

# A Secondary Study on the Hajong Community of Assam

Debismita Bora\*

Faculty, Department of Social work, Assam Kaziranga University, Jorhat, India

**Abstract:** North East is a region where different tribes are lives together from ancient period of time by preserving their own culture, tradition & heritage. Hajong community is one of the tribal communities belonging to the mongoloid race. They are spread all over the Assam particularly.

**Keywords:** Hajong Community, Socio cultural aspect, Assam.

## 1. Introduction

About Hajong Community

The Hajongs are one of those tribes whose culture is an integral part of this society. The Hajongs are Scheduled Tribe. The name Hajong has a particular significance. In the Garo language “Ha” means earth and “Jong” means insect. They are called “Hajong” means insects of earth. This name was given to them because the Hajongs’ life and activity is deeply associated with land. In Meghalaya they are mainly concentrated in the plains of the south-west and the western border of the West Garo Hills District while some Hajong villages are situated in the East and the West Khasi Hills as well some of them also live-in different districts of Assam(Devi, n.d.). It is traditionally believed that the Hajongs for early lived in the Hajo area of the Kamrup District of Assam when their population increased and their cultivable land was found too scanty to sustain them; they left the place and set out in search of a new land.

First, they settled at a place called Hachong. But they left the place and moved in a south westerly direction until they found this vast plain in the Garo Hills most suitable to their temperament as well as for cultivation. They settled in this place permanently and gradually extended their settlement in the south eastern direction along the foot hills of the Garo Hills and Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Though the

Hajong nowadays speak the jharua dialect of Assamese or the Mymensingh dialect of East Bengal it is very likely they belong to the same branch as the Bodos, Koches and Rabhas. The Assamese dialect is a mixture of Assamese and Bengali, but the influence of the Assamese language is greater. The Koch dialect is of Tibeto-Burman origin (Gait 1924). The influence of both Bengali and Assamese language is reflected in their dialect. There are two broad sections among the Hajongs, namely the Khatal and the Hajong.

## 2. Social and Cultural Aspects

A social and culture aspects are a kind of social necessity. It is also one of the quite well known methods of social control. Social and cultural aspects are based on traditional beliefs. For the purpose of the present study- the social and cultural aspects of Hajong community has been divided into the following category-

### 1) Society

Hajong society is patriarchal. After the death of the father sons inherit his property. Daughters however, are given some money and ornaments at the time of their marriage to start a new family life specially those who are not financially sound. Young men and women marry with their parents' consent. A Hajong man can marry a woman of his own clan as well as of a different clan. After marriage, women put on Sindur (vermilion) mark on their sithi (parting of the hair on the middle of the head). Child marriage is not allowed. Premarital sex is strictly prohibited. Hajongs generally abide by the rules and principles of marital purity. A husband cannot have more than one wife. Divorce is not uncommon and widows can remarry. Rice is the staple food of Hajongs. Fruits, vegetables, mutton, pork, ducks and chicken are other major items of their diet. Hajongs lead simple lives like Garos. Most families live in thatched houses. Relatively better off families have tin-shed or brick-built houses. Houses are neat and clean reflecting the neatness of their life-style. As modernization is making people's life standard in different turn, more and more Hajongs are dwelling houses in town and cities. Like other ethnic groups, Hajongs build and maintain community houses for social needs as well as for other purposes.

## 3. Beliefs and Religion of the Hajong

### 1) Beliefs

A belief pervades attitude and action to enter the stream of conscious thought. The most widespread manifestation of a mental attitude is in the shape of beliefs. Religion is a system of belief and symbolic practices. Rightly does observe M. J. Herskovits, "Religion may best be defined as belief in and identification with a greater force or power". E. Durkheim has also observed, "Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is thing set apart and

