



A Study On The Hajong Tribe And Their Social And Cultural Aspect In North-East India

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Abstract: North-East India is a region where different tribes have lived together from ancient periods of time by preserving their own culture, tradition and Heritage. The Hajong community is one of the tribal communities belonging to the mongoloid race. They form a sub-section of the Bodo-section Assam -Burma, a group of Tibeto- Burman branch of the sino- Tibetan family. The majority of the Hajongs settled in India and are predominant rice-farmers . According to the 2011 census the total population is 79,800 and presently their population is more than 10,0000 in India. They are spread all over Assam with main concentration in Assam like- Goalpara, Darrang, Tinsukia, Kamrup, Nagaon, Dhemaji, North-Lakhimpur, Chirang district in Assam and Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh in North-East India. The purpose of the present study is to introduce the Hajong people and their social cultural aspect in North-east India of Assam.

Keywords: Hajong, Culture, Social aspect, Festival, Religious

1. Introduction

The North-Eastern region of India is a home of different tribal communities who have influenced for centuries in the formation of its society and polity. The Hajong are one of those tribes whose culture is an integral part of this society. The Hajong are an agricultural community. They are very handy with agriculture activities such as ploughing, paddy plantation etc. The Hajongs are a scheduled tribe. The name of Hajong has a particular significance. According to the researchers, the name “Hajong” has its origin in the Garo language. In Garo language “Ha” means land and “Jong” means ants or worms. Thus literally means land-ants or worms. But some other researchers said that “Ha” means earth and “ jong” means insect. They are called “Hajong” which means insect of earth. This name was given to them because the ‘Hajongs’ life and activity is deeply associated with land. In Meghalaya they are mainly concentrated in the plains of the south-west and the western border

of the west Garo Hills district. In the Garo Hills, Twelve thousand Hajong people migrated to Garo hills . Thus they are known as (Baaro Hajari) in west Garo Hills, Meghalaya while some Hajong villages are situated in the east and the west khasi Hills as well some of them also live in different districts of Assam. It is traditionally believed that the Hajongs early lived in the Hajo area of the Kamrup District of Assam. When their population increased and cultivable land was found too scant to sustain them; they left the place and set out in search of new land.

In north-east India Hajong tribe play a vital role in the structure of tribal population living in Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal pradesh. In Assam, the Hajong people are found to live in different districts like Goalpara, Darrang, Chirang, Kamrup, Sonitpur , Nogaon, North-Lakhimpur, Tinsukia, Karbi-Anglong and Dima-Hasao (earlier North Cachar Hills) .

2. Objective of the study

1. To study on the Hajong tribe.
2. To study of the social and cultural aspect in north-east India of the Hajong tribe.

3. Methodology of the study

The research study is based on secondary sources of data. Data is collected from research articles, books, journals, newspapers, internet and other published data. Descriptive method is used to conduct this study.

4. Analysis of the Present Study

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECT OF THE HAJONG TRIBE

The hajong of Assam have their own rich culture which is different from other tribes. Since culture covers various features or aspect of life. It is necessary to discuss the most vital aspects of the Hajong people in the following sub-heads-

1. HOUSE PATTERN OF HAJONG PEOPLE

Hajong villagers are dwelling on high ground preferable near their wet paddy land. In a Hajong village, except for the house of the adhikari and the house of some well-to-do families the other houses are almost similar in pattern with variations in size. The scenario of having one earthen plinth and two thatched roofs on both sides is common in every Hajong village. Bamboos and timber are used for house structure. But the present day house pattern will be changed in modern day. The walls are made of split bamboo and plastered with mud mixed with cow dung. The Hajongs customarily construct four or five houses on the four sides protecting the middle portion of the courtyard. There are different names of Hajong houses like- Bhat Ghar, Akhli ghar, Kasri ghar, Khopra ghar, Chang ghar, Guli ghar, Dhiki ghar, Dyao ghar etc. The Hajong people courtyard is used as a space for religious rites. The kitchen is built separately from the main dwelling. There is a common courtyard in every household which is used for threshing grains after harvest. There are various type of Hajong house are mention below-

1. Bhat Ghar: BhatGhar also called maija ghar is the main dwelling, dining hall and also a bedroom.
2. Kasri Ghar: Kasri ghar means dormitory with provision for guests.
3. Khopra Ghar: Khopra ghar is another type of Hajong house. It's also called jura ghar, the bedroom for a married son or daughter.
4. Akhili ghar: It's another type of Hajong house that is the kitchen.
5. Chang Ghar: Chang ghar means granary.
6. Guli ghar: Guli ghar means (cow or cattle shed) is constructed of some distance or in the front side of the compound in a suitable place.
7. Thakur ghar: Thakur ghar in every households to perform daily prayer or worship.

