



## Socio-Economic and political life of deoris in Assam: A study on social acculturation

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### Abstract

The Deori community is one of the major Schedule Tribes communities of Assam, who have been able to maintain their old tradition and culture. They are constituted on important ethnic group in North East India. They belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. Among numerous kingdoms they came into political way and the most powerful and indigenous people can be known as the Deori-Chutia, even now would explain this fact. The Ahom rulers were quick to grasp this gap, and after consolidation of political power, and with more inter-contracts, their response to the Hinduisation process was one of the political considerations. The topic will show that there were two groups of immigrants from the North and north-west into the rich valley of the Brahmaputra i.e. the first entered North-east Bengal, thereafter slowly shifted to western Assam through the valley of the Tista, Dharla, Sonkosh etc. In this way after entering the Brahmaputra Valley they in course of time, founded the kingdom of Kundila in Sadiya. It has been stated in the available documents that the Deoris are ethnically affiliated to great Tibeto-Burman tribes. They conducted magico-religious rituals in the royal temples of the Chutias kingdom and of other kingdoms in olden days. There were four classes of Deoris, one of them are mysteriously missing when they migrated from Sadiya through River Brahmaputra. It will be stated on living pattern, social acculturation, practices of rites and rituals, social inhibitions etc. Their family structure, law of inheritance, marriage system, religion, language, and role of the priests in their society are drawn succinctly here. At the end of the topic some new conclusions are drawn methodologically and properly.

**Keywords:** family structure, law of inheritance, marriage system, religion, language, role of the priests in their society etc

### Introduction

The tribe Deori is one of the small prominent plain tribe of Assam and they belong to Indo-Mongoloid group of people. The Indian constitution has regarded the Deori as a Scheduled tribe of Assam who are mainly concentrated in Upper Assam. The present inhabitation of the Deoris spread in different district of Upper Assam but they are mostly concentrated in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Sonitpur, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. Other than the state of Assam, the Deori villages are also found in Lohit and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Further the Deoris have been specified in the Scheduled Tribe list of Arunachal Pradesh as per Scheduled Tribes Census Report of 1991, Govt. of India. The total tribal population of Assam is 3308,570 out of which the total population of Deori is 41,161 that is 1.2% of the total tribal population of Assam (census 2001). The Deori are classified into four groups. Each group is known as according to their habitations- *Dibangiyas*-who live in the bank of river Dibang, *Tengaponiyas*- The inhabitants of the riverside Tengapani, *Borgoyans*- who live in the bank of river Bornoi, The fourth group Patorgayan has become extinct and officially not traced yet. Among them only the group *Dibangiyas* can speak their dialect and maintaining their socio-cultural and religious practices in traditional way. The other two groups *Tengaponiya* and *Borgoyan* mysteriously lost their language. The *Dibangiyas* division may be regarded as the major division of the Deori community and also known as '*Jimocharu*'. While mentioning about the *Dibangiyas*, P.C. Saikia has termed them as one of the territorial groups of the Deori-Chutias of Assam and pointed out the *Dibangiyas* preserved the

tradition of Chutia's socio-cultural organization. The *Borgonya* and the *Tengapaniya* groups, have altogether giving up their traditional dialect in favour of Assamese. The *Dibongiyas*, on the other hand, have, as far as possible, preserved their traditional socio-ritual organization along with their dialect.

### Objectives

The present study will be carried out with the following objectives -

1. To find out the socio-economic and political identity among the Deori communities
2. To highlight morphological characteristics with anthropometric measurements.
3. To state on socio-religious acculturation

The 'Deori' is one of the major indigenous communities of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, India. According to the book *Mataks and their kingdom*, the Deoris had their abode on the bank of the Kundil River which flows through the Sadiya (Chapakhowa) area and for this reason their Kingdom was known as Chutam in the North Eastern region of the Brahmaputra Valley. In the book "*Siva Purana*", the late Ahom king Rudra Singha narrates that the Deoris were living at Chaug-Chu-Kul, Chakati-Chaliya, Laibari, Lataubari, Kundil, Joidaam, Arem-Kerem and Mamaru-Pichala (Now in Arunachal Pradesh). According to the book "*Boroni Jaiminaw Swamasarnai*" the Dimichiya Gonarajita whose capital was Kundil Nagar was ruled by the Deori tribe. They had an honorable and prestigious king called Patgauan or Tanugiria. The first king of Dimichiya Gonarajya was late Bisusing Borkoyo in 1500BC and the

