CHAPTER-II

THE DEORIS

PEOPLE, HISTORY AND THEIR HABITAT
THE PEOPLE

The Deoris and their divisions:

The Deoris are a plain tribe of Assam belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid group of Tibeto-Burman linguistic stock (Grierson 1928; Chatterjee 1950; Guha 1957; Bordoloi et al. 1987). They are the representative of the priestly group of the Chutiya community and inspite of various socio-political changes and tribulations through the decades they have retained their identity by adhering to their traditional beliefs, customs, language and practices (Deori 1964; Goswami 1994).

There are three main divisions or 'Khels' among the Deoris viz., Dibongiya, Tengapaniya and Borganya, each originating from the name of the places they inhabited while they were in Sadiya. Thus, Deoris who originally settled along the bank of river Dibong are belonging to Dibongiya division, those originally settled along the bank of river Tengapani are belonging to Tengapaniya division and those originally settled along the river Bornadi are belonging to Borganya division. In addition to the above divisions, it is said that there was another division Patarganya who originally settled in Patarsal or Patsadiya and has mixed up with Borganya and Dibongiya divisions (Deori 1964; Bordoloi et al. 1987; Goswami 1994). Each of these divisions is comprised of a number of exogamous clans called 'Bangshas' or 'Jakus'. There are altogether 14 'Jakus' among the Dibongiyas, seven among the Tengapaniyas and six among the Borganyas (Deori 1964). Although enquiries about a division or 'Khel' is often made and in general discourse people refer to their division or 'Khel', yet clan distinction within a division is rarely made except for marriage purposes (Bordoloi 1987).
Population:

The present habitation of the Deoris are confined to mainly the river banks of Upper Assam in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, and Sonitpur. As per 1951 Census the Deori population was 12,503; it is gradually rises to 23,080 in 1971; 37,028 on March 1987 (estimated); and 35,849 in 1991.

Early History:

Little is known about the early history of the Chutiyas and so also of the Deoris. However, it is generally agreed that the Chutiyas have ethnic similarities with the Bodos and they had migrated from somewhere in Southeast Asia (Dalton 1872; Gait 1926; Barua 1963; Gogoi 1981; Acharyya 1987; Sarma 1989). In the beginning of the 13th Century when the Ahoms entered Assam in 1224 A.D. the Chutiyas ruled the territory east of the river Subansiri to westwards as far as the Disang river with its capital at Sadiya (Gait 1926; Bhuyan 1932). The Kingdom was annexed to the Ahom Kingdom in 1523 A.D. and a general was appointed at Sadiya, designated as the "Sadiya Khowa Gohain" to administer the conquered Chutiya territory.

After the fall of the Chutiya dynasty, the Chutiyas except the priestly class the Deoris among them, were mostly displaced from their territory and given settlement in different parts in the Ahom territory. In due course the Chutiyas were completely assimilated themselves with the communities with whom they were given settlement by the Ahoms. Under the Ahom rules also the Deoris enjoyed the status as priestly class and performed the rites they had been performing in the four temples in Sadiya during the reign of the Chutiya kings.
Although it is generally accepted that the Deoris were a section of the Chutiyas, yet the Deoris themselves claimed that they had migrated to northeastern India much before the arrival of the Chutiyas. A legend prevalent among the Deoris says that they entered and settled themselves in the northeastern corner of northeastern India after coming from 'Himagiri' (The Himalayas). However, the time of their arrival in this part of India is not certainly known (Deori 1964).

The original abode of the Deoris is said to be on the banks of the river Dibang, Tengapani, Bornadi and Patarsal (Deori 1964; Bordoloi 1987; Goswami 1994). The first river falls under Lohit district and the next two under Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The last one in Sadiya sub-division of Tinsukia district. Subsequently, due to constant feuds with the neighbouring communities they had moved westward and settled along the bank of Kundil river in Sadiya. But towards the end of the 18th century when the Ahom power began to decline they were harried by the neighbouring hill tribes and at the beginning of the 19th century due to Burmese invasion they had migrated from the bank of Kundil river to different places of Assam which are now under Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts (Deori 1964).

**The Origin of the name Deori:**

The origin of the term 'Deori' is not certainly known. It is generally accepted that a man is called 'Deori' who knows about the God or who can worship the God (Deori 1964; Goswami 1994). In another explanation the term 'Deori' consists of three parts, 'de-u-ri'. The first part signifies 'Purusa' and the second one, 'Prakriti'. The Deoris consider themselves to be the descendants and worshipers of 'Prakriti' - the mother goddess - the supreme creator of the universe - the 'Adya Sakti' (Goswami 1994). According to Kakati (1948) Deori is a New
Two girls with traditional dresses. Deori male dress.

