

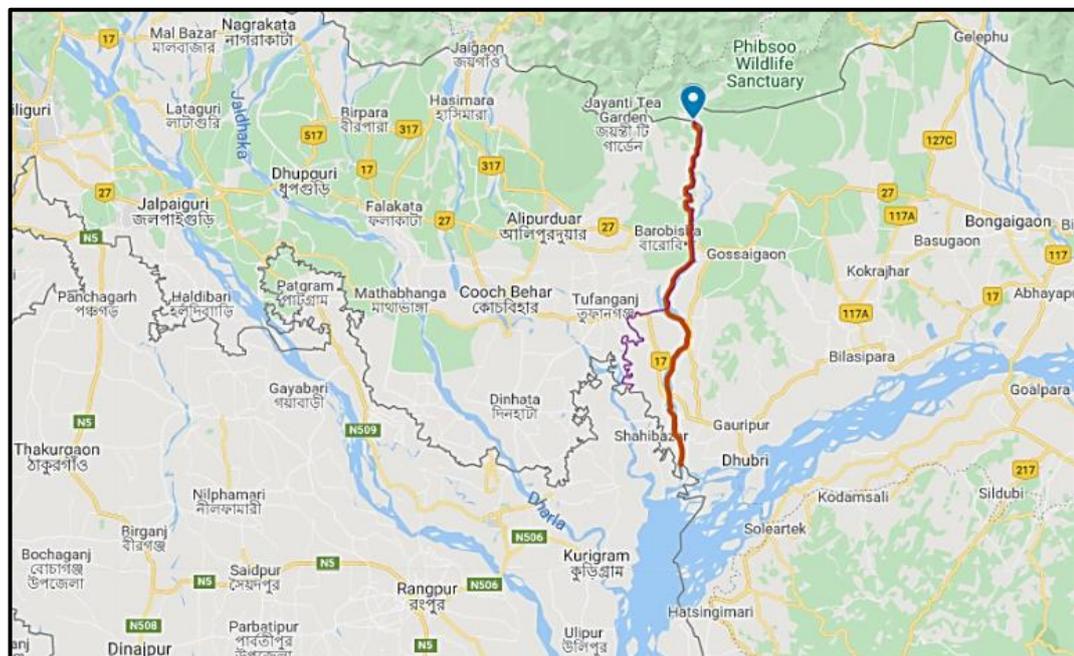
Draft Report of Nodi Baithak

Raidak (Doodhkumar) and Jaldhaka (Dharla) river, North Bengal, India

22 and 23 April, 2021

River Raidak (Doodhkumar)