\*Corresponding author: debismitabora2017@gmail.com

forbidden".<sup>4</sup> Beliefs ensure that the rituals will be observed. However, it may be kept in mind that the conception of the nature of the supernatural differs from society to society and people to people. For some the supernatural may be constituted of ghosts and spirits. For others it may be an impersonal power which pervades everything in this world. For still others it may be manifested through a pan them of anthropomorphic gods and goddesses. The Hajongs believe that the soul exists in human beings, and animals. It stays in the heart of a creature. They believe in the doctrine of transmigration. Like the Hindus, they also believe in the immortality of the souls, life hereafter, heaven and hell. They believe that a person dies, the soul does not get peace unless the final ritual of the deceased is performed properly. They also believe in rebirth. The Hajongs believe in and worship the Gods and Goddesses like Vishnu, Mahadev, Ganesh, Durga, Parvati, Lakshmi, Saraswati and other Gods and Goddesses. They are worshipped on various occasions and times. Among the Lord Vishnu is a very popular folk god for the Hajong community. He is worshipped at beginning of every phase of cultivation. The Hajongs believe in two imaginary places- Heaven and Hell. According to their belief, a man who works good for the society selflessly, takes place in the Heaven, and on the other hand, those who work bad for the society, take place in the Hell. Amongst the Hajongs it is a common belief that those parent's wards had died early after birth, such parents gave extraordinary name of the newly-born wards or sell them to the other people. To do this the Hajongs believe that the child can live in the future.

#### 2) *Omens*

Omen means a sign of some future event. The Hajongs being superstitious people believe in the various types of omens good or bad and follow them accordingly before undertaking any work or journey. Howling of an owl within the compound of a house indicates a bad omen- one may die soon. If a vulture falls on a house, it is regarded as a bad omen. While starting on journey if one sees the full water of a pitcher, it is a good omen. If a person comes across a funeral procession while starting on a journey, it is regarded a bad omen. The Hajongs believe a journey or any work should be started on a luck day. They regard Monday, Wednesday, and Friday as luck days. If one is not able to undertake the journey on an auspicious day, his belongings and clothes are put outside the house on the auspicious day, which is regarded as good as his departure. If anybody asks one as to where one is going, when he starts on his journey, it is considered as a bad omen. Journey should not be undertaken if a person sees somebody carrying corpse. A sudden shaking in the right eye during the lunar fortnight is regarded a good omen but shaking in the left eye during the same period is regarded as a bad omen. If the bee or dove builds a nest in the house it is regarded as a good omen. A shrill sudden cry of an owl in the twilight is regarded as a bad omen.

#### 3) *Dream*

Dream is thoughts and fancies in sleep. Dream is called *sapun* in Hajong language. It is obviously the Assamese derivation from Sanskrit *svapna*. Among the Hajongs it is a common belief that a pre-dawn dream is a reflection of the coming event. Dreams seen during illness have no effect. Again, if there is

earnest wish to see something or somebody in a dream, such dreams have no. The Hajongs believe that natural phenomena like the occurrence of thunder, lighting, rain, wind, earthquake, etc., are all governed by some spirits. They offer sacrifices to them in order to avert disaster from them.

#### 4) *Religion*

Religion means certain beliefs, rituals and ceremonies. It is a great force and exists in all societies in one form or the other. The hold of religion in the past was very strong but with the advancement of science its hold is decreasing day by day. It is institution which has grip over the people in all civilized societies. In fact, it is very difficult to trace the origin of religion in any single institution or factor. Fear, impersonal character of nature, belief in super natural power, rites and ceremonies, etc., all combined together are accountable for the origin of religion. Difficulty in tracing religion primarily arises because it is as old as man himself. Religion is the recognition of superiority moral and physical, of the collective over the individual. It is a device to secure mental and psychical stability in an individual's life. Rightly does observe M.J. Herskovits, "Religion may be defined as belief in and identification with a greater force or power" .<sup>5</sup> Traditionally the Hajongs, like the other tribes, are animists. Their religion is based on the belief on supernaturalism. They believe the spirits and ghosts which are always hostile to human beings. For them all sorts of sickness, death, calamity and misfortune are caused by the spirits living around them. It is further believed that the spirits possess the same desires food and drinks as the human beings have. In order to fulfil such desires the spirits strike troubles at human beings so that the latter offer sacrifice to the former. Thinking that troubles are caused by the spirits the Hajongs perform various rituals by drinks and animal sacrifice. It cannot precisely be said if the Hajongs were also animals like most of the tribal communities of the North East India in the by - gone days. They, however, now consider themselves to be Hindus, although some of the traditional religious practices are still found to be prevalent.