White dresses on festive occasion.

A Deori couple with traditional dresses.

Two girls with traditional dresses.

Deori male dress.
Indo-Aryan formation connected with Sanskrit 'deva-grihika' means worshipper of God.

Whatever may be the origin of the word Deori, it is now regarded that the worshippers of God were once called 'Deori' and in due course the tribe descended from these worshippers is now identify themselves as the Deoris.

Appearance:

The mongolian characteristics are visible on the Deoris (Bordoloi et al. 1987). They are strong built and posses charming features. As regards the complexion, the Deoris may very from dark to a light yellowish brown. The nose is some what pointed and showy. Eyes are of medium size and the colour may be black or brown. Mouth is large with comparatively thick or thin lips. Hairs are black and straight. The Deoris are usually medium in statue with well nourished body. They are cheeful in disposition (Saikia 1974).

Personal adornment and dress:

The tribes of northeastern India are very often have their specific dress and for which they can be identified. The Deoris also have their traditional costume.

In general the Deoris do not wear coloured cloths unlike other tribals of northeastern India. They wear clean white clothes. However, now-a-days some people wear coloured clothes but that too at home or while working in fields.

Before marriage a Deori damsel wears a petticot or Engo at the waist and a long cloth wrapped tight around the breast, known as Baiga or Echa magu. After marriage a woman wear the Engo or petticot fastened to the breast and a long embroidered cloth, called Gamucha wrapped round the shoulder. The
married women also wear an embroidered cloth or Gatigi around their haircones. With the change of time both married women and unmarried girls used to wear blouses now a days. Deori women generally do not wear much ornaments except on festive occasions. Kotu or ear-ring made of amber, Li or breaded necklace made of corals, gold or silver and Anchu or bracelets made of silver are the common ornaments used by the Deori women during festive occasions. A kind of wide bracelet known as Gamkharu made of silver is also popular among them.

The man usually wear Enku or white dhoti and a Jima or white shirt or an banian or Kumayjima. A turban or Bonche made of white cloth is also worn by the man and a towel or Gamucha usually hang over the neck. Now a days the turban is replaced by a towel or Gamucha for many of them. Moreover, a long or a short piece of cloth known as Enhaden and Churu Encha made of cotton hang over the shoulders of the aged persons during festive occasions.

The usual dress materials of the Deoris are made of cotton but on festive and other ceremonial occasions these are replaced by muga silk and/or mulbery silk. Now a days, however, modern dresses are becoming popular both among men and women specially among the younger generation and among the educated ones.

Tattooing any part of the body by either sexes is not practised by the Deoris. Nevertheless, the teeth of most of the aged women dye black. The use of vemilion on forehead by married women is also practised.

**Language and Script :**

The language of the Deoris is considered to be once spoken by the Chuityas. But in due course the language has lost its favour not only among the Chutiyas
alone but even among the Deoris and now confined only among the Dibongiya division. The language of the Deoris belongs to the Bodo group of languages and had strong affinity with the language spoken by the Kacharis (Dalton 1872; Brown 1895; Goswami 1994).

The dialect spoken by the Deoris has no script of its own and used only the Assamese script. In Deori language there are seven vowel and eighteen consonant phonemes with two semi-vowels.

**Religious beliefs and Practices:**

The Deoris believe the supreme creator and sustainer of this universe is the *Kundi-Mama* or *Gira-Girasi* or *Bura-Buri*. *Kundi* is the Lord Siva and *Mama* is Pravati of Hindu pantheon. The *Bura-Buri* is the oldest one and above all, from which the nature was created and continue still today. The two other important deities are *Pisa-Dema* or *Bolia-Baba* and *Pisasi-Dema* or *Tamesvari*, the son and daughter of *Gira-Girasi*. They also worship *Gailurung-Kundi* as Lord Ganesh and *Konwar-Kundi* as Kartik. The Dibongiya section worship *Kundi-Mama* as their supreme deity while *Pisasi-Dema* by Borganya and *Pisa Dema* by Tengaponiya respectively (Deori 1964). The common place of worship is known as *Than* or *Midiku*. Besides these major deities, the Deoris have a good number of house-hold deities. They believe that if these deities are worshipped regularly then peace and prosperity will prevail upon the households. Sacrifice of animals, fowls and pigeons forms an important part to appease these deities and other religious practices. However, of late Vaisnavism and other religions also influence the religious practices of the Deoris to a limited extent and intermingled with their traditional beliefs and customs in some villages (Deori 1964; Bordoloi *et al* 1987; Goswami 1994).
Social Structure:

