

CHAPTER-VI

IDENTITY CRISIS OF THE HAJONGS

The Hajong tribe is facing acute identity crisis living a displaced refugee life for a long period. Their identity and rich folk-culture, customs and traditions are on the verge of ruin in many parts of the regions. The problem of acculturation is high among the Hajong tribe for which once held rich folk-culture of the tribe is degrading day by day. This obviously had direct impact of displacement on the socio-cultural life of the Hajongs.

In fact, the effects of acculturation can be seen at multiple levels in the Hajong society. It results in changes to cultures, customs, festivals, social institutions, food, cloth and languages. The process from animism to Hinduism of the Hajongs is one of such example. Different worships observed by the Bengali Hindus are observed by the Hajongs and even the impact of Assamese festivals on the Hajongs is extensive. It is found that some traditional worships and festivals are still prevalent, but new generation of Hajongs are ignorant about them. In addition, the system of marriage, the food and dress habits, social customs and rituals have changed to a great extent. The effects of acculturation can be seen at multiple levels in the Hajong society. Thus, the chapter gives a complete picture of the changes mainly in socio-cultural life of the Hajong tribe as a result of displacement causing identity crisis in the Hajong society

6. Religious beliefs of the Hajongs - It is still not clear whether the Hajongs were animists like some of the tribes of North East India in the remote past. Almost all the Hajong claims that they are Hindus by religion, except few Hajongs who have been Christianized recently. In fact, very little is known about the social conditions, customs and beliefs of the Hajongs in their pre-Hinduised days. Biren Hajong (2000) stated that the Hajongs are Hindus but some traditional and tribal worships and beliefs are still found to be prevalent in the Hajong society.¹ Because of this, Hutton (1963) Bailey

¹. Bordoloi, B N 1991, *Tribes of Assam, Part-III*, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Schedules Caste, Gauhati, p.31.

(1960) believes that tribals are not Hindus but are animist.² The existence of some tribal characteristics in the Hajong society bears the evidence that Hajongs were tribal in the remote past. It has already been stated by Chatterjee (1975) that the Hajongs belonged to the Mongoloid group of people³ and sub-tribe of the greater Bodo group of people.

6.1. Process of Hinduisation of the Hajongs- A few informants like Arannya Hajong⁴ stated that “*the process of Hinduisation in religious life among the Hajong took place many centuries ago. It is not a matter of day or month.*” However, it is not known when and how the process of Hinduisation or religious acculturation began in the social life of the Hajongs. W.W. Hunter in his *Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol-V*, stated that the Hajongs did not have any religion in the pre-Hinduised period.⁵ In fact, embracing of Hinduism came not all of a sudden but through a process of reformation. A number of tribal communities of North East India have come to the mainstream of Aryanisation or Hinduisation in different phases of history. For the cause of upliftment in social status and dignity by embracing Hinduism as their religion, tribes like Bodo (Kachari), Rabha, Tiwa, Deuri, Hajong, Ahom, Mikir, Koch etc. relinquished their traditional tribal way of life.

6.2. Impact of Hinduised Kings:-A few Hajong thinkers have argued that the Hajongs were Hinduised since the days of Kumar Bhaskar Verma (595-650 A.D.). There is a prevalent myth among the Hajongs that the process of Aryanization in North East India started since the time of king Norokasura. His son king Bhagadatta, Borahi king Mohamanikya (Mohamaniddar), Koch king Biswa Singha and Malladeva are some of the earliest Hinduised king in the region. However, all these claims lacks documentary support and a bit exaggerated. Kanuram Hajong (2010) a renowned thinker of the present Hajong society stated that the impact of sanskritization cannot be denied on the plain tribes of lower Assam. He asserted that the process of Sanskritization among the Hajongs started since the middle of the 16th century. Though the practice of sanskritization or Aryanisation is an old practice among the other tribes of the region

². Ahuja, Ram (1999, Reprinted 2008), *Society in India: Concepts, Theories and Recent Trends*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp. 277-279.

³. Chatterjee, S K 1975, ' *Kirat Janakriti* ', Calcutta..p.34.

⁴. Interviewee-Arannya Hajong (65), Vill-Tengripar, Po-Hojai, Dist- Nagaon, Assam.

⁵. Hunter, W.W. *Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol.5. p.402.

and was initiated by the Great Koch king Noranarayana with the establishment of temple Kamakhya in 1564 A.D. Consequently, a number of tribes including the Bodos and other Tibeto-Burman groups of people Hinduised in the region. Because of this the Koch kingdom was regarded as the meeting place of both Aryan and Mongoloid cultures. However, Kanuram Hajong stated that to some extent there was scant impact of sanskritization on the Hajong populated areas of Koch kingdom.⁶ Yet he stated that a section of the Hajong tribe was influenced by the wave of sanskritization. This has resulted in the Ariyanisation of some of the traditional tribal idols and beliefs of the Hajongs and known as the Saktas.

6.3. Hajongs are Hinduised Garos:-Another group of thinkers wanted to say that the Hajongs are Hinduised Garos. Because the Hajongs are too close with the Garos in their physical structure. F.A. Saches stated in the District Gazetteer of Mymensing that 'Hajongs are Hindus; but from the side of physical structure they have similarities with the Garos'.⁷ Further E, T. Dalton (1978) observed regarding the racial affinities of the Hajongs and Rabhas as the branches of the Kachari race and their connection with the Garos.⁸ This bears more evidences that Hajongs were somehow connected with the Garos in the remote past and subsequently a seceded away Hinduised section of the Garos. But still it is indistinct when and how the wave of Hinduisation influenced the Garos giving birth to a new section like Hajongs.

6.4. Impact of Bhakti Movement- Many other evidences reveal different facts about the process of Hinduisation of the Hajongs. Even a few scholars wanted asserted that the Hajongs are Hinduised during their stay in East Bengal and was impacted by the Vhaishnava Bhakti Movement started by Chaytinnya Deb of Bengal in the 18th century.⁹ The disciples of Chaytinnya Deb had travelled to the Hajong populated areas of North Mymensing and Sylhet districts of East Bengal and converted them to that religion. This had a revolutionary change in the socio-cultural and religious life of the Hajongs of

⁶. Hajong, K 2010, 'Hajong Sokolor Sanskritiyon Aru Janajatiya Chetana', in Hakasam, U. Rabha (ed) *Assam Sahitya Sabha Patrika*, Chandrakanta Handique Bhawan, Jorhat-1, 64th Year, 4th Issue, p.460.

⁷. Saches, F A, District Gazeeteer of Mymensing, In Gupta, Pramatha, 1963, *Mukti Juddhey Adibasi*, Monisha Granthalaya, Bankim Chatteerjee Street, Kolikata, p.16.

⁸. Dalton, E T 1978, *Tribal History of Eastern India*, New Delhi, p.87.

⁹. Hajong, K. op. cit. p.460.

North Mymensing district. Kanuram Hajong (2010) stated that newly adopted Vhaisnav Bhakti Movement had created a new class known as ‘ Adhikari’ among the Hajongs . Later on, these Adhakaris began to perform the religious ceremonies, festivals, worships, social activities as Purohit (village priest) of the Hajong society. Since then there was a drastic change in the traditional, social-cultural and religious life of the Tibeto-Burman Hajong tribes. Sri Kanuram Hajong (2010) observed five point modifications from the traditional tribalism to Vaishnava , namely, (a) from matrilineal clan (nikini) to Patrilineal clan, which is believed to be the clans of Hindus, (b) worships of Hindu God-Goddess instead tribal idols, (c) giving up rearing and eating of pig and cock, (d) celebrations of birth, death and marriage as per rules of Hindu religion and (e) adoption of Aryan language in place of tribal language.¹⁰ The impact of the Bhakti movement cannot be denied on the Hajongs.

6.5. Impact of Vaisnava Religious Movement of Sankardeva:-It has been found that the impact of the Bhakti movement was more influential on the Hajongs, rather than the Vhaishnava Religious Movement of Sankardeva of Assam. The reason may be that neither Sankardeva nor any of his disciples had travelled to the Hajong concentrated areas of North Mymensing district. However, it has been reported that a small number of Hajongs comprising two small villages, namely, Goalgaon and Kharigaon under the then Garo Hills District, were influenced by the Sankari reformist movement. The Hajongs of both the villages were known as ‘Derkia Hajongs’¹¹ and other Hajongs were prohibited to maintain social relations like marriage, eating, festivals etc. with the Derkia Hajongs. Subsequently, as a result of social reforms movement known as ‘Upanayan’¹² the Derkia Hajongs was brought back and merged with the Hajong society. However, the impact of Vhaishnavite religion preached by Sankardeva cannot be denied. Kanuram Hajong stated that a person named Rakhawal Hajong took active part in spreading the Vhaisnav religion among the Hajongs through Sankardeva written drama ‘Bogasur Badh’, which

¹⁰. Ibid., p.461.

¹¹. Sheikh, E.A. 2000, *Hajong Janoghosti*, Moromi Printers, Goalpara, Assam. P.91.

¹². Ibid.,

is still revered by the Hajong society.¹³ This also shows the impact of Sankardeva on the religious reform movement among the Hajongs.

