CHAPTER – 6
THE DEURI CASE

I. A Background Note:

Earlier it was believed that the Deuris formed a division (the priestly class) of the Chutiyas and while referring to them the composite term “Deuri-Chutiya” was used to designate the community and the language. But it has since been established that the Deuris constitute an independent tribal community and it is now more common to refer to the community and the language by the single term “Deuri”. However, the ethnonym now being used by the community is “Jimochya”.

It can be mentioned in passing that whether or not the Deuris constituted a division of the Chutiyas, all historical evidences confirm that earlier they had close association with the Chutiyas and later on with the Ahoms.

It should be pointed out here that in early ethnographic accounts, books and documents the spelling of the name of the tribe was given as Deori. But nowadays most of the scholars use the spelling ‘Deuri’ as it comes closer to the local pronunciation. Here we have also used the spelling ‘Deuri’ to refer to the tribe.

As we have mentioned earlier, the Deuris are riverine people, they are found mostly along a few rivers of the Brahmaputra Valley. They are scattered in upper Assam and the contiguous areas of Arunachal Pradesh.
For this present study we have covered the following villages.

- Bordeuri Gaon
- Kinapathar
- Majar Sapari
- Madhupur Deuri
- Upor Deuri Gaon
- Name Deuri Gaon
- Mahadevepur No. I -
- Mahadevepur No. II -
- Mahadevepur No. III

Lakhimpur district (Dibongia)
Dibrugarh District (Tengaporia)
Jorhat District
(Dibongia)
{Tengaporia}
{Lohit District of Arunachal Pradesh}

The various divisions of the Deuris – Dibongias, Borgayas and Tengaporias are found scattered in different far-flung areas. As such, although the changes have occurred in more or less similar way in all the villages, the nature and degree of change in different aspects have not been the same everywhere. For example, the Dibongias who are mostly found in the Lakhimpur district have retained their language while others have given up their tribal mother tongue in favour of Assamese. Similarly, traditionally Deuris have been worshipping the Mother Goddess and her consort (which can be considered as a form of Saktism). But as a recent addition, the neo-Vaishnava influence also has made its entry in some areas, particularly among the Tengaponias in different degrees.

It may be possible that due to physical distances between the different divisions of the Deuri community as a whole (unlike many of the tribal groups) the Deuris seem to have become conscious about their distinctive common identity rather slowly, and in their case the process of ethnic assertion seems to be not very well-articulated.
II. Trends of Change:

i) In the Field of Socio-Economic Life:

Nowadays the Deuris are found to be settled cultivators and till the recent past no distinctly visible proofs of practicing jhum cultivation in the hill slopes have been found. But many of the elderly people belonging to different division and areas of the Deuri community had expressed the view during our fieldwork that in the past they also practiced jhuming in the sense of shifting cultivation in the plains itself. They rightly emphasized that the jhuming is technique not necessarily related to hill farming.

There was a discussion about the practice of jhum (in our presence) in which the participants were a number of villagers about the age of eighty. In reply to my queries they gave me their views, which we have summarized above. However it was found that they were referring to the given information only in respect of *ahu* (broadcasting) rice cultivation which does not depend on water retention as much as *sali* (transplanting cultivation).

The traditional *ahu* rice varieties found in almost all the villages under study are *kulagoni* and *letagoni*. Similarly the traditional *sali* varieties are – *borsali, naria, maghuri, boliamusora, bodumoli, bora, joha, tulpania, xulpora* etc. They have been using these varieties for the last 40 to 50 years. In more recent times of course some new varieties have been introduced. In some areas particularly in Upor Deuri and Nam Deuri villages of Jorhat district and Madhupur Deuri village of Dibrugarh district, the new high yielding varieties of rice have been gaining popularity. Apart from rice the other crops include pulses particularly *matimah*, mustard, potatoes etc. Productions of some of the crops earlier have been completely given up
nowadays – such as, millet, sesame, cotton, different varieties of yam and taro, etc.

