in Bangladesh. We envision that manifestations of a fishanthy theoretical framework would be reflected in the policy domain as designated resources and programs that would aim for the sustainable management of fisheries resources and the well-being of the user groups.

Keywords: peasantry, fishanthy, farmers, fishery, fishers, social class, differentiation, Asia

1. Fishers: A Neglected Community in the Development Discourse

Historically, terrestrial agriculture and farmers have been the almost exclusive frames of reference in addressing the questions of anthropological and political theorizing of the peasantry. Only a few scholars, based on their maritime ethnographies (notably Firth, 1966; Alexander, 1982; Ram, 1992), have intermittently debated the position of fishers within the peasant society. In the voluminous scholarship about peasantry, fishers' distinct ideas about nature, their culture and indigenous knowledge, and their social relations of production and livelihoods have generally been neglected. Numerous social and cultural anthropologists have relegated or levelled off different rural producers such as fishers under the general category of peasants¹. Such relegation has appeared in different forms in various forums. For instance, in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (1973-2012), the word *farmer* appeared 987 times, while *fisherman* was noted only nine times (accessed on July 4, 2012). The Human Development Report of the UNDP, *Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world* (2007/2008), mentioned four keywords relating to fish (fish, fisher, fisheries, fishing), while the keyword *farmer* (farm, farmer, farmland) appeared 68 times in the text. Bene (2003), by analyzing the World Development Report, *Attacking Poverty* (2000-01), calculates that the keyword *fish* (including fish, fishers, fishing, fishermen, fisherwomen, etc.) appeared only three times in 266 pages, and notes that there was only one case study on fishers out of the 35 cases on common property resource issues.

In the course of accumulating empirical knowledge of rural class differentiation in the fishing and farming villages of Bangladesh, we were confronted with both the conceptual diversity and weaknesses that the notion of peasantry holds, and realized that a critical assessment of the concept of peasantry was warranted. We registered a pattern of philosophical contradiction in the embodiment of artisanal fishers under the broad category of rural producers or peasantry. In the context of the complex socio-economic production relations and political structure of rural Bangladesh, we found out that a new conceptual framework for the small-scale fishers was necessary. In this first part of the study, we delimit our discussions to small-scale fisheries (also referred to as artisanal, inshore, and traditional fisheries), which are broadly characterized by a subsistence mode of production involving heterogeneous sets of full-time or seasonal, labour-intensive harvesting, processing, and

¹ For instance, in the Indian subcontinent, very few studies were conducted on rural communities, including peasants and fishers, during the pre-independence period (i.e., pre-1947). Gurumurthy (1982) claims that during the colonial period, many contributions by British scholars (Bedan-Powell, 1896; Griorson, 1926; Main, 1870; Wiser, 1930; compiled from Gurumurthy, 1982) aimed towards knowing the natives in order to administer them better with the least amount of expenditure and disturbance, so that the exploitation of natural resources by the colonial power would not be disrupted.

distribution technologies to exploit fisheries resources; small-scale fisheries are often targeted to local and domestic markets. In the second part of our study (which will be published in the next issue), we intend to analyze concrete social formation with a focus on class differentiation within fishantries, based on empirical findings from fishing and farming villages (coastal and floodplain areas of Bangladesh) representing varied ethnic communities, production systems and ecosystems.

An excellent context to look into the comparative perspectives between peasantry and fishers' conditions is Bangladesh's rural society, where around 60% of the rural workforce is directly or indirectly connected with primary agricultural production. The total size of the fisher population within such economy is considerable; around 1.2 million full-time and 11 million part-time fishers earn a livelihood from only small-scale fisheries. Bangladesh, located on the largest deltaic region of the world and significantly influenced by the water regimes of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers, has been since time immemorial a land of natural productivity, human habitation, occupational diversity, civilization, and vibrant culture. In the rural areas, there are both farming and non-farming occupational groups, with further differentiations within each of these occupations. Both groups contribute significantly to the local production systems. Along with the farmers who produce rice, the critical staple, the fishers are important suppliers of local food by providing fish; together they meet the well-known "rice-fish" dietary habits of the Bengali people.

Small-scale fishing is not only a source of livelihood for the rural fishers, but also an art of living that is characterized by a long tradition of adaptation to the dynamics of the social and natural environment. Prompted by our participation-observation of field-level realities in Bangladesh (details on methodologies will be provided in the next issue), we found out that the social scientific frameworks that embody all the rural producers under a general category of peasantry are overgeneralized and incompatible to encompass the differentiated social classes and the significance of their particular contributions. In this paper, we advocate for a distinct analytical framework for the fishers that can specify their position in the overall social structure, assist in enhancing awareness and consciousness of such position, and politically enable small-scale fishers to gain a voice in the domains of institutional power and authority.

In this first part of the study, we present our arguments in three sections. The first section examines the anatomy of the peasantry and how the fishers are situated within the framework. In the second section, we develop a new analytical framework for the fishers by refuting some commonly perceived interpretations of peasantry. The arguments favouring fishantries as a separate domain from peasantry in rural society are developed in the third section. We conclude that further social anthropological and political economy-oriented research is needed to synthesize from diverse geographical, socio-political, and cultural contexts to theorize on the small-scale fishers.

2. Flawed Anatomy of Peasantry and the Dilemma with Fishers

The interpretations of peasantry² are diverse, and various constructs of the essential qualities of peasants/peasantry/*peasantness* reflect the various ideological stances of scholars. Peasantry as a process (Shanin, 1973) has witnessed a drastic structural transformation through the dynamics of globalization - an indispensable force of the last few decades (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010). Ploeg (2010) synthesizes some of the major conceptual avenues that peasantries have witnessed: from land to ecological capital, subsistence to self-provisioning, partial integration to actively constructed “distantiation,” routine to dynamic co-production, subordination to multiple resistance, and community to extended networks and new marketplaces, revealing the capability and resilience of peasantry to adjust to changing conjunctures. Hobsbawm (1994) argues that the most “dramatic and far reaching social change” of the last century is the “death of the peasantry” (p. 289). Some scholars have raised the question whether it makes sense in this era of globalisation to speak of peasantry, as peasants are presumed to become a “historical anachronism, unable to survive the dynamics of the capitalist development of agriculture” (Veltmeyer, 2006, p. 445) on a global scale (cited in Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010, p. 179). The reality is that a subsistence-based class exists in most developing countries, and it keeps reproducing itself by struggling within the narrow economic spaces of rural agricultural production. We must not ignore the fact that primary agriculture is the mainstay of rural livelihoods in many developing countries, and these petty commodity-producing peasants supply the food reserve for their compatriots. We recognize that members of many peasant families, for the sake of their livelihoods, now do not exclusively depend on terrestrial farming; rather, they tend to diversify their income through extensification and intensification within and outside the agricultural sector by rotating between different social divisions of labour and adapting to new class relations. Despite the problematic of the complex nature of agrarian changes, especially in the context of the relationship of petty producers to the produce and the labour markets, the peasantry still upholds relevance, particularly to those scholars who are interested in examining the process of marginalization.

