

## **TRADITIONAL OCCUPATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY AMONT THE DEORIS OF ASSAM AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH.**

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### **Abstract**

Change is the nature of life, and hence modifications take place in every human society and culture; and the Deoris are of no exception. The Deoris are known for their expertise in priestly works since time immemorial and traditionally are paddy cultivators. They have their own distinct socio-cultural identity and till date they have been preserving these to a great extent without much change. In Madhupur, significant transformations have been found to be taken place in the socio-economic life of the Deoris due to natural catastrophe; while in Mahadevpur it is quite traditional. This paper gives an overview about the changing occupations of the Deoris of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It also tries to explore the probable reasons responsible for occupational deviation and its consequences.

### ***Keywords:***

Transformation;

Deviation;

Occupation;

*Rabi corp.*

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## 1. Introduction:

In a society, change comes in the natural course of social evolution. It may be rapid, if the society generates an internal dynamism encompassing all spheres of culture. Such endogenous change may be lasting as it gets reinforced by exogenous contact and continual renewal. On the other hand, change may be slow, even imperceptible, if it gets stagnated by socially caused inertia which thwarts internal dynamism and arrests progress (Ahmad, 1986).

The tribes of India are numerically small and found to be spread all over India. The traditional tribal economy of the Indian tribes grew on their dependence on natural resources available in the ecosystem, and use of indigenous technology. L. P. Vidyarthi (1977) has categorised the tribal population into eight on the basis of their economy: forest hunting, hill cultivation, plain agricultural, simple artisan, pastoral and cattle herder, folk artist, and agricultural and non-agricultural and the skilled white collar job and traders. Moreover, tribal economy however is a combination of several types of activities and hence these are only indicative of their main activities.

Majumdar (1950) studied on problems of culture contact among the Hos. After twelve years, he revisited the area and revised his work on the basis culture change. He also studied the cultural change among the Garos. In his book 'A study of Culture Change in two Garo villages of Meghalaya' he discussed the impact of settled wet paddy cultivation on traditional shifting cultivation. He also discussed the conversion to Christianity as a major factor of cultural change among the Garos.

The shift in tribal economy and diversification of occupations has been corroborated in the People of India report by the Anthropological Survey of India. In the report it is clearly stated that hunting and gathering has declined by 24.08 %, pastoral activities by 12.5 %, shifting cultivation by 18.14 %. However, the report also depicted the overwhelming rise in horticulture 34.4%, terrace cultivation 36.84%, steeled cultivation 29.58%, animal husbandry 22.5, etc. (Report of the high level committee on socio - economic, health and educational status of tribal communities of India (p-97).

Both in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, most of the tribal communities profess paddy cultivation as their main or primary occupation. The practice settled plough cultivation, terrace cultivation and shifting cultivation. Agriculture accounts for more than a third of Assam's income and employs 69% of total workforce; while in Arunachal Pradesh it is 63%. The tribes of these states practice paddy cultivation of different variety for their livelihood. Simultaneously several other activities such as fishing, vegetable cultivation, weaving, cattle herding, etc. are also being carried out by them as secondary means of livelihood.

### **Historical background:**

The Deoris proudly call themselves as the "*Jimo-chayyan*" meaning the children of the Sun and Moon. The word Deori has three parts, *Deo* - meaning great or respectful, *ow* -meaning male and *ri* - meaning female. It is a widely accepted legend that the Deoris were the '*Raj purohit*', the royal priest of the Ahom dynasty. In Assamese language also the meaning of the word 'Deori' refers to a section of people who offers prayer or '*puja*' to God in temples. The Deoris as a priestly section of people has a unique way of enchanting the '*mantras*'.

History reveals that since the Chutiya and the Ahom reign the Deoris were considered as one of the priestly section people, who performed religious rituals and works for the kings and commoners. It is a fact that during the early part of the Chutiya and the Ahom reign there was no caste Hindu priest as such and hence the Deoris were regard as the priestly class people of that period with high admiration.