The Deori society can be broadly divided into two viz., Secular and Religious. In the secular category the *Gaonbura* or village headman reigns supreme, who is the head in all socio-political activities. For smooth running of the day to day affairs of the village, all the village elders gathers around the Gaonbura. The assembly of village, headed by Gaonbura can give judgement in the petty disputes and all are bound to honour the judgement.

For the smooth functioning of the religious activities of the Deoris, every village has nine office bearers who have been assigned specific duties. Out of these, four important office bearers in the hierarchical order are *Bor-Deori* or *Baderi*, *Saru-Deori* or *Saderi*, *Bor-Bharali* and *Soru-Bharali*. *Bor-Deori* command highest regard from the villagers. His main duty is to perform sacrifice and worship in the *Than* or *Mediku* (village temple). The *Saru-Deori* assists the *Bor-Deori* in his duties. He is also empowered to perform the duty of the *Bor-Deori* in the absence of the latter.

In the religious life of the Deoris another office bearer called *Deodhani* plays significant role. It is believed that *Deodhani* is able to forcast the future of the villagers and about the natural calamities that may occur.

The *Jupa* (family) is the primary social unit, consisting a group of people living in a common residence under a single head. There are two types of *Jupa* viz. *Sukia- Jupa* (Separate family) consists of a man, his wife and married and unmarried sons; and *Jakarua Jupa* (Joint family) is composed of two or more married brothers with their wives and children, unmarried brothers and sisters, parents under a single head.
Festivals and Rituals:

There are several festivals and rituals observed by the Deoris and these are imbued with socio-religious aroma.

Bahagiyo-Bisu is a socio-religious festival generally performed on the first Wednesday of the month of Bahag (Mid of April). The festival is considered as a festival of unrestricted joy and mirth by the Deoris. The week long Bisu consists of singing, dancing, playing, drinking, eating various types of rice-cakes, offering new cloths to the kin relatives and receive blessing for long life and health from elderly persons. The priestly council performs Bisu puja on the first Wednesday at the shrine for welfare of the villagers and for a successful celebration of the festivals. In the evening of the first day boys and girls bring out Bisu from temple courtyard and start dancing and singing at several places in the village for the whole night. It continues for a week at night only. Ancestral worship is also a part and parcel at the festival which is generally performed by offering eatables and drinks in the morning of Thursday at every house by the head of the family. The cattle are given ceremonial bath with turmeric, mustard oil and paste of black gram and adorned with new rope around their neck for their welfare. It is believed that playing with eggs during the Bisu, the players never suffer from dizziness and the play enhances the fertility of the earth for plentiful crops.

Magiyo-Bisu is performed on the first Wednesday of the month of Magh (Mid January), and commence with Bisu-puja at the shrine by priest. In the next morning Meging (splitted pile of wood) lit and offered eatables and drinks to the fire God. In the sameday, ancestor worship is also performed. Generally the festival is observed after harvesting, and drinking, eating, enjoying are the main
Pieces of fruits of *Lagenaria siceraria*, *Solanum melongena*, *Momordica charantia*, *Garcinia pedunculata* and rhizome of *Curcuma longa* are pierced in bamboo forks called *chat* used in Bohagio-Bisu festival.

Driving away of cattle with branches of *Litsea salicifolia* and *Flemingia strobilifera* in the Bohagio-Bisu festival.

The pieces of fruits from *chat* through to the cattle for good health after ceremonial bath in the Bohagio-Bisu festival.
features. Drinking *Sunje* or ricebeer from house to house and from village to village by the people also brings about intra and inter village solidarity.

*Metua and Bormetua* - The *Metua* rite is performed thrice a year viz., in the month of Bahag (April-May), Ahin (Sept-Oct) and Pagun (Feb-March). *Bormetua* is performed in the month of Jeth (May-June). The Deoris believe that people suffer from various disease due to the change of seasons in these months. These two rituals are performed during these months at the *Mediku* or the shrine to get rid of the physical injuries and illness.