Scholars interested in peasantry have often viewed peasants through a broadly constructed general lens of rural producers and a purist lens of specifically land-based farming activities. For example, Firth (1950, p. 503) views a peasant “as a countryman engaged in rural pursuits,

² The literary meanings of peasantry are diverse. The *American Heritage Dictionary* (2009) views a peasant as a “member of the class constituted by small farmers and tenants, sharecroppers, and labourers on the land where they form the main labor force in agriculture; a country person; a rustic; an uncouth, crude, or ill-bred person; and a boor.” The *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia* (2010) considers a peasant as “any member of a class that tills the soil as small landowners or agricultural labourers...using a simple technology and a division of labor by age and sex.” The *Oxford Dictionary of Geography* (2009) views a peasant as a “farmer whose activities are dominated by the family group.” It recognizes that “although peasants have been characterized as backward and resistant to change, peasant strategies can be highly rational in a society where there is little margin for error.” The word is used as a modern slang to mean “ignorance, stupidity, or awkwardness.” The *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (1993) views peasants as “a farmer or agricultural worker of low status.” (Source: <http://www.answers.com/topic/peasant>, accessed on April 25, 2011.)

primarily agriculture, with a comparatively simple technology and a simple interest in the land.” Firth’s concept of *rural pursuits* is holistic in nature and recognizes the diversity of rural producers, including fishers and craftsmen. Lewis (1962, p. 179) categorically considers “the cultivation of the soil” as a crucial criterion as it is the “man-land relation which orders so much of what is distinctive of peasant life.” In its simplest interpretation, the possession of land has continued to determine who is a farmer and who transforms into a peasant. Again, it is this ownership and control over land that determines access to other determinants of power: social capital, political capital, and economic capital, which keep the rural property class tied to state power, providing them an advantageous position to further appropriate capital and opportunities (e.g., providence of cheap agricultural inputs, exemption of taxation, and state-patronized financial lending) and the authority to control and discipline the rest of the rural inhabitants. The purist approach especially invokes us to consider the professional significance and existence of an *extra-peasant* rural producer group in many of the professionally heterogeneous South and Southeast Asian rural societies. We view peasants as an underprivileged class whose own and familial labour is utilized in a subsistence mode of land-based cultivation/production.

Notable in the literature of peasantry is that land has been considered a determinant of class identity (peasant, farmer, proletariat, or entrepreneur) by the peasantry scholars, but any other source of production like aquatic resources has been overlooked. Land and sea are two separate ecological facets, requiring different tools and technologies, labour engagement, and modes of surplus extraction within the labour process. To fishers, the sea as a physical facet and the work carried out on that distinctive terrain provide them with an “alternative mode of self-representation, coherent in itself,” and fishers themselves “pose a counter-ideology of community based on a relationship of difference from and opposition to the model of agrarian” (Ram, 1992). In such a community, “the men - who put out to sea - are equipped with a masculine ideology of independence, individualism, bravery and resourcefulness,” and the women “promote a value system, which while emphasising communal and social responsibility rather than individualism, still differs significantly from that of women in caste society” (Ram, 1992, p. XIII). We argue that human-land relationships alone are limited and do not encompass all categories of rural producers. Rather, it is the social relations that make use of the tropical and subtropical environments which profoundly influence the social, economic, and cultural institutions of rural production.

Southeast Asian societies are diverse in terms of ecological, socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts, and hence, the complex processes of rural social transformations hinder the formation of a relatively homogeneous “classic” type of peasantry (Childs, 1977; Adnan, 1983; Shanin, 1987). Only in the recent wave of literature on sustainable rural livelihoods, we see inclusion of a wide array of natural resources as means of rural production. Again, there is a criticism that most of the popular sustainable livelihood frameworks heavily concentrate on the primary agrarian sector and the peasants. The very word *peasant* tends to exclude fishers from its self-determined domain. Eric Wolf’s characterization of peasants depicts this historical reality: peasants are the “populations that are existentially involved in cultivation and make autonomous decisions regarding the processes of cultivation... *This category... does*

NOT, however, include fisherman or landless labourers” (emphasis put by authors) (Wolf, 1969, p. xiv).

The discussion on peasantry has transformed as “more than a piece of intellectual nostalgia” (Shanin, 1990, p. 21) and peasantry is understood by scholars in many different ways. It is widely viewed as a distinct class, concept, and social process, yet it is difficult to capture all notions of peasantry with a single concept. The large diversity within the category of peasantry in different regions and most rural communities seems to militate against the notion of generalization (Shanin, 1987). Redfield (1956, p. 18) effectively captures the dilemma on the internal heterogeneity of the peasantry as a group and the fluidity of the concept: “peasantry as a type is not as distinct as birds are from mammals, or colloids from crystals.” Scholars have viewed peasantry using different analytical lenses: as a societal group and way of living (Redfield, 1956; Saul & Woods, 1987; Tung, 1946; Wolf, 1966); an economy (Alavi, 1987; Dumont, 1957; Galeski, 1968; Harriss, 1987; Rahaman, 1987); a culture (Bailey, 1966; Berger, 1987; Dobrowolski, 1987; Ortiz, 1987; Scott, 1976), and a class (Alavi, 1973; Hobsbawm, 1959; Marx, 1950; Scott, 1985; Shanin, 1987; Tilley, 1982; Wolf, 1965) (synthesized from Shanin, 1987). Some essential features of peasantry are: peasant families are the basic units of social organization; land husbandry practices are the key means of livelihoods; specific cultural patterns are linked to the ways of life; and peasants usually have the “underdog” position in society (Shanin, 1987, pp. 3-4).

As economic and social groups, there are some similarities between the peasants and fishers of Bangladesh and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Both depend considerably on manual labour and have their own indigenous sets of knowledge appropriate to their immediate ecosystems and professions. However, in an increasingly globalized pattern of dependency relationships in production and marketing, all categories of peasants and rural producers are increasingly “subject to the demands and sanctions of power holders” outside their social stratum (Wolf, 1966, p. 11). If a peasant’s entity, given his or her land-oriented distinct attributes, can be conceptually framed by the term *peasantry*, we would like to argue that fishers, in consideration of their unique attributes as an age-old professional group, similarly deserve to be designated with a separate concept, which we coin as *fishantry*. To describe the “peasant economy” of the Malay fishers, Firth (1966) acknowledges that the economy of a fishing community has some special features arising from its specific technical conditions, although it shares many of the general characteristics of an agriculture economy. Pi-Sunyer (1977, p. 43), to describe the Catalan fishermen-farmer community (Gerona, Spain), mentions:

...given these attitudes to farming and fishing, the close linkage between the two occupations, and an economic strategy based on a balanced exploitation of land and sea, it seems reasonable to approach the fisherman...as basically a variant of Catalan peasantry.

Later, in response to the criticism of the “anthropological ploy” of treating fishermen as a sub-type of peasantry, he mentions the intention of a particular adaptation in transition (Pi-Sunyer, 1987, p. 377). Mintz (1973) argues for developing typologies for different rural socio-economic groupings rather than abstract definitions of peasantry.

3. Fishantry: A New Analytical Framework for Marginal Artisanal/Small-scale Fishers as a Social Class

A fisherman is a fisherman; fish in our thoughts; fish in our dreams; fishy smell comes from our skin; fish is in our every discussion... We are gambling for fish throughout life; we are crazy for fish. Everything in fishing operations and fishing villages is peculiar. (Sitaram Jaladas, 56, Thakurtala, Moheskhali Island, Bangladesh)

“Jailla ar hailla ek na.” (Literally, fishers and farmers can never be on par.) (Udvab Jaladas, a fishing community leader, 48, Moheskhali Island, Bangladesh)

These simple statements of two caste-based fishers of Moheskhali Island, Bangladesh, depict that they, as a professional group, are “peculiar” and do not necessarily fit well within the domain of peasantry. For peasantry, Shanin (1990, p. 71) argues:

...no concept should be retired simply on the grounds of its representing only some aspects of reality. Every concept is systematically selective, and therefore carries necessary blinds and limitations... No concept should be retired on purely deductive and/or logical grounds without a thorough investigation of the insights into reality.

Another intellectual stimulus is from the plurality of views and connected reasons to explore and test knowledge of the “dynamics of agrarian transformation - or lack of transformation - in Latin American, Asian and African experience of colonialism and the legacies of those dynamics to subsequent process of development/underdevelopment” (Bernstein & Byres, 2001, p. 2). These propositions are supportive of laying the foundation for the new concept of *fishantry*, which fits well for fishers as a distinct professional community and fishing as a profession. We will elaborate on some distinct aspects for the justification of fishantry. Shanin’s (1990) conceptualization of parallel realities of peasantry can be considered and rephrased for approaching fishantry (Table 1). Some typical attributes (worldview and social, economic, technological, and ritual features) prevalent in both peasant and fishing communities are considered here.

