

# “ THE SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE OF THE DEORI COMMUNITY IN ASSAM”

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## Abstract:

The North-East India is well known for its unique diversity and rich socio-cultural background since time immemorial. The Deori tribe is one of the largest ethnic communities which is found in some districts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The unique dressing culture, village customs, livelihood process, different festivals and religious occasions etc. enriches the beauty of the tribe. Here the investigator tries to explore the socio-cultural and religious lifestyle of the Deori tribe and hence the main objective of this study is to explore the society and culture of the tribe 'Deori' .

**Key Words :** *Socio-Culture, Religion, Festivals ,Assam*

## 0.1 Introduction:

The Deori's are an indigenous group of the North-East enriched with their own language, costumes, religious customs and ethics. The Deori people are generally found in the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Darrang and also in Arunachal Pradesh.

Historically, the Deori's are considered to be representatives of the 'Purohit' of the Chutias (Chutia tribe) priestly class and are closely connected with them. Before the coming of the Ahoms in the 13th century, the Chutia tribe has their territory extended till the Suwansiri river of Assam. Thereafter, it got transformed to the kingdom of Kundil and Soumarpith. When the Chutias were ruling over Kundil, the Deoris were engaged as Purohites. The founder of the Kundil civilization, the Chutias were further divided into -Deori-Chutia, Hindu-Chutia and Ahom-Chutia in due course of time. William Barclay Brown, in his book "An outline Grammar of the Deori-Chutia language" mentions about the rituals and ceremonies of the Deoris and how they have kept up those rituals since pre-Ahom period. Delton with the help of Ahom history mentions that the Deoris were reluctant to the change the procedures of the rituals of the Brahmin Priests. Since then till this period, the Deoris have stood up as a prestigious ethnic group with their enriched culture and heritage. (Saikia,5)

## 0.2 Origin of the word 'Deori':

'Deori' is a Sanskrit derived word which is a New-Indian Aryan language as declared by Dr. Banikanta Kakoty. (Bhattacharya,70) 'Deori' refers to the ones doing works of the Devas or the priestly class who worship 'Dev-Devis' (Gods & Goddesses). In the tribal language of the Chutias, 'De' means Honourable and 'O' and 'Re' represents male & female respectively i.e. Honourable Man or Women. Actually the knowledgeable and aged were given the responsibility of the temples and so a custom was developed to call them 'Deoris'. (Saikia,1) This system is still prevalent in Vaishnavite religion/society.

## 0.3 The Society and Culture:

**0.3.01** The social classes were divided into-

- (i) Dibongia (the ones living near Dibong river)
- (ii) Tengaponia (the ones living near Tengapani river)
- (iii) Borgoyan (the ones living near Borno river)
- (iv) Patargoyan (live in Pat Sadiya)

Besides, as they worship in the 'Paat- Xaals' they are known as 'Patargayans' which are now-a-days not found as a class of the society. Out of all these classes only the Dibongia people have remained attached to their ethnicity. Others have adopted the Assamese customs and traditions.

## 0.3.02 Livelihood:

The Deoris are basically dependent on Agriculture and are very hardworking. The traits of the Mongoloid and the Mongoloid customs and traditions are reflected in the socio-cultural life of the Deoris. Patriarchal Society, Chang-ghars, dresses and tools made from locally available materials, the ritual of sacrificing animals like Pigs, Chicken, Goats and farming and consuming them, the vegetables celluloid from forests such as leafy vegetables, potatoes, yam, etc, boiled foods, wine made from rice (Haaj) etc. are the characteristics found in the daily lives of the Deoris. The women are very hardworking and they are seen working from the morning till evening. They are good weavers, and stitch all their dresses & customs at homes. The agro-dependent Deoris cultivate potatoes, rice, mustered, sugarcane, jute etc. The women are expert in every household activities like waling in looms and grinding rice with 'Dhekis'. The Deori families help each other at the time of need.

**0.3.03. Village Customs:**

The traditional village meetings in the Deori villages are called 'Pujari Chigga'. There is a committee of members who decide the religious and social customs of the village. The people are submissive to the 'Bor Deori' and listens to whatever he says or decides. The meetings and judgements are held in the house of the 'Bordeori'.