Religion plays a vital role in the life of the Hajongs. They have been following the Hindus rites and customs since a long time and it is not yet definitely known when the process of such acculturation or Hinduisation began in the social life of the Hajongs. The religion of the Hajongs begins with a primary belief in the existence of the spirits. The religion of them is endowed with the both of faith in benevolence and malevolence. In face the whole universe is divided into a dissemination of benevolent and malevolent forces. All good influence and blessing are caused by benevolent forces and all evil, tragedy and disasters in the world are caused by malevolent influences. Some of their deities are vegetarians and non-vegetarians and at any religious ceremony an offering of animal sacrifice is a very common feature in regard of malevolent deities.

#### 5) *Language*

Hajongs have their own language, but do not have an alphabet. Their spoken language is a mixture of local dialects. Speaking in colloquial Bangla is a common practice among them. The Hajong language was originally a member of the

Tibeto-Burmese group of languages, but later got mixed with Assamese and Bangla. Modern education is being gradually spread in Hajong society. In their life-style, Hajong people maintain, to a large extent, their traditional ethos of simplicity, honesty, and hospitality as well as other common plebeian characteristics. False play and deceit are rare in this society. Like Garos, Hajong people have protested vehemently against injustice, oppression, exploitation and persecution in the past and have histories of rebellion against feudal and imperialist forces. They took part in historic movements like the Hatikheda movement, the Tonk Movement, agitations against Zamindars, and the Tebhaga Movement. Hajongs cremate dead bodies. Usually, after 13 days of death the Shradhha (obsequies) ceremony is performed.

#### 6) *House of the Hajongs*

Hajong villagers are dwelling on high ground preferably near their wetpaddy lands. In constructing their house, they follow neither any definite pattern nor any definite plan. They construct their dwelling houses in cluster in the courtyard on the village's headman called Adhikari. Infact, the houses of the villages are huddled together in disorderly manner. Houses are constructed in such disorderly manner that some are facing east, some are facing west and some are facing south and some are facing north, being hardly any space between two homes. The only prominent house of in village is sometime the house of the Adhikari. On the other hand, Hajong's do have also profound likings for cluster houses allied Para (village). Like Rajbongshis' houses, the original Hajong house was also made of wood, bamboo, reed and thatch. In subsequent time these temporary structures were replaced by timber frame, C.I. Sheet roof and mud plastered all over bamboo frame by some capable families. RCC buildings are still very rare owned by Hajongs in the villages. In the past the Hajongs lived in a congested manner in the villages. In their habitation areas, land was available in abundance to make separate compounds. But instead, they would cluster and huddle up in a narrow patch of land to make houses to live in. This practice may be an indication of primitive fear psychosis of the tribe about enemies and wild animals. The houses, they constructed were also low in height and if there was veranda in a structure, one had to enter the house by bowing down one's head.

The Hajongs use mostly earthen floor unlike the planking or bamboo-split made raised floor used by other tribes. A typical Hajong house consists of some separate structures. One Bhat Ghor (bed cum dining room), one Akhil Ghar (kitchen), one Tongi of Kasri Ghar (dormitory with provision for guests), one Chang Ghar (granary house), one Khola Chang (open granary house to preserve paddy and harvested crops during rainy season), one Dheki Ghar (husking house). The Guli Ghar (cow or cattle shed) is constructed at some distance or in the front side of the compound in a suitable place. There is also a Thakur Ghar in every household to perform daily prayer or worship. There will be separate structure as bed room or rooms if there is married son or daughter, which is called "Jora or Cupa Ghar". The other remarkable feature of Hajong village is that there shall be a Bastuhali or Bastu than in every Hajong village with temples of Bastu deity to worship Kamakshya and Maa-Kali

once in a year in due time. Traditional deities worshipped by the Hajongs : The Hajongs have their own traditional God and Goddesses. The worship of these traditional deities is performed in two ways (a) one class of traditional deities are worshipped the Hajong priest (i.e., tribal priest) called Deoshi for the well-being of the members of the tribe, ) Deities of the other class are worshipped to get rid of various diseases by any individual if he or she is conversant with the method of worship. (ii) The deities incorporated from the Hindu tradition : The deities accepted by the Hajongs from the Hindu tradition are worshipped by the Brahmin priest in accordance with the Hindu modes and practices.

