CHAPTER - IV
4. RURAL INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE IN ASSAM

Information infrastructure of a society includes producers or generators, collectors, disseminators and the facilities to produce, distribute, store and preserve information. With the change of human society, the information infrastructure also has been changing. In the past, when there was no written language, information was just passed by oral or verbal or any other body languages. With the development of written language, information infrastructure also has been developed as well as human knowledge and technology, information infrastructure has been changing rapidly and now it has achieved such a position that one can communicate from one corner to another corner of the world in a second.

With the development of Global information scenario, Assam’s information infrastructure is also competent enough. But today’s position was achieved after a long chronological developmental process. We can distinctly divide this into three era of development of information infrastructure. Those are -

A. Information infrastructure of ancient time.
B. Information infrastructure of medieval time.
C. Information infrastructure of modern time.

4.1 Information infrastructure of ancient Assam:

In ancient Assam the information producers were mostly the kings or the governments, the priests, writers or scholars and the public. Information were stored in the governmental archives in the form of Sanchipat books, clay plates, stone plates, copper plates etc. The information distributors were the ‘Dakowals’, ‘Duts’, ‘Hatimota’s’ teachers, priests, writers etc. The tribal societies had their social organisations like ‘Deka chang’ ‘Gabhuruchang’, ‘Morang ghar’ etc. where information were distributed.

So, in ancient Assam, the information infrastructural components can be described as follows:

4.11 Information Sources:

4.111 Documents of stone plates, copper plates etc: Some of the Governmental documents of ancient Assam are still found in the form of stone plates,
Stone plates found in Orang National Park of Darrang District.

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copper plates etc. These reflect that the communication process through writing was very much developed in ancient Assam. Written information were documented in the form of stone plates, copper plates, Iron plates etc. The most significant rock and copper plates which are still preserved in various places of Assam are - Umachal rock inscription of king Surendra Varman, Balganga Rock inscription, Dubi copper plates, Nidhanpur copper plates of Bhaskar Varman, Tezpur Rock inscription of Harija varman, Hayunthal copper plates of Harja Varman, Tezpur copper plates of Vanamala, Uttar Barbil copper plates of Balavarman III, Nowgang copper plates grant of Balavarman III, Bargaon copper plates grant of Ratnapala, Suwalkuchi copper plate grant of Ratnapala and so on². These are now historical evidences of ancient Assam. The information of these plates are mostly description of any historical events or evidence of governmental donations.

4.112 Folk literature :-

Folk literature was important source of rural information. These folk literature were rarely found in written form. These were popular among the people by verbal transition. These folk literature were the poems, stories, or balads. which were propagated generation after generation through oral transaction. In Assam different tribal communities have their cultural traditions of telling stories or balads. Generally the grand fathers and mothers used to tell stories to the young ones. These were one type of informal education as because through these stories, the children were taught morality, responsibility and love towards society and nature³.

4.113 Folk culture :- Folk culture includes almost all the information regarding the way of life of a society. It reflects right from society’s food habit to cremation ceremony. In Assam, the ancient tribal as well as non tribal societies were very much rich in their tradition and culture⁴. The folk songs and dances, folk dramas etc. reflected some root information of the then society in informal manner. The diffusion and acculturation were also took place. The ideas and philosophy were also reflected in these folk cultural activities⁵. Dr. Birendra Nath Datta, Dr. Nabin Chandra Sarma and Dr. Prabin Chandra Das had commented on acculturation in the north east in the book ‘North-east Indias Folklore ; The integrate view’ as follows - “The acculturation situation in the Indian context has mostly been one of Aryan Hindu influences over non-Aryan non Hindu tribal stocks, leading eventually in a great many cases to integration, assimilation and
absorption of the erstwhile tribal elements into a ‘non-tribal’ complex. But this ‘non-tribal’ complex itself has all along been emerging in each region as an ever-evolving conglomerate thanks to the continuous process of adoption of local tribal elements. The north-eastern region abounds in living examples involving both these processes, sharp reflection of which is to be found in a considerable volume of folklore material.

First, we have those myths and legends which are clearly suggestive of the process of Hinduization and Sanskritization of erstwhile tribal groups. Most of these have a familiar pattern; whole groups or ruling dynasties are linked with Hindu Gods or Goddesses or with heroes or heroines of the epics by ascribing their ancestry to those personage or by some other convenient device.” So ancient society of Assam was also a acculturated society of tribal and non-tribal. The information carried by the folk culture reflected this harmony.

4.12 Institutions for information dissemination and preservation

4.121 Gurukuls:

Ancient Assam, i.e. Kamrupa was famous for Sanskrit education. This Sanskrit education was imparted in the Gurukuls’ which were run by the Sanskrit scholars and disciples used to learn under them staying under the control of ‘Guru’s or the teachers. Gurukuls had libraries where manuscripts of Sanchipat, clay plates, books of Bhurjapatra, clothes etc. were preserved. Gurukuls were centre of education and higher learning, where the ‘Guru’ or teachers were not only related to teaching but also related to research and literary activities. They wrote books, translate books and gathered knowledge from every sides. “Aano Bhodra Krotoauntau Viswata” - let all the noble thought come to us, - which was the idea of Rik-veda and that was followed by the Gurukuls. So, as a centre of knowledge education and learning, Gurukuls were responsible for collection, preservation, dissemination and production of knowledge or information.

4.122 Tribal organisations:

Every tribal organisation has it’s own social organisation. These organisations are created to run peaceful community life and to organise the socio-cultural ceremonies.
‘Deka-chang’ (Institution for boys), ‘Gabharu Chang’ (institution for girls) Morang Ghors
(A social club) of some tribal people of Assam are important from the point of non-formal
education. Through these organisations, the young generation learned about nature,
agriculture, social life and couple-life. These organisations make them disciplined,
laborious and social. The social rules and regulations of these tribal people are very strict
and these are maintained by those social organisations. Religious ceremonies, marriage
ceremonies, festivals etc. were supervised by such organisations.