Earlier, that is, about 30 to 40 years back, the vegetable products included pumpkin, different varieties of gourds, egg plant, sweet potatoes, chillies, different varieties of herbs, etc. But in recent times the range of vegetable products has undergone remarkable changes in variety, quality and quantity. In the case of agricultural implements changes have come in a similar manner. In place of traditional implements, the modern advanced technologies such as power tiller, huller machine etc. are gaining popularity in many of the areas under study. Of course in the villages of Lakhimpur district we have found that only traditional implements are still in use.

Formerly the concept of surplus and the market economy was unknown to them. The economy operated purely at the subsistence level. Although they did not always have much surplus, yet they had enough crops for their own use. Gradually they began to adapt themselves to the market-oriented economy and started production for surplus. In more recent times, specifically within the last 15 to 20 years, many of them have oriented themselves for production on commercial basis. This has led to extra income and also increased consumption of goods meant for comfort and luxury. This is reflected in their dress, food intake, entertainment gadgets, furniture, and so on.

Another important aspect that comes with the changes in the agricultural production, particularly the crop items, is the food habit of the people. The elderly people still remember the days when different kinds of yams and taros constituted a substantial portion of their food. Locally available varieties of herbs, roots, shoots, vegetables and fruits constituted
their delicacies. Gradually these items are losing importance as a large number of new varieties of vegetables and fruits have become popular. Even fruits like apples, grapes, pears etc. which are transported from outside are easily available in the market and also freely consumed.

The non-vegetarian items include large quantities of fish, various types of meat and eggs, chicken, pork, duck, mutton etc. Earlier, when the sacrifice of buffalo was common, the Deuris used to take the meat of the buffalo also. Taking of beef is, however, strictly prohibited. Use of oil was almost absent earlier. Items were mostly boiled, smoked, and sometimes roasted. But nowadays the use of oil is very common, which is definitely the influence of non-tribal Assamese neighbours. Similarly, the traditional cakes and snacks mostly prepared from bora rice, although still popular, are slowly giving way to modern factory-produced items. While the traditionally made rice beer suze is still the most popular beverage for all age groups, tea drinking has become popular, particularly with the young generation. Milk as food, not popular earlier, is being increasingly accepted with the passage of time. Smoking with the traditional pipe has gradually yielded place to bidis and cigarettes.

We are producing below a few reports based on field investigation in different Deuri villages focusing on different aspects of change in the economic field.

Lakhimpur Villages –

a) It appeared to me from my general observation that in comparison to other areas under study, the Lakhimpur villages are less well-to-do economically. In spite of the general lack of prosperity a number of individuals receiving higher education
in different disciplines have become both economically and socially well-established. The general tendencies among such persons are to move to urban centers and adopt the modern life style.

Jorhat and Dibrugarh Villages:

a) They have taken up cultivation of vegetables on commercial basis and have been using modern technologies and facilities wherever possible. They have started growing the new items of vegetables – traditionally not found - like cabbage, cauliflower, hybrid varieties of egg plant, tomato, different varieties of peas, squash, potato etc.

b) They supply a good quantity of vegetables to the nearest urban centers, for example Jorhat and Dibrugarh.

c) Though a considerable number of villagers are service-holders, yet they have not given up cultivation. In many cases educated youth have come up to take farming on scientific basis for their livelihood.

Mahadevpur Villages:

a) Use of the horse in ploughing and transport (by riding or by cart pulling) is quite common. Of course horses are used by the Misings of Jonai area also on a limited scale.

b) Use of the elephant for ploughing and cart-pulling was common till the recent past. The practise is gradually going out of use.

c) Some well-to-do persons are owners of elephants, which they rent out for drawing of logs by timber contractors in the
Arunachal hills. However, because of the recent restriction imposed by the Supreme Court on the felling of trees, this business has suffered a setback and some elephant owners have sold out their animals.

d) The fact that some villagers are owners of elephants and have big incomes – reflects the presence of disparity in the society. However such disparity does not stand in the way of social communication.

ii) In the Field of Social Institutions:

As in the case of the Misings, under the parameter social institutions we have mainly focused our attention on family, kinship, marriage and clan system.