Dambarudhar Deori (1966) mentioned that from the old folk songs of the Deoris, we can have a good idea that Kundil and Sadiya were the latest abode of the Deoris in this part of India. According to one old saying it is understandable that after the conclusion of reign of Chutiya king Bhismaka at Kundil Nagar, the inhabitants of that area i.e. the Deoris and the Chutiyas faced calamities and hence they moved towards Himalaya and reached the *Manash* Lake (*Manash sarobor*). They reside for few years there and then moved towards Tibet and reside for few years at Lahsa in Tibet and Swati Lake. After residing here and there for few years, they decided to return back to their native place. While returning back they came along the Subanshiri River (which originates in the Himalayas), they reached Sonagiri Hill and settled there for many

years with the Chutiyas. From Sonagiri Hills the Deoris lonely migrated to Kundil, Sadiya, Jaidam Hills and then to other parts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The Deoris have been further divided into four sub-divisions or *Phoids* or *Khels*; the *Dibangiyas*, the *Tengapaniyas*, the *Borgoyans*, and the *Patorgoyans*. The last *Khel* is reported to be extinct. The *Dibangiyas* are further divided into 12 exogamous clans; namely – *Sundari (Bor-deori)*, *Patriyo (Saru-deori)*, *Aireyo (Bharali)*, *Chariya (Bora)*, *Chitigaya (Cook)*, *Kumtai*, *Sukraongyo*, *Dhupiyaya*, *Murangyo*, *Kumarai*, *Lagachuyo* and *Kaliyachakuyo*. The *Tengapaniyas* has 7 exogamous clans; namely – *Machiyotika (Bor-deori)*, *Bikomiyotika (Saru-deori)*, *Khutiyotika (Bharali)*, *Chakucharutika*, *Pagimegaratika*, *Phaphoriyatika* and *Senaboriyatika* and the *Borgoyans* has 6 exogamous clans; namely – *Ikucharu (Bor-deori)*, *Simucharu (Saru-deori)*, *Hizaru (Bor-bharali)*, *Bukharu (Sacrificer)*, *Lupharu (Bora)* and *Gucharu*.

### **Micro field:**

For the purpose of the present study we have selected two Deori villages; one is situated in the state of Assam and other one is situated in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The village situated in the states of Assam is Madhupur Adarsha Janajati Deori village (set up 1) in the Dibrugarh District; while the No. 2 Mahadevpur Deori village (set up 2) is situated in the Namsia District of Arunachal Pradesh. These two villages are exclusively inhabited by the *Tengaponiyas*, a sub-division of the Deoris.

Set up 1 is a moderate village situated in the south – west direction, under Larua Mauza of Dibrugarh town. The villagers belong to Deori community except one household. It is around 26 Km away from the Dibrugarh town. The village is about 65 years old and presently inhabited by 97 families in 90 households, reported to have migrated from *Ghelgheli* near Dihingmiukh (Nitaipukuri) area of Sibsagar district after the great earth quake of Assam in 1950.

Set up 2 is situated in the Western direction of Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh and in the North – Eastern direction of Assam. It is about 122 km away from Dibrugarh town. The village is about 62 years old. The early inhabitants of the village had migrated from the greater Tengapani village, situated near Nitaipukhuri area of Sibsagarh district. The village is a moderate

one having 93 families inhabited in 89 households. The inhabitants of the village also belong to *Tengaponiya khel*.

### **Social life:**

As they are traditionally rice/paddy cultivators, rice is the staple food. Along with rice, leafy vegetables, edible roots, fish, meat and locally prepared fish pickles (*hukoti*) are consumed by them in their day today life. Traditionally the elderly members use to take a cup or two of rice beer (*mod or suje*) with the lunch and dinner. The villagers of both the set ups prefer nuclear family system in their day to day life, though earlier joint family system was very much popular in their social life. They are very close to one another despite of living singly in separate houses. All the relatives are found to be cooperative to one another in all kind of functions whether it is a moment of joy or sorrow. The villagers of both the set ups belong to the *Tengaponiya* phoid. The villagers of set up I belongs to *Bikomiyotika* and *Khutiyotika* clans; while the villagers of set up II, is a composition of four clans; *Machiyotika*, *Bikomiyotika*, *Khutiyotika* and *Pagimegaratika*. They worship *Bolia-baba* or lord Siva. The main religious center for the Deori is a temple (*mandir* or *goshani-saal* or *deo-ghar* or *than-ghar*), where they perform all the community level religious rituals. Their religion is so deep-rooted in them and it still occupies a prominent place in uniting them to live as a solid social group maintaining harmonious human behaviours, thoughts, activities, feelings, etc. Every *than-ghar* has its own functioning committee, composed of priests, their assistants and an advisory board. The chief priests are the *Bor-deori*, *Saru-deori*, *Bor-bharali* and *Saru-bharali* and are commonly known as *Chari pujari*, who customarily undergo several restrictions regarding food habit and in personal life. These chief priests are assisted by *Bora*, *Barik* and *Poriya*, are considered as the helpers to the priests.