Hypothesis 1: No distinctiveness: To assume that fishers do not possess a remarkably different set of related characteristics, thus leaving no scope for applying a separate analytical treatment, conceptual significance, and theoretical justifications concerning their aspects.

Hypothesis 2: Distinct but not significant enough: To assume that fishers differ consistently from non-fishers in ways which are socially significant, but the set of particularities can and should be fully explicated within the existing schools of thought on peasantry by extending its application.

Hypothesis 3: Distinct and significant characteristics: To acknowledge that fishers possess distinct characteristics compared to non-fishers, and hence, there is a critical need for conceptual innovation and treatment.

Table 1. Analytical justifications for fishantry

Characteristics	Hypothesis 1	Hypothesis 2	Hypothesis 3	Remarks
Worldview	No	Yes	Yes	Some variations might be observed between fishers representing different geographical areas and ecosystems.
Social attributes	No	Yes/No	Yes	
Cultural attributes	No	Yes/No	Yes	
Economic attributes	No	Yes/No	Yes	
Technological attributes	No	Yes	Yes	
Ceremonial/ritual attributes	No	Yes/No	Yes	
Theoretical distinctiveness	No	No	Yes	

Note: Modified from Shanin (1990).

Based on logical inferences and empirical knowledge, we pursue the idea that fishantry forms a social and occupational group possessing distinct characteristics relative to peasantry. Fishers, as an occupational category, have survived for generations based on their fishing and fisheries-related activities. We argue that fishers' way of life is not the same as that of peasants, and that fishers represent a unique social-economic-cultural domain within broader society. Despite some similarities in the labour-intensive mode of production, seasonality, and dependence on a natural resource base, the fundamental line of difference lies on the issue of ownership over the means of production. Peasantry (at least a certain portion) has legal entitlement over certain areas of land, whereas fishantry mostly depends on common property resources that are usually legally regulated by state agencies. This fundamental difference in the pattern of ownership over important means of production largely dictates the production relations and the sharing of associated benefits generated from the economic system. Most of the activities of peasants are land-oriented, while those of fishers are centred on different water bodies ranging from wetlands to littoral zones to the deep sea, although some activities like organization, processing, transportation, and marketing are land-based. The resource management systems are different, and there are different degrees of risk and uncertainty involved in each occupational type. Empirical evidence reveals that between the peasantry and fishantry, there are also distinct differences in harvest and post-harvest technologies, types of produce, social and economic organization of the production systems, gender aspects in labour distribution, frequency and types of rituals, political consciousness, and level of interactions with the wider society.

Fishantry as an occupational category itself is likely to encompass extensive divergences and intricacies. It is expected to cover the intricate production relations prevailing within and outside communities, unpredictable complexities that exist in the resource management system, the behaviour of the aquatic ecosystems and resources therein, and, on the whole, the sets of complex behaviour displaying how the fishers respond to these compounded complexities to gain their livelihoods. There are horizontal sub-groups with wide variations

in ethnicity, technology used, capital endowment, production economics, and power control. Because of fishers' distinct socio-cultural adaptations and relationships with their immediate aquatic environment, they have very rich and variegated socio-cultural traditions characterized by regions, religions, and local cultures. For example, the hereditary Hindu fishers of the coastal areas celebrate the worship of Ganga (the goddess of the sea) with utmost devotion, while the fishers belonging to the same religion in the floodplain area worship other goddesses that they deem more suited to their local culture and ecosystem.

A distinct interplay and trade-off between peasantry and fishantry tuned to the flood-pulse in the floodplain areas is apparent; a small section of the population in the fishing villages switches from agriculture to fishing or vice-versa. In fact, for a particular rural class that is deprived of all forms of productive material sources and that switches to sell labour in farming, fishing, and a plethora of insecure sources, it is difficult to frame them into a particular category using a unilinear and straightforward line between peasants and fishers. As we know existentially about the distinct characteristics of coastal and inland fishers relative to peasantry (details in part 2 of the series), hypothesis 3 of Table 1 can be considered most appropriate for approaching fishantry. "Peasant society and culture has something generic about it; it is a kind of arrangement of humanity with some similarities all over the world" (Redfield, 1956, p. 25). Similarly, small-scale fishers in Bangladesh (and many other developing countries) also have something in common with each other. These characteristics are: dependence on the natural resource base, conflict over control and access to productive fishing areas, the relative simplicity of crafts and gear of the fisheries, the use of family labour, the uncertainty of catch and sale, perpetual dependence on intermediaries, and a general prevalence of poverty.

We define *fishantry* as a unique social entity with distinct social, economic, political, and cultural characteristics tuned to the complexities of the small-scale fishery, and who, using simple equipment and mostly family labour, capture fish and other aquatic organisms for household consumptions and sale for income, work as paid labourers and/or remain engaged as coerced labourers on a share basis to serve the owners of production units. A study of the fishers transcending disciplinary boundaries, with a focus on their social structure, economy, history, dynamics, culture and other factors, can be put under a new area, *fishantology*, similar to *peasantology* (Shanin, 1990). Rather than viewing fishantology as an extension of fisheries science, it would be appropriate to find its roots within the social science and interdisciplinary domains because fishantry is primarily concerned about what fishers are and what they do.

4. Multi-dimensional Lens of Analysis, Differentiation and Dynamics

Based on a series of attributes, as evident in Table 1, we hypothesized in favour of a separate analytical framework for small-scale fishers. It is worth mentioning here that small-scale fisheries are prevalent in both the floodplain and coastal ecosystems, with a characteristic variation in catch and biodiversity, temporally and spatially. This characteristic heterogeneity in artisanal fisheries and fishantry is rooted in the miscellany of the ecosystems, resource bases, and socio-economic, religious, cultural, and political attributes. In practical terms, the

fishantry is comprehensible not from one analytical dimension, but from a complex, intertwined, overlapping, and inseparable web of dimensions. We considered seven analytical dimensions that are pertinent to understanding the perspectives and to delineating the distinctiveness between peasantry and fishantry.

4.1 Socio-Political Dimension

From the Marxian notion of social class and Eric Wolf's (1966) work on peasants, we see fishers are mostly characterized by powerlessness. Marx pointed out that the incorporation of peasants into a capitalist system does not necessarily entail a transformation from traditional peasant society and culture in the direction of modernization; rather, such incorporations have been impacted by reproducing them as proletarians as well as peasants, and by keeping them locked into their socio-politically conservative ways of life (Bardhan & Rudra, 1978; Keesing, 1981; Patnaik, 1976). Eric Wolf (1966) emphasizes that these rural producers are subject to the "demands and interest of power holders" that use and redistribute the surpluses to retain their elite positions. Thus, the systems of production generate a fluid or strong existence of social and class hierarchy. As is prevalent in the Bangladesh peasantry (Adnan, 1983), the fishantry also operates within the domain of a post-colonial state distinguished by the influence of external powers, unequal exchange and systems of dependence, and the persistence of many of the erstwhile colonial relationships in thinly disguised forms. Probably an inevitable aspect of the fishantry is the existence of dyadic relationships and interdependencies, typified by some form of reciprocity and exploitation within and outside the communities.

In the Bengal Delta, small-scale fishers' way of using resources was traditionally more flexible and skill-driven and not impacted by mere profit-making or economic determinism, unlike in the case of industrial fisheries. Fishers allege that in the last two decades, they have been exposed to different kinds of external pressures, market relations, values, and entitlements which have resulted in revised social power structures and sharp inequalities among the wider communities. The process of expropriation of the produce from aquatic ecosystems is passed on to the relatively powerful section of society, and thus leads to a further concentration of wealth and polarization of class structure. Because of the increased forces of globalization, fishers' self-contained and closed-in kind of subsistence economy has become more interactive and complex as they have started producing more for the wider societies. It is important to examine how fishers behave with all their apparent social and cultural conservatism in this transformation from the closed one-sidedness of production to the more open and competitive two-sidedness of economies. Following Wolf's (1966) classical explanations for peasants, it can be said that what makes and keeps fishers as fishers is their exposure to different facets of exploitation; because of the societal hierarchy, they are subject to the demands and interests of the small section of power holders.

