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Digitization of Assamese Literatures: A descriptive Study of Internet Archive

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Abstract:

Internet Archive is a well-known digital library of Websites, Books, Audio-Video, Softwares and other information media. The Open Library is a project undertaken by the Internet archive to collect books of different subjects of different language from different parts of the world and made it available for user in an open platform. The paper tries to evaluate and analyze the data of Assamese Languages books available in Open Library of Internet Archive. The paper focuses on collection of books according to subject, author, publisher, publication year etc. Total 2753 Assamese Books are archived in Open Library according to its statistics, where 225 books are bibliography, 27 books are written by Syed Abdul Malik, a famous Assamese writer. There are total 32 books on Srimanta Sankardev, a socio-cultural reformer of Assam.

Keywords: *Internet Archive, Digitization, Assamese Books, Open Library, Archives, Assamese Literatures*

1. Background of the Study

History claims that with some other Eastern Indo-Aryan languages, Assamese Language were also evolved from Kamarupi dialect of Indo-Aryan Magadhi Prakrit before 7th century which shows some close relations with Vedic Sanskrit but the exact route of origin and growth structure of its dialects is not yet transparent to look into. Assamese language has a long way journey of its development. Early Assamese, Middle Assamese and Modern Assamese are the three noteworthy eras of Assamese literature, segregated by Bani Kanta Kakati, the esteemed linguist of Assam. Earliest forms of Assamese literatures and its characteristics were witnessed between 8th to 12th centuries in some Buddhist verses called *Charyapada*. Court poets of Assamese literatures were emerged on 14th century and *Saptakanda Ramayana* of Madhav Kandali proves the point. Assamese literatures reach a milestone of its development in 16th and 17th centuries when Vaishnava literature was propagated and promoted by Srimanta Sankardeva. Bhakti

Movement was initiated during this period. In 1819, American Baptist Missionaries published The Bible in Assamese and this is considered as beginning of modern era of Assamese Literature. The first issue of *Orunodoi*, the first Assamese magazine was published in 1846 from Sibsagar District which can be marked as another milestone of Assamese literature. On the other hand, while first Assamese short story by Lakshminath Bezbaruah was published in *Jonaki* in 1889, the *Jonaki Era*, the romanticism of Assamese literature was started. Along with the born Assamese literatures, it is also rich with a huge number of made Assamese literature including translated Sanskrit epics and *puranas* which also enriched the Assamese culture and folklore. It shares a part of contribution to Indian socio-cultural background which act as vital communicators between generations; it brings knowledge from ancestors to ancestors. Preservation of such rich social, cultural heritages is an important we should focus on so that these sources of knowledge get universal access and sustainability. Digitization of literary forms and preserve it in a reliable media from where anyone from anywhere can access it can enhance the usefulness of these heritages. People often confuse with the concept of Digitization. Digitization is more than simply scanning a book and save it in a hard drive. Scanner, hard drive, camera are just technical products that we use to convert the physical documents to digital format. Digitization is a process where digital technologies are used to change the whole model of information production and dissemination and create new value providing opportunities for future. Assamese literature have been always contributed knowledge, entertainment, guidance, reformations, intellectual spirits to the society so, it is our basic duty to preserve these literary assets in the newest format, so that it can also guide our future generations. Various initiatives to preserve of Assamese Literatures have been already taken by different organizations and institutions. Digitization wing of Assam State Archives, The Center for Assamese Studies of Tezpur University, Asam Sahitya Sabha etc. are some of the name to mention which is working for preservation of Assamese literary forms. First edition of the '*Kirtana*' and the '*Namaghosa*' published by Haribilas Agarwala in 1876; Some rare sanchi-paat manuscripts of '*Dasam Skandha Bhagavata*'; Ananta Kandali's '*Ramayana*', '*Namaghosa*'; first edition of Hemchandra Barua's '*Hema Kosha*' which was published in 1900; personal diaries of Padmanath Gohain Baruah (1871-1946), KK Handiqui (1898-1982), some hand-written manuscripts of Jyotiprasad Agarwala (1903-1951), Chandrabala Barua (1907-1983), Maheswar Neog (1915-1995), Praphulladatta Goswami (1919-1994) and others have been digitized and preserved by the Center for Assamese Studies of Tezpur University. The Centre also digitized official letters and other important documents of establishment of Gauhati University in 1948 and some books from local libraries, archives and schools under the project. Assam's 103 year old literary and cultural body, the Asam Sahitya Sabha, in collaboration with IIT-Guwahati, Tezpur University, Cotton University have also taken an initiative to build a Digital archive of its collection to provide a limitless access to it. Under the project, the first Assamese language journal, '*Orunodoi*'; '*Bhakti Ratnavali*' by 15th century poet-saint Madhabdev; Some century manuscripts of 13th century made of tree bark; old dictionaries; and other valuable books and writings have been digitized. Different International Projects have been also initiated to preserve local and regional languages,

