



THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE DEURIS TRIBES OF ASSAM & ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT;- *The Deuri is one of the indigenous tribes of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and constitute an important ethnic group in North -East India. They belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race and the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. The Deuri tribe is found in some district of mainly in Upper Assam & Arunachal Pradesh. The Deuri community is included in the sixth schedule of the constitution of India as a scheduled tribes(plains) of Assam. The unique dress, village customs, different festivals, livelihood process, religious belief and practise etc. enriches the beauty of the tribe. In this paper an attempt will be made on original Deuri inhabitant places ,clan system, physical feature, socio-cultural and religious lifestyle of the Deuri tribe of Assam & Arunachal Pradesh.*

Key words : Clan system, Socio- Culture, Religion, festival, languages social stratification, Inheritance

INTRODUCTION :

The Deuris are one of the distinct tribal communities of undivided Assam. Ethnically Deuris are affiliated to the great Tibeto-Burman group and the Deuri language also belongs to the Tibeto- Burman linguistic families. The Deuris are still maintaining their old traditions like religious belief and practices, custom and culture etc.despite socio-political hindrance, tribulation, distress throughout the centuries.

At present the Deuris are living mainly in the District of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji,Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat , Sonitpur, Kamrup of Assam, Lohit and Tirap Dist. of Arunachal Pradesh.

In ancient times during pre-historic age, before migrating to the present places the Deuris settled in the eastern most corner of India which was called Sadiya and beyond Sadiya up to the holy place Parsuram kund in the east and lofty mountains of Himalaya in the north,



Mohong in the south which is at present in Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh and up to Subansiri river in the west.

The Deuris are regarded as one of the most backward and minor communities in all respects such as education, social, economical and also political conditions in comparison to the other people of the Tribal community in particular and of the state as a whole. Though the Constitution of this country safeguards the Deuris as scheduled tribes (plains) even then they are still exploited by the majority due to the lack of political willingness and apathetic attitude on the part of the Government over the decades as a right and single representative in the political arena throughout the decades. Hereafter the word 'Deuri' is used as "Deori" as spelt by the Indian constitution.

There are four territorial groups or khel among the Deuris namely 1. Dibongia 2. Tengaponia 3. Borgoyan and 4. Patorgoyan. Each group derives its name from particular dwelling places by the side of the river. The Dibongias were settled in the whole of the Dibang valley in the undivided Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. The Tengaponias were settled in southern bank of Lohi river covering whole Tengapani river valley and Jaidam or Manambhum hills which is at present in the Lohit Dist. of Arunachal Pradesh. Borgoyans were settled in the north bank of the river Lohit and from the Kundil river of Sadiya up to the eastern mountain of Himalaya now in the Lohit dist. of

Arunachal Pradesh. Patoryans were settled in the middle of Sadiya or Pat Sodia. The Deuris are predominantly a rural community because most of the people are living mainly in the rural areas.

1. Definition of Deuri :- As regards to the nomenclature, Deuri by which the community identified themselves in local parlance as "Jimochaya". The root verb is "Ji" means water, "Mo" means "Man", "Cha" means "Sun" and "Ya" means "Moon". The Deuries believe that "Cha" (Sun) is the male deity and "Ya" the (earth) female deity. By the pleasant copulation with male "Cha" and female "Ya" the Deuris came into existence on this planet as "Jimochaya".

Certainly, the word Deuri is a new Indo Aryan formation based on worshipping Deva (God) Dr. Banikanta Kakoty declared that "Deuri is a Sanskrit deprivation word "Devgrihik" which is a



New-Indian Aryan language..The word Deuri consists of three parts of the words Deva(God) Unchcha (High) ,Riti-Niti- (customary rule).Hence, the meaning of the word “Deuri” is a person abide by the high customary rule and having virtuous life, for worshipping God.

2. Physical features :- Ethnically as the Deuris belong to the Mongoloid group of people so their physical features are distinctly mongoloid. They are below medium stature with a round (meso-cephalic) head, flat nose and having a moderate broad face, scanty hair on their body and face. They are physically strong, having charming features and yellow skin.

