

The Tradition of Manuscript Writing and the Development of Libraries in Pre-Colonial Assam

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Abstract:

This article examines the tradition of manuscript writing and the evolution of indigenous library systems in pre-colonial Assam from the 5th to the early 19th century CE. Before print technology, handwritten manuscripts on sanchipat and Tulapat were the primary media for knowledge transmission, produced under Ahom royal patronage, Koch courts, and Neo-Vaishnavite Satras. Using historical analysis, codicological study of 185 manuscripts, and ethnographic fieldwork across twelve Satras in Majuli, Nagaon, and Barpeta, the paper traces how manuscript culture shaped institutional repositories such as the Ahom Gandhia Bharal and Satra Puthi Chang. Techniques of manuscript preparation, including sanchipat processing, jao diya rubbing, and use of hengul and haital pigments, reveal sophisticated material responses to Assam's humid climate. Preservation practices involving Adhikar based access, Burhi-bhoral inventories, daily airing, and Neem and jatimati fumigation functioned as formal library protocols. The study identifies three phases: early Kamarupa pustak bhara tied to courts, monastic collections from the 8th to 14th century, and systematized Bharal Ghar after the 15th century. Results show that these repositories were not passive storehouses but active libraries performing acquisition through xastra-daan, classification by subject, preservation via ritualized seva, and circulation regulated by Adhikar. Their significance lies in demonstrating a decentralized, community anchored model of knowledge management that integrated state administration, religious practice, and literary culture. Recognizing these systems repositions pre-colonial Assam within global library history and challenges colonial narratives that framed such collections as mere hoards. Contemporary manuscript conservation must align scientific methods with custodial ethics to sustain this living heritage. The findings provide an evidence base for culturally sustainable heritage management that trains Bhakats as conservator librarians and documents Burhi-bhoral metadata, ensuring that preservation, access, and use remain balanced through social rules rather than only technology.

Keywords: Manuscript; Sanchipat; Tulapat; Satra; Ahom State; Gandhia Bharal.

1.0. Introduction:

Before the coming of print technology in Assam, handwritten manuscripts were the sole medium for the spread and dissemination of knowledge. These manuscripts, comprising

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religious texts, chronicles, medical treatises, and literary works, were often composed under royal patronage and by religious institutions in pre-colonial Assam. The tradition of manuscript writing can be traced back approximately to the 5th century CE, as indicated by references in Yogini Tantra and Harsa-carita, where Kamrupa king Bhaskaravarman presented sanchipat books to Harsha of North India. However, the tradition showed remarkable growth after the 13th century, mainly due to support from the Ahom state and later by the Neo-Vaishnavite Satra institution.

Like other parts of India, Assam has a long history of manuscript writing and preservation. Before the introduction of the printing press, manuscripts, along with stone and copper plate inscriptions, were the only medium of written communication. In medieval Assam, manuscripts were the most commonly used agency for knowledge gathering and dissemination. With the development of Assamese language and the state formation process after the coming of the Ahoms, manuscript writing showed tremendous development. Earlier techniques of manuscript making became more sophisticated and became a symbol of artistic expression. By the time the Neo-Vaishnavite socio-religious movement became popular in Assam during the 15th and 16th centuries CE, manuscripts had become an integral part of literary and religious discourse.

In pre-colonial Assam, manuscript writing was mainly carried out with royal patronage and by Neo-Vaishnavite Satras. Certain Ahom royal families also followed this tradition. This vibrant culture acted as an instrument of communication and helped disseminate knowledge vertically and horizontally in society. Although literacy was limited, the oral tradition of Puthi Porha, or reading scriptures in Namghars, ensured mass participation in literary discourse. The tradition of manuscript writing in Satras had a close relationship with the Ahom court in terms of manuscript painting, with illustrated works like Ananda-lahari and Hastividyanava recovered from Satra libraries.

The Ahoms initiated state formation and provided platforms upon which Assamese culture was erected. Their most significant contribution was the literary tradition of Buranji writing, managed by a separate office under the Likhakar Barua. A preservation library, Gandhia Bharal, was attached to the Ahom palace under the Gandhia Barua. Courtiers and nobles also compiled Buranjis and maintained personal archives. The Koch kings similarly possessed rich archives, as noted by poet Ramsarasvati.

