

# Problems and prospects of public libraries: A Case-study under Chhaygaon Development Block

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**Abstract:** This paper is an attempt to depict the picture of public libraries under chhaygaon development block area. In spite of bright educational past as well as public library history of the area the present scenario of the public libraries as it exists today is not satisfactory. Of course, the scenario of the study area somehow represents the total picture of the rural libraries of Assam. The fact is that, the public libraries in the state are surviving without library legislation. Library legislation is the way of financial support to the public libraries. It is an instrument for the development of libraries in a planned manner to ensure establishment, development, and maintenance in a uniform pattern. Though 19 states so far enacted in library legislation in India, no library legislation has been enacted yet in Assam. As such, the budget is dependent upon the consideration of the Government year by year. The public libraries under the study area are suffering from this problem very much. Of course, besides financial problem the public libraries of the area are also suffering from many other burning problems which are also another significant causes for the limiting the growth and development of libraries in chhaygaon development block area. The study was made to find out these causes and drawbacks and forward probable solutions for the public libraries of the study area from where the author is belong to.

**Identity of the study area:** Chhaygaon Development Block is situated in Kamrup (rural) District, Assam. The Block is constituted of two Mauza - (i) Chhaygaon Pantan Mauza and Pub Chamariya Mauza (one Gaon Panchayat comes under Chhaygaon Development Block from Pub Chamariya Mauza). From both of the Mauza 52 villages come under the Block. The Map of the Chhaygaon Development Block has been included here –



Source: Chhaygaon Development Block Campus, Chhaygaon

**The study:** The chhaygaon development block is constituted by 52 villages. To study the picture of public libraries of the area 20 libraries were selected. It is because all the villages do not have a library and some other villages of course, had libraries but now they are vanished completely today. The investigation made in the study will examine the factors responsible for such unexpected situation.

The study is mostly problem oriented one. The observation is based on the data currently available. Data were collected from 20 libraries through questionnaire method. Hence 20 questionnaires duly filled up by library related personnel stands as the base line data for analysis and interpretation of the study. the questionnaires contained items like name of the library , registration no , electricity facility ,drinking water facility, toilet/ urinal facility ,types of languages of the books, opening hours, T.V. facility , financial source, number of staff , qualification of the staff, types of social activities, training obtained by the staff etc.

For analyzing quantitative data, basic statistical methods are used. Qualitative tools like interviews, interrogation were also used for collecting detail information.

### **Presentation of data and Analysis:**

The public libraries belonging to Chhaygaon Development Block Area of Kamrup (Rural) District, Assam covers the aspects relating to their collection of books, infrastructural facilities, their social activities, qualification of the staff, daily attendance etc.

