

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Hajong Language:

Hajong is the name of a language used by the Hajong, an ethnic tribe. As per information from Wikipedia Encyclopedia (retrieved on 06 March 2015, 08:38 p.m.), Hajong is spoken by more than 175,000 all over the world. The speakers of Hajong are found living in different states of India as well as in some parts of Bangladesh. Apart from other states like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal in India, the number of Hajong speakers are approximately 100,000 in the north eastern state of Assam. There are differences of opinion amongst scholars regarding the Hajong language. The language used by the Hajong people today may be considered as a mixture of Assamese and Bengali (involving different dialects of these languages). The Hajongs of Assam are seen to use a mixture of Kamrupi and Goalparia dialects of the Assamese language in their conversation (R.K. Ray Hajong, 2003). Dr. D. N. Mazumdar (1984) calls it *Jharua* dialect of Assamese. Again, Matilal Barman (1987) regards the Hajong language spoken nowadays as a branch of Kamrupi language (colloquial Assamese spoken in lower Assam). However, Ratan Kumar Ray Hajong (1982) holds that the Hajongs had their own language in the distant past that disappeared in course of time, the certain reasons for which are known to nobody.

While introducing the Hajong language, I would like to mention the observations made by the eminent writer belonging to the Hajong community Sri Paresh Hajong regarding the language in his book entitled *Hajong Bhasa Parisiti*. In '*Prak Parisiti*'

(Preface) of the book, he writes (translation of the original words from Assamese made by myself), "...people of different places express their thoughts and ideas through different sounds and symbols. So, generally, the language of a nation or community is known after their names. India is a small part of the world. Assam is a state of diversity surrounded by streams and rivers, hills and mountains, as well as various languages. 'Hajong' is a small tribe which grows in the lap of the mother of greenery and diversity (Assam). Apart from Assam, the Hajong people are found to live in Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura in India as well as in Bangladesh. ... The sounds and symbols used by them to perform their socio-cultural activities may be called the Hajong language.... Since long past, the Hajongs have been doing their reading and writing through the Eastern scripts - Assamese and Bengali. Without any written document, the historical value of a nation or community cannot survive. So, the existence and features of the Hajong language remained unknown due to the fact that it continued in spoken form only till a few years back.... Due to the extension of education, it is noticed that people have become conscious and interested regarding their concerned languages. The Hajong people are no exception. They have left no stone unturned to revive their spoken language by giving it a written form. This effort started a little bit in the 1960s for the first time. It was in 1965 that the first time a poem, 'Ay Aguya' and a proverb, 'Hajong Xathor' by Sri Paresh Hajong and Sri Sudhan Chandra Hajong respectively were published in Hajong language in the literary magazine named 'Puhar', Vol. I which was published by the *Tikrikilla Mechpara Hajong Samaj Seva Sangha*, a social welfare organization of the Hajongs of Garo Hills District of Meghalaya (formerly the district was included in Assam). This was the first ever effort to publish any writing in the

printed form. Then, the struggle for continuation and improvement of the written form of the Hajong language took a strong role from 1980 only. The efforts of using Hajong in written form since 1980 may be formed in chronological order as the following:

1. Publicity letter of *Uttar Pub Bharat Hajong Unnayan Samiti* (North East India Hajong Development Society), No. Pro-4/80/75-270 dated 24 January, 1981 was published in Hajong language.
2. The report of General Secretary of *Uttar Pub Bharat Hajong Unnayan Samiti* (North East India Hajong Development Society) and *Axom Hajong Rajyik Committee* (Assam Hajong State Committee) submitted in Hajong language in its first and second sessions respectively held in Pankata (Puthimari) of Dhubri district (Assam).
3. Some poems published in Hajong in ‘Chetana’, vol.2: II, the annual mouthpiece (magazine) of *Meghalaya Hajong Kalyan Samiti* (Meghalaya Hajong Welfare Committee) in November, 1984.
4. The report of General Secretary of *Uttar Pub Bharat Hajong Unnayan Samiti* (North East India Hajong Development Society) submitted in Hajong language in its fourteenth session held from 5-7 April, 1985 in Karaigora (Balat), West Khasi Hill District (Meghalaya).
5. The presentations made in Hajong in the open meeting of Hajong Sahitya Sabha session held in Tikrikilla, West Khasi Hill District (Meghalaya), in May, 2000.
6. The article entitled ‘Hajong Bhasa Sahityala Janma aru Bikash’ by Sri Biren Hajong written in Hajong, published in ‘RAO’ (Voice), Vol. 8, September, 2000.”

1.1.1. Classification of Hajong:

Grierson classifies Hajong as an Indo Aryan (IA) language and considers it as a sub-dialect of Bengali. In this regard, his remarks may be worth mentionable as he writes, “This is corrupt form of Eastern Bengali spoken by the members of the Haijong (often incorrectly called Hajong) tribe, a Tibeto-Burman clan settled in the districts of Mymensing and Sylhet, principally in the country at the foot of the Garo Hills. Haijong (or Hajong) has hitherto been described as a Tibeto- Burman language, but the tribe has long abandoned its original form of speech” (LSI, vol.5 pt-1).

As per the Ethnologue, Hajong is classified as Indo-European > Indo- Iranian > Indo-Aryan > Eastern zone > Bengali- Assamese (Gordon 2005).

Some scholars, however, argue that Hajong belongs to Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman (TB) language family. Hajong used to be a Tibeto-Burman language but, interestingly, it has now shifted to being much more closely related to Bangla and to Assamese (Breton 1997, as cited in Grimes 440); therefore, it has been categorized as “Indo-Aryan, Eastern zone, Bengali-Assamese” (Grimes 2000). The other languages belonging to the Bodo group are spoken by the following tribes- Bodo, Kachari, Rabha, Mech, Garo and Tripuri etc. But, the language spoken by the Hajongs had taken its present changed structure from its old form passing through various ups and downs and through different circumstances (Hajong, R. C., 2009). So, it is seen that the form of Hajong has much structural differences with the other language of the Bodo group. However, certain grammatical similarities such as case marking can be found between Hajong and some Tibeto-Burman (TB) languages spoken in the same geographical

location (Phillips 2011). The author further writes, “Although it is classified as Indo-Aryan (IA), several Hajong case markers are not cognate with those of the large neighbouring IA languages, Bangla and Asamiya. This raises the question of the origin of these case markers. Some authors have speculated that the Hajong language has a Tibeto-Burman (TB) sub-stratum. The Hajong people are ethnically and culturally closer to the surrounding Tibeto-Burman people groups such as Garo and Koch than to the Bengali population. (For example, the Hajong traditional women’s dress (pathin) is identical in pattern and the way it is worn to the Koch traditional dress.) The cultural and linguistic similarities could be due either to a common origin or to a mutual influence between the groups who have been living in proximity for generations.” (Phillips 2011).

The Hajongs mainly belong to the Mongoloid group of people whose languages are generally included in the TB language family. But due to the deep influence of the Aryan culture, the original structure of their language had been changed to some extent. Today, there are influences of Kamrupi and Goalparia (dialects of Assamese, colloquial) noticed in the Hajong language (Hajong, R. C. 2009).

R. K. Ray Hajong writes that the language used by the Hajong people is observed to be a mixture of Assamese and Bangla language. But it cannot be certainly said when and where it first started to be used. In fact, the language used by the Hajong people today is seemed to be not their original language. Referring to the book named ‘North East Frontier of India’ written by the great scholar A. Mackenzie says that the Hajongs had their own language which is out of existence or dead due to the absence of effort to preserve it. (Hajong, R. K. 2003).

Dr. Upen Rabha Hakacham in his book *Axomiya aru Axomor Bhaxa-Upabhaxa* (2014: p 96), referring to Dr. S. K. Chatterjee writes that the Hajong people had gradually forgotten their original TB language and had become the receiver and carrier of the neo-anthropological (*nrigustiya*) dialect which is full of TB elements such as phrase, idioms and also has much similarity with the language used by the three poets who exercised their poetic works under the patronage of the *Kachari* king. He further mentions that although its form and sentence structure are related to Assamese and Sanskrit-origin languages, Hajong has its greatness due to the non-Aryan relative pronouns, household materials, other cultural items and names of festivals along with its own unique sound system. There is the influence of various sub-dialects of Hajong scattered in different Hajong dominant regions, but in the folk songs i.e. Lewatana song, Tengla gahen, Bhangana nauka, Pabani, Gupani gahen, Bhaluk maga gahen, Thubu maga, Jakhamara, Ruwalaga/Gusipata, Hudum khela, Hadudu, Gitalu gahen, Sawa bujani gahen etc. that are related with the *Chorkhela* festival, there is the presence of the substratum level use of the TB origin Hajong language (--- p 96).

1.1.2. Linguistic Affinity:

“Hajong is classified as an Indo-Aryan language. It has some degree of similarity with Assamese and Bengali, the two IA languages spoken in the region” (Guts 2012). Our study reveals that Hajong spoken in the present day has affinity with both Assamese and Bengali. The following examples are given in support of the above observation (Table-1).