Family the smallest social unit is found to be joint in nature in most of the cases among the Deuris. In fact, Deuris still prefer joint family system. Though this system is fast loosing its ground, still we have found quite a considerable number of joint families functioning smoothly during our field investigation in different villages under study. The Dibongias called the joint family as jakarua jupa. The number of member of some of the joint families goes upto as many as one hundred. To accommodate so many members, the joint families construct long houses with compartments for individual families. Now-a-days the size of the family has come down to between 10 to 20, and thus very long houses are rare.

The Deuris have a rather elaborate clan structure. The different divisions or khels have separate clan systems. The clans that we have found in the villages under study are as follows:-
The Dibongias (the Lakhimpur and Jorhat villages) have ten clans called *jaku* or *bangsha*: Airo, Kumota, Chukrang, Chario, Sitikao, Lagasu, Patri, Sudario, or Boderi, Bihia and Sakusa. Among these divisions Kumota, Airo, Chario and Boderi are considered as the priestly clans because all the priests, their assistants and office-bearers belong to these four clans.

Again the Dibongias have a moiety system and Airo, Kumota, Murang, Chukrang form one moiety and the rest of the clans belong to the second one. Thus they maintain clan exogamy according to the moiety rule.

The Tengaponias (Dibrugarh and Arunachal Villages) have seven clans called Tika-Khutio, Masio-Nasiya, Pakimegera or Phakimengenya, Bigomia or Bikumia, Phaphoria or Phapohia, Senaboria or Senabarja, Sakusa or Sakusaya. Here also the priestly class belongs to Bikumia, Khutio, Masiyo, Phaphoriya clans.

It should be noted that till now clan exogamy is being maintained by the Deuris and there is a tendency towards retaining that tradition. Of course stray incidences of violating such rules are also found. In such cases the concerned couple has to face a heavy load of punishment and even excommunication.

Apart from the clan divisions, in the case of selection of the priest, their assistants and other office bearers, a kind of social hierarchy is found to be operating very strongly. For example, the Bordeuri, who command the highest prestige from the villagers, must be selected from the Sundariya or Machio clan. Similarly the other post holders must be selected from specific clans only.
In the case of kinship relationship, the Deuris of the villages under study have still retained certain traditional norms. For example, for a married woman, avoidance with husband's elder brother is very strong even today within the village. She cannot directly address him, give him anything, and her normal movements within the household are used to be restricted in front of him. Of course nowadays such restrictions have been relaxed to some extent and people coming out of the village set-up have put it to a minimum level. The relationship of avoidance is maintained also with the wife's elder sister. But here the strictness is not so strong as in the case of the former.

On the other hand, the husband's younger brother enjoys a joking relationship with his sister-in-law. Similarly, the wife's younger sister also enjoys a joking relationship with her brother-in-law, and grand-parents enjoy such relations with their grandchildren. The Lakhimpur Dibongias, who have retained their language, use the traditional kinship terms. But the Dibongias of Jorhat and the Tengaporias who have given up their language in favour of Assamese have also retained many of the kinship terms. For example, the following are some of the terms of address used by all the villagers under study.

- **Eyong** - Mother
- **Bang** - Father
- **Ajai** - Grand father
- **Aboi** - Grand mother
- **Phayung** - Father's elder brother
- **Mayung** - Father's elder brother's wife
- **Apa** - Elder sister of either father or mother and so on.
Again, many of the kinship terms of reference and address have been adopted from Assamese, even among language speaking Dibongias – a change definitely occurring due to close proximity with the non-tribal Assamese neighbours.

Though the formalities are still maintained, the kinship relationship and significance have been loosing day by day. For example, as in the case of Mising, here also cross-cousin marriage, which was formerly considered as a preferential one, has lost its importance as the young generation has abandoned the prescribed norm. Similarly, due to the diminishing trend of joint family, certain relationships which were much close once, have been losing that intensity in the present-day context.

Marriage is another important aspect of social institution which has gone through a number of changes.