The fishantry itself is indicative of the social low-classness prevalent within the Hindu caste-based hierarchy and status-based Muslim social groups under the existing socio-cultural structures of Bangladesh. The caste system originated from the occupational, genealogical, and organizational differentiation of the Indo-Aryan system of stratification, with a form of

institutionalized inequality in which ethnically distinct social entities are absorbed into a ranked status that is primarily endogamous, birth-ascribed, and kin-based (Ghurye, 1952, cited in Berreman, 1983). The hereditary Hindu fishers of the study village are thumped by both economic exploitation and birth-ascribed low-classness in the wider society, while the new-entrant Muslim fishers face a different kind of socially-ascribed low position. These castes, factions, and social groups are quite unique to fishantry. Both Hindu and Muslim fishers have a relatively inferior position in the wider society compared to farming communities.

There is a dimension of caste hierarchy and class, too, within the wider Bengal society. Ram (1992) aptly mentions:

Fishing communities not only fall outside the framework of agricultural production -understood, in caste society, as civilization self - but, involved as they are in the acquisition and processing of a flesh food, they are bound to be treated, according to the perspective of the dominant culture, as a polluting caste (Ram, 1992, p. XIII).

Generally, proletariat caste-based fishers are granted a relegated position in the society. However, the boat owners and moneylenders, usually positioned at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy, grant protection and material advantages for mere subsistence to the submissive fishing labourers to the extent that their power base and dominance are not challenged by the labourers either individually or collectively. These relations seem to be the outcome of a transformation from mostly non-motorized, localized, subsistence-based, kin-organized, unstratified fishing to mechanized, surplus-producing, class-stratified, profit-oriented, and larger territorially-organized fishing. The corollary of the emergence of new powerful social groups (through the process of leasing and the introduction of powerful engine boats, among other factors) is that the kin-based institutions, culture, and values might be at stake through the cumulative processes of social exclusion, marginalization, disempowerment, and globalization in the near future. Hence, caste-based Hindu fishers are assumed to rationalize and obfuscate social, economic, and political relationships with the newly emerged, powerful Muslim fishers within the wider society.

In the fishing communities, it is the family structure that is the centre of production, consumption, reproduction, socialization, and welfare. For peasantry, Shanin (1987, 1990) argues that the limitation of agricultural production itself puts limits on the density and concentration of the population. This observation does not necessarily apply to the Bengal fishantry. Rather, the forces of patriarchal society along with poor family planning activities and fatalism about birth determine the size of the family. Evidence reveals that socially and culturally, the caste-based Hindu fishers tend to be isolated from mainstream society, with an apparently somewhat conservative and inward-looking worldview revolving around the fishing aspects and their communities, though a small number of them maintain inter- and intrapersonal relationships with the dominant social and economic structures. To the caste-based fishers, a large family with more boys is a tool for securing wage-based livelihoods. We observed that Muslim fishers of the floodplains are reluctant to accept the

concept of family planning, and that the family size is primarily determined by socio-religious norms, not by the limitations or uncertainties of their produce or income.

It is worth examining here the trend in gender-based socio-political mobility. Fisherwomen (especially, caste-based Hindu occupational groups) demonstrated the ability to interweave between the aspects of locally-embedded patriarchy, the idiosyncrasies of social relations, and a typical seasonal form of matrifocality. In the absence of male counterparts, who remain at sea for around 6-8 months, the customary patriarchal family relations of Hindu society are shifted in favour of matrifocality, enabling a subtle shift in fisherwomen's roles, responsibilities, societal networks, and dignity (Deb et al. 2013). Unlike the roles women play in land-based farming operations, the economic functions are mostly regulated by the fisherwomen, although the power of key production functions remains male-dominated. Whereas peasant women's mobility is generally limited to their domestic spheres, fisherwomen's added roles and responsibilities for livelihood needs and social reproductions make them visible in the wider society without necessarily challenging or transgressing the cultural norms. Compared to peasant women (Hindu or Muslim), Hindu fisherwomen have demonstrated their capabilities in extending entrepreneurship, as well as social ties and kinship relations, with like-minded groups in and around communities. Despite an overall low social status, Hindu fisherwomen in the coastal regions of Bangladesh enjoy more freedom and mobility compared to women from peasant societies and floodplain fishing villages. However, given the nature of fishing operations and stringent socio-cultural norms in the floodplain areas, Muslim fisherwomen are not yet actively involved in the wider public domains of production, processing, and marketing.

This discussion would remain deficient without a brief examination of the political aspects of the fishantry. Historically, peasants (*raiya*s) of rural Bengal played an active role, much bigger in scale and political sophistication than any other working classes, in resisting the deprivation caused by colonial rulers³. Their "everyday politics" continue to be distinctively different from those of the entrepreneurial farming classes. Though peasantry is widely characterized by poverty, oppression, dependency relations and associated exploitation, as well as their own sense of weakness and inferiority, yet under certain conditions, the apparently most submissive and powerless peasantry is capable of displaying strong resistance (Hobsbawm, 1973). However, the role of the fishers within the peasantry class in

³ Some of the remarkable examples of peasant resistance against the agents of the British East India Company are *Fakir Sannyashi bidroho* (literally, proletariat resistance, from the 1770s to the 1780s), led by the religious leader Majnu Shah (and later by Balaki Shah of Bakerganj, Kalu Shah of Comilla, Syed Aga Muhammad Reza Beg of Sylhet); tribal *Chakma* (i.e., *Jhum* peasants) guerrilla warfare against company policy to levy cash rent (which culminated in the signing of the peace accord in 1787); Titu Mir's rebellion in 1833; the *Sherpur* rebellion led by Tipu Shah (1824-1833), popularly known as *pagal bidroho* (i.e., Mad's rebellion); the Rangpur peasant rebellion of 1783, led by Dhiraj Narayan against Devi Shing; the Indigo resistance and *Santal* rebellion of the late 1850s; the *Faraizi* peasant resistance led by Dudu Miah; the No-rent Strike (*dharmaghat*) of 1873; and also movements like *Tevaga*, *Nanker*, and *Tonk*, which all characterize the spirit of the peasantry movements. The outcome of the peasants' grievances was the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885, which helped in reforming the code of Permanent Settlement and restoring the rights of the peasants.

the past movements is not clearly reflected in the literature, and hence, remains an issue for further research. Field observations reveal that fishers in Bangladesh, as a socio-political aggregate, have not been able to bring forward any reformist or revivalist movement, mainly because of a lack of class consciousness, vibrant leadership, confidence, solidarity, and cross-scale networks, as well as their isolation from the mainland/mainstream. Further in-depth studies are needed to explore what issues have made peasant cohesiveness a potential basis for politically conscious class formation, and what factors have been responsible for the failure of a similarly politically conscious class formation in the case of fishers.

4.2 Economic Dimension

Raymond Firth's (1966) classic work on the Malay fishermen and their peasant economy, and Alexander's (1995) work on Sri Lankan fishers reveal the typical economies of Asian fishers. However, Firth (1966) uses the term *peasant* for agricultural and non-agricultural "countrymen" who share the social life and values of the cultivators. We would like to disagree with Firth's generalization, as we observed that the values of the peasants and non-peasants are not always similar and homogenous. We argue that fishers form a typical type of economy that may be diverse, ranging from simple family-based self-employment to complex forms involving multiple actors. As the production process turns towards a high-cost, complex form from the low-cost, subsistence character, it involves multiple actors and stakeholders and extended relationships beyond fishers' social territory, which together demand a transformation in the traditional form of patron-client relationships. Ram (1992) argues that "fishing economies cannot, by definition, be totally autonomous. Their specialization in one economic product renders them particularly dependent on trade relations with the wider society." With the growing pressure of unemployment, the traditional experienced fishers are eventually forced to compromise, adjust, and survive in a new competitive deal (See Deb & Haque, 2011), what Wolf (1966) describes for peasants as their continued efforts at retrenching and renewing social relationships with the power holders within a narrower orbit. In recent decades, the technological shift among the fishantries in Bangladesh has occurred in a relatively faster fashion compared to the peasants' terrestrial agricultural production technology.