6.6. Impact of Dominant Bengali Hindu culture:-It is important to mention here that during the British period the inhabitants of the Hajongs were chiefly confined in the Northern regions of undivided Mymensing and Sylhet Districts stretching over from Jamkona (Sylhet District) in the East to Meghadol, Karnijhora and Loachpara of Mymensing district in the West.¹⁴ Majority of the Hajongs believe that the process of religious acculturation took place among the Hajongs as a result of living in close proximity with the dominant Bengali Hindu cultures. The strip tribal land was encircled by the Caste Bengali Hindu population. It also becomes evident that the Hajongs were the subjects or tenants of the Hindu Bengali zaminders of Susang, Durgapur, Sherpur and Koraibari. This relationship between Hajong as subjects and zaminders made them prone to be influenced by the Bengali Hindu culture and who are considered to be more cultured and civilized. W.W. Hunter stated in his Statistical Account of Bengal that,

*“ the Hajongs may called a sub-tribe of greater tribe. They have no separate religion. After living with neighbouring Hindu society, they had adopted and assimilated the rituals and customs of the Hindus. They celebrate the Hindu religious festivals. Presently they are considered as lower caste Hindu community. By profession they are dependent on agriculture, hunting of animals, wood cutting and by selling fire wood”.*¹⁵

This obviously indicates the profound impact of the Bengali Hindu Zaminders during their stay in North Mymensing District. Thinkers from among the Hajongs like Biren Hajong (2000) opined that the zaminders were supposed to have encouraged and induced the Hajongs to observe the Hindu manners and customs.¹⁶ In this context it may be stated that the relationship between Hajongs and Zaminders were based on economy mainly agriculture. According to N. K. Bose (1949) the tribes are being pulled towards the caste system mainly through the agriculture and craft-based

¹³ Hajong, Monoranjon. R 2001, *A Brief History and Culture of the Hajongs*, p.11.

¹⁴ Hajong, B 2000, *The Hajongs and Their Struggle*, Hawakhana, Tura, Meghalaya.p.33.

¹⁵ Hunter, W.W. Statistical Account of Bengal, (Vol-V, p.402), in Gupta, P 1963, *Mukti Juddhey Adibasi*, Monisha Granthalaya, Bankim Chatteerjee Street, Kolikata, p.16.

¹⁶ Ibid. ,pp. 33-34.

economy of the caste society. The higher economy of the Hindus pulled the tribes towards emulating the caste system. From an anthropological point of view, tribes in India appear to be gradually merging with the caste system. Although the Hajongs were considered as untouched and lower strata Hindu by the upper caste Hindus. Accordingly, the Hajongs were Aryansed by reforming their old traditional religious life. Since then the profession of priest, barber introduced in the Hajong society. This caused revolutionary changes and reforms in the Hajong society by relinquishing their own title like 'Hajong' and adopted titles like Roy, Burman, Das, and Sarkar etc.¹⁷. This wave continued since the 18th century among the Hajongs of North Mymensing.

The impact of religious changes from the tribal to the dominant Hindu religion could easily be understood from the work of Subudh Ghosh's, 'Banglar Adivashi' that "*in Bangladesh, there are a few societies who once belonged to the tribes and sub-tribes societies. But at present, there is no sign of tribal and sub-tribal qualities among them as they turned into Hindu in their religious, linguistic, social customs and behaviour. As such, from the anthropological point of view they are Hindu today despite of their being tribal qualities*". The statement obviously indicates the massive acculturation among the Hajongs of Bangladesh towards Hindu religion. Again, the displacement and migration of the Hajongs from the erstwhile East Pakistan have also impact on their religious life.

6.7. Impact on Festivals and Worships- The festivals and worships observed by the Hajongs are influenced by two different trends of religious rites. While some of their religious festivals and observances are influenced by the neighbouring Bengali Hindu culture during their stay in East Bengal and the impact of Assamese culture after they had migrated to Assam in different phases in the wake of the partition of the Indian Sub-Continent. Biren Hajong (2000) stated that the zaminders of East Bengal are supposed to have encouraged and induced the Hajongs to observe the Hindu manners and customs. Because of this different worships observed by the Bengali Hindu people such as Durga, Lakshmi, Kali, Kartik, Manasa, Saraswati pujas are also observed by the Hajongs of

¹⁷ Hajong, P C 2011, 'Hajong Janajati: Samaj Sanskriti', In Rabha, Molina Devi. et.al.(eds.), *Assamar Janajati Aru Sanskriti*, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Chandrakanta Handique Bhawan, Jorhat, pp. 513..

Northern Mymensing district. He observed that the celebration of Durga puja is now widely adopted which was not so popular among the Hajongs before 1960. Even before 1950, the Saraswati Puja was not observed by the Hajongs of Garo Hills District, though it was in vogue among the Hajongs of North Mymensing.¹⁸ The Manasa or Padma Puja (worship of Goddess of Snakes and Reptiles) may be called as one of the main worships of the Hajongs. The worshipping of Manasa is very widespread among the Hajongs of North Mymensing area. It was not too popular among the Hajongs of Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. However, it is ambiguous and difficult to know when and how the Manasa puja became popular among the Hajongs of North Mymensing. Manasa Devi (Goddess) is known as 'Kanideo' among the Hajongs and her worship is called 'Kani puja'¹⁹. The preparation of Manasa puja takes place right from the first day of Sravana, the fourth month of the Bengali calendar. On that day the 'Padma Purana' (lyrical story of Manasa) is taken out for recitation. One of the key elements of this Puja is the sacrifice of various animals or birds such as pigeon, goat etc. A few other worships celebrated by the Bengali Hindu peoples such as Satya Narayan puja (Sole God), Trinath puja (Shiva), Doljatra, Nam Kirta (Hymns to Almighty Hari) are also found worshiped by the Hajongs.

6.8. Influence of Assamese Culture-Besides, the impact of dominant culture on the worships and festivals of the Hajongs could easily be seen from the Assamese culture also. Like the Assamese people, the Bihu festivals like Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu and Kati Bihu are also observed by the Hajongs.²⁰ But the nature and mode of observance of these festivals is different among the Hajongs. Bohag Bihu is celebrated as Chaitra Sankranti, on the last day of the last month of Bengali Year. On that day all the houses and courtyard are plastered with cow dung with a view to purify the house itself. They prepare cake, curd, and other sweets made of rice and serve to each other. The cattle are bathed and in some villages bull fighting and wrestling are held as part of Bohag Bihu. The particular wrestling is called by the Hajongs as 'Humlikhela'.²¹ But like the

¹⁸. Ibid. p.35.

¹⁹. Ibid. p.36.

²⁰. Barthakur, D.R 2003, *The Music and Musical Instruments of North East India*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, pp.45.46.

²¹. Hajong, P.C. op. cit, p.40.

Assamese people, Bihu dance and songs are not performed by the Hajongs. Similarly, Magh Bihu and Kati Bihu are observed by the Hajongs like the Assamese people with certain variations. They observe Magh bihu as Pausha Sankranti or Hangarani and Aswina Sankranti or Katigacha and so on.²²

6.9. Impact of Christianity-It is not clear whether there is any conversion of Hajongs toward Christianity. In the undivided India the Hajongs inhabited in the hilly part of Mymensing and Sylhet district of East Bengal along with Garos, Hudis, Rabhas etc. During the period many of the tribes except Hajongs leaned towards Christianity and majority of them converted to it later on. According to Nikhil Chandra Hajong²³ among all the tribes living in the North East India the Hajongs are the staunch believer in Hinduism. However, during my field study I have found that a few Hajongs did not hesitate to identify themselves as Christians especially in Meghalaya. As per the Census Report 2001 that there are 31,381 Hajongs in the state of Meghalaya, which constitute 1.6 percent of the total population and among them 97.23 percent are Hindus.²⁴This clearly implies that rest 2.73 percent Hajongs assimilated to no other than Christianity.

6.10. Traditional Worships of the Hajongs:- It can not exactly be said if the Hajongs were animist like most of the tribes of North East India. They consider themselves as Hindus, although some of the traditional worship and festivals are found to be prevalent. W.W. Hunter stated that the Hajongs had their own religion in the pre-Hinduised period.²⁵ Biren Hajong (2000) stated that all these traditional worship of Hajong deities are performed in two different ways. One category of deities are worshiped by a 'Deoshi' or 'Nongtang' or village priest for the well being of the society as well as the safer life of the Hajong tribe. The other category of deities is worshiped to get rid of

²². Sarma, N C 2006, *Oral Songs of Tribal Communities of Assam*, Director, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Schedule Caste, Gauhati, p.50.

²³. Interviewee-Horonath Hajong,(35) , S/O- Pantha Ram Hajomg, Sidhabari Camp, Matia,Goalpara, Assam.

²⁴. Census of India, Primary Abstract , Meghalaya. Also in:
Viewed 2 April 2013, <<http://www.academia.edu/t/nuiax/activate/e84a2a31121>>

²⁵. Hunter, W.W. (n.d) Statistical Account of Bengal, vol. 5, p.402.

various diseases from the society.²⁶ A few traditional worships prevalent among the Hajongs are-

6.10.1. Bastu Puja- Bastu Puja is regarded as one of the important traditional worship of the Hajongs. Bastu is a group of deities consists of Bastu, Lakshmi Thakur and Bara Deo. All these deities are chief deities worshiped by the Hajongs. According to the customary beliefs of the Hajongs that Lakshmi Thakur and Bara Deo are the Gods of Wealth and resources.²⁷ It is performed once in a year in a fixed sacred place called 'Bastu Than'. No idol is installed to for worshiping Bastu group of deities. Instead an altar is prepared and installed in a small hut for Bastu deity and Lakshmi Thakur. However, in some places 'Horse' and 'Elephant' made of clay are installed and worshiped for Bastu. Aryanya Hajong wanted to say that the Horse and Elephants represents their age old relationship with the 'Hayagribha' mandir which is located at Hajo in Kamrup District of Assam.²⁸ This also proves once again that the Hajongs have originated in Hajo of Kamrup district and migrated to other nearby places for historical reasons subsequently.