The most important of the deities of this category are- Bastu. Lakshmi, Thcikur.; Kali, Pdgladeo, Baradeo, Bandar deo, Khetra deo and go on. The services of a Brahmin priest are not required for the celebration of the annual rites associated with these deities. A priest i.e., Deoshi offers worships to these deities. The Deoshi is selected by the villagers through an extraordinary test known as Hill Jdgd or BaninJagd. The main function of the Deoshi is to offer sacrifices at the time of annual rites. The usual sacrifices for this category of deities are goats, tortoises, pigeon, duck. Rice beer is also offered to these deities at the time of worship.

No sacrifices are made to the second category of deities, only hhoga consisting rice, fruits and so forth are offered. The rites are performed by a Brahmin priest or alternatively by an Adhikdri, the 116 priestly class of Hajongs. Some such deities are - Siva. Surasvati. Kartika and so on.

The Hajongs observe ceremonial impurity (sewd) during the time of child birth, death and menstrual period of women in a household. The period of ceremonial pollution varies among the Hajongs. In case of child birth, the family members observe ceremonial impurity from five days to a month. In case of death of a child, it is three days but in case of death of an adult member the period of ceremonial impurity varies from ten days to a month.

#### 7) *Rituals*

Rituals are external sides of religion and have sacredness attached to it. It is believed that the rituals are more important than the religion itself because these strengthen one's faith in religion and religious practices. Rituals current among the primitive cultures were based on magical beliefs and these were chiefly intended to enlist supernatural aids to guard against evil. In every society certain ceremony and ritual are observed at the time of marriage, birth as well as death. Rituals, however, are but the implementation of belief. It is an enactment of a myth. Observe D.N. Majumdar and T.N. Madan. "Ritual consists in the observance, according to a prescribed manner, of certain actions designed to establish liason between the performing individual and the supernatural power or powers." The Hajongs believe that sacredness comes out of the performance of prescribed rituals, cleanliness and sanctification. Cotton is also considered sacred and is used in almost all rituals by the Hajongs. In the Hajong society, for any disease medicine is prescribed by the kaviraj but it cannot be kept away by medicine alone, ritual have to be performed by him. The rituals are performed by the individual family as well as by the members

of the village collectively. These rituals aim at achieving economic, social and personal security for the person who performs it. The rituals act as intermediaries between the Hajongs and their deities. The rituals can be classified into three categories- i.e., (1) the household type of rituals which aims at keeping the house sanctified, (2) the apparition type of rituals which aims at recovery from illness and (3) the marriageable type of rituals which aims at keeping the individual sanctified from birth until marriage. These rituals comprise of oral invocations, offerings, divination and sacrifice.

A general idea regarding the rituals of the Hajongs can be had from the following –

- Lakshmi Thakur: economic well-being. April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)
- Kali: to protect human and animals lives. April (Bohag, Assamese month)
- Kani: deo to protect human life for snake bite. August (Saon, Assamese month)
- Madan kam to increase fertility of land. April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)
- Kartika to increase the crops and sons. Oct/Nov. (Kati, Assamese month)
- Bastu to protect the human lives. April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)
- Kamakhya to protect the human and animal lives. April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)
- Baradeo general well-being. April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)
- Pagla deo prayer for rain. No fixed time
- Bandar deo to protect the crops from the monkeys. No fixed time
- Khetra deo to increase fertility of land. April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)

There is a fixed sacred place (the place of ritual) called a Than i.e., altar in every village. On the day of the ritual the villagers along with the priest, one assistant and the singers go to the Than to solemnize it. The villagers carry with them animals to be sacrificed along with other articles of a ritual like cooked rice, rice beer, perched rice, fried rice, curds, puffed rice, sweets, various fruits and prasad (consecrated food). The priest performs the ritual and he utters mantras (prayers) to the accompaniment of dhol and khol. Animal sacrifices are essential in the contexts of these worships. However, the practice of human sacrifice is unknown in their tradition. The following animals, birds as well as fishes are sacrificed in various worships prevalent among the Hajong society, e.g., goat, duck, pigeon, tortoise and magur fish.