The penetration of "new capital"⁴ and associated market forces has inevitably impacted the fishantries as a social class and as a way of living. In the floodplains, most of the fishers own low-cost fishing equipment. In the coastal artisanal fisheries, only a small number of the coastal fishers own efficient means of production, while most of them end up as coerced

⁴ New capital penetrates mainly through the process of massive mechanization. Such massive mechanization has been chiefly reinforced by the international donors. Non-fisher elites usually take full advantage of such opportunities. Following the devastating cyclone of 29 April 1991, a cooperative scheme of the government distributed around 200 mechanized boats to the fishers. Fake fishermen's cooperatives grew up overnight to take advantage of the scheme. Some genuine fishers who "put thumbprint and signature" for "something important," did never see their boats. Instead, they now receive repeated notices from the cooperative department of the government for "loan repayment."

labourers in a semi-capitalistic⁵ mode of economy. To many of them, fishing is considered an occupation of the last resort. Such economies can be analyzed in two ways: (1) through the lens of semi-feudal subjection, considering small-scale fishing as an intermediate state between the classical dualism of primitive/non-commercial and modern/industrial fisheries; and (2) as a persistently negotiated entity cross-cutting both of the former views, where the fishers' rural institutions manage to develop a deal with the powerful external agents. The latter form is prevalent among the floodplain fishers, where they continuously negotiate with the politically powerful leaseholders of productive water bodies.

Because of this mutual interdependence among different actors in such complex social and economic production relations, fishantry cannot be purely reduced to either a primordial form or a capitalist mode of production, despite the presence of many capitalistic characteristics such as the use of wage labour and positive responses to market prices. The pluralistic nature of the locally-embedded social organizations allows the small but powerful classes to make the most of manifold cleavages amongst the majority subordinate classes in terms of communal, religious, caste, ethnic, linguistic, and regional segmentation (Adnan, 1983).

4.3 Culture, Knowledge and Institutional Dimension

These dimensions emanate from the school of thought illuminated by the works of Berkes (1998, 2003, 2008), Berkes et al. (2001), Berkes et al. (2003), Cordell (1995), Johannes (2002), Ostrom (1990), Ostrom et al. (1994), Pinkerton (1989) and other scholars who view fishers' strong cultural traditions, ideological solidarity, local institutions, ethnographic knowledge base, and the utility of their traditional knowledge for the pursuit of sustainable resource management. Recently, Cinner et al. (2010), in their study on nine fisher and non-fisher Kenyan villages, concluded that fishers, as a group, are different from the general non-fisher population in terms of several key socio-economic characteristics, and that fishers' knowledge, awareness of, and opinions about marine ecosystems and resources significantly vary from those of the general populace. The very essence of these scholars' views is that fishers possess invaluable local knowledge, and if this knowledge base of the fishers withers away, the very existence of the fishers and their livelihoods may be threatened. Their traditional ecological knowledge is quite diverse and distinct from that of the peasantry (See Deb, 2009 for details).

Fishing rituals play significant roles in building a sense of solidarity and in enhancing psychological preparation for risky ventures. Among scholars writing on peasants, Redfield (1956) also puts significant emphasis on a culture that holds society together. Redfield's definition of peasantry as "a traditional way of life" also holds true for fishantry. This particular view of the relationship of peasant culture and society is compatible with a variety

⁵ Driven absolutely by commercial logic, this kind of privately-owned production system ensures that the new fishing technology and social organization of the labourers are utilized to maximize profits and meet the increasing demand of the market. In artisanal fisheries, both capital and commercial exchange have existed, but the distinction is that the mode of production depends substantially on cheap sources of fishing labour and does not usually lead to large-scale capitalist industry. It competes more with the non-mechanized mode of production rather than the industrial mode of fishing.

of theoretical positions, such as those that emphasize values or worldviews, those primarily interested in social relations, and those that see “society or culture as systemic or integral” (Silverman, 1983, p. 14).

Especially true for the older generations of fishers, their value system, their stance on age-old traditions, and their fatalism show vividly the pathological side of fishanry. Although it is generally believed in the wider Bengali society (reflected through a host of novels and other literary works) that the fishers’ worldview is handicapped by their social-cultural conservatism, inward orientation, and frustration about declining catch and income, it is equally true that historically they have not been granted a proper “bundle of rights and power” by the state, as they have failed to raise their voices concertedly, partly due to their geographical and political isolation. Also, their traditional resource management institutions have not been recognized and nurtured, and hence over historical time periods, fishers’ capacity to build institutions and network with other cross-scale institutions has remained poor.

4.4 Technological Dimension

In the context of some developing countries, this dimension has been elaborated by Kurien (2003). The political leaders of many developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, during the post-independence periods in the latter half of the twentieth century, adopted capital-intensive, large-scale fishing technologies in order to maximize catch for the betterment of the economy, health, and employment of the socio-politically tired countrymen. The ideology of rapid technological enhancement has similarities with the ideology of the Green Revolution, where biochemical innovations and the mechanization of production technologies were expected to promote a higher level of production and be beneficial to all sub-classes of peasants.

Such shifts in the production technologies, promoted by development agencies and donors, have impacted negatively upon the conservation-driven resource-use principles of genuine fishers, their property rights, and their diverse indigenous knowledge and technologies, eventually culminating in the disempowerment and marginalization of small-scale fishers (Kurien, 2003). Despite the immense importance of small-scale fisheries in providing food security and livelihoods, fishers are largely sidelined in the management process (Dastider, 2009; Jentoft, 1989; Kurien, 2003; Reeves, 1995). National policies worldwide often favour the large-scale industrial fisheries over small-scale traditional ones (Crosoer et al., 2006; FAO, 2003; Ghee & Valencia, 1990, cited in Hauck, 2007). However, especially in the remote floodplain areas, the peasantry has remained relatively unaffected by the impacts of recent modernization in Bangladesh.

There is no doubt that with increased mechanization⁶, the efficiency of fisheries has increased significantly in terms of the catch volumes and distance covered for fishing. We argue that

⁶ From almost no trawler in Bangladesh in the early 1970s, now 45 shrimp trawlers and 75 finfish trawlers are in operation. In the artisanal coastal fishery, there are 9,152 marine set bag nets (MSBNs), 3,417 longlines, 25,453 estuarine set bag nets (ESBNs), 558 beach seines and 400 trammel nets in

the benefits from such technological changes do not reach the majority of fishing communities and hence, are not neutral. However, a small section of the fishantry readily accepts new changes while the majority takes a cautious view from their own direct observations and cultural conditioning. The opportunistic dominant groups, usually external to the fishantry, impose new efficient technologies to ensure a quick return, and in this way, the local production system increasingly becomes subordinated to the monopolistic control of transnational interests, where decisions about the quality and quantity of production are increasingly dictated by powerful non-fishers.

Usually the poor fishers cannot make the appropriate use of new technologies. One important aspect of this technological infusion into artisanal fisheries is that the access to new technologies, being differentially situated in society, disrupts the traditional relationships and generates unequal power and a domination-veiled, persistent form of exploitation. This induces the formation of a typical fishing economy that reduces the majority of artisanal fishers to a social entity of comparatively “low-classness.” From some cases of Southeast Asian small-scale fisheries (Bailey, 1997), we see that rapid mechanization fails to sustainably benefit fishers as the profit maximization tendency eventually ruptures the ecosystem and resource base. The investors may opportunistically withdraw capital in a low-income situation while ruining the long-term fate of thousands of small-scale fishers. Although the fishers in a more commercialized artisanal fishery become technologically more capable than their predecessors, they are eventually put to a series of disadvantages (such as a decline in the resource base, wholesale marketing controlled by a few powerful persons external to the fishery, etc.).

