SOCIAL FOLK CUSTOMS OF THE HAJONGS

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I. INTRODUCTION

A study of our unknown or little known neighbors is a stepping stone for national integration through proper understanding of the cultural parameters which govern the more or less self-managed tribal communities. The study of the socio-cultural structure of small communities has drawn the attention of the researcher for over the last two decades. Yet there are few studies concentrating on the social and cultural conditions of tribal societies. When one further delimits the area and considers the North-East India, the study of sociocultural structures appear to be very few and far between. Hajongs believe that they are the descendants of Kartayabirjarjun, one of the greatest Khastriya kings of Mahabharata era. The great saint Parasuram who vowed to annihilate all the Khastriyas from the earth primarily for taking revenge on king Kartayabirjarjun who was accountable for killing his father Jamadagni ultimately had killed the king in the process. His queen Swarupa Devi was pregnant at that time. The queen fled away form the capital and took refuge in the hermitage of the sage Kamdatta in ancient Kamrup. She gave birth to a son who came to be known as Padangsku. Padangsku occupied the ancient Hajo township including the temple there. His descendants included Kumar Bhaskar Barman. The Hajongs are one of the Mongoloid communities of North-East India. They are a small tribe. They are regarded as a scheduled tribe in Assam. The Hajongs inhabit the plain and Hill areas in Assam. They speak a language belonging to the Indo-Aryan Linguistic family. At present majority of the Hajong population live in the state of Meghalaya, some of them in Assam. Besides these, a few number of Hajongs are at present inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh also. Besides the two autonomous hill districts, viz, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar, there are a good number of Hajong villages confined over the plain districts of Assam. In the plain districts of Assam, most of them are found in the Lakhimpur area and Dudhnoi area of Goalpara district, Southern region bordering Meghalaya in the South Salmar Sub-division of Dhubri district, South-West area of Kamrup district, Lakhimpur, Darrang, Dhemaji, Marigaon, Bongaigaon and negligible number in Nalbari district.

1.1. Main Theme

A social custom is a traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a particular society, place or time and is a kind of social necessity for social control. It is one of the important fields of folklore. Social custom is based on traditional beliefs which form the habit of obeying 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 bequeaths to his successors¹. The ambit of social folk custom includes the following aspects:
(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 and it ensures that religion is observed. 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 may best be defined as belief in and identification with a greater force or power”.²

The Hajong believe that the soul exists in human begins, and animals. They believe in the doctrine of transmigration and immortality of the soul, life hereafter, heaven and hell. They believe that when 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 and worship the Gods like Vishnu, Mahadev, Ganesh, Durga, Parvati, Lakshmi, Saraswati etc. They are worshipped on various occasions but Lord Vishnu is very popular folk God who is worshipped at beginning of every phase of cultivation. The Hajongs believe a good man will find a place in Heaven, after his death.

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 or a shrill sudden cry of an owl in the twilight 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. Comming across a funeral procession while starting on a journey is regarded a bad omen. The Hajongs believe a journey should be started on a luck day like. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. If anybody asks one as to where one is going, when he starts on his journey, it is considered as a bad omen. While starting on journey if one sees a full water pitcher, it is a good omen. A sudden flickering in the right eye during the lunar fortnight is regarded a good omen but of the left eye during the same period is regarded as a bad omen. If a bee or dove builds a nest in the house it is regarded as a good omen.

Dream :
Dream is thoughts and fancies in sleep and is called sapun in Hajong language. 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>Sl. 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 occurred</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 occurred</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>

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. Fear, impersonal character of nature, belief in super natural power, rites and ceremonies, etc., all combined together are accountable for the origin of religion. Religion is the recognition of superiority moral and physical, of the collective over the individual. Hajongs, like the other tribes, are animists. Their religion is based on the belief on supernaturalism. They believe the spirits and ghosts are always hostile to human beings and 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 food and drinks as the human beings have. In order to fulfill 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. 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.

(B) Festivals and Public Celebration
Festivals means a joyful celebration and is an 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 religion observances. 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 neighboring 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 be classified under four heads:

(1) Seasonal Festivals.
The Hajongs observe a number of seasonal festivals which are generally related to fertility cult. The Hajongs celebrate three Bihus. Nava 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 Bohag of Assamese months. This Bihu is called Chaitha Sangrani or Chaitha Sankranti by them. Kati Bihu called as Kiitigasha and is celebrated by the Hajongs on the last day of the month of Asvina (Assamese month). Earthen lamps are lighted in the paddy fields. The winter festival, Magh Bihu is a festivals of enjoyment observed by the Hajongs on the last day of the month of Pith (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.

(2) Calendric Festivals.

The festivals which are celebrated in different lunar months sankrantis, tithis and days are called calendric festivals. Like the Assamese Hindus the Durga 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 Kati (Assamese month).

