



Marriage System of the Hajongs and Associated Rites and Rituals

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ABSTRACT: Marriage one of the part of the social institution. It ensure the rights of the partners with respect to each other and to define the relationships of children within a community. The Hajong tribes has well established institutions of the marriage. The chief form of marriage is monogamous in practice. Polygamy is rare in practice. Various rites and rituals have ben associated in the marriage ceremonies of the Hajong which have been practiced since the time immemorial. In this paper, an attempt has been made to highlight and to study the marriage system of the Hajongs and associated rites and rituals.

Keywords: Suvah biya, Daipora biya , Hajong, Dharma mao, Dharma baap, Airock, marriage.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Hajongs are one of a small tribes of North-eastern region. Ethnologically the Hajongs are said to belong to the great Bodo family Indo-Mongoloid stock. On the other hand Hajong language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of the great Sino Tibetan family of languages. According to the traditional belief prevalent among the community, they originally inhabited in the *Has Pargana* or in the Hajo area of Assam. Due to some historical reasons they were compelled to leave Hajo area and fled to Garo Hills and from there they spread to Mymensingh, Sylhet etc. Some scholars have expressed the view that the word Hajong has been derived from a Kachari word *Haju* which means the people who live in high hills. Majority of the scholars, however, are agreement in one thing that the word Hajong originates from Garo word *Ha-jong*. In Garo, *Ha* means land and *Jong* means worm. So the term Hajong means land worms. Here the term *Jong* indicates not worms but the people who are expert in ploughing. As the main source of livelihood of the Hajongs is cultivation, and so to indicate this they are called Hajong. At present majority of the Hajong tribes are living in Meghalaya and Assam and a very negligible member is in Arunachal Pradesh.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to emphasize and study the institution of the marriage and rituals have been conducted in the Hajong marriage ceremony. They are not collected and written down fully in details. With the sole objective of understanding the ritual ceremony of the marriage and system of the marriage, this paper has been developed.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this paper is interdisciplinary approach which included consulting number of written sources as well as interview method. The people who have knowledge of the traditional marriage of the Hajong and various rites and rituals that associated in the marriage have been consulted and information also has been gathered from published work and journals.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Marriage is the purest form of acceptance of relationship between a man and a women as husband and wife. The Hajongs conduct marriage according to their own social customs, rules and regulations, their customary beliefs , attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners which accords status to their offspring. The Hajongs are Hindus, and they were very orthodox towards their religion, customary rites and rituals. Monogamy is the chief form of marriage. Polygamy marriage is almost out of practice while polyandry is not known.

The Hajongs, in the matter of marriage, follow the clan exogamy fully. In other words no marriage can take place between a boy and a girl belonging to the same clan since they are considered to be brother and sister. They are also very much orthodox regarding marriage matters in the sense that no one is allowed to marry outside his or her community. Violation of the customary law automatically leads to excommunicated from the Hajong society. But owing to unavoidable circumstances sometimes, the erring couple has to be inducted into the Hajong society with due atonement followed by fine in cash and providing a feast to the people of the concerned village. Since such a process is extremely expensive, the Hajong youths generally refrain from inter community marriages.

Marriage system in the Hajong society has some important aspects. These are as follows:

- A. **Khalti or Bride Price** : Hajong tribes do not have any dowry system. However, the guardians of the girl are to be paid a nominal amount in cash as a bride price which is called *Khalti* in Hajong. But now-a-days payment of bride price has been replaced by payment of something to the bridegroom by the parents of the bride.
- B. **Ghar Jangoi or resident son-in-law**: The Hajongs do not have the system of keeping the son-in-law at the residence of his in laws called *Ghar-Jangoi* after the marriage. However, in some exceptional cases, due to not having any son they use to keep their son-in-

laws in their residence after marriage.

- C. **Monogamy**: From the point of view of marriage the Hajongs are monogamous from the time immemorial. Polygamy is rare in practices and polyandry is strictly prohibited.
- D. **Divorce** : In the Hajong society divorce is very rare. Divorce is allowed by the society in exceptional case only. And it was known as Pan Pas Sari Dewa in Hajong language. A widow or a divorcee can remarry with the consent of the village elders and in such marriage, rituals are not performed. A small feast was organized by the couples to the villagers.
- E. **Absence of Child Marriage**: Child marriage is not conducted in the Hajong society. But sometimes in case of fleeing with the love one is another, in which the society excepted it due to the choose of the couples. Otherwise the concerned age of marriage of boy is 25 years and girl is 16 years and above.

There are seven types of marriages that are found to be prevalent in the Hajong society. They are as follows:

1. **Suvah biya**: This type of marriages are conducted after the discussion with the bride and bridegroom's family members. Here the marriage rituals are done as their age old practices in customary way. Such marriages can be arranged through a middle man known as *Jahu*. Proposal for marriage is sent from the boy's side. If it is agreed, they enter into mutual discussion and finalize the date for marriage. Apart from the middle man *Jahu*, *Dharma-mao (religious mother)*, *Dharma-baap (religious father)* and *Mita (friend)* of bridegroom are some of the important members in the marriage ceremony. Behind it five *Airock* (socially married women only) were there who help to manage the things of the marriage smoothly.
2. **Dai pora or Theng Pangrani biya** : This marriage is not like social marriage. A male is required to accept a female due to her maternity. In this case they have to pay penalty price due to their misdeed before marriage. A small feast was given to the villagers for being living together after onwards.
3. **Mona-moni biya**: This type of marriage is conducted by the choice of the couples. If they tied nuptial knot secretly, they are excluded from active participation in any social work of the village society. They can return back to village but their participation is restricted.
4. **Hanga or Khanga biya**: This type of marriage is especially conducted for the widow or widower. A widow is allowed to get married to an aged unmarried man or a widower. If widow posses child, it can also go to the new father or can stay at the residence of late father.
5. **Gachh Khara biya**: This type of marriages is solemnized when a girl become mother with out marriage. And for accepting them socially one male was fixed by the elders to be an illegal father of an illegal mother to maintain their social status.
6. **Temple Marriage**: These type of marriage is conducted by the couple in the temple throughout the priest.
7. **Court Marriage**: Now a days couple use to choose the registered marriage in the court. A court marriage is a ceremony that takes place in a court of law. It is a simple, secular alternative to traditional weddings.