Paresh Chandra Hajong (2011) stated that in some regions along with Bastu group of deities, the Hajongs worship Khetra Deo, Jatra Deo and Bandhar Deo (Monkey deity). To satisfy the Bastu Gods birds and animals like pigeon, tortoise, goat and cock are sacrificed.²⁹ Biren Hajong (2000) also stated that during worshiping of Bastu Puja rice beer are profusely used. Tortoise is sacrificed for Laxmi Thakur, and birds are for Bara Deo, which is the group of 12 unknown deities. Cooked rice and rice beer are also offered to these deities of Bastu.³⁰ He, however admitted that the practice of sacrificing animals, cocks and birds in the Bastu worship have been discontinued as result of greater influence of the Hindus or Brahmmins. But still the traditional practice of Bastu Puja is prevalent among the Hajongs of some regions.

²⁶ Hajong, Biren, op.cit. p.41.

²⁷ Hajong, P C 2011, op.cit. pp. 514-515.

²⁸ Interviewee-Hajong, Aryanya,(60), Tengripar, Nagaon, Assam

²⁹ Hajong P C. op.cit. p. 515.

³⁰ Hajong, B. op.cit.pp.42-43.

6.10.2. Bash-Puja (Bamboo worship)- Worshipping Bamboo or Bash puja is another traditional worship performed by the Hajongs. There are some evidences which indicate that there were practices of Bamboo worshipping in the Pre-Hinduised Hajong society. The celebration of Bash Puja is held in the month of Baisag, the first month of the Assamese year. Three newly cut bamboos are cut by an assemblage of villagers from a particular grove and used in the performance of this worship which continues for three days at a stretch. After decorating them with white and red clothes, the bamboos are fixed on the ground and then worshiped.³¹ According to their traditional believe that the two main bamboos represent two different Gods. There are divergent opinions regarding two Gods among the Hajongs. According to some Hajongs the two bamboos represent Madan and Gopal (Krishna) while some other says that they represent Shiva and Parvati. Besides, a few scholars regard the Bash Puja as a kind of worship to Indra, the King of Gods. Majority scholars, however, believe that it is a kind of sex worship and the two main bamboos represents Madan Kamdev, the sex God.³² This opinion seems to be more logical because of the fact that during the entire celebration period of Bash Puja the young boys dance in rhythms in the tunes of the musical instruments and the songs sung by the Geetals or the professional singers. A few songs are devoted to Gods and Goddesses, the remaining ones are love songs only. Birendranath Dutta also stated that majority of the songs sung in Bash Puja are directed towards young girls. One of the Bash puja songs may be given below-

*'Kanya bhabana kiche tur,
Ami yay cahar
Thak kanya tui baper bari
Ei bara bachar
Basiya thako yadi kanya,
dekha habe ar bachar
ai-re thak kanya tui
oi-bara bachar'*

³¹ . Bordoloi, B N. op.cit, p.32.

³² . Hajong, Paresh. C 2007, *Hajong Loka Sanskriti*, Tribal Research, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Schedule Castes, Jawaharnagar, Guwahati, p.28.

i.e, ' O maiden! Do not be worried,
I am going to town.
O maiden, stay at your father's house
For the period of twelve years
If I live these twelve years
Again I shall meet you
O maiden, please stay these long twelve years'.³³

Sheikh (2012) stated that Bamboo worship was not in practice in the Hajong populated areas of Nolitabari of present Bangladesh. Similarly, in Assam not even a single Hajong populated regions celebrate Bash Puja. He, however, stated that it is celebrated in the Tikrikilla of Garo Hills District, areas of Mechpara of Goalpara and Kamrup district of Assam.

6.10.3. Katka Puja- This is another traditional worship performed by the Hajongs. The Katka puja is also known as Kartik puja to worship God Kartik. It is performed towards the end of the month of Kati (September –October). It is important to mention here that the Katka Puja is celebrated merely by the female members of family. On the day of Puja, the idol of Kartik is installed and worships at night both by young and aged women folks. The women who desire sons have to observe fast and pray to the God Kartik to bestow them with sons. It is held that the God Kartik is regarded as the giver of sons and crops by the Hajongs. Throughout the whole night the women folk spend by singing and dancing Katka songs. After finishing the worship the participants are served with vegetarian food.

6.10.4. Worship of Kamakhya Goddess: - Another traditional worship performed by the Hajongs is the Goddess Kamakhya. The Hajongs are very earnest devotee of Kamakhya and regards Kamakhya as tribal which is situated in the Kamrup district of Assam. The worship of Kamakhya obviously indicates the relationship of the Hajongs with the ancient Kamrup district. The Goddess Kamakhya visibly Hindu deity,

³³. Sarma, N C. op.cit. p.127.

the origin, appearance and importance are quite Non-Aryan and rather tribal.³⁴ Besides, there are instances of Kamakhya temples at Ghusgaon, Mouzakhali in present Bangladesh and at Kharonggiri near Dalu in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. Biren Hajong (2000) stated that the Hajongs visited to the Kamakhya Temple near Netrikona of the Mymensing District. In these temples a grand Puja is offered annually and a large number of goats are sacrificed in the name of Goddess Kamakhya. However, it is very difficult to ascertain as to whether Goddess made their advent first among the tribals like Hajongs or among other Aryan Hindus.

6.11. Traditional Festivals of the Hajongs- The Hajong tribe celebrates numerous traditional festivals and ceremonies round the year. All these festivals indicates the existence of age old indigenous tribal nature among the Hajongs despite the influence of dominant Bengali and Assamese culture. Some of the festivals associated with socio-religious life of the Hajongs are-

6.11.1. Chormaga:- The chormaga or charkhela is the festival of dance and music of the Hajongs. The festival is named charmaga in Northern Mymensing district and charkhela in Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. There are divergent views regarding the traditional practice of the charmaga festivals and it is not yet possible trace out its origin. The festival is performed at the time of festival of Dewali. The preparation for the festivals begins about one or two months ahead of the date of festivals. As a part of the festival the Hajong boys and youths in the village forms charkhela groups consisting of 10 to 25 members. The group visits house to house displaying their music and dance performances ahead of the actual date of festival. Biren Hajong (2000) stated that there are two important ways in performing chormaga. According to one of the system the chorkhela parties perform their music and dance around the village from their homes and return their homes on the same day is called 'Dhawa Maga'. The second system is that the charkhela parties came out their villages and perform music and dances from village to village halting nights in villages.³⁵ The display of performances continues about 4 to 8 days and receives some rice and money in return to their display.

³⁴ Hajong, Biren. op.cit. p.38.

³⁵ Ibid. pp.44.45.

Thus, one of the songs sung in the charkhela festival may be given in Hajong language and translated in English;

*'Nirpani parile
Charkhela ahile
ai ami charkhela yang/
pathin nekha saj nai
charkheladhak parb nai
ai ami charkhela yang'*

i.e, 'Dew drops have fallen. The time of charkhela have come. O mother, we are going to attend the charkhela . But regret fully informs you that, O mother, we have no new dresses to wear and the charkhela is in the last stage'.³⁶

It has already been stated that chormaga is the festival of music and dance associated with various songs of the Hajongs. A few songs of chormaga festival includes Lewa Tana, Jakhamara, Bhanga Nauka (Broken boat), Tengla Gahen, Gopini Gahen, Din Dawa, song etc.³⁷ The Lewa Tana is a festival of love and held during the time of Bihu festival. Like the Assamese Bihu dances and songs, two groups of young boys and girls wearing traditional Hajong costumes dance and sing Lewa Tana Bihu songs. Sharma (2006) stated that both the dances and songs are replete with erotic motifs. As such, he termed these songs and dances as love songs. It becomes obvious from the following song:³⁸

*Gabhoru: 'ling linga gachate ura mau lagiche
Dada magi pari dena khang ki ram ai
Ram dada magi pari dena khang*

*Deka: bar gachani bar mau kamrale ye yaba jiu
taratari ghar bai yang ki ram ai ram
taratari ghar bai yang'*

i.e., Girl: 'The bee hive is on a very high tree
O my beloved, please bring the honey

³⁶. Sarma, N C. op.cit. pp.164-165.

³⁷. Hajong, P C. op.cit.p.519.

³⁸. Sarma, N C. p. 170.

O my beloved, please bring the honey

I will like to taste it.

Boy:

O my lady love,

If I try to bring the hive

From the tall tree,

I shall be stung by the bees

And thus I will die

Hence we should go home now’.

6.11.2. Thubau Maga:- This is another traditional festival of the Hajongs celebrated before the charkhela. Young Hajong boys form Thubau Maga parties and go house to house in the villages to collect rice by singing songs and dance with traditional musical instruments. The collected rice is sold for purchasing new dresses for charkhela. In fact, the festival of Thubau Maga is performed 15 days ahead of the Magh Bihu and the children enjoy the collected fund of Thubau Magha becomes clear from the following song:³⁹

*‘ thubau thubau
thubau maga alug-re
das taka pailung-re
gai kinaiba gelung-re
gaiyer nam taramani
dudh dei othar hari
raja khai praja khai
al dudh phuraya jai
thubau thubau ’*

i.e., The festival of Thubau Magha has come. We have received rupees ten. What shall we do with the amount? We will buy a cow whose name would be Taramani. The cow

³⁹. Ibid. p. 165.

would give eighteen earthen vessels of milk. Both the king and subjects will drink the milk.

6.11.3. Mosomao Kheda:- Mosomao means the driving away the mosquitoes is an important traditional festival of the Hajong tribe. It is celebrated in the evening of the last day of kartika (Bengali month). The children and the young boys of the village make jora (torches) with dried bamboo splits and lighting it up move one place to another inside the dwelling house singing Mosomao songs. The children then proceed to an open field and play with the torches and eventually stick the torches on the ground. The Hajongs believe that by doing this traditional practice the mosquitoes can be driven away. A stanza of Mosomao song reads as:

*Aghon ahe
kati jai
mosomao pora jai ...⁴⁰*

6.11.4. Poila Roa (First Paddy Plantation) Ceremony:- The Poila Roa (First Paddy) Ceremony is another traditional ceremony of the Hajongs. It is observed on the occasion of the first day of transplantation of paddy seedlings. As part of the festivals the Hajong workers sing, dance and play with the mud and smear each other. Besides, on that day a feast is arranged for the workers involved in the plantation work.

