

Noolaham Foundation

Project Report



Project Title	Sharing and Documenting Traditional and Religious Norms of Sri Lankan Tamil Community
Project Number	NF/PG/ 2014/0005
Project Location	Colombo
Sector	Noolaham Events
Implementing agency and contribution	Noolaham Foundation
Grant Agency and Contribution	Norway Tamil Sangam
Total Budget and Expenditure	Budget: LKR 500,000 Expenditure: LKR 216,567
Project Period	January 2014
Responsible Stakeholders	Norway Tamil Sangam , Batticaloa Theatre Lab and STA Solidarity Foundation, Sri Lanka

Summary

The project of 'Sharing and Documenting Traditional and Religious Norms of the Sri Lankan Tamil Community' is a common platform for the integration of Tamil speaking communities from different backgrounds in Sri Lanka. Hence, Noolaham Foundation has identified Koothu (melodrama) as one of the traditional tools that share some common values. Then Noolaham Foundation and Norway Tamil Sangam, staged 'Ravanesan Koothu' in Colombo with the facilitation of Batticaloa Theatre Lab.

The project's main event 'Ravanesan Koothu' was held at the Ramakrishna Mission Hall, Colombo – 06 on 4th January 2014 with more than 800 spectators. The 'Ravanesan Koothu' can be viewed as a great honor and a glimpse at our heritage for Tamil speaking communities in Sri Lanka through these treasury performances. The performance was telecasted on Vasantham TV, and a series of special articles were published in the Virakesari weekend edition about 'Ravanesan Koothu'. This is the first time 'Ravanesan Koothu' was telecast on the visual media in Sri Lanka. This online availability of the event will promote the rich heritage of Tamil culture and Tamil language around the world.

Noolaham Foundation believes that this project will develop an exposure for the arts which are being practiced by the Sri Lankan Tamil speaking communities.

Introduction and Background

Ancient Tamils had their own traditional and cultural values and a rich tradition of hospitality. They also had their own and unique speech-forms such as myths, proverbs, folk tales and songs as well as art forms like sculptures, stone inscriptions, dances, melodrama, ritual objects and etc. Unfortunately today these ancient Tamil heritages are in an endangered situation among the Tamil speaking community.

Koothu had functioned as a link between Tamil speaking communities at the early stage. Due to lack of interest among people to learn and improve their traditional practices, young Tamil generations lost their cultural heritages, identifications and cultural values. The Tamil community is now being divided by regionalism.

The majority of Tamils in Sri Lanka live in the Northern, Eastern, Central and Western provinces. It is very important to understand the relationships among the Tamil communities living in the different parts of the country. . Through stage dramas or 'melodrama' where north-west Tamils have the style of performing mythological based 'Ravana Koothu' and the up country Tamils have the tradition of promoting 'Ramar Nadagam & Lavakusalavan Koothu'. 'Sithaiyamman Kovil', 'Sitha Eliya village', 'Ravanagoda', 'Aanjaniyar Kovil', 'Ravana Ellai' are some of the related names to 'Ramayan' in Upcountry. Hence, Noolaham Foundation planned to integrate the cultural aspects of these different regions through this project.

Objective/s and Achievements or Results:

- Through this project Noolaham Foundation has generated, re-created and documented the traditional 'melodrama', folk tales and songs with the help of modern technology without changing their basic principles.

The 'Ravanesan Koothu' is recreated by Prof. Sinniah Maunaguru. It was recreated after an interval of five years. Prof. Sinniah Maunaguru is one of the patrons of Noolaham Foundation. He has written more than 25 books and 15 plays in Tamil and more than 150 scholarly articles that have been published in reputed journals. He is a pioneer in the stage performance of a Batticaloa traditional folk performance called 'Koothu'.

Vasantham TV telecasted this show on 15th January 2014. This Video document was digitized and archived under the Multimedia Archive Program of Noolaham Foundation, and it will be made available on the internet as well. It will give expatriate Tamil communities viewership globally. After the Colombo performance, 'Ravanesan Koothu' was performed in Singapore as well. It is one of the successes of Noolaham Foundation initiative.