The festivals observed by the Deoris have a link with the traditional paddy cultivation. They observe three types of *Bihus* namely – *magh*, *bohag* and *kati*. The *magh bihu* is observed at the end of harvesting (mid January) locally known as *bhogali bihu* or festival of ingestion and rejoice). The *bohag bihu* is observed in mid of April on the beginning of Assamese New Year. On the eve of this *bihu* they observe *goru bihu*, whereby they offer *puja* to the animals used for cultivation. The first day of *bohag* bihu is known as *manuh bihu*, and on this day different rites and rituals are observed in the *than ghar* and seeks blessings from their deities. On the

completion of this *bihu*, the villagers formally start their paddy cultivation and hence are also known as sowing festival. The *kati bihu* is associated with crop protection. In this *bihu* the villagers offer betel-nut and earthen lamp in their paddy fields and request goddess *laxmi* for a better harvest.

## 2. Research Method

Standard Anthropological methods and techniques were used to carry out the present study. Primary data were collected by applying interview, observation methods. During investigation elderly members are choosed as the chief informants for the purpose.

**Table 1.**

### **Comparison of occupation (Primary) pattern among the Deoris of set up 1. and set up 2.**

Sl. No.	Occupations (Primary)	Set up 1.		Set up 2.	
		No. Families		No. Families	
		No	%	No	%
1	Paddy cultivation	49	50.51	76	81.72
2	Seasonal vegetable and <i>rabi</i> crop cultivation/ vegetable seller.	23	23.71	01	1.07
3	Transportation	05	5.14	02	2.15
4	Cattle herding	11	11.34	00	-
5	Service	03	3.09	08	8.60
6	Shop keeping	04	4.12	06	6.45
7	Weaving	02	2.06	00	-
8	Total	97	99.97	93	99.99

The above table shows that out of 97 families in set up 1, only 49 families have been professing paddy cultivation; while in the set up 2, the number is 76 out of 93 families, being the percentages 50.51% and 81.72% respectively. It is noteworthy to say that the traditional occupation pattern of set up 1 has been seemed to be in a state transission, while the other set up

shows normal. Again, 48 families of set up 1 and 17 families of set up 2 has adopted new mode of primary occupation being the percentages 49.48% and 18.27% respectively. The comparison shows a marked deviation in occupation pattern in the set up 1. The deviation in traditional occupation pattern can lead to an enormous change in the socio-cultural aspect of the villagers of set up 1.

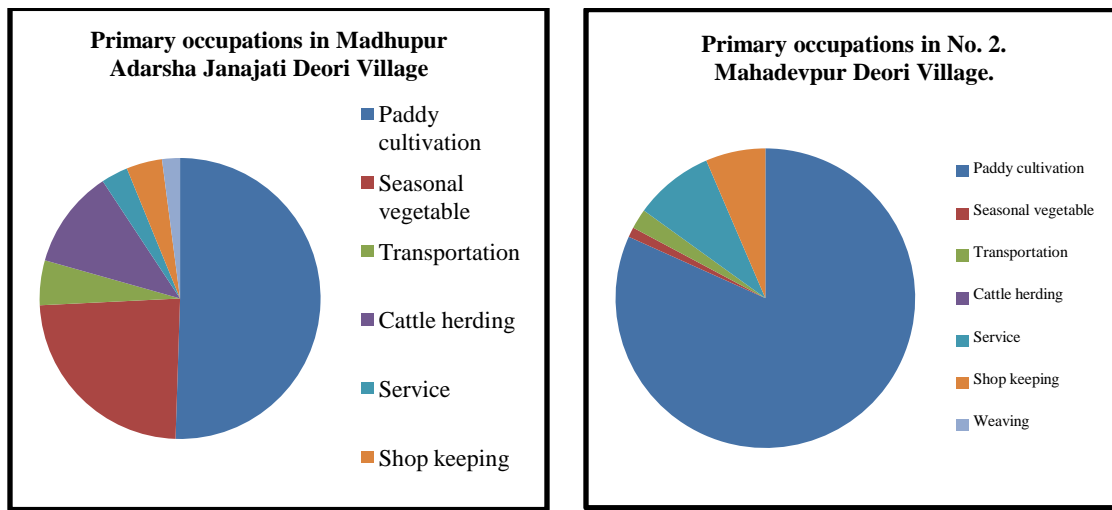


Fig. I. Pie diagram shows the occupation patterns in Madhupur Adarsha Janajati Deori village. Fig.II. Pie diagram shows the occupation patterns in No. 2. Mahadevpur Deori Village.