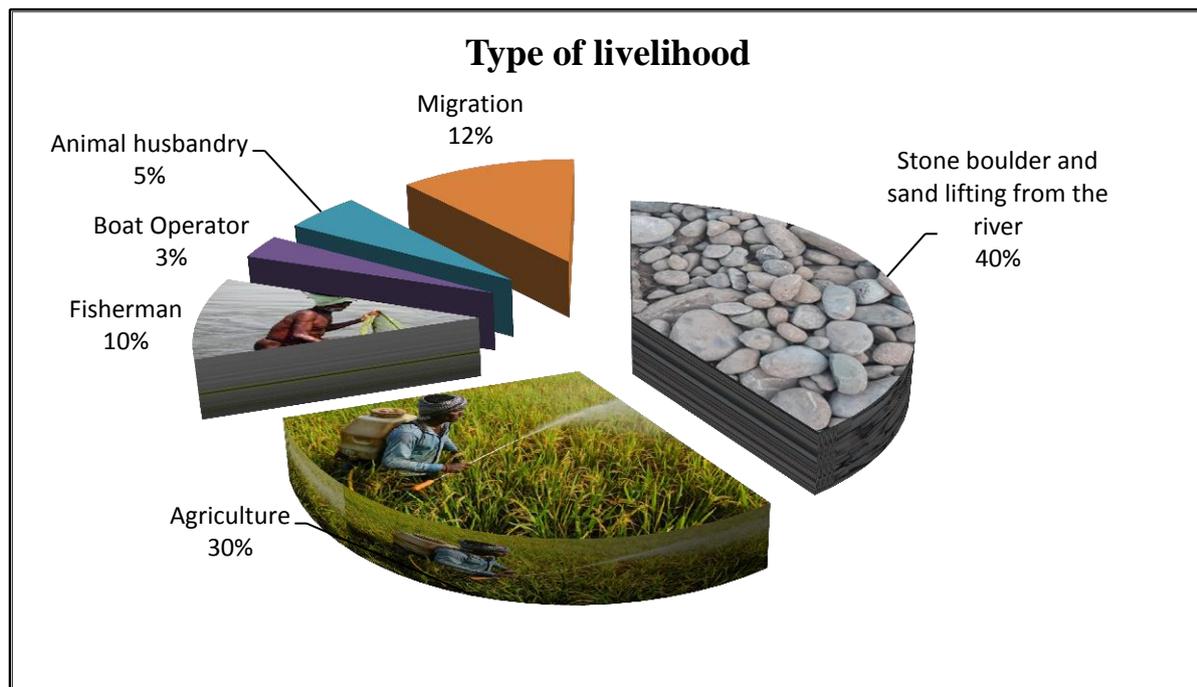
The name of the river "Raidak" is popular within the Indian Territory only. The river rises from Himalaya and folate through Bhutan as "Wang Chhu" river and enters in India in Mainabari in Kumargram block of Alipurduar district in West Bengal. A fter entering in India the river flows through West Bengal Assam border via Alipurduar and Cooch Behar district of West Bengal and finally it entre in Bangladesh from Binnychara in Assam. In Bangladesh the river merge with river Bramhaputra. This is one of the trans-boundary rivers between India and Bangladesh and in Bangladesh the river is known as river "Doodhkumar".



Raidak River Map

The place, where the river meeting took place:

The village name is Lalchandpur. It is situated in Kumargram block of the Alipurduar district of West Bengal. The other nearby villages are including Raidak - I & II, Tiamari, Khasbasti etc. All the villages are located along the river banks and naturally, the villagers are dependent on the river Raidak for various purposes including their livelihood, water sources for irrigation etc. The villages are mainly inhabited by indigenous people, besides them, different communities including Hindus, Muslims and Nepalese also inhabiting all those villages. The main livelihoods of the villagers are including lifting stones and sand from the river and selling, agriculture, fishing in the river, animal husbandry and boat operators (seasonal) etc. Because those villages are habiting far from the urban city, the primary health care facility, schools are not adequately available in those villages. Many people from those villages are travel to other Indian states for their livelihood.



Use of Raidak River for livelihood and Present Scenario:

10 – 15 years back from now, fishing was the main livelihood in those villages on the river bank of Raidah River; however the number of fishermen from those villages is currently declining. At present, the people of the villages are reluctant to take up fishing as a profession. Decreasing the amount of fish from the river is one of the major reasons that

people are not interested in fishing. An old fisherman told the river meeting that earlier it was easy to get fish from the river. In a day it was easy to get 10 kg of fish from the Raidak River, but now it is hard to get one-tenth amount of fish that used to be found from the river. According to others, the decrease of river depth and water in the river is one of the reasons for that. Earlier different species of fish were available in the river, now those fish are becoming extinct. Many fishermen are moving from this profession and currently working as a labour and lifting stone boulder from the river. A few of them are also going to other Indian states for work. The people of the villages think that the river water has decreased due to the construction of the dam on the river for the Chhukha Hydropower Plant in Bhutan.



Earlier, the river water was used for cultivation throughout the year. Irrigation was provided to the cultivated lands by cutting canals from the river. At present, the canals do not have water all the year because of the low water level in the river. Now the river water is used only for two - three month during the monsoon because at that time the river water level increases. Despite repeated requests by the villagers for canal reform, no major action has been taken yet by the government to improve the situation.

Local peoples feel that if the river course of Raidak river can be straightened from its Indian origin point to the Barobisha Raida Bridge, then the flow of water in the river will be improved, which will also increase the possibility of adequate water flow in those irrigation canals throughout the year and help in agriculture.

