

# Documenting Indigenous Knowledge Wisdom: The Role of Libraries in Preserving Tai Khamyang Knowledge System

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## ABSTRACT

Indigenous knowledge (IK) represents the collective wisdom of indigenous communities passed through generations, often orally, through practices, folklore, and rituals. It encompasses medicine, agriculture, environment, and spiritual practices. The Tai Khamyang community, a small ethnic group in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, has preserved its rich heritage through libraries embedded within their monasteries. This study explores the pivotal role played by three libraries—Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal, Sadharmma Sanka Puthibharal, and Pragati Puthibharal—in safeguarding the cultural and religious knowledge of the Tai Khamyangs. These libraries serve as custodians of rare manuscripts, religious texts, and Buddhist philosophy, some written in the endangered Tai Khamyang language. They preserve manuscripts using traditional cloth-wrapping Methods and participate in “Puthidana,” the sacred act of manuscript offering. Despite their invaluable contributions, the libraries face several challenges, including a lack of professional staff, proper documentation, preservation techniques, and ICT infrastructure. Only Pragati Puthibharal, a government-recognized rural library, has a trained librarian and some organizational support. This paper underscores the urgent need for institutional collaboration, capacity building, and government intervention for proper documentation and preservation. It advocates for university partnerships, training workshops, and community awareness to ensure the survival of Tai Khamyang knowledge systems. Libraries not only store texts but also provide a communal space for cultural continuity, intergenerational learning, and identity preservation. Through the lens of these three libraries, the paper highlights how grassroots initiatives can sustain endangered indigenous knowledge in the face of modernization and cultural erosion.

**KEYWORDS:** Indigenous, Indigenous knowledge, Wisdom, Tai khamyang, Knowledge System

## INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Knowledge refers to the traditional knowledge that was created and developed by the indigenous community, and it passed from generation to generation. It may be oral or written in the form of stories, folk tales, oral histories, traditional practices and many more. This knowledge is multifaceted and comes across widely array of knowledge systems in agriculture, forest cover, medicine, human health, plant and animal life, land pattern, water conservation, food security and so on on. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization ( UNESCO) - “ Indigenous knowledge is culture- and context-specific; non-formal knowledge; orally transmitted, and generally not documented; dynamic and adaptive, holistic and closely related to survival and subsistence for many people worldwide.”

The Indigenous Knowledge Library is a information resource center that supports cultural renewal, intergenerational healing, health equity, and overall well-being for Indigenous communities. They prioritize culturally appropriate content created by or for Indigenous people. It includes research, storytelling, and resources focused on building, sharing, and advancing Indigenous knowledge and health equity. The indigenous knowledge library is a great custodian of indigenous knowledge. Community people use to preserve their heritage knowledge in these libraries and they feel it proud. The Indigenous knowledge library acts as a guardian of society by ensuring the collection and preservation of indigenous knowledge. These libraries emphasized the importance of cultural heritage and provided a platform for the transmission of traditional values and practices.

The Tai-khamiyang community is a subgroup of the Mangoloid Tai and popularly known as Shyam. Tai community is consists of six Tribes i.e. Tai Ahom , Tai Khamyang, Tai Phake, Tai Turung , Tai Phake and Tai Khamti . They lived in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh , the NE part of India. Among the six tribes , Tai Khamiyang is a small tribe, lived in eight villages of 4 districts i.e. Tinsukia, Jorhat, Sivasagar and Golaghat and total population is aprox. 6000. In the Past, Tai people used to speak Tai language, which is a similar language to that used by people of Thailand.

Tai Khamyang is derived from the word Nawng Yang. According to Stephen Morey (2008) Khamyang is a group of Tai, identified as Khamyang, who were sent into Assam by the Tai King Sukanpha to search for his brother Sukapha, who had earlier founded the Ahom Kingdom in the Brahmaputra Valley, i.e.1228 BC. After being welcomed by sukapha, the Khamyang set out to return to King Sukhanpha in what is now the Shan States. The history states that the Khamyang people settled at Nawang Yang Lake by Sukanpha and lived there for about 500 years. Nawng Yang Lake is situated in the South of the Tirap River, just immediately south of the south Burma-India border. The name Khamyang is derived from the Lake Nawng Yang. In 1780, the Khamyang ventured to bank into Assam. They got caught in various troubles and fought against the Ahom kingdom. During the last Ahom kingdom, the Khamyang was divided into two groups. One group was settled in the Dibrugarh district and the second group was settled in Dhali in 1978 and they now live in the Jorhat district of Assam.

Tai Khamyang people are great preservers of their heritage knowledge. They preserve their heritage knowledge in the libraries associated with their monasteries. This paper makes an effort to study Indigenous Knowledge Resources with special reference to Tai Khamyang Ethnic community.