Table-1: Hajong words similar in meaning/pronunciation with Assamese or Bengali

<u>Hajong Word</u>	<u>English Meaning</u>	<u>Assamese Word</u>	<u>Bengali Word</u>
<i>/gas/</i>	tree	<i>/gɔs/</i>	<i>/ga:s/</i>
<i>/mas/</i>	fish	<i>/ma:s/</i>	<i>/ma:s/</i>
<i>/iŋrezi/</i>	English	<i>/iŋrazi/</i>	<i>/iŋrezi/</i>
<i>/t^handa/</i>	cold	<i>/t^handa/</i>	<i>/t^handa/</i>
<i>/ek/</i>	one	<i>/ek/</i>	<i>/ek/</i>
<i>/dos/</i>	ten	<i>/dɔh/</i>	<i>/dof/</i>

The words in the above table show the similarities among the three languages i.e. Hajong, Assamese and Bengali in respect of meaning or pronunciation. The *italicized* words indicate affinity in respect of pronunciation. Thus, it has been observed that in regard to either pronunciation or meaning or both some Hajong words are more identical to Assamese while some are more identical to Bengali.

1.1.3. Dissimilarities with Assamese and Bengali:

Although most of the Hajong words point towards similarities in case of either pronunciation or meaning or both with Assamese and Bengali, there are many words which are a little or totally different from these languages. Some such Hajong words are shown below (Table-2).

Table-2: Hajong words different in meaning/pronunciation from Assamese or Bengali

<u>Hajong Word</u>	<u>English Meaning</u>	<u>Assamese Word</u>	<u>Bengali Word</u>
/kuwlu/	cloudy	/dawaria/	/meg ^h la/
/gulumgulum/	smoky	/d ^h uoli-kuoli/	/d ^h uwa ^h fa/
/masaŋ/	meat	/maŋxɔ/	/maŋʃɔ/
/telka/	cold	/t ^h anda/	/t ^h anda/

1.1.4. Dialects of Hajong:

Some varieties in the use of the same language have been observed village wise as well as area wise. In other words, if we visit from one village to another or one region to another, the differences in the spoken form of Hajong are noticeable like any other language. According to geographical location of the Hajong people, it is noticed that their language has five dialects such as- (1) Dahkahani, (2) Koraihari (Char Ana), (3) Susong, (4) Barohajari (Kalu-Malu Para) and (5) Mechpara. However, some have divided the regions as per the varieties into eight, the three others apart from the above are- Koraihari (Baro Ana), Lahar and Bangsikunda. (Hajong, P.C. 2002).

The areas inhabited by the Hajongs as per the above mentioned linguistic divisions include villages as shown in the list below.

Mechpara: It includes Suwarkona, Laskar Para, Dhela Para, Abhiram Para, Dabang Gaon, Panila Gaon, Balu Para, Beru Para, Kathalhari, Bangal Kata, and Dewan Kata.

Barohajari: This area includes the following villages i.e. Dolguri, Sapalguri, Bandabok, Noyapara, Babapara, Ghulipara, Balachanda, Bhajamara, Dalangsa, Kalamati, Tilatari, and Ketekipara. This area is also known as Aygor area.

Karaibari (Char Ana): This region covers a large number of villages such as, Chelapara, Duphrai gaon, Kathuli gaon, Satahari, Kase gaon, Kuli gaon, Kole gaon, Mondol para (No.1), Mondol para (No.2), Morasali (No. 1), Morasali (No. 2), Bilpara, Zikzak, Phulbari, Bhoyrakupi, Zhaupara, Rakhaldubi, Zigatol, Guphrai gaon, Nunmati, Bagh hana, Korai Tula, Pagli para, Gorbhoy, Dahaghuli, Kasubari, Khesanpara, Kudal dhua, Dhorom Church, Kale gaon, Ulubari, Katholbari, Bhasanpara, Silbari, Ghilajhuri, Milapara, Kendrokuna, Amtuli, Noyapara, Malmuwa, Tarapara, Bilduba, Kawa ha gra, Dubajani, Gonapara, Purakusa, Katabari, Zhaukapara, and Bhatua gaon.

Karaibari (Baro Ana): It includes the following villages- Shulguri, Shipra gaon, Batajur, Samati, Morkuna, Borjupara, Murkhuti, Marpara, Jambari, Kharu gaon, Betasing, Khalpara, Nirgini, Kasara, Kherbari, Joyfar, Dew Kachari, Sukrakuna, Dakupara, Din juwar, Oiduba, Monjuri, Saultabari, Bhous bathan, Sap thuka, Ling Ghopa, Kong para, Garodoba, Tanga bari, Kathal bari, Rangatari, Bairagi para, Balu para, Naga para, Ghopa para, Andarkona, Ranagiri, Sompotgiri, Puthimari, Gandhipara, Bansal, Pankata, Dunajani, Puskuni para, Dolbari, Dhapa bil, Dhupguri, Birupara, Jekabari, Kuralbhanga, Bandorpani, Tikasali, Kalapara, Naribhita, Salibhui, Dipkaipara, Bena bazaar, Sewraguri, Balapara, Dhanuwa, Jauli, Tang gaon, Kalu para, Kharseng para, Rangtha para, Bhalikmari, Marok, Samaguri, and Gari gaon.

Dashkahani: Dalu, Halsati, Suipani, Diphlai para, Jatrakona, Shivbari, Gashua para, Chand bhui, Kapashi para, Bata para, and Barenga para are the places under this region.

Susong: This area includes the villages namely Mahish khula, Mohadeu, Rangra damuk, Baghmara, Tarapra, Netrokona, and Kapasi para.

Lahar: Balat and a few small villages in Khasi- Jayantia Hills fall under this region.

Bangshi Kunda: The places under this region fall in Bangladesh.

The above distribution of places according to regional variations of the Hajong language has been done roughly by Paresh Hajong excluding the places in Bangladesh (Hajong, P .C. 2002 p. 181-183). However, no systematic classification has been done so far regarding regional varieties of spoken Hajong in different states of India. In this regard, I had conducted a pilot survey in some Hajong areas of Assam. This survey includes Nagaon, Karbi Anglong, Sonitpur, North Lakhimpur and Goalpara districts. As per information collected from local informants, the regional linguistic variations appear as enlisted in the following table: (Table-3)

Table-3: Regional varieties of Hajong language spoken in Assam

District	Place/ village	Hajong dialect spoken
Nagaon	Derapathar, Lalmati	Dashkahani
	Tengripar(Hojai), Debasthan, Matipahar, Rajagaon, Alongiri,	Susong
Karbi Anglong	Budbar, Howraghat, Hamren, Tumpreng	Susong
Sonitpur	Dholaibil	Dashkahania
North Lakhimpur	Na-Kari, Moidumi, Sauldhua,	Dashkahania
Dhemaji	Joyrampur, Baro-bhuyan, Sankarpur, Darangpara, Solagaon, Bhangapara, Krishnapur, Srirampur, Kashinathpur, Aborguli, Harinathpur, Nalbari, Ejarbari, Panbari, Muktar, Sunapur,	Dashkahania
Kamrup	Bonda Colony, Bamuni camp, Boko,	Dashkahani
Goalpara	Matia, Sidhabari, Dhupdhora, Khardang, Dhaigaon, Dubapara, Harimura, Dhamor,	Dashkahani
Goalpara	Medhipara, Lakhipur Bhai-Bhanipara, Sisapani, Manas camp, Daranggiri, Suwarkuna, Beswarkuna	Dashkahani

Although these regional varieties have been found, no dialect seems to deviate much from the mainstream Hajong language. Hence, it may be assumed that Hajong has prevalently existed amongst the Hajong tribe as a single language carrying their identity (Hajong, R. C. 2009).

Regional variety in the Hajong language is found in its spoken form only. In written form a mixture of all the varieties is used and there is no standard variety. In the North East Indian region, Assamese script is used to write in Hajong while Bangla script is used in West Bengal and Bangladesh.

In this context, it may be necessary to have a glimpse on the following aspects- racial affinity, historical background, population statistics, culture, economy, socio-political status, language status etc. of the Hajong people living in Assam.

1.2. The Hajong People:

The Hajong people are found living in different states of India as well as in some parts of Bangladesh. Apart from other states like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal in India, the number of Hajongs are approximately 100,000 in the north eastern state of Assam. As per reports, the total number of Hajong in both Bangladesh and India vary from 70,000 to 135,000 (*Hajang of Bangladesh*). However, it is clear that the majority of Hajongs now reside on the Indian side, “as a majority of the tribe migrated to India after partition of the Indian sub-continent” (The Bangladesh Observer: *Culture of the Hajong Tribe*). Some aspects of these people are discussed in brief in the following sub-heads.

1.2.1. Racial Affinity:

There have been controversies about the racial affinity of the Hajong. Scholars are of divergent views on the subject, and therefore it is very difficult to ascertain about their racial affinity.