4.5 Evolution Dimension

This dimension can also be partly justified through the technological angle, the economic angle, or a combination of both. As mentioned earlier, new technologies and capital have been infused in the artisanal fishery sector in the last two decades. A process of *defisherization* and marginalization of traditional fishers through aggressive capitalization and mechanization is apparent in the small-scale fisheries. Interestingly, the proposition that industrial fleets would negatively impact the small-scale fishers is similar to Marx’s idea of peasantry that large-scale farming favored by capitalism and the systematic application of scientific advances can exploit small-scale economies, and thus, superior rates of capital accumulation are achieved (Marx, 1967). We posit that massive commercial harvest of marine resources causes not only quantitative transfer of common property resources to capitalist class (icon of *nouveau riche*), but also entails qualitative transformation of *de facto* fishing rights held for generations under non-capitalist property relations, and consequently, a

operation (source: www.bdix.net/sdnbd_org/world_env_day/2004, accessed 20 June 2007). The number of trawlers has increased dramatically in the last two decades as a result of politically motivated decisions. We noticed that with the change in political regime, opportunist political leaders and businessmen are issued licenses for deep-sea trawling without due considerations to the maximum sustainable yield level from the sea. Focus group discussions with the coastal fishers revealed that small-scale fishers face a serious struggle with the mechanized and industrial fleets that basically scoop out the fisheries resources, meant for gathering by small-scale fishers.

diminishing pattern in indigenous knowledge heritage and everyday livelihoods of poor fishers. Given the situation, the question arises: will fishantries survive?

In this context, the “disappearance” and “permanence” theses that Araghi (1995) used for examining peasantry may be considered. The disappearance thesis assumes that capitalism will lead to the dissolution of the peasantry as individuals become wage labourers in urban areas and capitalist farmers in the countryside. The permanence thesis, by contrast, argues that peasant societies do not necessarily comply with the commandment of individualistic capital, and have a “developmental logic” of their own that positively impacts the survival of both the peasantry and the condition of its production (Araghi, 1995; cited in Johnson, 2004). Within the domain of peasant studies, the disappearance thesis draws on Marxist thoughts, the works of Durkheim and Weber, Kaustsky’s work on *The agrarian question* (1899), and Lenin’s work on *The development of capitalism in Russia* (1899), while the permanence thesis draws on the works of Nicolai Chernyshevskii and Aleksander Herzen, as well as A. V. Chayanov’s work on *The theory of peasant economy* (1966, cited in Johnson, 2004). Chayanov especially focuses on an economic system in which land, family labour, and the means of production are the only possible sources of family income (Archetti & Aass, 1978). This family labour-based assumption holds true for subsistence agriculture but can be challenged in the case of the artisanal fishery, where the labour requirement can be addressed through the recruitment and social mechanisms of mobilizing kinship relations. In the case of the fishantries, it can be argued that some form of fishantries would persist and still retain some of its salient characteristics. Our stance is in favour of the persistence/permanence thesis for the Bengal fishantries, with some degree of socio-demographic and cultural transformation in it.

We propose that the concept of *defisherization* usually interplays as a consequence of the population boom, urbanization, modernization of fisheries, and livelihood diversity. If defisherization is considered as a livelihood coping mechanism, it is clearly indicative of an outcome of increased marginalization for a section of fishers in the rigorous competitiveness, low catches, and threatened biodiversity in the small-scale fishery sector. Given the divergence of the fishantries, generalization about the defisherization process is difficult. As evident from peasant theories, scholars have diverged on the characterization of peasants. For Karl Marx, it is the ownership of agricultural land that fundamentally separated peasants from the proletariat class. What is definitive about the peasant form of production is that regardless of the ownership of agricultural land, the logic of production is mostly subsistence (Johnson, 2004). But there are clear differences in fishantries since some fishers produce not only for their family needs, but also for profit-making.

As evident in both the inland and coastal fisheries of Bangladesh, the inherent dynamism associated with the process of defisherization tends to favour the politically powerful and the capitalist group. As mentioned earlier, in the case of floodplain fisheries, the leasing of water bodies in favour of powerful leaseholders has led to the removal of genuine fishers. On the other hand, in the open access coastal fisheries, hereditary Hindu fishers struggle to persist as a functionality of compromise with, or adjustment to, the growing forces of capitalism. As is prevalent in peasantry (Johnson, 2004), there are two fundamental characteristics in fishantries:

the logic of subsistence and the retention of at least some control over the means of subsistence.

While economic and social differentiation is not sharply hierarchical in the floodplain, it is so in the coastal and marine sector. There are coastal fishers working as wage labourers who in fact function as the proletariat group in Marxist terms, as they fail to reproduce themselves in the ecosystem and in essence represent the disappearance thesis. We assert that defisherization as a process is never complete. In our observation, it is in the category of the middle-order, non-motorized groups of coastal fishers that the persistence thesis is largely situated. Even if individuals switch conveniently to other professions, the remaining household members still tend to retain some control over the means of production. Thus, a pattern of subsistence fishing persists which may lead to *refisherization*.

The concepts of defisherization and persistence become more complex when we consider that fishers frequently become victims of socio-political relegations, numerous disasters, and environmental and resource degradation. Defisherization is also linked to globalization. Global capitalism impacts in such a way that increasingly larger segments of the world's population are systematically excluded from the process of effective participation in political and resource governance (Bernstein, 2001; Hoogvelt, 2001). Using this thesis, defisherization and the persistence of fishers can be seen as a manifestation of the social exclusion process and their inability to participate in the wider global market. Fishers using traditional fishing technologies assert that the "external pressures" are increasingly felt through the pressures of capital and technological infusions, and an increasing demand for fish and shellfish.

It should be mentioned that the very nature of the small-scale fisheries and their species composition supports a segment of fishers. Artisanal fisheries are multi-species and usually dominated by poly-breeders. Irrespective of size, quantity and commercial value, at least some species are available to fishers at any point of time. For example, the once dominant Indian major carps in the floodplain areas have been replaced by low-value, poly-breeder minor carps and some other floodplain resident species. It means that while the income from the highly valued, large-sized species has declined substantially, the marginalized fishers are still attracted to less-valued immature fish for the sake of subsistence. This assertion supports the view of fishers' persistence.

4.6 Production Uncertainty and Exploitation Dimension

One issue that is certain about artisanal fishing is its inherent uncertainty and unpredictability. In the case of the peasantry, a farmer can estimate his production because it is visible on the land surface. Similarly, pond farmers and aquaculturists can also guess reasonably well about total production from water bodies. But fishers catching fish from an open water body cannot accurately predict their catch levels. This unpredictability and the associated risks provide the capitalist ruling class ample room for exploiting and subjugating fishers.

Fishers are usually in tune with the uncertainty and rhythm of nature. In the course of adjusting to uncertainty, low productivity, and many other sets of vulnerabilities, they have to surrender eventually to the powerful group for support in crisis period and for building up

social capital. We can postulate that fishantry is about an uncertain way of living based on the vagaries of nature with which the fishers' lives, social organizations, and culture are in tune. As with the peasantry, portrayed by Shanin (1990, p. 27), fishantry is broadly a pre-industrial social entity that nurtures many specific elements of older forms of social structure, economy, and culture. The ways that fishers survive in extremely unfavourable situations and manage those who manage them with the help of social and material resources remain largely unrecognized in most policies and formal analytical schemes.