2. FOOD HABIT: Rice is the staple food of the Hajong. It is generally taken with vegetables. Fish is a favourite item of food for them. They do not generally eat pork and fouls. However, They eat pigeon and goat meat. Chewing raw betel nut leaves with tobacco is a common practice among the people of Hajong community. In the performance of socio-religious festivals as well in the performance of rituals, rice beer is not used by Hajong people. Rice beer brewed at home is a favourite drink, but it is taken occasionally.

For special occasions, rice is ground into fine powder and used to make steamed or fried rice cakes called pitha. Tortoise is traditionally a favourite meat for hajong people. The Hajong people have their various traditional dishes are- (i) Dingpura (Dingpura is a type of sweet rice cooked in a special type of Bamboo. (ii) Bukni Bhat (fermented rice). (iii) Bisi Bhat (a type of steamed sticky and sweet rice). (iv) Libahak (Dishes made with ground rice). (V) Putamas (Small fishes steamed in banana leaves). (vi) Kharpani (vegetable boiled with dried fish and soda). (vii) Tupla Bhat (Rice cooked in banana leaves). (viii) Chunsahak (A type of cooked vegetable for special guests). (ix) Bhatuwahak (Dishes with rice flour and fermented fish). (X) Chungahak (Dishes cooked in bamboo).

3. RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE: The traditional religion of the Hajong people is panentheism or belief in nature. They believe in the divine power in all sources of nature. Therefore, even though the Hajongs are Hindus, their traditional tribal religion is also active in an integrated form. To get rid of various suspicious activities and misfortune of nature, the Hajongs worship various gods and goddesses with faith and devotion. Among the duties they worship, Bauch or Bastudeo is the main deity. The Giati community of each village or neighborhood jointly performs Baais, i.e Bastu puja. Bastu puja is held in the month of Bohag. In some remote places in each village or neighborhood. The designated place for the Basto Deo is fixed. Along with Bastudeo, several other Gods and Goddesses are installed in a row. These Gods and goddesses are Kamakhya, Lakhimi, Pabani, Charaburi, Andahura, Hamhami, Damdami, Khangkhangi, Dadubi, Bardeo, Kshetrodeo, Jatradeo, etc.

Basically, the place is called Biish shali, because Bastudeo is the main deity of the Hajong people. According to the rules, animals are sacrificed and homemade liquor if offered to each deity. Previously tortoise, pig to charaburi, chickens to Khangkhangi, goats to Andahura and tortoise to Bardeo. Currently goats are sacrificed to all the deities.

4. CUSTOMS RELATED TO BIRTH: In Hajong society, when a child is born, a separate temporary hut or house is built for the mother a few days before delivery. This temporary house, build separately in the courtyard is called Chuva Ghor or Jatak Ghor’’. When the time for child birth approaches, the mother is made to lie on a straw bed in the Chuva Ghor. Except for the midwife or nurse, other family members are not allowed to stay with the mother. There is no connected for a few day. If it is a new born boy, the mother should stay separately for seven days, and if it is a girl, for five day, considering her impure. The midwife cuts the umbilical cord of the newborn with a bamboo splinter and buries it in a distant place behind the yard. After that, on a specific day, a barber is called to shave the newborn hair, and the Brahmin or the priest of their community purifies the house by chanting mantra and sprinkling holy water. This purification (Jatak) is done again after a month by shaving the child’s head. After this monthly purification, the newborn’s mother can start cooking and doing other household chores on the day of the monthly purification, the family sometimes organizes a feast to seek blessing from the elders and relatives of the community. Only after such purification, the parents of the newborn can participate and religious ceremonies. They believe that if they participate in any auspicious event or worship before the newborns monthly purification, if may brings misfortune to the child.

5. LANGUAGE: Hajongs language is a Indo- Aryan language with a possible Tibeto-Burman language substratum. It is spoken by approximately 80,000 ethnic Hajongs across the north-east of the Indian subcontinent, specially in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal present day India.

The Hajongs have their own language which appears to be a mixture of Assamese and Bengali. According to Dr. D.N. Majumdar called it JHARUA dialect of Assamese.” Mr. Matilal Barman however regarded the language spoken by the Hajongs at present as a branch of kamrupi language (Assamese spoken lower Assam district in colloquial sense).

Mr. Ratan Kumar Rai Hajong however, believes that the Hajong had their own language in the distant past but when and how the language disappeared nobody knows.”