1. Pre Marriage

Pre-marriage refers to the time before marriage, or the activities that take place before marriage. It can also refer to relationships that occur before marriage. The bride for the marriage is chosen through the messenger or middle man known as *jahu*. Marriage is solemnized in any of the couples place. The messenger meets the village headman of the bride's village and with him goes to the bride's family. After the discussion the actual date for marriage is fixed known as *Pan-Chini-Gua* ceremony in bride's home. In this ceremony villagers are invited, the groom's family brought clothes, cunch bangles, vermillion, ornaments etc for the new bride. The women's of the groom side help to wear the things to the bride. The villagers help the family member as per their directions in case of cleaning, cutting vegetables, cooking, washing utensils etc.

2. Traditional Marriage

For the organization of the marriage an huge contemporary pandal was make and decorated with leaves and flowers. In Subha Vivah, the Hajong's make bamboo mats for hanging in the wall which is later on plastered with the mud above it for the artistic design known as *Phool-Tulani-Bera*. It is very important for the marriage and it is kept towards east direction of the couples room known as *Jora-Ghar or Khopra-Ghar*. The measurement of the handmade bamboo mat was of the Dharma Maa's (Religious Mother) height and the wide of the two hands. It refers to that she is the protectioner and responsibility taker of the bride's now onwards. The design's make in the bamboo mat were sun, moon, stars and natural scenes with the rice powder, vermillion and black ash. In front of it in the floor above the rice sixteen diyas and sixteen little pots of mud were kept with particular leaves, coins, nuts etc. And for preparing these all things five *Airock* are essential. Without the presence of *Airock* the marriage is incomplete. At night the banana trees are fixed at the four corners of the mandap with the measurement of the two hands of the groom on each side. The height of the banana tree fixed must be of grooms. The square mandap is covered with a thin cover of bamboo and forest straw. The sixteen diyas and sixteen pots set up inside the *jora-ghar* are picked up by *Airock* and placed inside the mandap as before. The bride and groom are washed with turmeric and seated facing east in front of the mandap. Dharma Maa & Dharma Bap bow to the God and tied the knot of marriage in time. The priest lights up the sacred fire on the right side of the groom's front and begins the Homa Yajna. The priest offers ghee, honey, fruits etc. to the god of fire and recites mantras to the bride and groom. They make the two souls swear to become one in the presence of the gods. The bride and groom are then made to circumambulate the mandap seven times. Then the bride and groom are seated again in the mandap. Dharma Maa & Baap, parents, elderly relatives give blessings. The bride and groom were then took to the *jora-ghar*. This is the end of the social wedding ceremony at night. This wedding is held at night and is called Bhar Biya. The next day, a similar wedding was held in the same mandap in front of the village community and invited guests. There is no fire offering and no priest present in this wedding. The wedding is attended by the villagers and invited guests. This is called a Bahi wedding. On the night of the wedding, the bride serve food to the village elder members known as *Hata-Sowani*. It is noteworthy that the songs sung during the marriage ceremony by the women's is not being sung from many years. Previously songs were being sung by the hajong women's while different activities were perform during the marriage. Now it was performed in shortcut way without singing any songs by the women's.

In Suvah-vivah, *Ayobidhi Prashit* is done where the forefathers of the bride or bridegroom's family are being informed that he or she is going to conduct an marriage ceremony. So therefore *pind* offers to their forefathers for their blessings. In case of *Dai-pora vivah* and *Mona-moni vivah* simple *Prashit* is being done in shortcut way. After attempting this ceremony bride and bridegroom become pure known as *huddho-huwani*, after it actual marriage is conducted.

In some of the cases, we come to see that a boy choose to marry a girl outside their community known as intercaste marriage. For marrying a girl outside their caste she has to be first taken up to the hajong community known as *jat-uthani* . And for *jat-uthani* they have to pay penalty price *jori-mona* to the village commity for marrying a girl outside their own caste. And in case of social marriage the new couples have to pay an tribute in the name of the village temple. The main marriage is solemnized in presence of the village elders, priest etc. The priest chants mantra for marriage where bride and groom use to put garland on each other, vermilion on bride's forehead, conch bangles and take the blessings of the god & goddess together followed by village elders, family members etc. After it reception party starts on where they use to dress up with colourful clothes, young girls are very excited in case of dressing up in the wedding ceremonies. They use to sing, dance, entertained with their friends, relatives and neighbours'. And enjoy the ceremony very nicely starting from onwards. Food serving were done by the village young boys and girls. There helping nature to each other in various occasion makes them run the ceremony smoothly. Next day a small feast was given to those who work known as *kamla-kamli khua*. Afterall the marriage ceremony ended.

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