The goat meant for sacrifices is first bathed. It is then put into a wooden frame and slaughtered with a big sword by the priest. He chants some mantras at the time of the animal sacrifice.

#### 8) *Festivals and Public celebration*

Festivals means a joyful celebration. It is the external expression of social behaviour. The meaning of festival indicates a season of social mirth when series of performances of music, plays, feast or like honorary celebrations of historical events, birth or death of a hero or god are enacted by a

community. Festivals are associated with religious observances. We may quote here a comment made by William H. Hendelson : "Festivals held by the primitive people consisted of collective magic or religious rites for propitiation of evil spirits and invocation of friendly supernatural powers. The development of agriculture was accompanied by new festivals, also consisting of magical religious rituals, in connection with seasons. It may be mentioned that most of the festivals current in different cultures of the world developed out of magico-ritual practices. Rituals current among the primitive cultures were based on magical beliefs. Most of the societies, whether primitive or modern, have their own festivals and these are celebrated in one form or the other. Festivals celebrated by the Hajongs are influenced by two different trends of religious rites and social usages. While some of their observances and festivals have been influenced by the neighbouring Hindu Bengali or the Assamese, others are the reflection of their own traditional beliefs and customs. The Hajongs have been following the Hindu rites and customs since a long time. The Hajongs celebrate different festivals in the different season round the year. Most of the festivals current among them are associated with agriculture. Festivals celebrated by the Hajongs may broadly be classified under different heads:

- *Seasonal Festivals:* The main features of the festivals are popularity and universality. All festivals are universal in the sense that some people are generally always busy with their day-to-day monotonous work. So they need periodic times of temporary redress from such work and in which they can enjoy themselves together. In this way the tradition of seasonal festivals emerged. People of different States of the world perform different festivals in different seasons. The Hajongs observe a number of seasonal festivals which are generally related to fertility cult. Outlines of a few seasonal festivals observed by them are given below :'
- *Bihu Festival:* The Bihu festivals celebrated in Assam at three different times of the year by the Hajongs and non-tribals are generally seasonal festivals. The Hajongs celebrate three Bihus. Nava Barsha or Rangali Bihu is celebrated by the Hajongs like the Assamese people with some variations here and there on the last day of the month of Chaitra and on First Bohag of Assamese months. This Bihu is called Chaita Sangrani or Chaita Sankranti by them. On the day of Sankranti, the Hajong women sweep and rub the floor with cowdung. The cattle are washed. In the evening cows are worshipped. On the second day the younger ones pay their respects to the older members of the family and pray for the blessings. But, like the Assamese Bihu, performance of dance and song is not essential.

Kati Bihu called as Kiitigasha is celebrated by the Hajongs on the last day of the month of Asvina ( Assamese month). Earthen lamps are lighted in the paddy fields, in the front of main dwelling house, granary, cow-shed and in front of the main gate of the homestead. Some Hajong families light aksa/ivanti in every evening of the month of Kati (7th month of

Assamese calendar) and on the last day of the month, akdshvanti is ended with the performance of Satya Narayan worship. On the Aswinasankranti, afaigura (powder of the fried rice) or feast is arranged.

The winter festival, eg., the Magh Bihu is a festival of enjoyment observed by the Hajongs on the last day of the month of Pith (9th month of Assamese Calendar). The Magh Bihu is called as pushna by them. Arrangement of community feasts with newly harvested rice, cakes, curd and snacks made of rice dominate the festival. Another interesting festival of ThubauMagd like the Mahoho festival of the Assamese people current among the Hajongs is a seasonal festival. It can be said that the original purpose of ThubauMagd is associated with the practice of collecting alms. So the meaning of the term ThubauMagd denotes collecting alms. From the first seeing moon to the full-moon in the month of Puh ( 9th month of the Assamese Calendar), the youths form a party and go house to house in the neighbouring villages and collect rice and paisa. The collected rice is sold and the money is used for feast and dress.

Like the other Hindu people of Assam, Anmti or Ambubdchi is observed by the Hajongs in the second week of the month of Ahum (Assamese month). The ploughing of the land is suspended for the reason that the Hajongs believe the Earth to be a woman and the period from 7th to the 10th Ahara is considered to be period of menstruation of the Mother Earth. During this period if the Earth is hurt in the ways of ploughing and digging the Mother Earth bleed. Widows have to strictly follow a number of taboos. On the day of completion of Ambubachi public grand feasts are arranged.

