CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION:

SECTION I

THE DIBONGIYA AS A TERRITORIAL GROUP.

The Dibongiyas are one of the territorial groups of the Deuri-Chutiyas of Assam. The Deuri-Chutiyas are ethnically affiliated to the great Tibeto-Hmongian tribes of Assam.

The other groups of the Deuri-Chutiyas are the Bargonyas, the Tengapaniyas and the Patargonyas. The last group is reported to have become almost extinct. These four groups again constitute the Deuri-Chutiya subdivision of the Chutiyas. They sparsely inhabit some places in Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar and Darrang Districts in Assam.

Brown reports that there are three main subdivisions of the Chutiyas viz: 1. the Deuri-Chutiyas, 2. the Hindu-Chutiyas and 3. the Ahom Chutiyas. The Deuri-Chutiyas are the priestly section of the Chutiyas. Endle divides the Chutiyas into four subdivisions viz: 1. the Hindu-Chutiyas, 2. The Ahom Chutiyas, 3. the Deuri-Chutiyas- the Levite or priestly clan and 4. the Barahi Chutiyas- the pig eating clan. Oait also terms them as the priestly section of the tribe.
The traditional Chutiya socio-ritual organization seems to have been preserved by the Dibongiyas. The Borgonyas and the Tengapandiyas groups have altogether given up their traditional dialect in favour of Assamese. It has helped them to some extent to come into contact with a higher culture i.e. Assamese. Again, this contact is responsible for assimilation of a few traits of Borgonyas and Tengapandiya cultures. The Dibongiyas, on the other hand, have to some extent preserved their traditional socio-ritual organization along with their dialect.

SECTION II.

Then what are the forces and factors that are operating in keeping the Dibongiyas isolated from their cognate groups? These have been discussed below:

1. TRADITION:

P (H5) ex-barbari states "one day Kundisama decided to distribute the major portion of their state to Pichadema (Baliababa), and a small part to Pichashi (Tamreswari) their son and daughter respectively. But Pichashi taking advantage of darknight cheated her parents Kundisama in disguise form of Pichadema and received the miserable part meant for her elder brother. When Pichadema could understand the mischievous plot of his younger sister
he wanted to take revenge and also to kill her immediately. But his parents somehow prevented him from the act of annihilation to Pichachi along with her devotees. As a result he had to inherit Tengapaniya state from his parents. The parents kept separately the major part of this kingdom with its Dibongiya population. This is the basis of present day conflict between the Borgonya and the Tengapaniyas. The Borgonyas and the Tengapaniyas started to propitiate Pichachi and Pichadema respectively in two separate territories in Kundil Nagar (Sadiya). This is still a tradition of these two groups. They are debarred from participating each others rituals in their village shrines.

Brown and Endle also mention the names of three principal gods viz; Girashi gira, Pichadema and Pichachi propitiated by the Dibongiyas, the Tengapaniyas and the

Borgonyas respectively.

2. MIGRATION:

The original habitats of the Dibongiyas, the Tengapaniyas, the Borgonyas and the Patargonyas were the secluded, inaccessible places on the bank of Dibong river, Tengapani river and den no(horn) and Patarshal respectively presently situated in Lohit District and Sadiya transferred area of Dibrugarh District. Their names were originated according to their places of habitats.

The old informants say that their forefathers had to migrate from the above places to escape from frequent troubles created by their neighbours the Mishing and the Abors.
In one night, they came down on the courses of Brahmaputra with help of a mar nu. Unfortunately, one such mar nu carrying the Patargonya group lost their trace in the middle of the Brahmaputra. In connection with their migration Mr. Brown says that Raja Gaurinath Singha also being unable to protect the Deuris from the Mishmis and other tribes, removed them to Majuli where some of the villages are still found.

The Dibongiya group reached present day Siram Deuri Gaon in Majuli, Sibsagar District and settled there. This place was a very secluded place. The other two groups permanently settled at two different places on the Southern side of the Brahmaputra at present known as Rajabari Borgonya Gaon and Tengapani Gaon in Sibsagar District of Assam. These two groups of people got better places than the Dibongiyas. They easily came into contact with highly advanced Assamese neighbours.

Their villages are connected by roads with Sibsagar town, Dimou and Dibrugarh town. This initial contact with the highly advanced people like the Assamese in villages and towns, later on with the European in Tea Estate and Bengalis etc. is the main factor for their acculturation. They gave up their mother tongue completely in favour of Assamese. This is one of the factors for their advancement. Some people of the Borgonyas and the Tengapanyas have migrated to North Bank and established villages after the great earthquake and flood in 1950.
3. GEOGRAPHICAL:

The Brahmaputra becomes the main geographical barrier between the Dibongiyas, the Borgonyas and the Tengapaniyas. They could not easily come into contact with each other. The country boat was the only means of crossing the mighty Brahmaputra to meet each other in an especial occasion vis: marriage, bihu-festivals. This problem of communication between the Northern and the Southern banks of the Brahmaputra of Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, and Sibsagar is to some extent removed with the introduction of public boat (launch) services in 1950.

