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The deori tribe of Assam: A socio-cultural study

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Abstract

The state Assam is located in the North-Eastern of India. It is a landscape of indigenous tribes. The Deori tribe is one of the largest tribal communities of Assam. Deori tribe of the state is very rich in their culture and social activities. The people of the tribe distributed many districts of the state like-Jorhat, Majuli, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Biswanath etc. It has tremendous contributions to the socio-culture of the state Assam and India. The objective of the study is to explore the socio-cultural analysis of the tribe.

Keywords: Deori, socio-culture, Assam

1. Introduction

The Deori is one of the major tribal communities of Assam. It constitutes one of the distinct plains tribe communities of the state. The community is distributed in the districts of upper valley of river Brahmaputra. The Deori tribe belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family of Mongoloid stock (Sonowal, 2017) [8]. According to many historical studies it is found that the people of Deori tribe had migrated from Dibang, Lohit, Kundil valleys and settled in Upper Assam long ago. The community has maintained their racial traits, language, religion, folktales and traditional beliefs through the centuries. The people of Deori tribe are mainly categorized into four groups namely Dibongia, Bor-geeya, Tengaponiya and Pator-goya. During the early Ahom period, they were highly honoured by the Ahom kings and used to conduct magico-religious rituals in royal temples (Deori C. *et. al.* 2006). According to the Deori language 'De' means wise; and 'O' and 'Ri' means male and female respectively. The Deoris prefer to introduce themselves as "Jimsaya", the meaning of which is partly as – "Ji means water "No" means "Man", "Cha" means "Sun" and "Ya" means "Moon". The Deori Community believes that they are born from the moon, the sun and the water (Pathak, 2017) [5]. Deori people are culturally very rich and have contributions to the culture of the state since centuries.

1.1 importance of the study

The Deori tribe has many cultural identities. It is one of the oldest tribes of Assam. It is the second largest plain tribal community of the state and largest tribal community of the upper Assam. Thus, it is essential to study about the community on the basis of their social life and cultural activities.

2. Objectives

For the analysis of the study the following objectives is taken.

1. To Study the social life of Deori tribe
2. To study the cultural activities and traditions of Deori tribe

3. Data and Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature and based on secondary sources followed by different books, journals, articles, news-papers etc. For analytical data, the study also used the census reports.

4. Analysis

The analysis part of the study divided into two sections. First part related with the social life of the Deori tribe and second part on cultural activities of the tribe.

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4.1 Social life of Deori tribe

4.1.1 Type of House

Deoris live on the Bank of Rivers. The Deori people basically live in *Chang Ghar* (Stilt house). The traditional *Chang Ghar* of the deori people build by using cane, bamboo, wood etc. The first room to reach is called "Subasani" room which is set centering the home deity. The lower section of the house they used for household animals. Piggery is one of the favorite farming of Deori people and they give more interest on it. In the floor of the upper section they poses some holes to directly passes the unnecessary food grains to the animals in the lower. The fireplace attached with the *Chang* (Floor) and called *Dudepati*. They use various meats, fishes and many traditional vegetables use in their meals. S. Deori (2002), J.K. Deori (2004) mentioned that, Deoris are worshipper of God- Kundimama.



Source: <http://deori-jimochhayan.blogspot.com/2008/09/deori-people-their-culture.html>

Fig 1: The following image shows the housing type of Deori people

4.1.2 Marriage of Deori Tribe

There are some exogamous clans among the Deoris such as Sundhariya, Patriya, Dupiya, Marangya, Chariya, Lagasuya, Chitigaya etc. They are different in their clans but made it bigger Deori community. But one thing is that no two clans reside in the same village or a specific range of area. Marriage between the clans of the same division is highly prohibited among the Deoris and only marriage of adult person and monogamy is allowed (Pathak, 2019). *Damachi*, *Sachi*, *Chorubasi* 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.

4.1.3 Dresses and Ornaments

Every tribal community of Assam has a particular dress habit. Every individual tends to form society and in society they create their own peculiarities among themselves in various fields according to their religion and beliefs. They use different adornments in different occasions. A deori male uses in home a loin cloth called *ikhoon* combine with shirt. In the outside of their home they generally use trousers and shirt. They adorns white cloth and use a necklace (called 'konthamoni') while they take part in traditional social function. Deori women wrap up *Ujaduba igoon* which hangs loosely down wrapping tightly the breast along with *Jokachhiba* which is enclosed in the waist. Sometimes they use *Tegihra* a traditional outfit dress. To cover their

head deori women use *Gathiki* or *Gamucha* a towel. They wear a ring called *Gema* and use bangles called *Uchoon* in their wrist also they wear a necklace which they called as *Igawa*. Some of the ornaments they use while performing *Bihu*. The Deori young girls wrap up *Igoon* same like women but there has some differences; they wrap it up within stomach along with blouse and *Gamocho* for helping to hide breast.



