CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL FOLK CUSTOMS OF THE HAJONGS

A social custom is a kind of social necessity. It is one of the important fields of folklore. It is also one of the quite well known methods of social control. Social custom is based on traditional beliefs. Customs which contain magical and sacred potency may be termed as rituals.\(^1\) Customs enlighten man in his social life. From his very childhood man forms the habit of obeying them and he follows them without raising any hue or cry. He comes into possession of these customs when they come down to him in the form of his social heritage or inheritance and it is these very customs which he bequeathes to his successors.\(^2\) The ambit of social folk custom includes the following, aspects, eg., (a) folk beliefs and religions, (b) festivals and public celebration, (c) games and recreation and (d) folk medicine.

(A) Beliefs and Religion of the Hajong.

Beliefs

A belief pervades attitude and action to enter the stream of conscious thought. The most widespread manifestation of a mental attitude is in the shape of beliefs. Religion is a system of belief and symbolic practices. Rightly does observe M. J. Herskovits, "Religion

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2. Sharma, R.N. : *Principles of Sociology*, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, New Delhi, P. 180
may best be defined as belief in and identification with a greater force or power".\(^3\) E. Durkheim has also observed, "Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is thing set apart and forbidden".\(^4\)

Beliefs ensure that the rituals will be observed. However it may be kept in mind that the conception of the nature of the supernatural differs from society to society and people to people. For some the supernatural may be constituted of ghosts and spirits. For others it may be an impersonal power which pervades everything in this world. For still others it may be manifested through a pantheon of anthropomorphic gods and goddesses.

The Hajongs believe that the soul exists in human begins and animals. It stays in the heart of a creature. They believe in the doctrine of transmigration. Like the others Hindus, they also believe in the immortality of the souls, life hereafter, heaven and hell. They believe that a person dies, the soul does not get peace unless the final ritual of the deceased is performed properly. They also believe in rebirth.

The Hajongs believe in and worship the Gods and Goddesses like Vishnu, Mahadev, Ganesh, Durga, Parvati, Lakshmi, Saraswati and other Gods and Goddesses. They are worshipped on various occasions and times. Among the Lord Vishnu is a very popular folk god for the Hajong community. He is worshipped at beginning of every phase of cultivation.

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The Hajongs believe in two imaginary places—Heaven and Hell. According to their belief, a man who works good for the society selflessly, takes place in the Heaven, and on the other hand, those who work bad for the society, take place in the Hell.

Amongst the Hajongs it is a common belief that those parent's wards had died early after birth, such parents gave extraordinary name of the newly-born wards or sell them to the other people. To do this the Hajongs believe that the child can live in the future.

**Omens:**

Omen means a sign of some future event. The Hajongs being superstitious people believe in the various types of omens good or bad and follow them accordingly before undertaking any work or journey.

Howling of an owl within the compound of a house indicates a bad omen— one may die soon. If a vulture falls on a house, it is regarded as a bad omen. While starting on journey if one sees the full water of a pitcher, it is a good omen. If a person comes across a funeral procession while starting on a journey, it is regarded a bad omen. The Hajongs believe a journey or any work should be started on a luck day. They regard Monday, Wednesday, and Friday as luck days. If one is not able to undertake the journey on an auspicious day, his belongings and clothes are put outside the house on the auspicious day, which is regarded as good as his departure. If anybody asks one as to where one is going, when he starts on his journey, it is considered as a bad omen. Journey should not be undertaken if a person sees somebody carrying corpse. A sudden shaking in the right eye during the lunar fortnight is regarded a good omen but shaking in the left eye during
the same period is regarded as a bad omen. If the bee or dove builds a nest in the house it is regarded as a good omen. A shrill sudden cry of an owl in the twilight is regarded as a bad omen.

(ii) Dream:

Dream is thoughts and fancies in sleep. Dream is called sapun in Hajong language. It is obviously the Assamese derivation from Sanskrit svapna.

Among the Hajongs it is a common belief that a pre-dawn dream is a reflection of the coming event. Dreams seen during illness have no effect. Again, if there is earnest wish to see something or somebody in a dream, such dreams have no effect.

The following table shows the dream and their effects in real life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Dreams</th>
<th>Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bitten by hap(Snake)</td>
<td>finds damage of the eye to the person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Crossing Ganga river</td>
<td>death may be occured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Witnessing horse</td>
<td>cholera attacks a close relative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Witnessing tiger</td>
<td>disease may be occured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Witnessing dead body</td>
<td>portends personal gain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Catching fire in one's house</td>
<td>loss of another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Witnessing a fish</td>
<td>one would find money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Chased by vach (Buffalo)</td>
<td>one is likely to encounter worry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Chased a dog</td>
<td>an enemy harms the person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Witnessing flood</td>
<td>the forerunner of a good news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Witnessing sagun (Vulture)</td>
<td>portends epidemic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Witnessing elephant</td>
<td>one would develop.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Hajongs believe that natural phenomena like the occurrence of thunder, lighting, rain, wind, earthquake, etc., are all governed by some spirits. They offer sacrifices to them in order to avert disaster from them.

Religion:

Religion means certain beliefs, rituals and ceremonies. It is a great force and exits in all societies in one form or the other. The hold of religion in the past was very strong but with the advancement of science its hold is decreasing day by day. It is institution which has grip over the people in all civilized societies.

In fact, it is very difficult to trace the origin of religion in any single institution or factor. Fear, impersonal character of nature, belief in supernatural power, rites and ceremonies, etc., all combined together are accountable for the origin of religion. Difficulty in tracing religion primarily arises because it is as old as man himself.

Religion is the recognition of superiority moral and physical, of the collective over the individual. It is a device to secure mental and psychical stability in an individual's life. Rightly does observe M.J. Herskovits, "Religion may be defined as belief in and identification with a greater force or power".5

Traditionally the Hajongs, like the other tribes, are animists. Their religion is based on the belief on supernaturalism. They believe the

spirits and ghosts which are always hostile to human beings. For them all sorts of sickness, death, calamity and misfortune are caused by the spirits living around them. It is further believed that the spirits possess the same desires for food and drinks as the human beings have. In order to fulfil such desires the spirits strike troubles at human beings so that the latter offer sacrifice to the former. Thinking that troubles are caused by the spirits the Hajong perform various rituals by drinks and animal sacrifices.

It cannot precisely be said if the Hajongs were also animals 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.

Religion plays a vital role in the life of the Hajongs. They have been following the Hindus rites and customs since a long time and it is not yet definitely known when the process of such acculturation or Hinduisation began in the social life of the Hajongs.

The religion of the Hajongs begins with a primary belief in the existence of the spirits. The religion of them is endowed with the both of faith in benevolence and malevolence. In face the whole universe is divided into a dissemination of benevolent and malevolent forces. All good influence and blessing are caused by benevolent forces and all evil, tragedy and disasters in the world are caused by malevolent influences. Some of their deities are vegetarians and non-vegetarians and at any religious ceremony an offering of animal sacrifice is a very common feature in regard of malevolent deities.

The deities of the Hajongs can be broadly divided as benevolent and malevolent.

**Benevolent Deities:**

The benevolent deities are controllers of a number of natural objects. They are also protectors of the lives of human beings and animals. They are implored by the people for good crops, good health and for all other good activities. Even if they are not implored these deities do not harm people. Most of their benevolent deities are implored collectively. These rituals need costly sacrifice.

The following table gives a list of the benevolent deities of the Hajongs with their functions.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name of the Deity</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lakshmi Thākur</td>
<td>A deity of wealth and resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kāli</td>
<td>The deity of lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Manasā/Kānīdeo</td>
<td>The deity of snakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Madan-Kām</td>
<td>The deity of sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kārtika</td>
<td>Another deity of crops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kāmākhyā</td>
<td>A main deity of lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bastu</td>
<td>A deity of the protector of lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pāglā deo</td>
<td>A deity of rain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bandār deo</td>
<td>A deity of the protector of the crops from the monkeys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Jātro deo</td>
<td>A deity of works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Khetro deo</td>
<td>Another deity of agriculture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Malevolent Deities:

The Hajongs are also accustomed to conciliating various malevolent deities. While the benevolent deities always help people, the primary duty of the malevolent deities is to harm people and bring misfortune to them. The Hajongs believe that the malevolent deities cause various diseases and do harm to the people. These malevolent deities are controllers of disease and pain. They attack people in the form of a particular disease and cause pain and death. To keep away disease these deities are implored. If a person detects the cause of illness in time, he may implore the particular deity and be cured, otherwise the deity may kill the person concerned. The invocation of malevolent deity starts only after it attacks a person. So they implore them whenever they think it necessary to do for pacifying the deities. The imporation of these malevolent deities are very widespread among the Hajongs.