Although these organisations do not keep any documents or written material,
the oral transaction among the people in a organised way pass information for social
purpose. The knowledge or information are given in these organisation in a disciplined and
systematic manner. The knowledge dissemination processes of these tribal organisations
are like the Gurukuls of the Vedic era where disciples were provided knowledge of Vedas
only by oral transaction and disciples committed of memory those knowledge by their
own capacity. Of course, in the tribal organisation no such formulated education of con-
crete text were provided. These organisations make the young boys and girls aware about
socio-cultural life and also teach them how to run their domestic life.

4.123 Temples :-

In Assam temples were the main religious organisations. Temples were not only
the centre of worshipping, but also the centres of Sanskrit education. The priests of the
temples used to learn Sanskrit language. Sanchipat manuscripts were kept in these and
these temples were used for education. Various religious activities were documented in
the sanchipat books by the priest community. Copper plates, stone plates, clay plates etc.
are also found in these temples. The temples were patronised by the kings and they
provided required facilities to write books and preserve them. The libraries of the temples
were not open for all but only for priest community and members of royal family or
families of other high officers. Temple libraries were important from the point of preserving
the Sanchipat manuscript or other such documents.
4.13 Information carriers:

4.131 The ‘Dakowal’ or postman, ‘Dut’ or Ambassador, ‘Char’ or the spies:

For information transfer, ‘Dakowals’ (postman) ‘Dut’ (Emassador) and ‘Char’ (spies) were very much responsible persons. Dakowals carried the letters from one place to another place. They were mostly government employees but public did not get the service of Dakowals. Govt. employed Dakuwals who were well protected. They were provided arms for protection and horse or boat for transportation. Dakowals had the right to kill any person who create problems on the way to his destination. So, when Dakowals were passing through the road, everybody cleared the roads. These Dakowals had to move hundreds of miles by carrying the bags of letters or documents in their back.

The kings engaged ‘Dut’ or ambassador to convey messages from one state to another state. They carried information of one government to another government or one administrator to another administrator. Duts were highly honoured persons and they were not attacked even by the enemics also. They were provided full right to pass interstate boundaries so that messages or information from a king to another king can flow without any obstruction. Killing of Dut was un-ethical even at the time of war also.

But, the spies were very much suspected persons. Taking a great risk of life spies collected secret information on behalf of his own state or king. Their reports were kept confidentially, which were used to find out their enemy and to attack them. Spies were rarely seen in the open field.

4.2 Information infrastructure of Medieval time:

Information infrastructure of medieval Assam includes some more with the ancient times. Apart from the components which existed in the ancient times like Governmental documents such as copper plates, stone plates, sanchipat manuscripts; Folk literature, folk culture; Gurukuls; Tribal organisations, temples, Duts, spies and Dakowals etc., Besides them the Gondhia Bharals, Satras, Namghars, Masjids, Guruduuars, monks and Kakotis, Bora, Saikias etc. served a good purpose in the process of the transfer of ideas from one person to other.

4.21 ‘Gandhia Bharals’ and ‘Gandhia Bharalis’:

‘Gandhia Bharals’ were archives of the Ahom governments. ‘Gandhia’ means scented, ‘Bharals’ means depository. Gandhia Bharal means—where the scented documents were kept. The responsible person to look after these documents was known as
‘Gandhia Bharali’. All the governmental records which included census reports, court minutes, judicial proceedings, diplomatic correspondences, accounts of revenues and expenditures, account of royal animals specially the elephants, horses etc., accounts of royal wealth etc. were preserved. These documents were preserved with scented or perfumed preservatives. Copper plates, stone plates, sanchipat books were also kept in the Gandhia Bharals. To write the documents or copy the records, special professionals like ‘Kakati’, ‘Chang Kakati - etc. were also employed. The Historical records, which are known as ‘Buranji’ were also produced in the Gandhia Bharal. These were prepared by special scribes under the supervision of ‘Lekhakar Barua’ (the govt. documentation officer). Chiring Phukans were another officials who professed the documents or Buranji’s. They were like the priests in the Ahom regime and they were scholars in linguistics and historiography. All these high class officials were related to Gandhia Bharal who were responsible for production, preservation and dissemination of information from the Gandhia Bharals.

4.22 Namghars:

Namghars were the religious centres to worship God. But these were not like the temples. There were structural and organisational differences between Namghars and temples. The temples were generally taken care by the priests and supported by the kings. But Namghars were organised by the people and also the people took care in its maintenance and services. The set up of Namghars were established by Srimanta Shankardeva, the great writer and social reformer. He organised the Namghars in such a way that every members of a village could take part in it. He built up the Namghars not only as the centre of worshiping God but also as a centre of education, culture, literature and social court. Namghars were information production, dissemination and preservation centre also. Various religious books like ‘Srimadavagawata’, ‘Kirtana’, ‘Gita’, ‘Ranayana’, ‘Mahabharata’ etc. are preserved and read regularly. A special people who possessed a lucid voice and had knowledge in religion designated as ‘Pathak’ which means ‘reader’ was coined by Srimanta Shankardeva. The lady ‘reader’ was known as ‘Pathakani’. These Pathak or Pathakani used to read the books and other disciples were used to listen them. So the Namghars were like the public libraries. Namghars also facilitated lending

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books to the disciples. They took such books to their home and after finishing the study, these were returned. Thus the book circulation system was also started in the Namghars. So namghars were not only a religious organisation, but a non-formal or informal educational as well as cultural organisation where library system was also existed.