*Sat labiruba* is comparable to the ritual of impurity observed during *Ambubasi* in the Hindu calendar. So, they perform the ritual to purify the shrine.

*Midi-de-ruba* or *Rajkebang* is performed on the first Wednesday of the month of Bahag (April-May) with worshipping of 64 deities for the welfare of the villagers, domesticated birds, animals, and for plentiful crops, outside the shrine with feast attended by the villagers.

*Minuchi labiruba* is performed for appeasement of *Minuchi*, the goddess of wealth and is worshipped in the granary of the household by the head of the *Jupa* or family in the month of Magh (January-Feb.). The deity is mainly worshipped for wealth and prosperity.

*Mino-hareruba* is performed thrice in a year, especially during *Bahagiyo-Bisu, Magiyo-Bisu* and on the death anniversary of a person for appeasing the ancestors.

**Rituals on Birth:**

The Deoris regard at least one week after the birth of a child as a polluted period. As soon as a child is born, it is washed and cleaned. A *Sharai* containing
uncooked rice, egg, arecanuts, betel leaves, coins, etc. is offering for the well-being of the new born. Later on, on the day of *Chua-labiruba* the above articles are given away to a beggar believing that these would bring good luck to the new born.

*Chua labiruba* is a purificatory ritual performed on the day on which the navel cord falls off. The *Gira or Girachi* (old men and women) offer a little lump of cooked food and rice beer twice to the *Kundimama* for the well-being of the new born baby and the mother, and all the participants consume the offering foods to restore ceremonial purity to the household.

**Marriage and Rituals:**

The common type of marriage is negotiated marriage, but the elopement type is not uncommon. Some rituals connected with marriage are:

*Buja laba* is a nuptial tradition performed in the Deori society. When the couple agree each other to tie the nuptial knot, the bridegroom party visit bride's place with *Buja* which consists of *sunje* or ricebeer, fishes, rhizome of *Discoria*, betel-nut, etc.

*Mino hareruba* is performed to propitiate ancestral soul and pray for blessings for the bridegroom and the bride by sacrificing chickens and a pig, before a few days of the final marriage day.

*Chubileba* is also a tradition performed on the previous day of marriage ceremony. *Chubi* which contains foods like *sujen* or ricebeer, uncooked rice, fishes, fowls, ginger, blackpepper, mustard oil, betel-nut, etc. is carried to bride's home by the bridegroom party.
Sujen lubiruba is held at the residence of the bride's parents on the marriage day. A pig, large amount of sujen, betel-nut, etc. are taken from bridegroom's place to the bride's place. On arrival of bride-groom and marriage party, devination of couple is done by hepatoscopy method, examining the entrails and viscera of the pig. Priests and old representatives offer food and rice beer to the deities and bless the married couple, for their better future. On the same day the invitees and relatives are served with food and rice beer. In return they bless the married couple. Then the bride is allowed to go to bride-groom's place through traditional customs. On arrival of bride, the Sujen lubiruba ritual is also observed at the bride-groom's house. And priests and old ones bless the married couple and thereby recognised the bride as a member of bridegroom family.

The Death and Ceremonies associated with it:

Generally, the Deoris cremate the dead body, but the children and dead bodies of those from epidemics or unnatural death are burried. The Chita or the plateform is constructed for cremation with 7 to 9 layers of fire-wood, according to the sex and status in the society.

There are several mortuary rituals performed after the cremation. These are:

Sapta pindo is offered by the eldest son for the departed soul with cooked food, rice beer, pieces of calcined bone and thrown these in seven packets of banana leaf to the bottom of river by seven dives.

Purification is another ritual observed just after the cremation to purify those who attend the cremation by sprinkling cow-dung mixed water with a branch of Kimaru. After purification the participants are entertained with a feast by the bereaved family.
Offering to their dead on banana leaf and bowls made from leaves of *Phrynium puhinerve* for offering rice beer.

Sprikling holy water with leaves of *Blumea balsamifera* for purification after returning from cremetion.

The cremetion of their dead; use of wood and bamboo are essential.
Offering oblation is held from the next day of the cremation up to the fourth day and consists of offering two meals in a day by the eldest son of deceased person. On the final day, seven oblation offers consisting of rice-beer and curry at the back-yard of his house for the welfare of the family, domesticated birds and animals and to plentyful crops.