As mentioned in the ethnographic account in Chapter-5, the Deuris have mainly three types of marriage – borbiya, majubiya and sorubiya of which the first two types have lost popularity because of high expenditure and elaborate and time-consuming rituals. So sorubiya is the widely prevalent type of marriage of the present day. However, another form of popular marriage is the marriage by elopement. This type of marriage is found to be very common in the villages under study. In such cases, when the groom’s family accepts the marriage, the couple formally goes to bride’s place with bride price which includes areca nut and betel leaf, rice beer, dry fish, a fixed amount of money along with a token bundle (containing a kind of taro, black pepper, ginger, dry fish) for the bride’s mother with the belief that it would compensate for her labour pain. Also a feast with pig meat is given to the neighbourhood.
The pathoria or middleman appointed by both bride and groom's family plays an important role by settling bride-price and other details of the marriage. As a token of love, a family gives many items with the bride, which includes mainly bell-metal utensils, wooden or steel boxes, garments, areca nuts and betel leaves etc.

Formerly, marriages with non-Deuris were not common and were not accepted by the society. But gradually the attitude has changed. Nowadays in all the villages, cases of marriages with non-Deuris, both tribal and non-tribal, have taken place and they are being duly accepted by the society. In such cases the concerned couple has to pay fine (danda) and perform a purificatory ritual. A few cases are listed below:

1) A Karbi girl from Sonapur area of Kamrup district got married to a Deuri boy of Madhupur Deuri village of Dibrugarh district. The Deuri family has accepted the girl as their daughter-in-law by performing the formalities including a purificatory rite. She is the daughter-in-law of my informant Shri Nandeswar Bharali of Madhupur Deuri village. The marriage took place about 8 years ago.

2) A girl, herself a chemical engineer from Upor Deuri village, got married to a boy of caste Assamese (Koch) community. It is in the family of Shri Kripa Deuri, the village head man of Upor Deuri village. Both the families have accepted the union.

The marriage rules in general have become much flexible with the passage of time.

(iii) In the Field of Socio-Religious Life:

As we have pointed out earlier, the Deuris traditionally worship the Mother Goddess and her consort. It can be considered as a form of
Saktism. However, the different divisions or *khels* of the Deuri community worship these deities by different names.

Now we are going to describe the socio-religious rituals and celebrations specific to the villages under study and their changing trends wherever we have noticed.

Among the Dibongias of Lakhimpur and Jorhat district we have found the following:

The Bohagio Bisu (Bohag Bihu) celebration is accompanied by a puja at the midiku (the shrine) in the name of Gira-Girasi. The celebration starts from the first Wednesday of the month of Bohag. The preparation starts a week ahead nowadays, which was earlier a month-long business. Each of the families has to contribute rice, *mah prasad*, chicken and vegetables for the puja and the community feast. Bora and Kelua-Bora (traditional functionaries) collect the materials from each household. One or two families are given the responsibility for the preparation of rice-beer for the feast. On the previous Tuesday of the celebration, one of the priests collects a bunch of bananas from the village itself to be utilized as *prasad* on the Bihu day. An office-bearer of the priestly class (*tiriduboia* or *tirimuneya*) conducts this activity.

The puja starts in the morning at the *midiku or kundiku* (the shrine). The four priests, their assistants and other office bearer must be present in performing the whole ritual.

The four priests perform the puja; the Dupia (assistant) and Randhani or Ladani (cook) help them in conducting the puja. The puja is offered in the name of Gira-Girasi, whom they identify with Lord Siva.
and Parvati of the Hindu pantheon. Bolia Baba (Pisa dema) and Tamreswari (Pisasidema) son and daughter of Lord Siva and Parvati, are also offered puja. The sacrifices of goats and fowls are made. The puja continues up to mid-day. When the puja comes to an end, the priests give a kimaru leaf (which is considered as a symbol of purity) to each person. The prasad is given in the form of a bundle (ayuxtopola) to each family. Keluabora distributes the prasad. Puja over, the Randhani, assisted by four persons appointed by the villagers, cooks the food items for the feast. The womenfolk, though not allowed to join the community feast, comes to the puja ground to attend the puja and help in different chores including cutting of vegetables etc. After having prasad, the congregation comes to the morong (community hall) to enjoy the feast. The cook and his four assistants serve the food. Singing and dancing starts from the evening.

The next day, each family individually makes offerings in the name of the forefathers. The offerings consist of cooked chicken and fried bora rice. The offerings were earlier placed on koupat (a special variety of leaf) but nowadays they use the plantain leaves.

