CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Aims and Objectives of the present Study

A study of our unknown or little known neighbours is a stepping stone for national integration through proper understanding of the cultural parameters which govern the more or less self-managed tribal communities.

The study of the socio-cultural life of small communities has been drawn the attention of the researcher. In studies of the Indian small scale tribal and peasant community, the socio-cultural structure and its peculiar characteristics have been investigated by the researchers for over the last two decades. Yet there are few studies concentrating on the social and cultural conditions of tribal societies. When one further delimits the area and considers the North-East India, the study of socio-cultural structures appear to be very few and far between.

There is no gainsaying the existence of some suitable ethnographic accounts of a number of tribal communities. But we rarely find a detailed picture of a village community describing the interrelations between society and cultural activities. By dealing the village community and its cultural as single side of activity, we wish to examine the features of rural life as a whole. For this occasion our preference falls on Hajong tribe who represents social community which is half-way between a tribal as well as a farmer village group. Over and
above, this is a study of tribal community which has migrated from place to place and adopted system of cultivation.

Scope of the Study:

The community of Hajongs are preferred as this community does not constitute only a demographically important tribal community in Assam, more over Hajongs are one of the out and out conservative tribal communities. Yet, at present Hajongs follow many of the old customs and traditions. The elements of social change and their operation are highly accountable one structural relationships, popularly known as maladjustments in tribal groups. The tribal societies have undergone social transformation and some of their cultural traits have disappeared due to the changing panaroma of development activities.

The changes are markedly visible among the Hajongs of Assam who happened to migrate from one place to another. Their acculturation and assimilation with the neighbouring people have brought changes to their life and culture to the greatest extent possible. However, in spite of erosion of their culture in the periphery, they are found to have maintained their core culture in tact. Social change and transformation are affected by the social and geographical environment especially in case of immigrants who must adopt themselves to a changed situation in their new habitat. According to Gillin and Gillin, " Social changes are variations from the accepted modes of life; whether due to alterations in geographical conditions, in cultural equipment, composition of the population or ideologies and whether brought about
diffusion or invention within the group."1 The rural area under study provides an ideal field to know the complexities of tension and conflicts between old and new values, indigenous and exogenous ideas and practices which appear in all changeable societies. Hajongs have their own distinct identify from other tribes in Assam. They are also lesser known due to the lack of comprehensive literature and studies on them. Since sufficient research materials have not been available in published form, the scholar has to depend particularly and extensively on interviews of Hajongs community.

The People and the Land

The Hajongs are one of the Mongoloid communities of North-East India. They are a small tribe. They are regarded as a scheduled tribe in Assam. The Hajongs inhabit the plain and Hill areas in Assam. They speak a language belonging to the Indo-Aryan Linguistic family.

At present majority of the Hajong population live in the state of Meghalaya, some of them in Assam. Besides these, a few number of Hajongs are at present inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh also.

Besides the two autonomous hill districts, viz, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar, there are a good number of Hajong villages confined over the plain districts of Assam. In the plain districts of Assam, most of them are found in the Lakhipur area and Dudhnoi area of Goalpara district, Southern region bordering Meghalaya in the South Salma Sub-division of Dhubri district, South-West area of Kamrup district.

Lakhimpur, Darrang, Dhemaji, Marigaon, Bongaigaon and negligible number in Nalbari district.2

Topography:

The state of Assam is situated between 24°01' and 27°09' North Latitudes and between 89°08' and 96°01' East Longitudes with an estimated area of 78,523 sq.km. It is bound on the north by the territories of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, on the east by Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur, on the south by Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya, and on the west by Bangladesh and West Bengal. The major portion of Assam is covered with hills and plain. The climate of Assam in general is temperate but not uniform all over Assam. Most of rainfall occur in the months between April and September. Usually the rainest months are June and July. From November to February are the only cold months in the year.

Demography:

The population figure of the Hajongs according to the Census reports of 1971 are shown below as 1981 Census could not conducted in Assam due to foreign national agitation.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census year</th>
<th>1971</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Total in Assam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Dists.</td>
<td>Two autonomous Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Informant: N.M. Hajong (45), Dhamar, Goalpara, dt. 6.6.97
3. (Source: Directorate of Census, Assam)
Out of 386 there are 227 males and 159 females. This population figure does not, however, include the Hajongs inhabiting the plain districts of Assam. The Hajongs constitute 0.0026 percent of the total population of Assam, 0.0240 percent of the tribal population of Assam and 0.146 percent of the total hill tribal population of Assam as per 1971 Census.