last king was Bismoksing Borkoyo who was most famous and well known for his brilliance. These days the capital Kundil Nagar of Dimichiya Ganarajya is known as Bismok Nagar due to the strong Endeavour and enterprise of the late king Bismok Sing. The Deoris have a number of exogamous clans (Banshas). The major clans of the Dibangiyas are – *Sundario, Patriyo, Airiyo, Chario, Chitigayo, Kumotayo, Chukrangyo, (viii) Dupiyayo, Murangyo, Teliyayo, Lagachuyo* and *Kalia-Chakuyo*. The Tengapaniyas Deori division (*khel*) divided into seven clans, viz., *Machiotika, Bikarmiyatika, Kutiyatika, Chakucharutika, Pagimegeratika, Paparitika, Chenaboriatika*. The Borgoyans division of the Deoris is also known as *Midiya*. The Borgoyans have some major clans, these are- *Ikucharu, Chimucharu, Hizaru, Busaru, Luparu* and *Gosaru*. At present *Patorgayan* division cannot be traced anywhere. The Deori villages are settled in Different geographical and ecological set up with their diverse socio-religious characteristics and are various level of economic development.

### Social structure

Among the Deoris monogamy is the rule but polygamy is far from extinct, they prefer joint family. Besides a father, his wife and children, the same homestead is also occupied by father's bothers or cousins, their wives and children. In other words it members are two or more lineally related kinsfolk. The Dibangiyas call the family as 'Jupa'. A *Jupa* is a primary social unit consisting a man, his wife, children, his married and unmarried brothers and sisters, his parents including an adopt son or daughter occupying a single residential house under a single head of that unit. There are mainly two types of *Jupa*, viz. *Sukia Jupa* and *Jakarua Jupa*. The word *Sukia* which means separates where a man, his wife and his unmarried children occupying a single residence with one kitchen under the headship of the father while a *Jakarua Jupa* may composed of two or more married brothers with their wives and children's, unmarried brothers and sisters, parents living in common residence under a single head. The father is the head of the family and all the members obey his orders. Kitchen, social economic ties hold together the members of the family. Sometimes it has been observed that the both *Sukia* and *Jakarua Jupa* are live together in a single long-house but with two separate kitchens.

### Marriage system & property inheritance

Like the other communities of Assam, marriage is an indispensable part of the Deori society. The marriageable age of Deori young boy normally ranges from twenty to twenty six while age for girls is eighteen to twenty four years. Educated persons, though few, marry late. Child marriage is not prevalent among their society. The Deoris strictly follows clan exogamy in their marriage system, that is, no person can marry in his or her own clan. Similarly marriage is regulated by moiety, which is an exogamous group of related people. If one violets this social prescription he will punish by the priestly council of the village or villagers. Monogamy is the general rule and second wife is taken after the death of the first wife. The girl who married once, she belongs to her husband's family as a member. The children take their father clan name. Divorce does not occur generally in their society. Widows can live as wives with the widowers but in such cases no ceremony is

observed. Thus, after the death of the husband the younger brother of the deceased does not marry the wife of the elder brother. One does not marry generally the younger sister of the wife. The Deori are patrilineal in decent and count their relationship through the male line. Children take the clan of his father. After the death of a father his sons become the rightful owner of his property, which is equally divided among his sons. In case a man dies without any son or inheritor, his property usually goes to the nearest agnatic relations. The daughters are not allowed to share the property. There are different forms of marriages are prevalent among the Deori society, these are viz. *Borbiya, Majubiya, Sarubiya* etc. Distinctions of the marriage are made according to the expenses incurred in the marriage and also depending upon the mode of performances. *Borbiya* is an expensive affair and arrange it solemnized with much pompously which is generally continued for three to four days. The expensive and pomp of the *Majubiya* is slightly lesser than the *Borbiya* but the solemnized show the same and the duration is only two days. *Sarubiya* is also a popular marriage among the Deori society.

