

ENDANGERED ARCHIVES PROGRAMME**FINAL REPORT**

Please complete and return this form to:

Endangered Archives Programme Office
The British Library
96 Euston Road
London NW1 2DB
United Kingdom

An electronic version of the report must also be emailed to:

endangeredarchives@bl.uk

An appropriate senior person in your host institution must sign to certify that the statement of expenditure is accurate (signatures are not required in the electronic copy).

Independent Researchers who are not attached to a host institution are required to submit receipts with this report for all items of expenditure over £100.

A copy of the digital collections or pilot survey that has been produced during the course of the project must be submitted to the British Library at the above address.

The final grant instalment will be paid once this report and the digital collections or pilot survey has been satisfactorily received. Any unspent funds will be required to be returned to the Programme.

1 Grant details

Name of grant holder	<table border="1"><tr><td>Thillainathan Kopinath</td></tr></table>	Thillainathan Kopinath
Thillainathan Kopinath		
Project title	<table border="1"><tr><td>Survey and digitisation of individual manuscript collections in Northern Sri Lanka</td></tr></table>	Survey and digitisation of individual manuscript collections in Northern Sri Lanka
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Type of grant	<table border="1"><tr><td>Pilot</td></tr></table>	Pilot
Pilot		
Start date (dd/mm/yy)	<table border="1"><tr><td>15/11/17</td></tr></table>	15/11/17
15/11/17		
End date (dd/mm/yy)	<table border="1"><tr><td>14/11/18</td></tr></table>	14/11/18
14/11/18		

2 What was the aim of the work supported by this grant?
(200 words maximum)

The aim of this project was to “survey, digitize and archive the endangered palm leaf and similar manuscripts which are currently held by individuals and selected libraries in Northern Sri Lanka.” We expected to “collect, process, digitize over 12,000 images of approximately 60 sets of palm leaves through an outreach programme in the project locations and archive the same in the online repositories.” Building local capacity for field research, palm-leaf digitization, description and creating the workflow for this type of project was another major objective. Creating awareness about palm-leaf manuscripts and their preservation (i.e. through community events), and creating supplementary records (e.g. oral histories) about palm-leaf collections were part of the aim as well.

Initially, we had limited information regarding the surviving palm-leaf manuscript collections. Through the survey, we wanted to identify, locate and assess to what extent these materials had survived the protracted civil war in Sri Lanka. We aimed to collect information about the collections and their custodians as well.

3 What have you achieved?

Please be specific. If digitisation has been carried out as part of the project, ensure that you include information on the age and significance of the material that has been digitised, details of the quantity of original material that has been digitised, and the number of digital copies created.

We conducted more than 150 field visits for surveying and digitization. Through this work, we identified 49 palm-leaf manuscript collections. Of the 49 collections, we have fully digitized and described 21 collections of 124 palm-leaf manuscripts or works. The 124 works contain 29,458 pages or digitized images (700GB). It should be noted that we expected to identify about 30,000 pages through this pilot project. But in fact we have digitized that many pages. Due to risk factors and the reasons noted below, we focused on digitization. We achieved more than double our expected digitization output of 12,000 images.

Risk factors and reasons for focusing on digitization:

- Surveyed materials became unavailable after the initial survey/ contact because the materials were sold, donated, custodians relocated, custodians changed their mind about sharing the material and other reasons.
- Custodians were more likely to provide permission if we digitized the material immediately, as they were motivated through the prospect of long-term preservation.
- Logistically it was easier and more efficient to carry out surveying and digitization at the same time.

To our surprise, we located more palm-leaf collections during the survey than we had originally anticipated. Most of the collections were located with traditional medical centres/practitioners, temples, ritual practitioners/priests, astrologers and local libraries. As we had expected, none of the collections were under any preservation treatment. We excluded badly damaged collections and items from digitization and survey records. We estimate that at least 10% of the discovered materials were damaged beyond any use or repair. Additional time and labour were required to separate the leaves, clean them, and apply treatment to protect and make them legible.

