



Demographic Behaviour of The Deoris Of Assam

Surjya Chutia

Asst. Prof., Economics dept., Tinsukia College, Tinsukia, Assam-786125

ABSTRACT

The North East Region of India is the abode of about 130 tribal groups having different social structure and cultural heritages. Assam is the pioneer state of the NER of India and the habitation of various tribal communities. Tribes living in the state of Assam are categorized into nine plains tribes and fourteen hill tribes and the state accounted for merely 12.42 percent tribal population as per 2001 census.

The Deoris are one of the plain schedule tribes of Assam, who are likely to exhibit certain socio-cultural and demographic characteristics which are different from those of other tribes and non tribal population of Assam. As per 2001 census, the total Deori population in Assam was 41161. Ethnically Deoris are affiliated to the Indo- Mongoloid group and their 'Deori language' also belongs to the Tibeto-Burman of the great family of Sino-Tibetan languages. The Deoris have four main divisions (Khel), namely- the Dibongiya, the Tengaponiya, the Borgoya and the Patorgoya. But the Patorgoya group has almost become extinct today.

In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight some demographic aspects of the Deoris of Assam. The paper is mainly based on primary data collected through personal interview with the respondent sample households through an interview schedule.

KEYWORDS :

0.0 Introduction:

Assam is the homeland of various tribal communities, each having its own cultural heritage. The state has 9 scheduled tribes in the plains districts and 14 in the hills districts i.e. in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills (Sengupta, 2002). The total populations of Assam in 2001 census was 266, 55528. Of them 3308570 persons were schedule tribes (STs) constituting 12.42% of the total population of the state. The tribal population of the state was 5.5 lakh in 1901, which increased to 8.05 lakh in 1951 registering 46.36 percent increase during these 50 years. But in the next four decades, the tribal population in Assam jumped to 28.74 lakh in 1991 indicating 257 percent increase while the total population of the state increased by 180 percent during the same time period.

The Deoris are one of the plains Schedule Tribes of Assam, who have been able to maintain their old tradition and culture intact, in spite of various socio-political trials and tribulations through the ages. Ethnically Deoris are affiliated to the Indo- Mongoloid group and their 'Deori language' also belongs to the Tibeto-Burman of the great family of Sino-Tibetan languages. Originally the tribe comprised of four main divisions (Khel), namely- the Dibongiya, the Tengaponiya, the Borgoya and the Patorgoya. The Patorgoyan group is not traceable at present. It is presumed that the members of this group might have been amalgamated with the other existing groups of Deoris or with other communities. Only the people of Dibongiya khel can speak their own language. But they too use Assamese Language and script for inter-community communication

As per 2001 census, the total Deori population in Assam was 41161, comprising of 20809 male and 20352 female population. They are mainly concentrated in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Sonitpur, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar & Jorhat.

0.1 Importance of the study:

Population phenomena are largely the outcomes of different socio-cultural and economic characteristics of a population group. Every aspect of the socio-cultural life significantly influences the demographic behaviours of the population. The socio-cultural attributes of different tribal groups are invariably different, which result in difference in the demographic behaviour of different tribal groups. Micro level demographic studies on the ethnic groups can help in assessing their demographic profile. Such study can bring forth manifold gains to the policy makers as well. The present study is an effort in this line.

0.2 Methodology & Sample Design:

Three districts of Assam having very high to moderate concentration of Deori population have been purposively selected as sample districts. These are Lakhimpur Dhemaji and Tinsukia. From these three districts 21 Deori villages have been randomly selected as the sample villages. A village is said to be Deori village if the percentage of Deori

households in the village is 50 or above. A total of 1077 households from the 21 sample Deori villages have been randomly selected for intensive study. Thus the study is confined into 1077 sample (Deori) households. Data have been collected from sample households with the help of a series of questionnaires prepared for the purpose. Apart from the field survey data, information from several secondary sources like population census, statistical handbooks, journals, books etc. are also used.

0.3 Socio-economic Profile of the Sample population:

The Deoris are predominantly a rural community, because most of them are living in the rural areas. As per 2001 census, 93.9% Deori population of Assam live in rural areas. They are mainly agriculturalists. They are still depending upon the traditional method of cultivation. About 77.15% surveyed husbands are found purely cultivator and most of the wives (98.12%) are just housewife. It is found in the survey that the dominant form of family structure among the Deoris is nuclear (i.e. 61.8%).

The highest proportions (around 69.1%) of the sample households are having 5 to 9 family members. The big sized families having members 15 & above is about 3.6%. The average family size is found to be 7.16.

The sex ratio is found to be 966 females per thousand male, which is lower than that of total tribal population of Assam (972) and India (978), but higher than the overall sex ratio of the total population of Assam (932) and of India (933) in 2001.

The literacy rate of the surveyed Deori husbands and wives are not so poor as compare to the state's male and female literacy rate. The male literacy rate is about 85.46% against the state's rate of 71.30% as per 2001 census and female literacy rate is about 67.30% against the state's female literacy rate of 54.60% as per the census. The general literacy rate of the surveyed husbands and wives is about 76.36% which is also higher than the state's general literacy rate (i.e. 63.3%) in 2001 census.

