

# **TRADITIONAL FOLK BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF THE DEORI TRIBE OF ASSAM**

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## **Abstract:**

The state Assam is located in the North Eastern region of India. It is a landscape of indigenous tribes. The Deori is one of the major tribal communities of Assam. It contributes one of the distinct plains tribe communities of the state. The people of the tribe are distributed in many districts of the state like Jorhat, Majuli, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, Tinisukia, Lakhimpur, Biswanath etc. The Deoris are from the Tibeto-Burman caste from the Mongoloid race. They speak both Assamese and Tibeto-Burman language called Deori 'Chutia'. The name Deori derives from the word Deva, which mean God. Like the other tribes of Assam, the Deoris also have their own custom, folk belief, folk literature etc. the objectives of the study is to explore Folk beliefs of the Deori Tribes.

**Keywords:** Deori, Assam, Folk belief.

**Introduction:** - India's north east region is, in true sense, a meeting point of many communities. Folklores, Folk beliefs, cultures, customs and traditions of their region have always been the hub of cultural diversity owing to multiple ethnic and non ethnic communities living herein, practicing their own language customs and tradition. The north eastern region of India certainly highlights a glorious example of diversity which is very well reflected in the mosaic of Socio-cultural traits which are followed by myriads of distinct aboriginal tribal communities inhabiting this region. The Deoris amongst them are no exception to this rule.

Since ancient time the different tribes of people living in Assam made the Assamese culture more diverse and lively. The different tribes of Assam are: *Missing, Tiwa, Rabha, Sonowal Kachari, Bodo-Kachari, Dimasa etc.* For the formation of 'Assam' and contributing of the society and culture of Assam the Deoris are also Major tribe among all other tribes of Assam. The Deoris are from the *Tibeto-Burman* caste from the Mongoloid race. The Deori tribe is found in the state of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, They speak both Assamese and *Tibeto-Burman* language called Deori 'Chutia'. The name Deori derives from the word *Deva*, which mean *God*.

Like the other tribes of Assam the Deoris also have their own custom, Folk belief, Folk literature etc. through this study an attempt has been made to give an account of the prevailing folk belief among the Deori people.

1. **Importance of the study:** - This study has some significance: 1. one of the significance of this study is that people can know about the folk beliefs of the Deori people's conference. 2. It is essential to study about the community on the basis of their folk beliefs, because of the Deori tribe has many cultural identities and it is one of the oldest tribes of Assam. 3. It is important for other tribe living in Assam and North East India. 4. It will be vital for the folklorists for their research work in the related study Area.
2. **Aims and Objectives:** - The aims and objectives of this research: 1. To explore the characteristic features of the Deori Folk beliefs. 2. To reveal to the public the prevalent Folk beliefs among them. 3. To glorify the recent changes in their socio economic and cultural life over the years. 4. to gathering some knowledge on Folk beliefs of Deori tribe.
3. **Data Base and Methodology:** - Two Methods have been used for this study: 1. The study is descriptive based on secondary sources followed by different books, journals, articles, news paper etc. 2. Data requires for this research is obtained from primary source as i) personal interview and ii) Field visits.
4. **Analysis:** - The analysis part of the study divided into two sections. First part related with the Deori tribes of Assam and second part related to their variable folk beliefs.

**4.1 Deori tribe of Assam:** -The Deori is one of the Major indigenous community of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It constitutes one of the distinct plains tribe communities of the state. They historically lived in the area of Sadiya, Jaidam, Patkai foot hills and in the upper plains or also called as the hinterland of the Brahmaputra Valley. The Deori communities belongs to the Sino Tibetan family of Mongoloid stock (sonowal, 2017)<sup>1</sup>. They speak both Assamese and *Tibeto Burman* language called Deori 'Chutia'. The Deori people mainly live in

present day *Sivasagar, Lakhimpur and Gohpur* in Assam. According to the 1950 census, the population of those people is 12,503.(Asamar Janajati, 2008)<sup>2</sup>

They are divided into four classes- *Dibangiya, Tengapaniya, Borgoya and Patorgoya*. Almost all the three divisions of the Deoris namely the Dibangiyas, The *Tengapaniya*'s and the Borgoyans have been maintaining their traditional beliefs and practices. The fourth division of the Deori, The Patorgoya group is almost extinct and cannot be traced out every where except in some remote places.

According to the Deori Language 'De' means *wise* and 'O' and 'Ri' means male and female respectively. The Deoris prefers to introduce themselves a '*Jimsaya*', The meaning of which is partly as – '*Ji*' means *water*' 'No' means '*Man*', '*Cha*' means '*Sun*' and '*Ya*' means '*Moon*'. The Deori communities believes that they are born from the moon, the Sun and the water.<sup>3</sup> (Pathak, 2017). That is the people who know or worship the Goddesses are called Deori.

Dr. Banikanta Kakati mentioned that the word 'Deori' which emerge from a Sanskrit word '*Debagrihik*' is a new Indo Aryan word.

It is not worthy that according to the explanation Deori word the first part is male and second part is female. They believe themselves the inheritors of female.

Like the other tribes of Assam the Deori community has maintained their racial traits, language, religion, Folk tales and Folk beliefs through the centuries. All these folk cultures of this community have given them a different identity.

**4.2 Folk beliefs and Practices of Deori Tribes:** -Folk belief is the main aspect of folk culture. Folk culture fulfils the smile, tears, hope, ambition, religious beliefs and reforms of the folk life. People seek to know their destiny, eventually they take the help of astrologers believing in the natural circumstances to be their projection of destiny. This is how Folk belief is formed in the minds and heart of people. Both benevolent and malevolent signs can be observed in such Folk belief, Such Folk belief prevalent in the society rules the social as well as the personal life of the people. Folk belief influence the life of a person right from birth to death.