- Other objective of this project is reintroducing Tamils' cultural and traditional values, because they have vanished during the prolonged unfavorable situation.

This melodrama not only provided a medium through which Sri Lankan Tamils could examine their social framework but it also provided a shelter for traditional values that were threatened by the war and industrialization.

- To create a common platform for the Sri Lankan Tamils to interact with each other and to understand their common cultural values.

The main thrust of this objective is to take such plays to the midst of the diverse communities living in Colombo and to promote this type of new artistic fusion of 'melodrama' and dance. Colombo is the capital of Sri Lanka where people with different cultures and ethnicity live together in peace and harmony. Therefore Noolaham Foundation has staged such a cultural event in Colombo. It made a great and positive impact on the Tamil community and others.

- To introduce new exposure for the integration and sharing of traditional values among the Tamil communities in Sri Lanka.

“Ravavanesan Hasaka ‘dominant ritual objects are mostly similar to each group of Sri Lankan Tamil community because of the potential of tremendous cultural heritage and religious dynamics, it varies in the actions of colloquial Tamil and the socio-cultural norms and customs. This event integrates many artists from up country, Puttalam, Jaffna, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Ampara, Vavuniya, Mannar, and Kilinochi districts. This team introduces theme of unity among Tamil in Sri Lanka and ‘Melodrama’ reflects a common platform for Tamils’ cultural. Especially different target groups participated in this event such as social, economic, and cultural.

During this event the Noolaham Foundation’s virtual learning website ‘MOODLE’ system for the virtual learning platform was launched. The conference proceedings of Tamil Documentation Conference 2013 named Tamil *Aavana Maanaadu 2013 Aaivuk Katturaik Kovai* and Noolaham Foundation annual magazine also were released.

Noolaham Foundation collaborated with Batticaloa Theatre Lab to implement this project and many personalities from various fields such as civil society leaders, religious devotees, people who are interested in the same field, volunteers and well-wishers along with Noolaham Foundation and the directors of the stage-melodrama contributed towards this project.

Lesson learnt:

- In Noolaham Foundation only few numbers of staffs are working. Conducting a massive stage event with the limited number of staff is impossible. It mainly depends on volunteer work forces. Therefore responsibilities and workloads were shared among all the active volunteers and staff members.
- Since Noolaham Foundation renders its services to the public and depends on the support and donations from the community, it needs to socialize with the community. Despite the release of newsletters, leaflets, magazines and press releases and advertising of Noolaham events in the media and social Medias, it is expected to socialize with the community even further.

Constrains / Challenges:

- The conservatives protested against telecasting the ‘Ravanesan Koothu’ on TV as the drama was a fusion of traditional Koothu and dance to the accompaniment of western and eastern musical instruments in the background. It is obvious that traditionalists do not accept their own traditional and cultural values being remixed. However these cannot be avoided as modernization is considered a constant requirement to make art reach the public, especially through the media.

Suggestion and Recommendation:

- Noolaham Foundation would be extended its existing networks and relationships with volunteers to carry out the projects of Noolaham Foundation effectively. In this context Noolaham can organize awareness creation programs among the general public, universities and schools in order to get more volunteer support.
- It is also suggested that Noolaham Foundation shall be socialized more with the community. Then it could reach the public through Media and social Media to meet this suggestion of socializing.

Case Stories / Quotes



“It gives me great pleasure that we staged ‘Raavanesan melodrama’ in front of a large number of spectators. Myself and our students got motivated and encouraged by the big round of applaud and the standing ovation of the great audience. I’m looking forward for another opportunity to perform the ‘Raavanesan melodrama’ in collaboration with Noolaham Foundation”.

- Prof. Sinniah Maunaguru -

Relevant Attachment:

Scenes from ‘Ravaneeshan melodrama’ performed by Batticaloa Theatre Lab Students





Professor Sinniah Maunaguru was honoured by Dr. Nithiyanthan



The group of artist