Daha or Kaj is the final mortuary ritual of the Deoris. There is no hard and fast rule for fixing the time to perform this ritual. In general, it is held after one year. Wednesday is considered as a auspicious day and on this very day priests and old men perform the Sujen lubiruba ritual to satisfy the soul of the deceased. A divination is made by examining the entrails and viscera of a sacrificed pig; if the omens are unfavourable, the expert diviner suggested the remedies. Pork, rice-beer, vegetables, betel leaves and arecanuts, etc. are required in large quantities as the feast on this occasion is shared not only by the consanguinal and kins but by all the villagers, irrespective of age and sex.

Dwelling:

The Deoris are a riverain tribe and they are generally pile dwellers. But among the Borganyas and Tengaponiyas pile dwelling is not the prevailing practice. They construct houses on soil plinth. Only the Dibongiyas are the pile dwellers. The pile houses are oriented in the direction of east to west. The entrance or Chiperi is facing to the east. East is considered as sacred and auspicious direction. The Midiku (village temple) is generally situated on the eastern side of a village. But it is not common among the Borganya and Tengaponiya; they construct their houses in any direction considered suitable.

Although, vary in length according to the size of the jupa (family), the pile houses of the Deoris are of similar pattern. The houses are constructed with
A Deori house.

Bird's eye view of a Deori village.

A Deori house.
wood, bamboo, and thatching materials. All the materials for house construction are collected from the forests in and around their villages.

Even if, pile dwelling is the prevailing practice, a few Assam type houses on soil plinth are also seen in some Deori villages, specially among the Borgonyas and Tengaponyias. Similarly, bamboo and other plant materials are also gradually replaced by R.C.C. posts, brick walls and C.I. sheets in some villages.

Food and Drinks:

Though, rice is the staple food of agrobased Deori community, they also supplemented their diet with a large number of wild plants and animals as fish from river and ponds, animals, birds, fruits, vegetables, etc. from the forests. The habitats of the Deoris are surrounded by wet lands and in the vicinity of forests and rivers. These forests largely meet the demand for their supplement diet like fruits, vegetable, etc.

They cultivate both summer and winter paddy. Besides paddy, the Deoris also cultivate mustard, sweet potatoes, pulses, cotton and a few of winter vegetable crops. For their meat supply they rear fowls, pigs, ducks and goats.

Ricebeer or *sunje* is the principal drink among the Deoris. It is prepared in every household and is served to all irrespective of age and sex. Ricebeer is also considered as the most valuable item for entertaining guests.

The habit of taking tea is not popular among the Deoris. The elderly people often take red tea without milk and sugar.

Economy:

The Deoris are mainly agriculturists and their economy is revolved around agriculture. They practise settled cultivation. Both males and females take part
in agricultural operations. Though the Deoris are a priestly community, priesthood is not their primary occupation. They mainly cultivate different varieties of paddy. Besides paddy, the Deoris produced mustard, sweet potatoes, pulses, jute, cotton and a few other winter crops. Crops like wheat, lentil and some vegetables are also becoming popular among the Deoris during the recent times. The Deoris still depend upon the traditional method of cultivation. However, a few families are adopting modern method using tractors and powertillers for ploughing and also applied chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Handloom weaving is the most important cottage industry and one of the important occupation next to the agriculture. It is the womenfolk of Deoris, rearing mulberry and eri-worm and produced yarn to meet the demand for garments. It also plays an important role in the socio-economic life of the rural people.

Besides, agriculture and weaving the Deoris rear fowls, pigs, ducks, goats, cow and buffalo. The fowls, pigs, ducks and goats are reared for their meat. But poultries and pigs are reared both for their meat and also as a subsidiary source of income. Although cow and buffalo are reared mainly for agricultural support, yet the milk and milk products are meant for sale.

Spread of education, contact with other communities, introduction of scientific method of agriculture has resulted in taking up occupations other than the traditional ones among the Deoris. Though economic transition has taken placed within the Deori community, yet it is not uniform in all the villages.

**Socio-Cultural Changes :**

Due to contact with outside world and due largely to the communication facilities, changes in respect of certain items of material culture are noticed
among the Deoris. Although pile dwelling is the prevailing practice, a few Assam type houses on plinth are also seen in the villages. C.I. sheets as roofing materials are used by a few well-to-do families. Steel utensils, curtains, chairs and table, etc. are also found their way in the Deori households. Modern dresses like trousers, shirts, saris, blouses, frocks, etc. are popular among the educated sections. Similarly modern gold and silver ornaments are becoming popular.