6. DRESS: The Hajong have their own traditional dresses. Hajong dresses are very colourful like red, blue, green, black, pink and yellow etc. The main dresses put on by Hajong women are ‘PATIN’ and it is also called ‘RANGAPATIN. The patin is a horizontally striped colourful, rectangular piece of cloth with an alternate layer of different colour between red stripes and thick horizontal borders. The PATIN is used by women like mekhela and covers their bodies from the waist to the ankle. PATIN is woven by women at their family looms.

The traditional loom is called BANA where the use of two hands is only necessary. The women generally don't use blouses. They cover the upper part of their body with a home woven cotton scarf called PASRA AGRON . This piece of cloth is also woven with flowery designs. During festivals they also use a piece of cloth around the waist and it is called KAMARBANDHA.

The men wear home woven pieces of cloth bigger than Gamoga and it is called NiNGTI. During winter they use a scarf to cover their body and they also use a kind of muffler around their neck called KAMPESH.

7. ORNAMENTS: In Hajong society no ORNAMENT used by men could be identified. Whatever ornaments they now have, these are used by women only. Like the women of the other ethnic groups, the Hajong women also have a great liking toward their traditional ornaments. Ornaments with modern designs which are available in the local market are not at all favoured by the Hajong women whether young or aged. Some traditional ornament is given below—

1. KATA BAJU- Kata Baju is one of the traditional ornaments of Hajong women. It is Armlets made of silver used by women.
2. BAGHH- It is made very heavy silver anklets used by women
3. HARSARA- Harsara is a silver necklace having three rows of designed chains used by women.
4. GUNJAR- Round and heavy silver made anklets worn by women. Anklets when put on produce linkling sounds.
5. KAIRU- Earring worn by women of the ear-lobes made of brass with gold plating.
6. NALAS and KANFUL- The Hajong women also use silver made nos rings called NALAS and earrings called KANFUL.

8. MARRIAGE: Hajongs are endogenous people. Marriage with a person outside of their tribe is strictly forbidden, cases of such marriages are rare. Violation of the custom leads to ex-communication from society. In case of any unavoidable circumstance if a marriage is held between a couple of Hajong and other communities. The erring couple has to be inducted in the Hajong society with due atonement followed by time in cash and providing a feast to the people of the concerned village.

Some important aspect of Hajong marriage system are as the following—

- i). Khalti or Bride price - A payment to be made to the parents of the bride which is known as khalti but nowadays it has been replaced by payment to the bridegroom by the parents of the bride.
- ii). Four types - There are four types of Hajong marriages such as Subh Bibah, Sanga or Hanga Biya, Dai Pora Biya and Jangoy Biya. These are four types of marriage held in the Hajong society. These types of marriages have different status or importance out of which the first i.e Subh Bibah is the best type of Hajong marriage.

9. DEATH RELATED CUSTOMS: When a person dies in a Hajong family, the body is respectfully cremated. If the death occurs at home, relatives and neighbors bring the body to the first. They cleanse it with turmeric and water. Afterward, a bamboo stretcher is prepared to carry the body to the cremation ground; the community members, neighbors, are prohibited from cooking or engaging in other regular activities because the entire community is considered impure until the body is removed. The funeral attendees take the body to the cremation ground and perform the cremation According to the rituals. Each family of the community contributes wood for the cremation. Some people bury the body in the cremation ground instead of cremating it. After completing the burial of cremation, the attendees bathe and cleanse themselves before returning home. On the day of death, the family members fast. The deceased person's son can eat fruit only on the second day. It is customary to eat vegetarian food from the third day onwards.

In some religions, the Hajong people observe this mourning period for twelve days. At the end of the twelve days, they shave their heads with the help of a barber, their heads with the help of a barber and perform the shraddha ceremony on the thirteenth day with a priest. In other regions, some shave their heads on the tenth day and perform the shraddha ceremony on the eleventh day. The day of hair shaving is called ' Ghat-Kamani ' . On that day a puja is performed near a water body, the ' Ghat-Kamani ' place, for the soul of the deceased. On the day of shraddha, the designated person or a Brahmin priest performs the shraddha rituals. Relatives and community members are invited for a feast. This feast is vegetarian, but dishes made with lentils and fish are essential.