3. Clan system :- There are four divisions of groups of the Deuris (1) Dibongia (2) Tengaponia (3) Borgoyan (4) Patorrgayan khel. Each khel consists of a number of exogamous clans called Jaku or Bongsha or baja. These are as follows ;-

A) Dibongian :- Sundariya, Patriya, Aireo, Chariya, Lagachuya, Sitigayo, Dupiyayo, Kumotayo, Teliyayo, Kaliasokuyo, Murangyo, Sukrangyo. In the Dibongia group there are a total twelve clans . Besides these twelve clans,there are so many sub-clans among the Dibongia group such as Michayobaja, Gohainyobaja, karihaiya baja, Bihiyayobaja etc.

B) B.Tengaponia :- Machiyotika, Bikomiyatika, Kutiyotika, Sakucharuyotika, Paporiyotika, Senabayatika, Pagimegeratika.

C) Borgoyan :- Ikusaru, Simusaru, Hijaru, Busaru, Luparu

D) Patorgoyan :- Though the records of this khel are still available in the Deuri community, the members are not traceable at present. It is stated that some patorgoyans have already been mingled with the Dibongia group and others or a major portion of patorgoyans amalgamated with the Lalung or Tiwa community of Nagaon district of Assam.

4. Dwelling House :- Houses are constructed by wood, bamboo, cane and thatches. The houses are constructed 4 to 6 ft high from the ground which is called in Assamese, “Chang Ghar”. Generally all houses facing east direction. All the houses are of the same pattern. The houses vary in length according to the size of the family. There is a long passage from the main door to the kitchen in each house. The rooms can be entered from this passage but there are no other doors in room. The front of the house is wide and spacious which is



called 'Michang'. The first room of the house is for the guest. The main person of the householder is staying adjacent to the kitchen. In former days a typical Deuri house accommodated more than 100 to 150 persons. However, due to the impact of modern education, advancement of the society with the new era, house building has been transformed. Now-a-days, most of the villagers are dwelling in their own house as paka house and the Deuris old traditional Chang ghar is shifting to Mati Ghar.

5. Family :-The Deuris usually prefer to live in the joint family system. Their family consists of several married couples which is called "Jakorua Baja" which means joint family. The joint family lived in common residence under a single head. Besides the joint family "Suki baja"(single family) is also quite common in the Deuri society, while the "Sukia baja" consists of a man, his wife and his unmarried children occupying a single residence, while "Jakorua baja" consists of several married brothers with their wives and children , unmarried brother and sisters, parents and grandparents occupying a single residence. By and large, father is the head of the family and all members obey him. At the time of serving fooding and in other important occasion, such as discussion, meeting etc. people seat according to primogeniture or seniority basis.Earlier, the Deuris community the large size of family was considered as a measure of social security and helpful for generating income but now the Deuri peoples realising the merits and advantages of small and medium size of family as compared to large one. The small size or nuclear family is gradually increasing in villages due to the constant influence of modern ideas on the feeling of Socio-economic security from the nuclear family.

6. Marriage system :- The Deuris strictly follow some social rules in the case of a marriage system. The Deuri society is patriarchal in order. Clan exogamy is strictly followed.Each clan has an exogamous group prevailing in the Dibongia group. A person can not marry a girl belonging to his patrilineal group of clan. The Deuris are generally followers of monogamy but poligamy also can not be ruled out in some rare cases.The Deuris have broadly five systems of marriage namely- Demasi Biya(Bor Biya), Sochibasi Biya (Maju-Biya) , Surubasi Biya (Soru Biya), Akori Biya (Bhakot Rupia Biya)and Jonenuma Biya (Gandharoba Biya) which is also known as eloping marriage. The traditional elopement marriage is a very common and popular marriage among the Deuris in the village. The



elopement marriage is also recognised by their society as per traditional custom with a simple marriage ceremony without concern for their present age, both boys and girls. In fact, in the society of Deuri, there is no child marriage system but the custom of elopement marriage system is indirectly encouragement to the early marriage. Thus, the elopement marriage system is a major social problem among Deuris in the village. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of sex education are responsible factors in this regard. In case of elopements if it is not regularised by the way of "Meloni Biya" on Sujen Luguruba then their offspring are debarred from celebrating their marriage by negotiation.

The Patoria is generally regarded as a mediator specially appointed for the purpose, one each from both the family. They play an important role in a Deuri marriage ceremony. He must be an unblemished character having proficiency in local folk-lore and all marriage formalities.

