



## Identity Formation and Political Assertion among the Deoris



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### Abstract

Sub-regionalism or communalism, as we all know is a sentiment of similarity, amongst the people belonging to the same group. It means a sense of common consciousness or peoples under the same political organization. We know that there are different responsible causes for the resurgence amongst the tribal groups of North-East India and they have different natures, for example; aspiration for a separate identity, aspiration for establishing an autonomous council, development council, creation of a new state and many more. Assam is a part of the North-Eastern region of India, a district inhabited by aboriginal tribal communities in this state, viz; the Bodos, Karbis, Dimasas, Mishings, Doris, Rabhas, Sonowal Kacharis etc. They are distinguished from each-other societies by certain modes, behavior, character such as dress code, food habits, socio-cultural rituals, and religious belief. The Deoris are one of the major ethnic plain tribe of Assam. They have their own language to converse amongst themselves, own religious beliefs, living styles etc. Their present population is approximately two Lakhs According to the census report of Deori autonomous council (DAC). The Deories are settled mostly in the Districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Sonitpur and Tinsukia of Assam and some villages are also situated in the Districts of Changlang, Lohit, and Tirap of Arunachal Pradesh.

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## 1. Introduction

Caldwell, K. (2007), there are different factors, responsible for the separate identity amongst the ethnic groups of Assam. Some of the political factors such as emergence of middle class, emergence of different political organization, arrogant nature of the central government as well as state government and socio-economic factors such as historical, inhabitant, emotional, role of different tribal organizations, poor economic condition, land problem, consciousness of identity, self-determination, derivate feeling etc are some important factors towards the autonomy movement in Assam.

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The Deori society is a backward society as compared with other non-tribal people of Assam. Their villages are generally located in the far-flung riverside areas; therefore they are suffering from various problems such as - flood, landslide, communication, transportation and many more. Hale, C. R. (2002), as a result, the socio-economic condition of the Deori peoples are very backward. Further the community was also exploited by the government in the different stages of time; as for example, Jananayak Bhimbor Deori who passed civil service examination and selected as an extra assistant commissioner post but the interim government did not appoint him on that post by the direction of executive council; Shimray, U. A. (2004), because at that time the Assam government service was distinguished on the basis of communities population etc. At that time Deori community was not listed in the backward community.

The first batch Deori educated youth, namely; Gopal Chandra Deori, Dandhiram Deori, Phonindra Deori, Jugaswer Deori, Bhimbor Deori and Monbhal Deori of this community were felt that the Deori community is a very backward community as compares with other community of Assam. Jaananeta Bhimbor Deori who was the first president of 'Tribal League' of Assam and who was the founder member of 'All Assam Deori Sonmillan' in 1935. At that time Deori people were struggling for safeguards their language, custom, culture and also tried to have a separate identity.

Selznick, P. (2011), though the Deori is the aboriginal ethnic group known as 'son of soil' unfortunately this son of soil fails to coherence its progressive walk with the dynamic moves of time on contrary, it remains as poverty, landless, flood problems and most deprived class, hence they are socio-economically and politically backward. For the emancipation from this stagnancy the Deories had organized peaceful mass movement under the banner of some domestic organization of Deori community, namely, 'The All Assam Deori Student Union' (AADSU) which form in 1959 at Nokari Deori village of Lakhimpur District of Assam, 'All Assam Deori Sahitya Sabha'(AADSS) formed in 1965 at Baagoraha Deori village of Lakhimpur District, 'Deori Autonomous Demand Committee'(DADC) formed in 1995 at Kalowlowa Deori Village of Dibrugarh District.

### *Objectives*

The objectives of this article are:

- a) To study about identity and political assertion amongst the Deori tribe for the formation of Deori Autonomous Council (DAC).
- b) The second objective is to highlight the background and responsible factors for why this community felt the need for identity.

The third objective of this present paper is to focus a short description of the Deori community and their socio-economic condition.

