

Noolaham Foundation

Project Report



Project Title	Puthiya Poomi Digitization Project
Project Number	NF/PG/2010/0002
Project Location	Colombo
Sector	Collection Development
Implementing agency and contribution	Noolaham Foundation
Grant Agency and Contribution	Noolaham Foundation
Total Budget and Expenditure	Not Recorded
Project Period	2010
Responsible Stakeholder/s	Volunteers of Noolaham Foundation, Puthiya Poomi Publishers

Summary

The **Puthiya Poomi Digitization Project** was carried out by Noolaham Foundation and *Puthiya Poomi* publications in 2010 to digitize the publications of the *Puthiya Poomi* monthly newspaper. It was a project undertaken by Noolaham Foundation in collaboration with another organization. The main objectives this project was to provide the public open access to the *Puthiya Poomi* publications, preserve and create wide global visibility of historical documents.

The *Puthiya Poomi* is a political monthly newspaper published by I. Thampiya from Colombo. It typically contains news articles and feature articles on national and international issues as well as local news. The news included is related to vulnerable people, current national and internal political explorers, struggles of the people against imperialism, proletarian activities, social and left wing political concepts about communists' life over two decades. Totally 114 *Puthiya Poomi* monthly issues were digitized through this project and made available online through Noolaham Foundation's Digital Library at www.noolaham.org.

Introduction and Background

Noolaham Foundation is a non-profitable, collective and voluntary endeavor aimed at preserving books, magazines and other publications related to the Tamil speaking communities in Sri Lanka in the e-format in order to make them available to and for the benefit of all those who are able to access the internet. Therefore Noolaham Foundation has a digital library which provides free public access of e-books online. The notion behind the entire project is to make information and knowledge available to future generations that will base internet as one of the primary sources to gather intellectual resources.

Newspapers and journals greatly influence the formulation or the expression of the public opinion by providing the necessary podium for journalists to express their personal views and to analyze political, economic, business or cultural events. Newspapers put every person in touch with the active world. The newspaper, in the present era, is the most

powerful medium in educating, informing as well as entertaining people. Published with a huge volume and wide variety of information, it makes itself distinct from other media. It is used regularly by people from each and every strata of the society. Besides, academicians and professionals from diverse fields considerably use it retrospectively for their research and/ or application activities. However, it has been observed that due to the absence of an efficient and effective newspaper information retrieval system in Sri Lanka, the retrieval of such information is being hampered, and the multidimensional development activities have been severely affected by the same. The libraries in Sri Lanka are not easy to give these publications through their interlibrary loans and also they may not be reprinted.

Puthiya Poomi monthly is one such newspaper and it's not vastly available at Sri Lankan libraries for public use. Puthiya Poomi publications focus on class relations and societal conflicts; it offers a materialist interpretation of historical developments, and a dialectical view of social transformation. It also focuses on ethnicity, identity politics, conflict and conflict resolution, suppression of racial liberation struggles, the current crisis in Sri Lanka, international political events, self- determination, Tamil nationalism and liberation, democracy and governance, human rights, development and gender. Today in the digital world, digitization of library information resources has advanced rapidly. The digitization of published documents can potentially greatly increase the breadth of access that can be provided. Digitized documents can be made available to multiple local users. Use of a digital surrogate may decrease the need to use the original – which may be difficult to access. Digitization solves traditional problems faced by libraries like conservation, preservation, storage and space, and provides effective services to satisfy the user's requirements. It also provides wider access to information to different users. That being said, due to the sharp influence of technology, which has reshaped the lives of thousands of Tamil people, the ethics of the information have changed and many prefer to read displayed digitized papers to perusing an old-fashioned printed newspaper. But among the Sri Lankan Tamil speaking community there is no systematic funding for the digitization of historic and contemporary newspapers. These were considered when the project was initiated by Noolaham foundation.

Objective/s and Achievements or Results

This project was carried out under Noolaham Foundation objectives of provide knowledge and information services to ensure free and open access, and thereby supporting educational, research and development endeavors related to Sri Lankan Tamil speaking communities. Especially this project focused on Noolaham's objective of Collection Development.

A total of 114 Puthiya Poomi monthly issues were digitized through this project and made available online through Noolaham Foundation's Digital Library at www.noolaham.org. Metadata and a web portal also were created to increase searchability. Some of the news archives date back to the 1987. There is a timeline view available from June-July 1987 to January 2010, to select news from various years.

Normally political publications are harder to access and are preserved in only a few libraries. And, some of these publications are normally not available for public view or access through libraries reading rooms; however, they were made available for viewing on Noolaham Foundation's website (noolaham.org) through this project. In addition, this project gave a space to introduce international political trends to Sri Lankan Tamil community. At their best, digitized newspapers make their information searchable and accessible to anyone with internet access and with safety.

Constraints / Challenges and lesson learned

- Offering scanned images without any fully searchable text would only partially fulfill users' needs, as many (if not all) desire to search all of the texts available to them. It is necessary to consider providing navigation within the digital data through the use of indexing software.
- The resulting digital image quality of original newspaper is slightly lower than that produced by the paper scanning; however, it does have the benefit of being much faster to digitize.
- Due to the unstable political situation in Sri Lanka some of publications are not available at the publishers and at the community level and an enormous amount of valuable information in all formats remains uncollected and risks being permanently lost. The recollection of rare publications seemed to be a hard job during this project period.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- Once the digital image has been created, it needs to be made searchable and accessible. The images should be processed with optical character recognition software to make the texts searchable. But there is no such software available in the market which satisfactorily provided the required results in Tamil language. Descriptive metadata and Table of Contents must be created for each title, issue, image, and possibly article to help the users find what they are looking for.
- Noolaham Foundation should collaborate more and more with other publishers and groups in creating digital content to share information and resources.
- The publications left out should be scanned when resources are available and Noolaham Foundation should find those documents from the Tamil community and community based libraries with the help of its volunteers.

Relevant Attachment: Front page of the digitized Puthiya Poomi journal

June-July 1987 Publication



November 2009 Publication