Colonel Dalton regards the Hajongs as one of the branches of the Kacharis. He says, “The Rabha and Hajongs of Gowalpara District are branches of the Kachari race and are connected with the Garos” (Dalton, E.T. 1987, p-87). He further mentions, “The Hajongs appear to be identical with Hajai Kacharis of North Cachar...” (Dalton, E. T. 1987 p-87). However, Dalton does not put any reason in support of his above remarks. In this connection, Dr. Bordoloi writes, “Colonel Dalton, of course, does not mention in what way the Hajongs and the *Hozais* of the North Cachar Hills are identical. Hojai or *Hojaisa* is one of forty male clans of the *Dimasa Kacharis* called ‘Semphong’. In their material culture we do not find any identical features between the members of Hojaisa clan of the Dimasa Kacharis and the Hajongs. Colonel Dalton has used the verb ‘appear’ in his statement leaving enough scope for further probe in this respect” (Bordoloi, B. N. 1991).

Again, Mr. L. A. Waddell considers the Hajongs as the primitive Kachari of the hilly tracts (Waddell, L.A. 1975 p-4).

According to Dhananjoy Rabha, the Hajong belongs to the heredity of those *Rabhas* who were hired for ploughing in the Someswari Valley by the king of the ‘Atongs’ named Huseng (Rabha, D. 1998 p-22).

In the Census Report of 1891 the Hajongs have been referred to as a separate tribal ethnic group and their racial affinity to the Garos and the Kacharis has also been referred to (Mazumder, D. N. 1984 p-151). But such reference to the racial affinity amongst these tribes is not above doubt. Such doubt has been expressed in the remarks of eminent scholar of tribal studies like Dr. B. N. Bordoloi who writes, "... It is, however, very doubtful when the two communities who are poles apart from the point of view of lineage (while the Garos are matrilineal the Hajongs are patrilineal) could have close racial affinity apart from the fact that in other socio-cultural and religious aspects also there are differences rather than likeness between the Garos and the Hajongs. Since the Hajongs and the Garos have been living in close proximity from time immemorial, one can easily understand why some scholars try to establish racial affinity between the two ethnic groups" (Bordoloi, B. N. 1991 p-22).

R. K. Ray Hajong remarks that the Hajongs like to introduce themselves as *Kshatriyas* (Ray Hajong, R. K. 1982) to which Dr. B. N. Bordoloi comments, "... Neither the *Garos* nor the *Kacharis* consider themselves as such" (Bordoloi, B. N. 1991).

The above opinions do not give any definite base to conclude regarding the racial affinity of the Hajong people and it further seems to intensify the doubt concerning the matter. In this connection, we may cite the observation made by Dr. B. N. Bordoloi- "Whatever might be their racial affinity, it is certain that like the other tribes of North East India, the Hajongs are also Mongoloids. With the successive hordes of different ethnic groups, the Hajongs perhaps entered into this part of the country in the long past and moved towards south-east and finally settled in the Garo Hills and adjoining areas which are now a part of present Bangladesh" (Bordoloi, B.N. 1991).

1.2.2. A Historical overview:

The history of Hajong is not free from controversy. Scholars and even the Hajong people themselves do not agree to their history. Some say that the Hajong originated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and then migrated to the northern areas of Bangladesh and into India (*Hajang of Bangladesh* n.d.). According to another account, the Hajong came from Tibet as descendents of the Kachari people and settled in the Kamrup area of Assam state for many years (The Bangladesh Observer: *Culture of the Hajong Tribe*). Current-day Kamrup district of Assam adjacent to Nalbari district, is referred to by one Hajong author as he writes “The Hajongs claim their ancestral home was in Hajo area of present Nalbari district of Assam” (Hajong: 2000). He goes on to explain that some Mongoloid tribes came to power in that area in the mid-1400s. They were under 12 Koch chiefs, the most powerful of whom was Hajo. A grandson of Hajo founded the Koch kingdom, converted to Hinduism, and took the name Rajbongshi. Many people of the area apparently did the same, while others became Muslim. Those remaining faithful to Hajo began to call themselves “Hajbongsis,” which in time became “Hajong” (Hajong 2000). From the Kamrup and Nalbari areas of Assam, the Hajong spread to surrounding areas; it is not clear when or why they moved. It may have been in the early 1600s when Raghudev and his son controlled a large area or may have been during the Burmese invasion when people of the area were tortured (Hajong 2000). It may have been due to a major natural disaster that forced people to relocate (The Bangladesh Observer: *Culture of the Hajong Tribe*). Whatever the cause, it seems clear that some event or series of events compelled the Hajong to move to other areas of Assam and to Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and northern Bangladesh.

The ethnic tribe called Hajong lives in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and West Bengal in India and the Mymensing district in Bangladesh. The Hajongs are indigenous people of Northeast India as well as of Bangladesh. Some of them have been living in Changlang and Maio districts of Arunachal Pradesh since 1965. As per census report of 1891, the Hajongs are recognized as one of the indigenous people of North-East India. After 1947, the Hajongs are recognized as scheduled tribe in Garo hills autonomous district (Meghalaya, India) and in the greater Mymensingh district of then East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). Since 1947 this area was declared as a partially excluded area. After 1947 the Hajong people had to suffer a lot due to the tyrannical rule of the government of Pakistan. The soldiers of Pakistan often used to attack the Hajong villages and tortured the people brutally. They arrested the Hajong people without any reason and sent them to the jail many of whom never returned. Thus a lot of Hajong people especially youths were missing for ever. It is reported that the soldiers used helicopter too for searching the Hajong youths. In this way, they created a horrible situation in the Hajong area. On the other hand, the Pakistan Government allowed settlement of other people in the Hajong areas who started to occupy their farmland, cattle and farming garden. These people started robbing, kidnapping and thieving in the Hajong area. At last, many Hajong people left the country for ever. They scattered in different places of India. They were sent to Assam, Dandakaranna (Madhya Pradesh), Arunachal and Andaman Island as refugees.

From anthropological point of view, the Hajongs belong to the great Bodo family of Indo-mongoloid tribes who at one time spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley, North Bengal up to Bihar, Bangladesh, Tripura and thus formed a solid block in

North Eastern-India. It may be mentioned that the term 'Bodo' in general covers all the Tibeto-Burman speaking groups of Sino-Tibetan origin. The generic name Bodo was first applied by Hodgson in 1846. According to Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, 'Bod' is the earlier name of Tibet. The people who entered through Brahmaputra valley to this part of land are called Bodo. It denotes their earlier homeland and this word includes a large group of people who are the speaker of the Tibeto-Burman speeches of north-east India.

According to historians and scholars, the people of Indo-Mongoloid origin entered the north-eastern region in the new Stone Age. But they did not do so at the single point of time through the same route. They came here through different borders and followed different roads from the north-east and north-west.

The Hajong entered this area through the remote part of north western road of Assam. In course of their migration, the Hajong settled in the north of Coch Behar and the border of Bhutan for a few centuries where a place named Hajong is still there. Later, they shifted to the south bank of Brahmaputra in the old Goalpara district. After coming to this area, they spread out in different directions.

The Hajongs are found to settle in the south western part of Brahmaputra valley, in lower west southern part of Meghalaya and northern part of greater Mymensingh and Sylhet. In this way they set up their permanent settlement in different places of vast area extending from Mechpara, Barohajai (next named barohajari), Koroibari (South West Assam), West Meghalaya, Mohendragong, Doskahonia, Susong pargana and Bangshikunda (Sylhet).

According to M. Martin, the Hajongs are the original inhabitants and their chief was its proprietor. The earlier name of the Hajong was Badu Hazon (Boro Hazon) while the name of their territory was Badu Tai or Boro Hazai which later on was called Baro Hazari. This territory was situated in the west of old Goalpara district on the south bank of Brahmaputra and the foot hills area of western Garo hills and extended towards Mymensingh to the south.

1.3. Origin of the word ‘Hajong’:

As there is no adequate literature, history or mythology of their own, it is difficult to know them accurately on the basis of data. It has also become a mystery how and why the tribe is known as Hajong. Yet, some information regarding this has been found in the writings of some authors which provide opportunity to speculate the meaning of the term ‘Hajong’

Scholars like Mr. Dalton, Rev. S. Endwell, Mr. L. and Ashraf Ali Siddique put that the word ‘Hajong’ comes from ‘Bodo Haju’ which means ‘high land’. It might have originated from ‘hasu+ong’ which means ‘the inhabitants of a high land’ in Rabha language (Hajong, N. M. 2009). Colonel Dalton considers the Hajong as one of the “branches of the Kachari race and connected with the Garos” (Dalton, E. T. 1978).

Some others argue that the term ‘Hajong’ originated from Garo ‘Ha+Jong’/ ‘Ajong’; ‘Ha’ means ‘land’ and ‘Jong’ means ‘insect’, thus ‘Hajong’ means ‘insect of the land’ and the latter ‘Ajong’ means ‘Outsiders’ or ‘Non-Garo’. This meaning seems to be a justified one in the sense that the Hajong people who settled in the Garo Hills area led their livelihood by way of agricultural work. The author gives another account which

says that the word 'Hajong' might have originated from '*harajon*' which means 'sorrowful people' - *ha*-sorrow, *jon*-people (R. K. Ray Hajong. 1982).