## **2. Research Methods**

The article is mainly based on the primary and secondary data. The primary source of data 's includes the official records of Deori Autonomous Council(DAC), Different Memorandums submitted by the domestic organization of Deori community to the union ministers and state ministers from time to time in support of their demand for autonomy or separate identity. Tymoczko, M. (2000), apart from this, data were also collected through personal interview with some leaders of All Assam Deori Student Union (AADSU) and Deori Autonomous Demand Committee (DADC) as well as old aged people in this community. The secondary data is mainly based on the various books, journals, newspaper, pamphlet, and internet related to the topic of the study.

## **3. Results and Analysis**

### *3.1 Historical Background and Socio-Economic Condition*

The Deori is one of the scheduled tribes (plain) ethnic group of Assam have some distinct identical characteristics. They have their own religious beliefs, food habits and living styles, have their own dress, cultures, language etc. The Deoris are basically divided into four Khal or sub-branch, namely, Dibona, Tengapaniya, Borgongya, and Patorgoya. The name of each Khal or sub-branch is derived from a particular river of their original inhabitants. Those who lived in the bank of river Dibong is known Dibongya. Tengapaniya who inhabitants of the river side of Tengapani, the

Borgongya who lived in the bank of river Borgaang or Bor-Nadi and the Parorgayan khal who lived in the bank of river 'Pat-Sadiya' or 'Digaru'.

Before moving west, the Deoris were worshiped in the different places. The four temples or 'Thaan' of the Deoris situated at Sadiya of Arunachal Pradesh are, namely, 'Burha-Burhi Thaan', 'Balia-Baba Thaan', 'kechaikhati or Tamreswari Thaan' and 'Patar Shaal or Thaan'. According to 'Kalika Puran' and 'Yogini Tantra' holy script of Hindus, since the early of the sixth centuries, Deoris have been performing worships in the Tamreswari or Kechaikhati temple, Burha-Burhi (Shiva-Parvati) temple, Balia-Baba (Shiva) temple and in Patar Shaal which is in the northeast parts of Sadiya at present Tinsukia district of Assam.

According to the book "Shiva- Puran" the late Ahom king Rudra Singh narrates that the Deoris were living at Laibari(Rowing), Lafabari(Maalini thaan), Arem-kherem, Chakati – Chaliya (North part of Patkai Hill), Chandrakanta Warriner, D. S. (2007), says that the Deori were originally hills people, now living in Assam plains as a priestly class of the Sutiya. Sir Edward Gait says the Deoris are the priestly section of the Sutiya kings of Sadiya who worshipped the Goddess Kundi-Mama or Gira-Girachhi, Tamreswari or Kechaikhati and Balia-Baba.

One of the salient features of the Deori community is their Socio-economic condition. Co-operation is an important feature of their social life, both man and women are hard workers. They prefer the joint family system. The head man of the family plays a vital role for the peaceful running of their family. Socio-economic development of a Deori family mainly depends upon the head of the family. Agriculture is the main source of occupation amongst the Deori people both male and female are expert in the field of agriculture.

They build their houses with bamboo, timber, thatched etc. a typical Deori house is generally 5/6 feet above the ground .40/50 meters in length and contain more the 50/60 persons. The roof of the house is thatched and the walls are made of bamboos. The floor of the house is made of flattened bamboos or timbers. They prepare rice in their handmade rice machine known 'Dheki'. Weave tradition is one of the undividable functions of their social life.

The Deoris observe two major festivals during a year. One of them is "Bohagiyo Bisu", i.e. Bohag Bihu, while the other is "Magiyo Bisu" i.e., Magh Bihu. They have some special rules for the Bihu festivals.