## Statistical Features of the Public Libraries under the study area:

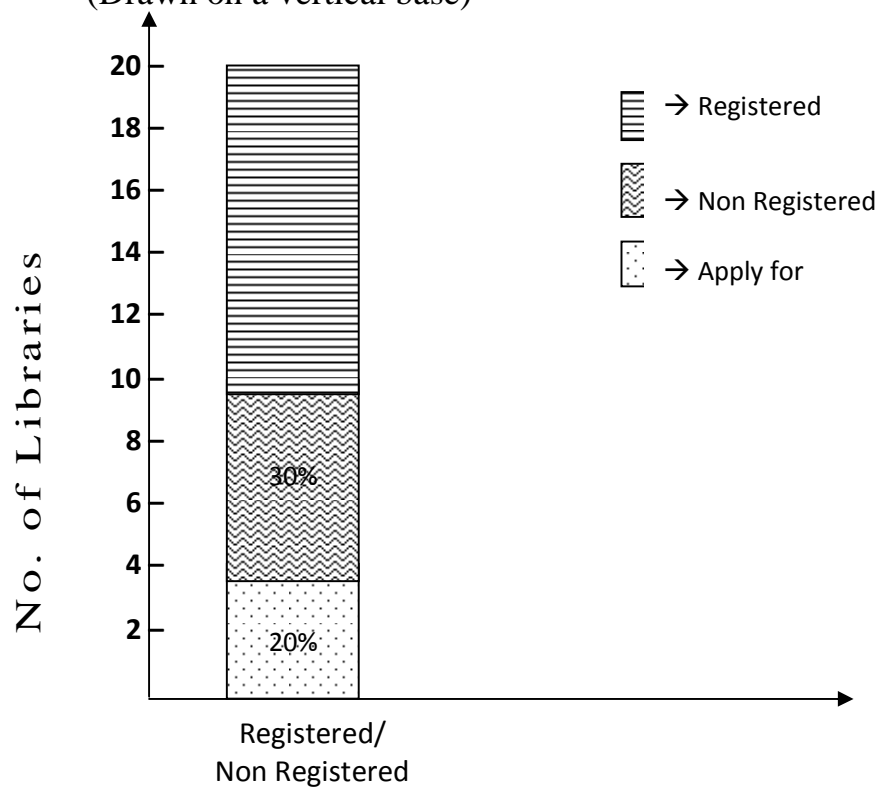
**Table 1:**

### Registered / Non Registered Libraries

Registered/Non-registered libraries	No of libraries	Percentage
Registered	10	50%
Non-Registered	6	30%
Apply for	4	20%

The above data can be represented by a sub divided bar diagram

(Drawn on a vertical base)-



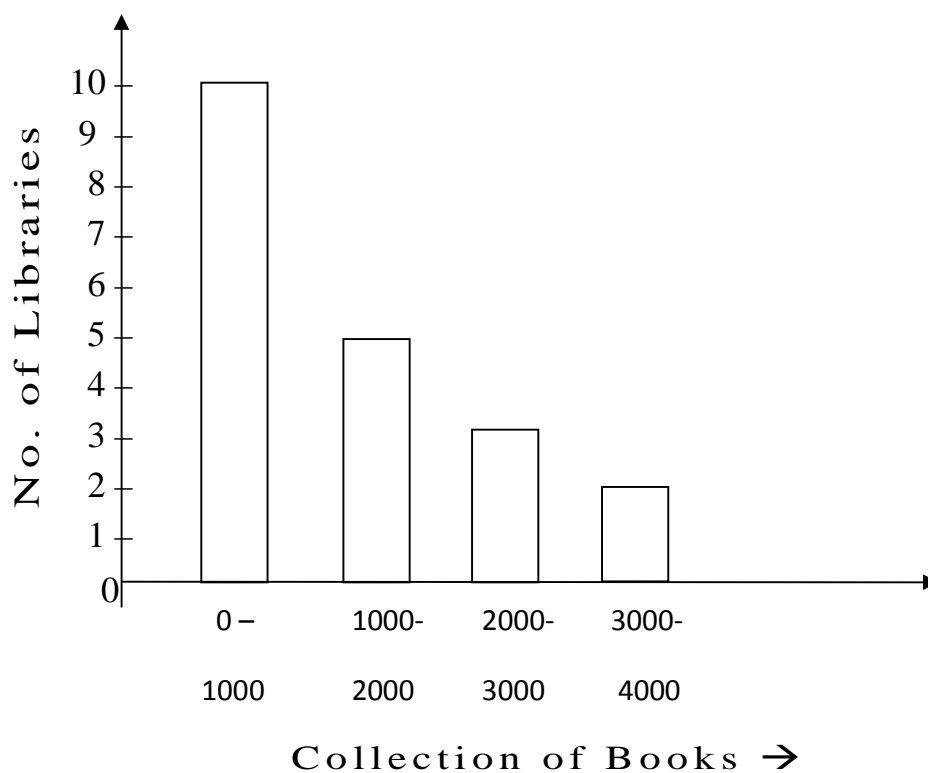
## Status of Library

The above data shows that the 50% of the libraries under study area are been registered already. 30% are non-registered and 20% of the total libraries are on process for getting registration. The registered libraries are enjoying to some extent Government aid or getting books and furniture from Directorate of Public library Services Assam, Guwahati.

**Table 2:No. of collection (books)**

No of Books	No of Libraries	In Percent
0—1000	10	50%
1000—2000	5	25%
2000---3000	3	15%
3000—4000	2	10%

The above data can also be represented in simple bar diagram as shown below.