**0.3.04. Homes:**

They generally reside in the areas near the rivers and cultivate there. So the clans of their social life are linked gradually with the rivers; not only rivers but also some villages. Generally, the houses of the Deori's are built either facing East-West or North-South direction. The Dibongias and Borgoyans build their houses facing east and west whereas the Tengaponias build their houses facing north and south. Each house has a 'Deohal' which is considered to be their backbone and place of utter devotion. There is a long passage from the main door to the kitchen in each house. The rooms can be entered from this passage but here are no other doors in room. The front of the house is wide and spacious. However, with the new era, the building method of the houses have been transformed.

One specialty of the Deori is that they are very united and they are very concerned about their responsibility towards their society.

**0.3.05. Dress and Costumes:**

The Deori women wear Mekhelas covering their chest and waist banded in the form of a cloth. They tie their hairs with a cloth called 'Gapigi'. The unmarried girls wear Mekhela till the waist and cover their chest with 'Seleng'. The dresses though are colourful, only white clothes are preferred during religious rituals. The men wear 'Dhotis' and 'Gamosas' around their neck. Different ornaments are also worn by the Deori women.

**0.3.06. Religious Life :**

Deories are the worshippers of the Power. Mainly they worship 'Gira-Girachi' (old man and women), 'Pichadema' (Bolia baba) and 'Pichachi Demachi' (Tamreswari Devi) as their numen. (Boruah,123) It is known that among these four classes of Deories the Dibongias are the worshippers of 'Gira-Girachi', the Tengaponias are the worshippers of 'Pichadema' and the Borgoyans are the worshippers of 'Tamreswari Devi' or 'Pichachi Demachi'. The place of worshipping are different to all three classes. The main 'Thapana' of Deories called 'Midikur', where five goddesses namely - Kuti-Mama, Aabrobi, Kundio Picha, Chaogurukundi and Konworkundi are living. The Tamreswari Devi who worshipped by Borgoyans is living in the centre of Deoxaal. This goddess is also known as 'Tamor Mai'. In the main 'Thapana' of Tengaponias, four goddesses residence are found namely- Sivsiya, Na-Konwar, Na-Bhoni and Sagar Gochiyari (Lakshmi).

To manage the Deoxaal different workers are appointed for different roles. Bordeuri, Sorudeuri, Borbhorali, Sorubhorali etc. are regarded as the main organizer of the Deoxaal and Khelua Bora, Bora, Barik, Poria etc. positions are appointed for servicing and worshipping. Apart from being an honorable person, the Bordeuri should be healthy, honest and without the slightest blemish. In absence of Bordeuri, the Sorudeuri performs the religious ceremonies. The Deories worship goddesses sacrificing different animals like- duck-pigeon, chicken, goat etc. Except all, lord 'Indra' is also worshipped by the Dibongias with the belief that it would heal the sufferings of people. Lakshmi puja, Bisu puja of Maghi, worshipping trees and newly sown crops etc. are regarded as the religious festivals and an important part of Deori society.

Some traditionally celebrated festivals of Deories are as follows -

- (a) Mimleba - a special event of Ancestor worshipping
- (b) Mimosareba - Ancestor worshipping festival over the river.
- (c) Metua - this festival is observed in the temples of the villages to save themselves from natural disasters, especially celebrated in Bohag, Jeth, Aahin and Fagun (assamese months)
- (d) Hat-Labib- The Dibongias observe this festival in the month of 'Aahar' (an assamese month)
- (e) Haono' Puja- observed in the month of 'Haon' (an assamese month) for more productivity of agriculture.
- (f) Mokonsisoban- celebrated before harvesting the new crops.
- (g) Minuchi- celebrated in the name of money and assets.
- (h) Yoy Michi- observe for the satisfaction of Devi.
- (i) Aasiri- celebrate for the productivity of more crops.
- (j) Rajkebang- observe for the welfare of the village people and farming animals.

**0.3.07.** The festival lover Deoris observe different kind of festivals at different time which they believe are an important part of their lives. Generally, they believe Wednesday as a good day for them. The 'Na-Khua' festival is a big one among the all festivals of Deori society. The Bisu or Bihu is mentionable festival among all the religious festivals of Deoris which is connected with agricultural activities. They observed 3 types of Bisu or Bihu - Kati Bisu, Bohagio Bisu and Magiyo Bisu. The Bohagio Bisu starts from the bigining of Sangkranti of Chot ( an assamese month) which is falls on Wednesday. Bisu starts with the ceremonial bathing of animals using pulse and turmeric paste on their body and offer prayers at Deoxaal. The Magio Bisu starts from the first Wednesday of the bright fortnight of Magh month (an assamese month). These three Bisu festival of Deori tribe

has many contribution to the enrichment of their culture. Apart from these festivals many other small festivals are also remarkable on the iridescent cultural elegance of Deori society.