The Kartika worship is celebrated by the women folk of the Elajong community on the last day of the month of Kati (Assamese month). It is difficult to trace out the origin of this worship. The worship is exclusively confined only to the womenfolk. The men folk are not allowed to participate in this worship. As such this worship may rightly be considered as a feminine worship. Kartika is considered as a god of child giver as well as com deity. Hence Kartika may be called fertility God. A few days before the actual commencement of the festival, on the altar of Tulsi (Basil) plant an old woman performs mock cultivation by tilling a very small plot with the help of two small girls as if they are a pair of bullocks. After ploughing various seeds are sown there. On the day of the worship the idol of Kartika is installed and worshipped at night by the women folk of the village, throughout the whole night along with singing and dancing by the women folk. Bass-puja i.e., bamboo worship is observed by them in the month of Bohag (Assamese 1st month). The bamboo symbolizes the male generative organ. This ceremony is connected with magical rites associated with the fertility cult. Bas-puja, according to a belief current in the Hajong society, is a kind of sex-worshipping. Three newly cut bamboos are used in the performance of this puja which continues for three days like well-known Bhaitheli festival of the Boros. After decorating them with white or red cloths, the bamboos are fixed on the ground and then worshipped. During the entire period of Bas-puja, the young boys dance in rhythms in the accompaniment of the musical instruments along with

singing of the Gitalas. It is interesting to note that the women folk are not allowed to participate in the singing and dancing but they can enjoy the dancing and singing.

Another important festival is chorkhela or chormaga found prevalent among the Hajongs. It begins one or two days ahead of Dewali and continues to 7 days or 9 days. The festival is a combination of dance and music. The content of this genre of songs is more or less similar to that of the Bihu songs. The preparation for chorkhela. Festival is started one and a half or two months ahead of the date of the festival. The youths of village form chorkhela party with 10 to 25 members. These chorkhela troupes go round the village from house to house displaying singing and dancing and continues for 7 to 9 days. The troupes come out of their own villages and do not return to their home halting the nights in different villages. During the time of this festival the groups display the various types of dances and songs such as Lew-tana songs, Tengldgd, Bihu songs, Nao-bhangagan, Lewa-tena dances, Bhanganaoki (dance) and so on. The troupes receive some rice or money in return to their performance. After completion of the festival the troupe's perform Satya Narayan Puja or feast with collection fund. It is regarded this chorkheld festival as a chance to see the future brides or grooms for each other. Hence the youths avail themselves of a chance to look at the young damsels of the village and ascertain their acquaintance through friends for future choice.

Another indigenous festival of Hajongs is nayakhawei or chinikkarcT which bears similarity with nakhowa prevalent among the non Hajong Assamese people. It is observed to mark the new harvest. Similarly, the Hajongs observe this festival in the month or Kdti or first part of the Aghon (Assamese month). During the time of nayakhwd festival, various Gods and Goddesses are worshipped. Feast is a must in the context of this festival.

*Calendric Festivals:* The festivals which are celebrated in different lunar months sankrantis, tithis and days are called calendric festivals. Some festivals such as, Durga-puja, Lakshmi-pujd, Kali-puja, Dewali and so forth celebrated by the Hindus, and the festivals celebrated by the Muslims such as Muharram, Id-Uz-Juha and the festivals observed by the Christians such as Christmas, Good Friday may be called calendric festivals.

The Hajongs observe a few festivals associated with their religion. Which are calendric in nature. A few of them are discussed below. Like the Assamese Hindus the Durga puja occupies an important place among the Hajongs. Due to huge expenditure, the Durga puja is celebrated collectively by them in the month of ( Ahin or Kati (Assamese month). The worship of Durga puja observed by the Hajongs bears similarity with that of the found among the Hindus of Assam or Bengal. The worship is getting popularity by and large among the Hajongs. The menfolk particularly the young generation plays important role in this context.

