OBSERVATION
CHAPTER-6

OBSERVATION

Geographical location of Hajo indicates to the social and historical importance of the area. Situated on the north bank of Brahmaputra river, the area is surrounded by rivers like Puthimari, Baralia and Sessa river. The surroundings of Hajo has hillocks like Ajnathuri, Hatimura, Barambai, Siddheswari, Poa-Macca, Manikuta hill which indicates its strategical and historical significant. The climate of the area is very much favourable for agriculture purpose with a mean temperature of around 24°C. The area offers platform for floriculture in the locality. Apart from traditional agriculture, each crops like potatoes, radish, chillies, brinjal, onion, garlic, etc. has replaced the long-term one. The beels, swamps and active flood plain area enhances the opportunity of pisciculture in the locality. The population composition of Hajo locality is consists of different ethnic, cultural and religious groups with their own social outlook. The indigenous people are concentrated in the area of better transport network and the scheduled caste people are located near the beel and swamps of the area, where fishes are available. Thus the economy of the area is based upon the activities of the small business and this business was originally based on temple economy.

The religious trends is very much interlink with the inhabitants and with different religious shrines having different nature. Since 4th century
A.D. the area depicts the religious trends of the area. The trend gained its momentum in medieval period when the Koch rulers reconstructed and started patronisation of temples at different places. During the period of Ahom rules the region witnessed maximum construction and reconstruction of religious shrines. They offered their attention not only to the Hindu shrines but usually the mosque or *dargah* of Muslim faith also got their support and attention. The temples of Haygriva Madhava, Kedaresvar, Kamalesvar, Kamesvar and Ganesa, popularly known as *Panchatirtha*, and mosque of Poa-Macca have reflect the social and economic outlook of the locality. These religious centres stands as a representative of the communities in asserting their social identity.

The religious centres of Hajo developed gradually through the various stages of the political development of the region, in fact the political condition of a region has an important effect on the religious centres of that particular region. Kumar Vaskarvarman of Varman dynasty played an important role in the history of Kamrupa. The ruler of Salastambha dynasty actually extended the territory of the region which was consolidated by the ruler of pala dynasty.

13th century Kamrupa witnessed significant event through the invasion of Turko-Afghan power and the political history of the region assimilated with the culture of an external force. In fact the area received the foreigners, who gradually settled in the area with specific profession. Even the invasion mark the political history of the state with introduction
of Islamic readings of *khutbah* and introduction of rituals relating to Friday religious services. This was an important feature of the study area where people belonging to different faiths are assimilated here.

The rise of Koch and Ahom powers was the most important event of the region. The Koch power started the policy of appeasement and royal patronages to the religious centres of the state and the temples of Hajo got their definite share in this regard. Under the rule of the Ahom rulers Assam became the centre of attraction for foreign elements in the field of religious activities. Different faiths of Hinduism got their royal support which included Saivism, Vaishnavism and Saktism.

Hajo became the centre of religious activities with the temples of Hayagriva Madhava, Kedaresvar, Kamalesvar, Kamesvar and Ganesa temple. Apart from these temples, the Muslim people got their holy shrine Poa-Macca. The Hayagriva Madhava temple, a *Visnu* temple reconstructed by Koch king Raghudeva in 1583 A.D., and the entire society of the locality is centered around this temple and the social fabric is greatly influenced by the temple. The Buddhist people of neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet claimed that this temple was a Buddhist one. Even some scholars also claimed this temple to be belongs to Buddhist faith. Even today Buddhist people come across to the temple to pay their tribute to Gautam Buddha. The temple of Kedaresvar, Kamalesvar and Kamesvar are the Siva temple which has consolidated the socio-cultural life of area along with Ganesa temple. These four temples acts as satellite temple of Hayagriva Madhava temple.
Poa-Macca mosque is noted for the Mazar of Giasuddin Aulia, and the mosque was rebuilt by Shah Suja in 1657 A.D. The shrine is highly regarded not only by the Muslim, the Hindu people of the locality also pay respect to the centre. The centre has contributed a lot to the communal harmony of the locality.

The religious centres of Hajo received the royal patronages in various stages of different rulers. Patronage was granted in forms of agricultural land, laboures (paiks) and other properties. In 1583 A.D. king Raghudeva made large endowments of land, money and other valuable to the Hayagriva Madhava temple. Ahom king Rudra Singha also donated large number of donations to the temples. One most important aspects of Rudra Singha's patronage was his survey of holy shrines where he had recorded the religious centres of Hajo including Poa-Macca, which also received direct patronage from the Ahom rulers. King Siva Singha, Pramatta Singha, Rajeswar Singha, Lakshmi Singha, Gaurinath Singha, Kamaleswar Singha and Chandrakanta Singha donated large amount of donation including, land, Sevaits and paiks to the religious centres of Hajo for maintaining the rites and rituals of the shrines. Even during the extremely disturb period of Assam also these holy shrines of Hajo received the attention of the royal powers, which indicates to the importance of these religious centres.