4.23 Satras:

Satras are also like the Namghars, but in a greater form. If we compare the Namghars with schools or colleges, we can compare the satras with universities. Satras were not only a centre of education and culture but also of agriculture, fishery, horticulture etc. Satras had the facilities like hostels where disciples could stay and study. They should engage in the productive activities like agriculture. Their production was divided into two parts. One part was for their livelihood and another part was contributed to Satras. Every Satras had well equipped libraries where specially the sanchipat manuscripts were kept. Various books were authored by Srimanta Sankardeva, Madhavadeva and others, which were copied by their disciples and kept in the libraries. Bhaona (drama), Borjeeet (song) etc. were part of cultural activities of the Satras. Drawing, crafts, letters etc. were also kept in the libraries of the Satras.

Satras were information centres also. They not only provided books but also the information about social, cultural and literary activities to the people.

4.24 Masjids, Monasteries, Churches, Gurudwaras:

Like the temples, the Masjids, Monasteries, Churches, Gurudwaras also served as the centre of religion and they also had some depository of books of the concerning religion. The Masjids kept Koran and other such literature related to Islam and Islamic culture. The monasteries kept books on Buddhist literature, Churches kept christian literature and Gurudwaras kept sikh literature. Churches were built in the last part of medieval Assam. Gurudwaras were built in 15th century and Masjids were built in the 13th century in Assam.

4.3 Rural Information infrastructure in modern time:

Modern rural information infrastructure has included almost all the components of past the ancient medieval time in a developed form. The Copper plates, stone
NAMGHAR: the great unifier

The single institution, playing the most catalytic role in fostering the spirit of sharing and caring is undoubtedly the Namghar or the community prayer hall, a replica of the Kirtan Ghar of the Satras, of which there are about 300 of them in the island. These prayer halls, in effect, act as the villages councils playing the most significant role in matters of local self-governance in addition to its pivotal importance as the place of mutual interaction and spiritual pursuance.

A typical Satra complex consists of several utility structures of which the most important being the Kirtan Ghar or the prayer hall and the Manikul – the sanatorium. A Balsara or the entry porch is a usual accompaniment to the main constituents. In close proximity to the Kirtan Ghar are situated the Halis or the dwelling quarters of the Bhakats or the monks and acolytes.

Each Satra being the centre of learning, has a museum. Here is stored the manuscripts called puthis, the handwritten treatise on a wide range of subjects including religion, scholasticism, medicine etc. as well as various objects of art and audio-visual accessories.

Each Satra consists of three principle categories of persons intimately connected with the welfare and management of the Satra – the Satradhikar, Bhakats and the Sishyas or disciples.

The first two generally reside within the four walls of the Satra campus, while the third lives in scattered places leading ordinary lives. The head of the Satra is the Satradhikar. He is the religious, moral and spiritual guide. Bhakats are those devotees who either hold some office or lead a devotional life within the campus. The disciple of a Satra is called a Sishya. Every Assamese Vaishnavite is invariably a Sishya of one or the other of the Satras, the number of disciples of the Satras varying from a few hundreds to as many as a million.

The resident disciples of the Satras are generally dedicated to the families of the Sishya in their early childhood and are mainly cultivators. For these boys grow up in these Satras, each takes up one of the trades like woodcarving, cane and bamboo craft, meek making, agriculture, music and painting among many others for their livelihood, thus imbibing a work culture in the young minds, besides the mandatory pursuits like arts, literature, philosophy and religious practices.

Various activities of the Satras of Majuli.
plates etc. are still preserved as the source of past information in the archives. The
folk - literature, folk culture, tribal organisations, Namghars and Satras, Temples etc. are
still existed. The Gandhia Bharals are developed as archives, village shrines as schools
and colleges and so on.

Apart from those, the new components which are included in the modern rural
information infrastructure are mainly the public libraries, medias, school and colleges Govt.
organisations and non Govt. organisations information, equipments like telephone etc.

4.31 Newspapers and Journals :

In modern society newspapers are the most important, powerful and useful
source of information. In Assam, newspaper circulation was started in 1846. ‘Arunadoi’
was published in this year from Sivasagar by the Christian Missionaries. Circulation of
this paper was only 1400 at that time. A few copies of this newspaper were circulated
in the rural areas of Assam. It was distributed by post. Later on, various newspapers like
‘Assam Bilasini’, English newspaper ‘Times of Assam’ etc. were published. As the
literacy increased, circulation of newspaper also increased. At present about 20
newspapers are circulated well in Assam and out of the total circulation of these
newspapers more than sixty percent are circulated in the rural areas. So most of the
newspaper readers are rural readers. These newspapers are supplied by the newspaper
agencies or the vendors. Newspapers provide day-to-day information to the rural public
and in the same time people can convey their opinion to the newspapers by writing letters
to the editors. The local correspondences or reporters collect information from the rural
areas on behalf of the newspapers.13

4.32 Radio :

Radio is still a popular media specially for music and news - information. In the
rural areas, where about 40% are under poverty, a few could buy television sets. most of
the lower middle class people fulfill their information needs and also recreate by radio.

Radio is not a visual medium and so music and sound effects are used to attract
the audiences. This develop the imaginative capacity of human being. As an oral, auditory
or voice medium, microphone is the only instrument through which a radio broadcast the
programmes to his listeners. The broadcasters must speak into the mike as if the listeners
are sitting by his side. And that is why, radio is an intimate media also. In our country radio is governed by the government and so all the governmental policies and programmes are communicated by the radio. There is special programme for the village people in the radio. There are special programmes for agriculture, veterinary, fishery, cottage industries etc. which generally used by the rural audiences. Family welfare programmes by the radios are also important for the village audience.  

Radio has many advantages. The most important one is, it is cheaper medium and easy to handle and manage. There is no need of electricity, simple battery can work for months. Illiterate persons also can enjoy a radio because vernacular language stations are available in every state. Radio is a mobile medium also. A man can listen to a radio in the home or in the field or in the car or in the bus.

Radio is a quick medium. It can transmit the news immediately after it occurred.