Besides the above mentioned traditional worships, the Hajongs also perform Dhan Duka and Kachidhuwa (Paddy harvesting and Sickle Washing ceremony), Brat Puja as mark of the completion of the wet paddy cultivation, Garam Puja when the rice is about to ripe with a view to propitiating Goddess Lakshmi.

6.12. Worship of Evil Spirits by the Hajongs- Worshipping of different evil spirits and other God and Goddesses among the tribals is not something uncommon. Like many other tribes of North East India, the Hajongs also believe in the worships of various evil spirits. The tribes including the Hajongs firmly believe that the evil spirits is responsible for various diseases and causes harm to the people. As such, in order to appease the evil spirits, the Hajongs worships them. Following are some of the evil spirits believed and worshiped by Hajongs are-

⁴⁰. Ibid., p.164.

6.12.1. Moila Deo worship-The traditional belief among the Hajongs is that Moila deo causes weakness and debility to their children. The Moila deo is responsible if a newly born baby dies. Therefore, the spirit is worshipped in order to appease the wrath of the spirit to cure an ailing child. According to their traditional beliefs that the Moila deo is worshipped outside the village in an open space or under a Moina tree (a kind of tree full of thorns and branches). One goat is sacrificed and the meat of the goat is cooked and served to the children present in the worship. The meat of the sacrificed goat is never taken to their home. The Hajongs believe that if the meat of the sacrificed goat is taken back to the home the Moila deo will take shelter to their home.

6.12.2. Jarang Deo- The worshiping of Jarang deo is another evil spirit among the Hajongs. The Hajongs believe that Jorang deo is the cause of vomiting and fever. If he is not worshipped timely the person suffered may die with no delay. Therefore, Jorang deo is worshipped by sacrificing a black goat outside the village during the night hours.

6.12.3. Machang Deo- The Hajongs believe that Machang deo is also influential like the Jorang deo. The traditional belief among the Hajongs is that the evil spirit causes sudden cold and fever. As the spirit stays in water, they prepare an effigy with the paddy straw of the suffered person and wrap a black piece of cloth on the head of the effigy. During evening time the effigy is placed on the river bank to appease the Machang deo.

6.12.4. Pubni Deo worship- The Hajongs also worship Pubni deo as well. It is observed in the month of Baisakha after Bastu Puja once in a year. Preparation of puja begins seven day before the actual worships and no image or idol is installed. One particular place is prepared for dance and singing with fencing in the middle so that men and women can dance separately. For dancing they wear garland of pithas (cake made of rice). One Deoshi (Hajong priest) is required who wear long garland reaching to his knee. During dancing and singing the Deoshi swing and move his garland to and fro. In course of dancing if the garland touches the body of a boy and then girl, the pair is declared adequate to marry. In this way a number of pair of youth is declared to be married of the occasion of Pubni puja. The singing is continued till mid night and eventually they go to the house of Deoshi to participate in the feast.

Biren Hajong (2000) stated that Pubni deo worship has now become obsolete and antiquated. Nowhere it is practiced now. It was observed up to the years of 1925 to 1930 in the villages of Bharugaon, Gandhigaon and Nalkura, all are now in Bangladesh. ⁴¹

6.12.5. Hoila Deo worship- The worship of Hoila deo is another traditional worshipping among the Hajongs. It is similar to Moila deo. According to their traditional belief that if Hoila deo takes shelter in a home the child cries excessively. Even a child may die a premature death if Hoila deo is not appeased by worshipping. As per the rituals the worship is performed under a sheora tree (a tree with small and dense leaves) outside the village. ⁴² The spirit is offered rice powder and atia kola (banana full of big seeds).

6.12.6. Chokdhapa deo- According to the traditional belief of the Hajong society that Chokdhapa deo cause high fever to a baby. To pacify the Chokdhapa deo one cock and one hen are sacrificed for the cure of the suffered baby.

6.12.7. Hudum Deo and Haka Deo worship-It has been found that a number of tribes worshipped God to get rid of droughtiness in their own ways. They worshipped and adopted different ways to appease the rain God for rain. During the time of draught the Hajongs worship Hudum Deo by the women for causing rain. In some regions Haka is worshipped for rain. Similarly, the Hajong also arrange chilly marriage in order to stop excessive rain. It has been stated in the History of Kochbihar (1932) that Hudum was widely prevalent among the Rajbongshis of Koch kingdom or the people of Kamtapur. Because of this Francis Buchanan Hamilton stated that a number of Hajongs of the earlier Rongpur District identified themselves as Rajbonshis. ⁴³

However, a few scholar like Sheikh (2012, p. 102) stated that it is very difficult to find any records about the observance of Hudum deo worship by the Hajongs. Instead they observe Frog Marriage at the time of droughtiness and Chilly

⁴¹. Hajong, B. op.cit. p.49.

⁴². Ibid., p.47.

⁴³. Gupto, P 1963, *Mukti Juddhey Adibasi*, Monisha Granthalaya, Bankim Chatterjee Street, Kolkata, p.16.

Marriage to stop continues rain. This also indicates the acculturation and assimilation of the Hajongs with the dominant Assamese culture.

6.12.8. Daini- Another evil spirit worshipped by the Hajongs is Daini. The Hajongs believe that there are some pre-indications by which one can identify the influence of Daini on a person like excessive talking and try to go to jungle. Besides, the spirit causes general debility to a person. It is worshipped with tortoise, boil fish and some puffed rice.

6.12.9. Nikni Deo worship- In Hajong society the matrilineal relations are called 'Nikini'. The nikini deo is to be worshipped for the wellbeing of the nikinis or clan relatives. As part of the worship a tortoise or in some cases a goat is sacrificed.

Besides, a number of other evil spirits are worshiped by the Hajongs in traditional ways. Some of them are Kalpisacha (sudden illness), Phuldeo(vomiting), Deshpura(fever and vomiting), Bondeo (stomach trouble), Pretni (continuous crying of a baby), Manasa Devi (Goddess) is known as 'Kanideo' among the Hajongs and her worship is called 'Kani puja'.

Thus, the worships and festivals observed by the Hajongs are influenced by two different trends of religious rites and social usages. While some of their festivals and worships were influenced by their neighbouring Hindu Bengalis during their stay in East Bengal. On the other hand, the culture was influenced by the dominant Assamese culture after their displacement from the erstwhile East Pakistan. Despite it has been found the reflection of their own traditional worships and festivals are in vogue in their social life. Majority of the respondents interviewed expressed their inclination towards traditional belief held by the Hajongs. Because of this they may be called as one of the most colourful tribe with their own culture and tradition which obviously find their manifestation in their songs, dances, music fairs and festivals. However, it is found that some new generation of Hajongs are totally ignorant about the traditional religious life of the Hajongs. Sri Pores Chandra Hajong (2011) did not deny the diminishing trends of the traditional festivals and worships of the Hajongs like Pubni Puja. According to him Pubni Puja was once celebrated with pomp and show in the Dashkahania region of Bhari

Gaon, Bharu Goan, Gandhi Gaon, Nolkura, Diplai Para and Jamtol etc. .⁴⁴ At present these worships are almost on the verge of extinction.

6.13. Languages- Like many other tribal communities of North East India, the language of the Hajong tribe are not rich in written literature but not poor in oral literature. They do not have alphabet of their own. The language (dialect) of the Hajong tribe belongs to the Bodo group of the Assam-Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese family.⁴⁵ Umesh Chetia (2008) also agreed that the Hajong language originated mainly from the Bodo language which belongs to Sino-Tibetan speech.⁴⁶ If it is so, Mackenzie (2012 Reprint) stated that Bodo or Boro, the language of the great Kachari race (Koch is merely the tribal name of Kacharis who have given up their native speech and adopted Bengali), under which comes Mech and Rabha (it is doubtful if they differ materially from Kachari) Lalung, Chutiya, Garo with its offshoot Hajong, Tiperah, Mikir is perhaps an outlying member of this group. Their vocabulary is very different but the grammatical structure is said to be similar.⁴⁷ This obviously indicates that the Hajongs are the sub-tribe of the Bodos, the Hajongs had their own language before the Ariyanisation. Ratan Kumar Rai Hajong (1991) believes that the Hajongs had their own language in the distant past. But when and how the language disappeared nobody knows.

In fact, the Hajongs does not have its own scripts. As such, the effect of acculturation could be seen in the language spoken by the Hajongs. It is said that Hajong dialect is more Assamese with considerable influence of Bengali. B.C. Allen (1905) stated that Hajong language is akin to Bengali. Like the religious festivals and festivals, the influence of the dominant Bengali language on the Hajongs cannot be denied. It came to exert influence during their stay at North Mymensing district. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (1951) stated that the Hajongs are the semi-Bengali inhabitants of North-

⁴⁴ Hajong, Paresh Chandra. op.cit. p.522.

⁴⁵ Das, Girinranath 2007, *Documentation of Tribal Language: Hajong* , Directorate of Assam Institute of Research For Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Jawaharnagar, Guwahati, p.5.

⁴⁶ Chetia, Umesh 2008, *Asom Loko Sanskritir Ruprekha*, Offset Printers, Dhemaji, p.151.

⁴⁷ Mackenzie, A 2012(Reprint), *History of the Relation of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal*, Cambridge University Press, p.547.

