CHAPTER II
The Deori is a riverine tribe of Assam. Though they are concentrated in Assam, yet a small section of their population is also found in Arunachal Pradesh. In Assam they inhabit mostly in the districts of Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Lakhimpur and Sonitpur. The Deoris are one of the four divisions of Chutiyas. These divisions are namely- Hindu Chutiya, Ahom Chutiya, Barahi and Deori. The Chutiyas are believed to have been members of the great Bodo race (Bordoloi, 1987:22). According to 1901 census, the original abode of the Deoris was in the bank of the river Kundil located in the eastern part of Sadiya (presently a subdivision of Tinsukia district of Assam bordering to Arunachal Pradesh). It was also mentioned by Brown (cited by Goswami, 1962:88) in his book An Outline Grammer of the Deori Chutiya that, the Deoris were originally living beyond Sadiya. Another traditional legend among the Deoris highlights that they had come from the Himgiri ranges and started living in the northern part of Assam. It is assumed that the Himgiri must be the Himalayan ranges
The exact explanation of the originality of the term Deori is not yet known. But it is believed that the term derived from the word *deo* (god). Generally the person who worships *deo* is known as Deori. Their main and supreme goddess is Mother Kamakhya. Dr. Kakati opined that, the term Deori derived from the Sanskrit word *deva* (god) (cited in Goswami, 1962:89).

Racially the Deoris belong to the Mongoloid group and posses charming features. Their simplicity and hospitality always attract people. Deoris are amiable and maintain cordial relation with other tribal and non-tribal population. Originally they had their own dialect but gradually due to assimilation with other Assamese caste population majority of them now have accepted Assamese language as their mother tongue.

Being a riverine tribe, Deori villages are found near the riverbanks in their habitat. Generally, Deori villages are medium to big enough comprising 50-300 or more households in each village. Deoris are pile-dwellers. A Deori house is constructed on a platform and called *chang ghar*. The main door of the house generally faces east, because east is considered as a sacred and auspicious direction by them. Houses are constructed with timber, bamboo, thatch, etc. Flattened bamboo is used to make the floor, which is a 5-6 ft. raised platform from the ground. Inside, the house is longitudinally partitioned from one end to the other to keep a passage for the provision for the family members to walk through. Attached to it a number of apartments are there. The
The space under the house is utilized to store firewood, pounding paddy, weaving, etc. In general, a typical Deori house can accommodate 40-50 people. The fireplace at the rear room of the house is considered as sacred and generally outsiders and visitors are not allowed to enter this place. However, there is another fireplace in the front room for the guests and outsiders.

The main occupation of the Deoris is agriculture. Rice being the staple food, they widely cultivate both ahu (summer paddy) and sali (winter paddy).
Use of other rice is more than *sali* among them. Besides, they also take advantage of the alluvial soil of the riverbanks and grow crops like potato, mustard, various pulses and other *rabi* crops. They still depend on traditional method of cultivation and only a small section of them have accepted modern techniques, implements, fertilizers, pesticides, etc. in their agricultural activities.

Besides agriculture, each family also rears some animals and birds in small scale both for household and commercial use. These domesticated birds and animals not only supply the eggs and meats, but also provide economic support to the household. The Deori women folk are expert weavers and each family has 1-2 looms. Generally the production of their cloths is only for personal use. Rearing poultries, goats, pigs, etc. is usually the duty of the females though the males are also not tabooed to do it.

It has been already mentioned that rice is the staple food of the Deoris. Along with rice they take boiled vegetables seasoned with chilli and salt. Pulses and legumes are not used regularly. Protein supplement sometimes they get from the domestic birds and animals. Fish forms a special delicacy in Deori menu. They relish fresh, dry and smoked fish. They also preserve fish in bamboo tubes after grinding it properly along with some leaves of particular plants and use throughout the year. Consumption of fats and oil is limited among the Deoris. Each and every household prepares rice beer (*suze*) and is
served to all household members irrespective of age and sex. It is considered as a most valuable item for entertaining guests. Drinking of tea is not much popular among the Deoris.