Originally, the aim was to cover all regions of the Northern province in the survey. However, we were unable to cover all regions due to more materials being available than anticipated, and also because of the focus on digitization. We focused on Jaffna district, which was the major center of learning and culture during the 18th and 19th centuries. We conducted limited field work in Vanni region and Mannar district, and further work is needed to fully cover these areas.

Two thirds, or 71, of the 124 digitized manuscripts are in Tamil language and script. Forty eight are in Sanskrit and are written in Grantha script. Three materials are in both Tamil and Sanskrit.

The materials can be broadly classified as original or unique manuscripts, copies of earlier works and archival records. They broadly cover the following subject areas: traditional Siddha and Ayurvedic medicine, Hindu religious and temple ritual texts, astrology/astronomy works, local histories,

unorthodox Hindu folk practices-related works such as tantras, mesmerism, and witchcraft, archival records such as birth charts and budgets, folklore, literature and mathematics.

The following are examples of rare and important palm-leaf manuscripts preserved via this project: Kaṇakkatikāram (mathematics), Cekarācācēkaram (medicine), Paramapuruṣaṇ (philosophy/religion), Cūṭamaṇi nikaṇṭu (lexicography), Kōvalaṇ katai (folklore/literature). The majority of the Tamil manuscripts are about traditional medicine of the Siddha and Ayurvedic traditions. The majority of the Sanskrit manuscripts are related to Hindu temple rituals. The breadth and depth of the materials surveyed and digitized established the cultural and scholarly significance of the material.

We created three oral history recordings, including with Dr. Bala Sivakadacham. He is one of the preeminent researchers on Sri Lankan Tamil palm-leaf manuscripts. We also recorded and shared a palm-leaf reading manuscript workshop.

We will detail our achievements with respect to capacity building, outreach and broader engagement elsewhere in this report.

In short, through the pilot project, we have established the existence of a significant number of collections of palm-leaf manuscripts with various custodians in the Northern province of Sri Lanka. In collaboration with the EAP team, we have built, refined and demonstrated the field research, digitization, metadata creation and workflow required to undertake this important work on a larger scale. Most importantly, from mathematical treatises to medical works, from archival recording of individuals' birth charts to literature, we have documented, digitally preserved, and shared an important slice of Sri Lankan Tamil culture, and human heritage.

4 Provide details of where the endangered archival material is now housed and where the copies of the material have been deposited, if applicable.

Details should also be provided of the accessibility of the material.

The strategic objective of this project was to digitize, digitally preserve and provide open access to these materials. The vast majority of the collections remain with the respective custodians. We have cleaned, and applied some treatment, as required, to the manuscripts. We have also provided basic guidance about their future maintenance/preservation.

The digital resources created are under the stewardship of Noolaham Foundation. As per the Foundation's preservation practices, three copies will be maintained at different geographical locations in order to minimize risk and mitigate threats of any future loss. Copies are being deposited with the British Library and Roja Muthiah Research Library (our archival partner).

We will make the material freely and openly available for everyone via our Noolaham Foundation's multimedia archival platform aavanaham.org.

5 How has the project contributed to the professional development of local staff and/or institutions?

Developing local capacity for field research, palm-leaf digitization, description, and project management was a key objective of the pilot project. We wanted to establish the capacity and workflow required to manage a major project of this type. As noted in the interim report, we successfully trained and engaged five recent graduates with social sciences backgrounds via this project. We trained them in various areas including field research, data collection, manuscript cleaning, digitization and processing. The EAP 835 team who were working based at Noolaham Foundation shared their experience and contributed to the training as well. The training process went well. Previously we had received training from the EAP 458 team based at French Institute of Pondicherry related to the processing of palm-leaf manuscripts, which aided in further developing the training and capacity as well.

At the beginning of the project, Noolaham Foundation did not have the capacity or the workflow in

place to do palm-leaf manuscript reading, which was required for creating the descriptive metadata. Training and volunteer service provided by Dr. Bala Sivakadacham was instrumental in bridging this gap. Dr. Sivakadacham's workshop helped one of our volunteers (Suganthan), develop the capacity to read Tamil manuscripts as well. The workshops are available via the Aavanaham.org platform: <http://aavanaham.org/islandora/object/noolaham:19188>. We are also planning to have a follow-up crowd-sourced workshop using the content of this project. We also engaged experts skilled in reading Sanskrit (Grantha script) manuscripts to develop the metadata for Sanskrit manuscripts.