Mymensing district.⁴⁸ He even called Hajong language a local sub-dialect Western Bhangra or a sub-dialect of Mymensing. Even Prof. P.C. Kar in his 'British Annexation of Garo Hills' has termed the Hajongs as 'veritable Hajongs Bengalis'. Dalton observed that Hajong appear to be identical with the Hojai Kochari. He also observed that they were Hinduised and adopted the language and many of the customs of the Bengalis. Because of this fact thinker like Playfair has supported Dalton in his work 'The Garos'⁴⁹. Thus, the scholars like Chatterjee, Kar and Allen called it as a sub dialect of Bangla. There is possibility that the entire Hajong inhabited areas of East Bengal was encircled by the Bengali speaking people and its influence on the Hajong language cannot be denied. Even Fancis Buchanan Hamilton in his Account of District of Rangpur stated that the Hajongs had adopted Bengali as their language because of lesser numbers of Hajong population.

However, the most scientific study about Hajong language was done by Grierson (1903). For the first time Grierson stated few comments about the Hajong language in his work 'Linguistic Survey of India' which reads as:

*"The Haijong sub-dialect is a corrupt form of Eastern Bengali spoken by members of the Haijong tribe, a Tibeto-Burman clan Haijong has hitherto been described as a Tibeto-Burman Language but the tribe has long abandoned its original form of speech".*⁵⁰

The comment of the Grierson clearly indicated the process of acculturation among the Hajongs. They abandoned their original language known as Tibeto-Burman and adopted a corrupt of Eastern Bengali. As he stated and outlined the demographic areas of the Hajong inhabitations like, "The Haijong tribe settles in the districts of Mymensing and Sylhet, principally in the country at the foot of the Garo Hills".⁵¹

Similarly, A. Mackenzie in Census Report of 1881 stated that 3689 number of Hajongs have returned as Hajongs by race while only 581 are recorded as speaking

⁴⁸. Chatterjee, S. K. op. cit .p.34.

⁴⁹. Hajong, B. op. cit., P.3.

⁵⁰. Grierson, G A 1903, *Linguistic Survey of India (LSI)* Vol. V, pt.1, p.215.

⁵¹. Ibid.,

that language.⁵² This clearly implies the decreasing numbers of Hajong language speaking people. He even stated that the Bengali is usurping the place of Hajongs. Again, Endle (1975) wanted to say that these people (Hajongs) are modern representatives of the ancient Koch-Hajo dynasty of present Goalpara district. The language spoken by the Hajong people is nothing more than a medley of Assamese and Bangla. The total numbers of Hajong people living nearby areas of Garo Hills are 8766.⁵³ Because of this factor F. A. Sachse stated clearly in his Gazetteer of Mymensing that in ancient Koch kingdom maintained a close similarities between Rajbangsi language and the Hajong Language which included the regions of Rajshahi, Kamrup, Goalpara, Kochbihar, Rongpur, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Maldah, Mymensing etc. ⁵⁴ According to Dharendra Narayan Majumdar the Hajong language is a dying language having similarity with Garo and Rabha and a mixture of Bengali and Assamese called Jharuwa (a branch of Goalpuria). ⁵⁵ In conformity with him, Mazumdar (1984) stated that the language they use is called Jharuwa, which is nothing but a dialect of Assamese language.⁵⁶

It has already been stated that Hajongs are the original inhabitants of the Hajo areas of the Kamrup district of Assam. The oral language of the Hajongs is a kind of Kamrupi language and has close relationship with the Assamese language. The influence of Western Kamrupia language and old Assamese literature on the Hajong can also be detected. ⁵⁷ The Assamese pronunciation of 'h' for 's' is practiced in many Hajong speaking regions of North Mymensing, West Garo Hills and in South West Garo Hills. Likewise, Motilal Barman stated that the language spoken by the Hajongs at present as a branch of Kamrupi language.⁵⁸ During their stay in East Bengal the influence of Bengali cannot be denied. Therefore, the language spoken by the Hajongs

⁵². Mackenzie, A 1976, Reprint 1999, *The North East Frontier of India*, p.548.

⁵³. Endle, S 1911, Reprint 1975, *The Kacharis*, Cosmos Publications. Delhi, p.86.

⁵⁴. Datta, Birendranath 1973, *A Study of the Folk Culture of the Goalpara District of Assam*, p16.

⁵⁵. Bulletin of the Anthropological Survey of India. Vol.XVIII, No.2, 1967, pp.79-82.

⁵⁶. Majumdar, D N 1984, 'Hinduised Communities of Western Meghalaya', in L.S. Gassah (ed.) *Garo Hills, Land and People*, New Delhi, p.151.

⁵⁷. Hajong, K 2003, 'Hajong Loko Sanskriti', in Birendranath Dutta (ed.), *Viswakos: Encyclopaedia in Assamese*, Vol.-V, World Literature & Kolk Literature, Chandrakanta Press Pvt. Ltd., Gauhati, pp.343-349.

⁵⁸. Barman, Motilal. 1987, 'Hajong Samaj aru Sanskriti', An Article Published in Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Hajong Unnayan Samity, Lakhimpur, p.40.

appears to be a mixture of Bengali and Assamese (Kamrupi). Besides, the Tibeto-Burman touch in the Hajong language signifies the independent characteristics of the Hajong language. Sing (2001) stated that a lot of words of Kachari and little similarities to Garo languages cannot be denied.⁵⁹ For reference a list of some Hajong vocabularies are cited below Table (6.1)

Table-6.1.

Hajong Vocabularies

Hajong	Assamese	Bengali	English
Moy/Mui	Moi	Ami	I
Toi/Tui	Tumi/Toi	Tumi	You
Mola	Mor	Amar	My
Umla	Teolokor	Tahader	Their
Megh	Boroshun	Megh/ Bristi	Rain
Maia/Aia	Ai	Ma	Mother
Buini	Bhani	Bon	Sister
Bhian	Pua	Prato Kal	Morning
Moi Jaay/ Jang ?	Kot Jowa?	Kothai Jao ?	Where do you go ?

Source:- Hajong, B 2000, *The Hajongs and Their Struggle*, Hawakhana, Tura, Meghalaya, pp.17-18.

During my field survey I have found that all the people used to speak Hajong at their home. However, most recently Assamese language and alphabet has been adopted as their writing language in schools in Assam and Meghalaya. Some respondents said they use more than one language in some situation. Besides, it came into light during interview with new generations of Hajongs (7%) who prefer Roman alphabet to write their own language especially in Meghalaya. A few respondents (2%) belonging to aged groups expressed their preference in Bengali script and 1% remained indifferent. Nevertheless, majority of the Hajong people (90%) intended high internal motivation for using their mother tongue in schools and colleges in Assamese language.

⁵⁹. Sing, R 2001, *Ethnic People of Bangladesh*, A.H. Development Pub. House, Dhaka, p.342.

The following table (6.2) indicates the preferences in using the script to write their language:

Table-6.2.

Response on the Language Script of the Hajongs

Roman	Assamese	Bengali	Don't Know
7%	90%	2%	1%

Source:- Field data generated by investigator.

Rosoraj Hajong asserted that-

“like many other minority community languages in North East India, the Hajong language is threatened by the dominance of Assamese and Bengali and now by the English language. The high rate of illiteracy and other socio-political problems among the Hajongs are responsible for that. Recently few Hajong organizations have been trying their best and accepted Assamese alphabet to write Hajong language”.⁶⁰

In this way Bengali, Assamese (Kamrupi) and Tibeto-Burman touch has been confirmed. Recently there are efforts among the new generations to accept Roman alphabet to write Hajong language remains at its primary stage.

6.14. Social Life of the Hajongs- The social life of the Hajong is full of divergent custom and traditions. Like many other tribes of the North East India, the Hajongs also considers village as the first unit of social structure. It has been found that since time immemorial the Hajongs were involved with agriculture. At the same time, they had to depend on the nature for their house-making materials, food, occupations etc. So, naturally for the convenience of their cultivation, they used to establish their villages near the rivers and forest. In fact, the Hajong villages are placed on high ground preferably near wet paddy lands. The impact of river and forest could be found in their beliefs in different spirits related with rivers and forest. The traditional social structure of the Hajongs were divided into the following divisions-

⁶⁰. Interviewee- Rosoraj Hajong,(25), S/O. Naren Hajong, Sidhabari Camp, Bakaitari, Goalpara, Assam.

6.14.1. Para:-The primary unit of the social strata of the Hajongs is called the Para. The Para consists of a cluster of Hajong houses and is administered by a Goan Bura (Village Headman). In general the Chief man of the village was recognized as Gaon Bora. Maintaining discipline and punishing the culprits was his prime duty. His decision was conclusive in the matter of inclusion and exclusion of a person in the village. The matters beyond the jurisdictions of Goan Bora were sent to the Chief of the Grams. The practice of the post of Goan Bora is still prevalent in a few Hajong villages.

6.14.2. Gram: - The second stratum in the social structure of the Hajongs is known as Gram. A few para together consist of a Gram. The chief of the Gram was called as Moral. The skilled and efficient persons illuminated the post of Moral. He had played a formidable role in resolving different problems of Paras. Sheikh (2012) stated that Moral always delivered his verdict with the consent of the Paras and was responsible to the Goan Boras for his activities. The names of a few Hajong Moral are too much renowned in the social life of the Hajongs. Some of them are-Mona Moral, Maya Moral, Madol Moral (Dhenki, Bangladesh); Gaya Moral, Hikru Fattung Moral, Chandra Moral, Bhengra Moral, Bhupalgiri Moral etc. are important. Francis Bukanon Hamilton also mentioned in the Account of Rangpur that the property of a famous Hajong Moral was sold in the name of the king of Bihar in the Singhi (Singhimari) regions. However, in present day the post of Moral is not in existence except the title Moral in the Hajong society.