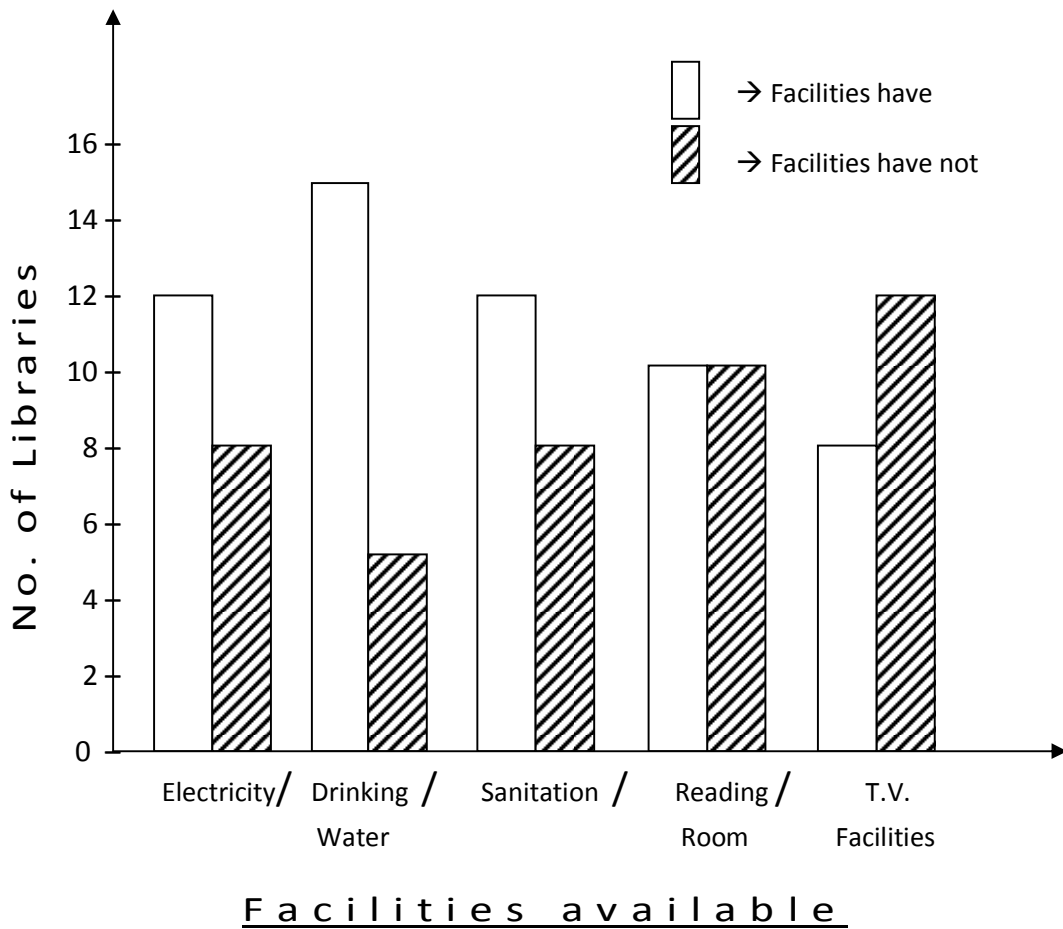
The above table and diagram (shown in the reverse) (simple bar diagram) shows the collection of books in different libraries. The highest collection is possessed by two (10%) libraries whose number of collections (books) prevail in the range 2000-3000. Five libraries (25%) possess a collection in the range 1000 – 2000 and the other ten (50%) libraries have only 0-1000 books collection. At the time of investigation it was observed that most of the collections are story books and novels. More over the condition of some collected books are not useable. Due to shortage of fund the care to the books like binding, spray (to kill insect) etc. have not applied in any library. Another problem was observed by the time of investigation is that all the libraries are suffering from shortage of stake to keep the books properly. It is also a cause of damage to the collection. Loss of books is another problem faced by the libraries – expressed by the librarians or care taker of the libraries. Due to lake of social awareness of the reader this problem arises.

**Table 3:**

**Facilities available**

Indicators	No. of Libraries			
	Have	In percent	Does not have	In percent
Electricity	12	60%	8	40%
Drinking water	15	75%	5	25%
Sanitation	12	60%	8	40%
Reading room	10	50%	10	50%
Television	8	40%	12	60%

The above table is represented below in a multiple bar diagram-



The table and the multiple bar diagram shows the picture of facilities available in the libraries. The study area Chhaygaon Development Block is situated in urban area of Chhaygaon Town. Therefore, most of the villages under the block have been taken under electrification programme already. But the research report shows that only 60% of the libraries are enjoying electricity facility. 40% libraries are to be electrified till now.