**SCOPE OF THE STUDY**- Although there are other libraries of Khamyang villages , due to our limitation we have selected three libraries for our study. These are - Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal, Sadharmma Sanka puthibharal and Pragati Puthibharal ( Puthibharal = Library).

## **OBJECTIVES**

The study focus on the following objectives-

- ✓ To know about the indigenous knowledge resources in the libraries under study.
- ✓ To study about method of collection process in the libraries and
- ✓ To explore the management system of the libraries under study.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Kaur K. (2023)** explored the role of libraries and museums in preserving indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage. Kaur emphasized that indigenous knowledge—also known as traditional or local knowledge—is specific to a particular ethnic group or community. It encompasses unique skills, practices, occupations, and ways of life, especially in rural areas, reflecting a shared history in areas like food, healthcare, and social customs. The main challenges in preserving traditional knowledge in libraries include insufficient funding, illiteracy, reluctance to share knowledge, and poor conservation of local materials, leading to the loss of valuable information. Many resources are rare cultural and historical items with limited accessibility. Additional issues involve the lack of representation of local knowledge in collection development policies and inadequate indexing systems in libraries

**Ojei, L. N. and et. al.( 2019)** stated in his paper Libraries as Driving Access to Indigenous Knowledge (IK) that Creating access to Indigenous Knowledge (IK) offers several benefits: it improves grassroots education through local language use, enhances primary healthcare and reduces mortality rates, helps eradicate harmful practices like female genital mutilation, promotes sustainable use of natural resources, supports the use of traditional medicine, and complements modern knowledge, such as in weather forecasting.

**Gardiner G. (2005)** examined indigenous knowledge within the library and information services sector, highlighting that it is traditional knowledge held by Indigenous peoples. In Australia, much of this knowledge was historically documented by missionaries and anthropologists. While a significant amount of sacred and secret knowledge is preserved across the country, oral traditions remain largely undocumented and are at risk of being lost between generations. Some local documentation efforts have helped recover and preserve cultural knowledge, now stored in libraries, archives, and museums..

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper is descriptive in nature . Primary data are collected from the field study, interview with respective librarian, library staff and resource person as well as villagers. Researcher visited the library and a questionnaire were distributed to the Library persons . Secondary data are collected from books, journals and internet.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY**

All three studied libraries are situated at Tai-Khamiyang Villages were established by the community to preserve their community and religious knowledge. These libraries have been a knowledge custodian of their heritage knowledge. They preserve their heritage knowledge in these libraries from generation to generation. All the studied libraries has a good number of books and hand-written Tai manuscripts on Buddhist Scripture, Buddhist doctrines, Jataka tales, and characters from the Buddhist lore. Tai Khamyang people used Tai Khamyang Language. This language has a unique script which is slightly different from the greater Tai-Ahom language script. UNESCO declared that Tai Khamyang Language is a critically endanger language. Today, this language is only spoken in the single village of Powaimukh, near Margherita in Tinsukia District. Only older adults are full speaker of the language. New generation of khamyang people forget their original language and now these language is going to endanger.

On the other hand Puthidana ( Manuscript Offering) also called pustakdana, is a sacred ritual practiced by the Tai Buddhist communities. It involves the act of writing and offering manuscripts to the Buddha during auspicious occasions like Buddha Purnima and the Kathin Cheevar Dana ( Robe offering Ceremony). The term “ Puthidana” comes from two words: Puthi or Pustak(text) and Dana( offering) meaning the offering of texts. Devotees believe it as a powerful act of merit making. Even those who cannot read or write in the Tai script actively participate by sponsoring the creation of manuscripts. Puthidana not only reflects the communities devotion but also plays a vital role in preserving and archiving sacred texts.

The Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal is situated at Chalapather shyam goan, district Chalapather. The village was established in 1869. All habitants are Tai-khamyang ethenic community. The Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal library was established in the year of 1948 by the initiative of the All Assam Budhist Association . All Assam Budhist Association is a Wing of WFB i.e. World Fellowship of Buddhist . Gradually, it was developed under the supervision of Dr. Bhadanta Shashanbansh Mahather. Dr. Bhadanta Shashanabansh Mahather was a prominent scholar who have written and translated 44 books. Government of Assam awarded him with Anandaram Award and Dibrugarh University awarded him D.Lit. Earlier the main objectives of this library was to establish Budhist Philosophy. Later on library have acquired large number of rare Budhist philosophy manuscripts, folklore and stories, books of tai language and assamese literature as well. Besides this library preserve all the books written by the Dr. Bhadanta Shashanbansh Mahather . Another library under study are the Sadharmma Puthibharal and is situated at Dichangpani Village, District Charaideu. Dichangpani is a village of Tai-Khamti ethnic community and it established in 1872. The library Sadharmma Puthibharal is established in 1939 and it associated with Budhist monastery of the village. And the other Pragati Puthibharal is situated at Rahan Shyam Goan, District Charaideu. The village was established in the year of 1919 and the library was established in 1956. All the residents of Rahan Shyam Goan belongs to Tai Khamyang community. In the beginning, the library was associated with vllage monk. Later, the library was recognized as a rural library by the Government of Assam in 1985.