Flooding is a common phenomenon in these areas for almost every year during the monsoon. Due to flood in the monsoon, the normal movement in those villages in both side of the river bank become challenging. During that time, river boat is one of the alternate transportation options for the villagers. People temporarily operate boat to cross the river, which is one of the alternate livelihood options for them. Mainly peoples who are living on the river bank of Raidak River use the boat during the rainy season.



Lifting stones boulders and sand from the river and selling, it is now a lucrative and popular livelihood. The people of all these villages are mostly involved in this work and even women are doing this also. Since the Raidak River flows strongly, a lot of stones, sediment etc. comes from the upstream of the river. Collecting those stone boulders, sand is become a livelihood option which is increasing every day.

However, since government supervision is low enough, some people are taking advantage of the opportunity and lifting sand and stones from the river with the help of machines, which causes abnormal depth in some of the places in the river. Not only that, the incidents like river erosion is also happening because of this illegal operation. The river ecosystem is destroying and the river fish is moving from that particular area.

The demand for human labours is declining due to the use of machines by local influential people; everyone wants to make more profit by using machines, so the villagers are now afraid that demand of manual labour will decrease and they might lose their job in the future.

Both, male and female workers are engaged in this work and lifting sand and stones etc. from the river, but the women complained at the meeting that they were paid less than the men. According to the local source am male labour get INR 300 against lifting of 100 cft stone per day, whereas a female labour get INR 200 for the same work. Due to the river originate from the Himalayan glaciers; the river water became cold throughout the year. It's a challenge for the workers, especially during winter. They stay for almost 8 hours in the river for this work which has a negative impact on their health.



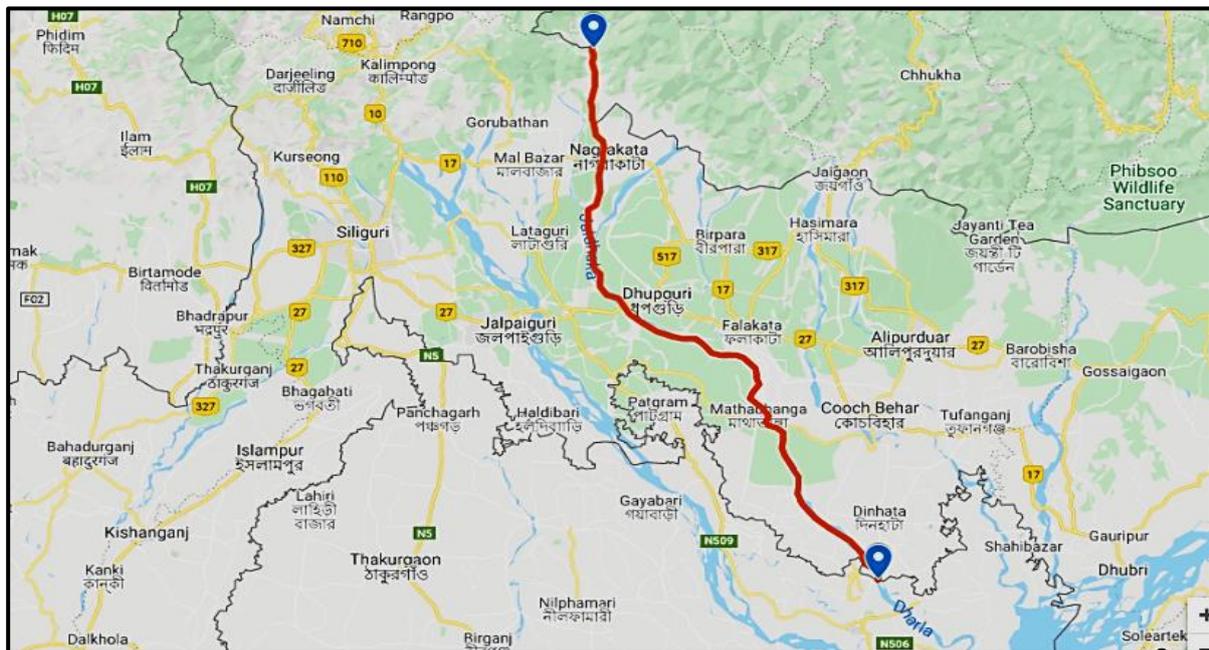
Nodi Baithak on Raidak River in Lalchandpur