Pure drinking water facility is a prime demand of mankind. Clean drinking water is an important factor of human health. The investigation shows that 75% libraries have drinking water facility and the remaining 25% has not any provision to provide water to the readers. It should also be mentioned here that the libraries with drinking water facility do not use any

kind of water filter or water purified measures; rather they use water from the source directly like, 'Damkal', 'Kuwa', etc .

Sanitation is an important part of civilized society and a way of good health. Without implementation of proper sanitation a society cannot say modern, civilized and healthy. In this respect also libraries under study area depicts a poor, unhygienic picture. 60% of the total libraries have this facility and the remaining 40% do not possess the facility yet.

Reading room facility is shown 50-50 in both sides. Reading room facility is one of the prime factors for success of libraries. The visitors or readers were interrogated who have not reading room facility in their library. They viewed that they use the library campus as reading room which is not comfortable specially for senior citizens.

In respect of TV facility 40% is enjoying and the rest 60% have not any TV facility in their libraries. This facility is also related with availability of electricity which is also not satisfactory (shown above)

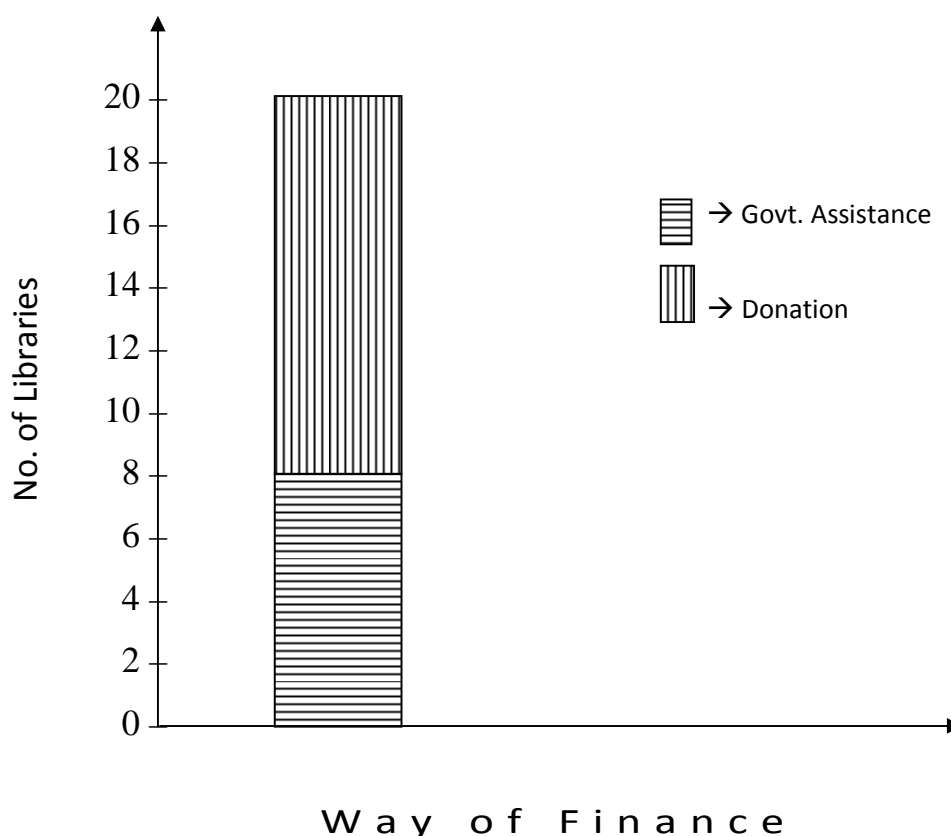
#### **Table 4:**

##### **Source of Finance**

Source of finance	No of libraries	In percent
Govt. of Assam	8	40%
Donation	12	60%
Own source	Nil	--



The above table can also be represented by sub- divided bar diagram-



Finance is the major problem for the public libraries of Assam as they are functioning without library legislation. The picture is same under the research area also. In the analysis we find that there are ten libraries under study area have been registered. But only eight libraries (40%) are getting Govt. assistance. It should be noted here that the assistance coming from the Govt. is not assured one (as there is no library legislation in Assam) and it comes off and on. The other 60% libraries survive on donation only. Donations come from villagers, politicians, social- workers, etc. Here, the questions of political influence over these libraries arise. The significant point here is that no library has its own source of earning to run the library. In this respect librarians were asked that they can adopt some sorts of ways to earn, like organizing lottery among the villagers, organizing drama show