The malevolent deities can be implored at a much cheaper cost as compared to the benevolent deities. They are implored individually.

The following table gives a list of the malevolent deities of the Hajongs, with the names of diseases caused them.
Table 3

List of Malevolent Deities of the Hajongs with the names of disease caused

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Deity</th>
<th>Disease caused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Măilo deo</td>
<td>causes weakness and debility to the children and babies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gongso deo</td>
<td>causes continuous crying of babies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chokhdhāpa deo</td>
<td>causes high fever to the babies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dăini</td>
<td>causes general debility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pretni</td>
<td>causes continuous crying of babies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kălpisāch</td>
<td>causes sudden illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bondeo</td>
<td>causes stomach trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Hudum and Hākā</td>
<td>causes general debility and pain in the various parts of the body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Desphura</td>
<td>causes fever and vomiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Phul deo</td>
<td>causes excessive vomiting to the babies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Jakhini</td>
<td>causes crying of babies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Hanghangi</td>
<td>causes epilepsy specially among the children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Khāngkhāngi</td>
<td>causes head-ache.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table will show the animals sacrificed to appease each of the benevolent deities together with the places of sacrifice.
Table 4

Name of animals sacrificed to appease the Benevolent Deities and the place of sacrifice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of the Deity</th>
<th>Animal sacrificed</th>
<th>place of sacrifice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nikanidefl</td>
<td>a tortoise</td>
<td>outside the village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bastu</td>
<td>a tortoise and pigeon</td>
<td>in the open field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lakshmi Thākur</td>
<td>a tortoise</td>
<td>outside the village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kānideo</td>
<td>pigeon, drake, goat, egg</td>
<td>in the every village and every house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Baradeo</td>
<td>a tortoise</td>
<td>in the court yard of the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Khetra deo and Jātra deo</td>
<td>a fowl</td>
<td>outside the village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pāglā deo</td>
<td>a fowl or drake</td>
<td>in the court yard.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table (No. 5) shows that the animals sacrificed to appease each of these malevolent deities together with the place of sacrifice.
Table 5

Names of Animals sacrificed to appease the Malevolent Deities and the place of sacrifice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Deity</th>
<th>Animals sacrificed</th>
<th>Place of Sacrifice.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Māila deo</td>
<td>a she-goat, duck,</td>
<td>outside the village in an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fowl or pigeon</td>
<td>open space or a jungle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gongso deo</td>
<td>one cock and one</td>
<td>in the court-yard of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hen</td>
<td>patient's house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chokhdpāpa deo</td>
<td>one cock and one</td>
<td>near the patient's house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dāini</td>
<td>a tortoise, a boal</td>
<td>in the court-yard of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>patient's house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pretni</td>
<td>one fowl has to</td>
<td>in a jungle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>be left</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kālpisāch</td>
<td>a he-goat, drake</td>
<td>outside the village in an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and fowl</td>
<td>open space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hudum and</td>
<td>a tortoise, duck</td>
<td>outside the village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hākā</td>
<td>and he-goat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Jakhini</td>
<td>a fowl</td>
<td>in the court-yard of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>patient's house</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Evil Spirit (Bhut):**

Besides the deities described above, the Hajongs believe in other types of evil spirits, eg., *Zukhini, Bhut* which may cause madness. They generally appear in dreams and give warning to a man or woman.
of impending mishap. They create panic in the heart of the person who later becomes mad.

For remedies, such evil spirits are to be appeased offering sacrifices with small quantity of food and drink.

**Witch (Dāini):**

The Hajongs believe, if a child suddenly suffers from a loss of appetite, one a head-ache without warning, a mother's breasts go dry, a cow suddenly ceases to give milk, two or three domestic animals die at a time, or a healthy man die suddenly, that these are the malignant effect of Dāinis, i.e., witches.

To scar away the witch in such cases a *kaviraj* (a village medicine man) sacrifices a black he-goat in the name of the witch in the jungle.

For the Hajongs, one has to face all the consequences of one's deeds - either good or bad, right or wrong during one's life time. A Hajong fears that either his own fellowmen or the spirits watch every conduct and activities of a man on the earth. For his apparent violation of any social code or conduct his own fellow men punish him and for his secret misdeeds or crime the spirits cause him suffering from illness. But he has nothing to fear from any punishment or reward in the other world after death. These facts suggest that the philosophy of the Hajong religion is oriented in-worldly and not out-worldly crime the spirits cause him suffering from illness, but he has worldly itself.
Of late, the Hajong religion is not a unified body of beliefs and practices as it used to be in the past. Since their migration from place to place due to economic condition, the Hajongs have been under constant influences of the other religions prevalent among the local people. One of the visible outcome of these influences is the emergence of the Bhakatiya cult which is an admixture of both the traditional religion of the Hajongs and neo-Vaisnavism cum Tantricism.

Some of the Hajongs have been greatly influenced by the school of Gaudiya Vaisnavism in due course than Assam neo-Vaisnavism. The spiritual guides of the majority of those professing Vainhnavism are Brahman, Gosains and their non-Brahman assistants called Adhikaris, belonging to the Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Bengali Kirtans are sung in most of the religious celebrations. There is also a large number of folk songs either containing direct references to Chaitanya Vaishnavism.

A few Hajongs have accepted Vaisnavism who celebrated religious practices by the Vaisnave Adhikaris. The Hajongs who have accepted Gaudiya Vaisnavism celebrate their religious practices by the Adhikaris with the singing of the Kirtan introduced by the saint poet Chaitanyadeva. This new system has replaced the traditional religious system. But the neo-Vaisnavite practices stated by the Hajongs could not totally wipe out the traditional religious beliefs. Some of Hajongs have given up their traditional beliefs and religious practices and have adopted neo-vaisnavism. The converted Hajongs believe neither in spiritism nor tantricism. Expect nāmkirtana, the Hajong Vaisnavas
perform no other rituals. The Hajong Vaisnavas establish Hari Mandira or Thakura Ghara (Temple of God) in their respective homes to offer daily prayer to Lord Krishna or Hari. They observe vratas regularly at the time of new moon and full moon. The non-converted Hajongs practise both their traditional as well as other Hindu tantric beliefs and rituals.

Keeping in view the existing religious practices, we cannot identify the Hajongs with any particular religious system. At best, we can call them Hindus in general but not as followers of any sect of Hinduism.

From the view point of religion the Hajongs can be divided into two sections, viz- (a) Saktas and (b) Vaishnavas.

Thus the religion of the Hajongs is oriented towards maintaining group identification and solidarity rather than to obtaining salvation for individual soul or getting better life on earth.

**Rites and Rituals**

Rite means religious usage and ceremony. Rites are the dynamic part of religion and associated with it. Rites without religion have no fruit. Religion without rites has no root. These are observed in connection with the taboos. Many primitive rites were associated with mourning and penance. In some cultures such rites were performed when the moon was invisible.
D.N. Majumdar and T.N. Madan observe, "In religion we have only sacred beliefs; beliefs which refer to Gods and deities who are actually symbolic of society. These beliefs are put into practice by the performance of rites." Rightly does observe W.H. Hendelson. "Rites originally involving physical exertions evolved into dances in later times. Rites which in early societies merely symbolized cruelty and blood lust become transformed, in later times, into such sadistic spectacles as the gladiatorial combats of ancient Rome, the knightly jousts of medieval times, and the bull fights of modern times." 

Numerous rites and rituals are observed by the Hajongs round the year. Through the process of sanskritization many Hindu beliefs, and rites and rituals have entered into the cultural texture of the Hajongs.

However, Vaisnava Hajongs believe in and worship Vishnu themselves without the help of the Adhikāri or the priest. Except the worship of Vishnu, they do not observe any worship.

The Hajong worship two categories of Gods and Goddesses in different time and season of the year which may be shown in the following ways e.g.

(1) Traditional deities worshipped by the Hajongs:

The Hajongs have their own traditional God and Goddesses. The worship of these traditional deities is performed in two ways(a)

one class of traditional deities are worshipped by the Hajong priest (i.e., tribal priest) called Deoshi for the well being of the members of the tribe. (b) Deities of the other class are worshipped to get rid of various diseases by any individual if he or she is conversant with the method of worship.

(ii) The deities incorporated from the Hindu tradition:

The deities accepted by the Hajongs from the Hindu tradition are worshipped by the Brahmin priest in accordance with the Hindu modes and practices.