culture, literary forms etc. Internet archive is such a project initiated by Unites States on 12 May, 1996. Under this project a digital library of different digitized resources like websites, software's, music/audios, movies/videos, moving images, books was created and permitted to free public access (upload and download) of all these collections. According to its statistics, Internet Archive's collection have crossed more than 30 million books, 8.9 million videos, 649,000 software's, 13,225,000 audio, 3.8 million images, and 580 billion web pages in April 2021.¹ Internet Archive has initiated another project called 'Open Library' which contains 25 million catalog records of books. The library contains more than 1,600,000 public domain books, in-print books and in-copyright books. It gives free web-access to books and most of the books are fully searchable, readable, and downloadable. Members of this open library can borrow e-books for two weeks which is controlled by digital lending process. More than 1000 libraries of 6 countries have collaborated with Internet Archive for the project. University of Toronto's Robarts Library, the University of Alberta Libraries, the University of Ottawa, the Library of Congress, Boston Library Consortium member libraries, the Boston Public Library, the Princeton Theological Seminary Library, and many others libraries have sponsored Internet Archive by providing millions of scanned publications. Library of Congress website have listed Internet Archive and Open Library as a source of e-books. Open library have collection of more than 100 languages. There are 0000 books of Assamese language is also available, which is a good initiative to preserve and disseminate core knowledge of Assamese culture and heritages. The paper aims to analyze data of available Assamese digitized books by Open Library. Paper will demonstrate overview of Assamese Digitized books available on Internet Archive.

2. Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the coverage of Assamese literature by Open Library of Internet. Study aims to focus on analyzing Open Library Data statistics of Assamese literatures according to Subject, author, writings on people, publishers and publication year.

3. Analysis of Data:

According to Open Library Data, 2753 Assamese Books are archived, which are systematically arranged. These Data are analyzed according to distribution by Subjects, distribution by author, distribution by writings on people, distribution by Publisher and publication year.

3.1 Distribution of Assamese Book by Subjects

Assamese literatures are categorized in more than 100 subjects. From these subjects, Biography, History and criticism and Assamese literatures are top three subjects which have highest collection, i.e., 225, 202, 127 accordingly. In Table 1 top ten subjects with highest no. of books in Open Library of Internet Archive is given below.

Table 1: Top ten subjects of Assamese Books in Open Library

Subjects	Total Books
Biography	225
History and criticism	202
Assamese literature	127
History	111
Assamese Authors	88
Politics and government	78
Civilization	71
Assamese language	59
Assamese poetry	42
Social life and customs	39

3.2 Distribution of Assamese Book by Author:

Open Library has archived Assamese books of more than 80 authors. Table 2 shows the top ten authors with highest no. of books archived in open library. Syed Abdul Malik is a notable Assamese writer who received various prestigious awards including Padmashri, Padmabhushan, Sahitya Akademi Award etc. Abdul Malik has contributed more than 60 novels, more than 1000 short stories and many more. But if we see the collection of Open Library, it has archived very minimum collection of well-known Assamese writers. Other than these ten authors, less than 15 books of Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi, Homen Borgohain, Birendra Nath Dutta, Phanindra Kumar Dev Choudhuri, Lakshminath Bezbaroa are also archived but no. of collection is not satisfactory.