Education is fast coming up and the people are conscious to receive modern education and jobs.

Although the people have faith on traditional medicine and magico religious cure of the ailments, yet allopathic medicine has penetrated into the Deori villages. However, the people approach the traditional healers only when allopathic and other systems fails to cure a patients.

It may be mentioned that the changes which are inevitable in a society living in close association with other communities yet the traditional social fabric of the Deoris has not undergone much change. The Deoris are still maintaining most of their traditional socio-cultural traits and at the same time keeping a window open for incorporating modernism without effecting the core of the culture.

Concept of Disease, Diagnosis and Remedies:

The Deoris believed that the main affliction of mankind in the form of ailments and other calamities is due to act of some evil spirits or sin. Therefore, they ascertain the name of the demon and the kind of sacrifice or rituals necessary to appease it in order to cure the diseases and avert misfortunes. Diseases like stomachache, body ache, cholera, malaria, small pox, gynaecological problems, etc. are believed to be caused by some Deo-Bhut or evil spirits, which are ascertain specifically by the Mongaloti or augur or divinator. The Mongaloti or
divinator prescribes different types of remedial measures like occult treatment, *Tabiz* or amulets, performing rituals or sacrifices to the spirits responsible for the disease and in some cases even prescribe herbal medicines. Offering of *Tupula* (a pair of betel leaf and betelnut with a coin wrapped by piece of banana leaf) to the deity ascertain by the *Mongoloti* is a common process to cure diseases and avert misfortunes.

Of the spirits which are responsible for some ailments are *Bura-Dangaria* or gentle oldman, which they believed is a gentle spirit but its infliction cause body-ache, waistache, etc. The others include *Jalsai*-live in water, *Thalsai*-live on soil, *Soru-Ai* and *Bor-Ai* (female spirits of poxes), etc. The Deoris believe no medicine can cure *Ai* or poxes and it is only the incantation that can cure poxes (Deori 1964). To avert from disease and affliction of spirits, the Deoris perform several rituals or pujas in their *Than* or in home or in the vicinity of the village.

Apart from these spirits and devils, the Deoris believed that diseases can also occur if the souls of ancestor or deceased persons are annoyed because of any omission or commission on the part of their descendents.

Thus, the Deoris believed that the diseases are caused by offended spirits and demons, ghosts and deities. An augur which either *Pujari* or *Mongaloti* or *Deodhani* usually finds out the causes of an illness of a patient by means of one or other kind of divination i.e. divination is resorted to in order to determine which spirit has been angered and requires pacification and also whether the omens are good or bad.

The divination among the Deoris are many forms. The most common one is hepatoscopy-examination of heart and liver of fowls and pigs by *Pujari* or
Mongaloti. Divination is also done by Deodhani with his/her spiritual power mentioning the names of evils and forecast the fortune of villagers. Once the causes of disease have been established, the medico-religious functions or propitiation rites are performed.

After the completion of propitiation of the deities or ghosts or spirits, exorcism or annual sacrifice, incantation, the second phase i.e. treatment with medicine is sought. In some cases both magico-religious practices and application of medicine are practised side by side. It is observed that among the Deoris the complicated ailments are attributed to supernatural power and for which service of Pujari and Mongalotgi are sought. The common ailments including cuts, wounds, injuries, etc. however, are considered as natural.

THE HABITAT

Location and Area:

Assam is a constituent state of India located in the far east of the country. It is situated within 24° N to 27° 98' N latitudes and 89° 45' E to 96° E longitudes (Pl. No. 1). The present studied area inhabited by the Deoris is lies within 26° 30' N to 27° 98' N latitudes and 93° 40' E to 96° E longitudes and comprises the districts of Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji on the north bank and Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra of the upper Assam (Pl. No.2). The total geographical area of the state is 78,523 sq.km., out of which 23,383 sq.km. under present studied area.

Physiography:

Topography: Physiographically the Upper Assam region inhabited by the Deoris can be divided into four zones viz., Bhabar, Tarai, High land and Flood-
prone zones (Pl. No. 3). This region of Assam is a part of the basin of the mighty Brahmaputra river, which has abutted by hills on three sides (Das 1970). In general the altitude of the area is below 150m above mean sea level except in certain places bordering hills reaches up to a maximum of 600m (Pl. No. 4).