The most important of the deities of this category are- Bastu, Lakshmi, Thākur, Kāli, Pāglā deo, Baradeo, Bandār deo, Khetra deo and go on. The services of a Brahmin priest are not required for the celebration of the annual rites associated with these deities. A priest i.e., Deoshi offers worships to these deities. The Deoshi is selected by the villagers through an extra-ordinary test known as Hill Jāgā or Barun Jāgā. The main function of the Deoshi is to offer sacrifices at the time of annual rites. The usual sacrifices for this category of deities are goats, tortoises, pigeon, duck. Rice beer is also offered to these deities at the time of worship.

No sacrifices are made to the second category of deities, only bhoga consisting rice, fruits and so forth are offered. The rites are performed by a Brahmin priest or alternatively by an Adhikāri, the
priestly class of Hajongs. Some such deities are – Siva, Sarasvati, Kārtika and so on.

The Hajongs observe ceremonial impurity (sewā) during the time of child birth, death and mentrual period of women in a household. The period of ceremonial pollution varies among the Hajongs. In case of child birth, the family members observe ceremonial impurity from five days to a month. In case of death of a child, it is three days but in case of death of an adult member the period of ceremonial impurity varies from ten days to a month.\(^9\)

Rituals

Rituals are external sides of religion and have sacredness attached to it. It is believed that the rituals are more important than the religion itself because these strengthen one's faith in religion and religious practices. Rituals current among the primitive cultures were based on magical beliefs and these were chiefly intended to enlist supernatural aids to guard against evil. In every society certain ceremonies and rituals are observed at the time of marriage, birth as well as death.

Rituals, however, are but the implementation of belief. It is an enactment of a myth. Observe D.N. Majumdar and T.N. Madan, "Ritual consists in the observance, according to a prescribed manner, of certain

\(^9\) Bordoloi, B.N. : *Op-cit*, P. 31
actions designed to establish liaison between the performing individual and the supernatural power or powers.\textsuperscript{10}

The Hajongs believe that sacredness comes out of the performance of prescribed rituals, cleanliness and sanctification. Cotton is also considered sacred and is used in almost all rituals by the Hajongs. In the Hajong society, for any disease medicine is prescribed by the kavirāj but it cannot be kept away by medicine alone, ritual have to be performed by him.

The rituals are performed by the individual family as well as by the members of the village collectively. These rituals aim at achieving economic, social and personal security for the person who performs it. The rituals act as intermediaries between the Hajongs and their deities. The rituals can be classified into three categories: i.e., (1) the household type of rituals which aims at keeping the house sanctified, (2) the apparition type of rituals which aims at recovery from illness and (3) the marriageable type of rituals which aims at keeping the individual sanctified from birth until marriage. These rituals comprise of oral invocations, offerings, divination and sacrifice.

A general idea regarding the rituals of the Hajongs can be had from the following table.

\textsuperscript{10} Majumdar, D.N. and Madan, T.N.: \textit{Op.-cit.} P.152
Table No. 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name of ritual</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Month in which performed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lakshmi Thākūr</td>
<td>economic well-being.</td>
<td>April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kāli</td>
<td>to protect human and animals lives.</td>
<td>April (Bohāg, Assamese month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kāni deo</td>
<td>to protect human life for snake bite.</td>
<td>August (Sāon, Assamese month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Madan kām</td>
<td>to increase fertility of land.</td>
<td>April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kārtika</td>
<td>to increase the crops and sons.</td>
<td>Oct./Nov. (Kāti, Assamese month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bastu</td>
<td>to protect the human lives.</td>
<td>April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kāmākhya</td>
<td>to protect the human and animal lives.</td>
<td>April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Barādeo</td>
<td>general well-being.</td>
<td>April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pāglā deo</td>
<td>prayer for rain.</td>
<td>No fixed time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bandār deo</td>
<td>to protect the crops from the monkeys.</td>
<td>No fixed time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Khetra deo</td>
<td>to increase fertility of land.</td>
<td>April/May (Bohag, Assamese month)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a fixed sacred place (the place of ritual) called a Thān, i.e., altar in every village. On the day of the ritual the villagers along with the priest, one assistant and the singers go to the Thān to solemnize it. The villagers carry with them animals to be sacrificed along with other articles of a ritual like cooked rice, rice beer, perched rice, fried rice, curds, puffed rice, sweets, various fruits and prasad (consecrated food).\footnote{Informant: N. Hajong (50), Matia, Dist. Goalpara, dt. 2.1.98}
The priest performs the ritual and he utters mantras (prayers) to the accompaniment of dhol and khol. Animal sacrifices are essential in the contexts of these worships. However, the practice of human sacrifice is unknown in their tradition. The following animals, birds as well as fishes are sacrificed in various worships prevalent among the Hajong society, eg., goat, owl, duck, pigeon, tortoise and magur fish.

The goat meant for sacrifices is first bathed. It is then put into a wooden frame and slaughtered with a big sword by the priest. He chants some mantras at the time of the animal sacrifice.

(B) Festivals and Public celebration

Festivals means a joyful celebration. It is the external expression of social behaviour. The meaning of festival indicates a season of social mirth when series of performances of music, plays, feast or like honorary celebrations of historical events, birth or death of a hero or god are enacted by a community. Festivals are associated with religious observances. We may quote here a comment made by William H.Hendelson: "Festivals held by the primitive people consisted of collective magic or religious rites for propitiation of evil spirits and invocation of friendly supernatural powers. The development of agriculture was accompanied by new festivals, also consisting of magical religious rituals, in connection with seasons.12

It may be mentioned that most of the festivals current in different cultures of the world developed out of magico-ritual practices. Rituals current among the primitive cultures were based on magical beliefs. Most of the societies, whether primitive or modern, have their own festivals and these are celebrated in one form or the other.

Festivals celebrated by the Hajongs are influenced by two different trends of religious rites and social usages. While some of their observances and festivals have been influenced by the neighbouring Hindu Bengali or the Assamese, others are the reflection of their own traditional beliefs and customs. The Hajongs have been following the Hindu rites and customs since a long time.

The Hajongs celebrate different festivals in the different season round the year. Most of the festivals current among them are associated with agriculture.

Festivals celebrated by the Hajongs may broadly be classified under four heads:

(1) Seasonal Festivals.
(2) Calendric Festivals.
(3) Limited Participation Festivals.
(4) Sacramental Festivals.

(1) Seasonal Festivals:

The main features of the festivals are popularity and universality. All festivals are universal in the sense that some people are generally
always busy with their day-to-day monotonous work. So they need periodic times of temporary redress from such work and in which they can enjoy themselves together. In this way the tradition of seasonal festivals emerged. People of different States of the world perform different festivals in different seasons. The Hajongs observe a number of seasonal festivals which are generally related to fertility cult. Outlines of a few seasonal festivals observed by them are given below:

**Bihu Festival:**

The *Bihu* festivals celebrated in Assam at three different times of the year by the Hajongs and non-tribals are generally seasonal festivals. The Hajongs celebrate three *Bihus*. *Navā Barsha* or *Rangali Bihu* is celebrated by the Hajongs like the Assamese people with some variations here and there on the last day of the month of Chaitra and on First *Bohāg* of Assamese months. This *Bihu* is called *Chaita Sangrani* or *Chaita Sankranti* by them. On the day of *Sankranti*, the Hajong women sweep and rub the floor with cowdung. The cattle are washed. In the evening cows are worshipped. On the second day the younger ones pay their respects to the older members of the family and pray for the blessings. But, like the Assamese *Bihu*, performance of dance and song is not essential.

*Kāti Bihu* called as *Kātīgāshā* is celebrated by the Hajongs on the last day of the month of *Aswina* (Assamese month). Earthen lamps are lighted in the paddy fields, in the front of main dwelling house, granary, cow-shed and in front of the main gate of the
homestead. Some Hajong families light *aksah vanti* in every evening of the month of *Kāti* (7th month of Assamese calendar) and on the last day of the month, *akāsh vanti* is ended with the performance of Satya Narayan worship. On the *Aswina sankranti, ajaigura* (powder of the fried rice) or feast is arranged.

The winter festival, eg., the *Magh Bihu* is a festivals of enjoyment observed by the Hajongs on the last day of the month of *Puh* (9th month of Assamese Calendar). The *Magh Bihu* is called as *pushna* by them. Arrangement of community feasts with newly harvested rice, cakes, curd and snacks made of rice dominate the festival.

Another interesting festival of *Thubau Māgā* like the *Mahoho* festival of the Assamese people current among the Hajongs is a seasonal festival.