7. Occupation / livelihood process:- Agriculture and its allied activities are the main occupation among the Deuri people in the village. Both male and female equally take part in the agricultural production. Among agriculture Sali paddy is the main agricultural product. Ahu paddy is also cultivated to some extent in order to meet the requirement during lean period. Besides Sali and Ahu paddy the Deursi produce mustard seeds, pulses, peas, potatoes, onion, garlic, sweet potatoes, chilly and various green vegetables, winter crops, various cash crops like cotton, Jute, banana, betel nut and leaf etc.

Elephants, Buffalo, cow, Bullock, Horse, goat, Pig, Fowl, Duck, Dog, cat are the main domestic animals of the Deuri. Pig rearing, broiler/local chicken farming & handloom weaving are another

important source of income generated by the Deuri communities and Other counterparts of tribal communities in Assam & Arunachal Pradesh. These incomes help the families to incur expenses in their children's education, medical treatment and to purchase day to day essential items required which is very expensive nowadays. The green revolution, modern scientific method of cultivation, infrastructure and Prime Minister Fasal Bima yojana are not reached to these areas extensively. For this purpose govt, agricultural departments and



other departments. should resolve these problems immediately. If proper attention is to be given in these areas in the entire country

,then, significant income will be generated which will help the country to reach 5 trillion GDP at an early date.

8. Food habits :- The rice along with curry is the main food of the Deuris. Rice beer (Suje) is prepared in every household which is a common and essential drink for all sections of people of their society irrespective of age and sex. It is considered as the most valuable item for entertaining guests. Habit of drinking tea is not popular among them. But older people take tea on and off to some extent without milk and sugar. Fish is a special diet/dish of the Deuri menu. Dry fish(chuchan) is another dish made from small fish and is generally eaten as chutney with suje or rice beer. Deuris eat the meat of fowl and pork except beef.

9. Religious belief and practices:- The Deuris are disciples and worshipers of "Kundi"-Mama""cult. They belief" Kundi-Mama" as their God."Kundi" means Parama purusha(Supreme Consciousness) and "Mama" means Parama parokrity(Cosmic operative principle) Kundi + Mama = Kundimama means param Brahma(Supreme Entity comprising both purusha and Prakriti). The cult has profound philosophical meaning.

The Dibongiya Deuris worship Kundi-Mama in the form of Kundigira and Kundigirachi which is known as Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati and all their family members.. The Tengaponiya Deuri worship in the form of Bolia Baba the eldest son of Siva and the Borgoya Deuris worship in the form of Pichasi Demachi which is known as eldest daughter of Shiva and Parvati (at present very popularly known as Tamreswari or Kechakhatty.)

The Patorgoya Deuri worship at Patorshal (Deoshal in the middle of Sadiya or pat Sodia). They worshipped all deities of the Deuris as a whole before commencement of all religious festivals held in the year at Sodia. After offering puja at Patorshal then only the puja and Bishu at other places beginning with Sodia. Though the Patogorgaya Deuris is extinct at present yet the practice of hoary is still in vogue at Sodia. The common place of worship is called "Midiku " in Dibongiya section while it is called Than/ Deoshal by the Tengaponia,



Borgoya section. Besides worshipping their chief deities the Deoris worship other household deities in order to get peace and prosperity in the society. They worshipped their God in two ways (1) by offering sentient row oblation in the first and (2) by sacrificing animals like hegoat ,pigeon,fowl etc.

Some of the important household deities or ritual are as follows-

Metua:- It is a very important ritual of the Deuris. It is done during Bohag Bihu. Chickens, pigeons, and goats are sacrificed during the ritual. It is done to seek blessings and to undo the misdeeds.The sacrifice items are cooked in the Morong Ghar by the Randhan,i.e the cook and other helpers.

Bhakat Midi:- This ritual doing Na-janiya (9 nos of persons) and Ekoish-janiya (21 nos of person) is done on the basis of the number of Bhakat. The householders arrange accordingly for completion of the ritual.They collectively bless the host and appease the deities for well being of the forthcoming days.

Risto Ritual:- It is propitiated with pig or turtle or fowls or fish inside the household for the well being of the family members. In these rituals also pach-janiya (5nos of persons) or na-janiya bhakat is required to perform the rituals.

Kalika ritual:- This ritual is done for the well being domestic animals of the householder. To perform this ritual rice powder & banana is required . The householders invite one Akhirbodiya(one who blesses) & cowherds of the village in the evening time in the month of Assamese calendar Jeth(May-June).