Most of the Deori houses are constructed by wood, bamboo, cane and thatches. The houses are four to six feet high from the ground which is called 'Chang Ghar'. The study confirms about 82% of the sample households are living in Chang Ghar. All the houses are of same pattern, generally facing towards east direction. The houses vary in length according to the size of the family.

Housing condition of the surveyed population is far from satisfactory as most of the households do not enjoy the basic amenities of life such as pucca house, pucca latrine and pure drinking water. It is found that only 8.2% of the sample households have pucca house, 23.6% have semi pucca and remaining 68.2% have cutcha house.

Only economically sound households (*about 11%*) have both the bathroom and toilet facilities in their houses. As there was no public latrine facility in the villages, a large portion of the Deori households (16%) have to go in open fields or nearby jungle for latrine which is very unhygienic.

It is found in the survey that only 14.7% households have electricity facility which is significantly low as compared to the state average. In Assam as a whole 26.4% households have electricity in urban areas and 21.1% in rural areas (*census report, 2001, India, Assam, part-III*). Regarding Fuel consumption pattern, it is found that 84% of the total surveyed Deori households used wood, 3.3% used Kerosene Stoves and 11.4% households were found using LPG.

The staple cereal food of the Deori people is rice. For their meat supply they rear fowls, pigs, ducks and goats. *Suze* (rice beer) is prepared in every household and it is the most favourite drink which can be severed to all, irrespective of age and sex.

Early marriage is quite common among the women of the Deori tribe. As many as 36.20% percent of the sample women got married below the minimum legal age of marriage of female in India i.e. 18 years. The mean age at marriage among the Deori females is found to be 19.17 years. Cases of divorce among them are very rare (0.24 % is found in the survey).

1.0 Fertility rates:

Crude Birth Rate (CBR) is most commonly used measure of fertility, which shows the number of live births at per thousand populations in a year. The crude birth rate in the present study is found to be 27.23 per thousand population which is higher than the crude birth rate of Assam (i.e.24.3) and India (i.e. 23.1) in 2007 (SRS). Poor practice of family planning methods, Lack of awareness about family planning, poor level of income etc. may be the reasons for high crude birth rate among the Deoris.

In case of the Age Specific Fertility Rate (ASFR), relatively high fertility has been observed in the age group of 20-29 years, therefore, women in that age group should be encouraged to adopt contraceptive devices to limit the family size.

The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) shows the total number of children born to a cohort of women and the gross reproduction rate used to show the number of daughters born to a cohort of women. The total fertility rate is found to be 2.8 children per Deori women of the reproductive age group, which is higher than the replacement level of fertility. The 3rd round of National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) found the total fertility rate for Assam as 2.4 and for India it is 2.7. Thus, the total fertility rate of the Deori is higher than that of Assam's and India's rate.

The Child- Women Ratio (CWR) is another important measure of fertility. A high child- women ratio reflects high level of fertility which is considered as bad for reproductive health of the women. The child-women ratio is found to be 362 children per thousand Deori women of the reproductive age group. In contrast to this a high child-woman ratio was found among the Saharias- a tribe of Madhya Pradesh (i.e. 667.78) (Biswas & Kapoor, 2003).

1.2 Mortality rates:

Mortality analysis is one of the important components of demographic study. Different standard measures of mortality have been worked out to study the mortality pattern of the sample population.

The Crude Death Rate (CDR) is found 10.54 per thousand. The rate is comparatively high than the all India rate and the State's rate. NFHS-2 has estimated CDR for Assam as 9.5 per thousand populations which is slightly lower than the all India rate 9.7 in 1998-99.

It is found in the survey that the average annual number of death of mother due to child birth related problems is 1. The total number of live birth being 148 in the year, so the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is found to be 676 per 1,00,000 live births which is higher than the national average of 540 as estimated by NFHS-2.

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) among the sample Deori population is found to be 79.36 per thousand live births. This rate is also higher than the infant mortality rate of Assam and India as a whole. As per 2001 census, infant mortality rate of Assam is 74 while the national average is 66 per thousand live births. Several factors like- mother's educational level, age at birth of the mothers, place of delivery, vaccination, post-natal medical care, number of existing children, and type of family have significant influenced the infant mortality among the Deoris of Assam.

It is found in the study that though most of the surveyed females have heard about AIDS, only 9% of them have knowledge of transmitting factors and precautions for avoidance of the disease. It reveals poor awareness on such disease among them.

Conclusion:

Improvement of demographic and hygiene behaviours of a tribe is very much co-related with the socio-economic development of the tribe. The findings of the study show that the demographic behaviours and hygiene status of the Deoris are lower than those of some other population groups of the state and national average in many aspects. Education, health and medical facilities should be increased and special campaigns should be organized to create awareness among the Deori people. No doubt, a meticulous planning on these lines will improve the life of the tribe a lot. Let us hope for a better future.

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