The Hajong people perform the shraddha ceremony according to Hindu customs with a Brahmin or their own community priest, but some traditional practices are also involved. On the day of shraddha, they offer satyanarayan to God with rice flour, banana, Milk and flour to worship. They call vaishnava kirtaniya groups to sing kirtan songs. The Hajong people believe in reincarnation. They believe that people are reborn according to their good and bad deeds in their lifetime. On the other hand, they believe that the soul wanders in the world of ghosts until the funeral rites of the deceased are performed. After the main funeral rites, some people also perform annual death rites at the end of a month or after a year. If someone dies of an immature age, the funeral rites are performed on the third day or after thirteen days. If a child dies in the mother's womb, the funeral rites of the deceased are performed thirty days (a month) later.

10. ARTS: Hajong Arts includes Birapat-Chita which are painted on a wall of the Airo Ghor by Airos during the wedding ceremonies. In Birapat-Chita also called Chan Bila Akawa the Sun, Moon, Stars, Birds, Boats and palanquins are painted with powdered rice (pithli), Vermilion and Kohl. Other works of Art are done in the preparation of merr for maroi puja. In merr various Gods and Goddesses and other auspicious objects are painted, intended for the worship of the serpent goddess Kani Diyao.

Paper cutting is another folk Art of the Hajong people. Paper cuttings with elaborate designs are hung on the doors during wedding occasions. Banana trees are often decorated with intricate paper cutting ceremonies.

11 . MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS: They have a number of musical instruments and musical folk. They use two kinds of drums, one is called DHULUK and other is called KHUL. While the Dhuluk is made of a piece of hollowed wood with hides on both ends, the khul is earthen made with hides on both sides. The khul is earthen made with hides on both sides. The former is used at the time of folk song and dancing during the performance of social festivals, the latter is used during the devotional song of the performance of religious festivals. They use two kind of string instruments. The musical instrument called RASAMANDALA is made of gourd crust having one string only. The other string instrument is DOTORA. Dotora is made of wood and the hollowed part of the end is covered with the skin of a kind of big lizard. Their wind instruments are one BANSI (flute made of bamboo) and GUBUA (Gagana) which is also made from a piece of bamboo.

12. FESTIVALS: The Hajong tribes are also for their agricultural lifestyle, celebrates various festivals, including the traditional Bastu puja, Chorkhela or Chormaga, Pusna, Leewatana festival, Kojai Ghor and Biswa alongside Hindu festivals like Durga puja, Kali puja, Kani puja, Katka puja, Lakshmi puja, Kamakhya puja etc. Some Hajongs festivals are mentioned below-

- **BASTU PUJA:** This religious festival, also known as Bastu puja, is a celebration of the “Place of Living” and involves worshipping Mother Earth, along with other Gods, to protect against bad omens, disease and wild animals. This traditional festival is performed by a Nungtang or Dyushi. In Bastu puja goats and pigeons are sacrificed for Bastu puja.
- **CHORKHELA OR CHORMAGA:** This is a popular agricultural festival, celebrated in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya and Assam in Goalpara district. Young People go from house to house, playing music and singing folk songs, and received rice or money in return, with the festival also serving as a chance for potential matchmaking. Since every person, both young and old, comes out to watch the play, this is considered a chance to check out prospective brides and grooms.
- **BISWA:** The Hajongs also celebrate their pre-monsoon harvest festival known as ‘Biswa’ Kani puja, katka puja are also performed on the last day of the month of srabon and kati. The day of sharad purnima is known as kujai Chor among the Hajongs.

Another important event performed by the Hajong tribe during this festival is known as ‘LEWA-TANA BIHU.’ ‘LEWA’ means creeper and TANA means pulling. Thus the literal meaning of “LEWA-TANA” means pulling a creeper. Among the Hajongs, although there is no creeper pulling, it is still called LEWA-TANA BIHU. In this Bihu two groups of Hajong tribal youth one consisting of young boys of marriageable age and the other consisting of young girls of marriageable age putting on their traditional dresses and ornaments dance and sing songs of love in their own languages. If the songs are rendered into Assamese one would hardly find any difference between the contents of these songs and those of the Assamese Bihu songs. In fact in the ‘LEWA-TANA BIHU’ intimate relationship grows between the young boys and girls according to their linking and exchange of heart and mind takes place which ultimately ends up in marriage between the lovers in due course.

CONCLUSION

The Hajong are a colourful tribe with their distinct culture and tradition. They have various types and forms of folk song and dances, such as Lewatana, Jhakhamara, Bastu dance, Pabni dance, Gopini dance, Gitalu dance, kati gahen, Tengela dance etc. Some of these songs and dances are related to their day today agricultural life and some are of fairs and festivals. It is to be noted that culture is not static dynamism which may be accelerated by different kinds of forces and factors. Such forces and factors have brought changes in the socio-cultural life of many of the tribes of North-East India. It is to some degree true to the Hajongs also.

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