6.14.3. Chakla or Juwar: - A chakla or Juwar was formed by the co-ordination of several Grams. The chief of the Chakla was known as Chakladhar or Juwardhar. A few Hajongs opined that the Chief of the Juwar were known as 'Sormoral'. The main duties performed by the Sormorals were to dissocialise a person from the society, if someone is found involved with anti-social activities or felony. Sheikh (2012) stated the existence of few Chakla since ancient times. In the North Bank of the river Brahmaputra the Pora Chakla (Borpeta District) and in the South Bank the Chakli (Goalpara District), Bhati Chakla, Dhoriya Chakla, Shoman Chakla (Bangladesh) are still found in existence. Besides, a few Hajong inhabited areas were named after Juwar like Borhazari Juwar,

Nama Juwar in Meghalaya, Porbhat Juwar in Dhubri District. In present Bangladesh also a few places were titled with the name of Juwar including Laou Chapra, Shantipur, Panchgram, Atghaiya, Bashtala etc.⁶¹ A few reputed Hajongs Juwardar were in existence in earlier days in present Bangladesh may be named as Bini Madhav Juwardhar, Rohini Madhab Juwardar(Laoachpara), Shiv joy Talukdar(Sadhu para) Mohendra Mohan Talukdar(Baligaon) etc.

6.14.4. Porogana:- A Parogana was considered as the supreme administrative organization of the Hajongs. It consists of a number of Juwar and the Chief of the Poroganas was known as the Hajong kings. There are several instances that the Hajong concentrated areas were divided into Poroganas. The subjects of the Poroganas had to pay the tax to the King. A few prominent Poroganas which are found in the Hajong history were Barohazari, Mechpara, Koraibari in India; Dashkahania, Susang and Bongshikunda in Bangladesh. Similarly, the names of a few renowned Hajong King of these Poroganas are found in the Hajong social history. Kamalakanta Hajong of Koraibari, Mahanta Kumar Haijong,, Paghlaraja etc. were prominent among them.

Thus, the traditional administrative structures of the Hajongs were simple and integrated. The existences of these structures were in operation in the pre- independence period in the Hajong inhabited regions of East Bengal and Assam. Except Paras, the other three structures as mentioned in the above are not found in practice especially in the Hajong rehabilitated areas of Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.

6.15. Housing:-The original Hajong house is made of wood, bamboo, reed and thatch. They mostly use earthen floor unlike the other tribes of the North East India who use timber or bamboo-split made and raised floor. The walls are made of split bamboos and plastered with cowdung mixed with mud. The windows are provided very rare in the traditional Hajong houses. The main door is measured not more than 4 x 3 feet.⁶² However, adjacent to the main house there is a veranda either in front or back side of the House. The house is made of two thatched roof on both sides. A traditional Hajong house is placed in Photo Section.

⁶¹ . Sheikh, E.A., op.cit. pp.65-66.

⁶² . Gupto, P., op.cit. p.18.

Besides, a typical Hajong house also consists of some other houses including-

- (i) Bhat Ghor (Bed room cum dining hall);
- (ii) Kasri Ghor (Dormitory with provision for guest);
- (iii) Jora or Khopra Ghor (House of married son or daughter)
- (iv) Akhli Ghor (Kitchen room);
- (v) Chang Ghor (Granary house);
- (vi) Dheki Ghor (Husking house) and
- (vii) Guli Ghor (Cow or cattle shed).⁶³

Biren Hajong (2000) also stated that in the past the Hajongs lived in a congested manner in the village. They cluster and huddle up in a narrow patch of land to make houses. Majumder (1984) stated that the Hajongs neither follow any definite pattern nor any definite plan in constructing the Hajong houses. A few Hajongs like Khorid Chandra Hajong wanted to say that, “ *in earlier days the Hajongs built their houses in the courtyard of the village headman called Adhikari. This had been done in order to protect the villagers from outside attack. The Adhikari did not demand any kind of rent from the people for the construction of houses in his courtyard*”.⁶⁴ This practice has been in vogue since time immemorial. It may be an indication of primitive fear psychosis of the Hajongs from the rival enemies and wild animals.

During my field survey majority of the respondents favoured to construct an Assam Type Pacca house in future and not traditional Hajong house. The traditional Hajong houses were replaced by timber frame instead of bamboo and tin sheet roof in place of thatched roof by some capable Hajong families. Even a few Indira Awaas Yujana (IAY) house were seen in Sidhabari Refugee Camp Bazar areas, Camp-1, Matia of Goalpara, Tengripar of Nagaon, Laskarpara of West Garo Hills Districts. Still we can see a number of traditional Hajong mud plastered houses in their localities. But these traditional houses are losing their entity with the passage of time.

⁶³ Hajong, Biren. op.cit. p.11.

⁶⁴ . Interviewee- Khorid Ch. Hajong (70), Tengripar, Nagaon, Assam.

6.16. Food Habits: - Like many other communities of the North East India, rice is the staple food of the Hajongs. In fact, Hajongs food items may be called as rice centered. Different favoured food items made of rice by the Hajongs are bhat (boiled rice), Chira (perched rice), Muri (fried rice), Khoi (puffed rice), Bukni bhat (Rice with juice), Ding pora and Kazipani (Typical cold drink), Bishi bhat (Binni rice) etc. The fish and meat are favorite items of food for them. Besides, the meat of pigeon, goat, deer, tortoise, are taken by them. In the past, the Hajongs managed these items by fishing and hunting. Likewise, dry fish is the most favorite food item for them. However, Hajongs are not averse to pulse and other vegetables in their daily food items. It is important to mention here that rice-beer is used profusely in all the socio-religious festivals among the tribal communities of the North East India. In that case the Hajongs are the exceptions and they do not use rice-beer in the performance of their rituals.

6.17. Dress: - The Hajongs have their own traditional dresses. Like many other tribes the Hajong men wore home woven piece of cloth called 'Ningti' and later on gamosa and the measure of it is about 5x2 feet. The men folk keep another gamosa on their shoulder which measure about 3x2 feet in length and breadth.⁶⁵ Bordoloi (1991) stated that during winter they use scarf to cover their body and a muffler around their neck called Kampesh.⁶⁶

The Hajong women wear is called 'Patin'. It is also called Rangapatin because the colour of Patin woven mainly in red colour with strips. The Hajong women prepare Patin and other necessary clothes in their traditional loom called Bana. The women cover their upper part of their body with a piece of scarf called Pasra. They never veil their head with scarf. The widows are prohibited to wear red clothes and shakha (bangles) in their hands.

However, the changes in the dress pattern could be noticed during my field visit. Not even a single man was found wearing traditional Hajong dresses. The aged Hajongs use to wear dhoti and shirts or Punjabi. The children and young Hajongs wear shirts and pants. Similarly, with the change of time the women are now wearing

⁶⁵ Gupto, P., op.cit. p.18.

⁶⁶ Bordoloi, B N. op.cit p.38.

Sari and Mekhela. The impact of dominant Assamese and Bengali culture could be noticed in their wearing. The women folk also use blouse to cover the upper part of their body. The women use Patin as their traditional dress during the time of marriage and festivals and even at home. Elderly men folk in the villages also use dhoti, Punjabi and chador. The impact of western dresses in changing the traditional Hajong dresses cannot be denied.

6.18. Ornaments: -Unlike many other tribes of North East India the Hajong men use no ornaments. But the Hajong women use to wear traditional ornaments. The number of traditional ornaments is limited to a few only. Bordoloi (1993) has given a list of traditional Hajong ornaments as:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| (i) Kata Baju | -Armlets made of silver used by women. |
| (ii) Bagh | -Heavy silver made anklets used by women. |
| (iii) Harsara | -Silver made necklace having three rows of designed chains used by women. |
| (iv) Gunjar | -Round and heavy silver made anklets worn by women and makes tinkling sounds when used. |
| (v) Kairu | -Earring made of brass with gold plating worn by women at the ear-lobes. ⁶⁷ |

Besides, the Hajong women also uses silver made nose rings called Nalas and earring called Kanful. Zamila Hajong expressed her opinion about these traditional ornaments that'

*“these ornaments are used profusely by our mother and grandmother. Still we preserved them in our houses. We use them whenever any occasion arises especially during the time of marriage and other ethnic festivals of the Hajongs. We have great liking of these ornaments. They increase the pride of Hajong women in the society”.*⁶⁸

This obviously indicates the regards for their traditions. However, when a

⁶⁷. Ibid p.39.

⁶⁸. Interviewee- Zamila Hajong (57), W/O- Rahanta Hajong, Manmao Kohiarbari Hajong Gaon, Tinsukia, Assam.

few young Hajong girls student were asked about the traditional ornaments, expressed their ignorance and were wearing ornaments with modern design

6.19. Family Structure of the Hajongs- A family is regarded as the first unit of a Hajong village. The traditional Hajong family was formed on maternal line like many other tribes of the North East India. There were drastic changes in the family life of the Hajongs after the process of Hinduisation among them. The family life of the Hajongs and changes in them can be shown as follows-

6.19.1. Daidi-bhagi (Paternal Relationship):- Unlike many other tribes of North East India the Hajongs follows a patrilineal system of kinship and inheritance in present family structure. In fact, the line of patrilineal relationship is called 'daidibhagi' in Hajong society. In ancient Hajo two important sects of family kinships were existence. One is affinal kinship which means that those who are eligible for having share of father's property. The other one is known as Consanguineous Kinship that those who could not claim properties share owing to remote kinship. Both this implies paternal Kinship (Agnatis Kin)⁶⁹ and become non existence now a day.

6.19.2. Niknis: - Before the adoption of the paternal system there was a practice of maternal clan system among the Hajongs. These clans were known as 'Niknis' in the Hajong society. In fact, 'nikni' is a Bodo word which means kinship of mother line.⁷⁰ According to this system the offspring follows the matrilineal identity in the society. The practice of Nikinis of the Hajongs may be compared with the 'Maharis' of the Garos. Like the Mahari system of the Garos, the marriage is strictly prohibited between the same Nikinis in the Hajong society. Even there were instances of death penalties against the breacher of the Nikinis. The stringent rules of Nikinis were too much prevalent in the regions of Nalchakra, Kaitkora (Netrokona) of East Bengal before the partition of the country.⁷¹

During my field investigation I have found that the Nikinis are still enquired at the time of marriage to avoid marriage within the same Nikinis. But I asked

⁶⁹. Sheikh, E A , op.cit. p.62.

