

## Deori People and their Agro-based Cultural Practices

**Noble Kishore Buragohain**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Economics*

*Ledo College, Ledo, Assam*

### 1. About the Deoris:

#### 1.1 Origin:

Deori is one of the most colourful and civilized tribes among the indigenous tribes of North East India. It has its own distinct heritage in terms of culture, traditional as well as folk. Anthropologically Deoris are Mongoloid. They are initially inhabited in the hilly areas of Kundil Nagar, the ancient Sadiya. During 15<sup>th</sup> century, a majority of the people migrated to Majuli, leaving their own place. Now deoris inhabit mostly in Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Golaghat and Sonitpur district of Assam.

#### 1.2 'Deori' Meanig

Generally, the person, who knows how to worship the God, is regarded as Deori. The term Deori is originated from the Sanskrit word *devagrihik*, a word from Neo Indo-Aryan language. According to some scholars, the term 'Deori' is constituted by three phrases of Deori language. 'De' stands for esteemed or best, 'ou' for male person and 'ri' for nature. So, the meaning of the term Deori is the son of best male and the nature. The Deori people like to introduce themselves as '*Jimchaya*'.

#### 1.3 Social system:

Basically Deoris have four *phaid*s (Clans). They are *Dibongiya*, *Tengaponiya*, *Borgoyan* and *Patorgoyan*. At present, there is no existence of *Patorgoyans*. Different *phaid*s (clans) have their own devoted God. The *Dibongiys* worship the God *Gra-girachi (burha-burhi)*, whereas the *Tengaponiyas* worship *Picchadema (Boliya baba)* and the *Picchadema (Tamreswari or Kechaikhaiti)* is the devoted God of *Borgoyans*. Now only the *Dibongiys* are the using Deori language. The others use Assamese language for conversation.

Social system of *Deori* community is governed by the Priestly council of the *Thanghar* (Temple). The priestly council is again directed by the active '*Deo's* (Deifies). Only the Deifies directed work culture was known as '*Deori Culture*'. *Deoris* believed that the Deities ruled their society through the commands of the *Deodhwoni*. The works which were not included in '*Deori culture*' were considered as forbidden works in their society. Identity of *Deori* was completely attached to *Deori* culture and is associated with the *Thanghar*.

#### 1.4 Cropping Pattern:

As far as cropping pattern is concerned, the *Deori* people usually prefer *Ahu*, *Bao* and *Xali* pattern of cropping. *Deori* people, both males and females are hard-working, self-depending and hostile. They are expert in adopting multi-cropping pattern in the same plot of land. Not only paddy, but the production of other crops like pulses, mustard, potato, cotton, jute, chilly and other vegetables is also given equal preference by the *Deoris*. They produce most of the crops by themselves, needed for daily household requirements. Cows, buffalos, pigs, goats, ducks, hens, pigeons etc. are some major domestic animals of the *Deoris*.

#### 1.5 Dresses:

*Deoris* use hand-woven traditional clothes which is a part of their age-old culture. For this purposes they domesticate *Endil, Muga* (Silk worms) in their houses. Females of the community know how to weave different cloths for members of the families. The *Deori* women weave their traditional clothes and garments by themselves to meet the family requirements. The weavers extract threads from cotton, *endi*, *muga*, *paat* etc. and weave different traditional dresses of different colours and designs for both men and women. The men wear *Dhoti* with white border on their waist and a turban of *Phulam Gamosa* on the head. The females generally wear *Igu* (long cloth from the chest to the toes), *Jokka Chirba* (cloth encircling the waist), *Gatigi* (clothes that wear in the head), *Baiga* (long cloth for the upper part of the body), *Luguru Icha* etc. The dress pattern of the married is different from that of the unmarried women. The girls wear *Phuru*, *Baiga*, *Luguruia*, *Icha*, *Phuru Gathiki* during social functions. The males wear '*Iku*' (long cloths for waist) '*Base*' or *Jema* (kind of towel) *Deicha* (big cloths), *Churu Icha* (small cloths) etc. During *Bisu Puja* while performing *Husori* (Bihu dance), the girls were *Changira*, *Changira Gathiki*, *Muga fyo Igu*, *Muga fyo*, *Luguru Icha* etc. White, red, and green are the main

colours that are common in their dress pattern. In the past all, the people of the community used to wear typical cotton shirt known as *Jimochya Jima*. It is the matter of shame for a Deori woman, if she does not know weaving. The families who do not have *dheki* (grinding liver), are considered as poor.