The Deoris have been considering themselves as priestly persons since beginning. The community-worshiping place of the Deoris is known as than or midiku. Because of their increased population and migration, the sacred place had also been divided into four divisions. According to those divisions of worshipping place with their respective gods and goddesses and also with their dwelling places the Deoris are divided into four divisions. These are:

(a) Dibongiya: lived in the bank of the Dibong river and worship

Bura-Buri or Gira-Girachi (equivalent to the Hindu god Lord Mahadeva and his consort Parvati).

(b) Tengapaniya: lived in the bank of the river Tengapani and worship

Boliababa or Pichadema (son of Lord Mahadeva and Parvati).

(c) Borganya: lived in the bank of the river Bornoi and worship

Pichechi-dema or Kechaikhanti (daughter of lord Mahadeva and Parvati).

(d) Patarganya: who worshipped in Patarshal.
According to a legend, when the Patarganyans collected materials to establish the worshipping place, due to some reasons they had to leave those in a place and as those collected materials were in the name of the goddess, so, that also had become a sacred place (Deori, 1962:101). However, this group has reportedly become extinct.

Each of the divisions has a number of clans called *jaku*. The Dibongiya have 14 clans, the Tengapaniyas are comprised of 7 clans (they called it as *tika*) and the Borganyas have 6 clans. All the clans are exogamous and have equal status. Among the three groups of the Deoris, the Tengapaniyas and Borganyas almost abandoned their language and it is only the Dibongiyas who still maintain their own language.

The Deoris usually prefer joint family system and the Dibongiyas call it as *jakarua jupa*. The family (*jupa*) is a primary social unit consisting a group of people living in a common residence under a single head. Usually the eldest male member of the family is the head, who controls the affairs of the family and all the members obey his orders. Kinship, social and economic ties hold together the members of the family. Among the Deoris, the decent, inheritance, succession, authority and residence after marriages are traced through the male line. After marriage the girl acquires the surname of her husband.

Generally monogamy is the rule among the Deoris. Clan exogamy is strictly followed in case of marriage (*biya*). Violation of this taboo by anyone will
be punished by the priestly council of the village. The system of levirate and sorrorate are not in vogue among them. Generally, four types of marriage namely— *bor biya* (great marriage), *maju biya* (medium marriage), *saru biya* (small marriage) and *gandharva biya* (marriage by mutual consent and elopement) are present among them. The first three types of marriages are arranged and organized by the parents. The duration of these three marriages are three, two and only one day respectively. The most popular and widely prevalent marriage is *gandharva biya*. In this type of marriage the concerned boy and girl take initiatives and they solemnize the marriage by elopement. Later, at any convenient time the couple has to perform a ceremony called *suze laguroba*, without performing which couple does not get recognized by the society, otherwise they may even be deprived of property inheritance and the husband also deprived from offering oblation (*pinda dan*) to the deceased father and mother. If the ceremony is performed at the old age of the couple, it is called as *burha biya* or *melani biya* (old marriage). The system of bride price is prevalent among the Deoris where the groom has to pay an amount (Rs. 126.00) and a big bunch of betel nut and a packet of betel vine leaf. However, the amount of money may be varied according to the economic condition of the groom's family. Widow marriage is not restricted, but such marriage is rare among them. Divorce is very rare among the Deoris.
A son receives the parental property after the death of his father. If a person has more than one son, his property is divided equally among them. Nowadays, the property of a couple without male issue goes to the daughter. Besides, if a daughter remained unmarried, she also gets share of her father’s property equally to her brother/brothers.

In every Deori village there is a village council (me). A village council is comprised of the elderly persons and headmen (gira). All types of disputes in the village are discussed and settle there. The cases cannot be solved by the village council are only sent to the law court. Any anti-clan or anti-social activities are placed in such village council and if it finds anybody guilty, he has to expiate himself from the defilement in their worshipping place (Saikia, 1974:43-44).

