Noolaham Foundation
Final Report
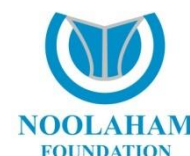
Project title	Tamil Documentation Conference 2013
Project number	NF/PG/2013/0003
Project location	Colombo, Sri Lanka
Sector	Conferences and Symposiums
Implementing agency and contribution	Noolaham Foundation
Grant Agency and Contribution	Noolaham Foundation
Total Expenditure	LKR 523,437.50
Start and End date	November 2012 – April 2013
Project Beneficiaries	Tamil speaking communities around the world
Responsible Stakeholder/s	Volunteers of Noolaham Foundation, Tamil speaking Scholars

Summary

Noolaham Foundation has been successfully carrying out the task of sharing knowledge for the benefit of the present and future generations since 2005. Marking the completion of its 8th year, Noolaham Foundation conducted a research Conference on the theme of "Documentation and Preservation in Sri Lankan Tamil Milieu" on the 27th and 28th of April 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. **Tamil Documentation Conference 2013** was aimed to enhance documenting and preserving the knowledge resources of the heritages of the Tamil speaking communities in Sri Lanka.

Through this project Noolaham Foundation has identified and discussed the past and future of documentation, preservation and dissemination of knowledge. Researchers, educationists and scholars across Sri Lanka and from other countries submitted their research papers on the following sub-themes at this conference: History, archaeological documents related to the heritages of the Tamil speaking communities in Sri Lanka, audio, visual and photographic documents , individual personalities and institutions, documenting society, linguistic and literary documentation, knowledge sharing and education, the role and uses of technology in documentation, digital libraries, websites and databases, cataloguing and library science , art, and cultural memory and documentation.

This conference is unique in the sense that is the first ever conference on documentation in Tamil. Forty eight research articles were presented at eight sessions. The conference proceedings volume is to be released at a later date. This research conference is one of the initiatives taken towards the Tamil communities' future plan to promote research on documentation and it received special appreciation from scholars and the public.

Introduction and Background

Tamils have a long and rich history spanning well over two thousand years. During this period, Tamils' knowledge evolved and manifested itself in different forms in literature, religion, dance, drama, music, astronomy, mathematics, remedies, chemistry, and building construction and so on.

Language diversity is essential to human heritage. Each and every language embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a people. The loss of any language is thus a loss for all humanity. Tamils and the Tamil language are highly adaptable and have survived the influence of other dominant cultures and languages so far. However, it is, like several thousands of other global languages, facing a threat as a result of the rise of English and the influence of western culture. The colonial past of the community and intense global wandering (immigration etc.) are factors that created an apathy and alienation. Cultural revivalism is possible if we evolve a scheme of participatory cultural activism among the Tamils. Without adequate documentation, a language that is extinct can never be revived. It is essential that the age old culture of Tamils needs to be retold in a modern way that reaches the ever changing Tamil Diaspora.

Preservation and popularization of these precious collections of Tamils' intellectual property is imperative for the healthy survival of the Tamil community. But, there are few visionaries who think about this seriously. They do attempt to connect our 'ages old' knowledge and wisdom to modern day technologies. Advances in personal computing and introduction of the Internet during the last two decades have opened up novel opportunities for this task. But there is a lack of awareness among the Tamil community about the documentation of intellectual property. To address the issue academically and from the grass root level, Noolaham Foundation has decided to hold a research conference, first of its kind organized by Noolaham Foundation since its inception, on the 'Documentation and preservation in Sri Lanka Milieu '. NF hopes through this effort that the Tamil community could preserve their Tamil intellectual properties and pass it on to the generations to come.

Implementation procedure

- Noolaham Foundation formed a special conference team with its volunteers (50 numbers) and staffs called TDC 2013 Committee. They were involved in various activities such as project initiation work, creating and launching a web portal, writing media articles about the conference to create public awareness, fund raising, designing the initial layout for publications, reminding the invited writers, issuing the public notice for conference registration, registration, hall arrangement and other facilities.
- Researchers were invited from Sri Lanka, India and the rest of the world to submit their abstracts on documents - preservation & maintenance, documentation, library science, digital library, knowledge sharing, protecting endangered documents. The abstracts should not exceed 400 words. Potential presenters were asked to submit the abstracts on or before the 15th of January 2013. Abstracts in Tamil were preferred in Unicode encoding. Abstracts were collected through Noolaham's email noolahamfoundation@ gmail.com and by post.

- The collected abstracts were reviewed by the TDC research committee with the help of committed academics. Notifications regarding acceptance of abstracts were sent out to the authors within two weeks from the closing date. In selecting the presenters and topics, Noolaham Foundation maintained gender balance, and regional and cultural diversity.
- Full research papers of the accepted abstracts were collected by the 1st of March 2013 in not more than 5000 words. All accepted research papers were submitted and presented at the conference under specialized professors in two days.
- The conference was held on the 27th and 28th of April 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The keynote address was delivered by Mr. Sundar Ganesan of Roja Muthiah Research Library, Chennai, India.
- The conference was conducted in eight sessions: Technical usage in documentation, History, Archeological documents and Traditional records, Ethnography, Art, Sociological documentation, Tamil Language and literary records, Manuscript catalogues and library science and cultural values. Professor V. Maheswaran, Professor Sivasubramaniam Pathmanathan, Professor Sinniah Mounaguru, Professor Sabharatnam Jeyarasa, Professor S. Yogarasa, Professor S. Thillainathan, Professor Somasundram Sandrasegaram and Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran chaired these sessions respectively.
- Noolaham Foundation provided printed compiled abstracts as a book, brochures and documentation related handbills to each participant on the conference days.