Source: Captured by Researcher

Fig 2: The following image shows the Deori women and their Traditional dress

4.1.4 Sujen- A natural based Element

In the socio-cultural life of Deoris, the rice beer *Sujen* has a very significant task. The process of preparation of *Sujen* is similar in the different tribe but the name and some elements of the processing little much different. For preparation *Sujen* it needs to prepare first the *Mod Pitha* (Cake). It is prepared by using different natural elements and parts of different plant spices. After preparation of *Mod Pitha*, *Sujen* can prepare. It is a process of brewing. For preparing *Sujen* different categories of rice are used.

4.2 Cultural Activities

4.2.1 The Festival Bisu

To enrich the Assamese culture, ethnic festivals of the tribal people have been playing an important role. The Deori people observed two major festivals in a year and both the festivals are connected with agricultural activities. The first is called *Bihagiyo Bisu* or *Bohag Bihu* and the other is *Magiyo Bisu* or *Magh Bihu*.

The *Bohagiyo Bisu* is the most important one and the Deoris and observed this festival for a period of seven days with unlimited joy and happiness. It is generally they start from Wednesday when the *sangkranti* of *chot* (a Assamese month) falls on that day. In that day the Deori people offer *puja* to god. The *Bisu* started with the ceremonial bathing of animals in the morning of the day. On that day *Suwasani puja* is observed in each and every household for the welfare and happiness of the household.

During the *Bihu* the elder citizen visits the villagers' households and gives blessings to the members of the households. Households entertained the guest by providing *Suzen*. Young male and female together performed *Bisu* dance by singing different *Bihu* song at *chhaje khula* (a middle place of the village). After declaration of the *husari*, by Deori *bharali*'s, on the second day of the *bisu* the *bihu*

dancing starts and then the parties go on visiting each and every household of the village. In the festival of Bisu, the Deoris use the musical instruments namely – “Durum”, “Kokili”, “Dentou”, “Tokamari”, “Taal” etc and the dances they perform are “Abarab”, “Hurair Rangoli”, “Lohoria”, “Chilum Chilum” and “Out Chapari Dema” (Pathak, 2017) [5].



Source: http://majulilandscape.gov.in/gallery_culture_festivals.php

Fig 3: The following image represents the *Bisu* festival of Deori People

4.2.2 Some other Traditions of the Tribe

The Deoris have different traditions in different occasions or point of time. They are very aware on their traditions and culture. Some of them are as follows

1. **Tradition of Using *Laa*:** This is a traditional toothpaste that used by the Deori women to blacken their teeth. *Laa* is a mixture of iron ash and oil paste. They believed, the *Sai Gira* (Priest) is allowed to accept the food and drink only from the lady with black teeth.
2. **Tradition of Using *Tel Pani*:** *Tel Pani* basically used by the Deori people, when they bury the dead bodies of their villagers. It is a mixture of oil, water, Dhuri Grass and Tulsi leaves which is to be kept on two separate bowl (left and right). Left bowl is for the female right bowl is for male. The persons those who visit the burial place to carry out the last task are welcome by a bit of fire in the courtyard while returning back to home (Pathak, 2017) [5].
3. **Scarcity of Rain water:** When there is scarcity of rain water in the paddy field at the time of cultivation, they perform various traditions like marriage of frog, *Dheki* (use to crushed rice) etc.
4. **Egg Cracking competition:** It is an open competition where all the villagers can participate of age and gender. In the time of Bohag Bihu they perform the event. It is one of the most joyful events and called *Duja Chujuaba* in Deori language.

5. Conclusion

Deori people and deori culture have many contributions to the culture of Assam. It has many prospects to attract the tourist in the region by enhancing the cultural exchange with the rest of the world. The traditional livelihoods of the Deoris make them healthy and prosperous in their socio-cultural activities. Their food habit and traditions have a unique identity. They are socially and culturally very much strong since centuries. Their social and cultural activities always have a great impact in the society of Deoris as well

as in the Assamese society and make the Assamese society bigger and greater.

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