Before this community puja, each and every family has to perform a purificatory rite called saksiklabiba. Any one of the priest comes to perform the rite. A number of persons from other clans have to be invited. Guests are entertained with a modest feast which includes a special dish known as kaji.

Usually an unmarried girl prepares the food. Before the preparation, she bows down before the household deity with a copper pitcher called garo and with kimaro leaf she sprinkles the holy water in the entire
household. She also prepares the rice-bear. It is believed that this ritual frees them from all kinds of omissions and commissions.

Merry-making by singing and dancing continues for seven days and a puja is performed on the Wednesday. On the next Thursday it is the end of the Bihu celebration, called *bhui urua* or *bisudabea*. In the evening they ceremonially give farewell to Bihu by singing Bihu songs and go to the river bank to perform some rituals. On their way back, mock-fighting, and wrestling are performed.

After one week they perform another Bihu known as Rajkebang or Pituakhowa Bihu or Pehababisu or Midideruruba. Within this week any kind of performance of ritual, either individually or community-wise, is prohibited.

In Rajkebang all the deities worshipped by the Deuris as a whole are offered puja. Four pigs are required for sacrifice. It is performed for the welfare of the village and its people.

Another important ritual performed by them is Maghio Bisu, which is also performed at the *midiku* like the Bohagio Bisu. A puja is performed on the first Wednesday of the month of Magh by the priests assisted by different post holders. In addition to the Bihagio Bisu puja paraphernalia, here cakes made of *bora* rice are also offered to the deities worshipped.

*Kati Bihu* is also celebrated by the Deuris. Earlier the celebration of Kati Bihu was very important but nowadays it has lost its older significance.
The other important community and individual pujas performed and observed by the villagers are Chiba Bochu, Goal Gorokhia sakam (Mosumeirakia Midi), Lakhi Sakam (Minosiridi muma) etc. The Chiba Bochu is held at the Deoshal Than on any Wednesday in the month of Saon. The priests and their assistants perform the puja. Fowls, pigeons, goats are sacrificed in the name of all highest gods and goddesses. The people outside the community can also offer sacrifices according to their wish. The Goal Gorokhia Sakam is performed either at the Morang or in the river bank. The puja is performed in the name of villagers normally on in the month of Phagun or Chot. The four priests and elderly persons perform the ritual. Earlier, sacrifice of deer was common. Now-a-days the purpose is served with pig or tortoise or fish. However, this celebration is loosing its ground day by day.

Lakhi Sakam is performed at the granary of individual household. At least one of the priests must be present. It is held in the month of Magh or Phagun or Aghon. Two pairs of earthen lamps are lighted and a pair of white fowl is required. Kimaro leaves are required for the puja along with four pairs of koupat. Bamboo sticks are placed at the puja site. The priest sprinkle water with the Kimaro leaf. The near kins are invited.

Ai Sabah is another community festival performed mainly by the women folk. Offerings consisting of fruits, mah-prasad betel nut and leaves etc. are made, and after the performance of the rites they float the offering in the water.

Other rituals of limited scope performed either at individual households by the near kins are saksisk yatema and nakhowa or chiba haba.
Saksik is the annual purificatory ritual to be performed by each household. The four priests come to perform the ritual. Close kins and neighbours may come, but guests from other clans must be invited. A girl from outside the clan must cook for the guests.

Nakhowa is the taking of new crop for the first time. It is also accompanied by offerings that are made in the name of pests and insects and other creatures that might have been killed during ploughing or harvesting or such other activities. At the same time, offerings are also made in the name of the forefathers of the family.

Apart from these a number of rituals related to the rites of passages are performed.

In the case of the Tengaponias the supreme deity is the Bali Baba. They regard Baliya Baba as being the protector of the villagers and they offer homage to the deity at the shrine from time to time. The rituals that are performed by the Tengaponias under our study are more or less the same as those found among the Dibongias. The rituals are as follows: Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu, Na-khowa, Patdangar Puja, Ghordoo Puja, Bura Dangoria Puja, Aimatri Puja etc. The performance of rituals are more or less same with some special features. For example, here the Burha Dangoria Puja is performed in the name of Burha Dangoria believed to be a ghost, in the jungle by offering chicken.