**Mythical Origin:**

About their mythical origin, there was a legend among the Hajongs. Hajongs believe that they are the descendants of Kartayabirjarjun, one of the greatest Khastriya kings of Mahabharata era. The great saint Parasuram who vowed to annihilate all the Khastriyas from the earth primarily for taking revenge on king Kartayabirajun who was accountable for killing his father Jamadagni ultimately had killed the king in the process. His queen Swarupa Devi was pregnant at that time. The queen fled away from the capital and took refuge in the hermitage of the sage Kamdatta in ancient Kamrup. She gave birth to a son who came to be known as Padangsku. Padangsku occupied the ancient Hajo township including the temple there. His descendants included Kumar Bhaskar Barman.4

**Migration:**

Regarding their migration into the present site there is a very interesting anecdote among the Hajongs. It describes the career of their most ancient king. The story is as follows.

During the reign of Bharat Barman, Hajo township was destroyed

---

and about twelve thousand Hajongs fled away to the Garo Hills. The place in the Garo Hills where they established their settlement was called Hājari. From Hājari, they spread over to a different areas. These people coined a new name for them with term "Hāj" corresponding to their place of origin, Hajo. And in course of time "Hāj" became Hajong.¹

**Legendary Origin of the Sub - Group :**

There has been a lot of confusions and it is very difficult to say what is precisely the number of sub-groups the Hajongs have at present. According to some authorities, they have 21 sub-groups but their names are neither available nor known. The people cannot memorise all of them except three, namely, Chondi, Kendagaiya and Baliati. ¹

Regarding the clan organisation, the Hajongs have a partilineal clan organisation as found in Assam. These clans being exogamous only at the time of marriage negotiations the concerned families try to trace their clans from oblivion.

**Historical background :**

There are historical backgrounds about the origin of the name "Hajong". There is no any agreed opinion regarding this matter. According to own traditional belief of Hajongs, they originally inhabited "Has Paragana" or in Hajo area of present Kamrup district. Due to avoidable reasons they were compelled to leave the Hajo area and they fled to Garo Hills. And from Garo Hills they spread to Mymensing, Rajsahi, some areas of present Bangladesh. They believe that the term "Hajong" is derived from the term "Hāj" which refers to the inhabitants of the ancient township of Hajo. ²

---

¹ Hajong, Paresh : *Jana si ksa*, Pp.11-12.
² Hajong, Paresh : *Jana si ksa*, Pp.11-12.
According to Mr. Ratan Kr. Rai Hajong, (a reputed writer hailing from this community) the term "Hajong" is originated from "Harajan". According to him, "Ha" means to express sorrow and 'Jan' means people. So it means a section of the people who had accepted a new occupation by abandoning the traditional one.⁶

Some of other scholars opine that the word 'Hajong' is derived from "Hājār" or Hājāri which was used in the counting the number of soldiers.

On the otherhand, according to few scholars the word "Hajong" is hailed from the Kachari word "Haju" which literally means the people who live in high Hills.

Moreover, majority of the scholars opine that the term "Hajong" originates from Garo word, "Hā-Jong". In Garo language, "Hā" means land and "Jong" means ants or worms. Hence it means the ants or worms of land. But it literally means the people, Hajongs who are expert in ploughing.⁷

According to E.T. Dalton, :The Rabha and Hajongs of the Ghowalpara District are branches of the Kachari race and connected with Garos".⁸

On the otherhand, Mr. L.A. Waddel opines the Hajongs as the primitive Kachari of the hilly tracts.⁹

---

6. Informant : R.K. Rai Hajong (50), N. Lakhimpur, dt. 4.7.97
7. Informant : Biresh Ch. Hajong (50), Lakhipur, Goalpara, dt. 7.6.97
8. Dalton, E.T., Tribal Histrory of Eastern India. P. 87
Hypothesis:

The following is the probable hypothesis of the present study under different heads:

1. The aspects of the social life of the Hajongs include the role of family, society, social structure, social institution, economic as well as educational condition will be examined in the study.

2. The cultural aspects of Hajongs include folk song, prose-narratives, proverbs, riddles and written literature will be studied.

3. Different social customs of Hajongs such as beliefs, religion and its rites and rituals, festivals, games and folk-medicine will be under the present study.

4. The various aspects of materials culture of the Hajongs such as arts, crafts, architecture, cooking and costumes will be studied.