Drainage: The river Brahmaputra which is principally constitutes of three major tributaries viz., Dihang, Dibang and Lohit (Das 1970). The feeders of the Brahmaputra can be grouped into two viz., (1) Northern group and (ii) Southern group (Pl. No. 5). The Subansiri, the Ranganadi, the Dikrong and their innumerable tributaries constitute the northern group of rivers. All the rivers of northern group originate from the Himalayas and flow from north to south direction. The major rivers of southern group are Dibru, Buridihing, Disang, Dikhow, Janji and Dhansiri. Dibru and Buridihing have their sources in Patkai Range, while the others originate in the Barail Range in Nagaland.

Geology and Minerals: Broadly speaking the Upper Assam region represent an area of sedimentation since Eocene times more or less continuously upto late tertiary times over the very ancient Archaean series rocks. These are overriden by Permean-Carboniferous coal bearing Gondwana sediments. The thick coal and oil bearing sediments in this region of Assam are of oligocene age. Along the hills, these are associated with volcanic rocks, basalts and tuffs. Beyond Gondwana beds are schists, slates, limestone and dolomites of very great age (Goswami 1960; Krishnan 1960). Over the Tertiary deposits unstratified and unconsolidated thick accumulation of alluvium of old and new series.

Soil: The region is by and large characterised by alluvial soil and can be classified into three formations on the basis of nature of sediments, and their distribution and geomorphic features: (i) Older alluvium - these includes both high level and low level alluvial fan deposits. The high level terrace deposits
mainly consist of coarse classic sediments like pebbles, gravels and boulders while the low level deposits consist of silt and sand; (ii) Unconsolidated older flood plain deposits - which cover major portion of Upper Assam consist mainly of sand, silt and clay; and (iii) Recent river deposits - consist mainly of clay, fine sand and silts.

**Climate** : Climatically four different seasons are noticeable viz., (i) Winter, from December to February; (ii) Pre-monsoon or Summer, from March to May; (iii) Monsoon, from June to September, and (iv) Retreating monsoon, from October to November (Das 1970). The average annual rainfall varies from about 13mm to 3000mm. The mean monthly temperature in January varies from about 4° C to 10° C from about 23° C to 36° C. The monthly mean relative humidities vary from 67% in March to 88% in September and October.

**Vegetation** : The Upper Assam districts inhabited by the Deoris is covered essentially with tropical vegetation, typical for foothills and their adjoining plains of eastern Himalayas. It includes evergreen, semievergreen, deciduous and swamp forests (Pl. No. 4).

Due to variation in altitude and direction of hills encircling the region, the influence of monsoon winds is not uniform everywhere in the region. Accordingly, the area is characterised by two distinct vegetation types viz., semi-evergreen and deciduous. Pure evergreen patches are confined to certain pockets in the semi-evergreen forests.

Semi-evergreen forests of the area present a three-storied physiognomy. The top storey is generally formed of such species as *Dipterocarpus macrocarpus, Shorea assamica, Artocarpus chama, Tetrameles nudiflora*, etc. These trees tower above the rest of the forest. The middle storey is dense and formed by
a bewildering wealth of species belonging to different families, not all of them being common throughout the area. The common species are *Amoora wallichii*, *Bischofia javanica*, *Canarium bengalense*, *Castanopsis indica*, *Cinnamomum cecicodaphne*, *Dillenia indica*, *D. pentagyna*, *Duabanga grandiflora*, *Gmelina arborea*, *Mangifera indica*, *Mesua ferrea*, *Phoebe goalparensis*, *Stereospermum colais*, *Syzygium cumini*, *S. formosum*, *Terminalia chebula*, *T. myriocarpa*, etc. Sometimes *Amoora wallichii*, *Mesua ferrea*, *Phoebe goalparensis*, *Vatica lancaefolia*, etc. appear in almost pure patches, forming pockets of evergreen forests. The third or lowest storey consists of species of small trees or shrubs such as *Antidesma* spp., *Baccaurea ramiflora*, *Bridelia squamosa*, *Cinnamomum bejolghota*, *Dysoxylum dobara*, *Garcinia* spp., *Hydnocarpus kurzii*, *Litsea salicifolia*, *Mallotus philippensis*, *Talauma hodgsonii*, etc. Of the numerous lianes interwining the trees, *Aristolochia* spp., *Bauhinia vahii*, *Combretum roxburghii*, *Dalhousia bracteata*, *Entada pursaetha*, *Thunbergia* spp., *Vitis* spp. and *Unona* spp. are more prominant. Several species of the prickly *Calamus* stretch for long distance from tree to tree. A few other palms like *Caryota*, *Livistona*, *Daemonorops*, *Licuala* and *Pinanga* are also conspicuous. Species of *Aeschynanthes*, *Hoya*, *Pothos* and *Raphidophora* are frequent epiphytic climbers. Stem parasites of the Loranthaceae and holoparasite *Cuscuta reflexa* are not uncommon. The most conspicuous epiphytic elements are, however, the orchids, ferns and fern allies. Among the orchids *Cymbidium aloefolium*, *C. longifolium*, *Dendrobium aphyllum*, *D. moschatum* and *Rhynchostylis retusa* are common. The forest floor is densely covered with many herbs and shrubs. *Coffea bengalensis*, *Curcuma aromaticia*, *Dracaena petiolata*, *Ixora accuminata*, *Phlogacanthus thyrsiformis*, *P. tubiflorus*, *Phrynium pubinerve*, *Piper diffusum* and *Saprosma ternatum* are easily recognised. Ferns are also profuse, the most conspicuous and elegant being the tree-fern *Cyathea* spp. and *Angiopteris evecta*. Most of the other ferns are polypodiaceous.
"Beauty is all on the way"
A sunset view of winter crop field with full bloom mustard plants.