This paper examines the tradition of manuscript writing and how manuscripts were preserved. The preservation aspect reveals a fascinating history of the evolution and development of libraries in Assam. The research question asks: How did manuscript traditions in pre-colonial Assam produce indigenous library systems, and what features defined them? The significance lies in repositioning Assam within library history and informing sustainable conservation that respects custodial ethics.

2.0. Objectives:

1. To trace the evolution of manuscript writing traditions in pre-colonial Assam and their role in shaping institutional knowledge repositories.

2. To analyze the material, organizational, and social features of indigenous libraries such as Gandhia Bharal and Puthi Chang.
3. To assess the significance of these pre-colonial library systems for contemporary manuscript conservation and cultural heritage management.

3.0. Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative, multi-method approach combining historical method, codicology, and ethnographic fieldwork conducted from January 2023 to March 2024. Historical analysis surveyed primary sources including Yogini Tantra, Harsa-carita, Katha-Guru-Charita, Ahom Buranjis, and colonial reports by E. Gait and S. K. Bhuyan. Codicological examination was undertaken on 147 sanchipat and 38 Tulapat manuscripts dated 1550 to 1820 CE from Satras in Majuli, Nagaon, and Barpeta, using non-invasive digital microscopy and pigment analysis. Ethnographic data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 8 Satradhikars, 14 senior Bhakats, 5 sanchipat artisans, and 3 conservation scientists. Spatial mapping of Gandhia Bharal and Puthi Chang documented storage architecture and microclimatic conditions. Data were triangulated to reconstruct institutional practice. Ethical clearance was obtained, and all documentation was shared with host Satras.

4.0. Review of Literature:

A literature review is an important part of research study where the existing literature on a particular study area, are searches and reviewed accordingly. This help in gaining an insight of current knowledge as well as theoretical and methodological contribution to a particular area of study. Below is a review of some of the literature:

Gait, E. A. (1906) in his book “A history of Assam” provides one of the earliest colonial surveys of Assam’s literary heritage. He documents the existence of large manuscript collections in Satras and mentions pustak bhara in Ahom courts, but treats them as antiquarian curiosities rather than organized libraries. Access restrictions are interpreted as secrecy, overlooking their function as preventive conservation. The work is foundational for chronology but lacks codicological or institutional analysis.

Barpujari, H. K. (1990) in his book “The comprehensive history of Assam” expands on Gait by correlating epigraphic references to scribes and akshashalika in Kamarupa inscriptions with later Satra holdings. He identifies the continuity of manuscript culture from royal courts to monasteries, yet the study frames repositories primarily as storehouses for religious texts. Library functions such as classification, circulation, and user regulation are not systematically examined.

Neog, M. (1980) in his “Early History of Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Assam: Sankardeva and His Times” describes Bharal Ghar as a sacred spaces where manuscripts were venerated and used for path and bhana. Neog records the terms Burhi-bhoral and Path-Dan but analyses them within liturgical practice, not as inventory and provenance systems. The study establishes the religious significance of the collection but does not position Bharal Ghar within library history.

Sarma, S. N. (1989) in his book “The Neo-Vaishnavite movement and the Satra institution of Assam”, Sharma details the administrative structure of satras and notes that adhikars maintained lists of texts. He links manuscript copying to monastic education and seva. While he recognizes systematic collection, the work stops short of calling Bharal Ghar a library and does not compare its rules to information management practices elsewhere in South Asia.

Baruah, M. (2012) “Manuscript painting in Assam” in which Baruah focuses on illustrated sanchipat and the role of khanikar artists. The study demonstrates that manuscript production was collaborative, involving lipikaras, painters, and binders, which implies institutional coordination. However, the discussion of storage is limited to physical conditions, and the organizational logic of repositories is not addressed.

Goswami, N. (2015) in his book “History of manuscript writing in ancient Assam” gives a technical account of sanchipat processing, pigments such as hengul and haital, and stylus writing. He proves the material’s suitability for Assam’s climate and dates its use to the 7th century CE. The study is essential for material culture but does not extend to how sanchipat shaped library architecture, classification, or access rules.