It is faster than the TV even. For TV it is more difficult to take the camera immediately to events as they are happening. For newspapers, we have to wait till the morning hours of the next day to know about that facts of an event, as it requires time to be printed in the papers. Now a days, radio has provided special phone - in programmes, where the audiences can communicate at the time of broadcasting. The rural people, who are not in a position to enjoy TV or cinema, or the newspapers, they are very much interested on the radio and they have been using it effectively for information, education and recreation.

4.33 Television:

Television is the most popular mass media at present. It is an audiovisual media, which directly acts on two senses simultaneously, those of hearing and seeing. It has greater impact, on people because the eye absorbs much more than the ear in the same time. Eye and ear are to be engaged jointly to receive the information by the brain.

Television is used both for information and recreation. As an medium of information, Television is highly credible one. ‘Elements of mass media,” a book on journalism and mass communication by B.S. Thakur and J.S. Jadava says - “The TV camera, today goes to the planets, it goes under the Earth, and into the sea and throws light on the dark areas of knowledge about our world, the universe and the total environment. It has brought
about an information revolution and has turned our society into an information society. Because of its reach, TV has widened the mental horizons of man. It has become the supreme education of man. It has the potential of humanizing knowledge. He can be educated to feel as a citizen of the world. He can be educated by TV to look at the entire environment sympathetically and to think of himself as a part of it. TV has a great potential for imparting fruitful lessons on one world education to mankind. TV is a credible, a believable medium. Seeing is believing. Things that a few people might believe otherwise become believable when shown on the TV screen. Stories of man’s poverty and richness, of the beautiful and the ugly, of meanness and nobility, of despair and exultation, when seen with naked, open eyes, become absolutely true. They become effectively truer than those that one reads in print medium or listens to on the radio or learns through hearsay or word of mouth.” Because of such believability or credibility it is now the most paver media. It is a glamour media also, because it projects personalities and events in a glittering way.10

In rural Assam, TV is still less in numbers due to people’s poverty, low economy and lack of electricity facility, so more than fifty percent village areas of Assam are deprived from television service. The areas, where electricity is available, their also, the lower income group people can not buy the TV. Only 20-30% of people of these areas are able to enjoy TV. A study was done in village Sonajuli, which is a small village of Orang Mouza of Darrang District. This village has 23 numbers of families. Out of this 23 numbers only 6 families enjoy TV and all these TV sets are black and white (Year of study-April, 2003). It reflects that the TV viewer on the rural areas are not more than 30%. Of course, there are more casual viewers, because the neighbours of a TV owner in a village sometimes come to enjoy TV. But these are not regular viewer. These are potential viewer, if they can have the capacity to buy a T.V set they will definitely buy the same and enjoy it regularly. It is worth mentioning that, out of the 23 families of Sonajuli village, 21 families have radio sets. It means, 90% of the village people are in a position to enjoy radio, and all the radio listeners are potential TV viewers.

It is to be noted that, almost all the rural TV viewers enjoy the national channels. Because, cable TV that provide different channels are found rare in the rural areas. In the National TV channels news bulletin sometime reflect the news of rural areas.
But investigative rural news is very rare in TV. When some ‘big’ news occurs due to natural calamities like flood, earthquake etc. or visit of ministers are seen in the TV news. Rural day-to-day news are almost uncovered by the TV channels. So, for the rural people TV is a one way traffic of information where they do not get enough opportunities to provide feedback or reflect their problems.

4.34 Academic Institutions :-

4.341 The schools:

The Gurukuls or village shrines were replaced by the schools. Schools are the centre of education for children and teenagers. According to new education policy, school education requires 12 years (10+2). This twelve years education is achieved by students of villages with the great support of government. These schools are divided into three stages such as primary schools, high schools and higher secondary schools. In the rural areas all these schools are prevailing with hundreds of teachers. These teachers are information disseminators in the rural area. They teach the students and in the same time they also provide information to the villagers through any formal or informal talks. The village teachers are like the guides of the rural public. Generally most of the newspaper readers in the rural areas are the school teachers. School teachers are also responsible for fulfilling some governmental aims for which they are entangled with the public directly. Governmental departments always take help of the schools to implement some programmes or policies. They are engaged in census duty, election duty and other such activities which are having direct touches with the rural people. The schools are also the centre of various socio-cultural functions. Independence day, republic day, some other recreational functions such as - Swaraswati Puja etc. are observed in the schools. So schools are not only educational centre, but also mass communication and cultural centres in the rural areas where from various informations are generated.

Schools are also responsible for gathering information. Most of the schools subscribe newspapers and collect books. Although there are not well-trained librarians in the libraries of high or higher secondary schools, there are collection of books in the schools. These books are distributed among the teachers and students.
On the other hand, the information about various schemes of education, adult education, health etc. reach the schools via governmental employees and they take help of schools for helping the people.

4.342 The colleges:

After independence, colleges were developed in the village areas also. As the institution of higher education, the colleges of the villages are most important institution from the point of knowledge gathering and dissemination of knowledges. In the colleges, generally the students get information or knowledges from the teachers in a systematic, disciplined and formal way. At the same time the rural public get information from the colleges informally with the help of teachers and students. The prospectus etc. are distributed from the colleges where information about education are available. Various ceremonial functions of colleges, different socio-cultural activities of the colleges carry information to the nearby public.

As an institution of higher learning colleges have the libraries. These libraries are run by professional staff. These libraries are information centres also. College libraries are well managed information centres. Although the college libraries are used only by students and teachers, the impact of the college libraries is not only limited to the teachers and students only. These libraries carry a lot of information to village people via students and teachers. The teachers and students of a rural area are also the citizens of that locality and the information they gather from college library go to their family members as well as their friends. These college libraries have indirect impact on the society as an information centre.