Again the Patdangar Puja is performed to mark the starting of ahu cultivation.

From the above description we can note some significant points relevant for our study.
1. There has been a steady tendency towards identifying the tribal gods and goddess with Hindu gods and goddesses, more particularly of the Sakta order.

2. Again, some rituals of Vaishnava affiliation have been adopted.

3. The Assamese festival complex of three Bihus – Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu and Kati Bihu – have been accepted by them as their own festival and been suitably adapted into their traditional socio-religious framework.

While dealing with the socio-religious beliefs and practices of the Deuris, the issue of human sacrifice has to be taken up for special consideration. From all past records and reports it is evident that the practice of human sacrifice to propitiate Mother Goddess was prevalent among the Deuris. The famous Tamreswari temple is believed to have been an important center where human sacrifice was performed. The Mother Goddess was known by the appellation ‘Kesai Khaiti’ (eater of the raw flesh) because of this. Although stories about such human sacrifices still continue to circulate, the practice is known to have ceased quite some time ago. No such sacrifice has been reported in the recent past. But the idea still lingers in the group-psyche of the people and manifests itself even in the present time in rather strange ways. We are citing an example of such a manifestation which was reported to us in the Major Deuri village during one of our field visits.

In the year 2000, in the Deuri village of Bahgarha in Lakhimpur district, a young girl in a state of trance received the message from Burha (equated with Lord Shiva) that a human sacrifice was to be offered. The village community under the leadership of the priest discussed the matter
seriously and decided that although a regular human sacrifice was not be possible, the god's command had to be respected. It was decided to offer a number of goats in place of a human being. The news spread to other Deuri villages, and contribution of goat came from these villages with which a grand sacrificial ritual was performed. The Upor Deuri villagers contributed six goats.

iv) In the Field of Socio-Political Life:

Traditionally the Deuris had their own village self-government. Each village had a village council constituted by the village elders of which the village chief was the head. All local cases of disputes and breach of rules were heard and settled by this council. The guilty party was punished by the imposition of a fine, excommunication, and in some cases, physical laceration. In some villages this council was known as salisnama.

Gradually, the villagers started taking serious cases to the government agencies like the police department and the judicial court. The government appointed Gaon-bura continues to be the village headman and he enjoys a special status as the agent of the government in the village. In some areas it was noticed that the village head men of a cluster of neighbouring villages had formed a common organization under the name and style of "Santi Committee Gaonbura Sora" (the Village Headman's Forum for Peace).

As indicated in the Background Note, the sense of group solidarity among the Deuris has been rather slow to come. One of the reasons is that the Deuri villages are scattered in different parts of a large area and as such, there was not much of mutual contact among them. Again, until
about four to five decades back, the Deuris had more or less accepted the prevailing view that they constituted the priestly class of the Chutiyas. There was no visible objection to the hyphenated nomenclature Deuri-Chutiya (or Deori-Chutiya). The separate and independent status of the Deuris has come to be asserted gradually since that time. The first organization meant for the welfare of all the Deuris of Assam was the Sadau Asom Deuri Sanmilan (All Assam Deuri Conference). But his organization was not very effective and has since become non-functioning.²

In fact, ethnic consciousness and ethnic assertion of an aggressive type has never been a visible feature of the Deuri solidarity movement. In spite of that, the Deuris have in the mean time taken a leaf out of the recent history of politico-ethnic movements of other tribal groups of the region. They have formed ethnic organizations following the models set by other tribal groups. Some such organizations are set by other tribal groups Deuri Sahitya Sabha (Deuri Chu-Chebancengcha), Deori-Chutiya Sahitya Sabha (Deori, Chutiya Chu-biba Magana), Deuri Students Union etc. These organizations have been demanding introduction of the Deuri language for Deuri students at the primary level. In very recent times, influenced by the autonomy movements persistently carried on with various degrees of success by some other plains tribal groups like the Bodos, the Rabhas, the Tiwas and the Misings, some enthusiastic sections among the Deuris have also been airing claims for similar autonomy for them. But these have not taken concrete shape. It appears, there have been no well-thought out schemes in this regard.
v) In the Field of Material Culture and Language:

a) Material Culture:

In the case of material culture of the Deuris the changes that have taken place are more or less in the same line as we have found in the case of the Misings. We are pointing out below some outstanding features under specific heads:

House-type:

Like the Misings, the Deurits also have the traditional *chang* (raised platform houses) houses made of bamboo, timber and thatch. As the first stage of change some modifications are made with the *chang*, such as, giving wooden flooring, mud plastered walls and timber posts. Side by side the more well-to-do families had gone for bungalow pattern wooden raised platform houses keeping the traditional structure of the house intact. (These types of houses were favoured by the British administration. In Assam this type of houses is called *chang bangala*). Again, at the same time people have adopted the typical Assamese rural house pattern with bamboo posts, mud plinth, mud plastered walls and thatch roof. A modification of this type has timber posts, timber battens and tin roof supported by wooden structure. Next, the use of cement became popular and a more advanced version with cement flooring and full or half brick walls came to be preferred by all those who could afford, whether tribal or non tribal. And the latest trend is to go for R.C.C. constructions of the latest design.

With the changes in the house patterns and materials used, many of the social practices connected with older system had to be modified. For example, according to their death ritual the portion of bamboo platform
where the body of deceased was kept used to be burnt and later repaired. Nowadays in the new house patterns the area of the floor is sanctificed. Again, the significance of the hearth (tiphai) and related customs has undergone modifications with changed house types. Modern bath-rooms, modern toilets, modern cooking range and entertainment gadgets have become common.

During our field investigation we have found the co-existence of all these types of houses almost in all the villages under study.

Textile:

In the field of textile changes are distinctly visible in many areas. For example, the Deuris have completely given up the loin loom and adopted the common Assamese throw-shuttle loom, and now the fly-shuttle loom.

The female attire consists of mekhela, paoga/baiga, kakal bandha and takaria. The female garment differs at different stages of life. From the infant stage to puberty, a small mekhela, usually in black or in white, is used to cover the lower portion of the body. In the next stage, a special chadar woven by the girl’s mother is given before puberty in the presence of some of her friends. After attaining puberty, there comes the stage igopichagema when a proper mekhela is given to her. The final stage is jokasiba, when the girl herself prepares her dress and it is considered to be the symbol of eligibility for marriage. The married woman covers, the head with a hand woven towel called taka rin.

Similarly the traditional male attire consists of dhoti (iku), a chadar (aba), and a turban.
Other than the costumes, *borkapor, khania kapor* etc. are important textile items. *Eri* and *muga* were produced on a large scale earlier. Nowadays it is produced on a much reduced scale. Weaving with synthetic yarn and wool are becoming more and more popular.

Modern dresses and fashions have also made their entry among the Deuris. The young generation, both male and female, have been using factory produced garments of the latest designs. Of course, traditional dresses are still very much popular at the time of rituals and celebrations among the new generation too.

The Deuris not only produce traditional garments but also materials for many new items, such as bed-sheets, cushion covers, pyjamas, shirts, and so on.

Formerly the male-folk used to keep long hair and wear ear rings, mostly made of bamboo. That was about 70/80 years back as reported by a person of late nineties at Bordeuri village. Female-folk used to wear ornaments made of silver, brass, different kinds of beads and occasionally gold. Blackening of teeth by the females was very common among the Deuris, which is completely absent today.

**Implements:**

We did not find during our field work the use of digging stick, hoe etc. related to shifting cultivation. Most of the implements now used are the same as those used by the non-tribal cultivators. Again, the latest trend of change has been leading to another new phase: adoption of modern technological aids like power tiller, water pump set, huller machine, etc.
In the case of weaving implements the changes have been mentioned already.

Transport and Communication:

The changes have come in a big way to the transport and communication scenario. Developed roads and public conveyance system, railways, postal service, telecommunication, electronic media like television etc. have brought in revolutionary changes to their life style.