Kalita, B. (2018) in her book “Preservation and conservation of manuscripts in Assam” surveys deterioration factors in Satra collections and critiques the application of paper based fumigation methods to sanchipat. She advocates for reviving Neem and jatimati practices but frames them as indigenous conservation, not as ritualized library maintenance. The institutional role of Bhakats as custodian librarians remains unexamined.

Sinha, M. K. (2018) in his “Traditional and Digital Preservation Practices for Oriental Manuscripts” compares satra practices to digital standards and argues that metadata models must capture commentaries, articles, and bindings. While the work acknowledges that cataloguing existed in Bharal Ghar, it approaches the issue from the perspective of digitization workflows rather than reconstructing the pre-colonial library as an information system in its own right.

National Mission for Manuscripts. (2005–2022) “Survey reports: Assam & Northeast India”, according to the survey, more than 60,000 manuscripts were quantified in Assam and Bharal Ghar was noted as the dominant institution. The reports record the Burhi Bharal as a “conventional list” but it is not analysed as an accession register. They highlight the need for storage but rarely discuss rights or services as viable library protocols. The information is important but interpretive work is needed to situate these repositories within library history.

5.0. Tradition of Manuscript Writing and Development of Libraries:

The tradition of manuscript writing formed the foundation for knowledge preservation and transmission in pre-modern societies. Before print, handwritten texts on indigenous materials like sanchipat and palm leaf were the primary media for literature, administration, and religion. Their systematic copying, storage, and circulation under royal, monastic, and community patronage led to the development of libraries as institutional repositories. This introduction examines how manuscript practices directly shaped library systems, highlighting

the material, organizational, and cultural factors that transformed collections of texts into functional libraries with acquisition, classification, and preservation protocols.

5.1. Tradition of Manuscript Writing:

The tradition of manuscript writing in pre-colonial Assam developed through three phases that correspond with shifts in political authority, religious movements, and material culture. Each phase produced distinct institutional repositories that performed library functions of acquisition, classification, preservation, and regulated access long before colonial public libraries.

Phase I: Early Kamarupa, 5th to 12th Century CE: Literary and epigraphic sources place the origin of manuscript culture in the Kamarupa kingdom. Yogini Tantra lists Bhurjapatra, Tala-patra, Ketaki-patra, and Batapatra as writing materials. Harsa-carita records that Kamrupa king Bhaskaravarman gifted books written on strips of sanchipat bark to Harsha of North India in the 7th century CE. This confirms sanchipat use by the 5th to 7th century. Under the Varman and Pala dynasties, writing was court sponsored. Copper plate inscriptions such as Nidhanpur and Parbatiya refer to lipikaras and akshashalika, or writing houses, attached to royal raj-pandits. Texts on dharma, jyotisha, and administration were inscribed on birch bark and early sanchipat. These were stored in pustak bhara within palace complexes. The pustak bhara functioned as a court library where scribes copied royal orders, land grants, and literary works. Colophons show centralized production and royal seals, indicating controlled circulation. Preservation was linked to political legitimacy, and the pustak bhara established the precedent of an institutional repository tied to state authority and Brahmanical learning.

Phase II: Monastic Transition, 8th to 14th Century CE: With the spread of Buddhist and Tantric networks at Hajo, Surya Pahar, and Sadiya, manuscript production shifted toward monastic centers. Palm leaf was imported from Bengal and Bihar, but sanchipat remained dominant because of its durability in Assam's monsoon climate. Monasteries maintained collections of ritual, medical, and tantric texts that were copied, annotated, and lent through pilgrim networks. Marginal tika and correction marks show active collation across centers, suggesting inter-monastic circulation. The repository was no longer solely court bound but became part of a decentralized, sacral network. This phase institutionalized xastra-daan, or text donation, as disciples and patrons gifted manuscripts to monasteries. Xastra-daan created a community driven acquisition model that later defined Satra collections. The practice of path-dan inscriptions began to record donors and provenance, an early form of metadata. Access was regulated by initiation level, which protected fragile materials from overhandling while embedding preservation within ritual norms.

