

SOCIO-CULTURAL SYSTEM OF DEORI TRIBE AND IMPACT ON LIVELIHOOD: A CASE STUDY OF LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT, ASSAMPaban Jyoti Deuri¹DOI: <https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.24127/ADDEDJ.V2I2.PJD>**Review: 08/07/2025****Acceptance: 20/07/2025****Publication:24/08/2025****Abstract**

No doubt shortage of capital is an obstacle to the development of economy of an individual or a country. But the socio-cultural condition is also an important factor to the economic development. Therefore, to understand the economic development of a society, it is necessary to observe their socio-cultural systems. This study makes an effort to analyse the economic impact of socio-cultural activities of Deori community on their livelihood. For the purpose of the present study, we have selected four villages i.e.- Majorchapor, Kinapather, Borchapor and Kundil Nagar under Narayanpur Development Block of Lakhimpur District, Assam.

Key words: Development, economy, socio-cultural systems, livelihood.

INTRODUCTION:

The Deuris are one of the Mongoloid Community of Assam in the North East India. The Deuris belongs to the Mongoloid ethnic groups who entered into Assam from the North-East direction of our country and settled in the upper part of the River Brahmaputra which is situated in Joydham Hills under Lohit District of Arunachal Pradesh.

As per census report, 1901, the British Government mentioned that the Deuris inhabited on the bank of Kundil river, which is the East of Sadiya. After all it may be mentioned that the ancient inhabitation of the Deuris was in the region spreading from Kundil to Sadiya. But in course of time, the Deuris, due to disaster perhaps in different reasons such as natural disaster, ethnic clash economical as well as political, settled in various parts of upper Assam. At present, they spread particularly in the district of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Tinisukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat, and Sonitpur of Upper Assam. The Deuri villages are also found in Lohit and Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The Deuri villages are generally found in plain areas of the river banks. Majority of the Deuri people are found in Lakhimpur district of Assam.

The Indian Constitution has regarded the Deuris as a Scheduled Tribes of Assam. According to the 1961 census total population was 13,876. Again according to the 1971 census their total population stood at 23,080, out of which 11,901 were male 11,179 were females. Out of the total population of 23,080, the speaker of mother tongue stood at 12,190. According to the 1991 census of India the total population of Deuris in Assam has been figured 35,849 members and according to the 2011 census, the Deori population in Assam was 43,750 which represents 1.13% of the total tribal population in the state. But the whole figure set by census of India have not been accepted by Deuri national organizations like All Assam Deuri Students' Union (AADSU), All India Deuri Youth Students Association (AIDYSA), All Assam Deori Sammillan, All Assam Deuri Mahila Samity etc. According to the census by the All Assam Deuri Students' Union, 1991 the total population of Deoris in Assam has been figured 85, 849 numbers and according to 2003 census, that has been figured as 1,38,602.

However, the Deuris are socially divided in three *khel* (sub-tribe) on the basis of settlement like Dibongia, Tengaporia and Borgingia. Though the word Deuris was widely used from earlier times, at present they like to introduce themselves as "Jimasayan". This is because they believe that the word "Deuri" as exonym and "Jimasayan" as autonym. So, the Deuri people use more the word "Jimasayan" instead of Deuri at present. Besides, these three *khels*, Patorgonyakhel is said to be out of extinction.

It may be mentioned here that the Deuris consist in small number and are backward educationally and economically, yet they are still able to preserve their traditional ethos and customs, language, and their own religion in society. In this connection, W.B. Brown says, "Their main interest attached to the Deuris is that they have preserved the language, religion and customs which we may presume have descended to them with comparatively little change from a period anterior to the Ahom invasion."

Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the study are:

1. To analyse the socio-cultural system of Deori Community in Assam.
2. To examine the economic impact on festivals, food habit and religious practices of Deori community on livelihood.

Methodology of the Study:

The methodology of the study is mainly based on survey method. The data were collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from field survey with the help of the interview, questionnaire and schedule. For personal interview, out of total 600 household, 400 respondents of different age group were selected for the study. Important inputs for the study were also received from experts, made available from different journals, published books etc. that is secondary sources.

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Findings and Conclusions:

The present study reveals the following findings.

1. Society and Culture:

Society and culture are inseparable elements for any society in the world. During the field inquiry it is found that the Deuris generally worshipped Gods and Goddess for the well being of the general people irrespective of tribes. Deuri culture is related to agriculture. Agriculture is related to the seasons of the year. So, in order to increase the production of agriculture and to expect welfare of the village as well as domestic animals, Deuris worship the deities and perform the pujas. For this purpose, they spend major part of their annual income and therefore their savings is very low.

It is mentioned here that, the Deuris have different cultural aspects compared to the other tribes. Their beliefs and worship, customary practices and folk tradition are different from other tribes. Their society is less stratified basically due to economic reason. Their extended family provides the basis for organisation and control. They have endogamous marital relationship. Those marrying outside the community are not allowed to attend community function. They have loyalty to the clan, kin and family. Their economy is based on agriculture, piggery, fishery and poultry. Some of them also serve in government sector and in private farms as well. They trade with outsiders in daily and weekly markets.