It can be said that the original purpose of *Thubau Māgā* is associated with the practice of collecting alms. So the meaning of the term *Thubau Māgā* denotes collecting alms. From the first seeing moon to the full-moon in the month of *Puh* (9th month of the Assamese Calendar), the youths form a party and go house to house in the neighbouring villages and collect rice and paisa. The collected rice is sold and the money is used for feast and dress.13

Like the other Hindu people of Assam, *Anmti* or *Ambubāchi* is observed by the Hajongs in the second week of the month of *Ahara* (Assamese month). The ploughing of the land is suspended for the

reason that the Hajongs believe the Earth to be a woman and the period from 7th to the 10th Ahāra is considered to be period of menstruation of the Mother Earth. During this period if the Earth is hurt in the ways of ploughing and digging the Mother Earth bleed. Widows have to strictly follow a number of taboos. On the day of completion of Ambubachi public grand feasts are arranged.14

The Kārtika worship is celebrated by the women folk of the Hajong community on the last day of the month of Kāti (Assamese month). It is difficult to trace out the origin of this worship. The worship is exclusively confined only to the womenfolk. The men folk are not allowed to participate in this worship. As such this worship may rightly be considered as a feminine worship. Kārtika is considered as a god of child giver as well as corn deity. Hence Kārtika may be called fertility God. A few days before the actual commencement of the festival, on the altar of Tulsi (Basil) plant an old woman performs mock cultivation by tilling a very small plot with the help of two small girls as if they are a pair of bullocks. After ploughing various seeds are sown there. On the day of the worship the idol of Kārtika is installed and worshipped at night by the women folk of the village, through out the whole night along with singing and dancing by the women folk.15

Bās-puja i.e., bamboo worship is observed by them in the month of Bohāg (Assamese 1st month). The bamboo symbolizes the male generative organ. This ceremony is connected with magical rites associated with the fertility cult. Bās-pujā, according to a belief current

14. Ibid. P. 16
15. Ibid, P. 19
in the Hajong society, is a kind of sex-worshipping. Three newly cut bamboos are used in the performance of the this puja which continues for three days like well-known Bhaitheli festival of the Boros. After decorating them with white or red cloths, the bamboos are fixed on the ground and then worshipped. During the entire period of Bas-puja, the young boys dance in rhythms in the accompaniment of the musical instruments along with singing of the Gitālas. It is interesting to note that the women folk are not allowed to participate in the singing and dancing but they can enjoy the dancing and singing.

Another important festivals is chorkhelā or chormāgā found prevalent among the Hajongs. It begins one or two days ahead of Dewāli and continues to 7 days or 9 days. The festival is a combination of dance and music. The content of this genre of songs is more or less similar to that of the Bihu songs.

The preparation for chorkhelā festival is started one and a half or two months ahead of the date of the festival. The youths of village form chorkhelā party with 10 to 25 members. These chorkhelā troupes go round the village from house to house displaying singing and dancing and continues for 7 to 9 days. The troupes come out of their own villages and do not return to their home halting the nights in different villages. During the time of this festival the groups display the various types of dances and songs such as Lew-tanā songs, Tenglâ gān, Bihu songs, Nao-bhanga gan, Lewā-tanā dances, Bhāṅgā naoki (dance) and so on. The troupes receive some rice or money in return to their performance. After completion of the festival the troupes perform Satya Narayan Puja or feast with collection fund.
It is regarded this chorkhelā festival as a chance to see the future brides or grooms for each other. Hence the youths avail themselves of a chance to look at the young damsels of the village and ascertain their acquaintance through friends for future choice.

Another indigenous festival of Hajongs is naya khawā or chinik karā which bears similarity with na khowa prevalent among the non Hajong Assamese people. It is observed to mark the new harvest. Similarly the Hajongs observe this festival in the month or Kāti or first part of the Aghon (Assamese month). During the time of naya khawā festival, various Gods and Goddesses are worshipped. Feast is a must in the context of this festival.

(2) Calendric Festivals:

The festivals which are celebrated in different lunar months sankrantis, tithis and days are called calendric festivals. Some festivals such as, Durga-pujā, Lakshmi-pujā, Kāli-pujā, Dewāli and so forth celebrated by the Hindus, and the festivals celebrated by the Muslims such as Muharram, Id-Uz-Juha and the festivals observed by the Christians such as Christmas, Good Friday may be called calendric festivals.

The Hajongs observe a few festivals associated with their religion, which are calendric in nature. A few of them are discussed below.
Like the Assamese Hindus, the Durgā puja occupies an important place among the Hajongs. Due to huge expenditure, the Durga puja is celebrated collectively by them in the month of Ahin or Kāti (Assamese month). The worship of Durgā puja observed by the Hajongs bears similarity with that of the found among the Hindus of Assam or Bengal. The worship is getting popularity by and large among the Hajongs. The menfolk particularly the young generation plays important role in this context.

Another important calendaric festival observed by the Hajongs is Manasā worship which is known as Kāni puja. Preparation for Manasā puja is started right from 1st day of the month of Sāon (Assamese month). On that day the Padmā Purāṇa is taken out and ceremonially placed on an altar for daily recitation. The said Purāṇa is read over in an assembly of the villagers every evening. The Purāṇa shall be completed on the last day of the month of Sāon and on that the last worship of the Manasā should be performed collectively. Singing and dancing of the Gitālu gāhen is essential in the context of Kāni-Bisahari worship (i.e., Manasā worship).

On the last day of the month of Sāon, Manasā puja is held in every household of the Hajongs. For the worship somewhere in the household, the idol of the Manasā is installed and some individuals use the picture of Manasā drawn in a paper and place it on an altar. One of the main features of the Manasā puja is the sacrifice of various animals or birds such as pigeon, drake, he-goat, etc.
The Kāli puja is also collectively observed by the Hajongs on the First Tuesday of Dark-fortnight in the month of Bohāg with animals, cow birds sacrifice. Singing and dancing as well as the playing of musical instrument are also important aspect of Kāli puja observed by the Hajongs.

The worship of Bastu deity is one of the remarkable festivals of the Hajongs. This deity is worshipped once in a year, during the month of Bohāg. The worship is performed in a fixed sacred place which is called Bastu Thān. No idol is installed in this context. An altar is prepared in small miniature hut for Bastu deity. In some places small clay horse and elephant are used in this connection. This horse and elephant bear the trace of Haya-griva temple located at Hajo in the district of Kamrup. Belief goes that originally they used to live at Hajo and then they migrated from Hajo to other parts of Assam, Meghalaya, Bengal and so on. Bastu deity is a benevolent deity and they worship this deity for the well being of the Hajong community.

Dol Jātrā is celebrated by the Hajongs in the month of Phagun (11th month of Assamese calendar) as a spring festival. This festival continues for three days. Abir i.e., phaku or phagu (red powder), indigo, mud etc., are played freely each other besmearing both both men and women, boys and girls. Another aspect of the Dol Jātrā among the Hajongs is singing of Holi songs. A big public fair is held on the occasion of Dol Jātrā.16

Pāgā Bastu puja is celebrated on the First Thursday of the bright fortnight of the month of Bohāg by them once in a year for getting rain profusely at the drought season with sacrifice.

The Hajongs celebrate Jatra puja in the Vijaya-dashami tithi (i.e., last day of the Durga puja) which is claimed as their indigenous festivals. On the day this festival, all the household materials and furniture are washed and cleansed. The worship aims to well being of their society. The worship is always associated with singings and dancing.

(3) Limited participation Festivals:

The festivals which are limited only to small or occupational groups, known as limited participation festivals. The Vishvakarma puja is a good example of limited participation festival. Says R.J. Smith, "Festivals are not limited only to big communities, smaller and more exclusive groups also have their festivals".  

Agriculture is the main occupation and chief source of livelihood of Hajongs. Some festivals are observed by them centring round agriculture. The cultivators of the Hajong society observe some other festivals in the field as well as at home in keeping with the spirit of their agriculture life. The basic pattern of the festivals observed by Hajongs bears similarity with the non-tribal Hindus of Assam.

17. R.J. Smith: "Festivals and celebration" in Folklore and Folklife, P. 164
The following are the festivals of this kind performed by the Hajongs.