Noolaham Foundation believes field research-based documentation is a critical capacity needed to document the knowledge resources of Tamil-speaking communities. This project helped us build that capacity. We also refined our digitization setup and metadata creation workflow.

This project contributed tremendously to building trained staff, a strong volunteer base and a community of practice for archiving. It also enhanced Noolaham Foundation's capacity to undertake these types of field research-intensive projects in the future.

6 Provide details on how the results from your project have been disseminated, including any reports in the local, national or international media.

Community Outreach & Dissemination

Creating awareness about palm-leaf manuscripts, and the need for preservation, was one of the main aims of this project. Many people have only heard of manuscripts and have never seen them in real life, or even digitally. Thus, we held four community outreach events to engage the public in this project. The original intention of these events was to help identify custodians. Although these events did not help in identifying custodians directly, they helped in building rapport and awareness about the mission of the project.

The most successful of these events was the Palm-leaf manuscripts exhibition held toward the end of the project. It was held over a three day period and over 400 people attended the exhibition, including students, custodians, librarians, and researchers. More than fifty people provided written feedback about the event, which was overwhelmingly positive. The event received wide media coverage, including via newspaper, television, radio and online media. As noted above, the palm-leaf manuscript reading workshop was also very successful. We have collected the photos, articles, recordings and other media related to this project here: http://aavanaham.org/islandora/object/noolaham:eap_suvadi

Media Coverage

Preserving and providing access to palm-leaf manuscripts was of key interest to many stakeholders in Tamil speaking communities, and thus this project received considerable coverage from local and national media. A summary follows:

- National daily Tamil newspaper *Thinakkural* published an in-depth article focusing on the digitization of palm-leaf manuscripts titled "Computerization of Palm-Leaf Manuscripts": <http://aavanaham.org/islandora/object/noolaham:19379>
- Jaffna weekly Tamil newspaper *Ethirol* published an in-depth article titled "In Search of Roots of Our Heritage": <http://aavanaham.org/islandora/object/noolaham:19381>
- Jaffna weekly Tamil newspaper *Puthuvithi* published an article titled "Fruits of a Young Team" focused on the project and the team behind the project: <http://aavanaham.org/islandora/object/noolaham:19380>
- National online English platform *Roar Media* covered the project in its profile of Noolaham Foundation titled "This Digital Library Is Preserving Sri Lanka's Tamil Literary Heritage": <https://roar.media/english/life/in-the-know/this-digital-library-is-preserving-sri-lanka-s-tamil-literary-heritage/>
- Toronto monthly Tamil magazine will be publishing an in-depth article titled "Noolaham's Palm-Leaf Documentation" in its annual special issue coming out on February 24, 2019.
- Capital FM 94.0 & 103.1 Radio and Sakthi TV covered the Palm-Leaf Exhibition, and several news websites covered the event as well. e.g.: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qd-tWkCn1hE>

- 7 **State the steps taken to obtain any copyright clearance in the materials copied. Where available, please provide supporting documentation.** Please refer in particular to sections 39 and 40 of the Terms and Conditions of Award

As noted in the original application, the materials under consideration are not under copyright. The vast majority belong to the 18th to early 20th century. For the digitized collections, we have obtained informed permissions from all custodians except two to preserve and make these materials openly accessible. We have also obtained four permissions from custodians of survey only collections, and we are in the process of obtaining additional permissions. Those permissions are being sent with the files.

- 8 **Have any other funding bodies been involved in supporting this project?** ☐ Yes ☒ No
If yes, please provide details

- 9 **Do you have any comments you would like to make regarding your research, this award or the Endangered Archives Programme as a whole?**

Survey and digitisation of individual manuscript collections in Northern Sri Lanka” project has identified significant, perhaps the largest, soon to be publicly accessible Sri Lankan Tamil and Sanskrit palm-leaf collections. These surviving endangered resources are pride and jewel of Sri Lankan Tamil speaking communities. This work would not have been possible without EAP. The project team, Noolaham staff and volunteers, EAP program team and trailblazing project teams were instrumental in making this project possible and successful.