It is assumed that once upon a time, some number of the Hajongs fled away from Assam to settle near the Chalchala block of Garo Hills District. It is also known that their number was 12,000 from which probably the 'Baro Hajari Pargana' was created. From that area they extended their settlement by setting up villages in the large area which was then under the Garos. The area had fertile plain lands that attracted the Hajongs whose main source of livelihood was agriculture. In the course of time, there arose discord between the two communities- the Hajong and the Garo. As a result of such discord, the Garos left the plain valleys to the Hajongs and kept the hills areas under their possession (*Muktijudde Adivasi*).

Paresh Hajong presents a mythological story which says that during the age of Mahabharata there was a very powerful *xshatriya* king in Avanti whose name was *Kartabirjarjun*. An angry saint called *Parasurama* killed the king for his crime of kidnapping the mother goddess *Kapili* of *Jagadmuni*, the father of *Parasurama* and tried utmost to destroy the *xshatriya* dynasty. At that time the queen Swarupa who was pregnant fled away from the country and sought refuge with Kamdatta muni of Kamakhya in Kamrup. Later on, Swarupa's son Pradangshu was married to Suthama, the adopted daughter of the saint. Their son named Podangshu was a king who conquered and reined a vast area beginning from Kamakhya to Haju. Afterwards, the sons of Podangshu named Sudhangsu, Samancha, Samakya etc. up to the nineteenth number ruled the city state of Haju. During the reign of Bhaskar Barman and Bharat Barman who were descendents of Sudhangsu, Haju was destroyed. As a consequence, the descendents

of the king went away to different places out of which a team of twelve thousand people under the leadership of their hero named Kashyap settled in Garo Hills. The place where they settled first had been named as '*Barohajari*' and is known so till the present day. With the passage of time, the members of this team of twelve thousand scattered to settle in different places like Garo Hills, Goalpara, and Bangladesh. Since these descendents of king migrated from Haju, so they are known as '*Hajong*' (Hajong, P.C. 1971).

N. C. Muchahary, an eminent writer denies the interpretation about the meaning of the word 'Hajong' as *ha-* soil and *jong-* insect thereby meaning as insect of soil to indicate the Hajong very expert in 'wet cultivation'. Rather he supports the interpretation made by another group who hold that the term 'Hajong' originated and developed from the Bodo word as such: *ha+* *gajou* > *hajou* > *haju* > *hajong*. *Hajou* or *haju* in Bodo means high land. Probably the Bodo people had given the name to the people who lived in hilly areas belonging to their same clan (Muchahary, N. C. 1986).

According to Dhananjoy Rabha, the Hajongs are the descendents of the Rabhas whom the king *Huseng* of the *Atong* hired for agricultural work in the Someswar valley. In the Rabha language, 'Ajong' means brother. The people hired for farming work by king *Huseng* are the brothers of some relatives of the Rabhas and so, they called those people as 'Ajong'. As they were skilled in farming work the Garos also called them 'Ajong'. In Garo, 'Ajong' means ant or earth-worm (*A-* earth/soil, *jong-* ant/worm). It also means the non-Garos or the people of other language. The term 'Ajong' later on changed into 'Hajong' (Rabha, D. N. 1998).

1.4. Population in Assam:

Before the partition period (till 1945) the existence of Hajong population was witnessed within the following geographical area- to the north Suwarkona (presently in Goalpara District of Assam), to the south and the east Jangkona and Jamkona (present Bangladesh) respectively and Morkona (Garo Hills District of Meghalaya) in the west (R.K.Roy Hajong, 2003).

As per census record of 1951, the number of Hajong population was 3,226 only (Payeng, 2009). The Hanjong people of the hills Districts of Assam were considered as Scheduled Tribes (ST) as per provisions in schedule 342 of the Constitution of India (vide North Eastern Areas reorganization Act 1971, Act No. 81 of 1971). Later on, the Hajong people living in plain districts were given Hills Tribes in Plain status by the Govt. vide Letter No. T.A.D./S.T./279/82/16 dated 24-12-82 and after another decade considered as Scheduled Caste (SC) under 'Scheduled Caste & Scheduled Tribes order (Amendment) Act, 2002 vide Letter No. TAD/BC/87/93/46 dated 01- 04-2003. As per the census of 1971, the number of Hajong population in the two hills Districts of Karbi Anglong and N.C.Hills was only 386 whereas in the plain districts it was 44,655.

Another statistics as per census conducted in 1996 by K. R. Hajong , then General Secretary of Assam Hajong Jatiya Parishad shows that the number of total Hajong population in different plain districts of Assam was 59,609 (Payeng, 2009; R. K. Ray Hajong, 2003). This census was conducted by Mr. K. R. Hajong himself taking together the Hajong people living in the plain districts of Assam. The following list shows the details of the population statistics of the Hajongs as per the census conducted by K. R. Hajong in 1996: (Table-4).

Table-4: Census report, 1996 (conducted by K. R. Hajong) of Hajongs in Assam

Name of District	Male	Female	Total
Goalpara	11,081	11,402	22,483
Kokrajhar	04	03	07
Dhubri	4,381	4,385	8,466
Bongaigaon	574	602	1,176
Kamrup	1,712	1,768	3,480
Barpeta	168	182	350
Nalbari	809	898	1,707
Darrang	860	990	1,850
Nagaon	1,840	1,936	3,776
Lakhimpur	2,487	2,615	5,102
Sonitpur	138	164	302
Dhemaji	4,379	4,531	8,910
Tinsukia	922	949	1,871
Dibrugarh	62	74	136
Total	29,113	30,496	59,609

Again, in 1988 ‘The All Assam Hills Tribal Council’, a welfare organization of the Hills Tribes of Assam submitted a Memorandum to the ‘The Tribal Recognized Sub-Committee, Assam’. In the Memorandum entitled ‘Demand for Creation of more Tribal in Assam and Safeguard the Tribal Identity as Economically Weaker Section’ signed by the secretary Prabhat Hajong dated 11-07-1988 mentions the total Hajong population of Assam as 88,655 (R. K. Ray Hajong, 2003).

Moreover, in the year 1997 R. K. Ray Hajong produced a documentary film on behalf of the ‘Doordarshan’ on the socio-cultural life of the Hajong. The documentary called ‘Hajong’ (A Look on the Social and Cultural Life of the Hajong Tribe) shows the total Hajong population of Assam, Arunachal and Meghalaya as 1,20,000 (R. K. Ray Hajong, 2003).

The above data indicate the large growth of population within a period of four decades only which is due to the migration of Hajong people to the hills districts of Karbi Anglong (formerly Mikir Hills) and Dima Hasao (N.C.Hills) and other plain districts of Brahmaputra valley.

1.5. Background of the Study

The Hajongs of Assam are a small number of people living scattered in different places allotted to them by the government. They settled in the state as refugees who are the victims of the partition of India. Although they settled as immigrants they did not leave their effort for overall promotion of the community. As a consequence, it has been observed that some social activists, scholars and organizations of the community are

incessantly working to develop the language, literature and culture of the Hajong. To get an overview of the developmental status of this ethnic tribe, I have conducted a pilot survey in a few villages and studied some of the literature available concerning them. The study reveals the fact that a lot of research work had already been done on various aspects of Hajong culture and literature but only a few works concerning particular aspects of Hajong language have been done so far. Another fact is that whatever works have already been done are mostly written in Assamese and Hajong except a few only in English. It has also been noticed that efforts are going on for the protection of this unscheduled language by the scholars and organizations concerned probably because of the observation that the future of the language is in the wave of danger particularly due to the fact that the importance of it is decreasing amongst the new generations of the community. The cause behind the above fact is that the influence of Assamese or English as medium of instruction in educational institutions as well as other socio-cultural factors. The socio-cultural factors include the co-existence of the Hajong people with other communities who are majority and influence easily on smaller groups. Moreover, they get the least opportunity for exposures to their language that is mostly confined to their family. The survey reveals a tremendous fact that in some Hajong settled small pockets many teenagers when interviewed could not inform the Hajong synonyms of some words and informed they use the Assamese words for the same in their daily conversations. This gives us an impression that in such way the language may lose many of its own words in future if not preserved properly. However, such efforts are going on and research works concerning the language are surely positive signs for the development of this language.

1.6. Demographic Characteristics:

Some features of the demography of the Hajongs living in Assam are remarkable.

The number of Hajong population in the state is very low. As per data, “the Hajongs constitute 0.0026 per cent of the total tribal population of Assam as per 1971 census. Their sex ratio is 700 females per 1000 males. From the point of view of literacy the Hajongs are lagging far behind. As per 1971 census, their percentage of literacy was 10.88 only as against State percentage of literacy of 28.72. The level of literacy between the males and females among the Hajongs is 14.98 and 5.03 respectively as against 37.19 per cent for males and 19.27 per cent for females for the State of Assam. Thus the level of female literacy is found to be almost one third of that of the males. (Bordoloi: 1991).