We are citing a case here-

During our stay at Mahadevpur (No.3) village in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh, it was arranged that our hosts would take us to Mahadevpur (No. 1) village about 4/5 km. away. The message was sent over the telephone and when we reached that village, everything was set for our visit. This has been become almost a part of the daily life of the people there.

b) Language:

We have already seen that of the three major divisions of the Deuris, only the Dibongias have retained the Deuri language for communication among themselves. But for outside communication they also freely use the Assamese language and are thus bilingual. Their children also receive education through the Assamese medium. Even in the Deuri language as spoken by them, more and more Assamese loan-words are being incorporated. As for the other two groups, i.e., the Tengaponias and the Borgoyas, Assamese has been adopted as the mother tongue in place of Deuri. But their link with the language has not been completely snapped. For example, many of the ritualistic chants and incantations chanted by the priests are in the Deuri
language. Most of the rituals, ceremonies and festivals as well as many of the social institutions have Deuri nomenclatures. Similar is the case with many of the kinship terminologies, which we have mentioned in the section on social institutions. But in recent times the Assamese-speaking Deuris are also showing consciousness about the desirability of knowing their 'own' language. Thus the Deuri Sahitya Sabha and similar other Deuri organizations have been pressing for Deuri being taught as a language in the primary schools of Deuri majority areas. They have also been publishing books and magazines with materials in the Deuri language. Although because of the peculiarity of the Deuri phonetic system, they have been finding it rather difficult to transliterate the Deuri language materials through the Assamese script, the Deuris have been sticking to the Assamese script. The Deuris living within Arunachal Pradesh are facing a different kind of problem. Although they are Assamese speakers, their children do not have the opportunity of learning Assamese at school because there is no provision for teaching the language at any level in Arunachal Pradesh.

It may be mentioned here that though the Dibongias have so long retained their language, there has been some gradual erosion in their case also. For example, in the Upor Deori and Nam Deori villages near Jorhat inhabited by people of the Dibongia section, because of various factors, some people, particularly among the younger generation, have virtually stopped using the language and have become more and more dependent on Assamese.
NOTES:

1. In this connection the following work may be cited: Brown, W.B. 1895
   *An Outline Grammar of the Deori Chutiya Language.*

2. It appears that the inspiration behind the formation of the organization
   came from late Bhimbor Deuri who was a very energetic and forward-looking Deuri leader. He was one of the chief architects of the “Tribal League” which was meant to serve as a common forum for the all plains tribal people of Assam.
THE DEURI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS
THE DEURI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS

7
8
9
10
11
12
THE DEURI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS

Image 13

Image 14

Image 15

Image 16

Image 17

Image 18
THE DEURI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS

19

20

21

22

23

24
THE DEURI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Deuri mother with her children with Deuri houses in the background
2. A traditional house with a modern solar power device in front
3. View of a Deuri homestead
4. A group of Deuri women in Traditional Dress
5. A typical Deuri raised platform house (Chang Ghar)
6. Deuri women pounding and sifting rice
7. General view of Deuri temple complex in a Lakhimpur village
8. Inside the temple complex with two priests
9. General view of another Deuri temple site in Lakhimpur district
10. General view of the temple site in Mahadevpur area in Arunachal Pradesh
11. The community prayer hall within the temple complex in a Lakhimpur village
12. The sanctum atop a tower in the above temple complex
13. A Deuri death ritual in progress in the courtyard of the family of the deceased in a Lakhimpur village
14. Mixed group of men and women in the death ritual
15. A Deuri patriarch relaxing in the company of younger relatives. Note the hookah and the modern garments
16. The researcher with a Deuri family on the front veranda of a traditional house
17. Around the tiphai of a Deuri house in the presence of a non-Deuri guest
18. The researcher (in Deuri dress with a Deuri family in Mahadevpur (Arunachal Pradesh)) with modified houses in the background
19. Elephants with members of the owner's family in Arunachal Pradesh. Note the typical architecture of the house
20. Ploughing with an elephant in a Deuri village in Arunachal Pradesh
21. A Deuri girl 'made up' in traditional brides attire
22. A Deuri boy 'made up' in traditional bride-groom's attire.
23. A modern Deuri chang ghar
24. A Deuri family in a room with a TV set