### 3. Results and Analysis:

#### Traditional occupation of the Deoris:

The Deoris are rice/paddy cultivators and cultivate different varieties such as *sali*, *ahu* and *bau* during a year. *Sali* and *bau* rice cultivation is generally done in the rainy seasons (June-July); while the *ahu* rice cultivation is done in the dry seasons (January-February). Their livelihood centers around the production of rice, which is consumed and sold to earn money for family needs. Besides, paddy cultivation, they also cultivate different seasonal vegetables as secondary means of income. They are self sufficient people and most of the food items consumed by them are either cultivated or collected from the nature. They are good in fishing and they often go for fishing in the nearby ponds and rivers.

Over the time, with the shrinking of agricultural lands, it has become difficult to support their families by doing a single cultivation. Hence, apart from the traditional paddy cultivation; they are bound to practice the other allied cultivations.

### **Transformation in to new occupation:**

The villagers of set up 1 are undertaking various other sources as primary means of income for their livelihood such as cattle herding, seasonal vegetable cultivation and selling, private transportation, shop keeping, etc.; while the villagers of set up 2 still practicing paddy cultivation. Due to frequent flood related problems and deposition of river silt and sand, the villagers of set up 1 have been suffering badly since last 4 years and as a result they have adopted alternate modes of occupation for their livelihood. Presently, only a small portion of agricultural land is found to be useful for paddy cultivation. The villagers of the set up 1 faced a hard time to adjust with the new occupations and in due course they one way or another coped with it. As the villagers are traditionally expertise in agricultural works, hence they have shifted their occupation to vegetable cultivation and cattle herding, as they are long been familiar with kitchen gardening and domestication and rearing of animals.

In the set up 2, not much deviation is seen, still then a tendency to profess a new occupation is found as altogether 8 families have been shifted to shop keeping and private transportation occupation.

After detailed study it is seen that a marked diversification in occupation is found among the villagers of set up 1. At present 49 (50.51%) families have continuing paddy cultivation as their primary means of occupation; while 23 (23.71%) families have been newly undertaking seasonal vegetable and *rabi* crop cultivation and sell it in different markets. This shows a drastic change in occupation pattern among the Deoris of set up 1. They cultivate different seasonal vegetables such as Mustard greens, Spinach, Long beans, Black gram, Sponge gourd, Potato, Ivy gourd, Pumpkin, Radish, Ghost pepper, Bottle gourd, Brinjal, Teasle gourd, White gourd, etc. to support their livelihood. They also collect different plants and edible fruits such as *Dimaru (Ficus glomerata)*, *Mechaki (Sarcochlamys pulcherrima)*, Indian patchouli (*Hukloti*), *Tora gajali (Alpinia allughas)*, Skunk vine (*Bhedailota*), *Tikoni barua (Smilax perfoliata)*, Rattan shoot (*Bet*



*gaj*), Fiddlehead fern (*Dhekia*), water spinach (*kolmou*) elephant apple (*Ow tenga*) from the nearby Medela reserve forest. Moreover, 11 (11.34%) and 5 (5.14%) families have been undertaking cattle herding and private transportation as their means of primary occupation respectively. Only 4 (4.12%) and 2 (2.06%) families in set up 1 have been professing shop keeping and weaving as their primary occupation respectively. This shows a trend of transition in traditional occupation pattern among the villagers of set up 1.

In the set up 2 no marked deviation is seen in traditional occupation pattern as 76 (81.72%) families have been still practicing rice/paddy cultivation. Only 6 (6.45) families have been adopted shop keeping as their primary occupation. An insignificant no of families 2 (2.15%) and 1 (1.07%) have been newly adopted private transportation and seasonal vegetable cultivation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

From the above discussion it is clearly seen that occupational diversification has been taking place among the Deoris of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The present study clearly shows that diversification in occupation is quite prominent in set up 1; while in set up 2. it is insignificant, but a tendency is present. The reason behind professing new occupation pattern is soil degeneration and low production of agricultural yield. Marked changes have been found in occupation pattern in set up 1 is due to adverse influence of nature. The occupation change pattern partly influences their lifestyles. In spite of that, the Deoris have still been able to carry their traditional values with few modifications. If we categorise occupations into traditional and new, and make a comparison between two set ups, we will find that 50.51% and 81.72% of families have been continuing traditional paddy cultivation, while 49.48% and 18.27% families have adopted new occupations as their primary source of income in set up 1 and 2 respectively. So, we can come to a conclusion that change in the ecosystem can be considered as one of the prime cause behind occupational change.

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