Another important calenderic festival observed by the Hajongs is Manasd worship which is known as Kali puja. Preparation for Manasa puja is started right from 1st day of the month of Sa'on (Assamese month). On that day the Padma

Purana is taken out and ceremonially placed on an altar for daily recitation. The said Parana is read over in an assembly of the villagers every evening. The Parana shall be completed on the last day of the month of Saon and on that the last worship of the Manasd should be performed collectively. Singing and dancing of the Gitalugahen is essential in the context of Kani-Bisahari worship (i.e., Manasd worship).

On the last day of the month of Saon, Manasa puja is held in every household of the Hajongs. For the worship somewhere in the household, the idol of the Manasa is installed and some individuals use the picture of Manasa drawn in a paper and place it on an altar. One of the main features of the Manasa puja is the sacrifice of various animals or birds such as pigeon, drake, lie-goat, etc. The Kali puja is also collectively observed by the Hajongs on the First Tuesday of Dark-fortnight in the month of Bohag with animals, cow bird's sacrifice. Singing and dancing as well as the playing of musical instrument are also important aspect of Kali puja observed by the Hajongs.

The worship of Bastu deity is one of the remarkable festivals of the Hajongs. This deity is worshipped once in a year, during the month of Bohag. The worship is performed in a fixed sacred place which is called Bastu Than. No idol is installed in this context. An altar is prepared in small miniature hut for Bastu deity. In some places small clay horse and elephant are used in this connection. This horse and elephant bear the trace of Haya-griva temple located at Hajo in the district of Kamrup. Belief goes that originally, they used to live at Hajo and then they migrated from Hajo to other parts of Assam, Meghalaya, and Bengal and so on. Bastu deity is a benevolent deity and they worship this deity for the wellbeing of the Hajong community.

Dol Jatra is celebrated by the Hajongs in the month of Phagun (11th month of Assamese calendar) as a spring festival. This festival continues for three days. Abir i.e., phaku or phagu (red powder), indigo, mud etc., are played freely each other besmearing both men and women, boys and girls. Another aspect of the Dol Jitrci among the Hajongs is singing of Holi songs. A big public fair is held on the occasion of Dol Jatra. Pagia Basin puja is celebrated on the First Thursday of the bright fortnight of the month of Bohag by them once in a year for getting rain profusely at the drought season with sacrifice. The Hajongs celebrate Jatra puja in the Vijaya-dashamithi (i.e., last day of the Durga puja) which is claimed as their indigenous festivals. On the day this festival, all the household materials and furniture are washed and cleansed. The worship aims to well-being of their society. The worship is always associated with singings and dancing.

#### 9) *Food Habits*

Rice is the staple food of the Hajong. It is generally taken with vegetables. Fish is a favourite item of food for them. They do not generally eat pork. They however eat pigeons and goats meat. Chewing raw betel nuts with betel leaves with tobacco is a common practice among the people of Hajong community. Rice beer brewed at home is a favourite drink.

#### 10) *Marriage*

Marriage is accompanied by different types of rites and ceremonies. The Hindu marriage is a social and religious sacrament in which a man and a woman are bound in permanent

relationship for the physical, social and spiritual purpose of sexual pleasure, procreation and observance of dharma. Rightly does observe E.A. Hoebel, "Marriage is the complex of social norms that define and control the relations of a connubial pair to each other, their kinsmen, their offspring and society at large."

As with non-tribal Hindu society of Assam the marriage ceremony is the most important ceremony in the life cycle of the Hajongs and it may rightly be termed as sacramental rite. The marriage ceremony has been playing a significant role in the life and society of the Hajongs. Marriage by negotiation called Subha Vivdh is generally settled through a go-between eg. ghatak or jahu (middle man). The main specialities of this type of marriage are that the selection of partners is made by the fathers or some other guardians of the person to be married. Secondly, a go-between eg. ghatak is appointed to negotiate between the families. Thirdly, the parent or the guardian of the girl is to be paid a nominal amount which varies Rs. 30 to Rs 140 depending on the case of mutual decision as a bride price and it is paid on the date set for marriage. The bride price of the Hajong society is known as Khalti which bears similarity with the society of Dimasa. Fourthly, clan exogamy shall be observed.