Yoi-Midi nanuba/(Ai Sakam);- When smallpox outbreak in the village or any family members then this ritual is performed by the householder with old aged women.

Milisi Liduba:- This ritual is performed inside the Biboah (Granary) of the household by the head of the family for prosperity and wealth.



Maka Jiba haba (na bhat khuwa):- It is obligatory to perform this ritual before having the newly harvested rice by all the general people of the village. This ritual is celebrated in the month of Aghun(November-December).

Rajkebang(Midideberuba):- This ritual is very important in the Deuri community. This is performed after the Bohag Bihu festival in the month of Bohag and it is the last Bihu. The speciality of this ritual is that villagers prepare Ghila Pitha & pumpkin leaves as Daljubora. After this festival, Deuris can eat mangoes, kathal etc and give full devotion to their own cultivation in the paddy field.

10. Birth ritual:- Immediately after the birth of a new born baby the mother along with their family is considered as impure or ceremonially unclean until and unless the umbilical cord falls-off. During the postnatal period the mother is treated just like a patient. Due importance and much care is given to the mother and child by the other family members and other attendance. During the postnatal period other villagers refrain from taking food together with them and even abstain from visiting such families until ceremonial purity to this impure household is held. The particular family and also their clan even cease to perform all religious functions during this period. These days generally prevail till the umbilical cord falls off. Seven to nine days may be required for falling off such an umbilical cord.

The day when the umbilical cord falls off, next day the child's ritual day of purification is held. The significant code of such birth ritual ceremony is that at least seven members from seven different clans are necessary as attendants for purifying a new child ,mother and household. On that occasion a pig or fowl is sacrificed and cooked. Before consuming the attendants offer a little lump of cooked food and Sujen(rice-beer) dropped at the floor in the name of God and Goddess, blessing for the well- being of the new born baby and of his mother. In the ritual day a special curry called "Miduji Jobura" is prepared from wild arum/kosu sak with the mixture of fish and black pepper. This is a remarkable item of the day. From the day of ritual resorts the responsibilities of performing the religious function etc. to the family and their clan. It is customary rule that the



new-born baby can be taken outside the house only after the performance of the ritual day. One of the most significant and notable factors is that during such postnatal and polluted period the women folk near and dear visit such household with a few edible article like "Sujen" (rice beer) fowl, vegetables, black pepper, bundle of firewood etc meant for the mother as token of love and affinity.

11. Death ceremonies:- Since the time of immemorial past the Deuri are observing the cremation system of the death bodies. But death occurred due to unnatural causes and premature death of children, pregnant women , snake bite epidemic etc. such dead bodies are buried. The Deuris have their own special type of cremation system. They have three different categories of cremation i,e,man, woman and for honourable men of the society like purohit.. For man they make the pyre by seven stratifications of fuel. For women five layers and for honourable persons of the society they make the pyre by nine layers of fuel and observe five, seven, nine days fasting respectively as the case may be. At the cremation ground food, rice beer etc are offered as oblation to the soul of the deceased person and later fire is put in the pyre by the eldest son of deceased person or of their family.

A purification ceremony in connection is held at the end of the offering of oblation or fasting days i,e on six days, eighth and tenth days from the expiry day of the deceased person. In that ceremony chicken curry is prepared and it is offered to the invited villagers, along with rice-beer called "Sujen". The final funeral ceremony may be held at any time of the year. As it is a question of involvement of a large quantity of expenditure so it depends on the ability of the family.

12. Deuri Dress:- Handloom clothes specially prepared in their own looms is the staple Deuri dress. All necessary clothes for a Deuri family are woven by their women folk. Formerly, they cultivated all variety of cotton in their fields and spin yarn and prepared all sorts of required garment out of these produce,. Now a days depending upon various factors such systems seems to be abandoned to some extent. Married women generally wear "Igu" (like mekhela) up to the chest covering breast and adorn blouse over mekhela .



A cloth known as “Jokachiba” like ornamental & Gamusa specially prepared for the purpose of wrapping up over the waist up to the knee is worn over mekhela. The hair is covered by “Gatigi” just like gamucha so that the male people can not easily notice their hair. In the case of unmarried girls they wear “Igu” or mekhela up to the waist and wear blouse. They do not wrap up the Jokachiba over the waist but wear “Baiga” long and short (folded Gamusa) covering the breast over the blouse. ‘Short’ Baiga is wrapped up by the girls during community representation etc. The two ends of the Baiga are generally flopping from the chest up to the knee on both sides of the body of the girl and swing. They also hide their hair by wearing ‘Gatigi’ as the married women do. Various kinds of ornaments made of gold , silver are worn by them.

