

Noolaham Foundation
Project Report



Project title	Malaiyaham Archive Pilot Project
Project number	NF/PG/2014/0004
Project location	Up-Country of Sri Lanka
Sector	Collection Development - Special Collections
Implementing agency and contribution	Noolaham Foundation (NF)
Grant Agency and Contribution	Noolaham Foundation
Total Budget and Expenditure	
Start and End date	Start – September 2013 End – September 2014
Responsible Stakeholder/s	Mrs. Radhika Thinakaran, Volunteers of Noolaham Foundation, Badulla Literary Circle and Up-Country Tamil speaking community, writers and publishers.

Summary:

The **Malaiyaham Archive Pilot Project** was carried out by Noolaham Foundation during 2013 and 2014 to digitize and preserve the publications of the Malaiyaham Tamil speaking community. It was implemented as a special collection development project of the Noolaham Digital Library. Documentation and digitization of books and publications related to the Malaiyaham Tamil community was an objective of the project as well.

Through this project Noolaham Foundation has digitized 140 documents and made them available on its digital library at www.noolaham.org. The digitized publications include their culture, distinctive history, tradition, political context, religious practices, arts, stories, the schooling system, journals and novels. These documents are available for free access and could be downloaded in the user-friendly interface of Noolaham Foundation's Digital Library and most of the knowledge seekers and relevant stakeholders will have easy access to these services. A web portal named *Noolaham:Malaiyaha_Avanakam* (நூலகம்: மலையக ஆவணகம்) was also created. This portal will enable effective and speed searches of the required knowledge.

This project was a successful initiative and received special appreciation from Malaiyaham Tamil writers and publishers. When new documents arrive from the Malaiyaham Tamil community, the documents will be digitized by Noolaham Foundation's Malaiyaham representative in the future. It will be implemented as part of the Noolaham Foundation's recurrent Collection Development Project.

Background

A significant number of Tamils in Sri Lanka are of Indian origin. They were brought to Sri Lanka by colonial powers to fulfil their economic needs as indentured labor. They speak

Tamil as the Tamils of Sri Lankan origin. They are concentrated in the south-central 'up country' highlands. Indian Tamils who were brought to Sri Lanka by the British to work in the plantations were usually poor when they arrived in Sri Lanka.

Up-country Tamils of Sri Lanka have faced enormous hardships in postcolonial Sri Lanka. They survived amidst poor living conditions. Lack of political representation, inadequate education, and low wages are some of the challenges this community faces even today. The Up-country Tamils have been "othered" and treated like aliens by the majority of Sri Lankans since 1947. Today, Malaiyaha Tamils deserve to be called one of the national minorities in Sri Lanka because of their distinctive history, tradition, and culture. The Up-country Tamil identity has not developed due to marginalization alone. Instead, the Up-country Tamil identity must be understood in light of the historical, cultural and, political context of Sri Lanka and India. They achieved citizenship rights and were allowed to participate in the national education system after a political struggle in which the dimensions of caste, language, economic status and ethnicity are intertwined.

In Sri Lanka the plantation sector has been a key component of the economy since the 1830s when the British Colonial government encouraged large scale clearances of land for the cultivation of coffee, followed in the 1880s by tea. Despite the contribution of the plantation economy and communities to Sri Lanka's development, analysis of educational progress in Malaiyaham is scarce. Political scientist de Silva notes that education was not part of plantation culture; it was neither technically necessary nor did it have any survival value.

Over the past fifty years, Up-country Tamils have generally tried to secure their vision of living within a multi-ethnic Sri Lanka. Documentation and archiving are keys to the knowledge profile of a community. These activities are important information providers to processes that influence the social and economic development of Malaiyaham Tamil community. Documentation and archiving are also influential in the manner in which the histories of local communities are written. The functions of documentation and archiving turn out to be particularly difficult tasks in minority communities like Malaiyaham Tamil community which are neglected by the postcolonial state. Hence a more robust community-driven approach to documentation and archiving is important. Noolaham Foundation feels that such a process is best channeled through the digital media. Hence Noolaham Foundation has decided to maintain documentation and archiving through the digital library that could be accessed by all.

Objective/s and Achievements or Results:

The objective of the Malaiyaham Archive Pilot Project was to convert physical books and documents related to Malaiyaha Tamils into machine readable formats and to make them available online through Noolaham Digital Library (www.noolaham.org). The preserved historical information was shared with others as well.

Noolaham Foundation actively participated in awareness raising campaigns about this project. As part of the awareness creation campaign, discussions were held with the Badulla Literary Circle in Badulla. During the course of the project, volunteer involvement and the contribution of the community was highly observed. The members of the Literary Circle welcomed the overarching mission of Noolaham Foundation and the various projects carried out to meet the organizational objectives. A CD consisting of nearly 70 up-country documents that have been digitized and archived by Noolaham Foundation were handed over at this awareness raising campaign to the general public.

The members of the circle willingly came forward to contribute books in the future to our Foundation for digitization and documentation processes. Through this project 140 rare documents were digitized and made available on Noolaham Foundation's digital library at www.noolaham.org. All the Tamil speaking communities around the world shall benefit from this project. This project will also benefit individuals and institutions who want to digitally archive their publications. Thus this project will help the Malaiyaham community to preserve and share their knowledge bases and memory for the long term.

Constrains / Challenges:

- Recollecting intellectual, rare and endangered documents is the major challenge to the development of digital library collections during the project period.
- Copyright and other intellectual property rights (IPR) such as moral rights have substantial impact on digital preservation. These matters are another important topic for which it is difficult to find practical information during the project period. Items in an archive may become inaccessible for legal reasons as well as for technical reasons. This is a much greater threat than most people realize, particularly after the person who created a document, photograph, or recording has passed away.

Suggestion and Recommendation:

- Noolaham Foundation should put more effort on finding these information resources and provide background knowledge and exposure to contributors of Malaiyaham Community.
- Motivate people to take basic steps to assure that historical information will be reliably accessible beyond their lifetimes. Written authorizations that release most or all copyright restrictions can greatly increase the accessibility, use, preservation, and long-term historical value of photographs, documents, and recordings. Voluntary arrangements need to be negotiated on a case by case basis.

Relevant Attachments

Introductory meeting with Badulla Literary Circle