River Jaldhaka (Dharla)

The Jaldhaka River is a trans-boundary river with a length of 192 kilometres. The rivers originate from southeastern Sikkim in the eastern Himalayas and flows through Bhutan and enter India from the Bindu village in the Gorubathan block in Kalimpong district in West Bengal. Bindu lies in the Indo-Bhutan border. After that, the river flows through the Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts of West Bengal and finally, the river enters Bangladesh through the Lalmonirhat District and then joins with the Dharla River until the Dharla debouches into the Brahmaputra River near the Kurigram District. In



Bangladesh, the river known as Dharla river.



Jaldhaka River Map

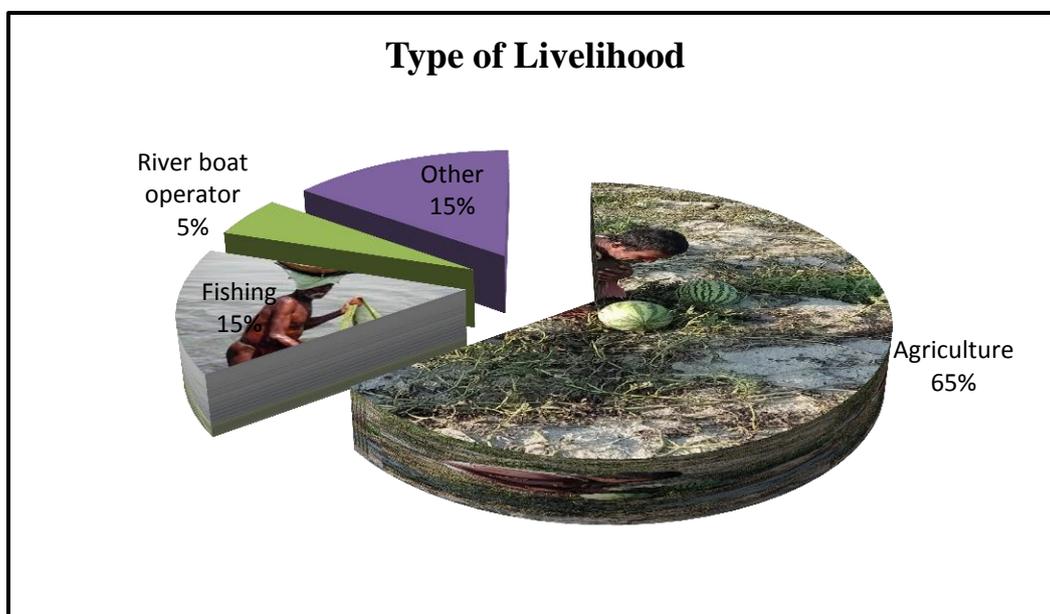
The place, where the river meeting took place:

One Nodi Baithak was held on the bank of the Jaldhaka River. The place called Tapsitala village under the Fulbari gram panchayat in the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. The other nearby villages are including Kalabari, Baraibari, Giladanga, Doribospur etc. Almost all the villages have developed along the river and the river has a greater impact on the life and livelihood of the villagers.



The Jaldhaka River has sufficient water throughout the year; however, the depth of the river is very low. Knee-deep water stays all year round. During the monsoon season, the river water rises and flood is a common incident every year. River erosion is also normal in this region. Even 10 years ago, the river was far away from this area, during this time about two or three villages were wiped out by the river erosion.

Averages of 400 households are there in each of the villages. Agriculture is the main livelihood option here, however, fisherman, riverboat operators are also there in those villages.