The Hajongs are found scattered in different areas of Assam. The reason behind this is that they had settled in the places allotted to them by the government after the partition when they migrated to India as political victims from then East Pakistan, their original home. Government of India had allotted land to these refugees in different government reserved areas. Therefore, it is observed that in some places only a few families originally settled in the allotted land. However, even the small numbers of families have been increased with the passage of some years as the descendents of those families grew up, married, and have got their new families. Since the land remained the same and the population increased, the density of population of the Hajong has also been increased.

1.7. Culture & Tradition:

The Hajongs are very rich in their culture and traditions. The reflection of their culture is found in various aspects such as life-style, food and attire, society, language, religion and other everyday activities. In the following sub-heads, an attempt has been made to present a note about particular aspects of their culture and tradition in some detail.

1.7.1. Religion:

From observation, it may be said that the Hajongs once practiced animist religion, but nowadays consider themselves to be Hindus as their religion included many ideas and deities of Hinduism. Some of the animistic worship and beliefs are still prevalent among the Hajong people. This is evident from their various worships or *pujas* concerned with nature. In this regard we may mention the remark made by Paresh Hajong as follows (translated by me from original Assamese): “From pre-human civilization men have weakness towards the nature and amongst the superior creature of God i.e. man, it (nature) has been able to possess the greatest position. Attracted towards the beauty of nature as well to control the anti-living forces existing in nature, men have been constantly trying to win over those forces as a result of which nature could have been able to obtain honor and worship from mankind through ages. The mystery contained in the very life-style of nature made the human beings, who have a believing tendency, to brood and imagine over such mystery and finally to conclude that the existence of God is universal in the nature. Therefore, apart from India, in various cultures of the world, nature worship has been prevalent from time immemorial. Amongst many other resources

of nature bamboo has got a special position. It is of so much necessity in our everyday life that people of some society consider the bamboo plant as their god and worship and celebrate it. Such bamboo worship is observed in the Garo Hills in Meghalaya and Goalpara in Assam by the Hajong community. They call this worship *bansh puja*. (Hajong, P. C. 2007). Another scholar Dr. B. N. Bordoloi writes, “It cannot precisely be said if the Hajongs were also animists 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. Hence, the religion professed by them can be said to be Hinduism combined with their traditional religious practices.” (Bordoloi, B.N.1991). Ahmad Rafiq writes, “in terms of religious belief, Hajongs are close to Hindus. Hajongs worship *Durga* and other Hindu gods and goddesses. But Shiva is their chief deity. They observe a number of *bratas* (vows) including the *Kartik brata* performed in the month of Kartik (October-November). Girls and women dance and sing in brata ceremonies. Hajongs also worship the Brahmaputra river. Like Hindu Brahmans, Hajongs wear *paita* (the holy thread) on their bodies. Hajongs are believers in reincarnation too” (Rafiq 490).

Basil tree is considered as a holy one which is worshipped by the Hajongs, like the other Hindus. The existence of a basil tree in the yard of every Hajong family is compulsory. The tree is worshipped everyday in the morning and evening.

The Hajongs perform numbers of *pujas* in a year. The priest or *Adhikari* is the most important person in such occasions. Some of the remarkable *pujas* performed by the Hajongs are described in brief as below.

1.7.1.1. Bash Puja:

Bash puja or bamboo worshipping is celebrated in the month of *Baisakh* or *Bahag*, the first month of an Assamese year. Some rites and rituals are observed when this puja is performed regarding which Bordoloi writes, “Three newly cut bamboos are used in the performance of this puja which continues for three days. The three bamboos are cut by an assemblage of villagers from a particular grove. After decorating them with white or red clothes, the bamboos are fixed on the ground and then worshipped. The two main bamboos represent two gods. But who are the two gods? There are divergent opinions. According to some, the two bamboos represent Madan and Gopal (Krishna) while according to some others, they represent Shiva and Parvati. A few scholars regard this Bash puja as a kind of worship to Indra, the king of gods. Majority, however, believe that it is a kind of sex-worshipping and the two main bamboos actually represent Madan-Kam, the sex gods.

The last opinion seems to be more logical because of the fact that during the entire period of Bash puja continuing for three days, the young boys dance in rhythms in the tunes of musical instruments and the songs sung by the *Geetals* or the professional singers. While the first few songs are devoted to various gods and goddesses, the remaining ones are love songs only. Although the women cannot participate in singing and dancing, nevertheless, they enjoy the dancing and singing by their men folk as onlookers.” (Bordoloi: 1991).

1.7.1.2. Padma Puja:

This puja is also known as Manasa puja which is celebrated before the marriage ceremony is held. The concerned family arranges the puja to worship *Padma (Manasa)*, the goddess of snakes and reptiles. The worship is done with offerings by the head of the family with left hand only which is followed by sacrifice of a goat. *Padma puja* is performed with prayers for protection of the couple to be married from snake bite.

1.7.1.3. Kartik Puja:

Besides the *bansh puja*, they perform *manasha puja*, *kati puja* and other *pujas* performed by the Hindus. They also celebrate *Bihu* according to their own traditions and are known as *bisuwa*, *pushna*, and *kati gasa* for *bahag*, *magh*, and *kati bihu* respectively.

Although the Hajongs consider themselves as Hindus, they perform *pujas* in a different way than the others. Some traditions of their own are noticed to be followed while performing religious rites.

At present the Hajongs are divided into *Saktos* (followers of Lord Shiva) and *Vaishnavas* (followers of Lord Vishnu). The former worship various god and goddesses and sacrifice animals in their name while the latter only worship Vishnu and do not perform sacrificing animals. The Vaishnavas are mostly vegetarian and do not touch wine, meat or fish etc.

1.7.2. Folk Song:

Folk song plays a vital role in the life of the Hajong people as the main source of these songs are the physical labour involved in agriculture. It is the most important

element of Hajong folk literature. As R.K. Ray Hajong writes, "...physical labour is the centre of folk-life. All the songs, dances, festivals etc. of folk-life are created concerning the physical labour. (Hajong, R. K. 2003). Physical labour of the Hajong is mainly related to agriculture and therefore it is observed that the folk- song, dance or festival reflects the hopes and aspiration, happiness and sorrow, love, unity and separation etc. which are very closely related to folk-life.

Various folk-songs are sung during festivals relating to agriculture. Folk songs of various types are sung mostly with performance of dance that reflects the folk life of the Hajong people. Some such songs are described in brief below.

1.7.2.1. *Rasi Gahen* is sung to get inspiration in work. It amuses the farmers and provides strength to do more hard work in the field. Moreover, the note of happiness, sorrow, hope and despair of farmers are also revealed through these songs.

1.7.2.2. *Lawatana and Tilenga gahen* are other kinds of folk song sung in the *Chorkhela* festival.

1.7.2.3. *Sikar (hunting)/ Masmora (fishing) Gahen* is another kind of folk song sung in the hope of getting succeeded in hunting and fishing. The most important aspect of these songs is that they present the unity and fraternity amongst the people of the community. While going out for fishing or hunting, people follow some norms as per their tradition and sing such songs.

1.7.2.4. A kind of folk-song is sung during *Gasa pata parba*, the festival held in the paddy field along with dance in the hope of fruitful result of the farmers' hard work.

1.7.2.5. *Gupni gahen* is another folk song presented along with dance by the ladies as a prayer for the progress of the person who invites them on the occasion. The ladies while presenting these songs also wish for the childless couples that God may gift them with babies.

1.7.2.6. *Dhapakirtan* is sung in the religious festivals as well as in marriage ceremonies in order to wish the newly married couples and other religious festivals. In the *Dhapakirtans* mostly the stories of *Raslila* are described in the form of songs. The followers of *Vaishnavism* called the *Haribhakat* present these songs.

1.7.2.7. *Sawa Ghum parani gahen (lullaby)* is sung to make the babies asleep. Like any other community the Hajong ladies sing such song to console the annoying babies and make sleep to get rid of their annoyance. Such lullabies are carried orally through the ladies generation after generation.

1.7.2.8. *Sawa Khelani gahen (nursery rhyme)* is sung by the mother, sister, aunt, and the maid as a sport with the babies that provide great happiness. While playing with the babies, their voice and broken utterance coming out with heavenly smile add to such happiness in an unexplainable degree. Soon the attendant lady sings addressing the baby and gets utmost satisfaction. Such songs are available in folk literature of all the communities of the world.

1.7.2.9. *Biya naam or wedding song* is sung at marriage ceremony. Some traditional rules are observed during the marriage of the Hajong people.

1.7.3. Folk Festival:

It has already been mentioned that the main occupation of the Hajong is agriculture which involves hard physical labour. Therefore, folk festival plays an important role in their life like any other community who are concerned with labour related with their livelihood. Although due to hard labour they loss energy, they regain it through the festival. In this connection, the following remark may be mentioned: "...poverty, negligence and exploitation etc. sometimes may restrain people but not make hopeless because labour is the centre of folk-life. Based on this physical labour festival, song and dances are created indeed." (Rayhajong, R.K. 2003).