The Deoris are the followers of shakti cult. All the three sections of the Deoris are still maintaining their pristine beliefs and practices. For every worshipping place there is a committee of the priests (Purohit Santha) comprising with at least nine office bearers. Among them, the main four priestly functionaries are bar deori or baderi, saru deori or saderi, bar bharali and saru bharali. These office bearers are essential in all the rituals relevant to the community-worshipping place. The principle priest bar deori, assisted by the saru deori, sacrifices the birds and animals offered for the gods and goddesses. In absence of the bar deori, saru deori performs the duties of the bar deori. The bar bharali holds the front legs of the animal to be sacrificed and in the absence
of bar deori and saru deori, he can perform the responsibilities of them provided the villagers permit. During sacrificing, the saru bharali holds the back legs and helps in other tasks of the rituals. Besides them, other office bearers are khelua bora, who collects birds and animals from the villagers for sacrificing, bora, who collects and arranges gram, green gram, fruits, flower, etc. in a special kind of plate for the goods and goddesses, barik announces all than/midiku related matters to the villages and distributes sacred offerings, randhanı who cooks various items for the deities, and pariya, who helps in all other tasks in the than/midiku, cleans the than and surroundings. Sacrifice of animals is an integral part of most of the Deori rituals. Wednesday is the most auspicious day for the Deoris and any type of religious functions are performed either on Wednesday or on Sunday. However, apart from their traditional religious beliefs, now a days influence of vaisnavism is also noticed among them. Janmastami, the birth day of Lord Krishna, birth and death anniversaries of Srimanta Sankardeva, the founder of vaishnavism in Assam, worshipping of goddess saroswati, the goddess of art and knowledge, etc. are also incorporated into the religious structure of the Deoris.

The Deoris observe seclusion for seven days at the death of any family member. They offer oblation (pinda dan) to the deceased once in a day till seven days. On the last day, they sacrifice a fowl and prepare kaji (a kind of curry) and offer to the deceased with rice beer. On that day the elderly people of the village pray together for the family by pouring rice beer. From that day the
family becomes pure. Later, according to the convenience of the family *daha* (death ceremony) is performed which is an elaborate and expensive one.

### THE GAROS

The Garo is one of the matrilineal hill tribes of North-East India, live predominantly in the districts of East and West Garo hills of Meghalaya. Though the Garos are mainly the inhabitants of Garo Hills, they are also found in Assam, Nagaland, Tripura and West Bengal (Singh, 1994:282-287). There is no such reliable evidence about the origin of the Garos. The origin of Garos has been extensively dealt with by Major Playfair (1975:7) in his book *The Garos*. There, he explained different possibilities of the origin of the Garos based on folklores of the Garos. None of the hypothesis is based on any historical or archaeological evidences. According to one legend the name Garo has been derived from the name of a group of a tribe who call themselves as *Gara* or *Ganching*. Another legend says that this term was owned by one of the original leaders of the migratory group from Thibet called *Garu* and that he gave his name to the tribe. Whatever is the term, they prefer to be identified as the *Achik mande* means Hillman.

In Assam they constitute one of the scheduled tribes in the two Autonomous Hill districts of Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills. However, in the hill districts their habitat is confined more or less into the
Neparpally area within the jurisdiction of the Bokajan Tribal Development Block in the Karbi Anglong District. There are also a good number of Garo villages in the Goalpara districts bordering Garo Hills of Meghalaya.

The Garos are generally short to medium structured with a round face and flat nose. They possess plenty of body and facial hair. According to their physical characteristics they belong to the Mongoloid group. They have their own language that belongs to the Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman family of language and they use roman script.

A Garo village usually consists of 40-50 households or more. A lane, generally kutcha, bifurcates the main road to enter a village. The houses are connected by some lanes and bye lanes. They often built their houses on the slops of a hill generally, the length of the houses runs out from the hill, the inner supports the flooring near the hill being short and the outer supports long to preserve its level. The houses are average about 80 ft. in length and about 10-15 ft. high. Houses are generally long having no separate rooms inside. More than half of the house is open from end to end forming one long apartment for general use. A traditional Garo house is generally constructed with bamboo, timber, thatch, etc. The platform (machang) is made up of bamboo. Usually the style and internal arrangements of the Garo houses are same everywhere. But the houses in the plains and the houses of the Christian Garos are different in designs and structures and are influenced by neighboring Assamese people. Another type of house called borang, which is built on a big tree top, is used for
the sentry to keep an eye on their agricultural productions from the wild birds and animals. This type of house is seen only in Garo Hills. Besides, almost in every Garo village there are youth dormitories (nokpante) and community guest house (alda).