For day-to-day survival, fishantry requires some common-interest services, social-economic-cultural engagement, and safety measures, as well as some degree of social solidarity; together they make up a highly traditional and conformist culture. The collective behaviour of fishantry is noteworthy. Beyond the traditional functioning of families for survival, it is the village structure that provides an influential framework for production and well-being. When the labour input of a single family for certain activities (e.g., marriage, cremation/burial, erecting a damaged house after a cyclone) is not enough, the kinship ties and institutional reciprocity of the village work together.

4.7 Resource Governance Dimension

The resource management patterns under peasantry and fishantry are distinct. On the one hand, peasants are usually bound by an identifiable spatial boundary, while fishers widely enjoy fishing in water bodies as long as major restrictions are not imposed by the government or leaseholders. Small-scale fisheries are often open access with little or no control because of the vastness and dynamics of the ecosystem and the lack of sufficient human, technical, and financial resources of the government regulatory agencies. On the other hand, cultivable land is mostly based on private management with a distinct pattern of ownership and individual or collective management. In Bangladesh and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the issues of fishers' customary rights and fisheries management have attracted less attention from the rulers compared to the issues of land administration.

The fishantry framework can benefit from the entitlement theory of Sen (1981). We opine that small-scale fishers' low catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) is not only a state of fish availability decline, but also emanates from a rapid decline in fishing entitlements, i.e., the ability and right to fish appropriately from a designated zone to ensure adequate food for a family. Such fishing entitlements are intricately linked to morality, conservation values, the functioning of informal institutions and the fishers' belief systems, which are central to sustainable fisheries management and livelihoods. For fishers, fisheries resources, apart from their economic roles, are also important for social, cultural, spiritual, and communal identity.

For floodplain resource management, we observe some donor-driven initiatives (e.g., Community-Based Fisheries Management projects, phases 1 and 2) that involve a section of the fisher population through capacity-building activities and the granting of property rights. Though the New Fisheries Management Policy of Bangladesh is supportive of the fishers' collective actions, the macro- and meso-level institutions and legal structures do not favour

the poor fishers' entitlements and their local institutions⁷. Because of fishers' poor political exposure (Toufique, 1997), their organizations have little or legally no recognized role in the centric, expert-centred fisheries management. There is evidence from many corners of the world that, when left to their own ways of management and under certain conditions (such as, prevalence of well-functioning rural institutions, democratic practices in resource allocation, supportive roles of the government, etc.), fishers can successfully regulate access and enforce rules through community-devised institutions and social practices so that fishery resources are used sustainably (Berkes, 2008; Hviding & Larsen, 1993; Johannes, 2002; Nayak & Berkes, 2011; Ruddle, 1994).

5. Concluding Remarks: Fishantry Should be Regarded Distinct from Peasantry

This article has two broad implications: First, it challenges the myth of leveling off all the rural producers under a general category of peasantry. We have argued that fishantry as an occupational class is distinct from peasantry. Second, it provides a separate analytical treatment for the complex and dynamic nature of fishers' production, power relations, social structures, resource management, worldview, and indigenous knowledge. As a social entity with relatively low-classness, marginalized fishers can be ideologically framed by the notion of "smallness." Their subsistence mode of production is characterized by inequality which, as Abdullah et al. (1976) view for peasantry, is assumed to be "tolerable, domination veiled, and the stratification obscured by kinship and quasi-kinship formation in which dominance is legitimized through extra-economic personalized sanctions" (cited in Rahaman, 1986, p. 3). We believe that small-scale fishers have important roles in the rural production circuits, and that small-scale fishery itself deserves more attention of scholars and policymakers on the question of the political economy of agrarian change, structural transformation, the emergence of capital in the fisheries sector, and the logic and imperatives of the marginalization process embedded therein.

The peasantry discourse, as a process, is a source of continuing debate, and new understandings of the classical account of agrarian questions that were raised in the nineteenth century are being added continuously (Akram-Lodhi & Lay, 2010; Ploeg, 2010). Our plea is simple: small-scale fishers deserve more and serious attention in development thought. Based on local-level realities and place-based understanding, we attempted to rethink, retool, and reinvigorate fishers' unique and dynamic perspectives of an occupational type that is situated outside the lens of peasantry. Fishantry, then, in our consideration, offers both theoretical foundation and empirical coherence (more in upcoming issue), as well as analytical sensitivity, to better understand the producers, the process of production, and their socio-cultural relations. Fishantry itself faces fierce competition owing to growing

⁷ The "collective action" school of thought (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001; Baland & Platteau, 1996; Berkes, 1995; Berkes, 2000; Berkes et al., 2003) on institutions takes into consideration the existing rules, informal norms, conventions, social interactions, and dynamism embedded within the local culture, while the functionalist "new institutionalism" school of thought puts more emphasis on minimizing transaction costs for resource monitoring and on the "rules in use" in society (Ostrom, 1990).

demographic pressures and resulting in the transformation of age-old socio-cultural structures and values.

The corollary is that within artisanal fisheries, a process of fragmentation and differentiation, created primarily through economic and political processes among many other causative factors, is more active now than ever before. Strong political and institutional commitments are inevitably needed to recognize, incorporate, and institutionalize the role of fishanry and other stakeholders in the management of fisheries. The fishery planners of Bangladesh (and many other developing countries with similar contexts) must realize that effective fishery management is almost impossible in the long run in an institutional vacuum without the active support of the fishanry. There is a critical need to conduct extensive research regarding fishers in other developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America to assess their performance and transformation as rural producers. We need to know more about how they cope with the forces of globalization.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the fishers and farmers of the coastal and floodplain study villages, who shared their rich heritage of experience with us. We acknowledge the financial support provided through a grant from SSHRC (Social Science and Humanities Research Council), Ottawa, Canada, to conduct part of this research in Bangladesh. We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

References

- Adnan, S. (1983). The conditions of the peasantry in Bangladesh. In J. P. Mencher (Ed.), *Social anthropology of peasants* (pp. 313-319). Bombay: Somaiya Publications.
- Agrawal, A., & Gibson, C. C. (2001). The role of community in natural resource conservation. In A. Agrawal & C. C. Gibson (Eds.), *Communities and the environment: Ethnicity, gender, and the state in community-based conservation* (pp. 1-31). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Akram-Lodhi, A. H., & Cristobal, K. (2010). Surveying the agrarian question (part 1): Unearthing foundations, exploring diversity. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 177-202. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066150903498838>
- Alexander, P. (1995). *Sri Lankan fishermen: Rural capitalism and peasant society*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.
- Archetti, E., & Aass, S. (1978). Global depeasantization 1945-1990. *Sociological Quarterly*, 36(2), 337-368.
- Bailey, C. (1997). Lessons from Indonesia's 1980 trawler ban. *Marine Policy*, 21(3), 225-235. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0308-597X\(97\)00003-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0308-597X(97)00003-1)
- Baland, J., & Platteau, J. (1996). *Halting degradation of natural resources: Is there a role for rural communities?* Oxford: Clarendon Press for FAO.