The Mughal emperor of the contemporary period also granted royal charter for the management of the shrines. Emperor Shahjahan and
Aurangzab granted land not only to Poa-Macca mosque, but they had shown equal interest in the Hindu temples also. Apart from Hayagriva Madhava temple, the Umananda temple also received grants from the Mughal emperor. This type of grants from Ahom rulers and Mughal emperors signify that the grant was aimed at effective agriculture through the *Paiks* which upgraded the economic conditions of the religious centres as well as the life of common people also.

The *Sevait*, who were donated to the centres along with lands played an important role in the organization of the religious centres. Their duties were pre-determined by the royal charter. They were responsible for any kind of omission and commission in regards of affairs of the religious centres. These *Sevait* were given settlement near the centre by the authority. Hence lived on that settlement pattern to offer services to the temples.

The well organised religious centres of Hajo has certain social implication. These implications are the product of certain rites and rituals which are related to the centres and the people of the locality regards them as integral part of their day to day life. They are binded with these social norms both socially and culturally. However, these centres witnessed a socio-religious changes after British entered into the territory of Assam. During this period the influence of priestly class along with the *Daloi* was distinctly witnessed and gradually the gap was widened between the *Brahman* and non-*Brahman* section of the temples. The *Daloi* and others
priests were regarded like *Zamindars* which lead to the rivalry between the groups related to the temples.

The religious centres gradually witnessed the social evils like the problem of castism, untouchability and disputes. In the name of untouchability, the lower caste people of the locality was restricted in performing rituals in the temple. People belonged to the caste of *Jellias*, *Keots* and *Namrudras* fought together to avail the rights to perform rituals. This problem brought attention from the elite section of the locality and they crossed all barriers to regain their rights. It was regarded an important aspects of social awareness of the locality which defeated the feudalistic approach of the priestly class. The social disturbances brought many disputes into courts of various capacities. The main disputes were taken place between the *Sevalts* and the *Daloi* for upholding certain rights and duties. This development brought the ideology of the common people (*Sevalts*) into the limelight and they were very much vocal against the corruption of the influential officials and priest. The religious centres were effected to a great extent for the social changes that took place in the administrations of the centres. The disputes and litigation were very significant in upholding the rights of the *Sevalts* in performing their ritualistic activities. It also marked a remarkable influence on the religious centres of the locality and changed the outlook of the feudalistic society which was once developed round these centres. As a result the authorities had to passed a few act to deal with the matter of the religious centres and by the passing of the *Assam State Acquisition of land belonging to Religious*
or charitable institution of Public Nature Act, 1959 (Assam Act, IX, 1961), the religious centres were taken over by the Government along with its properties.

The economy of Hajo flourished with the help of large number of handicrafts which has offered self employment opportunity to the people. These handicrafts consolidated the temple economy which is entirely based upon economy of the temple. Among the handicrafts, the brass-metal industry is in manufacturing process since the period of the Ahom rule. Mariya people, as well as the other communities are also in this profession. Earlier these artisans used to supply the brass metal utensils to the religious centres and it was used in religious activities.

Pottery making is another features of economy of Hajo. The Kumar and Hira people of the area are engaged in their profession who used to supply the earthen pot to the religious centres of Hajo. The granting of status of Sevaits to these people by the Ahom kings signify the relevance of this traditional industry. Despite many hurdles the industry is marching which required less capital and physical labour, and contributed a large share to the economy of the area. Along with pottery making the goldsmithy of Hajo had the royal support and developed a commercial centre around the temples of the locality. Essential ritualistic ornaments were supplied by these artisans to the temples and few of them are available in the custody of the temples.

The entire locality of Hajo is very rich in textile industry. The household
industry is employing the weavers of the area and they are producing silk clothes like *Pat*, *Muga*, and also *Cotton* clothes. The most important significance of the industry is that the entrepreneur has established link with foreign countries for exporting the dress-materials. The textile industry has become a mixture of traditional work and the modern technology with innovation of fashion technology. Sualkuchi, the centre of textile industry, a nearby centre of Hajo township has influenced the sector to a variable extent.

Flower is an essential element in worshipping, and thereby the floriculture of Hajo has developed encircling the religious centres. Flower and *Tulsi* is offered in every ritualistic purposes in a temple and the profession in floriculture is gradually developing with establishment of new farms of flowers. Being the most profitable sector, the educated unemployed youths of the locality has adopted the profession. As a result Hajo has developed as a centre for floriculture in the North-East region. Exporting of flowers to other places signify the importance of the floriculture in the economic scenario of the locality.