The main stay of the Garos is agriculture. In the hills, they mainly depend on shifting cultivation. There they produce paddy, cotton, tapioca, ginger, maize, etc. In the plains they practise wet cultivation and cultivate paddy, mustard, different pulses, etc. They are very good horticulturists and grow many horticultural plants, mainly pineapple and oranges for their personal as well as commercial purposes.

They domesticate cattle, pigs and poultry. Every woman is an expert weaver and weaving is considered as a household industry. In their handloom Garo women produce garments for their household use and also for occasional sale. Sericulture, mainly the endi is also an important subsidiary occupation for them. People are laborious and besides agriculture as their main occupation a section of people are also engaged in service, business, wage labour, etc.

Rice is the staple food of Garos. Traditionally rice was cooked in bamboo tubes or in earthen pots. In addition to rice they also eat maize, millet, tapioca along with different vegetables. Fish curry is relished by the Garos. Dried fish (nakam) is one of their favorite delicacies. They relish curry prepared with bamboo shoots and eat almost fleshes of all kinds of birds and animals. Oil or ghee is never used in traditional Garo food. Rice beer (chu) is a most favorite
drink for them. Use of rice beer is indispensable in their socio-religious functions.

The Garos are broadly divided into nine sub-groups, which are often referred to as sub-tribes. These are: Along, Ambeng, Awe, Chisak, Garoganching, Matabeng, Matchi-dual, Megam, and Ruga-chiteak (Majumdar, 1980:19).

The most interesting thing is the Garo Social structure is that, like the Khasis they follow the mother's line in tracing relationship. Technically this system is known as 'matrilineal system'. Tracing relationship in this way they have certain kin groups known as machong. These may technically called clans. Most of these clans are named after some villages in the district. These machongs are again grouped mainly under three larger kin-groups. These larger kin-groups are Sangma, Marak and Momin. They call these groups chatchi. Marriage within the machong is strictly prohibited. A man belonging to the same machong is regarded as a close relation, though he may be living hundreds of miles away. There is another smaller group inside the machong. This is known as mahari. This consists of males and females of the same machong with whom some sort of relation could be traced, though the relationship may be distant. The mahari jointly shares the responsibility of all the members. If any member of the mahari commits any offence and is fined for that, the whole maharis has to subscribe the fine. If a man of another mahari marries a girl and she dies or becomes old or proves childless, her mahari is to
give another female from amongst the *mahari* members (Majumdar, 1966:11-12).

The Garos traced their descent through the females only. In a family, though the father is revered, it is only the mother who occupies the place of the head of the family. Children of the family acquire the surname of the clan/sub clan of the mother. In addition, the maternal uncle possesses great power in the family.

Second selection of the mate, the Garos strictly follow the rule of clan-exogamy. It is generally the girl who selects her husband and negotiations begins from the family of the girl. Generally, negotiated form of marriage is the prevailing practice and is known as *dosia*. Besides, other forms of marriage such as – marriage by mutual consent and elopement, marriage by capture, etc. are also prevalent among the Garos. Cross-cousin marriage, i.e. marrying the daughter of mother’s brother is a preferential system of marriage among the Garos. But marrying the daughter of the father’s sister is a taboo. Polygyny is still practiced by them. Usually parents of girls bring a son-in-law for only one of their daughters, other girls are married away. The son-in-law who resides in the home of the mother-in-low is known as *nokram*. The *nokram*’s wife inherits her mother’s property. If there is no female child in the family, a girl belonging to the *machong* of the wife (preferably the daughter of her sister, real or classificatory) is adopted to be inheritress. Child marriage is unknown and divorce is rather easy.
In each Garo village, the traditional chief is known as *nokma*. A *nokma* is a powerful person in the village. All cultivable lands in and around the village are administered by the *nokma* and the council of the village elders in accordance with the customary laws. A man from another village may also cultivate in jhum land of a particular village with the prior permission of the *nokma*. If he is a non-Garo, he has to pay land revenue to the *nokma* in terms of paddy. Besides, in all matters of the village administration like festivals, religious rites, marriage, cultivation, etc. the *nokma* is to be consulted.

