INTRODUCTION.

The Deori Chutiyas are a small and secluded tribe in the Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts of Upper Assam. Their principal settlements are on the Majuli Island in Sibsagar, and on the Dikrang river in North Lakhimpur. They number less than four thousand in all.

As the name implies, they are the representatives of the priestly or Levite class among the Chutiyas, who are one of the most numerous castes in these districts, numbering 87,691 at the census of 1891; and whom we know from history to have been the ruling race in Upper Assam before the Ahom invasion in the fifteenth century. The other two divisions of the race, the Hindu Chutiyas and Ahom Chutiyas, have long since lost all trace of their language and origin, and have become merged in the general mass of semi-Hinduised Assamese; but their original connection with the Deoris has never been disputed, and is freely acknowledged by themselves. The main interest attached to the Deoris 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. The Chutiya language, indeed, may fairly claim to be the original language of Upper Assam.

The following description of their way of living at present, taken from the Assam Census Report for 1881, is accurate:

"A Deori Chutiya village consists of some thirty houses, built on bamboo platforms raised about five feet from the ground. A single house...

* The people are generally called Deoris simply; the language is more properly known as Chutiya.
will often contain a family of forty persons, living in one great room without any compartments" (but with separate fireplaces), "with a verandah in front, where visitors are entertained. Deori Chutiyas are tall, large, well-nourished men, with features bearing a strong resemblance to the Kachari. They drink strong liquor, and eat all kinds of flesh except beef."

They have permanent cultivation, and use the plough. They are not averse to education, several of them being employed as muharrirs.

The Deoris attach much importance and mystery to their religion; but the knowledge thereof seems to be confined to the older men, and particularly to the puja irs, or priests, of whom there are four attached to each khel, viz., the Bor Deori (Deori Dema) and the Saru Deori (Deori Surba), the Bor Bharali and the Saru Bharali. It is the duty of the two Bharalis to collect the dues of the temple, and to provide animals for sacrifice; they are also privileged to hold the head of the victim, which is generally a goat. The two Deoris perform the sacrifice; they alone enter the temple, and sing hymns, which are scarcely understood by the common people. At a casual view, these temples appear to be perfectly empty; I am told that temporary images are made.

The chief gods are three, viz.,—

(1) Girasi-gira (Assamese Bura-buri) ("the Old Ones"), always spoken of as a wedded pair; worshipped by the Dibongia khel. The original temple was on the Kundil river.

(2) Pishadema ("the Elder Son"), called in Assamese Boliya-homata, worshipped by the Tengapania khel. Temple on the Tengapani river.

(3) Pishasi ("the Daughter"), known as Tameshari Mai ("the Mother of the Copper Temple") and Kechakhati ("the Eater of raw flesh"), to whom human sacrifices were offered. Her temple was somewhere about Chunpura on the Brahmapatra. She is worshipped by the Borgaya khel.

* "The supreme gods of the Dhimals are usually termed Warang-Berang, that is, "the Old Ones," or father and mother of the gods."—(Hodgson’s Essays, p. 128.) Most of Mr. Hodgson’s remarks on the religion of the Bodo and Dhimals might be applied, mutatis mutandis, to that of the Deoris.
Besides these three *kheles*, there was a fourth, Patargoya, which was considered inferior, and has (consequently) become extinct.

For purposes of intermarriage, the Deoris are divided into a number of exogamous groups.

In addition to the three greater gods, there are a number of household gods, who are worshipped in the family.

All rivers are worshipped, particularly the Brahmaputra, which is called Ji Chima or Chima Jima ("the Mother of Water").

*Puja* is also performed under big trees; but no reverence seems to be paid to the cactus.

There are four great festivals in the year, two of which correspond to the Assamese *Magh Bihu* and *Baisak Bihu*, but are celebrated on different dates from the Assamese festivals.

The Deoris have a great reputation among ordinary Assamese for the black art. They are believed to be able to make their enemies die mysteriously of a wasting disease; a reputation which they share with the Khamptis, and to some extent with those recent immigrants, the Nepalese. They are resorted to in cases of loss of cattle, and of undetected robberies.

It will have been observed that the original seat of the Deoris was in the region beyond Sadiya. It is only about a century ago that they removed thence to their present settlements; and some of them still occasionally visit Sadiya for religious purposes.