**0.3.08. Birth, death and marriage :**

In Deori society the birth of a baby is also considered as impure like the death. The birth related impurity does not have any geographical limitation rather it is applicable for the whole family. After cutting off the umbilical cord of a new born baby the ritual 'Sua-Lobiruah' or 'Hudi-Lobiruah' is observed. At the day of sanctification a festivity is organized. In the rituals of Deoris, there is no any nomenclature part rather the name of the new born baby is chosen by the people presented at the day of 'Hudi-Lobiruah'. For the well-being of the new born baby the Deories prepared rice-beer and colocasia leaves curry and it is considered as a rule of their culture.

The Deories sanctify the death rites through buried or burning the dead bodies. Unnatural deaths like epidemic, pregnant women, suicide, accidental cases are buried. In other cases they burned the dead bodies. They believe that the impurity of birth is more impure than death. The dead bodies are bathed with water using turmeric paste on the body, new cloths are wrapped over the bodies, an ornament 'Kopali' is given on the forehead and puuted some silver coins on the mouth of the dead bodies. The person who gave agglomeration has to permeate a few paddy between the fingers of the dead body with the help of a bambo pincers. Later the peddies are preserved seperately and they believe that if the numbers of rice is increase than their wealth will enhance. The person who gave agglomeration has to put fire in the pyre. After 5 or 7 days of death the older son offers cooked food and rice-beer to the soul of the dead. The final purification work is called 'Doha' or 'Kaj' .

The marriage ceremony of Deories are - Borbiya , Sorubiya, Majubiya, Bhokatporiya Biya . The ' Borbiya' is for 3 days, 'Majubiya' for 2 days and 'Sorubiya' is for 1 day. The rituals of marriage are same for all the three types. The Bhakatporia marriages are expensive. Now a days the Borgoyans and Tengaponias observe this kind of marriage ceremony. The Dibongias are the follower of run off marriage and Bhokatporia marriage. After the run off marriage the young groom has to do some rituals in his house. The widow remarriage is acceptable and the cases of divorce is very less in Deori society. They mostly marry among their own tribes. The Deoxaal plays an important role in the marriage ceremony of Deories. The newly married couples worship in Deoxaal for their happy married life.

**0.3.09** 'Husori', 'Bohua-Lehedua', 'Midi Kagba' etc. are the part of the Bohagio Bishu of Deories. Aabrab, Lohoria, Hurai-Ronguli, Bisu-Sajeba, Maje or Mojai or Loguru Sajeba are the traditional folksongs of Deories. The Bisu songs are divided into different types according to its presentation style like –

- (i) The songs sing at the Debaloy or Thanghor,
- (ii) The song sing inside the village. The songs which are sung in the Thanghor are mainly religious. Aabrab, Hurai-Ronguli, Husori etc. re included under the religious songs of Deories. Through these songs the religion, social and cultural life of Deori people are reflected .Many other folk songs are prevalent in the Deori society which are regarded as the documentary of their socio-cultural life.

**0.3.10. Language :**

The language of Deories is actually came from the Chutia language which is presently not found in Chutia tribe. Among the all 4 groups of Deories only the Dibongia group seems to use this language. It have seen that the Dibongias have taken various steps to preserve the linguistic tradition of their culture.

**Conclusion:**

On studying the topic "Socio-cultural life of Deori community of Assam" it is known that the tribe Deorih has their own cultural identity. They divided into four types - Dibongia, Borgoyan, Tengaponia and Patorgoyan. From centuries they have many contributions to the large Assamese culture. Their traditional livelihood of is very healthy with unique food habits, festivals , rituals and rites . Also, the cultural and religious activities of Deories always have a great impact on their society.

Though the tribe is traditionally very rich, some superstitious beliefs are also prevalent in some Deori society like - sacrificing duck, piagons etc. in the name of offering venerations. Beside this, cooperation among the people is a strong feature of their society. The women are very hardworking and laborious . The Deories are experts in agriculture.Through celebration of different festivals and religious occasions they built unity among themselves and spread love and respect among them.

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