### 3.2 Quest for Separate Identity

Why and for which factors are mainly responsible for a separate identity amongst the Deori peoples? Why quest for identity, autonomy? We can't solve the questions in a word or a sentence. It is a very critical question to answer, that we saw that the tribal people of Assam have been struggling for a separate identity in a different decade of time and from a different angle. We had seen that the autonomy movements by the tribal groups of Assam are not the product of a single factor. It is rather out come different factor. The Deori tribes of Assam was also demanded and struggled for a separate identity. Some of the important factors responsibilities for the creation of Deori autonomous council in the name of separate identity are:

- a) Historical factor: One of the causes of demand for autonomy movement amongst the Deori community was the historical factors, historically; the Deories of Assam is the earliest community, they regarded themselves as 'son of the soil' and therefore they claim that they must have the right of autonomy. Historically the Deori people are the earlier people of Assam before Ahome came entered to Assam the Deori was living in an upper part of Assam.
- b) Constitutional provision: The sixth schedule provision of the constitution of India is also one of the responsible factors for the emergence of different tribal autonomy movement, including the Deori. During the time of farming of the constitution, the sixth schedule of the constitution was farmed to provide autonomy for the tribal of north-east.
- c) Economic factor: Economically, the Deori people are backward people. Agriculture is still a primary source of income. The absence of government remarkable effort for their agriculture development was an important factor for their aspiration of autonomy.
- d) Government Employment system: The government employment system is an important element for their autonomy movement. The unfairness process of government job allotment, create aspiration amongst the Deori peoples for a separate identity. There are as many as twenty-four tribes and sub-tribes but there are provisions for only ten percent of job reservation for plain tribes including Deori, the Government doesn't take any measured to fulfill the vacancies reserved for tribal.
- e) Role of different tribal organization: Role of the different tribal organization was also one of a most responsible factor for the feelings of separate identity amongst the tribal of Assam. The Deori tribes was gradually become

awareness to safeguard their custom and religion; after the formation of 'Plain Tribal League' (PTL) in 1933. The PTL was the first attempt to voice of plan tribes, particularly, regarding the protection of tribal land.

### 3.3 Historical Background of Dac

Every movement had its own historical background. The Deori Autonomous Council (DAC) a separate Autonomous council for Deori community. It is one of grassroots level administrative body of the government of the nation. Inboard meaning Deori Autonomous Council is a government for all-round development of the Deori people. Before going to established it, a great historical event was related to the people of Deori community. We had seen that All Assam Deori Student Union (AADSU) played a leading role in the formation of their Autonomous Council and also lead for focusing the quest and aspiration among them. To study, how and when the aspiration of Deori people was focusing on their various stage of time is so important in this present paper. Under the following, we are tried to highlight the main events or struggles for aspiration and mass movement of Deori people for a separate political identity.

#### a) First stage

we can say that the first stage of autonomy aspiration among the Deori people was begun at the time of jananeta Bhimbor Deori, who was the founder general secretary of Assam Plain Tribal League in the year of 1933 and was a minister of Gopinath Bordoloi cabinet. After the formation of 'All Assam Deori Sonmmillian'. Who tried to be the focus and conscious among the tribal people of Assam including the Deori. The year 1959, was a historic day for the Deori community because some of the Deori educated youth was formed a non-political organization at 'Nokari' Deori village of Lakhimpur District of Assam; known the All Assam Deori Student Union (AADSU). The aims for the formation of AADSU was to developed and the progress of the young generation and socio-economic development of the Deori community. ADDSU was taken some initiate programs during this stage, such as organized meeting, progressive activities for students, cultural programme etc. one of the most important decision was taken by ADDSU during the time of eighty decade, In 1982 an annual conference of AADSU was held at Sadiya; in that conference AADSU taken a decision for their language reorganization and think about the Deori autonomous council. ADDSU decided to submit a four-point memorandum to the interim Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

The four-point of the memorandum was:

- 1) A separate autonomous council for Deori people.
- 2) To recognized Deori language as a govt- language and making a system of teaching at primary school level under the jurisdiction of Deori villages.
- 3) Total safeguard of Deori custom and culture.
- 4) Total protection of Burha-Burhi Thaan, located at Sadiya; where Deori people were living in the earlier time.