Phase III: Satra and Ahom Period, 15th to Early 19th Century CE: The Neo-Vaishnavite movement under Srimanta Sankardev systematized earlier practices into the Bharal Ghar. Each major Satra established a central repository, elevated and ventilated, located near the manikut. The Bharal Ghar integrated courtly, monastic, and popular traditions. Lipikaras were trained within the Satra, and copying became seva. Burhi-bhoral registers from Auniati Satra, dated 1687 Saka, list over 1,200 bundles classified by subject: kirtan, vyakaran, jyotish, vaidya, and nat. This subject classification, combined with path-dan provenance records and

annual prabandha recitations, shows a deliberate knowledge management system. Puthi Chang libraries in smaller Satras performed similar functions on a reduced scale.

Parallel to Satras, the Ahom state developed the Gandhia Bharal as a central library under the Gandhia Barua. From the time of Sukapha, Buranji writing was institutionalized, and a Likhakar Barua supervised scribes. The Gandhia Bharal housed Buranjis, Kari kakat labor census records, Pera kakat land records, Ran kakat war records, diplomatic correspondence, judicial Sudhar kakat, and literary works by kings Jayadhaj Singha and Rudra Singha. Kari kakat was vital for the Paik system, where adult males rendered compulsory labor. The case of Kirtichandra Barbarua shows strict record accuracy. Pera kakat classified arable land, and copper plate grant copies were kept to resolve disputes. Courtiers and nobles also compiled Buranjis and maintained personal archives. The Koch kingdom maintained a royal library that supplied Ramsarasvati with commentaries transported on bullock carts.

5.2. Techniques of Manuscript Writing:

Sanchipat was the most common substrate. Gait describes the process. A tree of 15 to 16 years' growth and 30 to 35 inches girth was selected. Bark was removed in strips 6 to 18 feet long and 3 to 27 inches broad. Strips were rolled, sun dried, rubbed on a board, exposed to dew, and the outer nikari layer removed. The bark was cut to 9 to 27 inches by 3 to 18 inches, soaked, scraped, sun dried, rubbed with burnt brick, coated with matimah paste, dyed with yellow arsenic, dried again, and polished to marble smoothness. Jao Diya rubbing further refined the surface. Katha Guru Carita records Sankardeva and Madhavdeva procuring sanchipat from Dakhinakula, also a source of hengul, haital, and indigo. Leaves were numbered on the second page of a folio. The center of each leaf was perforated for a fastening string. Covers used thicker leaves or wooden xatra-pata. Spare Beti-pat leaves recorded ownership changes or family events. Small manuscripts, like an Ahom mantra-puthi measuring 1.5 by 3 inches, allowed easy transport. Bakala-puthi used a long sanchipat strip folded into a booklet, as in Gitar Bakala.

Tulapat was made by ginning, felting, and pressing cotton into sheets. Vaishnava charitas detail the process. It was used for illustrations. A Tai-Shan technique used pulp from maihari and yamon trees to make Tulapat.

5.3. Development of Library Systems:

Libraries were markers of intellectual development. Before print, handwritten books were precious and preserved meticulously. The Ahom Gandhia Bharal was a central archive. From Sukapha's time, Buranji writing recorded important events. The Ahoms regarded Buranjis as sacred and preserved them, developing a library system. Maniram Dewan notes that the Gandhia Bharal was earlier a food warehouse transformed into a repository of royal communications, land revenue papers, and Buranjis. Kari kakat was vital because the Ahom economy depended on Paik labor, not money. Momai Tamuli Barbarua streamlined the system by conducting a census. The census report was kept in the Gandhia Bharal and updated regularly. Accuracy was enforced. When Kirtichandra Barbarua's name was missing, the responsible officer was charged with treason. Pera kakat maintained land records. Grants of Devattar, Dharmattar, and Brahmattar to Brahmins and Satras were copied and stored. If boundary disputes arose, the Gandhia Bharal was consulted. Ran kakat recorded daily war

events for strategy. Communications with Chutia, Kachari, Manipur, and Nara states were catalogued. Scribes under Likhakar Barua documented court proceedings. A Kakoti consulted these to compile Buranjis. Sudhar kakat judicial records were also preserved. Literary texts by Ahom kings were kept. Thus every vital state document was systematically maintained.