The account which the Deoris give of their history, when stripped of legend, appears to be reasonable, and to agree with what is otherwise known about them. It is that theirs was the established religion in the time of the Chutiya kingdom, although Hinduism may have made some way. The Ahom invasion was followed by intermarriages between the Ahoms and Chutiyas; and at this period the distinction between Ahom Chutiyas and Hindu Chutiyas arose. Finally, the Ahoms
and both classes of Chutiyas became converted to Hinduism. The Deoris, however, were maintained all along as, locally at least, one of the established religions of the State, until their removal from the Sadiya district. Since that event, they have lost much of their former importance.

The stories which the Deoris tell about the Chutiya kingdom before the Ahom invasion are mythical. The following account is given of the Ahom conquest:

The Chutiya Rájá was a kind of Samson, or Siegfried. He was invulnerable; his life being concealed in his mother's hair. Having conquered all the people on the earth, he started digging up the ground to see if he could find new enemies to subdue. This was noticed by the Old Ones, who sent two Ahom princes down the golden ladder from heaven. A series of fights ensued, in which the Ahoms managed to kill off the Chutiya king's armies, but they could do nothing to the Rájá himself, until his secret was betrayed by his tamuliyá, or bearer. This man threw dust in the Rájá's mother's hair; and, under pretence of clearing it, he cut it off, thus securing the Rájá's life. He then stabbed him in the back. The descendants of this traitor are still extant as one of the minor groups into which the Deoris are divided; and it is said that up to the present day no good man has been known to come of that stock.

According to the Deoris, they were treated with much respect by the Ahom Rájás. They were exempted from service and provided with guards and slaves. Grants of land inscribed on plates of copper are still extant. It is said that when any Hindu Gosain appeared before the Rájá, the latter remained seated while the Gosain put the garland on his neck and gave the asirbad, or blessing; but when the four chief Deoris paid their annual visit to the Ahom court the Rájá rose and stood before them to receive their salutation. There was a reason for this; as it was on these occasions that the Deoris demanded and obtained the sanction of the Rájá for
their annual sacrifice of human beings. According to the myth which is told on the subject, this sacrifice was originally a propitiation for the introduction of sin into the world, offered by the Daughter to the Old Ones; but, in effect, it seems to have become a sacrifice to her on behalf of the whole nation, something like the Jewish scapegoat. This institution was abolished by the Rájá Gaurinath; who also, being unable to protect the Deoris from the Mismis and other tribes, removed them to the Majuli, the Holy Land of Assam. Deoris have remarked to me that from the abolition of this sacrifice the Ahom kingdom began to go from bad to worse. I was surprised at this sentiment, which was evidently sincere; for at present the Deoris are particularly mild and amiable:

Saepius illa
Religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta.

To turn to the language itself, very little appears to be known about the Chutiya language hitherto. Some time in the forties Colonel Dalton contributed a few words to the Asiatic Society’s Journal; from which his acute genius discerned the connection with Kachari. It is the main object of this little work to confirm and establish that conclusion. A short note is appended of the principal grammatical resemblances between Chutiya and Kachari; and it is hoped that the materials provided will be useful to anyone making a systematic study of the Bodo group of languages. A somewhat longer Deori Chutiya vocabulary was contributed to Hodgson’s Essays by the Reverend Mr. Brown of Sibságár; but the usefulness of this is marred by its being mixed up with the vocabularies of a number of Nága dialects. Both these vocabularies are inaccurate, and even misleading, on such important points as the numerals. Besides them, I am not aware that anything has been published about the Chutiya language. Indeed, it has recently been officially announced to be extinct by the author of the Assam Census Report for 1891. This is by no means the case; for, although the Deoris all speak Assamese fluently,
and have incorporated a good many Assamese words in their own vocabulary, still they all speak their own language; and are rather proud of it, and of the difficulty of learning it.

The present work differs from the other grammars which have been published at the Assam Government Press, in that it is not written so much for practical use as for the philological and historical interest of the language. I have not attained to any great conversational fluency in speaking it. It will perhaps be a sufficient excuse for this that the only Deori village in this subdivision is about 30 miles from headquarters. With the help of an intelligent Deori mubarrir, who has some knowledge of Bengali grammar, I have analysed the grammar as carefully as possible; and on my occasional visits to the Deori settlement, I have improved my practical knowledge. I should have hesitated to publish the result, but for the little likelihood of anyone else taking up the subject. It is hoped that the information collected may be sufficient for the object in view.

I must acknowledge my great obligations to the Reverend Mr. Endle's "Outline Kachari Grammar" which has been my guide throughout. I have borrowed freely from his examples, believing that in the case of kindred languages similar examples will be of most use for purposes of comparison. Other works consulted have been Hodgson's "Essays on Miscellaneous Indian Subjects," and Sir George Campbell's "Specimens of the Languages of India."