Another important calendric festival observed by the Hajongs is Manasa worship which is known as Kani puja. On the last day of the month of Saon, Manasa puja is held in every household of the Hajongs. The Kali puja is also collectively observed by the Hajongs on the first Tuesday of Dark-fortnight in the month of Bohag with animals, birds, sacrifice.

The worship of Basra deity is one of the remarkable festivals of the Hajongs. This deity is worshipped once in a year, during the month of Bohag.

Dol Jatra 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 besmeasuring both men and women, boys and girls

Pagla Bastu puja is celebrated on the First Thursday of the bright fortnight of the month of Bohag 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 (ie., 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.

(3) Limited Participation Festivals.

The festivals which are limited only to small or occupational groups, known as limited participation festivals. Agriculture is the main occupation and chief source of livelihood of Hajongs. The basic pattern of the festivals observed by Hajongs bears similarity with the non-tribal Hindus of Assam.

Paila roa or guchha pota ceremony (first paddy plantation ceremony): After making the field ready by tilling, pail a roa or guchha pota ceremony is performed by the Hajongs with some rites. 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 prayer 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. The songs sung by them during the time of paila roa ceremony are known as laga gaan. 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.

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 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 cow dung. 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 chang -ghar (granary). This is called agana 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.

Dhan duka and kachidowa (last harvesting and ceremonial washing of sickles): Dhan duka and kachidowa 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.

(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.”

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 centers round the three most important rites of passage, eg., marriage, birth and death.

(c) Games and Recreations :
The activities that come involuntarily and get delight is termed play and it makes a person flexible and exercises important influence on man's emotions and sentiments. The Hajongs of Assam are generally cultivators as well as daily labourers. Games and sports are played during their festivals and sometime also on 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, classified into two, viz- (i) Outdoor games like Hunlei Khel, Nuntha, Chai Gulla, Lamba Phal and (ii) Indoor games like carom, ludo, cards, lacha khel etc

(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. 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 uncertainly 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 ie,
Natural folk medicine:
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 kavirajs, e.g., 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 kavirajs prepare necessary medicine from the herbs and roots of the plants and uprooted at special occasions in particular ways by using the prescribed charms.

Plants like haldhi, gol mori, dhekia, neem, bhui tita, guava, black berry, tobacco used by kaviraj for treatment of various diseases.

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 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.

It is a common belief among the Hajongs like other tribes of Assam on the Tantra Mantra, Jada Vidya, Jara phukha, etc. practices of both black and white magic. The kaviraj 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 kaviraj, 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. 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:
Moila Deo- causes weakness and disability in children
Gongso Deo- causes continuous crying in babies
Chukhdhapa Deo- causes babies to suffer from high fever
Prethi, Kalpisath, Phul deo etc

II. CONCLUSION

There is no gainsaying the existence of some suitable ethnographic accounts of a number of tribal communities but we rarely find a detailed picture of a village community describing the interrelations between society and cultural activities. By dealing the village community and its cultural as single side of activity, we wish to examine the features of rural life as a whole. For this occasion our preference falls on Hajong tribe who represents social community which is halfway between a tribal as well as a farmer village group. Over and above, this is a study of tribal community which has migrated from place to place and adopted system of cultivation. The Hajongs are an integral part of the Assamese community that have been living in the northeastern states since ages. The socio-cultural aspects of the typical Hajong community is quite unique in its own way even though over the ages they have been influenced to a great extend by the mainstream Assamese community.

Knowing their culture, their customs, rituals, their social bondage will help us a lot in understanding the community well and in turn help the whole Assamese community to bond with their brothers better. The compassion and respect that will be bestowed upon such communities and all their practices and believes will depend to a great extend on how much we understand them and their society as a whole. The richness that the Greater Assamese community today is because of such individual and smaller threads woven together to form a strong and never breakable bondage of all the communities coming together of which the Hajongs are an inseparable part.

III. REFERENCE

[16] Borev, Y.: Aesthetic, Moscow, 1985
Hajong people are an ethnic minority of Tibetan descent in India and Bangladesh. They belong to the Bodo-Kachari group of tribes of North East India. According to 2011 census, Hajongs were the fourth largest ethnicity in the Indian state of Meghalaya. The Hajongs are agrarian people, and have brought wet-field cultivation to Garo Hills, where the Garo people used slash and burn method of agriculture. Pathin is a wrap-around skirt worn by the women of the Hajong tribe of Northeast India and Bangladesh. It covers the upper and lower part of the body from the bust till the calf of the leg. Women in the upper class wore a longer pathin which falls down to the floor while women in the lower class wore a shorter pathin which length reaches to the ankle. See more of Hajong social stage on Facebook. Places Goalpara Community Organization Social Club Hajong social stage.English (US) · Suomi · Svenska · Español · Português (Brasil). Information about Page Insights Data.