

Hajong And Their Bastu Festival

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Abstract

There are various numbers of tribes and communities present in northeastern part of India. The Hajongs are also one of them. We can observe a number of various traditions and culture because of the presence of such vast number of different tribes and communities. The celebration of different festivals among these communities highlights the beauty of their culture. Northeast India is very colourful because of the culture of these different tribes. Among these communities, the Hajong community also has rich in their traditional culture. The Hajongs are spread out in different regions of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mymensingh of Bangladesh. Generally, they are branch of the Mongoloid race.

The Hajongs are an agricultural community. Their main source of livelihood is agriculture and the majority of people are dependent on it. The festivals of the Hajongs, too, are directly or indirectly related to agriculture. According the customs and rituals of their festivals, traditional festivals of Hajongs can be classified into three types such as Seasonal, Agricultural and Religious Festivals.

One of the religious festivals of Hajongs, Baastu Puja has been discussed here. A thorough analysis has been made based on the data collected from the field study to make the study a success.

Keywords: Culture, Folk Believe, Tribes, Religious Festival and Religion.

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I. Introduction

The Hajongs are a minority tribe in Assam with very less population. They are regarded as Scheduled Tribes (Hill) in the autonomous councils of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills and as Scheduled Tribe (Plains) rest of the Assam state. They are also present in districts of Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Goalpara as well as in Arunachal Pradesh and Mymensingh of Bangladesh. They are a majority in Garo Hills of Meghalaya. According to their traditional belief, they are original inhabitants of "Has paragana" or Hajo area of present in Kamrup District, Assam. They migrated to different places from Hajo thus they call themselves as Hajong. According to the Hajong writer Mr. Paresh Hajong they are the descendants of *Kartyabir Arjun*, the great Khatriyat king of the Mahabharata.

Because of some historical reason they migrated from the Hajo area to the Garo Hills. Twelve thousand Hajong people migrated in Garo Hills. Thus they are known as *Baaro Hajari* (twelve thousand) in West Garo Hills, Meghalaya. In time, the spread from Garo hills to Mymensingh, Rajshahi and Sylhet region of Bangladesh.

The Hajongs are an agricultural community. They are very handy with agriculture activities such as ploughing, paddy plantation etc. According to the researchers, the name "Hajong" has its origin in the Garo language. In Garo language, 'Ha' means land and 'Jong' means ants or worms. Thus, Hajong literally means land-ants or worms. But here 'Jong' doesn't refer to ants or worms but it implies people who are expert in ploughing.

II. Objective of the Study

Hajongs are a small tribe and live among people from other communities. Thus, there has been a strong influence of other communities in their culture, festivals and language. Being an agricultural community, the Hajongs celebrate various festivals related to agriculture along with many religious festivals. These festivals can be classified into agricultural, seasonal and religious festivals. The *Bastu puja* Festival of the *Baaro Hajari* Hajongs of West Garo Hills has been discussed here.

III. Research Methodology

The discussions below have been based on the data collected from field work, various books which have been used as a secondary source along with observations made during the field work. The *Bastu puja* Festival discussed is, especially, celebrated in Bhalukmari of the West Garo Hills.

IV. Discussion of the Study

The Hajong is agricultural based community. Thus in their celebration of festivals are related with directly and indirectly to agriculture. They are also celebrated different kinds of religious Festival: Bastu/Baush puja, Jatra puja, Kani Dew puja, Gorom puja, Pagla Bastu puja ect. Among from these, Bastu puja has taken discuss here.