Nowadays most of the Garos follow Christianity, though traditionally they are animistic. They believe that the world was created by the supreme deity whom they call by the name of *Tatara Rabuga*. In the creation of the world he was assisted by the spirits *Nosba Napantu* and *Machi*. *Tatara Rabuga* is considered the greatest deity of all, who is particularly responsible for curing, wasting and persistent diseases. The Garos worship a number of benign and evil spirits and natural forces. Among these spirits, *Choralede* (protector of crops), *Saljong* (god of fertility), *Goera* (god of strength, who causes thunder and lightning), *Kalkame* (the spirit who has control over men’s lives), *Susime* (she gives wealth but at the same time responsible for rousing blindness and lameness) occupy vital position in pristine Garo religion. They believe that eclipses are caused by spirits, who occasionally swallows the sun and the moon.
THE KARBIS

The Karbis, also known as Mikirs, constitute one of the important hill tribes of Assam. Though traditionally the Karbi is a hill tribe, for various reasons they are scattered over plain areas also. Their main abode is the hill district of Karbi Anglong of Assam. They are also scattered over Golaghat, Nagaon, Sivasagar, Kamrup, Darrang and North Cachar Hill districts of Assam. However, barring Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hill districts, Karbis living in other districts are not a scheduled tribe. The origin and exact route of migration of the Karbis is quite obscure. It is believed that with many other migratory groups from the Central Asia, the Karbis also entered to the North-Eastern part of the country. It is very difficult to trace the history of the early settlement of this tribe due to lack of any reliable documents and other evidences. According to Stack and Lyall (1908:1-6), originally the Karbis were in the eastern portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills bordering to the Kapili river. Medhi (1974:17) assumes that the early habitat of the Karbis was in the hilly region between Nagaon and Jorhat districts in and around Kaziranga National Park. Later, they were driven to the hills by the Kachari king. A section of the Karbis entered the Jaintia Hills and lived there. Some of them moved towards North-East and entered into the Rongkhong ranges. The group who continued to live in Jaintia Kingdom had to face harassments from Jaintias and compelled to migrate towards the north. A good number of them entered the Ahom Kingdom and again faced the Burmese invasion and forced them to refuse in the deep jungles and hills leaving their early settled home and place in the sub mountains
region. Later, they shifted their capital from Socheng, in rongkhong ranges to Niz Rongkhong near Hamren of Karbi Anglong. Racially the Karbis belong to the Mongoloid group, while linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. Physically the Karbis are short to medium structured with flat nose. Complexion of the people is neither very dark nor very fair.

A revenue Karbi village is comprised of a number of hamlets. There is a headman (charthe) of each revenue village. Apart from this each and every hamlet also has a headman, who is known as charthe in hill and gaonburha in the plains. The post of the headman whether that of the revenue village or of hamlet is a very prestigious one. In any type of socioreligious ritual or festival, the village headman has to be honoured first. It would be worth mentioning that each Karbi village is named after the village headman.

Traditionally, the Karbis are pile-dwellers and the houses are built on wooden piles. Floors and walls are made of flattened bamboo and the roofs are covered with thatch. Walls are made with split bamboo and plastered with mud. A traditional Karbi house consists of a single room, which is longitudinally divided into two by a partition (arpong). The left side compartment is known as kut, where the family members sleep and the other part is known as kam, meant for the guests. The house has two verandah- one at front and another at back. Cattle and pigs are generally kept under the house. The old and traditional type of house is generally replaced by the Assam type houses, which are constructed on the ground.
The principal occupation of the Karbis is agriculture. In hill areas they are mainly shifting cultivators and in plains they practise wet cultivation. Generally, in the hills for shifting cultivation the land is owned by the community, but in plains they have individual ownership of land. They mainly grow paddy and vegetables in their fields. Besides, each family domesticates animals and birds both for household and commercial use. Karbi men folk are experts in bamboo and cane work. They prepare different baskets for different purposes, the durability and strength of which are conspicuous. They knew the art of making poultry. In the past there were good blacksmiths (hema) among them who have sufficient knowledge of iron melting. This skill is now fast disappearing unable to compete with the modern ones. Women folk are expert weavers and produce clothes usually for their household use. The art of weaving, dyeing, spinning and sericulture had been known to the Karbi women since time immemorial. The economic condition of the Karbis is far from satisfactory and this condition further aggravated because of utilization of a considerable portion of rice to make rice beer (hor), which is an integral part of life of the Karbis. Besides all the above, people are habituated to collect a number of roots, shoots, tubers, fruits, etc. from the forest, especially during lean period. Individual and collective hunting and fishing are also prevalent among them.