1.7.3.1. *Chorkhela* is the most important folk-festival of the Hajong observed for one week that starts from two or three days prior to *Dipawali*. It is celebrated at the end of cultivation in the rainy season. The main objective of this festival is amusement and marry-making to get relief from the pain caused by hard labour involved in agricultural work in the paddy field.

Generally, the Hajong farmers- the major part of which are the youth get work-free time after completion of sowing paddy in the field. This leisure period extends up to the start of harvesting. So, naturally during this period of leisure, the youth minds become absorbed in imagination and colorful dream. The Hajong youths thus celebrate the *Chorkhela* festival in the hope of a good harvest and perform song and dance to express their imagination mainly concerning love.

During this festival the performance of song accompanied with dance called *Chormaga* is very common. By singing and dancing, a team of youths go door to door to

collect money. They do so during day time and when night approaches they take rest at that village. The team is given a very warm welcome by the people of that village because to receive such team is a matter of honour for the host. The process continues for one week and at the last day a prayer is done by offering '*chaki*' (lamp) in the paddy field in the hope of a good harvest and a '*khaon*' (feast) is arranged.

Lewatana is a kind of song accompanied with dance performed by Hajong boys and girls during the *Chorkhela* festival. It is like the *Bihu* festival which is observed by different tribes and communities according to their own tradition. In Hajong, *lewa* means 'a climber' while *tana* means 'to pull' that indicates to the love relation between the young boys and girls that breaks in the same way the growing climbers grows which breaks if pulled on much.

Another ingredient of *Chorkhela* festival is the *Tilenga gahen*, a kind of song that narrates about the war between China and Japan. The young boys are grouped into two-one senior and the other junior according to age. They put on the dress of soldiers and the senior group begins to sing a few lines after completion of which is repeated in a loud voice by the junior group. However, the presentation of this song has been found almost absent in the recent days but was prevalent during the earlier days.

1.7.4. Musical Instruments:

It has already been mentioned that the Hajongs are very rich in their culture and tradition. Therefore, various folk song, dance and performances are observed by them. Some of the performances are accompanied with music which is played with their traditional musical instruments. Some of these musical instruments are similar to those

used by the Bengali rural folk. The traditional musical instruments used by the Hajongs are mentioned below.

1.7.4.1. Drum :

Drums are of two types: *Dhuluk* and *Khul*. The former is made of a hollowed wood with hides on both ends while the latter is earthen made with hides on both ends. *Dhuluk* is used at the time of folk song and dancing during the performance of social festivals whereas the *Khul* is used in the accompaniment of the devotional songs during the religious festivals.

1.7.4.2. String instruments:

These are of two kinds: *Rasamandali* and *Dotara*. The former is made of gourd crust having one string only. The latter is made of wood and the hollowed part at the end is covered with the skin of a kind of big lizard. The wooden portion is decorated with carvings of various floristic designs.

1.7.4.3. Wind instruments:

Two kinds of wind instruments called Bansi (flute made of bamboo) and Gubua (Gagana) which is also made of bamboo are used by the Hajongs.

1.7.4.4. Cymbals:

The Hajongs use three types of cymbals called *Ramal*, *Kartal* and *Dhapakartal*.

1.7.5. Food:

Rice is the staple food taken twice or thrice daily by the Hajong people. Vegetable and pulse are used with rice. Fish, meat of pigeon, goat are also favourite food items

consumed by them. Unlike the other tribes, they generally do not take pork or fowls. *Tamul-pan* (raw betel nut and betel leaf) with lime is eaten and offered to guests and visitors at home. Smoking of tobacco is generally done by the male members while a few of the aged female are also seen to do so. Occasionally, they use rice beer prepared at home. It is observed that in case of this tribe the use of rice beer in socio-cultural festivals is not compulsory like most of the other tribes. However, on the occasion of such festivals both males and females may drink the rice beer. The liquor prepared from rice are of three kinds namely, *kasa*, *ruhi*, and *ghamani*. *Kasa* is prepared with half boiled rice mixed with a medicine called *bakhor* and kept for two or three days covered with banana leaf. *Ruhi* is prepared with the specific rice called *bora rice* in the same process as the *kasa* and kept in a vessel with hole at bottom. Another vessel is kept under the hole through which drops of liquor fall for two/three days. *Ruhi* is kept in bottle capped for three months to one year when it becomes stronger which is known as *ghamani*.

Another popular food of the Hajongs is *bukni bhat*. To prepare it, raw *bora rice* is fermented in water and then the rice is separated grinded to make powder. Now, *bora rice* is cooked and kept in a banana leaf until it becomes cold. Then the powder is mixed with the cold rice and kept in an earthen vessel for 24 hours. The *bukni bhat* is ready for use. This kind of food is very sweet and delicious that it is liked by all and so very popular.

1.7.6. Dresses and Ornaments:

Like other tribal groups the Hajongs have their own traditional dresses. The most important traditional dress of this community worn by women is known as *Pathin* which

is popularly called *Ranga pathin* because of its red colour. There are stripes of blue threads in it and carved with designs of flowers. This kind of dress is woven in the family loom. Women put on it to cover from waist to ankle. To cover the upper part of their body, women use a home woven cotton scarf called *Pasra* or *Agrun*. During festivals they use an extra cloth around their waist known as *Kamarbandha*.

The traditional dress of the male members of the community is called *Ningti* which like the towel in bigger size. During winter they use shawl or scarf to cover the body and a kind of muffler called *Kampesh* around the neck.

It may be mentioned that the dresses required for marriage of a girl are generally woven at the family loom, preferably by the girl herself. This indicates the expertise of women in weaving for which the women are noticed to produce most of the traditional dresses for the entire family in their family loom.

Ornaments in the Hajong community are seen to be used by women only. No male is found to use any traditional ornaments. Like the women of other ethnic tribes, the Hajong women have a great liking for their traditional ornaments. That is why probably the modern ornaments available in the market are not at all favoured by women. However, a few young girls nowadays are seen to use such ornaments with modern designs occasionally. Most of traditional ornaments of the Hajong are silver made. The traditional ornaments used by the Hajong women are a few which are mentioned below:

1. *Kata Baju*- armllet made of silver.
2. *Baghh*- silver made anklets which are very heavy.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 3. <i>Harsara-</i> | necklace made of silver having three rows of designed chains. |
| 4. <i>Gunjar-</i> | round and heavy silver made anklets while put on produce tinkling sound. |
| 5. <i>Kairu-</i> | earring made of brass with gold plating worn by women on ear-lobes. |
| 6. <i>Nalas-</i> | silver made nose rings. |
| 7. <i>Kanful-</i> | a kind of silver made earring. |

All the above ornaments are worn by the women only.

1.7.7. Housing Pattern:

The Hajongs generally build their houses in the highland nearest to their cultivable lands. The houses are small in size except the house of the *Adhikari* (Village Priest) which is bigger than the other houses. The houses of the common people are almost similar in pattern. Such house has an earthen plinth and two thatched roofs on both sides. Bamboos and timbers are generally used to construct the house. The walls are made of spilt bamboos and plastered with mud mixed with cow dung. However, nowadays concrete houses made of sand, brick and cement are available which are built by well-to-do families. Another type of house of which the wall is made of mud is very comfortable during the summer is also found in the Hajong villages. The wall of such houses is very heavy which is constructed in the same structure as the concrete wall. However, due to lack the soil required for construction and higher expenditure the

numbers of such houses are decreasing. Each family has many small houses for different purpose such as *Bar ghar* (main bed room of the head of family), *Kasari ghar* (guest room), *Guli chang* (granary), *Akhli ghar* (kitchen), *Dheki ghar* (Pounding house), *Guli ghar* (cow shed). Attached to the house, there is a plot having different kinds of fruits trees like mango, banana, jackfruit, betel nut, betel leaf, coconut and other vegetables. Every house has a pond for rearing fish as well as the water for use. In the house of every Hajong family different kinds of domestic animals like cow, goat, dog, cat etc are kept. But unlike other tribes they do not rear pig or cocks because it is prohibited by their social rules.

1.7.8. Family Structure:

The Hajongs have patriarchal family structure. They live in joint family where the senior most male is the head. Like other patriarchal family, the sons inherit the property after the death of their father. In the absence of son, the property goes to the possession of a male member belongs to the same dynasty. However, this system has been stopped nowadays and both son and daughter enjoy equal right to the family property. Since the family system is patriarchal the father is considered as head of the family and after marriage the daughter has to go to the house of her husband.

1.7.9. Birth:

Some customary rules are observed by the Hajongs in respect of birth. It is seen that a separate house is built for the pregnant lady at the approach of the time of child delivery. The lady stays in the house on the bed prepared by hay and a knife made of iron is kept under it so that no evil spirit may harm the child or the mother. Generally, an

experienced lady of the village performs the duty of a nurse or *dhai* at the time of delivery. However, nowadays some admit the pregnant lady in a hospital when the time of delivery is due. After the birth of the child, the *dhai* washes the infant and pours a drop of honey to the infant's tongue. Before that the tongue of the infant is cleansed with the tip of the mother's hair.