### Religious practices and language

Deoris are *Saktras* (worshippers of power), hence they belong to Hinduism by religion. The chief deities of *Dibangiya Deoris* are *Kundimama* or *Gira-Girachi* or *Burha-Burhi*. The *Pisa-Dema* or *Baliababa* (Lord Shiva) and *Pisachi Dema* or *Tamreswari* or *Kechaikhati* (Goddess Kali) which are worshipped as chief deities by *Tengapaniya* and *Borganya* groups respectively. The primary source of livelihood of the Deoris is agriculture therefore, accepting the beliefs of supernatural origin, the religious rites and rituals are seem to be performed mainly for ensuring better agriculture and welfare of the villages. The language spoken by Deori tribe is known as Deori language, which in Deori tounge *Jimosanya Chu*. According to Linguistic Survey of India the Deori language belongs to Tibeto-Burman sub-Family of the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese family (Deori. S. Glossary of Deori language, 2015, p-1). Grierson says that this is by no means the case, for although the Deoris all speech Assamese fluently and incorporate good many Assamese words in their own vocabulary, still speak their own language and are-rather proud it'. 'The people are generally called Deoris simply; the language more properly known as Chutiya, the other two divisions of the race, the Hindu Chutiyas and Ahom Chutiyas have long since lost all trace of their language and origin and have become merged in the general mass of semi Hinduised Assamese; but their original connection with the Deoris has never been disputed, and is freely acknowledge by themselves. Among the four divisions of the Chutiyas, it is the Deori Chutiyas who are preserving the language, religion and customs of the Chutiya race with little change.

### As a priests class in society and judicial system

The person who performed the worshipping activities and engaged as main priests of the Chutiya and Ahom kingdoms, these are known as Deoris. Therefore the word Deori indicates the people of priestly class. Having deep devotion to religion and belief in super natural power Deoris passed their lives by performing priestly works in the temples. It can be easily understood the role of the priests in Deori society from the above facts. The priests and priestly council of the Shrine is the key controller of religious rituals

of Deori villages. The priestly council is the traditional head of the Deori villages, whereas the village Gaon-Burha is the administrative head with link to the government. The latter system has been incorporated in their village societies during the British period. The socio-cultural rituals of Deoris are governed by the shrines and the priests have been playing a important roles in their society. Deoris have adopted a system of traditional judgment and never went for other authority regarding any controversial matter especially before the independence. Crime related to all cases is judged in the Temple and before the God about the crime and expected punishment for him. The God or deity punished as the accused wanted for him. Harming in one of the eyes or breaking of one leg or hand of the accused are considered as the punishments triggered by the deities. The remaining controversial matters are judged in the 'Morong Ghor' (Common Hall of the village). Insurgency, injustice and anguish are very rare in the society.

### Economic status

The Deori are traditionally cultivator. So, the economy is depends upon the production of crops. Paddy is the principle crop and they practices two types of paddy in a year i.e *Ahu* and *Sali*. Besides this, most of the Deori household has their own kitchen garden where they produce variety of vegetables. The Deori people are still maintaining a traditional method of production in their agricultural field. But now a day, a few of them use sophisticated machinery, power tiller and fertilizers for plenty production of agricultural products. They use traditional sets of plough (*naji*) which is made of wood, bamboo and iron. It consists of a beam, a yoke and the body. The yoke rests on the necks of two bullocks. The outer end of the beam is fixed to the middle portion of the body. The iron part is fixed in the anterior end of the body. As the bullocks keep moving the sharp iron part digs the soil. They also use a kind of harrow (*Moi*) which is made of and is basically used for levelling and breaking clods or soil and better prepare for sow the seeds. Other agricultural implements used are sickle for reaping harvests or crops, *biriya* etc.

### Spinning, weaving and household utensils

Deori girls and women are adept in the art of spinning and weaving is an activity exclusively confined to them. Every house hold possesses a loom which is placed in the front side of the house. They believed that the knowledge of weaving is considered as one of the most important qualification for a girl. The Deori community clothes are generally very colourful. They weave their own cloths like *Igu* (cloth used for lower portion of body for men and women), *Seleng* (scarf for men) *baiga* (women cloth used for upper portion of body), *Bonse* (towel), *Topen* (bed sheet) and various colourful dresses for both men and women in their looms. Different types of household utensils are used by Deori people in their day to day life. Both wooden and bamboo articles are used for various purposes and these are comprise of bamboo articles like- *dolaa* (circular shallow container generally used to clean rice), *Chaloni* (similar to dolaa with smaller holes at the bottom, through which unwanted parts are removed), *Paashi* (large size bamboo basket), *Khorahee* (bamboo made round container), *Chakoni* (bamboo made sieve used for filtering traditional rice beer). Besides, these days most of the Deori people

purchase kettle, cooking pots (both for rice and vegetables) from the nearby market. *Miron* (disc made of bell-metal) and *Jibi* is the most respected utensils among them where they always offered food to the head of the family and also guests.