4.35 Administrative institutions:-

4.351 Gaon Panchayats:

Gaon panchayats are rural based political organisation for self-governance. Some of the governmental departmental works are carried out by the Gaon Panchayats. The president of a Gaon Panchayat is an elected member and the secretary is appointed by the government. People can know about various governmental policies and programmes through these panchayats. The elected members of the panchayats carry the messages from the government to the rural people. The Ideas relating to the panchayat was very high, but due to lack of fund and opportunities these are not in a position to serve the rural people.
effectively. Political influences also make these panchayats weak and one sided. Even then, these are the most important rural electoral body to collect information from the government and disseminate to the people, which help a lot in the development of rural areas.

4.352 Post Offices :-

Post offices are important organisations for delivering information from one individual to other individuals as well as one institution to other institutions. It is also important organisation for collection of information. Post masters and peons are responsible for systematic collection and distribution of letters or other postal documents. Post offices are also provided telegraph facilities which was important communication process when telephone was not so developed.

4.353 Governmental departments :

Some of the governmental departments have their branches in the rural areas. These are generally found in the Blocks and Mouzas. There are a few government offices in the remote villages. These are mostly agricultural centres, Veterinary sub-centres, public health centres, temporary centre of adult education etc. These governmental departments distribute the concerning governmental policies and programmes to the people. Some of the governmental department carry research activities in the rural areas. For instance, the census department not only collect population data, but also collect production data of village areas. Thus governmental departments not only disseminate information to the rural areas but also collect information from the rural areas.

4.36 Business concerns :

In rural areas, there are a few business concerns which are socially organised. During the time of seventies or eighties, co-operatives were very much active in the rural areas. The rural weaver co-operatives, co-operatives of brash workers, earthen potters, fisherman etc. are still active in the rural areas. These co-operatives collect information about governmental policies and programmes and disseminate to the members as well as the rural people. From these activities of these business concerns, information about rural economy is produced which are collected by the rural journalist and govt. departmental employees to publish and record them.
4.37 **Cultural institutions**:  
Assam is rich in folk culture, various tribes have their own cultural traditions. Apart from traditional cultures, the modern culture has also incorporated in the village life of Assam. There are a lot of cultural institutions in the villages of Assam which specially organise different cultural events such as dance, drama, music etc. Some of these cultural organisations are permanent and some are seasonal. The permanent organisations carry year long activities. These activities create rural information. These cultural institutions help in dissemination of information to the rural public in regard to different cultural items or events.

4.38 **Literary organisation**:  
Branches of ‗Asom Sahitya Sabha‘ are the important literary organisation in the rural areas. They publish journals, books etc. and organise various literary activities. ‗Natun Sahitya Parishad‘ also is one of the important literary organisation which is entangled with progressive literature. ‗Asom Lekhika Samaro Samiti‘ ‗Asom Kavi Samaj‘, etc. are the literary organisation which carry their activities in the rural areas also. Some of the rural youths organise literary organisation independently and publish magazines, books etc. For instance ‗Rup Jyoti Sangha‘ of Nankar vaira village of Nalbari District has been publishing ‗Seuji - Seuji‘, a magazine of poem regularly for long 25 years.22 Such organisations have been taking immense responsibilities to disseminate literary information in the rural areas.

4.39 **Women organisation**:  
The most popular women organisation of rural Assam is ‗Asom Pradesik Mahila Samiti‘. It was organised by great social worker Chandra Prabha Saikiani before independence.23 Its aim was to educate and make aware the women of Assam and lead them in the freedom struggle. Mahila Samiti was organised almost all the villages of Assam. Chandraprabha Saikiani guided this organisation on Gandhian philosophy. The members of this Mahila Samiti were not only the freedom fighters but also worker for socio-economic and cultural activities. They also used to organise the weavers of the villages and set-up co-operatives. These were the information centre for various socio-economic, cultural and political activities not only for the women but also for the whole society. Mahila
Samities of the villages subscribed newspapers and journals and organised meetings and seminars. So, there were two way process in the offices of these Mahila Samities. They collected information and disseminate them to the people.

4.310 **Clubs**

The rural clubs are formed by the educated youths for recreation by voluntary efforts for upliftment of the society as well as to serve the society at the time of any danger. These clubs gather information from newspapers, TVs, Telephones, computers etc. and from the individuals. They disseminate information to the members through these medias, discussions and meetings. Clubs are therefore important information centres. Some clubs are associated with libraries also. Clubs are having reading room like the libraries and it is a place of formal or informal talks and this is why it can create an environment of information transaction.

4.311 **NGOs**

There are a few NGOs in Assam which have been working for rural development. For instance ‘Rashtriya Gramin Bikash Nidhi’, ‘Gramin Bikash Parishad’ etc. have been working in some of the villages of Assam. Some local NGOs also have been working in the rural areas. On the other hand, some clubs also have been working as NGOs in the rural areas. For instance ‘Brahmaputra Club’ of Ratanpur Na-Pamua Gaon of Majuli have been working as NGO for upliftment of the villages. They have collected fund from the donor organisation and banks and have started the farms of goat, nursery of plants, cultivation, horticulture etc. They have given employment opportunities to many of the people of the village and these activities are running effectively. They gather their required information from the banks, Governmental departments, media, renowned personalities involved in various social works. They distribute fruitful information about jobs, business activities etc. to the youths as well as students and teachers.

4.312 **PCOs**

The telephone business concerns, PCOs (Public call offices) are important information centres not only in the cities or towns but also in the villages. Although the numbers are less, they are functioning in central places or in the Bazars of rural areas. From these PCOs, a villager can talk to any one in any part of the world because these PCOs provides STD, ISD facilities also. So, these PCOs have taken a great role to make
the world a global village. Those who do not have the capacity to install a telephone in his home can enjoy the telephone facilities from the PCOs. Some of the villagers are having telephone in their homes itself.