**Pail problème or guchha pota ceremony**
(first peddy plantation ceremony):

After making the field ready by tilling, *paila roa* or *guchha pota* ceremony by the Hajongs with some rites. The guardian of the family, generally the elderly female member prepares an altar with the planting of *Tulsi* (Basil) and banana tree in one side of the field and offers a pair of arecanuts and betel leaves with perfuming of incense and resin in the name of *Lakshmi*, Goddess of wealth. The elderly female member as well as other female members slatute towards the east and then start plantation. Rice beer is served in the field for the workers. They work and drink, sing, dance and play with the mud of the field throwing to or besmearing each other. The songs sung by them during the time of *paila roa* ceremony are known as *lagd gân*. It is the traditional belief of Hajongs that by singing of such songs all weariness can be ended and the speed of the work can be enhanced. On that day the younger ones pay their respects to the elder members of the family and pray for the blessing. At the end they participate in the feast.¹⁸

**Ag ana ceremony**
(bringing the first paddy from field to house):

Though simple, on the day of *ag ana* ceremony (bringing paddy from field to house), the Hajongs also follow some rites like the non

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¹⁸. Informant : N.M. Hajong, age-45 village Dhamar, Goalpara, dt. 5.1.98
Hajong, Assamese Hindus. When the rice becomes ripe for reaping, the elderly female member of the family observes vow at the previous night and the floor of the store-house is plastered with mud mixed cowdung. Then she takes her bath and offers a pair of areca-nuts and betel leaves with incense and resin in the name of the goddess Lakshmi i.e., the goddess of wealth. Then she brings a small quantity of rice reaping with a sickle in the morning and after sprinkling water on it, the small bundle of rice is kept inside the chāng-ghar (granary). This is called agā ānā ceremony. The women sing songs and pray for the welcome of the goddess to the house. At the end of the ceremony vegetarian food is served to the participants.19

Dhan dukā and kāchidowā

(last harvesting and ceremonial washing of sickles)

Dhan dukā and kāchidowā ceremony is observed on the occasion of the last day of harvest by the Hajongs. On the last day of harvest the sickles by which the crops are mowed is washed ceremonially. It is a traditional belief among the Hajongs that the tools of cultivation are very sacred and there are to be preserved with care and dignity. Rice and rice bear are arranged. 20

(4) Sacramental Festivals:

Life is full of transitions in cyclic order. The life cycle consists of a series of rites of transition which have been called rites of passage.

The rites of passage accompany every change of place, state, social position and age. Rightly does observe Arnold Van Gennep, "The life of an individual in any society is a series of passage from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginning birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization and death. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass one defined position to another which is equally well defined."21 "From a gross biological point of view, says E.A.Hoebal "Life may be reduced to a simple formula: to be born, to mature, to reproduce and to die."22 Birth, maturity, reproduction and death are the four basic and universal crises in the completed life cycle.

The basic pattern of a few festivals of Hajongs associated with the rites of life cycle is more or less same in the non tribal Hindus of Assam. The Hajong life cycle more or less centres round the three most important rites of passage, eg., marriage, birth and death.

Marriage:

Marriage is accompanied by different types of rites and ceremonies. The Hindu marriage is a social and religious sacrament in
which a man and a woman are bound in permanent relationship for
the physical, social and spiritual purpose of sexual pleasure, procreation
and observance of dharma. Rightly does observe E.A. Hoebel,
"Marriage is the complex of social norms that define and control the
relations of a connubial pair to each other, their kinsmen, their offspring
and society at large." 23

As with non-tribal Hindu society of Assam the marriage
ceremony is the most important ceremony in the life cycle of the Hajongs
and it may rightly be termed as sacramental rite. The marriage ceremony
has been playing a significant role in the life and society of the Hajongs.

Marriage by negotiation called Subha Vivāh is generally settled
through a go-between eg. ghatak or jāhu (middle man). The main
specialities of this type of marriage are that the selection of partners is
made by the fathers or some other guardians of the person to be married.
Secondly, a go-between eg. ghatak is appointed to negotiate between
the families. Thirdly, the parent or the guardian of the girl is to be paid
a nominal amount which varies Rs. 30 to Rs 140 depending on the
case of mutual decision as a bride price and it is paid on the date set for
marriage. The bride price of the Hajong society is known as Khālti
which bears similarity with the society of Dimasa. Fourthly, clan
exogamy shall be observed.

As soon as the marriage is settled a party from the boy's village
attends a ritual called pānisini or guā khowā (eg., bridal) at the residence
of the girl in presence of the villagers and the family members. The

boy's party entertains them with tea and bettle-nut and also offers ornaments, clothes, oil, etc. meant for the bride. The actual marriage ceremony which continues for two days takes place at an auspicious date taking into consideration of the convenience of both the families.

Prior to the celebration of the marriage a friend called Mitar (in the Hajong language) is to be selected for the bridegroom who acts as a witness in the performance of the marriage and he remains a life long friend of the married couple. Secondly, in the Hajong community the services of an elderly couple - a husband and a wife - are also needed to serve as "god-father" and "god-mother" in the marriage performed in the traditional way.

The marriage ceremony is held either at the boy's residence or the girl's residence according to the economic position of the family. Generally, it is seen that the marriage takes place at the boy's residence. The parent of the bridegroom with the help of the villagers and the relatives go to the house of the bride to bring her for marriage. The bridegroom party consists of at least two women and some elderly men. If the house of the bride's parent is situated at a distant place, then the bridegroom party has to start to that place one day earlier of the particular date of marriage. The bridegroom's party as well as the bride's party called Darāli (in the Hajong language) arrive at the house of the bridegroom along with the bride. As soon as the bride arrives with her party, she is welcomed ceremonially at the gate of the house by the members of the bridegroom's family. Her feet are washed with water by the younger sister or brother of the bridegroom. Then the bride is

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led to the main house. After staying for sometime both the bridegroom as well as the bride are taken to the altar of the yajna which is called mandap (in the Hajong language).

Both the bridegroom and the bride are given seats in front of the fire of the yajnā facing towards the east. It is the Adhikāri i.e., the local priest who starts the function of the wedding among a few people of the Hajong society. Of late, there appears to be a tendency among the Hajongs to perform the marriage ceremony in the Vedic way by requisitioning the services of Hindu Brahmin as priests.24 At the very outset the elder brother or elderly person of the bride's relatives prays to God standing before the blazing fire of yajnāhuti uttering the mantra. The priest chants the mantras first then he is followed by the elder brother or elderly person of the bride's relatives. After the completion of the chanting the elder brother or the elderly person of the bride offers corns (eg., rice, pulse, fried rice, sugar, etc) to the fire. Thus, after offering the corns to the fire the elder brother or the elderly person of the bride prays to God for blessings of the newly married couple, He declares in presence of all that he has offered (sampradan) the bride to the bridegroom keeping the fire as witness. Then the bride and the bridegroom chant the mantra separately and again jointly under the guidance of the priest. In the end they pray for the blessing of God. After the end of the first day marriage the newly married couple has to live at newly constructed house called jaraghar or khuparāghar (in the Hajong language) at night.

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24. Das, B. : Op-cit, P.8
The second day of the marriage is called *Bāhi Biā*. On this day the service of the priest is not required. Only all the invitees are to be entertained with food and drinks. The relatives and friends of both the bride and bridegroom offer blessings in the form of presentations of articles, ornaments or cash.

In the Hajong marriage the services of five or seven women are very much essential. But they shall not be widow as well as childless. They are known as *ayātisunā* help the bride and the bridegroom in all respects of the celebration of the marriage. The most interesting episod in a Hajong marriage is perhaps the continuous singing of marriage songs to the accompaniment of various musical instruments by a group of male singers only whom they are called *Gitāl*. It would be worthwhile to mention that the Hajong women never sing marriage songs.  

**Pregnancy:**

Life begins with conception and conception produces pregnancy. Pregnancy is the foreshadowing of birth.  

Every mother - in - law of a married woman of the Hajong society naturally becomes happy while she comes to learn about the first pregnancy of her daughter - in - law. There are special rites or

25. Informant: Shri N.M. Hajong, Age-45, Village: Dhamar, Dist. Goalpara, dt. 5.1.98
ceremony connected with pregnancy in the Hajong society like the non-Hajong people of Assamese Hindu society. During the pregnancy the expectant mother is not given special diet. Her movements are not restricted. She works in the field, carries water from well or nearby spring or performs all household works. But a pregnant woman and husband have to observe certain taboos. During the time of pregnancy she is not allowed to go the cremation ground or touch any dead body as a precaution for the protection from evil spirits. They have to abstain from killing any birds and animals. If they disobey these taboos, it is common belief that delivery will be complicated and delayed. On the otherhand, dead child may be delivered.

**Birth Rite:**

A pregnant woman of the Hajong society expects her baby a separate room for the birth of the child is kept ready and it is in this room in presence of the local midwife the delivery takes place. A bed specially prepared for the purpose of delivery with thatch is used by the woman. Under the bed a piece of iron or a knife is kept so that neither the mother nor the new-born child could be harmed by any evil spirit. After birth a drop of honey is poured into the tongue of the child. Prior to this, the tongue of child is cleaned with the tip of hair of the mother.
Purification ceremony:

Virtually all societies do isolate mother and child from periods of time varying from a few days to several months. The purification ceremony is observed by the Hajongs after a few days of newly born child which depends on sex. Various rites are performed relating to the purification ceremony. In case of male child the purification ceremony is performed by the Hajongs on the 7 days and for a female child it is for 5 days from the day of the birth. At the time of purification ceremony the hair of a child is ceremonially cut. It is called as janan swa peluwa (first cutting hair). Then the baby is sprinkled with holy water, mixed with dubri (a kind of grass), a few holy basil leaves and a ring of gold. After the ceremony the blessings of the village elders are sought. The ceremony ends with refreshments.