### **1.6 Folk Practices:**

Deori people usually prefer to inhabit on side of river. They have their traditional *chang ghars* made from wood and bamboos. Generally, these *chang ghars* are constructed approaching their faces towards east or west. The Deori villages are constituted in accordance with their different *phaidis* (clans) available, which tightens the social bonding among themselves. Foods and drinks like traditional home-made wine, chicken, pork etc. are usually consumed by the Deoris, but except these, they do not allow the items for consumption, which are forbidden in Hindu *shastras*.

Some traditional sports like *ghila khel*, *latum ghurua*, *dhup khel*, *hoi khel*, *bagh-goru khel*, *ling mora*, *dhanu kad*, *lathi khel*, jumping, swimming, boating etc. are still popular in the Deori society.

### **1.7 Marriage System:**

Prevalence of three types of marriage in the Deori society have been noticed. These are *haru biya*, *maju biya* and *bor biya*. In the marriage ceremony, there is a tradition of offering *bhars* (a bundle of different items). The major items that the *bhar* contains, are rice, wine, ginger, black pepper, salt, hukoti (dried and preserved fish), turmeric, mustard oil, *kochu hak*, betel nuts (60 pairs), a hen, a fish, a pig etc. One *bhar* required in *haru biya*, two *bhars* in *maju biya*, whereas, three *bhars* required in *bor biya*.

## **2. Agro-based Festivals of Deoris:**

Deories are originally agriculture based and essentially they are hard-working and self-dependent. Deori women are equally hard-working in farming, animal husbandry, weaving and other allied activities at par with their menfolk. So, we cannot deny the presence of agricultural elements in each and every aspect of their cultural and traditional practices.

The *Deoris* observe the Bihu festival, which they called *Bisu* (Deori, 1974), and generally starts in their temple. They observe three major *Bihus* during the year, which fall in the months of *Bohag* (April), *Kati*(October) and *Magh* (January).

According to the *Deori* Language, the term *Bisu* denotes 'Extreme Rejoicing', where 'Bi' means extreme and 'Su' mean rejoicing. The *Bihus* are popularly known amongst them as *Bohagio Bisu* and *Maghio Bisu*, perhaps named after the respective months in which those fall. *Deori* culture is related to agriculture. Agriculture is related to the seasons of the year. So with the views to increase production of agriculture and to expect welfare of the country, society or domestic animals and for worshipping the deities, they perform the *Puja*.

### **2.1 Bohagio Bisu:**

Like other tribes and communities of Assam, *Deoris* also believe that youths need to perform songs and dances in order to gain the fertility of soil. *Deka gabhoru nach*, *boka nach* etc. are some forms of traditional dance of the *Deoris*, which symbolize the fertility of soil. Some rituals have to be performed before dancing.

From the first Wednesday of the *Bohag* month, celebration of *Bohagio Bisu* begins. The priest sacrifices fourteen chickens in the *Deoghar*. After the sacrifice, the villagers arrange a community feast in the *Morong ghar*. The significance of the ritual is to draw permission from their devoted God, for celebration of *Bisu*, which continues for a week.

The first day of *Bisu* is called *goru bihu*. In this occasion, cows are worshipped and brought to the river or pond for bathing. A *phot* (tilak) is marked on the forehead of each cow and beaten those by *makhiyoti* and *dighloti* sticks. In the evening, cows are tightened by the special ropes made from *tora* plant.

The very next day of *goru bihu* is called *Manuh bihu*. People wake up early in the morning, take a bath and worship to their ancestors. This is called *mimohaberua*. Here they offer *jalpan*, *chuje* (a traditional wine) and *kaji* (chicken curry) to their ancestors. Only after offering these items, they can have food. Then the villagers perform *bihu* dance in front of the *Deohaal*.

The second Wednesday of *Bohag* month, the *Deories* observe a *puja*, called *rajkebang*. They have to offer *puja* to 33 crore *devatas* by sacrificing hen, duck, goat etc. and take a community feast in the *Morong ghar*.

On the third Wednesday, another sacrifice of hens and goats is made in the name of their devoted God, expecting the wellbeing of the community, called *methua puja*. On this occasion,

spirit is called and the spirit may influence any of the villagers, which is called *deodhani*. He accepts the sacrifices made in favour of the God. He is regarded as the representative of the God and becomes capable of speaking anything about the past and the future. The *bihu* ends with the *methua puja*, which is also known as *bisu dabeba*.