4.313 Community Information centres:

From 2001, the state government has been spending a lot of money to install community information centres for the rural people. But it has been seen that, the centres are actually not installed in the rural areas, but in the township of sub-divisions or blocks. These are facilitated with modern computers, internets etc. But villagers are not served by this community information centres, as because, these are situated far away from the villages.

4.314 Rural Public Libraries:

Rural Public Libraries are the most important component of rural information or infrastructure in Assam. These were started by the modern school educated people in the last part of 19th Century. There were many factors in the development of these rural libraries. These can be explained as follows:-

A. Increasing literacy:

During the pre-Independence era modern educational system was started to develop by the social workers. Schools and colleges were established and literacy percentage started to increase. The literate people need books to satisfy their urge for knowledge. This urge for knowledge made them dependant on books which encouraged them to build up the libraries.

B. Impact of western civilization:

British rule in Assam had enormous impact on the development of the libraries. In 1903, when Government public library was established at Sillon, it created an awareness for public libraries. On the other hand, English education was introduced by the British rulers which carried western thoughts of education. The enlightened people by this English education were inspired by on the modern library services. They understood the role of libraries in the informal education process which pushed them to lift up the libraries.
C. **Struggle for Independence**:

Struggle for independence was another factor of development of rural libraries. To aware the rural public about freedom struggle and to encourage and make them informed about independence of the country, there was a great need of libraries. The books on Indian history, Indian culture, biographies of Indian past heroes, messages of the leaders of freedom movement were supplied to these libraries. The newspapers which carried the news on freedom movement were also distributed in these libraries. To get rid of the atrocities of the British police force, these libraries were run by the then congress volunteers secretly. For instance, there was a library in Hakama village of Dhubri district run by freedom fighter, Ex-Chief Minister of Assam, Sarat Ch. Sinha. Mr. Sinha used to keep the books in trunks and those were hidden under a bamboo bush during day time. The freedom fighter used to come at night, pull them from the bamboo bush and distributed the books to the readers. There were many such groups of readers and many such secret libraries in rural areas during the time of freedom movement of India.

D. **Eagerness for entertainment**:

Libraries were also established as an institution of entertainment. In the past there was no radio or TV like the present time. Only entertainment was to read and enjoy with the books. The story books, novels, biographies, travel-literature were popular tools for entertainment. The educated youths of the villages built clubs where libraries were one of the part of the club as a source of entertainment also.

E. **Competitive Psychology**:

Libraries in the villages used to be the symbol of prestige. A village with a well-equipped library is regarded as a developed, cultured and educated village. During the time of pre-Independence, these libraries were frequently visited by the leaders of freedom movement. To get the honour as well as to catch the eyes of high level officers as well as politicians, the villagers competed to build and develop the libraries.

Before Independence there was no Governmental efforts to develop libraries in the rural areas. British government established a few public libraries in Sillong, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Dhubri and Guwahati. These libraries could not serve the rural people as these were far
চবকারী অবহেলার বলি,
গ্রাম্য পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর
আদেশান খোসণা

প্রতিদিন সচরাচর, ওষুদ্ধ, ২৯ অক্টোবর
কিংবা ১০ ঘন্টা ঘরে বায়ার চারানীকে কল করানি অতি অভ্যন্তরে আকর্ষণ করার প্রতিদিন আর কোনো গ্রাম্য স্থানে করা হয় না। অথবা পুরুষ জাতি মানুষের প্রতিটি স্থানে সুনামের বহিরাহলন করা আরম্ভ করা হয়।

চারানীর পাত্রে যখন পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারানীর পাত্রে ১৯০২ চারানী উৎস নামে পৃথিবীনাল

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারার মাধ্যমে প্রতিদিন পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

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চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

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চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

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চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

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চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

চারা প্রতিদিন ফুলি পৃথিবীনাল কর্মচারীর

A News regarding the movement of rural Librarians of Assam in 'Asomiya Pratidin' published on 30th October, 2004

The report criticises the Government for not giving proper salary to the rural Librarians.

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from the rural areas. There was no scheme for the rural libraries or service for the rural people. The rural social workers, student organisation like ‘Chatra Sanmilan’ helped to build the libraries. Almost all the rural libraries were built by public donations. During pre-independence there was not a single rural library funded by the government. So all the rural libraries of that time were public institutions. Some of them were run by Assam library Association, some were by the local clubs, some were by the religious organisations like Namghars, Masjids, Gurudwaras and so on.

Not only the British Government but also our the state Government did not take any scheme for rural libraries till 1985 in Assam. In 1956, the district libraries were established in Silchar, Tezpur, Dhubri, Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Nagaon and Jorhat. In’ 67 and’ 68 Diphu and Halflong got the district libraries. In the same year sub-divisional libraries were established in Goalpara, Golaghat, Karimganj, North Lakhimpur, and Sivasagar. In 1969-70 Barpeta, Hailakandi, Kokrajhar, Mongaldoi and Nalbari Sub-divisional libraries were established. But not a single rural library was established by the Government.38

Rural library scheme was taken by the government in 1985. According to this scheme it was planned to establish rural libraries in each Gaon Panchayats. Then there were 714 Gaon Panchayats. But only 204 libraries were established within the year of 1987. No more rural library was established by the government after 1987.39 Now these libraries are run by the librarians and one library assistant. The librarians get a paltry of Rs. 250 and library assistant get Rs.175 as monthly salary. Only for two years, these libraries were provided fund to purchase Journals and newspapers. After 1987 the regular fund supply was stopped. Book supply is also became irregular. Most of the libraries are not subscribing newspapers and journals due to lack of fund.30

4.4 Rural library services - A survey

Library services not only include the book lending service. It includes various service like CAS, SDI service etc.31 Current awareness service is to aware the readers about the books which fulfills the first law of library science. If there are books in the libraries, but readers do not know about them, they will not search these books. So readers' awareness is important library service. Another important library service is arrangement of the books in scientific order so that readers can find out their necessary
books from the big heap of the books. This scientific arrangement is done by following classification procedure, cataloguing, computing and so on. This fulfills the second law of library science. This means every reader has to find out his necessary books which are available for him in the library. The scientific procedure of arranging the books also fulfills the third law of library science. It means that every book has its own readers, but the book has to be provided to the reader. If the books are not arranged in scientific order, book may not be found out by its concerned reader. So it is the librarian’s duty to make the match of right book with the right readers.