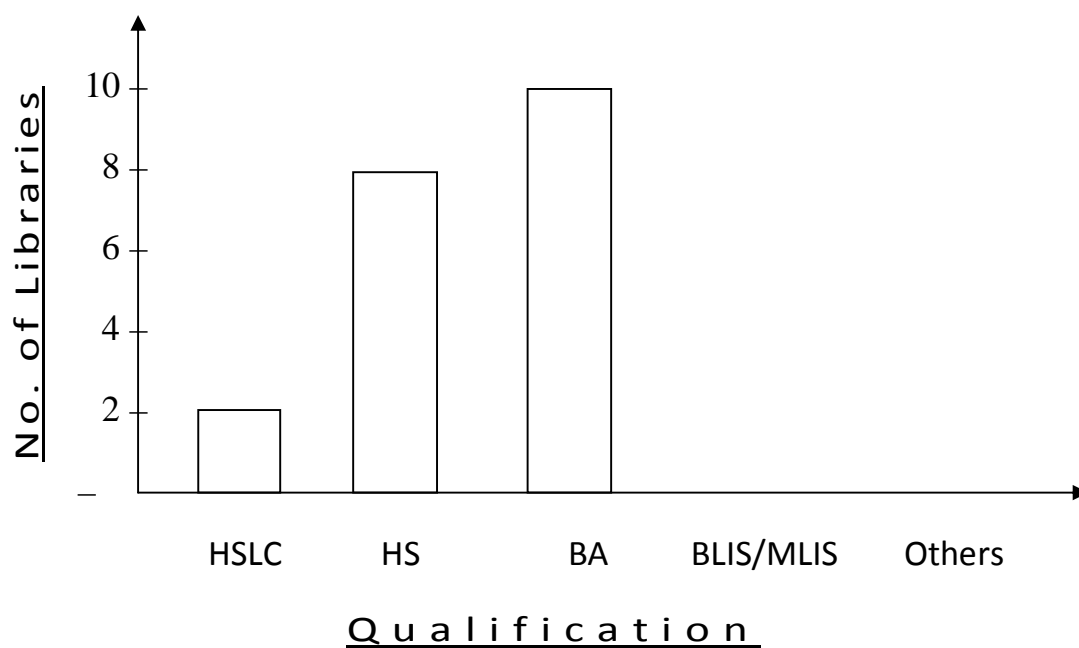
or musical night show against ticketing, etc. They were seen very impressed by the suggestions forwarded by the researche

### **Table5:**

#### **Qualification of the staff (Librarian)**

Qualification	No. of Libraries	In Percent (%)
HSLC	2	10
HS	8	40
B.A./B.Sc./B.Com.	10	50
BLIS /MLIS	-	-
Others	-	-

The above data can be represented in simple bar diagram:



The qualification of the librarian was asked in the questionnaire in the above heads. Among twenty libraries under investigation there is 10%, 2 libraries have their librarian with matriculate qualification only. 40%, 8 libraries have H.S. passed librarian and the other 50%, 10 libraries have B.A. passed librarian. No one librarian found with masters degree or with a degree of library education. Most of the libraries pay a very uncomfortable salary which is not justified for a qualified person. As there is nobody with higher qualification— qualification like BLIS/MLIS or other higher degrees like M.A./M.Sc./M.Com. etc. no diagram is here to represent them. Villagers and library personals were interrogated by the researcher in this regard. All of them viewed that salary level deprives the highly qualified persons to come to this field as one cannot earn his livelihood by this type of earnings. Therefore highly educated unemployed persons generally do not prefer to be a librarian of a rural library.