Table 2: Top ten Authors of Assamese Books

Author	No. of Books
Abdul Malik	27
Nirupama Bogohain	20
Hiren Gohain	18
Bhabendra Nath Saikia	18
Saurabh Kumar Chaliha	18
Lakshmi Nandan Bora	17
Mamani Roysam Goswami	16
Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya	15
Maheswar Neog	15
Bhupen Hazarika	15

2.3 Distribution of Books by People: There are 32 books on Srimanta Sankardev (1449-1568), who was an eminent social-religious reformer of 15th Century. His contribution on the field of literature and arts are the main source of today's Assamese folk and tradition. So, it is a good sign that Literatures on Srimanta Sankardev holds the 1st rank on Open Library. There are 12

books on Bhupen Hazarika, a well-known Indian Singer; Bishnu Prasad Rabha, an eminent cultural figure of India; Madhavdev, famous preceptor, a religious reformer next to Srimanta Sankardev each. Figure 1 presents the top 14 People with highest no. of books archived in Open Library.

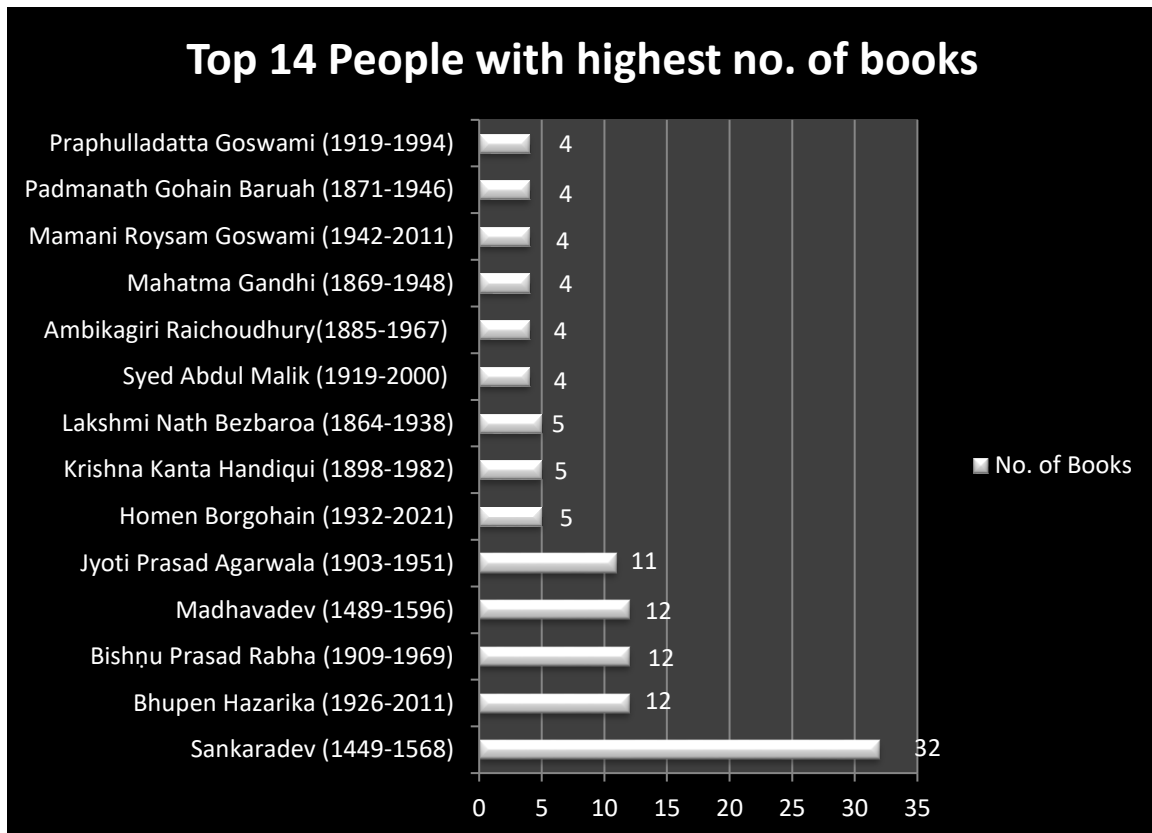


Figure 1: Top 14 People with highest no. of books

3.5 Distribution of Books by Publisher: 226 books from Banalata, 188 books from Lawyers Book Stall, 161 books from Students Stores, 133 books from Jyoti Prakashan, 120 books from Bharati Book Stall are archived in Open Library. Figure 2 presents the top 10 publishers with highest no. of books.

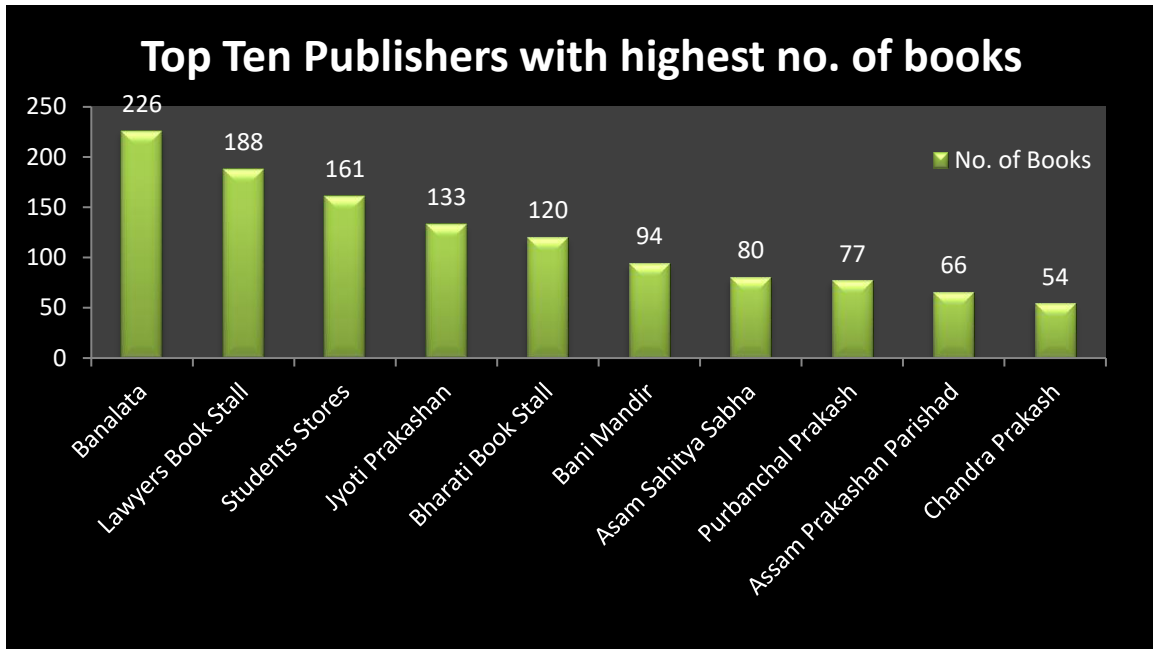


Figure 2: Top Ten Publishers with highest no. of books

3.5 Distribution of Books by Publication Year

Figure 3 represents the year wise distribution books. 168 books published in year 2009 are archived in Open Library. 112 books published in year 1993 and 1998 each are archived.