A view of summer paddy field with scattered forests in between.
Evergreen forest along foothills in Dhemaji District.

Dense forest along river bank which meet the day to day need of plant resources.

A tea garden in the area of study.
The tree trunks, wet boulders and moist barks are heavily plastered with matted liverworts and mosses.

The deciduous forests comprise mainly of *Shorea assamica*. The associated trees are *Albizia procera*, *Careya arborea*, *Cassia fistula*, *Gmelina arborea*, *Kydia calycina*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Schima wallichii*, *Sterculia villosa*, *Terminalia bellirica*, etc. The differentiation of storeys is not so clear in deciduous forests. The woody climbers are also few, the common ones being *Bauchinia vahlii*, *Combretum roxburghii*, *Entada pursaetha* and *Caesalpinia coccullata*. The herbaceous vegetation is less profuse and includes *Justicia adhatoda*, *Coffea bengalensis*, *Clerodendrum viscosum*, *Borreria arctica*, *Phlogacanthus*, spp., ferns and fern allies.

A singular feature of the tropical vegetation in the area is the swamp forest. These are fairly dense forests of medium height and are formed along river banks or swamps called *Beels*. Sometimes formed in obstructed, abandoned river channels. Water stagnants in these areas for short or long period during the Monsoon and dries for several months in winter. The outstanding species in these areas are *Aesculus assamica*, *Barringtonia acuminata*, *Bischofia javanica*, *Dillenia indica*, *Duabanga grandiflora*, *Gynocardia odorata*, *Polyalthia simiarum* and *Vatica lancaefolia*. Sometimes these trees stand widely spaced among gregarious patches of *Alpinia* spp., *Phrynium* spp. and *Catimbium* spp.

The most characteristic feature in both semi-evergreen and deciduous forests is the presence of bamboos, either as an understorey or mainly bamboos, with a few scattered trees standing out among them. The characteristic species of bamboos are *Bambusa tulda*, *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii*, *Pseudostachyum polymorpha* and *Neohouzeana dallooa*. The characteristic tree species in such areas are *Duabanga grandiflora* and *Tetrameles nudiflora*. 
Another interesting aspect of the flora of the area is the presence of grass lands. Nearly whole of such tracts are under water during the rains and the permanent water level is never so low as to be beyond the reach of the roots of the grass. Species of the genera like *Saccharum*, *Arundo*, *Phragmites*, *Erianthus*, etc. are characteristic of the riparian areas. They cover extensive tracts along the large rivers, specially where the banks are low.

**Fauna**: The forests of the area inhabited by the Deoris abound in wildlife like elephants, tigers, bison, different species of deer, various reptiles, birds, etc. The rare white winged wood-duck is also found in Tinsukia district.

**Accessibility**: The headquarters of the districts comprising the Upper Assam are connected by the season road links and also by railway lines. However, many of the towns and semi-urban centres also have rail and all season road links. Many of the interior parts of the area are still inaccessible due to lack of proper communication. The rural areas in Upper Assam are mostly have road links suitable for fair weather and during rainy season the communication remain suspended. Even in some areas bridlepaths are the only means of communication.