Rice is the staple food of the Karbis. Roots and other vegetables grown by them in jhum field or collected from forest are also taken with rice. Pulses are used occasionally. They relish fresh, dry and smoked fish along with rice. The
Karbis preserve dried and ground fish in bamboo tubes and use throughout the year. Generally, dry fish in any form is their favorite delicacy and they use it in their everyday meals. Use of wheat and wheat products are not very common to them. They drink rice beer irrespective of age and sex at any time of the day and also offered to the guests.

From the point of habitation, the Karbis are divided into four broad social groups, namely- Amra (Amri), Dumrali, Chinthong and Ronghang. However those who live in the plains of the state are known as Dumrali (Singh, 1997:467).

The Karbi tribe is divided into five clans (Kur), viz. Inghi, Ingti, Teron, Terang and Timung. Each clan again has a number of sub-clans. The Enghi has 30 sub-clans, Ingti has 5, Terang and Teron have 6 each and Timung has 31 sub-clans. These clans are strictly exogamous (Medhi, 1987-88:10-11). Although all the five clans are socially on an equality, yet Ingti being a priestly clan was supposed to have a higher status in former time.

The Karbi is a patrilineal tribe and generally the father is the head of the family. Usually the families are nuclear. However, joint family is also seen to a very limited extent. Any male members either the son or the brother starts living separately as soon as they get married. A girl does not change her surname after marriage, but her children will use her husband's surname. The girl members of the society use pi after their surname. For example- if the surname of the girl's father is Terang, her surname will be Terangpi.
As mentioned earlier, all the clans stated are completely exogamous. Children of the same clan are considered brothers and sisters and therefore, marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited. Violation of this customary law leads to ex-communication, which is considered a severe punishment; hence marriage law of the Karbis is hardly violated. The asymmetrical cross-cousin marriage i.e. marriage of a person with his mother's brother's daughters, is a preferential one, but now a days youngsters prefer to choose their own mates. In their society, marriage by negotiation and marriage by mutual consent and elopement are prevalent. Marriage by capture is also found to be present among them to a limited extent. Although, monogamy is the common form of marriage, yet polygamy is also permissible. They follow the patrilocal rule of residence. Divorce is rare; though remarriage is permissible among them. Divorce can be obtained only through the approval of the village council.

The Karbis are traced through their male line. At the death of a person, his son inherits the deceased property. If the person dies without any male issue, his property is inherited by the nearest male kin of his clan. A childless couple can adopt a son who must belong to the clan of his foster father clan and at his death his adopted son will inherit the property (Bordoloi, 1987:57-58).

The traditional village council (me) of the Karbis is comprised of all the elderly male members of the village, which is presided over by the village headman. All the village disputes are settled here. The council also decides the
new sites for jhum cultivation and also distributes lands to the individual family. However, now a days, people prefer to go to law courts, instead of approaching to the village council. Another important institution of the karbi society was the bachelor's dormitory (jir-kedam). It looked after the matters associated with agriculture, social and almost all other activities. But, gradually this institute is also disappearing.

The Karbis can be regarded as animist tribe. Traditionally, they worship different benevolent and malevolent spirits. According to them each disease and ailment is associated with a presiding deity. To get relief from diseases or ailments and also for protecting people from or removing evil spirits, the sacred specialists are assigned for worshipping. Hemphu (equivalent to Hindu Lord Shiva) is then supreme god who is a benevolent deity and never herms the people. They observe many rites and rituals throughout the year to appease these deities. Sacrifice of animals and birds and use of rice beer are inevitable to each karbi ritual and festival. The most elaborate socio-religious ceremony observed by each of the family is chomangkan (death ceremony), which is believed to be diffused from the culture of the neighbouring Khasis. They believe that unless the spirit of the death is sanctified with elaborate rituals of chomangkan they do not get admittance into the chong-arong, the world of the dead. They also believe in witchcraft and black magic. A small section of the Karbis has accepted Christianity.