The analytical study focuses on the folk belief that has been prevailing amongst the Deori Ethnic group of Assam. Notably, the folk beliefs between the Dibangia class and other class of the Deori community does not show much difference. Like the different ethnic groups of Assam, the Folk beliefs are also prevalent among the Deoris. Such beliefs can be classified mostly related to agriculture, birth, religious, death and marriage.

**4.2.1 Agricultural beliefs:** The main way of living of the Deori Community is agriculture. They also have various Folk beliefs like other agricultural society, related to agriculture. The Deori regard Wednesday as the auspicious day or good luck. So, they start any activity like ploughing, planting paddy on this day. They used to take stone in the basket and sea bean while sowing seeds. Then the seeds become like stone and bunches are like sea beans. Besides if anyone dies in the village then nobody goes for ploughing because it affects on harvest or the paddy become weak. They regard as bad sign if the plough breaks while ploughing. If this happens then the plough man keep fast according to Folk belief.

They believe that the harvest (Laxmi) returns to the cornfield if anyone looks back while bringing them. Moreover many folk beliefs have been following for fruits and vegetables. They never sow black lentil and not even take/eat on Saturday if anyone see backside while sowing see it raises its hand. They donot sow ginger near their home or shady place to avoid danger as they have folk belief.

**4.2.2 Related to birth:** - In Deori Community there is a belief that a child's future depends on parents action. So, they believe that if a woman is pregnant then she or her husband never kill any animal, otherwise the baby of them will be born as dead or physically disabled. This kind of belief has been following even in Assamese and other societies. The pregnant mother should carry iron weapon in her hand anytime, then an evil spirit can not do any harm to the baby. There is a belief that since the baby in mother's womb. Her husband must not cut trees which bears fruits and kill animals, otherwise the baby bring bad luck to their family. If the mother dreamt '*Saal*' fish in her dream, then male baby will be born and there will be sign of danger if sees blood. There is a belief that if anyone cross on the rope of the cow, then her child's cord is twisted. Another folk belief is that it tongue comes out of a snake or frog while father killing them, then tongue of their baby is seen coming out.

**4.2.3 Religious belief:** - The chief duties of Deori are in number *viz, Gira, Gira-Girachi, Pisa-Dema and Pisachi*. They are worshiped by the three groups of the Deories as *Dibangiyas, tengapaniyas and Borgoyans* respectively. *Gira-Girachi* is also known as "*Kondimama*" or "*Bura Buri*", *Pisa Dima* as "*balia Baba*" or "*Balia Hemta*" and *Pisachi* as "*tamreswari*" or *Kechaikhati*".

The Deoris generally worship "*Purush and Prakriti*" as their chief duties who are believed to be Siva and parvati according to Hindu belief. However, the Deoris also worship Gailuring Kundi as Ganesh and Konwar Kundi as kartick.

The *Dibangias* propitiate almost all the deities of the Deoris but that is not so in case of the *Tengapaniyas* and the *Borgoyans* as they worship *Kundimama*'s eldest son and daughter only respectively.

The patorgoyan group of the Deoris which is almost extinct propitiates the deity of the patorshal at part-sadiya. The deity worshipped by this group of the Dibangiya group worships the deity *Kundimama* or *Gira-Girachi* along with the deities generally worshipped separated by two other groups. At the same time, the *Tengapaniyas* and the *Borgaoyans* only worship *Pisa-Dema* and *Pisachi*, the eldest son and daughter of the shief deity Kundimama. Kundimama is one of the main religious of the Deori ethnic tribe. Kindism is the mined impact of Saiva Shakta religion.

The impact of globalization has changed the Deori Society greatly. The globalization has highlighted the religious life of the Deori community. Hence, some Deori people have taken different religions namely, *Christinism, Namdharm, Krishnaguru, Anukul Thakur's* religion etc.

**4.2.4 Related with mariiage:** - Marriage is one of the major social tradition of a society. The marriage ceremony of Deori community is very interesting. The Deori people are very conscious in the field of marriage and relationship. Deories largely followed the exogamous system and nobody is allowed to marry within the same class. Though this practice they believe that they have maintained this original culture. There are some exogamous class among the Deoris such as *Sundhariya, Patriya, Dupiya, marangya, Chariya, Lagasiya, Chitigaya* etc. they are different in their class but made in bigger Deori community. But one thing is that no two class reside in the same village or a specific range of area. Marriage between the class of the same division is highly prohibited among the Deoris and only marriage of adult person and monogamy allowed (Pathak, 2019), *Damachi, Sachi, Cherubasi and Dalibiah* are the four types of marriage ceremonies of Deoris. On the fixed day of marriage, when the groom and his relatives, friends etc. reaches bride's house, a person known as *Deodai* performs a ritual called *Sujelongduraba* to summon divine favour for a happy marital life for the couple.

Apart from all these, other Folk beliefs are also prevalent in Deori society. The Deori people build their house on the east-west sides and keep the main door towards the east is their social rule. Therefore the *Deoghar* of the tribe is also reflected towards the east of the village.

**5 Conclusion:** With the spread of education and change of time, the Folk beliefs of the Deoris has changed to some extent. Earlier, the way the obeyed the Folk beliefs has changed now and we cannot say that they strictly follow the Folk beliefs. To adopt with the era, the believes of the Deoris to the Folk beliefs needs to be changed with the progress of society and culture. Those Folk believes which has helped to continue the social order and unity and which has also contributed for the humanity and generosity of the tribe will always be welcomed. Otherwise, it is better for the Deoris to escape from those Folk beliefs which is destroying the social order of the community.

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