Bastu/ Baush Puja: -

Bastu Puja is a religious festival celebration of Hajong Community. According the Hajongs, Bastu refers to 'Baa' which means 'Bakh' which translates to the living in English and 'Sthu' means 'Bitha' which translates to the land where a house is built. Together it means the Place of the Living. Since every living creature lives within the Mother Earth, thus they worship mother earth as Bastu or Bais god. This reflects that the Hajongs are worshippers of nature. Along with worshipping the Bastu they also worship various other gods. In order to protect themselves from bad omens and diseases and prevent attacks from wild animals the villagers together perform the Bastu puja. Bastu puja is celebrated once or twice a year and every Hajong village has a place to celebrate the Bastu which is a peaceful place in the village with various trees surrounding the place. The Hajongs believes that the Banyan tree consists of the spirit of their god and thus accordingly every place of the Bastu puja consists of a Banyan Tree. Bastu puja celebrated in the month of April (Bwisag in Indian Calendar) and in the months of October and November (Kati in Indian Calendar). In older days, there was no specific day or dates to celebrate the Bastu Puja. In the present day, the puja is celebrated in the first Saturday of Bwisag month.

Cleaning the Place for Bastu Puja:

Since, no one visits the place during the time when it is not in use and due to its limited use the place of the Bastu puja is covered with various plants and grasses most of the time. The men of the village clean the place a day or two days before the puja is celebrated. On the day of the puja, small huts are built in the name of various gods which were built with thatch (thuri) grass in the older days whereas in the present day it is built with bamboo.

Selection of the Deusi/ Nongtang (Priest):

Bastu Puja cannot be conducted without a Deosi (Priest), sometimes referred to as Nongtang. There are two Deosies in the Bastu Puja. The Hajong's selection of the Deosi is admirable. In the need of a Deosi for the Bastu Puja, the villagers together call the Doudini and request her to select the Deosi. On the request of the villagers the Doudini comes and places a stone in the place of the Bastu Puja, lights a Diya and says the following, as the need for a Deusi has occurred in this village for the Bastu Puja, the whole of the village will gather tomorrow. "Oh god, from whose hands would you like to be prayed, you come and choose" and thus the Doudini select the Deosi. On the next day, Doudini freshens up and comes to the place of Bastu Puja and touches the stone where after that the spirit of the gods enters the Doudini's body/soul and then she sprinkles holy water in the head of the chosen person who is to be

the Deosi (head priest). Theng Dhora (Assistant Priests) is also selected by the same process. The Deusi, Theng Dhora and a Jogali (helper) play the major roles in conducting the Bastu Puja. In Hajong Language the selection of the 'Deosi' is called '*Borun Jaga*' or '*Hil Jaga*'.

Rules/Process of Bastu Puja and celebration of Batsu Puja:

The Bastu Puja is celebrated through donations of money and rice from all the villagers. A day before the Bastu Puja, the men of the village built small huts with help of bamboo. In older days, the huts were made using thatch (Thuri). The design of the huts varies accordingly with the various gods of the puja. The huts are made only for Buri Thakur Rani (Kamakya), Bastu (Bais), Vadra Kali, Sosan Kali and Niku Lamba Deu (goddess of wealth). The Hajongs belief the Niku Lamba Deu has a tail, and thus builds its hut consisting with a tail made of thatch or straw, etc. An idol of elephant and a horse is made from mud in the place of the Bastu God. It is belief that in the older days, the Hajongs use to travel with the help of elephants and horses and they have helped the gods in various ways during their lifetime. Therefore, they keep a place for the elephants and horses and worship them as well. The Hajongs have a great believe in the Bastu or the Mother Earth, and thus they never do any work which includes ploughing or disturbing the agricultural fields before the Bastu puja. They believe that such work will disappoint the mother earth.

In order to get rid of various diseases, problems and bad omens and in hope of bringing happiness, blissfulness and peacefulness in the village, the Hajongs celebrate the Bastu Puja. The Hajongs are classified in two types according the norms of worshipping the Bastu, which are: (a) Sakto and (b) Bhakto (vaishnavas). The Saktos offer/ sacrifices of animals and rice beer and follow the old rule of worshipping the Bastu whereas Bhaktos do not offer any sacrifices or wine (rice beer) but conducts their prayers by offering flowers. In older

days, the Hajongs use to prepare traditional wine for the Basthu Puja whereas in the present day such norm cannot be seen, but still the wife of the Deosi prepares the wine to offer to the Niku Lamba Deu. The wine is only offered to the god of Wealth. On the day of the Puja, every household reconstructs and designs their houses. The Deosi, Theng Dhora and the Jogali (helper) after taking a bath also have to be present in the place of the Bastu Puja. The Deosi not allowed consume any food a day before the Bastu Puja. The Deosi with the help of Theng Dhora and the Jogali (helper) gets busy in decorating the Basthu Puja since early morning. The requirements of the puja are as follows:

1. Banana Leave
2. Earthen Pot
3. Pure rice beer (traditional wine)
4. Uncooked Rice
5. Mustard Oil
6. Thread
7. Diyas
8. Basil Leafs
9. Banana
10. A White Goat
11. A Pair of White Pigeon
12. 3 Black Goats
13. Two Tortoises
14. 3 Pair of Pigeons and 3 Hens or Cocks

All of the above requirements are contributed through donations from all the villagers. The 'Deosi' arranges and cleans the place of worship and the 'Theng Dhora' and the 'Jogali' helps him with the cleaning work. The Deosi lights diyas in the name of all the gods and offers two pieces of rice, a pair basil leaves in the 'Dona' (A traditional banana plant bowl). After the Deosi completes his prayers, the villagers both men and women, young and old prays and offers whatever they can to the gods in the direction of North to South. Then, the Theng Dhora and Jogali prays to god 'Sitli' and goes to the river bank along with the villagers where the Jogali lights a diya and performs rituals in the name of God Sitli and throws a live white goat in the river and also frees the pair of white pigeons from the river bank. Then, all of them comes back to the place of Bastu Puja and performs the Bastu Puja. Sacrifices are then made in the name of some gods starting from Goddess Kamakhya or Buri Thakuria one by one from North to South.

Table- Name of the Gods and the sacrifices/offerings made to them

Sl. No.	Name of the Gods	Sacrifices made to gods
1.	Buri Thakurani (Goddess Kamakhya)	A dark goat and a pair of pigeons
2.	Niku Lamba Dew (Goddess Laxmi)	A Tortoise and Rice Beer
3.	Baro Devta	A Chicken
4.	Sitli	A white goat and a pair of pigeon
5.	Vadra Kali (Goddess Kali)	A goat and a pair of pigeon
6.	Pal Pahuri	A Chicken
7.	Bonomali	A Chicken
8.	Sosant Kali	A dark goat and a pair pigeon
9.	Bastu(Bais)	A Tortoise

After the sacrifices are made, offering of heads and blood of goats, pigeons and chicken are made and the rest of the meat is cooked and offered again to the respective gods. Also, anyone from among the villagers

makes other offerings as they wish. After the puja, the young men and women plays the Dhaki (traditional drum), Singa (instrument made from the horn of a buffalo), and Basi (Flute) and sings and performs their traditional dances where the men also distribute wine (rice beer) to the women. In the end, all the villagers share the Bhog (Rice cooked with meat) and wine made for during the Bastu Puja.

On the next morning, the game of throwing Kadong (Mud) is played by the villagers where men or boys throw Kadong (mud) to women or girls and vice versa and then the next day the Hajongs start cultivating and other activities.

V. CONCLUSION:

Above discussion of Hajong's Bastu Puja it can be say that they worship both domestic and god of Jungle. Among the communities have a social belief that if, they worship by offering some things then they get relief from several disease and obstacles. Hajong likes nature; Bastusali (place of Bastu puja) has green surroundings of carious trees and plants. Basically they are dependent on agriculture. With cultivating they like to fishing, hunting and collecting vegetables from jungle. So, they worship the jungles god and goddesses also to protect from wild animals. They have their own traditional culture and religious festivals. But due to the influence of other religions they are assimilating rapidly with the other religions and losing their own culture and traditional religion day by day. Many people are don't like sacrificed. So some villagers quit to their own festivals. They are losing their language, culture and religion. Without sacrificed it can also be celebrate offering other things like fruits and flowers. Therefore through this study tied to recognize as a heritage community.

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