5. Different aspects of performing artforms include song, dance and drama will be discussed under this study.

It is hoped that the proposed study, when completed, will bring to light many aspects of the socio-cultural of the Hajongs in the broader perspective and will help in a better understanding of the composite culture of N.E. Region.
Works done so far in the field:

It has already been stated that no systematic study has been attempted so far on the socio-cultural life of the Hajong community of Assam. Of course, a very few articles and papers in different aspects of the Hajongs may be found, which are largely written in Assamese language. Furthermore, these articles and papers are not systematic and research oriented studied. Although systematic study on the socio-cultural aspects of the Hajongs is not adequate books or monographs on the Hajong community as whole are very poor, since a very few British administrators have given brief account in their various monographs regarding the Hajongs. In this context we must mention the name of E.T. Dalton who had written a monograph entitled, "Tribal History of Eastern India" in 1978. Here the writer has given impressive accounts about various ethnic groups of Bengal and Assam including the Hajongs. L.A. Waddle was another British administrator who had written the book entitled, "The Tribes of Brahmaputra Valley," 1975. The book contains a brief ethnographic account of the Hajongs of Assam. B.C. Allen was also a British administrator who has written the book entitled "Assam District Gazatters", Vol. III in 1905. The book contains brief clan accounts of the Hajongs.

The Census Reports of Assam furnished by the British administrator in different times may find detailed accounts of Hajongs of which Sir Mekenji’s Census Report, 1881 is worth mentioning. He has made attempt to give an idea about the language which is the mixture of the Assamese and the Bengali.

In the Census Report of 1891 while the Hajongs have been considered as a separate tribal ethnic group, their racial affinity to the
Garos and the Kacharis has also been referred to. In addition of these reports, the following books may give an idea about the ethnographic accounts of the Hajongs e.g., Rev.S. Andlé's the *Kachari* (1975), S. Karotemprel's the *Tribes of North East India* (1984), B.N. Bordoloi's *Tribes of Assam* (1991), L.S. Gassah's *Garo Hills land and People* which may give vivid picture and varied descriptions of the Hajongs of the Assam.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that no body has written a systematic monograph on various socio-cultural aspects of the Hajongs till today. So it is hoped that the proposed study would be the first attempt to focus significant light on the socio-cultural milieu of the Hajong society.

**Methodology:**

Various method of investigation and research in social phenomena have been adopted to collect the requisite materials but for the purpose of the proposed study the following methods adopted are -

1. Observation method.
2. Interview method.
3. Case study method.

Since adequate research materials have not available in published form, I have to depend mainly on participation with the people. As I am the people of Chhaygaon, it gives me the opportunity of coming into direct contact with the Hajong people concentrated areas. The rest of the materials in which I was not directly involved has also been witnessed on different occasions.
The materials from the field study have been collected through interview method. For the purpose many Hajong villages of Assam are visited. I interviewed a number of Hajong families and active bearers of their culture at North Lakhimpur, Gogamukh, Dhanshri Basti, Tamulpur, Bijni, Lakhipur (Goalpara), Dhamar, Matia, Dudhnai, Krishna, Rajapara, Dhupdhar, Boko, Bamunigaon (Chhaygaon), Sonapur, Khetri, Bonda (Guwahati).

The selection of informants for field study was made on the following basis:

1. For social aspects - Old Hajongs age above 50 years.
2. For cultural aspects - Hajong people i.e., bearers in between 50 to 70 years.
3. For social customs - Hajongs Adhikaris, Priests, ojas and active bearers age group between 50 to 70 years.
4. For material culture - Hajong men and women artists age group between 40 to 55 years.
5. For folk-performances and verbal artforms- Hajongs actors drumers, dancers, singers, age group between 20 to 65 years.

Questionaries and schedules are prepared to collecty data from the informants and information collected are checked and cross checked from various sources. The investigator, instead of impartially interpreting the data may interpret that to suit his convenience and purpose. Connexious are established with the aid of the Hajongs making friendship with them. For thís; their traditional ways and courtesy are
followed. The act of giving process is followed and betelnut, cigarettes, wine and donation to festivals and taking of rice and tea with the families of the Hajongs and spent at least one night with them are the tactics adopted by the investigator.

Moreover the library work has been done at different libraries of the State with the view to collect the secondary datas. In addition to the published works of the Hajong authors and non-Hajong authors, some unpublished papers have also been studied intensively.

*****