Objectives and Achievements or Results

Immediate objectives of the project
- To create awareness among the general public and research community about documentation by conducting a two day conference
- To provide an opportunity to those who have been already working in this area to present their research work.
- To create a space where researchers in the field could meet each other, exchange their ideas and receive constructive feedback from each other on their work
- To identify collective areas where research work needs to be done in the future
- To encourage young scholars to view documentation and preservation of knowledge as an important academic discipline that has the potential to contribute to the social, economic and cultural progress of a community
- To encourage inter-disciplinary research that would offer an opportunity to scholars working in the fields of history, archaeology, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, linguistics and literary studies to draw insights from each other's discipline in order to enhance their own research
- To strengthen the idea that documentation, preservation and dissemination of knowledge without discrimination against individuals and groups is necessary for knowledge-based development
- To publish a conference volume with in depth coverage on documentation with a view to encouraging research in the areas of documentation and preservation of knowledge.

Overall objective
The objectives of the project are bringing together researchers and communities, building communities of practice, processes, technologies and standards of archival, library and information sciences through conferences and symposiums.

Result
Noolaham Foundation strongly believes that the research conference would instigate new research efforts among scholars who are interested in the field of documentation and preservation of knowledge and create a platform for researchers to present the work that they have already done in this area, to share their work and receive feedback from each other. NF also expects that this conference will spur a renewed interest in the areas of documentation and preservation, and create awareness on challenges facing those who are involved in documentation and limitations experienced by them in the digitization process in terms of identification, collection, classification, organization, digitization and retention of sources.

This project is successful a fusion between the younger generation, not so older generation and the older generation of Tamil educationalists and enthusiasts. The conference provides great opportunities for interactions among several fresh writers along with seasoned campaigners.

Constrains / Challenges
- The biggest challenge that NF faced during the initial period of the project is that some people protested against having this conference due to lack of awareness about the importance of organizing conferences on digitization and documentation. They misunderstood our effort as a celebration.
- The Tamil community and business people negatively perceived this conference, and failed to understand the actual value of this project. That is why NF was not able to raise sufficient funds locally.
- Lots of people participated in the evening sessions of the conference, and therefore NF faced some challenges in making sure the conference space was a comfortable area for spectators, where everyone was able to hear and see the event.
- Informing the presenters of conference details by phone or by e-mail and to get their confirmation took more time and effort than we expected.

Suggestions and Recommendations
- Noolaham Foundation should extend its existing networks and relationships with Tamil community to carry out the conference in the upcoming years consecutively and effectively. In this context Noolaham can organize programs to create awareness of the importance of documentation among general public, universities and schools in order to get more support from the community.
- Since Noolaham Foundation renders its service to the public and depends on the support and donations from the community, it needs to socialize with the community

more frequently than now. Despite the release of newsletters, leaflets, magazines and press releases and advertising of Noolaham events in the media and social Media spaces, it should explore other ways in which it could socialize with the community.

- Noolaham Foundation will have to find a more flexible space to conduct conferences in the forthcoming years. The physical environment of a conference can directly impact its effectiveness, the learning and retention of its participants and consequently, its relative cost as well.
- Sending out an agenda in advance and continuous reminder to presenters that meet only a few times a year help participants think through the issues before they come to the conference, ensuring that the conference can move ahead smoothly.

> *"It is a wonderful endeavor and this has been a historical and intellectual treat for everyone. I have been inspired by committed volunteers and staff of this Noolaham Foundation and their activities. This kind of conference has not been conducted even in Tamil Nadu. This conference will increase the community and researcher's interest in documentation on their intellectual properties of the Tamil people. Noolaham Foundation has done this great work despite financial and social risks. I wish them all the very best to pursue excellence and make these marvelous works available to researchers and the public now and in the future. Truly an inspiration"*
>
> **Mr. Sundar Ganesan, Director**
> **Roja Muthiah Research Library,**
> **Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India**

Relevant Links

Web portal address of the Tamil Documentation Conference 2013

http://noolahamfoundation.org/wiki/index.php?title=Tamil_Documentation_Conference_2013

News about Tamil Documentation Conference 2013 (2013.04.27)

http://noolahamfoundation.org/wiki/index.php?title=News/2013/2013.04.27

Tamil Documentation Conference 2013 : Compiled abstracts (Maanaattu Munmozhivuk Kovai)

Digital version

http://noolahamfoundation.org/documents/publications/Noolaham%20Abstract.pdf

Lightning an oil lamp at the opening of conference by Mr. Sundar Ganesan, Director Roja Muthiah Research Library, India.

Cover page of compiled abstract book

The eminent scholars from various fields and participants