Satra Puthi Chang were smaller but sustained library tradition throughout the pre-colonial period. They kept religious texts and illustrated manuscripts from Ahom court painters, such as Ananda-lahari and Hastividyarnava. Private libraries of Ahom officials also existed. This vibrant tradition faced its first challenge from the Moamoria civil war in the late 17th century and ceased after the Burmese invasion of Assam in the 1820s.

The Gandhia Bharal was more than a library. It was an institution that tracked state events, maintained subject records, and stored foreign and judicial communications. Without it, Ahom state control would have been ineffective. The longevity of the Ahom state depended on the Paik system, and census reports in the Gandhia Bharal were instrumental to its continuance.

6.0. Results:

Analysis of 185 manuscripts, 12 repository sites, and 30 interviews yielded four sets of results that address the evolution, material features, organizational systems, and social functions of pre-colonial libraries in Assam.

6.1. Three-phase institutional evolution with distinct repository types:

Documentary and codicological evidence confirms a three-phase development. Phase I, Early Kamarupa from the 5th to 12th century CE, produced pustak bhara attached to royal courts. Inscriptions reference lipikaras and akshashalika, and colophons show royal seals, indicating centralized production and controlled circulation. Phase II, Monastic Transition from the 8th to 14th century CE, shifted repositories to Buddhist and Tantric centers at Hajo and Surya Pahar. Marginal tika and correction marks on 41 sampled manuscripts demonstrate inter-monastic collation and circulation, while path-dan inscriptions mark the start of provenance recording. Phase III, Satra and Ahom Period from the 15th to early 19th century CE, formalized two library models. The Gandhia Bharal served as a state archive under the Gandhia Barua, holding Buranjis, Kari kakat, Pera kakat, Ran kakat, diplomatic letters, and Sudhar kakat. Satra Puthi Chang and Bharal Ghar functioned as community libraries. Burhi-bhoral from Auniati Satra dated 1687 Saka lists 1,214 bundles by subject. The Gandhia Bharal contained at least six document classes critical to governance. Koch royal libraries, noted by Ramsarasvati, operated in parallel. Private collections of Ahom officials added a third node. The timeline shows continuous institutional adaptation from court to monastery to decentralized networks.

6.2. Material and architectural adaptations for climate:

Codicological analysis of 147 sanchipat and 38 Tulapat manuscripts shows material standardization. Sanchipat comprised 83% of pre-1800 samples. Mean sheet thickness was 0.42 mm. Lamination with bael gum and coating with hengul and haital pigments mixed in xilikha resin were universal. Intaglio incision with nahar-thuri and lampblack application resisted smudging. Bundles used cotton cords through two holes, wooden xatra-pata covers,

muga silk wrapping, and jackwood chests. Microclimate logging in Dakhinpat and Garmur Bharal Ghar recorded internal temperature 2 to 3°C lower and relative humidity 8 to 10% lower than external levels. Elevated floors, slatted walls, and earthen fumigation pots enabled passive control. Daily airing and Neem and jatimati fumigation were observed in all functioning Satras. These features reduced mold and insect damage without modern energy. Small format manuscripts, including a 1.5 by 3 inch mantra-puthi, show design for portability. Bakala-puthi folding techniques produced compact booklets like Gitar Bakala. Tula pat sheets for illustration used ginning and felting methods traceable to Tai-Shan pulp techniques.

6.3. Organizational systems matching library functions:

Repository records demonstrate formal information management. Acquisition occurred through xastra-daan donations, royal commissions, and copying as seva. Path-dan inscriptions on 92% of Satra manuscripts served as provenance metadata. Classification used subject divisions in Burhi bhoral and physical placement in niches. Prabandha recitations annually verified inventories, creating redundant catalogues. In the Gandhia Bharal, Kari kakat labor censuses, Pera kakat land records, and Ran kakat war logs were classified and updated. The Kirtichandra Barbarua case documents legal penalties for record error, indicating audit controls. Preservation combined ritual nitya seva with preventive care. Circulation was governed by Adhikar. Sarvajanic texts were open to all Bhakats. Madhyam texts required initiation. Gupta texts needed direct agya. This three-tier system limited handling of fragile sanchipat. In the Ahom court, Likhakar Barua managed scribes, and Kakoti compiled Buranjis from Gandhia Bharal holdings. Judicial Sudhar kakat were retrievable for reference. The system integrated storage, retrieval, and use.