#### **About The Library**

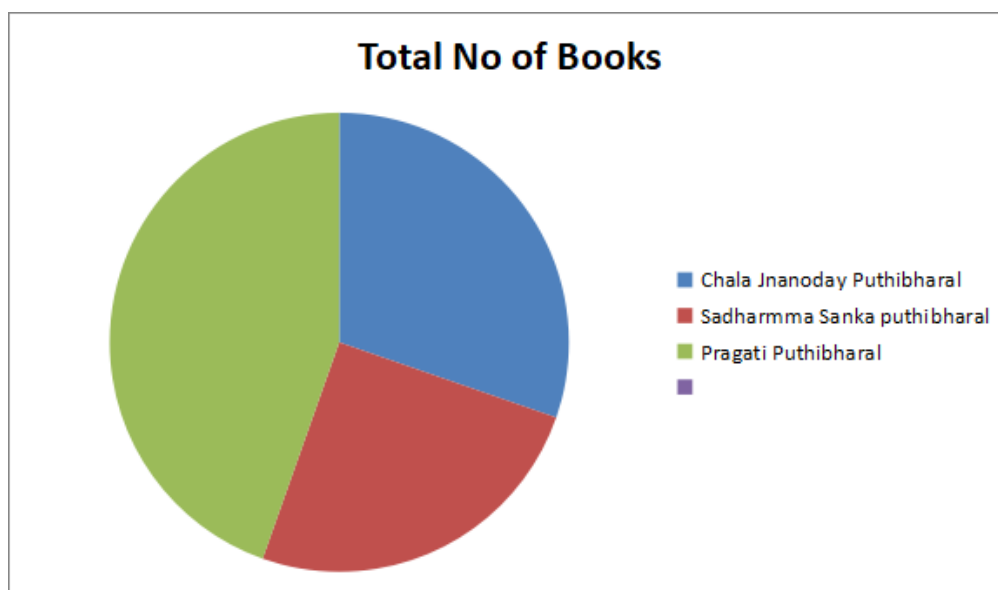
Sl. No	Name of the Library	Date of Establis hment	Nature of the library	Registration Yes/No	Library Opening Hour	Users
1	Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal	1948	Monastery Library	No	9am to 5pm	Villagers, Students and Research Scholar,
2	Sadharmma Sanka puthibharal	1939	Monastery Library	No	9am to 5pm	Villagers, Students and Research
3	Pragati Puthibharal	1956	Rural Library	Yes, Under rural Library	11am to 5 pm	Villagers, Students and Research

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Table shows that Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal was established in the year 1948, Library opening hour is 9am to 5pm. This is a Monastery library and they have not registered with rural library services or other association. Sadharmma Sanka is also a monastery library and established in the year of 1939. It usually open 9am to 5pm. They also have no registration with other services or association. Pragati Puthibharal is a Rural library and have registered with Assam Rural Library Services . It was established in the Year 1956 and opening our is 11am to 5pm. The users of all three library are Villagers, students and research Scholar.

### **1. Library Resources**

Sl. No	Name of the Library	Total No of Books	No of Manuscripts	No of Religious Books	Other
1	Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal	6123	2400	1123	2600
2	Sadharmma Sanka puthibharal	5070	1530	727	2813
3	Pragati Puthibharal	9007	2101	802	6104



Above table and Fig. shows that Chala Jnonoday Puthibharal has more than 6123 books , which comprise 2400 manuscripts, 1123 religious books and 2600 other books. Sadharma Sanka puthibharal has more than 5070 collection including 1530 manuscripts, 727 religious books and 2813 are other books. Pragati puthibharal has more than 9007 books which consist 2101 manuscripts, 802 religious books and 6104 no other books.

### **1. Nature of Collection**

Sl.No	Name of the College	Nature of Collection		
		Purchase	Donation	Other
1	Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal	-	Yes	
2	Sadharmma Sanka puthibharal	-	Yes	
3	Pragati Puthibharal	-	Yes	RRRLF

Table shows that the nature of collection mainly depends on donation. Only Pragati Puthibharal received books under Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation. No library directly purchased books.

## 2. Library Management and Staff

Sl. No	Name of the Library	Nature of Management	Librarian	Other Staff
1	Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal	Managed by Village Management Committee	01, honorary unprofessional	10
2	Sadharmma Sanka puthibharal	Managed by Village Management Committee	01, honorary unprofessional	05
3	Pragati Puthibharal	Under rural library services	01, trained govt. rural librarian	01

Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal and Sadharmma sankha Puthibharal are managed by village management committee. Both have unprofessional staff. Pragati puthibharal is a rural library and run under rural library services. They have a trained librarian and one library assistant.