### **Table 6:**

#### **Types of Languages of the collected books**

In the questionnaire there was a question about the language of the collected books. The data obtained has been shown below in a tabular form:

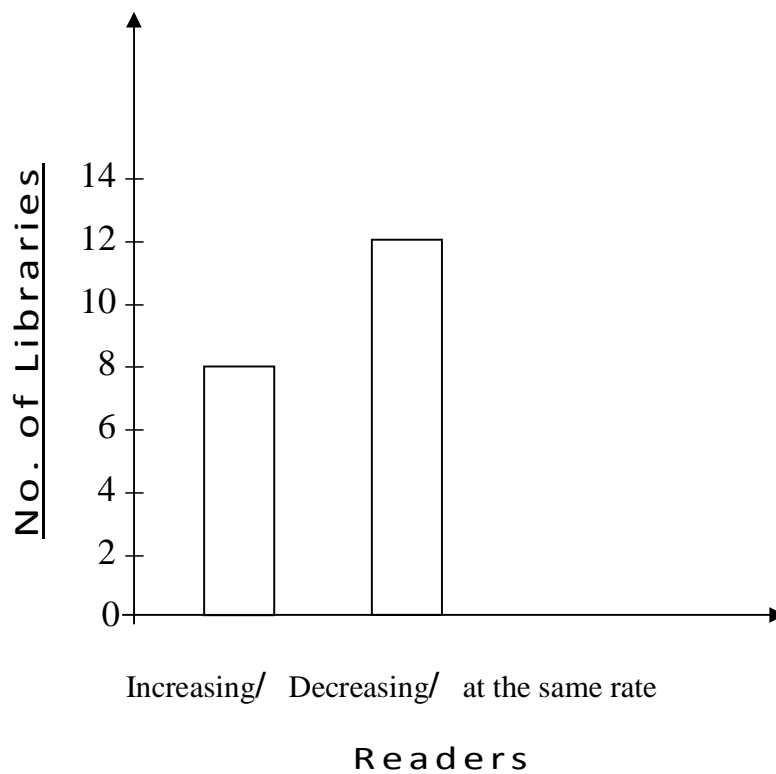
No. of Libraries	Assamese	Hindi	English	Bengali	Others
8	yes	yes	no	yes	no
3	yes	no	no	no	no
4	yes	no	no	yes	no
5	yes	yes	yes	no	no

The questionnaire contains four languages, they are- Assamese, Hindi, English, Bengali and others, if any. At the end of collection of questionnaires it showed that there is variation in terms of language to the collection of the libraries. Out of twenty libraries, there found only Assamese books in 5 (25%) libraries. No books of other languages found. There found 8 (40%) libraries with books of 3 languages- Assamese, Hindi and Bengali. Four (20%) libraries have collection of books of two types of languages- Assamese and Bengali. Four (20%) libraries have collections of books of two types of languages - Assamese and Bengali. The other five (25%) are found with books of four types of languages – Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, English. Except the above languages no library possesses any other types of languages. A question was asked in this regard to the librarian that what language generally readers prefer beyond Assamese language. We did not find any uniform answer. Somebody said it is Hindi, another one said it is Bengali. But there was similarity of the answer about English Language. Librarians said that only a few number issue English books from the library. The researcher found one significant point about the books of Bengali Medium – that senior citizens generally issued Bengali books on drama, poetry, novel etc. Some librarian said that the young generation does not issue Bengali books from the library. At the time of investigation the investigator also found the report from some senior citizen that their libraries were also rich with some ‘Gramophone Record’ of Assamese and Bengali languages – which are now completely damage due to lack of proper preservation. Some of them, of course, are affected by flood. The researcher investigated the ‘Gramophone Records’, in several libraries. But lead to be pleased hearing the past history of the ‘gramophone records only. The researcher also observed that books of different languages are kept in the libraries in a heterogeneous way. There is no system or discipline of arrangement of the books of different languages or different subjects and the same condition continues in their entry of books (in register book) also. Here again arises the question of qualified librarian.

**Table 7:****Increasing / decreasing reading habit**

No. of Libraries	Increasing	Decreasing	At the same rate
8	yes		
12		yes	

The above table has been represented below by a simple bar diagram:



The above table and diagram (simple bar diagram) depicts the overall rate of readers have been decreasing in the libraries. Out of twenty Libraries twelve summoned about decreasing the reading habit of the reader. Eight libraries made positive answer that their reader is increasing. It is surely a good sign of a knowledgeable society. There was no tick mark in the questionnaire at the head, 'at the same rate'.