According to the fourth law of library science librarians should save the time of the readers. To follow this law, librarians can go for selective dissemination of Information (SDI) service. To provide this service the librarian has to select the necessary information for the readers and disseminate to them.

The fifth law of library science is, library is a growing organization. Day by day new books or reading materials will be deposited in the library. Librarian has to provide some sort of managerial services to manage these growing portion of the library.

In the rural libraries of Assam all those above mentioned services are not available. Book lending service, reading room services are regularly provided in the rural libraries. Generally the rural people are poor. Interested rural readers among them depend on the libraries to satisfy their urge for books. So lending service is very much essential by the rural libraries. Rural libraries provide readers service by availing them reading room facility. The rural readers gather in the reading room and generally they read newspapers and journals in the reading room.

A survey was done to know about the present scenario of the rural libraries of various districts of Assam. Some 65 nos. of libraries were studied among which Guru Nanak Gramya Puthi Bharal of Barkola under Nagaon district has the highest collection (20,055). It was established in 1955. The daily readers are hundred and twentyfive nos. per day. This library subscribes two daily newspapers and two journals. There are some libraries which are having the collection of Sachipat Manuscripts. Some libraries are having their own publication. The Nankar Bhaira Gramya Puthibharal of Nalbari district has

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been publishing a journal on poems and poetic literature “Seuji Seuji” for long twenty five years. Some libraries publish yearly journal or souvenirs. This libraries are having a great impact on society as the centre of information and literature. The rural correspondences not only take references from this libraries but also get day to day information as because these are the public gathering places in the rural areas. But many libraries are unutilised by the reporters due to lack of reference stock and lack of awareness.

Out of these sixtyfive libraries sixteen libraries are regularly utilised by the correspondences as the source of information, fourtyone libraries are casually utilised and six libraries are not utilised by the rural correspondents of the newspapers at all. So, 24.61% are regularly utilised, 63.7% casually and 12.30% libraries are not utilised by the rural correspondents of newspapers.

To aware the readers, some rural library arrange seminars or meetings. Most of the rural libraries are attached with local clubs, which are responsible to run the library. Such clubs organise debating competition, Quiz Competition, extempore speech competition and discussions to develop the personality of the students which indirectly have impacts on the readership of the library. They become aware about various information. Competitive mind of the students are encouraged by these functions and they become interested to go to the library to enrich their knowledge.

Most of the librarians of the rural areas are social worker and most of them provide honourary service. Only the government registered library’s librarian get Rs. 250 salary which is quite minimum. Even then they render their services as a social service. So rural library services are social services almost without payment. Due to this reason, rural libraries can not provide the services like the district libraries or sub-divisional libraries. Most of the rural librarians are ignorant about the techniques of organising the library. They do not know to classify the books or how to catalogue them. They provide their managerial services in traditional way. Selective dissemination of information service is almost absent in the rural areas. Of course some of the rural libraries provide documentation service. They provide this service by sticking the paper cuts of related news to the local areas in an information board. Information about job, cultural information, sports information etc. are provided by this documentation process.
Publicity service or general information service also provided by the rural libraries to the rural readers. Notice Boards are used for this purpose.

Some rural libraries also share their resources with the locally established schools and colleges. They not only share the reading materials but also the equipments like chairs and tables for the reading room, Almirahs to preserve the books, building to set up reading room or stack room etc. are also given. In most cases this type of resource sharing with the rural libraries and educational institutions are informal but done it in a cordial manner.

The rural libraries are the centre of various social functions like Bihu, Puja, Idd, Tithi of Shankardeva, 15th August, 26th January and so on. Most of these social functions are organised inside the libraries and librarian take the leading role in these functions. These functions have indirect impact to increase the popularity of the library in a rural area. In most of the cases rural libraries are centre of non-formal education, information dissemination and sports, cultural and literary promotions.

These rural library services are contributing a lot to educational, intellectual, cultural upliftment of the rural people of Assam. Study has been done in the Sundaridiya village of Barpeta district.

The report follows:

Madhabdeva, disciple of Sankardeva established ‘Sundaridia Satra’ in 1570 and stayed there for long fourteen and half years. He was supported economically by one of his friends Madhava Marol who was a rich and influential person in the area. Organisational support was provided by Thakur Ata, who was a disciple of Madhavadeva. Both these helping hands made Madhavadeva strong enough to organise the satra with the different creative activities. Madhavadeva wrote the great books ‘Namghosha’ and the dramas like ‘Chordhara Pimpora Gushua’ ‘Bhojan Behar’, ‘Zumura’ and so on while he was residing here. He organised the village people in a systematic manner. He divided the village in four parts as Pub-Hati, (East part) Pashim Hati (Western part) Uttar Hati (Northern part) and Dakhin Hati (Southern part). All these parts of the villages were provided special responsibilities for the development of the Satra. The youths of these villages were taught in the Satra and engaged them to copy the manuscripts of literary works. They were also taught to sing, dance, play drama and make the arts and crafts.
The Sundariduya Satra - where there is an archive of Sachipat Manuscript.
Such manifold education uplifted the personalities of the youths of Sundaridia and they became experts in every side. The tradition of this education system is still followed by the rural libraries of the village. There are three libraries in the village. The Madhabdeva Library, Students Library and Sankardeva Library. The Madhabdeva Library was established in the year of 1914. These libraries distribute books, journals, news papers etc. to the readers. The religious books like Bhagawata, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc.; biographies of greatmen were also distributed among the readers. Students library has a special stock for children also. The almirahs of these libraries are still filled of such books which are now not so popular among the readers. Now the reader need newspapers and journals rather than entertainment books.

