

# Analytical Study of Deori Ethnic Identity Living in Assam

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## ABSTRACT

Like every tribe living in the north-east of India, the Deori community too has its own cultural identity. Deori culture has contributed immensely in giving a diverse and perennial look to the larger Assamese culture. The Deoris, who mainly live in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, belong to the Assamese-Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burmese region of the Sino-Tibetan language-family in anthropological considerations and in linguistic terms. Not all Deori people use Deori because of the geographical location of the Deori people living in different parts of Assam and are influenced by different language speakers. There are four faids of the Deori tribe. These are: 1) Dibangia Faid 2) Tendapania Faid 3) Bargaya Faid and 4) Patargaya Faid. Out of these four faids, only among the Dibangiya Fayeds is the present Deori language. The people of these Dibangiya Faids are living in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Jorhat, Tinsukia, etc. in Assam. In formal activities, these people speak Assamese language. In the past, the language was prevalent among all the elders of the Deoris, though the Bargiya and It is not known when the people of Tengapaniya Faid abandoned their language and adopted Assamese as their mother tongue. It is possible that due to contact with the Assamese language, it can be thought that these Faids stopped speaking their language. Our research article attempts to discuss the Deori tribal history of Assam in a holistic manner.

**Keyword:** Deori Caste Introduction, Deori Caste History, Deori Caste, Culture

## INTRODUCTION OF ETHNIC GROUP:

The term "ethnic group" has a cultural meaning. It is regard as a human group which has its national origin or distinctive cultural patterns. The term ethnic group or ethnicity signifies Cultural feature which may include language, religion, national origin, dietary practices a sense of common historical heritage or other distinctive Cultural traits. In this context ethnic identity movement has become an important factor in the politics of North-East India. Obviously, ethnic movement in North-East India in general and the state of Assam in particular has assumed a considerable role with the passage of time, owing to the growing identity consciousness among the different ethnic groups. The ethnic crisis and identity movement does not emanate from single factor. It may sometimes emanate from the economic backwardness, Socio-Culture and political issues and sometimes from humiliating treatment from other

Castes and from the aspiration of gaining autonomy in Socio-Political spheres. However this identity movement became more and more vibrant when most factors arise together. The Identity movement means democratic process provided it aims at to fulfill the socio-economic, linguistic, cultural and necessity of diverse ethnic groups. But it may sometimes turn into undemocratic direction such as burning of public property, stabbing, murders etc that may be called anti-social activities. Therefore, ethnic identity movement may be defined as participation of the tribal people in demonstration, strikes, processions mass gatherings, walk butts bumming of properties, arison, stabbing violent confrontation with the police and sometimes classes with leadership. There is a long history of the ethnic identity in Assam. The British government divided Assam into two geographical divisions - the plain districts and the hills districts. It was in 1928-29 when Simon Commission visited Assam, the leaders of various groups of tribal and other backward classes for the first time, met the Commission and submitted memorandum for reservation of seats in various elected bodies. The leaders were Muhi Chandra Miri (Miri), Rai Pyari Mohan Das (Mahishya), Nilakanta Hazarika (Kalvartta), Jogesh Chandra Nath (Yogi), Jadav Chandra Khaklari (Kachari), Kali Chandra Brahma (Boro), Mohindra Lal Das (Ialung & Mikirs) and Romesh Das with a view to forming a Common Platform of tribal leaders got together in meeting held on 17th April, 1933 at Roha, Nagaon district under the Leadership of the Kachari leader Jadav Kachari and formed "Assam Backward Plain Tribal League" that was called 'Assam Tribal League' later on. It gave rise to popularizing a sense of autonomy among the tribal communities. During the pre-independence period, a group of educated tribal elite merged in the Socio-Political field with the formation of the Assam Plain Tribal League. The eminent leaders became active support to the League, Rupnath Brahma, Rabi Chandra Kachari, Karko Doley were the some of the leaders at that time. There were mainly three political factors viz-1/ the Congress, 2/Tribal League and 3/ Assam Muslim League. The Tribal league demanded for reservation seat to the Assam Legislative Assembly. In response to their demand, the government- reserved four seats out of total numbers of seats 108 in the legislative Assembly in 1935. In the elections held in 1937, for the first time Rupnath Brahma, Rabi Chandra Kachari, Kanak Chandra Doley and Dhin Singh Deori were elected as member of Legislative Assembly from the Constituencies reserved for the Tribal League.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of the study have been spelled out as follows-

1. To find out the anthropological, historical and ethnic existence. of the Deori of Assam as one of the major plain tribal group of Assam
2. To observe the whole issue of ethnic identity in general and in case of Deori in particular.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this paper exercise a Historic, Analytical and Empirical methods have been adopted. The analytical method is also helpful to analyze the fact critically.