Decreasing reading habit is now a social phenomenon of every modern society, worldwide. As much as the ways of e-entertainment is increasing the number of readers is decreasing day by day. People now does not like to spent time by studying book but want to spend time with computer or enjoying T.V. programmes . T.V., internet, mobile phones, cinemas and numbers of other mediums of entertainment increasing day by day, are the main factors for decreasing reading habit of the people. The readers related to the study area also depict same character. In the time of investigation the investigator found the data that—in the libraries which posses T.V. facility - villagers come to the library to enjoy T.V. but not for a book. Some years ago the picture was different. People spent leisure studying a book and coming to the libraries was the demand of mind and soul. As the numbers of visitors were very high the conditions of the libraries were also very alive. At the time of investigation many senior citizen told about the sound condition of the libraries of some years ago. But the situation has been totally changed now. One likes to site before a T.V. set of his/her residence instated of devotes time for a book. Young generation becoming more and more interested to spent time with T.V., computer and mobile phones. Computers providing lots of entertainment facilities like 'Face book', 'Twitter', etc. diverts their attention from study. Thus study of books has been becoming now the second habit of the society.

In the questionnaire, the libraries were asked that if they provide any other social activity or not. Interestingly, all the questionnaires bear positive answer of the question. In this respect, the librarians were interrogated about their activities. From their answers it seems that the libraries act as a club house in the village rather than a library. They organize playing events, organize cultural shows, singing-dancing competitions etc. in the village.

They observe seasonal festival with the help of villagers. At the time of natural calamities like flood (Chhaygaon is a highly flood affected area) the members of the library perform its duty as an NGO to help the villagers. But beyond these, there found no library who ever organize programmes like adult education, continuing education etc. The investigator asked the library related people that they can do something towards the illiterate to provide them education. But most of them expressed their ignorance about such programme. It may be said that the library personals of the public libraries of rural areas highly deserve training to fulfill the objective of the public library.

Another one question put to the libraries about the opening hours of these libraries. Some questionnaire carried answers (8) (40%) and others avoid the question to answer. Librarians were then asked personally about the answer .But no suitable answer came out. It may be said that some librarians open their libraries according to their own convenience. There is no rigid schedule to open the library and any time bar about opening hours.

## Conclusion and suggestions

The above report of analysis of data collected proves that the existing condition of rural libraries under chhaygaon Development Block is not in a satisfactory condition. Financial crisis low level infrastructural facilities associated with low level social awareness stands as barrier in front of development of public libraries under the study area. Worth mentioning is that the Chhaygaon area is a famous place from the point of culture, heritage and literature. There are numbers of 'Satra' institution in this area where there were the libraries with the repository of Sanchipat manuscripts. The literacy history of South Kamrup found from 15<sup>th</sup> century. The 'Chamariya Sanskrit Tole' of Boko Constituency is famous in this respect. 'Poet Suramani', father of 'Poet Ramsaraswati' was the founder of the above institution. Many students from Chhaygaon went to this 'Tole' for this education. The literacy history of Chhaygaon shows that there was a famous poet 'Sivanath Dwije' by name in 17<sup>th</sup>

century in Chhaygaon. There was another one 'Satra' in Garoimari which was very famous for its cultural heritage. It should be mentioned here that the forefathers of Dr. Mamoni Raisom Goswami, the Gyanpith Awardee, was the resident of this 'Garoimari Satra'. The severe earthquake of 1897 destroyed the Satra badly and the forefathers of Dr. Goswami shifted to Jambari (in the West side of Chhaygaon constituency) and then to 'Amranga Barihat' of Palasbari Constituency.

### **Suggestions:**

The various specific suggestions are made for the development of rural libraries-

- (i) Public Libraries should be reviewed and reshaped by which all section of the society could be properly served.
- (ii) Infrastructure facilities should be improved. Supply of electricity and sanitation facility should apply properly.
- (iii) Each and every rural library should be aided by Govt. fund. It should have regular source of income.
- (iv) The library staff should paid satisfactory salary according to their qualification.
- (v) In flood affected areas, the library building should plan on safety places.
- (vi) The library staff should provide proper training.
- (vii) To increase the reading habit of the mass people, recent famous publications should be collected.
- (viii) The collection should be updated by adding the latest publications and weeding out the outdated items.
- (ix) The library building should provide sufficient seats for readers and rack to accommodate the book collection.
- (x) More scientific research in the field highly expected.



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