Name Giving Ceremony:

Naming incidentally, is a universal human practice. It symbolizes the individual's personality and often indicates some aspects of his social status. If the name is ceremonially bestowed, this is usually done by a near relative, otherwise, the most common practice is for the mother to decide what her child is to be called. Names that are associated with good luck or great deeds tend generally to be preferred.

27. Hoebel, E.A.: Op-cit, P. 324
Name giving ceremony is observed by the Hajongs after few months of new born child. It is observed by the Hajongs that the formal names of the children are chosen and often given by the parents at the time of Name-giving ceremony called *namakaran* consulting with the *Adhikari*, the village priest. For this ceremony, the relatives and the village elders are invited. On this occasion a grand feast is arranged.

Puberty Rite:

Puberty marks the twilight of youth and the dawn of adulthood. Rightly does observe E.A. Hoebel. "The onset of menstruation quite definitely signals the attainment of puberty for the female".  

As regards to puberty of the girls no social observances is seen to be resorted to in the Hajong society. It is generally noticed that the mother of a girl is the only member of the family who gets the information of attaining puberty by the daughter. It is also peculiar that the girl who attains puberty, maintains secrecy about this important rite of passage. She performs all household works and there is no bar to the side of her parent. Generally the girl who attains puberty is somehow restricted from mixing with boys. However, she changes her dress all puts on a garments meant for a grown up female, known as *patin* (a kind of female gown) which covers her body from the chest to the ankle. No ceremony is observed on the occasion of the puberty in the Hajong society.

Death rites:

Death marks the end of corporeal existence. Says E.A. Hoebel, "Death has no absolute finality for any primitive people. All of them believe in the immortality of the soul".  

Of late, the Hajongs profess Hinduism and as such all the rituals related with death of a person are performed in the Hindu way with some variations. Just after the confirmation of death, the dead body is taken out from the house and is brought near a *Tulsi* (Basil) plant. The dead body is washed with a turmaric paste. Then the thumbs of both hands are tied together with a white thread. It is believed that by doing so any evil or malevolent spirit cannot enter into the death body. As soon as the death body is placed on the *chang*, a kind of trellis made of a raw bamboo. Earthen lights are lighted and incense is burnt and water with *Tulsi* leaves (Basil) is sprinkled on the dead body.

The Hajongs follow both the burial and the cremation system of the disposal of the dead body. Earlier the Hajongs generally preferred burial to cremation. Perhaps, due to profession Hinduism they give up the system of burial. On the way from the house of the dead person to the cremation ground it is a custom among the Hajongs that any part of the dead body is touched in the portico of the house. The dead body is then taken to the cremation ground. While the dead body is to be burnt, the funeral pyre is arranged as the non-Hajong Hindus of Assam do it. A long bamboo pole which is hung a white piece of cloth, fixed near the cremation site. Besides offering some food items

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and a few coins at the cremation site, two bamboo poles are also fixed. These two poles are then tied together with a white thread. It is a belief of Hajongs that the soul of deceased may travel to the other world with ease.\(^1\)

After the cremation is over the members of the funeral party take bath in the river or stream before returning to their respective houses. A few charred bones are collected and buried under the *Tulsi* (Basil) plant. Every evening earthen lights are lighted and incenses are also burnt at the site where the charred bones are buried in the courtyard near the *Tulsi* plant. A knife is kept in the courtyard. It is believed that the spirit of the deceased cannot harm to any individual of the family.

**Ghat kamani ceremony:**

On the 12th day a ceremony called *ghat kamani* is performed by the Hajongs. This ceremony *ghat kamani* bears similarity with *dahā* which is performed by the non-Hajong Hindus of Assam. This ceremony is required to be performed by offering *pujā* to the soul of the deceased on the bank of the river near the cremation site. On the bank of the river special food is prepared by the villagers for the soul of the deceased in an earthen pot. The sons of the deceased after shaving their heads and breads take a holy immerse in the river and purify themselves. Generally the sons of the family pray to the dead person kneeling down on the ground appealing him to accept the offerings made by them.\(^2\)

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31. Informant: B.C. Hajong, Age-65, Vill. Bund, Guwahati. dt. 5.1.98
32. Informant: Same as the reference No. 31, dt. 5.1.98
Srāddha or death ceremony:

The actual Srāddha or death ceremony is performed by the Hajongs on the 13th day from the day of the death of an adult person in the Hindu way. Rightly does observe J. Hastings. "The Srāddha the mind-rite of orthodox Hindus, known as the Srāddha (Sanskrit, Srat, faith trust, belief) is a mere highly developed form of the primitive funeral feast and of the custom of feeding the dead." 33

The death ceremony is conducted by the Adhikāri, who chants the mantra in the half-sitting position facing to the south in accordance with customs and traditions of the Hajong community. On the day of the Srāddha ceremony, Nāma Kirtan (chanting of the names of the Hari) is chanted by a group of Kirtaniā (singers). Generally the responsibility of conducting the whole ceremony rests on the eldest son of the dead person. The ceremony formally comes to an end with the entertained of the relatives of the deceased and the village people with a feast. Help and co-operation are extended by every family not only with manual labour but also with provisions of food like rice, fish, betel-nuts and betel-leaves. One important aspect is that like other tribes the Hajong never use rice-beer in the context of the death ceremony celebrated by them, due to the impact of Hinduism. 34

(c) Games and Recreations:

The activities that come involuntarily and get delight is termed play. Play is a pleasant social control for both children and adults. It is

34. Informant: Naren Hajong (50) Mattia, dt. 6.1.98
a symbol of unity among the human beings. Observes Robert A Georges "Play is a form of expressive behaviour common among all human beings and manifested overly in all cultures. Like language and religion, play is a complex phenomenon that cannot be defined succinctly."  

Play makes a person flexible and exercises important influence on man's emotions and sentiments. Play has several characteristics which can readily be isolated. First, play is a voluntary in that it does not directly satisfy biological needs associated with survival. Another characteristic of play is that it is separated from reality in time and space, therefore, its goals and sources of motivation are intrinsic. 

Generally games differ from other play activities in that they involve competition between at least two persons explicit or implicit rules which specify the kind of human interaction permissible and which the players are familiar with before the activity begins, are also required as is a specific method for determining winners and losers. Thus boys play games that require hunting, attacking, running, defending or play at soldiers, howkers or railway guards and in games acquire group competition, co-operation, discipline and other social behaviours which will stand them in good stead in adult social life. Girls playing with dolls and kitchen utensils, they practise being a mother, nurse or teacher. Play thus becomes a preparation for the life. We are to lead in mature years. 

35. Georges, R.A.: "Recreation and Games" in Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction, P.173
36. Ibid. P. 174
37. Ibid. P. 175
38. Ibid. P. 180
The Hajongs of Assam are generally cultivators as well as daily labourers. Games and sports are played during their festivals and sometime also an ordinary occasions. However, the young boys and girls use to play some kinds of games though not in the nature of some functions. In the past the Hajongs played games associated with hunting of animals and other sorts of amusements. Due to the lack of written evidence of games and sports of the Hajongs. We have to depend on the oral tradition connected with games and sports which have been handed down traditionally.

The games which are played by the young boys and old people, are classified into two, viz- (i) Outdoor games and (ii) Indoor games.

The following are some of the outdoor games that prevalent among the Hajong society.

(1) Hunli Khel:

It is a wrestling game which is known as gāngilagā or hunli khet. It is a form of wrestling between two men. There are no rules governing this wrestling and the two wrestlers simply require to hold each other on their waists and try to pin down to the ground for a considerable period of time. 39

39. Informant: N.M. Hajong (45), Dhamar, dt. 7.1.98
(2) Nunthā :

It is a game in which one player stands in one side of a field, calls on the word nunthā (means salty). The remaining players keep account the word, nuntha how many times are pronouncing. At the end of ten times, the player who is called first nunthā, stop breath and newly he pronounces nā, nā in the same breath and tries to touch the other players. If he can touch any body, such player comes to his side. Doing, this. if a player stops his breath. such player is regarded as defeat. On the otherhand. If nunthā called player can touch the whole players, he is called the king of nunthā. 40

(3) Chāi gulla :

Two parties are involved in the game. Among the party, a player is given the name of māo. There is a single point here. There are the other players with māo. On the other side there is a post in the field. If a māo can go to the post, there is declared a game. The opposite party takes rest in the post in which the māo can take to win and from that there is competition. In this way the opposite party is kept away due to win of the mao. The opposite can sit any place. If a player stops breath, he is declared defeat. 41

40. Informant. : Same as the reference No. 39, dt. 7.1.98
41. Informant : Same as the reference No. 39, dt. 7.1.98
(4) Lāmbā Phāl :

There is a mound of earth measuring about 4 feet in width and 30 feet in length usually in the centre of the field. A slab of stone is laid at one end of mound. The jumper runs towards it from some distance, pause for an instant on the stone for blanching the body and then jump. The distance is usually measured by the marks made by the feet where the jumpers land on the mound.