Pisciculture or aquaculture, has became a high priority agricultural practices and offers nutritional supplement with a speedy income generating prospects. The culture started with the practices of supply fishes to the temples which were regarded as *Bhoga* by the devotees. The large swamps and *beels* of the area provides the opportunity of pisciculture and these wetlands are store house of many varieties of fishes.
An important aspects of pisciculture of Hajo is the physical condition of the wetlands which has proved to be conducive for the high production of the fishes. The fish farmers has fulfilled the demand of the local markets and also supplies fishes to the nearby markets including Guwahati. The farmers are noticed that they are not engaged in excessive fishing and thereby enhances the production of the fishes in large scale. Hence these elements has great prospects of economic opportunities in the area of Hajo.

The ongoing works has observed a few major findings. These findings include the constraint and lacuna which were noticed after the analysis of the aspects. The major findings of the study include:

(i) The religious centres of Hajo is in a poor condition of its structural buildings. The centres which got royal patronage in the medieval period, presently suffering from lack of proper agency or authority, who can look after the structure or building in a proper way. The involvement of government in the affairs of the centres is not satisfactory. Due to lack of fund the centres is unable to carry out the maintenance process in a smoothly manner.

(ii) Another important findings of the study is the problem in the preservation of property of the religious centres like - the rock inscription inscribe on the buildings of the centres, the monuments and idol of the centres, the related ornaments of the centres, various manuscripts relating to
the centres of different times, the musical instruments etc. which are in a neglected position as there are no scientific measures taken by the agencies related with the centres. Specially the rock inscription are facing the danger of total destruction due to climatic and human activities.

(iii) The disintegration of Sevaits of the religious centres under the provisions of Government Act has brought out many problems and changes which directly effected the management system of the centres due to lack of manual services. The centres are unable to engaged the daily wage labourer to maintain the rites and rituals in a proper way. As a result some ritualistic activities ceased to work due to non-performance of voluntary services by the sevait groups. Due to poor economic conditions the centres cannot employ labourers for the maintenance of its buildings, on the other side the disintegrated groups of Sevaits has also lost its glory and priviledge and as a result they are living in a transition period.

(iv) The religious centres had a powerful supervising machinery and this machinery had to suffer due to strain relation between the priest and non-priest section of the centres. The temple property was enjoyed by the priestly section and it lead to the social differences among the Sevaits and the supervising officers. This socio-religious changes had
far reaching effects in the religious centres in particular and the society in general.

(v) The traditional brass-metal industry is facing problems from the cheap aluminium and steel products in the field of production, and, also facing hardship in the field of supply of raw-materials. The artisans has to depend on middle men to get the regular supply of raw materials.

(vi) Non-use of scientific and advance machines in the production processes are also observed. The traditional tools are time consuming and the workers has to face shortage of finished products, due to the slow production processes.

(vii) The brass metal industry of Hajo is facing the danger of its existence as the machine made brass utensils have flooded the market of the area. The machine made utensils are cheap than the traditional one.

(viii) The pottery making industry has witnessed lack of clay compound, which is essential for the manufacturing processes. The industry is also face the problem of proper marketing facilities.

(ix) The floriculture has lack of proper supplying of seed of high yielding varieties required for the cultivation, on the other hand the locality has no cold storage to stored the flowers of the locality, and the farmers are compelled to engaged themselves in random selling.
There are no funding agency to offer financial assistance to the farm owner of the locality who have adopted the profession in a commercial way. The farm owner finding it difficult to compete with the cultivators of outside Assam who uses to export the flowers to the local markets.

It has been observed that most of the villagers of the areas near the beels and wetlands encroach them for agricultural and settlement purposes on individual capacities. Moreover, for the purposes of fish production, the people generally allowed to form societies on community basis which ultimately encouraged them to get settlement. After getting settlement they change the natural make up of the beels and wetlands and transform them into fisheries. This type of development had badly damaged the eco-system, economy and culture of the area at large.

The fish farmers are not given proper technical training by the concerned authorities to increase the production of fishes, which has lead to financial losses of the fish farmers. The traditional method applied by them in the profession frequently received set back due to many diseases of fishes. On the other hand the high yielding variety of seeds of fishes are not available locally and they had to depend only on the local varieties of fishes.

The rural economy and culture are closely associated with
the wetlands. These wetlands are the treasure house for many floral and faunal resources. These water plants are used by the farmers as fencing, fertilizers and making of some domestic articles like Pati, Dhari etc. The lotus and water hycinth has great economic values. But these aspects are totally neglected in the locality.

(xiv) It has also been observed that the beels and wetlands are located in a chain from one plot to another. The locational pattern of these wetlands provides a series of activities other than fish trade also in the economic aspects of the locality, which has not been explored yet.