### **SOURCE OF DATA**

This study is mainly base on primary sources such as leaf- lets, pamphlets, mouthpieces and historical records, information documents, interviews, field materials and other literature publish. In addition to this the secondary source such as relevant books, journals and articles are also largely consulted to uphold the findings of the study.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEORIS:**

The Deoris are one of the colourful plain Scheduled Tribes of Assam. They have been contributing a great deal to the process of formation of Assamese Society. They are one of the tribes of Assam belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid group of Tibeto-Burman Linguistic Stock. By nature, they straight forward, polite and peace loving. They are renowned specifically for hospitality. They are four division or phoids. 1/ Borganya, 2/ Dibangia, 3/ Tengeponiya and 4/ Patarganya. The phoid are named after the river and 'Sal' (place of worship) where they originally settled. According to sources available from Delton's record the Chutias had a wide and prosperous kingdom from Patkai region to the Subansiri River. Sir Edward Gait mentioned that, Chutias conquered some lands from the Hans and so some Hans mixed with the Community. To the East of Ahom Kingdom in Sibsagar District Chutias had a very strong and independent kingdom, which is recorded as the Chutia Kingdom in history. According to Imperial Gazetteer 1909 the first rule of Lakhimpur was considered to be clan of the pal king. The first King of pal kingdom is known to be Birpal with the reign of Nitipal the Chutia Kingdom disintegrated and Ahom were the major force behind it. After several years of Collision between the two sides, towards, 1523A. D Chutia almost lost its influence. Yet to dominate the missing and the Chutias, the Ahom adopted different methods. The Ahoms rehabilitate the Chutias in the different places Asam. Sometimes marital bond was established, sometimes portfolios in the Ahom kingship were handed. Deori are also one of the four divisions of the Chutias. Viz-1/ Hindu Chutia, 2/Ahom Chutia, 3/ Borahi Chutia and 4/ Deori Chutia. Further, mention is made there are three divisions of Chutia viz- 1/ The Deori Chutia, 2/ the Hindu Chutias and 3/ the Ahom Chutia. As a Deoris, Revs. Indle includes another division i.e the Borahi Chutia. In the early period of history It was found that the Deori settled in the vast areas around Sadiya divided into four "Khels". The Borganya, Dibangia, Tengapania and Patarganya each originating forms a particular name of a place. The Borganya Deori khel lived on the bank of river Bornadi and worshiped the famous Pisasi Dema (kechaikhati) at the copper Temple (Tameswari Mandir). The Tengapania Deori khel lived on the bank of river Tengapani and worshiped Pisa - Dema (Baliababa) in baliababa Temple. The Dibangia Deori khel lived on the bank of river Dibang and worshiped Gora Girasi (Kundi - Mama). The Patarganya Deori khel lived in Pat Sadia worshipping the deity at patar sal Temple. Dr. Ramprasad Deori of the opinion that only on family of the Patarganya is still setting at mahadevpur village of the Arunachal Pradesh.

The Deoris originally lived In Sadiya. Due to frequent quarrels with the neighbouring tribes, i.e, the Mishings, the Khamtis and the Singphos they had to move westward. Their present inhabitants are spread on the banks of the rivers of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Sonitpur and Guwahati. Raja Gourinath Singha removed some of the Deoris to Majuli when he failed to protect them from the above tribes

### **POPULATION OF THE DEORIS:**

At present though Deori are resident of Lakhimpur and Sibsagar district. It is seen that the community is settled at both the banks of rivers Brahmaputra, i.e. starting from Darrang district to Sadiya. In Arunachal Pradesh in the district of Lohit there are nine Deori villages. One in Siang district and three in Tirap district. According to 1951 census the population of Deori both in plains and hills was 12503. Out of this Deori speaking member is 6157. According to 1971 census, total population of Deori is 23080 in Assam, but Deori speaking population is 12190 only. The percentage of literacy as per 1971 Census was 27.72%. however, the percentage of literacy among the Male (39.38) was higher than State percentage.

The Census report of 1991 reveals that as many as 35849 Deori populations in different districts in Assam. The All Assam Deori Student Union (AADSU) claims the number nearing 91000 at present with 197 villages. Another Source claims that the number of Deori people of Assam about 214063 with 133 Cades trail villages. The female sex ratio is above 100 for every one thousand males. The joint meeting of W.P.T. and B.C department of government of Assam and AADSU and other Deori Organization, the concerned circle officers involving also the members of AADSU carried out a joint survey of Deori population in all Deori villages in April-May-2003. This survey shows a total Deori population as 2117063. According to 2011 census the total population of Deori is 4388756 in Assam and according to this census the total population of Deori in Dhemaji District is 48472. And according to 2011 census the Deori literacy rate is 84.36% in Dhemaji district.