### Food habit, dress and ornaments

Deori people are non-vegetarian. Rice is the staple food among them and generally it is taken three times in a day. Fish, meat, egg and vegetables are also taken along with rice. *Paitya bhat* (left soaked overnight in water) is also a traditional food among them. They eat a variety of edible forms of flowers, fruits, roots, tubers, leaves, stems, seed, and wild mushrooms. However, the food habits are greatly influence by their thoughts, believes, traditions, and taboos of the society. Meats and fishes are most influential dish among them. Being Hindu by religion they never take beef, dog, cat, fox, snake, tiger, elephant, rhino, vulture crow etc., if someone take the meat of these animals the society punish them according to their customary law. The diet is mostly comprises varieties of unconventional foods like- vegetables of leafy varieties of their own kitchen garden and also grow as wild weeds. In time of scarcity or when the food is in short supply people are mostly dependent upon various dried food and various wild plants. The Deori women are expert in traditional food preservation. They preserved variety food like *Nakira-Chuchu* (dried meat), *Nakirachiyan* (dried fish) and also some locally available of different natural plant and leafs like *Kharisa* (bamboo shoot), *sukuta*, *Kharoli*, *chuchan* (*sukati* in Assamese) etc. Sometimes *sukuta* is also use as their traditional medicine. *Sukuta* is a bitter taste but they believed bitter leaves are beter for good health but never take it at night. *Sukuta* is leaves of jute plant and these are dried and preserved in a slender bamboo container. The dry fishes are grinding in a particular way and store them in slender bamboo container which is they called *sukati* and can be preserved for a long time. The food habit of snacks are also observed among them during the different occasions and festivals these are *chirah* (flat rice), *saandah* (fried rice powder), variety of *pithaa* (rice cake) etc. Rice beer is a traditional homemade beer prepared from fermented rice along with some leaves which are locally available.

The Deori people are. After finished the hard work, taking of rice beer around the fire place in the evening time is a common picture among the peasant Deori society. Deoris use hand weaved traditional clothes which is a part of their age-old culture. For this purposes they domesticate *Edi/Muga/* silk worms in their houses. Women of the community know how to weave cloths very well for members of e family. The females generally wear *Igu* (long cloths from chest to toes), *Jokka Chirba* (cloth encircling the waist), *Baiga* (women cloth for the upper part of the body), *Gatigi* (women wear the cloth around the head) etc. The dress pattern of the women is different from that of the unmarried girls. Generally the girls wear 'Iku' long cloth for waist), *Bose* or *Jema* (kind of towel), *Deicha* (a big cloth), *Churu Icha* (a small cloth) etc. During Bohagiya Bisu while performing *Husori* (Bihu dance) the girls wear *Changira*, *Changira Gathiki*, *Muga Iyo Igu*, *Muga Iyo*, *Luguru Icha* etc. White, red and green are the common colours in their dress pattern.

**Findings:** The Synoptic findings are-

1. The Deori communities are economically and socially are very poor and they busy in traditional work so, they are not concise for political activates.
2. The literate and educated Deori peoples are this area confident to face the realities of the life. However the semi-literate peoples lack self confidence and exhibited their shyness even during the work.
3. Another one of the major findings is the Deori government that is the Deori Autonomous Council is not work in properly and the funds are not utilised in proper places so, the Deori villages are not developed.
4. Agriculture is the primary source of their livelihood and they constitute fully a peasant society. They are revering people, therefore the villages are mostly found in fertile areas of river bank and a Deori village is usually named of the river, which it is situated.

**Conclusions**

From the above all it is found that the Deori basically who belongs to the agricultural groups in upper Assam. The most important areas of occupation in the village are agriculture, animal husbandry, weaving, poultry etc. Participation of females in the workforce is generally for household work while the males are engaged in economically productive activities outside. The Deori community is busy in this type of work but now a day they are concise for every sector including political environment also.

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