From the above discussion, it may be concluded that mythology, migration, geographical barrier are the main forces and factors for the separation of the Dibongiyas from the other cognate groups like the Borgonyas and the Tengapaniyas.

SECTION III

ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNTS:

The following ethnographic records about the Chutiyas in general and the Deuri-Chutiyas in particular had been written by previous authors some of whom had firsthand knowledge of the people.
Brown, W.B. "An Outline Grammar of the Deuri-Chutiya language spoken in Upper Assam. 1895 (typed copy). Mr. Brown deals mainly with grammar of Chutiya language and compares it with the language of Kachari of Assam. He says "the people are generally called Deuris simply; the language is more properly known as Chutiya" (1895: INT 1). He also opines "the Chutiya language, indeed, may fairly claim to be the original language of Upper Assam" (INT 1).

He divides the Chutiyas into three main divisions viz: the Deuri-Chutiyas, the Hindu-Chutiyas and the Ahom-Chutiyas. The Deuri-Chutiyas are again subdivided into four khels viz: the Dibongiyas, the Borgonyas, the Tangapaniyas and the Patargongas.

Brown says "at a casual view, these temples appear to be perfectly empty; I am told that temporary images are made" (INT 1). But I have not found any trace of images in the shrine in Sissimukh Deuri Gao. Again, Brown's (INT 1) girasi-gira (Assamese Bura-Buri) should actually be termed as Gira-Girasi (Bura-Buri). Gira-Girasi are popularly called Kundima in the Dibongiya society.

Brown's opinion about the Patargongan khel is that they are considered as 'inferior' (INT 2) is contrary to the fact. There is no system of rank among the Dibongiyas. He again says "the Deuris have a great reputation among the ordinary Assamese
for the black art (INT 2). But black art is quite unknown to the Dibongiyas of the village under study.

According to him the chief gods vis: Girasigir, Pishadema, Pishashi are worshipped by the Dibongiyas, the Tengapaniyanas and the Borgonyas respectively. He has not mentioned the name of the god of the Patargonyas. They propitiate the deity of the Patarhal.

2. Endle, R.S. "The Kacharlis" 1911.

Endle divides the Chutiyas into 4 main subdivisions vis; 1 Hindu Chutiyas 2. the Ahom Chutiyas 3. the Deuri-Chutiyas—the Levite or priestly clan and 4. the Barahi Chutiyas— the pig eating clan (P 91). He says "in all likelihood the language of the Deuri-Chutiyas gives us the purest and most archaic form of the Bara speech and there can be little doubt that in earlier times it was the dominant language of Eastern Assam (P 92 APPL).


Mr. Shakespear describes the history of the Assam Rifles posted in different parts of Assam. He says "Hannay found the remains of two shrines vis; " those of Tamar-Mai or the copper temple from its copper roofing and of Bhora-Boori" (P 265).


His book in Assamese is a popular and descriptive one. He describes the cultural life of the Deuri Community as a whole. There is lack of distinct informations about the Dibongiyas.
5. Deuri, Abichandra "Deuri-Sampadai"- presidential address, reception committee, 15th August 1939 P 27.
Deuri says "'Ku' means the shape and 'mu' signifies the yolk of an egg. Therefore, 'koum' stands for an egg.
Yogucha(kundi) and yoguchachi(mama) were born from this koum.
So he is called Kundimama. Kundimama creates Pichchire-chire cha( sworgokhonda), Chachi chire chire cha( marta khonda) and koum chire chire cha(patal khonda), Gira girashi(gurã buri), Pichadema(Baliababa), and Pichachidema(Tameswar). But my findings reveal the fact that the Dibongiya term for Kundimama stands as the following - Kundi signifies gira and mama denotes girashi.

He illustrates the grammatical structure of the Deuri(Chutiya) language with syntactic examples. He has not described the socio-ritual structure of the Dibongiyas in his book.

There are two articles about the Deuri-Chutiyas written by Goswami(Dr) U and Deuri, G in the book mentioned above. But no separate anthropological accounts of the Dibongiyas are available in these articles.

Professor M.C. Goswami receives garments from Shri N. Deuri, in 1972.

The Ethnographer with members of the host-family in the field in 1968.
The Dibongiya group of the Deuri-Chutiya are more or less have preserved their traditional culture, religion and language. The other groups viz; the Borgonyas, the Tengapaniyas, of the Deuri-Chutiyas have forgotten their own tongue and adopted Assamese language and few traits of culture.

The Dibongiyas of Sissimukh Deuri Gaon (27.21 E and 9h.37'), Lakhimpur District, Assam are marked by their...
A SKETCH OF SISSIMUKH DEURIGAON (MAY, 1972)
traditional way of life. Their socio-cultural life is comparatively much more traditional bound than those of other cognate groups belonging to the same ethnic stock.