Besides these, the young boys and girls play some of the modern games borrowed from outside, generally learned through the school mates or from the plain people. These are:

(a) Lukā bhāku khel is a played generally by girls. The girls are hard pressed with their householf chores such as fetching water, cleaning and washing, etc. and whatever little time they get to spare as leisure time they play lukā bhāku khel called hide and seek. 42

(b) Kukurā yujā is played both by boys and girls since unknown time.

Apart from these, football, volley ball, basket ball, table tennis have been played by young generation.

Besides the outdoor games, the Hajong people have been playing the indoor games. Among the indoor games usually played by them a few of such games are the following:

42. Informant: Same as the reference No. 39, dt. 7.1.98
Indoor games:

The indoor games like carrom, ludo, lāch khel (game) and eards, etc, are also played both by young and old. Moreover the educated young have been seen games through T.V. or listen to the radio if available and read about games through newspaper, magazines, etc.

The little boys and girls in the village donot play any specific game, to them, games are like climbing trees, throwing stones, or other similar activities with which they remain engaged and thus spend the day until feel tired and go to their homes. 43

Recreation:

Recreation is an opportunity to refresh and amuse oneself, serious living calls for effort and concentration and leads to fatigue. Sometimes children and adults want recreation to refresh themselves. All play is recreation and relaxation turning away from serious business of life. It does not directly satisfy biological needs associated with survival. Apart from these, recreation is not related with the production of wealth or goods. As long as there is no competitive interaction the past time can be called recreation. Says R.N. Sharma, "In the recreational group a person under goes socialization and learns the methods of behaviour towards other people". 44

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43. Informant: Same as the reference No. 39, dt. 7.1.98
44. Sharma, R.N.: Op-cit, P. 185
The life lived inside dormitories is of a light hearted type where all seems play and recreation. The existence of dormitories has been found among the tribal communities except the Hajongs in India. Life in dormitories is total absent in the Hajong community. The recreational activity of the Hajongs is the normal and the general type.

Generally the Hajongs are residing in the rural and the hilly areas. They relax themselves only after coming from the fields. The men and the women sit around the hearth snapping stories and grossiping about the fields and crops, and the prospects of the coming harvest, thus removing the fatigue due to the day's work. When they meet with friends and relatives the inevitable subject of crops always comes up for discussion amongst them apart from some family matters or other matters.

Sometimes they sing in chorus while working in the field or sing simple melodies while thrashing the crops, which seems to dispel the fatigue due to the hard labour and weariness from the body and mind.

Generally the young men of the Hajong community frequently go during their leisure time for hunting the wild animals and the birds in the forest or fishing in the nearby ponds or rivers.

Though the Hajongs have to undergo through the rigours of nature which makes their life hard, yet their hearts are full with hope and joy, and they are satisfied with what they have. The Hajongs are the wards of the nature and find music in the winds, streams and woods which fill their mind with much delight.
(d) **Folk Medicine:**

Among most of the tribal communities the folk medicine is common. Folk medicine is generally interpreted as the ability to cure various diseases with the use of herbal medicine as well as charms and incantations by the village medicine man. The medical aids are primitive.

The practices of healing of various diseases among the non-elite folk which have been transmitted traditionally and almost orally may be termed as folk medicine. Folk medicine is more or less related derivatively to the academic medicine on our fore-fathers.\(^{45}\)

Folk medicine is an integral part of a religion of a tribal dimension. Untoward natural events, inadequate technical means and situation full of danger and uncertainty lead to belief in the folk medicine. Tribal people believe in folk medicine because it fits in with their culture and way of thinking.

The ambit of folk medicine includes two branches i.e., (a) natural folk medicine and (b) magico religious folk medicine. The first variety carries the ideas of man's earliest reactions of his natural surrounding and involves the seeking of healings for his ailments in various herbs, plants, minerals and animal substance of nature. This category of folk medicine may rightly be called natural or herbal medicine. The second branch of folk medicine i.e., magico religious variety is also known as occult folk medicine. It includes *mantras* or charms, incantation, holy words and holy action with a view to curing various diseases.\(^{46}\)

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45. Yoder, Don : "Folk-Medicine" in *Folklore and Folklife*, An Introduction, ed RM. Dorson, Chicago, P. 191

46. Ibid, P. 192
The natural folk medicine of the Hajongs:

The Hajong society has its own belief and practices concerning the treatment of diseases physical and mental. To protect the people from their troubles the necessity of the natural folk medicine is very great in the Hajong community. It is very peculiar in character that the folk medicinal practices of the Hajongs are being employed generally in case of charmic non-incapacitating days functions. Generally, belief plays an important role in the treatment of not only the diseases which are caused by the wrath of Goddess, evil eye or magic, etc., but also of those diseases which are believed to be unaffected by them. Attempts have been made to discuss how the Hajongs apply their traditional medicinal knowledge in the treatment of various diseases.

Most of the kavirājs, eg., the village medicine man of the Hajong society learn the names of diseases and symptom and medicine essential for those ailments traditionally. Of course, according to some source, they have learnt regarding herbal medicines of different ailments in dream. It is seen that most of the forest plants and the domestic plants have their curative power. Generally the kavirājs prepare necessary medicine from the hurles and roots of the plants and uprooted at special occassions in particular ways by using the prescribed charms.

Among the herbal plants generally used by the kavirājs the most important are the following:

1. Haladhi i.e., Turmeric plays a prominent role in the domain of natural folk medicines. It is generally applied for curing anaemia, leprosy and all kinds of skin diseases.
(2) *Gol-mori* (a kind of chillies) is grinded and applied by the *kaviraj* to the patient after mixing up with honey in the case of cough called *kāsh* in the Hajong.

(3) The *kaviraj* wave the leaves of *dhekiā* (a species of fern) over the affected part with chanting of *mantras* in the case of headache and bodyacha.

(4) The leaves of *neem* tree and Basil plant are important values in the domain of natural folk medicine and used by the *kaviraj* for curing fever.

(5) The *bhui titā* (a kind of wild plant’s root) is grinded and applied by the *kaviraj* to the patient after mixing up with luke warm water in order to recover from diarrhoea.

(6) In order to cure from dysentery the leaves of guava and black berry are used and applied by the *kaviraj* to the patient after mixing with salt.

(7) The Hajong *kaviraj* use the leaves and roots of tobacco for remeding ailments of teeth, various types of skin diseases and to cure many ailments of cows and goats as well as to prevent the attack of different worms and insects.47

Magico - Religious Folk - Medicine:

The tradition of magico - religious folk medicine is also known as occult folk medicine. The periphery of magico religious folk medicine

47. Informant: Shri Naren Hajong, Age-50, Vill. Dudhnai, Dist. Goalpara, dt. 5.1.98
includes "using words", charms, amulets and physical manipulation in
the attempt to heal the ills of man and beast. It is based on primitive
world view of all things, heaven, earth, man, animal and nature. 
There is common belief among all the primitive societies that diseases
are caused by the influence of evil spirits into the person or animal.
hence such diseases have to be removed counter spell which can be
provided by rituals, written charms involving holy words or prepared
amulets.

Assam is a land of Tantra-Mantra or magic. She is familiar outside
her territory generally as a land of witchcraft and magic, animism and
wild tribes. Observes P.C. Bhattacharyya. "The Tantra-Mantra, Jādu-
Vidyā, Jārā-phukhā and some materials prevalent in the villages of
Assam are originally obtained from the Tribal people."

It is a common belief among the Hajongs like other tribes of
Assam on the Tantra Mantra, Jādu Vidyā, Jārā phukhā, etc. practices
of both black and white magic. The kavirājs perform the desire ends
by the rituals, techniques and praying an appeal to the disease curing
deities. They collect some special power which are either achieved by
training or making known.

There are many mantras for curing the diseases among the
Hajong society. It is a traditional belief of the Hajongs that the diseases
are nothing but the creation of the spirits only. With the help of the
kavirājs, they find out the spirit by whom the disease is created or
caused and then with the help of mantra they worship the particular
spirit and while the spirit is pleased, the disease is also cured, they
believe.

