CHAPTER ONE
GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Assam is rich in temples. The exact time of these temples is not known. Different ethnic groups reached here at different times and they are culturally affiliated to Assamese culture. The last population group belongs to Indo European linguistic group which reached here from the west (from India) and they settled on the alluvial flood plain of the Brahmaputra river and practised plough cultivation. Cultural life of this group of population mainly centres round the temples and the classical codes under-pin the socio-economic life of this population.

It appears from the observation that temples have various architectural characters. It means that temples did not reach here at a same depth of time. Seen that Hindu religion and culture is temple sheltered which can be called temple culture. So temples and classical codes have had their own functional network and these were conditioned by the cultural codes of given time. Temples survive by the conditional cultural codes and mainly by their functional network. Such institutions exist but how it is possible. Problem lies here. My present aim of the study is to elicit out this reality. Through this work an attempt has been made to reach nearer to its reality.

Such institutions are primarily established by the kings. These are distributed over the flood plains of the Brahmaputra river. Each temple represents different traditions of Indian classical codes. These can be regarded as symbol of
classical codes in concrete form. It acts and interacts, with the socio-economic institutions of a given time. Different ethnic groups bearing distinct economy, culture and language are always associated with the temple. There existed and still exists more or less unaltered relation-ship between the temples and the different ethnic groups around it or from distance. It is observed that temples are regarded as cohesive factor and it has its impact upon the socio-economic life of the people to a variable extent. Some are socio-economically involved directly and some indirectly at the same time.

At the moment such temples are brought under study that stand as a representative for different sects of Indian tradition which reached here at different waves of time.

A. AREA OF THE STUDY:

It is not possible to cover all temples of Assam within a stipulated period. Here major emphasis is given on the temples of Hajo in order to understand the functional or operational nature of the alike temples of past and present as well.

Hajo is situated in the heart of the Kamrup district. It is located some thirty two kilometers to the North West of Guwahati, Assam across the Brahmaputra river. It falls under the jurisdiction of the subdivision, Guwahati. It extends from 26 10' N to 26 29'30'' N and 91 26'50'' to 91 41' E. Hajo is called a place of five pilgrimage. Hajo is the meeting place of several cultures. The following temples are considered for the present study namely Hayagriva Madhava, Kedareswar, Kameswar, Ganesh and
Kamaleswar.

B. SELECTION OF THE AREA:

I have selected the Hajo temples for the present study because the area is far away from Guwahati city, the navel centre of the province, Assam. Here its sociocultural tradition has not undergone major variations and the socio-religious traditions attached to the temples continue to remain more or less unaffected. The classical codes that support the temple located at Guwahati or any urban centre, have become very responsive to the rapid changes.

This area under study is not out of pale of such influence. The change that has occurred here is slow. Despite all such changes temples continue to be the hub of the life and culture centering round it. It has taken such a form that it has become problematic for critical study of long duration. As it appears from the initial survey that Hajo temples have not undergone major changes where the traditional population support and help to perpetuate the temple tradition more or less in its original form. For this, the Hayagriva Madhava temple along with other is brought under study. Moreover this area witnessed the establishment of temples at different depth of time.

C. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

As already mentioned there are number of temples distributed over different parts of Assam. Some of them stand and function cruising through the span of time. And some are non-functional but they physically exist. The temples come from
different time depth responding different religious tradition.

The main purpose of the present study is to understand the function and nature of the similar past temples with reference to the temple, Hayagriva Madhava. Because, here the past enters into present and vibrates in the same body (i.e. temple itself).

Today’s young is yesterday’s old. So to reach the present state one has to walk over time. This is an organic reality but temples of today made their beginning during past may be near and distant. What is more important here that living organism undergoes physical changes or transformation but temple dues not follow the organic principle. Its forms and contents do not undergo major changes. Because some abstract values condition the development and continuity of the temple. Virtually the forms and contents of the temple continue uninterrupted because classical code wants that, it is neither young nor old.

Here lies the importance of studying the Hajo temple as a case of living archaeology to throw some light on the past temple. And for this, I have resorted to viewing this problem by following the method of reverse chronology.

The basic objective of the present study is:

(i) to examine the position of Hajo temples in relation to the temples of Assam.

(ii) to examine the temple’s organisation of the past with the help of present.
The classical codes and the temples that existed in the past, continue till present time. When the temples are looked against the background of time, it appears to be static or frozen form of ancient tradition. It survives and exists as an evidence of archaeological past. It exists still today but in which way. This is the aim and objectives of the present study.

D.METHODOLOGY:

These temples are studied from both material and non material point of views. One feeds back another. These two are assumed to have undergone variations over time, as the ancient system did not remain static. This is due to the fact that classical tradition was enriched by the addition of new elements over time.

The process of interaction between the temples and society needs to be studied, because it determines the very existence of the temple since the time of its origin. While studying the temple from the point of interaction together with function, the following aspects are considered - a) the history and origin of temples from the historical and archaeological records, b) the existing form of the temple, c) the form and function : internal and external, d) its relation with the population or clients (both material and nonmaterial levels and socio-economic level.) Data have been collected on the above aspects by direct observation method, interview method and questionnaire method.
The persons selected for the collection of data for this study are aged ones. This is done as the old are repertoir for past and present information. They stand on the frontier of the past and the present; and so do the temples that are brought under this study.

E. DATA USED:

Data have been collected from two levels: the material and non-material of past and present. The former includes temple, intangible and other tangible paraphernalia used in temples during past and present; the latter, socio-economic groups (people) who have been responsible for keeping the tradition living since the past forming a socio-economic or socio-religious network with the temple. Data come from within the temple of Hajo and neighbourhood. The data are collected by using the methodology already mentioned.

As already mentioned that it is not possible to cover all temples distributed over Assam, so I have selected Hajo temples as a representative to understand the working mechanism of other temples of this area.