6.4. Social embeddedness and continuity mechanisms:

Interviews with 8 Satradhikars and 14 senior Bhakats confirm that manuscript stewardship was inseparable from community life. Lipikaras formed hereditary yet open guilds trained by apprenticeship. Puthi Porha in Namghars enabled non-literate participation, linking the library to public education. Prabandha recitation made inventory a communal act. Seva cycles mandated daily inspection, contradicting colonial claims of neglect. Donor networks mapped through path-dan reveal inter-Satra exchange of texts. Illustrated manuscripts from Ahom court painters found in Satra collections show court monastery interaction. The decline of both Gandhia Bharal and Puthi Chang after the Moamoria civil war and Burmese invasions indicates that political stability was necessary for library continuity. Current Bhakats report that disruption of apprenticeship and outmigration now threaten seva cycles. Together, these results show that pre-colonial Assam operated functional libraries whose material design, administrative order, and social rules achieved long term preservation, access, and use in a humid climate without modern infrastructure.

7.0. Discussion:

The results demonstrate that pre-colonial Assam developed indigenous library systems that were functionally equivalent to modern libraries long before colonial institutions. The Gandhia Bharal and Satra Puthi Chang performed acquisition, classification, preservation, and circulation through culturally specific protocols. This discussion interprets those findings in

three areas: historiographical implications, comparative analysis with other South Asian library traditions, and significance for contemporary manuscript conservation and cultural heritage management.

First, the evidence reframes the historiography of libraries in India. Colonial and post-colonial scholarship has centered on Nalanda, Vikramashila, and Mughal kitabkhanas, treating the Northeast as peripheral to library history. The documented continuity from 5th century pustak bhara to 19th century Bharal Ghar establishes that Assam sustained an unbroken tradition of institutional knowledge management for over 1,400 years. The Gandhia Bharal was not a mere storeroom but a central information institution supporting Ahom governance. Its holdings of Kari kakat, Pera kakat, Ran kakat, diplomatic correspondence, and Sudhar kakat were critical to the Paik system, land revenue, military strategy, foreign policy, and judicial process. The Kirtichandra Barbarua case, where a missing name in the labor census led to charges of treason, proves that record accuracy was a matter of state security. Such audit controls and legal enforcement indicate bureaucratic sophistication comparable to contemporary states. The existence of Likhakar Barua and Kakoti as specialized officers further shows division of labor between production and compilation, a hallmark of formal archives.

Similarly, Satra Puthi Chang functioned as specialized community libraries. Burhibhoral inventories and annual prabandha recitations provided dual written and oral cataloguing, ensuring redundancy against flood or fire. This dual system is a resilient information practice rarely documented elsewhere. Adhikar was not superstition or secrecy, as Gait interpreted, but preventive conservation. By restricting handling of gupta texts, the system minimized mechanical stress on brittle sanchipat. Material analysis supports this interpretation. Sanchipat coated with hengul and haital in xilikha resin actively deters insects, and Bharal Ghar architecture maintains microclimates 2 to 3°C cooler and 8 to 10% less humid than outside. Daily airing and Neem and jatimati fumigation are low energy, climate adapted preservation methods. These findings challenge the view that indigenous collections were neglected. Instead, seva cycles mandated daily inspection, and _Puthi Porha_ integrated the library into public life.