The village is surrounded by Sissiriver in East West, Domakata nala in North West, and Singarijan in North East. The E. &D dyke which runs from the North East to South Western direction in the main communication of the village with Sissimukh and Morfidal respectively (See Map 1). The total population of the village was 364 (male 180 and female 184) on 25.5.71. Hira (H 33) is only the Arts graduate in the village in 1972. There is no forest nearby the village except a few trees and bamboos in the compounds of the residential houses.

The most important aspect of the Dibongiyas is their socio-ritual life centering round the midiku. They pay great reverence and propitiate them by sacrificing goats, ducks, pigeons, chickens, pigs etc. for well-being of the villagers, domesticated birds and animals and for success of the crops.

This typical group of people is still little known to the outsiders. This group has not so far been studied intensively. Prof. M.C.Goswami and Shri P.C. Saikia have only published a few papers on socio-ritual and socio-cultural life of the Dibongiyas recently (see page no 9).
The map shows the distribution of areas inhabited by the Dibongiyas, the Borgonyas, and the Tengaapaniyas. D = Dibongita, B = Borgonya, T = Tengaapaniya.
Anthropological study of this typical group may give some insight into the tenacity or otherwise of the working of this socio-cultural unit in an environment in which they live.

SECTION V

PROBLEM:

The Dibongiyas are a territorial group of the Deuri-Chutiyas. Formerly, they were a priestly section among the Chutiyas and conducted magico-religious rituals in the royal temples. Now, they are recognised as one of the plains scheduled tribes of Assam by the constitution of India. The most interesting and striking feature of the Dibongiya-society and culture is that they have preserved their tribal traditional socio-ritual beliefs and practices and language uptil now to a considerable extent.

The principal objective of this study is to investigate into the socio-ritual structure and the network of relations between ritual and socio-economic structures of this priestly community. Working hypotheses are: what forces and factors are operative in keeping them isolated from the cognate groups like the Tengapaniayas and the Borgonyas and other
neighbouring villages? Will the Dibongiyas stick to their traditional tribal ways of life as they do now? Is there any trend for modernization in respect of socio-economic, socio-ritual structures of the society? Is it possible that they will gradually lose their traditional ways of life and undergo some modifications to cope with the modern situations as soon as they come into contact with the highly advanced people, receiving higher education, getting medical facilities, having employment opportunity, etc.?

A detailed social anthropological study, especially the socio-ritual aspects of the Dibongiyas will throw some light on the way of the traditional folkways yielding before the forces and factors arising out of close contact with a technologically and industrially oriented society. This will also enable us to expose interrelationship between ritual and social organizations and between ritual and economic organizations in the Dibongiya society.

The socio-cultural phenomena observed among the Dibongiyas is also observed among other tribal groups which, have been subjected to similar changes. The degree of change, however, is comparatively slower in the case under study. The causes for such an unparalleled phenomenon, which are required to be inquired into.
Mr. Hira, is first graduate of the village, and an assistant teacher of Sissimukh H.E. School introduced me to the elderly persons of the Sissimukh Deuri Gaon on 2.10.68. They accepted me as one of their co-villagers - since my identity as a Hindu Chutiya was acceptable to them. As they are bilingual i.e. they speak both Dibongiya (Chutiya) and Assamese languages, I could easily carry out my field investigations works among them. I gave up wearing long pants, hawai shrits, and used their home-woven ikun, gamochā inorder to meet the local situation. It was difficult for the outsiders to distinguish me from the Dibongiyas. At first, I visited house to house as a guest. Sometimes, I had to convince a few persons interested to me that I wanted to know the socio-ritual life of the Dibongiya community.

I primarily used participant observation method supplemented by intermittent questions to collect my data. Because, "observation is not only one of the most pervasive activities of daily life, it is a primary tool of scientific enquiry" I also verified my data by cross-checking with other sets of informants in and outside the village. I
started my field investigations works on 2.10.66 and came to an end of it on 16.8.72. During the above period, I used to stay as a member in T's (H 12) residence, which enabled me to collect my data easily in the village. The first Capital letter of the names of the informants is maintained throughout the thesis. Of course, a few of them have been incorporated as X and Y in order to keep the secrecy of the persons concerned. Furthermore, the incantations and the method of propitiation of the chief deities of the midiku have been preserved intact at the hands of the ethnographer. These could not be published for fear of breaking strict secrecy between the persons who delivered it and the ethnographer.

The meaning of each Dibongiya (Chutiya) word is given in English in the Appendix.

The thesis comprises of the following 5 chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the introduction of the subject matter, chapter 2 consists of social organisation, chapter 3 includes ritual structure, chapter 4 embraces socio-ritual changes and chapter 5 marks the conclusion of all.
The ethnographer is esteemly indebted to his teacher, Professor M.C. Goswami, M.A.B.T.M. Litt (Cantab), Professor and Head of the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University for giving him critical advice, suggestions, and guidance in completion of this thesis.

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