The period of segregation of the mother depends on the sex. In case of male child, the segregation period is for a week while it is for five days in case of a female baby. After the purification ceremony is over, the baby is carried out of the house to seek the blessings of the village elders.

The name-giving ceremony may be held after some days. On this occasion, a feast is arranged by the family according to its economic status. When the child attains five years of age, the Adhikari (the traditional village headman and priest) initiates the child to the Hajong society by reciting some hymns in the ear of the child. Without this ceremony, the child is not considered to be included in the society and later on, when he/she comes of ages, cannot enter into wed-lock.

1.7.10. Marriage:

Although the Hajong society is patriarchal, it is observed that the clan system is run as per matriarchal rule. In case of marriage, the Hajongs follow some customary rules concerning clan exogamy. According to such rules, marriage between adult boy and girl belonging to the same clan called *Nikni* cannot take place. In other words, marriage is possible between two adults if they belong to two different clans. It is also observed that the Hajongs are very orthodox concerning the marriage customary laws violation of

which leads to punishment by the society even to the extent of ex-communication from the society. However, in case of unavoidable circumstances, “the erring couple has to be inducted into the Hajong society with due atonement followed by fine in cash and providing a feast to the people of the concerned village. Since such a process is extremely expensive, the Hajong youths generally refrain from inter-community marriages.” (Bordoloi: 1991).

1.7.10.1. *Subh Bibah*:

There are three types of marriages prevalent in the Hajong society, the first of which is the *Subh Bibah*. This is negotiated social marriage and is the best type considered by the society. Such marriages are settled through a mediator called *Ghatak* or *Jahu*. As soon as the marriage is settled, a group of people from the boy’s village visit the girl’s residence to attend the ritual called *Pan-Chini* or *Guwa-khowa* where the villagers and the family members and relatives of the girl remain present. The boy’s party entertains them by offering betel nut, betel leaf, and clothes, ornaments, oil etc. for the girl as a mark of settlement. Then, as per discussion amongst the elder members of both parties the date the marriage ceremony is settled at a convenient date. The ceremony continues for two days. Generally, the marriage takes place in the residence of the bridegroom. The first day of the marriage is known as *Bhor Bia* and the second day as *Bahi Bia*. The marriage is solemnized in the presence of the villagers and the bridegroom’s party and the marriage rituals are performed by the *Adhikari* or the community priest of the Hajong. However, nowadays it has been noticed that many well-to-do families have a tendency to perform the marriage ceremony in the Vedic way by hiring the services of the Hindu Brahmins.

Next, the services of ‘god-father’ and ‘god-mother’ to be selected from the aged couples of the village are vital in the performance of marriage. As soon as the marriage ceremony is over, the ‘god-father’ and ‘god-mother’ take the newly married couple to the house meant for them. The couple regards them as their own parents.

An interesting aspect of the Hajong marriage is that at the end of the ceremony, the bride and the groom play a game of dice. Fainting defeat the bridegroom tries to flee away from the marriage penndel by brandishing a sword. Then the bride requests him not go to which he agrees and stay with her.

Another important feature of the Hajong marriage is the services of five women who help the bride and the bridegroom in all matters of the performance of the marriage. These five women must not be widow and childless.

The most interesting episode of the Hajong marriage is the performance of marriage song or *Bia nam* by the party of male singers called *Geetal* or *Geetalu*. The *Bia nam* is sung in the accompaniment of musical instruments continuously throughout the ceremony. It is mentionable that the Hajong women never sing the *Bia nam*.

A Hajong marriage is an expensive affair because a lot of people who include relatives of the bride and the bridegroom as well as the villagers are invited. All the invitees are to be entertained with food and drink throughout the ceremony.

1.7.10.2. Hanga:

Hanga or marriage between a widower and a widow or divorcee is the second type of marriage which is very simple in respect of ritualistic performances. It is performed in the traditional way but there is no marry-making and the ritualistic performances are very

few. Even singing of marriage song in accompaniment of musical instruments is a taboo. People are not entertained with lavish food and drink. A simple feast or tea party is offered to the invitees. In such marriage, very less number of people are invited.

1.7.10.3. *Dai Para*:

Dai Para or marriage by elopement is the third type of marriage in a society. It has already been mentioned that the Hajong society is very orthodox concerning marriage that strict social rules are observed in this regard. Therefore, marriage by elopement is totally disfavored. In case of elopement, the boy adult pair must remain aloof from the society till they pay the fine imposed on them by the village elders or agree to bear the punishment that might be decided for them by the society in general and the elders of the two concerned villages in particular. Because of such strict social norms, the cases of elopement are very few in the Hajong society.

1.7.10.4. *Mitar*:

Prior to the celebration of the marriage ceremony, a friend called *Mitar* is required to be selected for the bridegroom to act as the witness of the marriage. The role of the *Mitar* is very important since he is considered as a friend of the married couple for their whole life.

1.7.10.5. *Khalti*:

Khalti or bride price: The Hajongs do not follow dowry system. However, the parents or guardians of the bride are to be paid *Khalti* or bride price by the groom's family that resembles the *Kalti* system of the Dimasa tribe. The *Khalti* or bride price reminds about the importance of women in the Hajong society. *Khalti* or bride price is a cash amount

which varies depending upon the financial position of the groom's family. But nowadays, in some cases such system of payment to the bride's family has been replaced by payment of some cash or kind to the groom's family by the parents or guardian of the bride which also vary depending upon the status of the bridegroom. As a consequence of this, the poor parents or guardians of a girl have to face trouble in the arrangement of the marriage. "That is why, for the poor Hajong families, to give their daughters in marriage has become a difficult problem." (Hajong, P. C.1985).

1.7.10.6. Monogamy:

An important aspect of marriage in the Hajong society is monogamy and is noticed to be followed very strictly. Marrying more than one wife is considered rather a taboo. A childless man does not wish to marry a second wife even if his wife permits him to do so. Therefore, the case of second marriage in the Hajong society is very rare, while the first wife is alive.

1.7.10.7. Divorce and Remarriage:

In the Hajong society, the case of divorce is very few. The general social norm does not allow divorce. Only in exceptional cases divorce is allowed by the society. However, a divorcee can remarry with the consent of the village elders but without ritualistic performances and marry-making. In such marriage, the couple may entertain the villagers with a simple feast or tea party in the event of solemnizing.

1.7.10.8. Absence of Child Marriage:

Another aspect concerning marriage in the Hajong society is the absence of child

marriage. Generally, the marriageable age for male is 25 years and above while it is 16 years and above for females.

1.7.10.9. *Ghor Jangoy*:

The son-in-law who lives in his in-laws' house is known as *Ghor Jangoy*. Generally, the Hajongs do not have the system of keeping the son-in-law in the residence of his in-laws. However, nowadays, it is noticed that some rich families keep their son-in-laws at their residence.

1.8. Death:

The Hajongs observe the rituals concerning the death of a person according to the Hindu way because nowadays they follow Hinduism. Like the other Hindus they believe in the immortality of the soul, life after death, rebirth, sin and punishment, heaven and hell. The rituals connected with death are related with these beliefs of Hinduism.

At the death of a person, the dead body is brought under the Basil plant. Then it is washed with a turmeric paste. The thumbs of both hands are tied together with a white thread so that no evil spirit can enter the dead body. Earlier the dead body was buried but due the influence of Hinduism it has been totally stopped. The dead body is taken to the cremation ground and burnt in the funeral pyre. The eldest son or the younger with the consent of the elder put fire at the mouth of the deceased. In case of a sonless dead person, a near relative of blood relation perform this ritual. The parts of the dead body not burnt are collected and packed with a white cloth and then floated in the river. A knife made of iron is buried in the yard of the house so that the spirit of the deceased may not do any harm to the family. A few charred bones are collected and brought home to bury

under the Basil plant. Every morning and evening prayer is performed by lightening a lamp or candle under this Basil plant. A share from the vegetarian meal prepared by the son or near relative who has lit the funeral pyre should be offered in the name of the deceased and this ritual continues till the performance of the *Sraddha* or the death ceremony which is observed on 11th or 13th day.

On the day of death, the family members keep on fasting. On the second day fruits can eaten while from the third day onwards till the *Sraddha*, a small amount of vegetarian food can be taken. Another ritual called *Ghatkamani* is observed on the 10th or 12th day, the previous day of *Sraddha*, on the bank of the nearest river. In this ritual a special food is prepared by the villagers for the deceased in an earthen pot at the bank of the river and the sons of the deceased after shaving their heads take a holy bath in the river to purify them.

The *Sraddha* or death ceremony is performed on the 11th or 13th day according to the Hindu rites. During this ceremony the relatives of the deceased and the villagers are entertained with a feast. A significant aspect of the *Sraddha* ceremony is that unlike other tribes any kind of wine- even rice beer is not used. “It may be mentioned that the use of rice-beer in the performance of the death ceremony is a must for those tribal societies who are still maintaining their traditional religious practices. The absence of the use of rice-beer by the Hajongs on this occasion, therefore, can be ascribed to the performance of the death ceremony almost in the Hindu way.” (Bordoloi: 1991).