## 2.2 Magio Bisu:

Unlike *Bohagio Bisu*, *Magio Bisu* is also celebrated on the first Wednesday of the *Magh* month by sacrificing thirteen chickens to their God on *Deoghar*. The main objective of this ritual is that they make prayer to their God to eliminate all the troubles and miseries of the villagers. Villagers celebrate *bihu* on the next Thursday.

As the part of preparation, from the few days before *bihu*, people start to construct *Meji* by arranging fire-sticks and also collect food items for the feast. For this occasion they call for a meeting and collect fund from the villagers. Usually they make two *Mejis* having the height approximately of 20/25 *haat*. After completion of *Meji*, the villagers arrange a community feast in the evening of Wednesday. In the morning on Thursday, *Mejis* are burnt. Before burning *Meji*, people tight the fruit plants of their own campus, by the straws of *Ahu dhan*. Deoris believe that, by doing this the trees will produce more fruits and will be safe from storms in future. The youths also perform traditional songs and dances around the *Meji*. The ceremonial fighting of buffaloes, eggs, cocks and even men is arranged during the *Bihu* seasons.

## 2.3 Kati Bisu:

The Deori villagers pray to the Goddess Lakshmi during *Kati Bisu*, to fulfill their *bharals* (paddy store houses) by crops, going to be empty. They observe this on the day of *sankranti*, of *Ahin* and *Kati* month. Generally people lighten *chakis (diyas)* in the paddy field and under *tulsi* plants. People of *Dibongiya phaid* of some regions, sacrifice hens in the paddy fields or on the *bharals* (store houses). They believe that this reduces the harmful insects in the paddy field and also expect more crops by the grace of Goddess Lakshmi.

## 2.4 Xaoniya Puja:

Deoris generally produces the crops like rice, pulses, mustard etc. For better production, they observe this *puja*, on a day of *Xaon* month. To worship of 33 crore *dev-devis of deoghar*, they sacrifice goats, duck, pigeons etc in the *Xaoniya Puja*. They also offer *prasads* to their devoted Gods. In the ancient days human sacrifice also was practiced in the *Borgonya phoid*.

The *Dibongia phoid* sacrifice 14 chickens to their God. The *Tengapaniya Phoid* offers 2 goats to their God as sacrifice.

### **2.5 Cchiba Monk and Bhakat Monk:**

Cchiba Monk and Bhakat Monk is the festival of taking meal from newly produced crops. Cchiba Monk is observed in the month of *Xaon* and *Bhada*, because *Ahu dhaan* is harvested during these months. The deoris offer this newly produced crops to Goddess Lakshmi and sacrifice hens in the *Deoghar*. The villagers arrange a feast, where meat of the sacrificed hens is used.

On the other hand, Bhakat monk is observed during the *Aghon* month, when *Hali dhaan* is harvested. In this festival they do not worship to their God. A community feast is arranged on the open field or the side of river. In the feast they do not use meat or fish. The priest offers grace to all before taking meal.

### **2.6 Minusi Puja:**

The Deoris celebrate two types of Minusi Puja. They are- *Minusi midi muma* and *Minusi kundimama*. *Minusi midi muma* is performed in the paddy field by sacrificing two white hens. The main objective of this function is to pray the God for better production of crops. Whereas, *Minusi kundimama* is observed near the *bharal* (store house) by sacrificing two white hens on Sunday or Wednesday. They pray the almighty to improve their crop production. By lightening four *diyas* around the *bharal* and fixing a branch of *megela* plant, the Deoris worship their devoted God.

### **3. Conclusion:**

It is worth-mentioning that in the festivals of Deori society spirituality is given much priority than amusements. Now-a-days, there has been a lot change in their rituals since the ancient days. Due to the rigidity in their customs and traditions, people have to spend much time. For present generation, it becomes difficult to follow. Although there have been a lot of changes in the customs and traditions, the significance still exists.

**References:**

1. Chutia, Rinkumoni(2015) : *Deorisakalar Krishibhittik Utsav, Axomor Janagosthya Krishibhittik Utsav Parvan,* Golden Jubilee Publication Cell, Naharkatiya College.
2. Deori, Herambar (2018) : *Deori Janagosthi: Ek chamu Abhash Burhidehing, (Souvenir), Axom Sahtya Sabha.*
3. Deori, Phanikanta (2017) : *Deori Jatir Samu Samiksha Bodousa (Souvenir), 9<sup>th</sup> Bodousa Cup Tournament.*
4. Deori, Saranan (2002) : *Religious Practices of Deoris* Bina Library, Guwahati,