In the ‘students library’ of Sundaridia, out of 40 readers in a day only 5 readers borrow books. Other 35 readers are the readers of newspapers and journals. The electronic entertainment media has reduced the demand of entertainment information books in the village libraries also. There is a TV set in the Madhavadeva library where the users get news information as well as entertainment information. So these libraries provide entertainment information to the users with the help of audio-visual media. Before invasion of TVs, radios were kept in the libraries.

Libraries in the villages used to be a symbol of prestige in a village. A village with a well equipped library was considered as culturally developed village. During the time of pre-independence, these libraries were frequently visited by the leading personalities. To get the honour as well as to catch the eyes of higher authority, the villagers enter into competition with the neighbouring villages in regard to its services. After Madhavdeva library the youths of Pub Hati of the Sundaridia village started ‘Students library’ with this idea and motive. This library was established in 1953, this library competed with Madhavadeva library and continued to survive with good numbers of readers and reading materials. In 1965, this library was visited by Bishnu Prasad Rabha, the great
writer, artist and freedom fighter. He commented on this library as follows - “Visiting the students library of Sundaridia, I have come to know that the students of this village has great eagerness to learn. They have tremendous spirit in their mind and hope, this spirit will make the library a successful one. The library should organise discussions or seminars for intellectual upliftment of the readers. They should also try to acquire more books for the library. I wish bright future of the library.”

Bishnu Prasad Rabha commented this in 7-2-65 which is hung on the wall of library binding with his photograph.

Like the Students library the third library was also developed in the north part of the village by the youths of Uttar Hati. It was named as ‘Sankardeva library.’ This library has no books. It is meant for newspapers only. There is a reading room in the library, where about 20 readers read in a day. The reading room is kept open from 7 AM to 8 PM. There is no holiday for the reading room, like Madhavdeva library and students library.

Thus three libraries are continuing the information services to the people of Sundaridia village keeping open more than 12 hours per day in the days of the whole year. They try to fulfill the information needs of the people of the village by providing them books, Journals, newspapers and facilities to enjoy electronic medias also.

But these libraries are not run by trained or professional librarians. These are directed and managed by the committees of the youth clubs with financial help of public.

Worth mentioning that these three libraries and the Satra (where about 60 manuscripts of sanchipat books are preserved) support not less than 250 readers cum listeners everyday. Such eagerness for information is really a sign of healthy education in the village.
References:

1. Hatimota’s were the employees to inform the public about government during the time of Ahom rule in Assam. Such titles are still used by some of the successors of the Hatimota race. For instance - Ratnakanta Hatimota (Nagaon). Bhuyan Jogendra Narayan, preface, *Mahim Bora*, (a biographical book on writer Mohim Bora), Rumi Rupak Enterprise, Nagaon, 1989, PP 5-9.
10. ‘In medieval times, up to the British occupation, the education was not a concern of the state. Here and there were tols and pathsalas named by private individuals, but those were like a drop in an ocean. With the development of the satra institution the responsibility of imparting education came under its domain. The satra institution voluntarily took upon itself the noble responsibility enlightening the people through their own tols. All the important satras used to maintain and are still maintaining a regular band of scholars whose duty it was to impart education, specially in respect of ancient lores and scriptures. The Vaisnavite lores were, no doubt, studied but other branches of study such as Vyakarana, Nyaya and Kavyas were not neglected. Many of the early Vaisnavite reformers took upon themselves the task of educating the pupils. Madhavadeva him self taught Ramacarana, his nephew. Haricarna and Purosottama, the youngest son and the grandson of Sankaradeva, respectively. He also imparted education to Parmananda, son of Narayana, Thakur, Achyutta Sarma, Bar-Visnu Ata and

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Laksmana Oja Bhattadeva, the satradhikara of the Patbasi Satra and the father of Assamese prose literature, conducted a regular lot in the precincts of his satra and it is narrated in the biography by Ramraya Dvija that one thousand students received education from him.

Like the Christian monastery of the medieval times, a satra was a religious centre, a school and a library. Not only the existing books were preserved with utmost care but books were imported from other places of India. Every satra possesses a library consisting of manuscripts to the extent of a few thousand copies. Big satras like Auniati and Daksinapat once contained more than a thousand manuscripts, some of which are being preserved in the different antiquarian institutions. It is not that only religious scriptures were preserved, but books on music, dance, medicine, literature, philosophy and even painting were carefully preserved, some rare Sanskrit manuscripts like Srihasta Muktavali, Satvata - tantra, Hasti - Vidyarnava have been recovered from the satra libraries in Assam....

The books that were preserved were not to lie fallow. They were industriously and assiduously copied and worn out ones were replaced by new copies. The manuscript leaves were made of two materials. The thicker variety was made from the bark of sachi tree (Aquilarea Agallocha) and the thinner variety known as tulapat was made by pressing cotton. The preparation entailed a labourious process no doubt, but a set of persons were specially entrusted by affluent satras to do the necessary work of preparing manuscripts. The copying of manuscripts was considered a meritorious deed”. (Sarma, S.N., The Neo-vaishnavite movement and the satra Institution of Assam, G.U., 1966; PP 100, 111, 155-156).

15. Shabha M., Writing for Radio and Television, IGNOU, New-Delhi, 1995, PP 31-60
18. Maheswari, Shriram, Indian Administration, 5th ed, oriental Longman Ltd. 1968, PP 598-618
27. “Ex-chief Minister of Assam, Mr. Sarat Ch. Sinha resided in the Hakama village during his childhood and used to read in the school. During those student life he organised a library cum club with the helping hand of his teacher Nishinath Chakravarty and his fellow friends” (Interview).

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