At the site of the Basil plant under which the charred bones are buried, two bamboos are fixed and the two poles tied together with a white thread believing that the

spirit of the deceased person may travel to the other world (heaven). At the cremation site some food items and coins are offered and two bamboo poles are also fixed with a white flag. A part of the flag is taken to be used as *lagun* (used by a Hindu around the neck) by the person who put fire at the mouth of the dead body.

The sons of the expired have to observe some taboos for one year duration from the day of death. These taboos vary in case of the death of father or the mother. The sons should not use umbrella or sit on the seat made from planks. They should not take meals in the house of others or eat banana in the event of father's death and milk in the event of mother's death.

1.9. *Nikni* or Clan system:

A clan is called *Nikni* in Hajong the actual number of which is not known. Some say there are 21 clans in Hajong but their names are neither available nor known (Hajong, P.C. 1987). As per field investigation conducted by B.N.Bordoloi, the informants report about 7 numbers of clans the names of which they could not memorize except the three namely, *Chondi*, *Kendagaiya* and *Baliati*. (Bordoloi: 1991).

One scholar has mentioned about 13 *Niknis* available which are the following: *i. bakse gaon, ii. Kende gaon, iii. Purakasia, iv. Purahati, v. purasunga, vi. Balihati, vii. Kamakhya gaon, viii. Bogorikhati, ix. Katle gaon, x. kase gaon, xi. Khase gaon, xii. Karnajhora, and xiii.surabadi.* (Hajong, N. M. 2009). Observation reveals that the clans are all based on paternal line. These clans being exogamous, only at the time of marriage negotiations the concerned families try to trace the clans.

Some argue that the Hajongs had one matrilineal clan system. Dr. D. N. Mazumder opines that due to the adoption of the practice of prohibition of marriage between the kins of both paternal and maternal lines, the matrilineal clan system was perhaps lost sight of long back. (Mazumder, Dr. D. N.1984).

1.10. Economy:

The main occupation of the Hajong people is agriculture. Unlike the other tribes of the North Eastern Region, who mainly practice shifting cultivation (*zhum*), the Hajongs are found to be more or less like the settled cultivators. Paddy is the principal crop produced by them. Besides, other crops like mustard, jute, etc. are also cultivated by them for domestic use. Generally, the crops are produced to meet domestic needs and so except paddy other crops are produced depending on the availability of land suitable for such cultivation. There is no commercial concept relating agriculture. Whatever crops produced are meant for the requirement of the family and therefore, their economy may be considered as sustenance economy. Surplus products, if any remains after consumption in the family, are sold in the market. One Hajong scholar, Harsh Kumar Hajong puts that 90 per cent of the Hajong people depend solely on agriculture for their livelihood and the remaining 10 per cent dependent on service, wage earning, petty business, carpentry etc. (Hajong, H. Kumar: 1987 p7).

It has been observed that the Hajongs have adopted modern techniques of cultivation recently although they were using the traditional technique till a few years back. But the fact is that the agricultural land under their possession is very less for which the produced materials are consumed for private use and not for commercial purpose.

Generally, they sell the surplus agricultural products, if any remains after domestic consumption. *Adhiyar* system concerning agriculture is prevalent amongst the Hajongs. Some people are seen to give their land to others belonging to their own community for cultivation on *adhiyar* basis. Again, some of them also give the land to non-Hajong people on the same system. Another system concerning agricultural economy of the Hajong is that they put their lands on mortgage to meet financial needs relating marriage, birth and death ceremonies as well as other socio-cultural rites etc. So, due to these some adverse effects on their economy has been witnessed that contribute to the increase in poverty.

Another fact concerning agricultural work of the Hajongs is that both males and females contribute equally. Generally, the males plough land while the females help in other works like sowing the saplings, rearing cattle, goats, pigeons etc.

Hajong women contribute to the economy indirectly through weaving which is one of their compulsory domestic activities. They are very expert in weaving and almost all women both married and unmarried are seen to be engaged in spinning and weaving in their domestic looms. Every Hajong house has its loom where the ladies work during spare hours after performing other domestic works. However, such weaving works are generally performed for personal needs and the clothes of the female members of a family are produced in the family looms. Weaving is considered as a traditional activity and domestic industry. However, nowadays, some such industries are set up for commercial purpose too.

Our survey proves the above information. However, with the advancement of education, a few numbers of educated Hajongs have got some lucrative jobs both in government and private sectors but still the number is negligible.

Our investigation reveals another fact concerning their economy that due to the influence of the business and economy of the neighboring people, some remarkable number of youths have entered into business and have made some progress. An instance of such fact is found in Tengripar village of Hojai sub division under Nagaon district. We found many Hajong youths have been involved in Agar wood and perfume business in collaboration with the neighboring Muslim youths. Indeed, through such business their financial position has been raised.

1.11. Literacy & Education:

In respect of literacy and education, the Hajongs are lagging behind even today. The percentage of literacy has not reached the top although it has been increased in recent time. The literacy rate of Hajong population is low compared to the other communities because of the fact that the elder generation is lagging behind in this respect. However, the new generation of Hajong are found 100 per cent literate but still beyond the mark in respect of education. To know about the present educational status of the Hajong, I had conducted a pilot survey in three villages of Nagaon district namely, Tengripar, Debasthan and Derapathar. The survey report shows the educational status as presented in the table below (as per the data furnished by the informants). (Table-5)

Table-5: Educational data of three Hajong villages

Name of the village	Total population (approx.)	Educational qualification			
		HSLC	HS	UG	PG
Debasthan	600	12	9	7	0
Derapathar	1,500	28	19	14	0
Tengripar	900	06	04	0	0

As per information from the respondents during fieldwork, it is found that that the average literacy rate of the Hajongs of Assam is approximately 70% out of which male and female literacy rate are 40% and 30% respectively.

1.12. Contribution of the Study:

The study of the topic is surely a positive step in the analysis of Hajong language from linguistic point of view. Since the language has not been investigated widely concerning its linguistic features, so it would contribute to the development of the language in general and phonological features of it in particular. Besides, the data collected in this study might help to carry on the research concerning various perspectives of this language. It is also expected that the information and data collected as well as the findings of the research may be helpful for those who would desire to conduct a comparative study of Hajong with other IA languages, particularly Assamese

and Bengali which are its closest IA languages. In fact, this study is expected to contribute to the research work of any aspect concerning the Hajong language.

1.13. Methodology:

The research includes both primary and secondary sources. The secondary source includes books, journals, magazines etc. While conducting the study, I have consulted books written about the Hajong language. Some of the books are written by native speakers while others are non-natives who had conducted survey regarding the language or culture of the Hajong people. While consulting the books, I have observed the findings of the authors and compared with my own findings that are perceived from my field work. Therefore, the works of the writers provided me an insight into carrying forward my research. I had gone through some articles written by native writers on various aspects of the Hajong language. Again, some works of non-native speakers gave me an opportunity to observe carefully regarding a particular aspect comparing the same with the work of a native writer which helped in my study. The books, journals, magazines I consulted are written in three languages- English, Assamese and Hajong. However, I am quite familiar with the former two while I had to take help of native people to understand the contents of the latter fully. In this way, the available materials are utilized for the purpose of the research work. Apart from the works on linguistic aspects of Hajong, some works relating history, culture and tradition are also consulted which helped to understand overall aspects of the community which is very essential for understanding and investigating about their language.

The primary source includes mainly field work for the purpose of collecting basic data on the language. While conducting the field work I have taken the help of native informants from different Hajong localities/ regions such as Derapather, Devasthan, Tengripar (Nagaon District), and North Lakhimpur, Goalpara etc. to collect Hajong words along with their meaning in Assamese, Bengali and English. During the collection of words voice record of selected words was done to ascertain the nature of sounds of a particular phoneme. Sometimes, interviews were held with native speakers to understand a particular linguistic matter. Last but not least, I consulted some writers from both native and non-native speakers who deal with the subjects of Hajong language, literature and culture for clarifying any doubt and confusions that arose in my mind during the research work.

1.14. Outline of the Thesis:

The thesis contains four chapters along with bibliography and appendices according to the following outline.

Chapter-I (Introduction) is devoted to furnish general information regarding the Hajong language and its speakers along with a brief note on different other aspects such as history, culture, population etc.

Chapter-II (Review of Literature) presents review of some works already done by other writers or researchers regarding the Hajong language and the people with various other aspects of their life. Here, a general discussion regarding the contents of the works with simple remarks and significance are presented.

Chapter-III (Phonology) is the main chapter that contains the information, data and the findings concerning the topic of research.

Chapter-IV (Conclusion) is the summary of the overall findings of the study that is just like an overview of the research findings.

Appendices are presented in order to provide first-hand knowledge about the vocabulary (Appendix-1), phrases of everyday use (Appendix-2), sentences (Appendix-3) and specimen poem (Appendix-4) of the Hajong language.