As soon as the marriage is settled a party from the boy's village attends a ritual called panisini or guakhowa (eg., bridal) at the residence of the girl in presence of the villagers and the family members. The boy's party entertains them with tea and bettle-nut and also offers ornaments, clothes, oil, etc, meant for the bride. The actual marriage ceremony which continues for two days takes place at an auspicious date taking into consideration of the convenience of both the families. Prior to the celebration of the marriage a friend called Mitar (in the Hajong language) is to be selected for the bridegroom who acts as a witness in the performance of the marriage and he remains a lifelong friend of the married couple. Secondly, in the Hajong community the services of an elderly couple - a husband and a wife - are also needed to serve as "god-father" and "god-mother" in the marriage performed in the traditional way.

The marriage ceremony is held either at the boy's residence or the girl's residence according to the economic position of the family. Generally, it is seen that the marriage takes place at the boy's residence. The parent of the bridegroom with the help of the villagers and the relatives go to the house of the bride to bring her for marriage. The bridegroom party consists of at least two women and some elderly men. If the house of the bride's parent is situated at a distant place, then the bridegroom party has to start to that place one day earlier of the particular date of marriage. The bridegroom's party as well as the bride's party called Darali (in the Hajong language) arrive at the house of the bridegroom along with the bride. As soon as the bride arrives with her party, she is welcomed ceremonially at the gate of the house by the members of the bridegroom's family. Her feet are washed with water by the younger sister or brother of the bridegroom. Then the bride is led to the main house. After staying for some time both the bridegroom as well as the bride are taken to the altar of the yojna which is called mandap (in Hajong language). Both the bridegroom and the bride are

given seats in front of the fire of the yojna facing towards the east. It is the Adhikari i: e the local priest who seats the function of the wedding among a few people of the Hajong society. Of late, there appears to be a tendency among the Hajongs to perform the marriage ceremony in the vedic way by requisitioning the services of Hindu Brahmin as priests. At the very outset the elder brother or elderly person of the bride's relatives prays to God standing before the blazing fire of yajnahuti uttering the mantra. The priest chants the mantras first then he is followed by the elder brother or elderly person of the bride's relatives After the completion of the chanting the elder brother or the elderly person of the bride offers corns to the fire the elder brother or the elderly person of the bride prays to God for blessings of the newly married couple, He declares in presence of all that he has offered (sampradan) the bride to the bridegroom keeping the fire as witness. Then the bride and the bridegroom chant the mantra separately and again jointly under the guidance of the priest. In the end they pray for the blessing of God. After the end of the first day marriage the newly marriage couple has t6o live at newly constructed house called Jaraghar or khuparaghar (in Hajong language) at night.

The second day of the marriage is called Bahi-Bia. On this day the service of the priest is not required. Only all the invitees are to be entertained with food and drinks. The relatives and friends of both the bride and bridegroom offer blessings in the form of presentations of articles, ornaments or cash. In the Hajong marriage the services of five or seven women are very much essential. But they shall not be widowing as well as childless. They are known as ayatisuna help the bride and the bridegroom in all respects of the celebration of the marriage. The most interesting episode in a Hajong marriage is perhaps the continuous singing of marriage songs to the accompaniment of various musical instruments by a group of male singers only

whom they are called Gital. It would be worthwhile to mention that the Hajong women never sing marriage songs.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Hajongs are socially and economically most backward community in the entire North-East India. Socially, they are so backward that they failed to occupy any prominent or influential position in any mainstream society. Even some sections of the Assamese society do not have clear information about the Hajongs. When Hajongs are one of the numerically small tribes of Assam, at the same time, they are lesser known due to lack of comprehensive literature and studies on them. As such, some people of in upper Assam think that the Hajongs are Bangladeshi. It is very unfortunate for the Hajongs that, due to socio-economic and political reasons, the Hajongs were dispersed in different geographical locations which made them weak socially, economically and politically as an ethnic group. Partition of India made a section of Hajongs refugee. Due to political division of this sub-continent, the aboriginal tribe of Assam, the Hajongs had to suffer from torture, deprivation and exploitation. They are treated as the illegally migrated Bangladeshi nationals. Entire Hajong inhabited areas are under flood affected areas. Hajongs are basically agrarian people with agriculture being their main sources of earning livelihood and traditionally, they are found living near the river sides

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