#### b) Second stage

Another important stapes for autonomy movement was a highlight in the decade of ninety. It was a landmark for the Deori people, to establish their autonomous council. The 15th annual conference of AADSU was held at Majuli, of Jorhat district. In that conference, total 525 delegated AADSU members were represented; came from the different district of Assam. The conference was a successful and important conference for AADSU, because in that conference AADSU was taken a new policy of movement for autonomy. They regularly published their pamphlet and magazines to publish their aspiration and problems. They regularly organized their meeting, conference etc .leader of the AADSU and others conscious Deori people wanted to focus through the publication of the magazine and tried to understand the general people that if they lost their custom, culture, language etc; they will be lost their separate identity in future. Further, they felt that if they can't success their autonomy movement, the Deori community will be never developed their socio-economic status.

It was the 24th September 1995, a political organization 'Deori Autonomous Demand Committee' (DADC) was formed at 'kalolowa Deori Gaon' of Dibrugarh District, under the banner of AADSU. To establish a separate autonomous for socio-economic development of the Deori community was the main motive of DADC. Dated 11th, 12th and 13th February 1996, the 19th annual conference of AADSU was held at Philabari Deori gaon of Tinsukia district, proposal passed in that meeting was to solve the burning problems that have been facing by Deori community and to organizing an important delegate meeting at Lakhimpur dist. It was a 9th march of 1996; an important meeting of the members of central committee was organized at Dibru College,

District of Dibrugarh. Aiming was to discuss the ignorance and arrogant view of government to the Deori community and their demand of autonomous council.

On 25th July 1997, some members of AADSU discussed with the tribal minister Mr. Rajendra Musahary, on the demand of Autonomous Council and language recognition.

c) *The third stage or last stage*

We can say that the third stage or the last stage of movement was started from the year 2001. It was 24th June 2001, under the banner of AADSU some domestic organization of Deori, such as 'Deori Sahitya Sabah' and 'Deori Mahila Committee' and some Deori peoples had welcome to the 'Tarun Gogoi government and they also discussed their 12<sup>th</sup> point demand with Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi. Two important demand among these were 'Language recognition and autonomous council'

A biannual conference of AADSU was held on 25th to 27th January 2002, at 'Jananayak Bhimbora Deori Khetra' in that conference AADSU took a strong resolution and decision for their demand, media also played a vital role to focus and published their activities, a motorcycle relay from Guwahati to Sadiya, where Deori village are available, was a remarkable activity done by AADSU. All Deori people actively participate and support for creating an autonomous council for Deori community. On the above activities of the Deori peoples, the decade of eighty, ninety and the beginning of twenty century was the memorable and historic days for Deori community. They lost their time, money and many more on the name of the autonomous council. It was 28th January 2005, Deori language was recognized by the Assam government and on the 8th March 2005, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed between the government of Assam and The All Assam Deori Student Union and Some Domestic Organization of Deori Community Such As All Assam Deori Autonomous Council Demand Committee, All Assam Deori Sonmmillian etc. the Deori autonomous council was constituted by an executive order of the government of Assam and act was passed in Assam legislative assembly name 'the Deori autonomous council act-2005.

At present, the Deori Autonomous Council Secretariat is situated at Bhimbora Nagar, Narayanpur, and P.O-Dikrang of Lakhimpur District,

#### 4. Conclusion

The Deori autonomous council, a separate identity for the Deori community of Assam is undoubtedly a body of all-round development of the Deori people. Central government relishes a sufficient fund for their socio-economic development. But the d DAC is not free from lapses; during the time of established. Some Deori peoples have been criticized that DAC activities have been not properly one, since the time of established. They criticized that the DAC have been dividing the unity and peace of the Deori community, fund relished by the government has been misused, corruption and nepotism has been arising day by day etc. Further, the biggest achievement of the council is that it has given Deori peoples a distinct identity, political awareness etc. We hope that if the members of the council agreed to do all-around development activities for their community and if the government relish sufficient fund for DAC, the DAC will be able to fulfill the aspirations of the Deori peoples.

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*Statement of authorship*

The author(s) have a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author(s) have approved the final article.

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