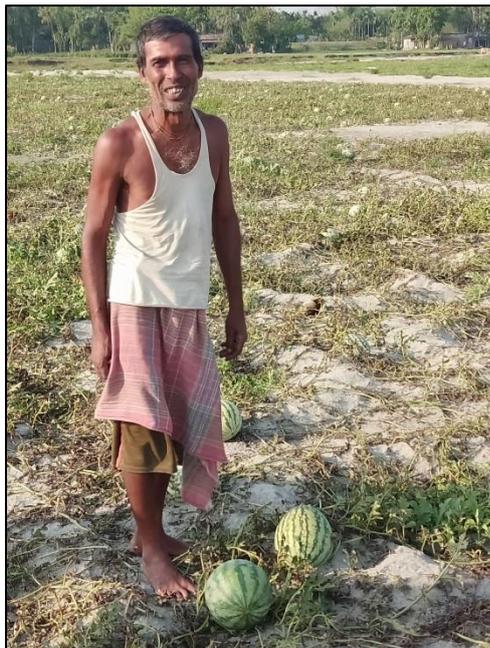
Use of Jaldhaka River for livelihood and Present Scenario:

Agriculture and importance of river:

There is no deep tube well irrigation system in these areas, as the main cultivated lands are situated on the banks of the river and those lands change every year depending on the course and erosion of the river. The depth of the river affects because of huge sand flown in the river with water. Sometimes, the agricultural land decreases its cultivable capacity, when sand accumulates in large quantities in certain places and because of that problem, the permanent irrigation system cannot be arranged, cultivation depends on river water only.



The river bank and its sandy soil are the major source of fertile land in these villages. Large quantities of watermelon are cultivated every year on the river banks. Thousands of acre land is being used on the river bank for watermelon cultivation. Lots of farmers in all these villages are involved in watermelon cultivation. A few other crops including Potato, Green chilli, Jute etc. are also cultivated by using this riverbank.



Although a lot of watermelons were produced last year, they could not be sold in the market due to the COVID pandemic and subsequent lockdown, resulting in huge losses to the farmers, informed by the local farmers in the meeting.

During the monsoon season, the river water level increase and as a result, the flood comes every year in this area and it is not possible to cultivate on the river bank during that time.

A few farmers told in the meeting that it could be better if the river canal system can be built in this area which may help in agriculture. All the agricultural lands which are far from the river can be used for cultivation with adequate water arrangement throughout the year.

Women are also engaged in cultivation, particularly watermelon cultivation. A few women farmers are also there in this area. One women farmer Ms Gouridas Mondal informed that she has lost her land due to river erosion, now her son is working as agricultural labour.

Fishing as an alternate livelihood on Jaldhaka River:

Fishing in the river is another livelihood options in this area and approximately 15% of the villagers are engaged with this profession. Different variety of fish are available in this river which including "Boawl", "Shol", "Chingri", "Boroli" and a small quantity of "Ilish" (Common fish name in Bengali) etc. However, a few local fishermen informed in the meeting that gradually the quantity of fish is decreasing from the river. The earlier scenario was more enriching. 15 years back it was easy to get 4 - 5 kg of fish from the river in a day time, however, now it is very difficult to get 1 kg of fish from the river in a whole day. Earlier a fisherman used to earn an average of INR 500 - 700 per day from fishing, however, it becomes



challenging to earn INR 200 from fishing now. They also informed that various types of fishes are becoming extinct from the river. The fishermen are feeling that reducing river depth, low water level and water pollution are the main reason for that. Another mind set is that the Bindu hydropower project is the reason for reducing the water in the Jaldhaka River.

Boating in the river:

This is another livelihood option for a few people in the villages. Especially during monsoon, the demand for boat operators becomes increased. People, who are involved with this profession, have their own boat. Because of seasonal work, the young generation are not interested to take this as a profession. Instead of this, they prefer to travel to other parts of the country or an alternate livelihood.

Government intervention on the river project to facilitate lives and livelihood.

The villagers present at the meeting said that the existing dams are not being adequately supervised by the local administration; even new dams are not being constructed properly to prevent river erosion.

An alternate livelihood opportunity can be arranged through Animal husbandry, poultry farms, etc. on the river bank. It will create a lot of employment, moreover, if these farms are

built on the river bank and in an open area, it will not harm the environment, as well as diseases of farm animals and birds will be less. It would bring benefit if the government takes such an initiative.



Nodi Baithak (River Meeting) on Jaldhaka River ban at Fulbari GP