2. Family Planning:

The study finds that the joint family system is one of the most important social characteristics of the Deuris which is the primary economic and social unit. But the family system of the Deuris is also responsible for the backwardness of their economy. Because the family attitudes of the Deuri societies leads to growth of population pressures and attachment to land. Majority of the Deuri families are characterised by the joint family system. This makes people lethargic and stay-at-home. It is also seen that most of the Deuri families spend more their income in buying the consumer goods and also spent on uneconomic ventures such as religious festivals and ceremonies. Ostentation expenditure is very high in Deuri society. So they have limited capacity to save.

The implementation of family planning norms in Deuri village under study is at all encouraging. The adoption of scientific methods of family planning is not given paramount importance to reduce the abnormal growth of population which definitely stands in the way of all round development of the people. The survey reveals that, out of 400 families under the study, the heads of 240 number of families (60%) opined that family planning is useful and small family is a happy family. The heads of 160 number of families (40%) however, could not agree to the small family norms. They argue that it is not within the competence of human beings and a child comes to this earth with two hands. If opportunities are given to the locals, population explosion will not be a problem.

Although a majority respondents have not supported the family planning, as many as 280 number of families (70%) are against on accepting any family planning measures. Only 120 numbers of families (30%) have accepted the family planning methods. The people are not using the indigenous method too, only 100 number of families (25%) reported that they know the indigenous method of family planning.

3. Marriage System:

Like the other communities, marriage is an indispensable part of the Deuri Society which can be regarded as a social institution. Practice of early marriage is very much common in Deuri society and the average age of marriage is still around 18 years. So far as our field study concerned that out of total women population, 85 percent women had got married within the age group of 18- 20 years without any professional skill. This has led to growth of population and so growing pressure on land.

It is to be mentioned that Deuris have endogamous marital relationship. Those marrying outside the community i.e. inter cast marriage are not allowed and they are also not allowed to attend community functions. The survey findings reveals that majority of the families are against such marriage. Out of 400 number of families under the survey, 320 number of families (80%) opined against the inter cast marriage system while 80 numbers of families (20%) preferred inter cast marriage.

From the study, it is also seen that only 58 number of families (14.5%) gave positive opinion raising the cast status by marrying in higher caste while rest families i.e. 342 families replied in negative. Again 112 numbers of families (28%) reported increase of inter caste marriage while rest of the families i.e. 288 number families opined that such type of marriage among the Deuris is not increasing. 320 number of families (80%) considered education responsible for the inter caste marriage and 35 number of families (8.75%) considered that Government policy is also a contributing factor for inter caste marriage.

4. Awareness of the Welfare Measures:

By and large the Deuris are not aware of the various welfare measure adopted by the Government for the welfare of the scheduled tribes due to lack of proper information about the welfare policies. There are only 120 number of families (30%) who have knowledge about such policies of Government while the rest 280 families (70%) are not aware of any such Government measures. As regards to enjoyment of such facilities, only 90 number of families (22.50%) have been benefitted by government welfare measures.

5. Socio-Legal System:

Since the Deuris are rural people, they have their own system of law and justice as regards socio-legal system and petty cases are decided in the villages. The village council known as 'Raijor Mel' of village headed by the Gaon Burha decides the disputes. Generally, theft and assault cases are decided and punishment are inflicted on the offenders.

Generally, Deuri people never went for courts or any other authority for getting judgement of any controversial matter. Like the judicial system of the country-judicial and criminal, Deuris have also two traditional courts for this purpose in their society. Six related

cases are judged in the *Dewalayas* and if it is found punishable, the accused himself have to confess before the god about the crime and about the expected punishment for him. The remaining crimes except sins are judged in the *Morong Ghar*.

Social system of Deuri culture is completely based on the hints or direction of active deities they worship and the people obey these directions while doing their works. So, it is to be said that, the Deuris are more or less influenced by superstitions.

6. Food Habit:

As regards to food habit, it is found in the survey that almost all Deuri people consume rice as major food item. In addition to this, it is to be mentioned that 98% of them have the habit of drinking homemade alcohol and liquor prepared from rice. Habit of taking tea is not popular among them. The elderly people rake red tea without milk and sugar. It is to be mentioned that rice beer is prepared in almost every household and it is used in religious ceremonies as well besides being served to guests. It is considered as the most valuable item for entertaining guests. In order to prepare this rice beer they spend a huge part of rice from their production. Some others prepare this by buying rice. This also raises the expenditure of Deuris in Lakhimpur District.

Conclusion:

As per the survey it has been found that majority (51.01%) of Deuri people under the study living below the poverty line which is higher than the percentage of people below poverty line in Assam (36.09%) in general. Therefore, the standard of living of Deuri people is very low and most of the families have few land resources.

Money is invested in uneconomic ventures such as religious festivals, ceremonial occasions etc. The people spend more than their income in buying consumer goods. Thus, the Deuri villagers saving are very low.

However, the Deuri people are expert in making bamboo and cane-based products, but due to lack of adequate marketing they are not able to earn substantial income. Similarly, the Deuri women are expert due to lack of proper business ecology they are not able to earn good income from the weaving. Although there is scope of improving the economy by undertaking various cottage industries and the men folk possess all the skill, yet due to non-availability of raw materials at cheaper cost, the Deuri people are not in a position to earn anything tangible from cottage industries. Besides, scientific and systematized animal husbandry may also uplift the economic condition of the people.

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