- Bardhan, P., & Rudra, A. (1978). Interlinkage of land, labour and credit relations: An analysis of village survey data in east India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13(17), 367-384.
- Bene, C. (2003). When fishery rhymes with poverty: A first step beyond the old paradigm on poverty in small-scale fisheries. *World Development*, 31(6), 949-975. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X\(03\)00045-7](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(03)00045-7)
- Berkes, F. (2000). Cross-scale institutional linkages: Perspectives from the bottom up. Retrieved December 16, 2008, from <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/archive/00000217/00/berkesf041200.pdf>
- Berkes, F. (2003). Alternatives to conventional management: Lessons from small-scale fisheries. *Environments*, 31(1), 5-19.
- Berkes, F. (2008). *Sacred Ecology* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Berkes, F., Mahon, R., McConney, P., Pollnac, R., & Pomeroy, R. (Eds.). (2001). *Managing small-scale fisheries: Alternative directions and methods*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.
- Bernstein, H. (2001). The peasantry in global capitalism. In L. Panitch & C. Leys (Eds.), *Socialist register: Working class, global realities* (pp. 25-51). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Bernstein, H., & Byres, T. J. (2001). From peasant studies to agrarian change. *The Journal of Agrarian Change*, 1(1), 1-56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1471-0366.00002>
- Berremen, G. D. (1983). The evolutionary status of caste in peasant India. In P. Mencher (Ed.), *Social anthropology of peasants* (pp. 237-250). Bombay: Somaiya Publications.
- Chambers, R. (1994a). The origins and practice of participatory rural appraisals. *World Development*, 22(7), 953-969. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(94\)90141-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(94)90141-4)
- Chambers, R. (1994b). Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA): Analysis and experience. *World Development*, 22(9), 1253-1268. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(94\)90003-5](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(94)90003-5)
- Childs, S. M. (1977). The peasant concept: Its applicability to rural Southeast Asia. Retrieved December 16, 2010, from http://soar.wichita.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10057/1735/LAJ_v9_p49-68pdf?sequence=3
- Cinner, J. E., McClanahan, T. R., & Wamukota, A. (2010). Differences in livelihoods, socioeconomic characteristics, and knowledge about the sea between fishers and non-fishers living near and far from marine parks on the Kenyan coast. *Marine Policy*, 34, 22-28. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2009.04.003>
- CODEC (Community Development Centre). (2007). Concept note: Sea piracy and the vulnerable fishermen community. Prepared for *Manusher Jonno* (For Humans) project, Chittagong, Bangladesh (Mimeo).

- Cordell, J. (1995). Review of traditional ecological knowledge. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 2, 43-47.
- Dastidar, R. (2009). Capitalist development and technological innovation in open-water fisheries: Impacts on traditional 'water-slave' fishing communities of southeastern Bangladesh. PhD dissertation. South Asian Studies Programme, National University of Singapore.
- Deb, A. K. (2009). *Voices of the fishantry: Learning on the livelihood dynamics from Bangladesh*. PhD dissertation. Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada.
- Deb, A. K., & Haque, C. E. (2011). 'Sufferings start from the mothers' womb': Vulnerabilities and livelihood war of the small-scale fishers of Bangladesh'. *Sustainability*, 3, 2500-2527. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su3122500>
- Deb, A. K., Haque, C. E., & Thompson, S. (2013). 'Man can't give birth, woman can't fish': Gender dynamics in the small-scale fisheries of Bangladesh. Accepted for upcoming issue of *Gender, Place and Culture*.
- Firth, R. (1966). *Malay fishermen: Their peasant economy*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books.
- Gurumurthy, K. G. (1982). *Indian peasantry*. Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation.
- Hauck, M. (2007). Rethinking small-scale fisheries compliance. *Marine Policy*, 32(4), 635-642. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2007.11.004>
- Hobsbawm, E. (1973). Peasants and politics. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1(1), 3-22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066157308437870>
- Hoogvelt, A. (2001). *Globalization and the post-colonial world: The new political economy of development* (2nd ed.). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Hviding, E., & Jul-Larsen, E. (1993). *Community-based resource management in tropical fisheries*. Bergen, Norway: Centre for Development Studies, University of Bergen.
- Jentoft, S. (1989). Fisheries co-management: Delegating government responsibility to fishermen's organizations. *Marine Policy*, 13(2), 137-154. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0308-597X\(89\)90004-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0308-597X(89)90004-3)
- Johannes, R. E. (2002). The renaissance of community-based marine resource management in Oceania. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 33, 317-340. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ecolsys.33.010802.150524>
- Johnson, H. (2004). Subsistence and control: The persistence of the peasantry in the developing world. *Undercurrent*, 1(1), 55-64.
- Keesing, R. M. (1981). *Cultural anthropology: A contemporary perspective* (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc.

- Kurien, J. (2003). *The blessing of the commons: Small-scale fisheries, community property rights, and coastal natural asset*. Working paper 349. India: Institute of Development Studies.
- Lewis, O. (1962). Some of my best friends are peasants. *Human Organization*, 19(4), 179-184.
- Marx, K. (1967). *Capital*. New York: International Publishers (text of the English edition of 1887 edited by Frederick Engels).
- Mintz, S. (1973). A note on the definition of peasantries. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1(1), 91-106. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066157308437874>
- Nayak, P., & Berkes, F. (2011). Commonisation and decommissioning: Understanding the processes of change in the Chilika lagoon, India. *Conservation and Society*, 9(2), 132-145. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4103/0972-4923.83723>
- Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511807763>
- Ostrom, E., Gardner, R. J., & Walker, J. D. (1994). *Rules, games and common-pool resources*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.
- Patnaik, U. (1976). Class differentiation within peasantry: An approach to analysis of Indian Agriculture. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11(39), 85-101.
- Pinkerton, E. (1989). Introduction: Attaining better fisheries management through co-management – prospects, problems and propositions. In E. Pinkerton (Ed.), *Cooperative management of local fisheries* (pp. 3-33). Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Pi-Sunyer, O. (1977). Two stages of technological change in a Catalan fishing community. In E. Smith (Ed.), *Those who live from the sea* (pp. 41-55). New York: West Publishing.
- Pi-Sunyer, O. (1987). Fishermen and peasants. *American Ethnologist*, 14(2), 377. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/ae.1987.14.2.02a00130>
- Ploeg, J. D. van der (2010). The peasantries of the twenty-first century: The commoditization debate revisited. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 1-30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066150903498721>
- Pomeroy, R. S., & Viswanathan, K. K. (2003). Experience with fisheries co-management in Southeast Asia and Bangladesh. In D. C. Wildon., J. R. Nielsen, & P. Degnbol (Eds.), *The fisheries co-management experience: Accomplishments, challenges and prospects* (pp. 100-117). Fish and Fisheries Series 26. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Rahaman, A. (1986). *Peasants and classes: A study in differentiation in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: University Press Ltd.

- Ram, K. (1992). *Mukkuvar women: Gender, hegemony and capitalist transformation in a South Indian fishing community*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Redfield, R. (1956). *Peasant Society and Culture*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Reeves, P. (1995). Inland waters and freshwater fisheries: Issues of control, access and conservation in colonial India. In D. Arnold & R. Guha (Eds.), *Nature, culture, imperialism: Essays on the environmental history of South Asia* (pp. 260-292). Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ruddle, K. (1994). Changing the focus of coastal fisheries management. In R. S. Pomeroy (Ed.), *Community management and common property of coastal fisheries in Asia and the Pacific: Concepts, methods and experiences* (pp. 63-86). ICLARM Conference Proceedings 45. Manila, Philippines.
- Sen, A. (1981). *Poverty and famine: An essay of entitlement and deprivation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Shanin, T. (1972). *The awkward class: Political sociology of peasantry in a developing society, Russia 1910-25*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Shanin, T. (1983). Defining peasants: Conceptualization and deconceptualization, old and new in a Marxist debate. In J. P. Mencher (Ed.), *Social anthropology of peasantry* (pp. 60-86). Bombay: Somaiya Publications.
- Shanin, T. (1987). *Peasants and peasant societies: Selected readings* (2nd ed.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Basil Blackwell Publishers.
- Shanin, T. (1990). Agenda of peasant studies and the perception of parallel realities. Retrieved June 20, 2007, from <http://old.msses.ru/shanin/agenda.html>
- Silverman, S. (1983). The concept of peasant and the concept of culture. In J. P. Mencher (Ed.), *Social anthropology of peasantry* (pp. 7-31). Bombay: Somaiya Publications.
- Toufique, K. A. (1997). Some observations on power and property rights in the inland fisheries of Bangladesh. *World Development*, 25(3), 457-467. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X\(96\)00108-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(96)00108-8)
- Wolf, E. (1966). *Peasants*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Wolf, E. (1969). *Peasant wars of the twentieth century*. New York: Harper and Row.

Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright reserved by the author(s).

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).