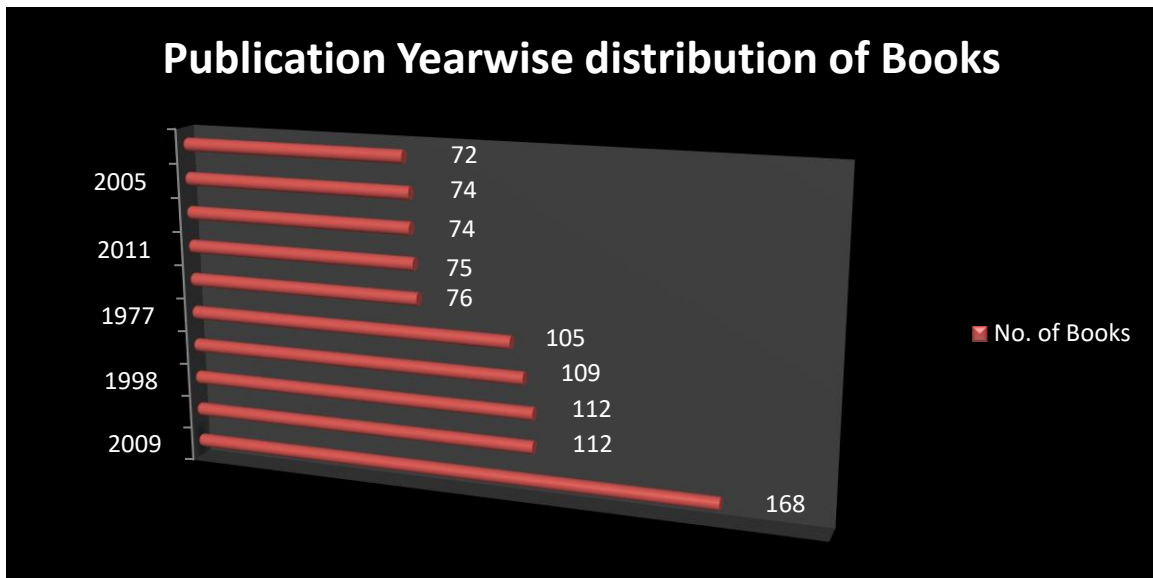


Figure 3: Publication Year-wise distribution of Books

4. Discussion

Assamese literature is rich because of its diversities. Short Stories, Poems, Novels, and other fictions reflect the Assamese society, its folk, culture, rituals etc. If we analyze the literatures of 19th century and 21st century, we may experience some differences, which may be result of development, amendment in social rituals etc. As we have observed highest no. of books are archived from 2009. But during the research we came across a question on accuracy of Open Library. Because, history claims that 1st printed Assamese Book “Dharmapustak” is a translated version of bible which was printed in 1813 but statistics of open library shows that one book from 1808 is archived in Open Library which may arise a confusion that if 1st book was published on 1813, that what is the book archived under 1808 in Internet Archive. The Banalata Publisher is very oldest publication companies of Assam which have completed at least 45 years, and open archive have only 226 collection of this publisher which represent the very poor collection of Assamese literature in Open Library. 1st Assamese novel Bhanumati was published in 1890 which was written Padmanath Gohain Baruah. There are 4 books written on Padmanath Gohain Baruah is archived in this digital Library. There are 3 books on Jayamati Queen, spouse of Gadadhar Singh; King of Assam is also archived. The collection made by open library is very precious but there are more scope to improve the quality, quantity and accuracy of collection. Collection of Open Library is very less may be due to various copyright and legal issues.

5. Conclusion

Preservation of oldest literary form of any language is a vital role of an information aware society. For the spontaneous and sustainable use of different forms of literatures, digitization is mandatory which allow open access to resources from various geographical locations at a time. Initiatives have been taken to preserve Assamese literatures already. Internet Archive has collected total 2753 Assamese books, which is very low as compared to Assamese literatures. Again, some problems have been also found in searching books in Open library like accuracy of results. From the study a conclusion can be made that the process of converting printing resources to digital format have been started however this revolution have still a long way to go. Process of digital Conversion and use of Assamese literatures worldwide have also started. Assurance of accurate statistics, quality control etc. are the area that should be focus on for long term use during digitization.

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