⁷⁰. Hajong, Biren. op.cit., p.18.

⁷¹. Sheikh, E.A. op. cit., p.60.

about the names of various Nikinis, they expressed their inability to memorise them except two or three of them. However, it can be ascertained that before the assimilation and Hinduisation of their social system, there were several places or villages based on Nikinis or matrilineal lines. About twenty one of them were found in existence such as (a) Kendegaon, (b) Kachhegaon, (c) Toklegaon, (d) Ghasegaon, (e) Balihata, (f) Kornojhora, (g) Baksegaon, (h) Purakhasia, (i) Purachunga, (j) Kamakhyagaon, (k) Bogorihati, (l) Churabudi, (m) Chandi, (n) Porakhati, (o) Dingjor, (p) Akshigaon, (q) Bagigaon, (r) Katagaon, (s) Simulgaon, (t) Bhoragaon.⁷² At present it would be cumbersome to find out the whereabouts of these old Nikinis. The present generations of Hajongs are unaware about these Nikinis.

However, Seikh (2012) stated that in some places of present Bangladesh traditional Nikini is followed during the time of marriage. According to him the displacement and refugee life of the Hajongs are responsible for the decline of old Nikinis in Assam or in India. D.N. Mazumdar (1984) stated that the Hajongs had once matrilineal clans and due to the adoption of the practice of prohibition of marriage between the kin's of both the paternal and maternal lines, the matrilineal clan organization was perhaps lost sight of long back.⁷³ This obviously shows the lost practice of Nikini and was replaced by the patrilineal relationship after their Hinduisation.

6.19.3. Inheritance- The Hajong follow a patriarchal system in their society. Family is the smallest unit and senior most male member becomes the head of the family. The line of descent is traced through the fathers only. The father holds a more important position than any other members in the family. He is the only decision maker.⁷⁴ After the death of father his son or sons inherit the prosperities. The system of paternal relationship is followed and mostly sought for at the time of their marriage. Bordoloi (1991) stated that as per their customary law, the property of a man having no male issue will be inherited by his nearest male kin and not by his daughter at his death.

⁷². Hajong, Biren, op.cit. p.18.

⁷³. Mazumdar, D.N. op.cit. p. 159.

⁷⁴. Goswami, Bhaskar. J (ed.) 2011, *Tribal Studies*, Annual Research Journal, TRI., Assam Sahitya Sabha, Rangsinha Bhawan, Vol.-1, No-1&2, Diphu, p123.

However, this customary law is found to have been obsolete and a daughter might inherit her father's property at his death if he is sonless. This is perhaps due to their living in close proximity with the Bengali people for centuries together.⁷⁵ It is important to note that the paternal system of inheritance was introduced in the Hajong society during the process of Hinduisation. A few Hajong people wanted to say that Hajongs were divided into six endogamous groups in the past. All these groups were named on Agnatis Kin lines in areas or villages. They are- (a) Harang Poriya, (b) Tepor Poriya, (c) Bhojni Poriya, (d) Manik Poriya, (e) Satodol Poriya, and (f) Manji Poriya. But Subash Hajong⁷⁶ stated that these divisions are no more use in present Hajong society.

6.19.4. Adoption: - In the Hajong society the adoption of a son or daughter is acceptable. The adopted child will have the same right to possess or inherit the property of the adoptee parents. As per the customary laws of the Hajong society the adopted son or daughter will lose his/her identity of original parents and will have no claims over the properties of his original parents. They have to perform all the rituals, rites of the adoptee parents.

6.19.5. Gotra:- It has been found that the system of Gotra was not prevalent among the Hajong tribe. Seikh (2012) stated that the Hajongs divided themselves into different Gotros (clans) after Hinduisation. The Formation of Gotras is always based on religions. It is found that the Hajongs are divided into main six Gotro or divisions as per 'Sama Vedha'. They are (I) Sandillya (II) Parasar (III) Kashayap (IV) Bharadwaj (V) Akulananda and (VI) Achutananda. Besides, N.S. Bishat & T.S. Bankoti (2004) added two more Gotras like Manu and Aliman. They use Hajong, Roy, Das, Sarkar, Burman, Biswas etc. as surname.⁷⁷ A few Hajong scholars wanted to say that the number of clans is more than 26 in number. A number of villages and places were named after the Chief male member of the clans. But the existence of these villages could not be identified in present day. Thus, the adoption of Bengali Hindu clans such as Kashyap, Bharadwaj etc. by the Hajongs cannot be denied.

⁷⁵ Bordoloi, B N. op.cit. pp.24-25.

⁷⁶ Interviewee-Subash Hajong (60), S/O- Moheshwar Hajong, Matia, Goalpara, Assam,

⁷⁷ Bishat, Narendra. S & Bankoti, T,S (ed.) 2004, *Encyclopedic Ethnography of the Himalayan Tribe*, Global Vision Publishing House, Delhi, p.522.

6.19.6. Marriage: - Marriage is a social institution that involves men and women as partners. Different tribal group of people attend different kinds of rituals for establishing their marriage in North East India. Here, the Hajongs are significantly different and enriched with their colourful marriage rituals. In the matter of the marriage the Hajongs follow the clan exogamy. No marriage can take place between a boy and a girl belonging to the same clan since they are considered to be brother and sister.⁷⁸ Likewise, they are much orthodox regarding matter of marriage in the sense that no one is allowed to marry outside his or her community. Even the violation of this traditional law leads to ostracism from the Hajong society. However, the couple can be inducted into the Hajong society provided they give an expiatory feast to the community. Such union is called 'Daipara' and the feast is known as 'Jatiutha Khawa'.⁷⁹

The Hajong marriage has two important parts. The main ceremony is called the 'Bhor bia' which is held at night. The other part of the marriage is known as the 'Basi or Bahi bia' and is performed in the next morning. According to Biren Hajong (2000) the Hajong marriage contains the following important aspects-

(i) Five to seven members selected from the women, having their husband alive, who renders all help to the priest or Adhikari in performing the marriage. These women sound 'uludhwani', an auspicious sound as per Hindu religious rites.

(ii) Selection of Dharam-Bap and Dharam-Maa (religious father and mother) , who perform the ceremony of the marriage and act as a guardian.

(iii) Selection of a 'Mita' who works as a witness in the marriage ceremony and becomes the lifelong friend of the married couple.

(iv) All the formal rites are performed by an Adhikari or by a Hindu Brahmin.

(v) Gitalu and Kirtan paries sing the marriage ceremony songs. In fact, these songs depict the story of Shiva Parvoti, Lakhinder and Behula.

Besides, the Hajong marriage requires some other goods and materials as per the traditional rites of the Hajong society.

6.19.6.1. Kinds of Marriages:-There are three important types of marriages that are found to be prevalent in the Hajong society. They are-

⁷⁸ Bordoloi, B.N. op.cit. p.25.

⁷⁹ Hajong, Biren, op.cit. p.30.

- (i) Subha-Vivah, i.e., negotiated marriage.
- (ii) Hango Marriage, i.e., marriage between a widower and a widow.
- (iii) Daipara Marriage, i.e., marriage by elopement.⁸⁰

6.19.6.2. Khalti (Bride price):- Like many other tribes of North East India the Hajong society do not believe in dowry system. However, as per the customary laws the parents or guardians are to be paid trivial amount as a bride price known as 'Khalti' in Hajong society. It is important to mention here that in Dimasa society the bride price is also called 'Kalti'.⁸¹ But in present day the bride price has been replaced by payment of something to the bridegroom by the parents of the bride. Daughters are given dowry and ornaments at the time of their marriage. Biren Hajong (2000) stated that, "at present, observing the practice of dowry system in other Hindu societies a section of Hajong youth started to demand a high dowry in cash which is creating problem and concern in the Hajong society".⁸² This also shows the impact of replacement of simple traditional bride price of Hajong society into modern dowry system. Even 80 percent of the respondents gave their consent in favour of dowry system.

6.19.6.3. Ghor Jangoi:- In the Hajong society the system of keeping the son-in-law at the residence of his in-laws after the marriage is called Ghor Jangoi. It is important to mention that as per the Hajong traditional social norms the Ghor Jangoi system is not endorsed in the society. However, it has been found that some rich or well to do families have come to keep their son-in-laws in their houses after marriage.

6.19.6.4. Adhikari:-The Hajongs have their own community priest known as 'Adhikari' in the Hajong society. In fact, it is the Adhikari who performs marriage ceremonies, worships and other religious rituals in the Hajong society. The Adhikari initiate people to become his disciple who obey and follow Adhikari as their preceptor and philosopher.⁸³ However, Bordoloi (1991) stated about the changing role of Adhikari was replaced by Hindu Brahmins as priest. According to him there appears to be a tendency among the well-to-do families of the Hajongs to perform the marriage

⁸⁰. Goswami, B J .op.cit. p.123.

⁸¹. Bordoloi, B.N., op.cit. p.25.

⁸². Hajong, Biren, op.cit. p.30.

⁸³. Ibid.p.19.

ceremony in the Vedic way by requisitioning the services of the Hindu Brahmins as priest.