48. Yoder, Don: Op-cit, P. 203
Amongst the super natural elements ie. spirits, ghosts, witchcraft, etc. which are thought to be caused the various diseases in the Hajong society the most important are the following:

(1) Belief in the existence of the Moila deo:

The *Moiladeo* (*Moilâ* spirit) is generally known as a popular malevolent god. This spirit causes weakness and debility to the children and babies. Such children and babies of a family lose lives without proper treatment. But it is also believed that no medicine can cure such diseases until the *mantra* and worship are applied by the *kavirâj* (village medicine - man). With the help of *mantra* the *kavirâj* worships outside the village in an open space or near a jungle. For this occasion she goat, duck or pigeon is sacrificed.

(2) Gongso deo:

*Gongso deo* is another kind of popular malevolent spirits. This spirit is supposed to cause continuous crying of the babies. With the help of *mantra* the *kavirâj* performs the worship to this spirit in the front of courtyard. To pacify this spirit one cock and one hen are sacrificed. The *kavirâjs* can cure the disease and save the lives of the victims.\(^{50}\)

\(^{50}\) Informant: Naren Hajong (50), Dudlmoi. dt. 5.1.98
(3) Chukhdhāpa deo :

*Chukhdhāpa deo* is generally known as a popular malevolent spirit. The babies suffer from certain unknown high fever due to the bad influence of this spirit. The *kavirāj* can cure the diseases by applying *mantras* as well as offering worships in the name of *chukhdhāpa deo*. One cock and one hen are sacrificed for its pacification.  

(4) Pretni :

Sometimes it is observed that the babies of a family are continuously crying due to certain unknown diseases. It is believed that *pretni* causes continuous crying of the babies. Under its influence a baby sometimes cries. sometimes laughs and feels itching sensation. But it is also believed that no medicine can cure such disease. The *kavirāj* can cure the disease with the help of *mantra* as well as worship to this evil spirit. To pacify this spirit one fowl has to be left in a jungle putting in cage.  

(5) Kalpisatch :

The Hajongs believe that the evil spirit, *Kalpisatch* cause sudden illness and death among the people. Offering the sacrifice of an animal i.e., a he-goat, drake or a fowl along with the *mantra* in the name of the patient to appease *kalpisatch* causing the disease is found among the Hajongs.

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51. Informant: Same as the reference No. 50, dt. 5.1.98  
52. Informant: Same as the reference No. 50, dt. 5.1.98  
53. Informant: Same as the reference No. 50, dt. 5.1.98
(6) Phul deo:

There is a belief among the Hajongs that *phul deo* is one of malevolent spirits and is thought to be caused excessive vomiting to the babies. With the help of *mantra* the *kavirājas* offer worship in the name of the patient to appease this spirit. To pacify this deity a garland of flowers is to be immersed in a stream.54

The Hajongs believe in and practise both white magic and black magic. The *kavirājs* are the persons who practise magic in the Hajong society. The Hajongs believe that the super-natural elements, i.e., sprits, ghosts, witchcraft etc., cause the diseases and sufferings to the people. Among the kinds of black magic practised by the *kavirājs* in the Hajong society the most important are the following:

**Black magic:**

The beliefs and practices of black magic are current in the Hajong society from unknown time like the other tribal societies of Assam.

(1) Birā:

*Birā* is generally known as malevolent spirit. The *kavirājs* utilise them to fulfil their ill-motives with the help of *birā*. The *kavirāj* engages the *birā* to do harm to any people who is regarded as his enemy. The *birā* can disturb a person in such a way that he cannot live peacefully.

54. Informant: Same as the reference No. 50, dt. 5.1 AS
The harmful *birā* can be removed only by another *kavirāj* who is more powerful than the applier of the *vira*. It is believed that the *kavirāj* can drive away from one place to another.

(2) **Bān mārā**:

Another black magic practised by the *kavirājs* is called Bān mārā. It is generally seen that sometimes the *kavirājs* get pleasure by applying the black magic i.e., *bān mārā* on occasion of the marriage ceremony. Although not so harmful, the victims of the black magic known as *Mayadhob*, fall down on the ground and become un-conscious for the time being. Often as a precautionary measure some *kavirājs* are engaged at the time of ceremony to protect from the members of the family from the affect of any black magic.

(3) **Purā bān**:

Another kind of black magics practised by the *kavirājs* is called *purā bān* i.e., the magic of fire. With the help of this black magic the *kavirājs* apply magical power against their enemies. As a result of this black magic fire originates at any place of the house of a person against whom the *purā bān* is applied. Any powerful *kavirāj* can remove the applied magic and save the lives of the victims. 

55. Informant: Same as the reference No. 50, dt. 5.1.98
56. Informant: Same as the reference No. 50, dt. 5.1.98
White Magic:

With regard to the white magic the number of the kavirājs who are expert in white magic is not negligible in the Hajong society. It is a belief of the Hajongs that like the human beings the Gods and Goddesses are roaming invisibly. They create diseases to the people. The kavirājs know well when and what diseases attack the people because of the ill-motives of God and Goddesses. For the welfare of the people, the practices the white magic are no doubt good than the black magic.\(^{57}\)

(1) Kās parā:

The kavirājs use to apply white magic on a suffering people. A small piece of thread full of incantation is bound around the wrist or the neck of a sufferer. The mantra applied thread is called kās parā in the Hajong. It can be prepared on Tuesday or Saturday. It can be used for a week. If the patient recovers before the completion of one week even then thread must be retained on the body for a week.

(2) Jal parā:

There is a belief among the Hajongs that some diseases can be cured by applying mantra only. The kavirājs apply mantra on water also. The mantra applied water is called jal parā in the Hajong. Little portion of such water is taken and rest is applied on the body or any

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\(^{57}\) Informant: Same as the reference No. 50, dt. 5.1.98
affected parts of the body of the patient. A few leaves of the basil plant are also kept in water. In this way a person can be saved from a disease.

Practice of Sorcery:

The practices of sorcery are still current among the Hajongs. They fear the magic of the enemy like that of the evil spirits. According to them many diseases are due to the influence of the witchcrafts.

(1) The Evil Eye:

The belief in the danger resulting from the evil eye prevails most widely in the Hajong society. The term, evil eye by which it is known as najar i.e., sight and specially in the sense of the baseful influence emanating from the glance of certain classes of people. The general explanation of the origin of this belief is that it is based on envy. There is a belief among the Hajongs that some persons have the faculty to cast a spell on others by just looking at them. As they cast the evil eye, the person or thing faces misfortune. The thing may perish, the person may suffer from disease.

For remedies in case of evil eye, the kavirājs chant spells and wear of charms and amulets to the affected person. Sometimes a little water is taken and the kavirājs sprinkle over the face of the patient. Preventive measure is taken against the evil eye putting kājal (black dot) on the face of the child.  

58. Informant: N.M. Hajong (450 Dhamar, dt. 8.1.98)
59. Informant: Same as the reference No. 58, dt. 8.1.98
(2) Khetra lāgā :

Sometimes the malevolent spirits attack any individual, either male or female. As a result the patient meets different fearful animals like elephant, bear, tiger etc., in dream and he or she is chased by these animals. The patient loses the health day by day and becomes bloodless. This type of suffering is called khetra lāgā in the Hajong. It is believed that generally the pregnant women or the babies become victims of this suffering.

If a person is attacked with the khetra, the deity is propitiated with the articles like a knife, a pair of incense sticks, a pair of pigeon, a pair of duck’s egg, flowers of white and red colour, vermillion, a pair of areca nuts and betel leaves and basil. All the articles are placed on a raft (bhur) float away stream. The kavirāj enchants the mantra addressing the gods of khetra i.e., bandeo, hudum, dāini, deshphurā etc.60

(3) Sadhan :

The practice of the meditation is still prevalent among the Hajong society. The person who acquires the magical power (e.g., sadhan) is called Sādhak. The kāli sādhan is one of the main practices in the Hajong society. It is the traditional belief of the Hajong community that to acquire super natural power a person practises mediation in the name of the Goddess Kāli and then he is called the Kāli sādhak. Sometimes, on the basis of the meditation the sādhak finds out the

60. Informant : Same as the reference No. 58. dt. 8.1.98
disease of a patient and to this a cure is a matter of rituals, sacrifices and incantations.\footnote{1}

In fact, the Hajongs are rich in their own folk-medicine since time immemorial. Due to the social change and the development of medical science the importance of folk medicine has been decreasing day by day.

\footnote{1 Informant: Same as the reference No. 58, dt. 8.1.98}