Lessons learned in this project include the following:

- When dealing with endangered resources, digitization/digital preservation should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity, preferably at the same time as surveying.
- We under-estimated the labour involved in cleaning and processing required getting the manuscripts ready for digitization. Noolaham Foundation staff contributed towards this.
- Reading the manuscripts required specialized expertise. We failed to engage language and subject matter experts early and throughout the project, which delayed the project delivery.
- Close reading is required to describe the material with high degree of accuracy. Though this is out of scope of this project, we hope making these material openly accessible via web will enable people to undertake that work and contribute back.
- From field work co-ordination, metadata creation to reporting, we relied on volunteer resources heavily. Workflow improvements and staffing allocation are needed to reduce the workload on volunteers.

EAP plays a critical role in preserving and making accessible knowledge resources from Global South. EAP program design which encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing between EAP projects and teams, local capacity building, Open Access and the pilot-major model have been effective. We aim to build on this work in the near future.

We want to close by translating the comment provided by librarian Mrs. Nadaraja when she attended the palm-leaf exhibition outreach event. She was the chief librarian of Jaffna public library when it was burnt down in 1981 with 97,000 documents including rare palm-leaf manuscripts. The comment amplifies the emotions felt by many attendees at the palm-leaf exhibition and the emotional connection many staff, volunteers and public have with this project.

“I came (all the way) from Colombo to Kokkuvil see the palm-leaf manuscripts. I am very content and peaceful in seeing these manuscripts. We need to collect these manuscripts from many people and preserve our heritage. I am happy without bounds to meet staffs who are undertaking this work with a community service mindset. My wishes and blessings.”

[illegible]

Prof. B. Brown

தென்னாற்காசியில் பிள்ளைப் பள்ளி - -
உயர். பள்ளி

13/10/18

Notes to the expenditure statement

- The exchange rate used for the final report is £ 1.00 = Rs. 204.05. This exchange rate is the average rate of the first two instalments.
- The third and final instalment amount is £ 1,116.00. But there is a surplus of £ 391.04. So the balance is £ 724.96
- The cost to courier the hard disk is not included in the expenditure statement yet. It would be around £ 40.00. So the total balance would be around £ 765.00
- But at the current exchange rate of £ 1.00 = Rs. 225.00 to 230.00, a final instalment of £700.00 would cover the balance.

10 Statement of expenditure

	Amount awarded (£)	Amount spent (£)	Surplus (£)
Replacement teaching			
Replacement archivist/librarian cover			
Research staff	8,400.00	8,086.15	313.85
Technical, clerical and other staff costs			
Travel and subsistence	1,440.00	1,253.35	186.65
Equipment and consumables	580.00	753.14	-173.14
Training costs			
Other costs associated with copying material			
Costs associated with transfer of material to local archives			
Costs incurred by local archives			
Other costs	740.00	676.31	63.69
TOTAL	11,160.00	10,768.96	391.04

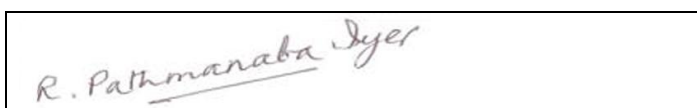
For Independent Researchers only

☐ A detailed statement of expenditure must be sent in with this report together with receipts for all items of expenditure over £100. Please check this box to confirm that the receipts are enclosed.

For and on behalf of the Host Institution

I certify that this is a true statement of expenditure of funds awarded under the Endangered Archives Programme

Signature



Date

15/02/2019

Name

Rathina Iyer Pathmanaba Iyer

Email address

pathmanabhan@gmail.com

Position in Institution

Chairperson

Institution

Noolaham Foundation

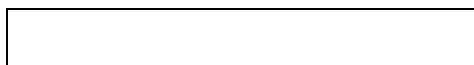
Institutional stamp



Director
Noolaham Foundation
No.185, Aadiyapatham Road
Kokkuvil, Jaffna
Sri Lanka

I certify that the information provided in this report is accurate and complete.

Signature of Principal Applicant



Date

15/02/2019