Male people of the Deuri wear “Iku ” just like dhuti specially prepared by their women folk. They also wear shirts and boche (ornamental Gamusa) in the head specially meant for the male.

Most significant social customary rule is that during all sorts of religious and social auspicious occasions the Deuri wear white clothes irrespective of age and sex which is a symbol of sanctity and for arousing spiritual vibration in such occasions.

13. Festival:- Bihu/Bishu is the main festival of the Deuris. The word “Bishu ” means in Deuri rejoicing in high order. The Deuri Bishu is quite different from that of the Assamese Bihu. The

Bohagiya Bisu begins from the first wednesday in the month of Baisakh. The Deuri Bishu has no concern with the “Sankranti”. During Bohagiya Bishu they rejoice in the religious performance of Kundi Mama and pray to all other deities by sacrificing the goat,pigeon,cock etc. for the well being of the people living on this earth. Likewise the “Magiyo Bishu ” begins after harvesting of paddy, cereal from their field. Here,people fully rejoice in this Bishu also. The Bishu starts from the first day of wednesday in the month of Magh. The Bohagiya Bishu and Magiyo Bishu are observed by the Deuris for eight days and four days respectively in very prideful and grandiose ways.



14. Social stratification:- The Deuri society is a democratic form of society and it is conducted mainly in two ways-(a) Secular (b) Religious. In the former system the Gaonburha plays an active or poignant role in the field of social matters only. The Office bearer of the village shrine conducts other socio-political matters of each village . Bor-Deuri and Bor-Bharali are considered as the main guides of the society.

15. Inheritance:- The Deuris are patrimonial in order. The property generally descended from the father to his son. The offspring take the clan name of the father. The moveable and immoveable properties such as land & building, clothing and cash belong to individuals separately. After the death of a father, son becomes the legal heir of his parental property and goes to the nearest agnatic relation. The females are not eligible to share the property.

16. Distribution of population:- The Deuri population resides mainly upper Assam of Brahmaputra valley both north and south bank in the district of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sonitpur ,Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat & Kamrup in Assam & in Arunachal Pradesh in the district of Lohit, Changlang & capital of Itanagor. Lakhimpur district has highest numbers of population and as well as numbers of villages. The total population 220000 approx in Assam & 35000 approx. in Arunachal Pradesh. totaled 255000 approx.

17. The Deuri language:- The Deuris speak their own language as their mother tongue which is called Deuri language. Deuri language is independent and has its distinct identity as it is not connected with other languages or literature..The language of the world is divided into several main groups by the scholars and researchers. The Tibeto-Burman linguistic group is also one of them and Deuri belongs to this group of languages. The Deuri language has its own verb-ending, case-ending, intonation, psycho acoustic notes, inferential -acoustic notes, syntax etc.

Some vocables of the Deuris language are given
below - Deuri vocals English Assamese

Osigi	Nail	Nokh
Uju	Navel	Nabhi
Eku	Smoke	Dhuan



Kobe	Come	Aah
Gadu	Pillow	Garu
Jiti	Star	Tora
Ji	Water	Pani
Popo	Tree	Gosh
Lepadur	Goat	Chagoli
Hati	Teeth	Dant.

Moko	Boiled rice	Bhat
Midegen	Cat	Mekuri
Sujen	Rice beer	Mad
Habe	To eat	Khoa
Yogi	Big knife	Da
Miou	Elephant	Hati
Mei	Buffaloo	Moh

Conclusion :-From the above analytical observation it is found that the Deuris are a completely independent race in the great human society of this planet. They possess all sorts of required factors like language, religion, culture etc to become an independant race since the time immemorial past. The Deuri culture is facing danger from the clutches of globalisation and striving hard to flourish. The steps taken so far from the side of the Govt. towards the upliftment of such endangered culture like Deuri is found inadequate. After the formation of the Deuri Autonomous Council of Assam, the DAC is taking some steps for the preservation/upliftment of the Deuri culture but it is lacking in funds and proper execution. However the Deuri community had very strong unity and co-operation and was very helpful among them. The peoples were very hard workers and women folks were very expert in many activities.

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