### **IDENTITY CRISIS AND MOVEMENT OF THE DEORIS:**

It is stated that the identity movement of various tribal groups in Assam, in fact, has background of its own. Autonomy movements are essentially the outcome of the intense urge of the ethnic people for recognition as they have a distinct identity different from others. The demand of autonomy of the Deoris is not different from this idea. In the middle of 20th century the autonomy movement of the Deoris started in a separated nature. The All Assam Deori Student Union was established in 1959. Since its inception the All Assam Deori Student Union (AADSU) has placed several demands for the ethnic identity and development of their Community the All Assam Deori Students Union started a separated movement of Deori Autonomy within the state of Assam under Schedule of Indian Constitution Comprising the core areas and Satellite areas inhabited by Deori people and including all Tribal belt and blocks and existing Tribal sub-plan villages of the district of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sivsagar, Jorhat, and Sonitpur. For this purpose the organizations like Deori Youth Student Association, All Deori Mohila Somittee etc, were form at the initiative of All Assam Deori Student Union. The Deori Sahitya Sabha established in 1965 was also one prominent Organization of the Community for preservation of their Culture, language and literature. It may be said that during the reign of the Congress government led by Hiteswar Saikia as Chief Minister of Assam the plains tribes of Assam were promised to confer autonomy. Accordingly separate Autonomous Council was constituted for the plain tribes of Assam such as Bodo, Mishing, Tiwa and Rabha. But Deoris were not included in it. This caused recent that of the entire Community. They feel that they have been deprived of special privileges enjoyed by other plain tribes of Assam. The demand for the separate greater Deori Autonomy in Assam first emerged after the AADSU'S Sadiya Conference in the year 1982. The huge gathering at Sadiya Conference has passed 12 (twelve) resolutions including the demand of separate greater Deori Autonomy. In this way the AASDU, till the day has been demanding and fighting for separate greater Deori Autonomy in Assam for the Deoris. Amongst those demands the demand for separate greater Deori autonomy and creation of the Deori Autonomous Council in response to their demand is considered to be absolute. According to the All Assam Deori Student Union the census initiated the Colonial Administration of British since 1872 and the successive decadal census of 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, etc, did injustice to the various smaller tribes of the Assam like Deoris, Hamrs etc, by wrong enumeration and inappropriate nomenclature. For example, while Hamrs were considered and enumerated as Kukis, the Deoris were considered as enumerated as Chutia wrongly. The AADSU clearly opened and unexpressed their dissatisfaction that they are very much deprived and started the apathy of the Government toward their problems. The Government of Assam always turns a deaf can to the

grievances of Deoris placed through Deori representatives and association which leaves us no choice but to go for autonomy demand so that we can look after ourselves on the basis of right of self-determination. In case of education there is no good institution as all schools in Deori areas suffer from shortage of book, teachers and other facilities. There is no much hardship of deserving Deori candidates to get into Government job because of discrimination and nepotism. The Assamese chauvinist policies of previous Assam Government play great role in suppressing our Socio Cultural identity. The AADSU do not consider that the census reports of 1991 and 2001 give the correct, picture of Deori population. The Govt, is therefore urged to carry out on the spot village wise enumeration of Deori population. In pursuance to a decision taken in the joint meeting have W.P.T and B.C department Govt. of Assam and AADSU and other Deori population organization a joint survey of Deori population in all Deori villages was carried out in April-May 2003 by the concerned AADSU. The survey shows a total Deori population of 217063.

### **DEORI TRIBAL CULTURE**

The Deoris are more bound by almost all aspects of their age-old cultural traditions. It has given them a distinct identity within the changing world and they have been able to live with their individuality in the midst of exploitative external forces and ethno-cultural mixes. The social structure of the Deori tribe is quite unique which attracts the attention of most of the prominent anthropologists of the Indian subcontinent.

Marriage is considered an important institution in the Deori tribal society. These Deori tribes, like many other Indian tribes, follow the rules of ndogami with great enthusiasm. Special wedding rituals are also being followed by the Deori tribal community. That is, deori men will have to pay the traditional bride price to the family members of the prospective bride. Also, if he is unable to pay such a lump sum, the Deori tribe custom is that he will offer to work at the bride's family's house for a stipulated period of time.

They follow animistic religion. Every village has a common place to worship God. This is called than

### **CONCLUSION:**

It has already been stated that the tribal identity Movement since pre independence period in Assam was very prominent. The sense of deprivation from their due share as well as the exploitation during British rule and aftermath, the tribal people always felt that would not be developed until and unless separate autonomy for preservation and maintenance of their identity is provided. They felt that through proper Autonomy they would fulfill their hopes and aspirations. They felt that being the "sons of the soil" they have been deprived from their 'Legitimate Share' in all fronts. They also realized that they have been exploiting economically, socially and politically by the non-Tribal, Assam being the homeland of driver's ethnic groups has experienced the tribal identity problem in course of its long history.

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