In order to overcome the above mentioned problems and findings the following broad remedial measures may be suggested:

(i) Effective and immediate measures should be adopted by the authority in order to preserve and maintain the structure of the religious centres with timely repair and reconstruction;

(ii) The in-house property of the centres like rock inscription and manuscripts etc. should be preserved in scientific method through the competent authority, so that the property can be kept for public viewing to restore the age old tradition;

(iii) To restore the ritualistic activities in the centers a trained group of professionals or guide should be appointed with sufficient knowledge about the centre and its culture to help and guide the devotees;
(iv) The religious centres should have a proper supervising machinery to look after the centres as well as the devotees who visits the shrines. These machinery should have sufficient fund to run the affairs of the centres;

(v) To boost up the rural economy, the brass metal industry of Hajo should be protected by supplying sufficient raw-materials, timely financial assistance, training of the artisans and there should be an organization which will responsible in dealing all these matters;

(vi) With limited capital and manpower, the pottery making industry should get a proper marketing facility to sell their products in time;

(vii) To explore the floriculture, supply of high quality of seed should maintained by the competent department to increase the production. A funding agency to help the farmers should set up to boost the production processes. The unemployed youth should be encouraged with proper training to adopt the profession;

(viii) Immediate step should be taken to stop the encroachment in the beels and wetlands for agricultural purposes. These beels and wetlands are the main stakeholder of ecosystem and bio-diversity of the locality;

(ix) The fish farmers should get proper technical training for
fish rearing, which will help the sector with better and timely production;

(x) Emphasizing the importance of the wetlands and their economic opportunities education should be given to the communities. The different water plants can be used as herbal as well as raw materials for many products of the locality;

(xi) The locational pattern of the *beels* and wetlands provides the opportunity and prospects of eco-tourism development and wetland developments, many water sport including boat racing and water polo is viable in these wetlands. It should be noted here that the Pitkati wetland has privilege of hosting the All India Boat Race Competition. So these wetlands can be a repository of Eco-tourism with great potentiality of economic development.

(xii) Last but not least the religious centres of Hajo has bright prospects for all forms of tourism including eco-tourism and cultural tourism with special reference to the artistic, archaeological and cultural heritage, and these should protect and pass on to future generation. Particular care should be devoted to preserving and upgrading monuments, shrines, archaeological as well as historical site and must be widen open to the tourists which could generate fund and ultimately
improvement of the area. The following aspects of tourism can be adopted to have better economic opportunities:

(A) Eco-tourism:

Eco-tourism in the area can be developed through the beels and wetlands which are regarded as storehouse of fishes, flora and fauna. The wetlands are located in the backdrop of a line of hills itself and provides natural beauty with bio-diversity and served the region as valuable resources for the development of tourism. The hilly rocks and exotic flora and fauna offers unlimited scope for the sector.

(B) Social tourism:

The locality of Hajo offers vast scope for social tourism with folklore and folkloristic components. The locality has many tribal and non-tribal communities living in plains and hilly areas. Each communities has its own distinct oral traditions, folkcustoms, life styles, religious practices, fairs and festivals, material culture like physical artifacts, arts and crafts or handicrafts and folk-performing art in their society. If these resources are fully utilised for promoting tourism, than it may became one of the richest component of tourism sector. In addition, Hajo is a meeting place of three major religion- Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, hence regarded as a socio-cultural mosaic.
Historical or cultural tourism: 

Historical or cultural tourism centred round the religious centres. It includes the historical and archaeological sites, the culture and traditions of various communities, festivals, rituals, social values and life-styles. People get opportunities to know and learn about each others way of life and thought. Obviously, the area has good prospects of cultural tourism. For the promotion of cultural tourism, tourist products such as handloom textile and handicrafts, cane and bamboo products, brass metal products, and their well organised marketing through the state government emporium and stalls are the most essential aspects. The basic amenities and infrastructure such as road transport, pure drinking water, food staff, restaurants and skilled trained guides must be made adequately available at the tourism sites. Publicity both through electronic media and print media, guide books etc. is one of the most important components for the advancement and popularization of historical or cultural tourism. Preparation of systematic calendar of various cultural events, fairs, festivals is also most important in the case of historical and cultural tourism.

Therefore development of all forms of tourism is highly essential to earn substantial revenue through these sites by the Government and local artisans. Hajo area is endowed with a panaroma of cultural mosaic and socio-economic entity. It is through tourism that unity among cultural diversity can be rebuild in a smoother way among the people and the nation. Thus, tourism industry can contribute substantially towards the
regional domestic products, helping positively in improving quality of life and taking an important part in overall economic, social as well as cultural and historical development of a locality. For this development authority should maintain an image of a destination of moderate cost and moderate infrastructure but very rich in experience in terms of hospitality and touristic exposures. Tourism activity should be planned in such a way as to allow traditional cultural products, crafts and folklore to survive and flourished, rather than causing them to degenerate, as tourism activity is associated with culture and nature.