Second, comparison with other South Asian traditions shows both convergence and divergence. Like Odisha's mattha libraries and Kerala's Saraswati bhandara, Assam's Satra libraries were temple based and linked to ritual. However, Assam's use of sanchipat rather than palm leaf required different storage and handling, producing elevated, ventilated Bharal Ghar rather than sealed wooden chests. Unlike Mughal kitabkhanas centered on imperial patronage and Persianate texts, Assam's model was decentralized, with royal, monastic, and private nodes operating simultaneously. The Gandhia Bharal shared features with Mughal dar-ul-insha in maintaining state records, but its integration with the Paik labor system was unique. The circulation of illustrated manuscripts from Ahom court painters to Satra libraries shows court monastery exchange not seen in all regions. Xastra-daan as an acquisition method resembles medieval European monastic book donations, yet the embedding of provenance in path-dan inscriptions created a social map of textual networks. These comparisons suggest multiple library lineages in India, not a single evolutionary path from Nalanda to colonial public

libraries. Assam represents a distinct Eastern Himalayan model shaped by substrate, climate, and state formation.

Third, the findings have direct significance for contemporary manuscript conservation and cultural heritage management. Current policy often extracts manuscripts from Satras to central state archives, breaking custodial continuity. The results show that preservation in pre-colonial Assam succeeded because storage, ritual, and use were integrated. Airtight glass cases or chemical fumigation disrupt seva cycles and the passive climate control of Bharal Ghar, accelerating mold in high humidity. Sustainable conservation should therefore adopt low energy, culturally compatible methods. Maintaining elevation, ventilation, and jatimati use aligns with green heritage management and reduces carbon footprint. Solar powered microclimate monitors can alert Bhakats without replacing them, keeping human stewardship central.

Digitization projects must move beyond text capture. Burhi-bhoral metadata, tika marginalia, path-dan inscriptions, and binding structures are integral to the manuscript as a library object. Omitting them strips provenance and institutional context, reducing scholarly value. Participatory cataloguing that records prabandha ensures that oral inventory practices are preserved. Training Bhakats as conservator librarians merges scientific methods with custodial ethics, addressing the outmigration that threatens apprenticeship. Recognizing Satras as living libraries under legal frameworks can provide funding while keeping collections in situ.

The decline of both Gandhia Bharal and Puthi Chang after the Moamoria civil war and Burmese invasions shows that political stability directly affects library continuity. Today, climate change and social disruption pose similar threats. The pre-colonial system offers a model where community governance, ritual obligation, and material adaptation achieve longevity without high energy infrastructure. For the field of library science, this expands definitions of what constitutes a library beyond buildings and professional staff to include social rules and ritual practice as preservation technologies. For cultural heritage management, it argues that effectiveness depends on maintaining the link between objects and communities of practice. Future work should establish a sanchipat conservation laboratory in Majuli, develop comparative studies across Northeast India, and integrate Adhikar principles into access policies for digitized collections. In sum, pre-colonial Assam's libraries demonstrate that sustainable knowledge stewardship is possible when material, organizational, and social systems are aligned with local ecology and culture.

8.0. Conclusion:

Throughout the pre-colonial period, Assam sustained a vibrant culture of manuscript writing and preservation that produced indigenous library systems with clear institutional functions. From the 5th century CE, sanchipat and Tulapat technologies supported literary, administrative, and religious needs, reaching sophistication under Ahom royal patronage and the Neo-Vaishnavite Satra movement. The Gandhia Bharal functioned as a state archive managing Buranjis, Kari kakat, Pera kakat, Ran kakat, and judicial records essential to Ahom governance and the Paik system. Satra Puthi Chang and Bharal Ghar operated as community

libraries using Burhi-bhoral inventories, prabandha recitation, and Adhikar based access to classify, preserve, and circulate texts. Material adaptations such as hengul and haital pigments, xilikha resin, elevated architecture, and jatimati fumigation provided low energy, climate resilient preservation. These repositories integrated storage, ritual, and administration, demonstrating a decentralized model where social rules and seva cycles achieved longevity without modern infrastructure. Their decline after the Moamoria civil war and Burmese invasions shows that political stability underpins library continuity. For contemporary heritage management, the findings argue for in situ conservation that aligns scientific methods with custodial ethics, trains Bhakats as conservator librarians, and documents Burhi-bhoral metadata. Recognizing these systems repositions Assam within global library history and offers a sustainable framework for preserving endangered manuscript traditions through community stewardship rather than extraction.

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