## 3. Library Services

Sl. No	Name of the Library	Accession	Classification	Cataloguing	Circulation	Publication Services
1	Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal	Done	No	No	Yes	Books and One Wall Magazine published in every year
2	Sadharmma Sanka puthibharal	Done	No	No	Yes	Books and Wall magazine
3	Pragati Puthibharal	Done	Done	No	Yes	Wall Magazine

Table shows that all three library has done accession work and Circulation services. Only Pragati Puthibharal has done Classification work under the guidance of district library. All three libraries publish books and Wall magazine regularly.

## 4. ICT application in Library

Sl. No	Name of the Library	Computer/Laptop	Projector	Xerox	Printer	CCTV	Internet
1	Chala Jnanoday Puthibharal	Computer-01 Laptop-01	01	01	01	Yes	No

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2	Sadharmma Sanka puthibharal	Computer-01	No	No	No	Yes	No
3	Pragati Puthibharal	No	No	No	No	No	No

Chala Jnanodoy library has some ICT facility like Computer, Laptop, Projector , Xerox, Printer, CCTV etc. Sadharmma Sanka Puthibharal has a computer but no other facility. Remaining library has no ICT facility.

### **5. Some of the Rare Manuscripts are found in these libraries**

Sl. No	Name of the Manuscript
1	Suktha-nipan
2	Suksilakhan
3	Lik win Kathing Sungkar kham
4	Lik Sungphaa Aapak
5	Traa kham To chow hik chom Aakaawaa Lasak
6	Hotham Aon
7	Sasanalankar

Some rare manuscripts like Suktha-nipan, Suksilakhan, Lik win Kathing Sungkar kham, Lik Sungphaa Aapak, Traa kham To chow hik chom Aakaawaa Lasak, Hotham Aon, Sasanalankar etc. are found in these libraries.

## **FINDINGS**

1. **Large Number of Rare Manuscript** : There are a significant collection of rare manuscripts, all of which are wrapped in cloth. Unfortunately, due to inadequate preservation methods, some of these manuscripts have suffered damage, including torn pages, warped cloth and visible torn letters. Despite this damage, people can still read them .
2. **Thai Tripitak Manuscript**- Chala Jnanodoy Puthibharal preserved a old manuscript known as Thai Tripitaka . In spite of this , there are other manuscripts exist in different languages including Singhali, Devanagiri and Bengali in the studied library.
3. **Golden Plated Manuscripts** : There are several golden plated manuscript in the studied library . One particularly notable manuscript is made of bamboo on the inside and covered with a layer of golden plating. Scripts are written by La. Originally this manuscript was came from Burma and name is Lik Kanwa, 1969. This suggests it might be a valuable or significant document.
4. The paper of old manuscripts are different. It was made from Tamarisk (Tamarica India ). Natural Ink was also used to write in the manuscripts.
5. The way of preserving the manuscripts in these libraries is different from that of other library or collection centre. The devotees neatly wrap the manuscripts with yellow or orange silk clothes of various shades. On the top of the package, the title of the manuscript and the donor's name and purpose of donation are written. All the manuscripts are kept piled up on a shelf with the clothes wrapped up.



6. Although the people are good preserver of heritage knowledge. But due to lake of proper knowledge and trained professional , the library are unorganized, do not able to record all the documents properly. Only Pragati library has a trained rural librarian . With the guidance of district library, pragati puthibharal has done library activities and services properly .
7. One of the very impressive work is done by them is they has been maintaining visitors book very well . Chala Jnanoday puthibharal has been maintaining a visitors book from 1948 when 1<sup>st</sup> governor of Assam (Independent India) visited the library and given them feedback in his own hand . After that , so many people and tourist has been visited the library from different countries and written feedback in different languages.
8. The Library has been providing a platform to the villagers to organize different community functions, meetings and training also.
9. To inculcate reading habit and to attract new generation towards library, All the three libraries publish books and wall magazine regularly.

## CONCLUSION

Tai-Khamyang language is under the endanger condition. From this point of view, proper documentation work is necessary. On the other hand, Tai-Khamyang people think and belief that these resources are their Intellectual Property and they don't want to give another party for documentation. So considering this sensitive matter, the Government should take some initiative for proper documentation and preservation of these valuable resources and should arrange some special training and workshops for this community. Nearby universities and college libraries should provide help to these libraries and make them aware of some housekeeping operations. Community people also try to make the new generation aware of their valuable resources and encourage them to practice speaking and writing so that they can save and secure their script and language.

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