6.19.6.5. Monogamy: - The Hajongs are monogamous from the point of view of marriage. Bordoloi (1991) stated that marrying more than one wife is a taboo and a Hajong having no issues does not go for marrying a second wife even if his first wife permit him to do so. This implies that it is very rare to find a second wife while his first wife is still alive among the Hajongs. However, Biren Hajong (2000) stated that there is no bar for a male member having two or more wives.⁸⁴

6.19.6.6. Divorce and Remarriage: - The practice of divorce and remarriage is prevalent among the Hajongs. It has been informed by majority of the female respondents that polygamy is rare among the Hajongs. However, divorce is allowed by the Hajong society in exceptional cases. Similarly, a widow or divorcee can remarry with the prior approval of the Hajong society. Such a marriage is performed in the traditional way, although ritualistic performances like singing of marriage songs with musical instruments and entertaining lavish food is a taboo in such a marriage.

Thus, in the Hajong marriage system is a sacred social affair with some hard and fast rules. However, there has been a drastic change in the traditional marriage system of the Hajongs. According to Paresh Chandra Hajong (2013) the tough rules relating to the Hajong marriage system of earlier days have been relaxed in recent times. Most recently there are no social hurdles in accepting girls from other's community in the Hajong society.⁸⁵ Because of this Pramatha Gupta (1963) stated that the Hajong marriage system is full of simplicity and normal. They can marry any women of any age except his close relatives.⁸⁶

6.20. Birth: - The Hajongs also observe some rituals at the time of birth of a baby. When the time of delivery is due, a separate room is kept ready and it is in this room the delivery takes place in the presence of midwife. As per traditional beliefs of the Hajongs,

⁸⁴ Hajong, Biren. op.cit. p.31.

⁸⁵ Hajong, P C. 2013, 'Hajong Janaghosti Aru Samaj Sanskriti', *Mahamaya-A Souvenir* Published by Sidhabari/Bakaitari Saranatri Puja Committee on the occasion of Golden Jubilee Celebration, edited by S. Dhalu. Durjay Hajong & Sukanta Bhowmick, p.43.

⁸⁶ Gupta, P., op.cit, p.18.

an iron made knife or a piece of iron is kept under the bed of the mother so that neither the mother nor the child could be harmed by any evil spirit. With the birth of the baby a drop of honey is given into the mouth of the child. From the birth of a baby, a period of defilement is observed which depends on the sex of the baby. In the case of a male child the period is for a week and for a female child it is for five days. At the end of the defilement the parents and close family members of the baby do kamani (shaving work) by a barber and considered to have purified. On the day of kamani all the houses are purified by sprinkling shantijol (holy water).

At the age of 6 or 7 months of the baby, one First Rice Eating ceremony called 'Bhat Chua' is organized by some parents performing worships to the home deities arranging feast for the relatives. Similarly, name giving ceremony of the baby takes place at a later date. When the child grows up and attains about five years of age, the traditional village headman called Adhikar or Gosai (preceptor of the family) initiates the child to the Hajong society by reciting some Mantras in his or her ears.

6.21. Death: - Unlike many other tribes of North East India, the Hajongs practice Hindu rituals in connection with the death of a person. However, a few scholars including S. Endle stated that in earlier days the Hajongs buried the dead bodies instead of cremation. Like the Hindus the Hajongs also believe in the immortality of the souls, life hereafter, rebirth, heaven and hell. After death the death body is brought near a basil plant to wash with turmeric paste. The thumbs of both the hands are tied together with a white thread to prevent any evil spirit in the dead body. Then the body is taken to the cremation ground and burnt in a funeral pyre. A few charred bones are taken and brought home and buried under the basil plant. Besides, offering some food items and a few coins at the cremation site.

Every evening the incense is burnt and lights are lighted where the charred bones are buried under the basil plant in the courtyard. On this occasion a vegetarian meals is prepared by the sons or relatives and shared by those who lit the funeral pyre. These rituals will continue till the performance of the Shradha ceremony or the death ceremony observed on the 11th or the 13th day in the Hindu way. Besides, on the 10th or 12th day a ritual called by the Hajongs as 'Ghatkamani' is performed on the nearest river

bank. The sons of the deceased after shaving their heads take a holy dip in the river and purify themselves.⁸⁷ In this way, the Shraddha ceremony comes to an end with a feast of the villagers and relatives. The Hajongs follows the death ceremonies like the Hindu way with some variations.

6.22. Economic Life of the Hajongs:- Unlike many other tribal communities inhabiting in the hilly regions of the North East India practicing shifting cultivation, the Hajongs are found to be settled cultivators. The primary occupation of the Hajongs is agriculture. Since earlier times the Hajongs are expert in wet cultivation. Because of this a few scholars are of the opinion that the word 'Hajong' emanates from the Garo word 'hajong'. In Garo 'Ha' means 'earth' and 'zong' means 'ants' or 'worms'.⁸⁸ The inner meaning is that the Hajongs are expert in wet-cultivation confined in the plain field.. On the other hand, Garos are not proficient in wet cultivation, since they are habituated in shifting cultivation in hilly areas. According to Biren Hajong (2000), ex-president, Hajong Sahitya Sabha, that' the Hajong in Garo Hills and Garos called them 'Ajong' which means outsider or non-Garo or it means 'earth-worm with an amusing feelings. The word earth-worm obviously compared with the Hajongs. It is a notable feature among the Hajongs that they are not found to undertake the jhum or shifting cultivation on hills like many other tribes of North East India.

The partition of the Indian sub continent had profound impact on the economic life of the Hajongs. Biren Hajong (2000) stated the pre partition life of the Hajongs as,

“ before independence of India the Hajongs were not landless peasants. Eighty per cent (80%) of the Hajongs had their landed properities ranging from 3 acres to more than 1000 acres, owned by one individual. About 80% of them were self sufficient and numbers of helpless poor were very less among the Hajongs. In earlier days they did not go outside in search of jobs for wages. At present the numbers of landless peasants are swelling for economic reasons and this people have to flock to the towns and business centers for their daily jobs” .⁸⁹

⁸⁷. Bordoloi, B, N, op.cit., p.30.

⁸⁸. Ibid., p.21.

⁸⁹. Hajong, Biren, op.cit., p.13.

It has been observed that the Hajongs in some rural areas practice traditional methods of cultivation. About 80 percent of the Hajongs are involved in primitive method of farming. However, a modern method of cultivation is slowly emerging in the Hajong society. The displaced Hajongs lacks enough land for cultivation. The land allotted to the rehabilitated Hajong refugees by the Relief and Rehabilitation Department varied from family to family. For example, the rehabilited Hajongs of Mymensing Kohiar Bari Hajong Gaon of Tinsukia, Assam had been allotted 7 Bighas of land to each family. On the contrary, the Hajongs of Sidha Bari, Matia, Goalpara were allotted half (½) bighas of land to each family. Similarly, the lands allotted to the Hajongs in Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh are in hilly areas are not suitable for wet cultivation. This followed the Hajongs to abandon their traditional occupation like agriculture. Despite, it has been found that many Hajong families involved in cultivation have given their lands to others to be cultivated on Adhiar or Pikas system.

It has been found that both sexes work in the agricultural field equally. The Hajongs women are expert in paddy transplanted. They work as wage earners in the work of paddy transplanted of others. In Tengripar, Nagaon, Assam the Hajong women busy in paddy plantation is captured in photos section. Besides, the Hajong women are equally expert in fishing. The community fishing is still prevalent among the Hajong women with Zakoi (a trap made of bamboo for catching fish). A photo copy of the Hajong women may be shown while fishing in the photo section.

Most importantly, not even a single respondent replied to work as collecting fire wood and selling it in the market, which was once considered as the traditional occupation of the Hajong society. They rear cattle, goat, duck and pigeons. However, as per the customary rules of the Hajong society is that the rearing of pig is strictly prohibited.

Similarly, the traditional occupation of weaving in the family loom of the Hajong women has been grasped by many problems. According to Ajit Hajong that,

“Hajong women are skilled in spinning and weaving. All the clothes required for the family members were produced at the family looms. But due to economic crisis and mainly the impact of other dominant culture the traditional loom is losing its

*importance in the Hajongs society. But still the expert weaving by the Hajong women could be noticed in the rural areas”.*⁹⁰

Thus, in analyzing the socio-cultural background of the Hajongs reveal that over the course of time they have acculturated many traits from other cultures especially Bengali and Assamese cultures. The declining trend of the Hajong populations is a matter of concern for them. They are marginalized and in the category of less than 1% population of the total tribal population in Assam. As per census report of 1991 Hajongs are 0.008 % of the total tribal population in the state of Assam. Likewise, the Census Report 1981 recorded 85 Hajong tribes in the state. The declining trend of the Hajong population in the state of Mizoram is very much clear from the Census Report of 2001, in which only 2 persons returned as male having no female in the state. Similarly, beyond the north east India, the Hajong inhabitations are also recorded in the West Bengal. The census of 1981, recorded 1035 numbers of Hajong tribe in the state and especially in the Jalpaiguri district. The diminishing number of Hajong population are also recorded in the census report of 2001 which reported 597 (334 Males and 263 Females) in the West Bengal. It may be mentioned here that the Hajong tribe which once lived in several parts of West Bengal like Kochbihar, Nodia, Santipur, and Khardah almost they lost their identity. This amply probes that the numerically small size of the Hajongs had to face cultural identity crisis as a result of their displacement.

The changes in human society are inevitable and the Hajongs cannot remain aloof from it. Many deviations are found from their socio-cultural and traditional life. This happened as result of their Hinduisation, although it was gradual and slow. For instance, as it has been stated that the Hajong follow a patrilineal system of kinship in present day society was earlier in matrilineal clan system. Despite all these changes the Hajongs retained their traditional way of life especially in the worships and firm believe in evil spirits. The Hajongs, although numerically small, are one of the most colourful tribes of the North East India with their own traditional customs and rituals which finds their manifestation in their folk cultural songs, dances, worships and festivals.

⁹⁰. Interviewee- Ajit Hajong (55) Moudanga Pather, Nagaon , Assam