

ENDANGERED ARCHIVES PROGRAMME

FINAL REPORT

This form must not be completed until a copy of all project outputs (the digitised content and metadata or pilot survey) have been submitted to the British Library and signed off by the EAP team.

An appropriate senior person in the Host Institution must sign to certify that the statement of expenditure is accurate (signatures are not required in the electronic copy). Independent Researchers not attached to a host institution are required to provide evidence that their accounts have been independently verified.

The final grant instalment will be paid only when and the digital collections and metadata or pilot survey plus final report have been satisfactorily received. Any unspent funds must be returned to the Programme.

The project outputs should be sent to:

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

*Round 17 Project Leads may use this facsimile as a template. Earlier projects should be reported using this form. Please save as a PDF or Word document, naming it as follows: **EAPxxxx_[name]_final_report** and email to endangeredarchives@bl.uk*

1 Grant details

Name of Project Lead

Project title

Type of grant

Start and end dates
(dd/mm/yy – dd/mm/yy)

2 What was the aim of the work supported by this grant?

(200 words maximum)

The primary aim of this project was to catalogue, digitize, and preserve 70,000 images from between 300 and 500 Tamil and Sanskrit palm-leaf manuscripts from the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. Secondary aims for EAP1260 included building local capacity for field research, palm-leaf digitization and description, and developing an appropriate workflow for this type of project, given the constraints unique to working in Sri Lanka. Finally, we sought to create awareness about palm-leaf manuscripts and their preservation through community events and to create supplementary records (e.g. oral histories) about palm-leaf collections.

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, and the number of digital copies created. This text will be used on the EAP website.

Over the course of EAP1260, we identified 99 palm-leaf manuscript collections. Of these, we have fully digitized and produced metadata for 77 collections. These 77 digitized collections consist of 600 separate palm-leaf manuscripts totalling 100,210 digitized images.

We have obtained signed permission from owners or custodians of all 77 collections. Of these 77 collections, 50 (totalling 267 palm-leaf manuscripts) were located in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, and 27 (consisting of 333 palm-leaf manuscripts) were found in the Northern Province. Of the 600 digitized manuscripts, 582 are in the Tamil language and script. The remaining 18 are in Sanskrit and are written in the Grantha script. Nine manuscripts are in both Tamil and Sanskrit.

37% of the palm-leaf manuscripts digitized were related to health and medicine. Literature was the second most common theme (26.67%). Among the digitized collections, 68 are held by individuals, and nine are held by institutions. It should be noted that the greatest number of manuscripts (49) are part of the collection 30 of this project. This extensive collection was identified from Sivagnanamoorthy in Batticaloa. The collection comprises 4,540 leaves, and it covers a wide range of subjects including health and medicine, literature, folklore, history, caste, astrology, magic, yoga, and mathematics.

Four oral history recordings related to palm leaf manuscripts, the historical background and significance were recorded from the following individuals: Subramaniyam Velupillai, Krishnaraja Sellaiya, Pathmanathan Vallipuranathar and Kamalanathan Karththikesan. One major palm-leaf manuscript exhibition and two events were organised in partnership with local institutions, Jaffna Hindu College, Kaithadi Siddha Ayurveda College and Akkaraipattu Book Fair.

Historically, palm-leaf manuscripts were the primary source for knowledge creation, preservation, and dissemination in the Tamil-speaking communities of Sri Lanka. Due to colonization, post colonial political and economic instability, and the ensuing three decades of civil war, the majority of these resources have been destroyed. The 600 palm-leaf manuscripts that have been digitized and preserved under the EAP1260 reflect a robust sample of the rich and complex epistemic heritage of the Tamil-speaking communities of Sri Lanka. This collection is considered to be the rarest and largest digitised and openly accessible collection of Tamil palm-leaf manuscripts that are publicly available. The manuscripts cover the periods of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. The subject topics of the manuscripts range from local and folk medicinal practices that are unique to Sri Lanka and the South Asian region to folk theatre and practices, and literary and religious works.

The medical manuscripts include and document the various medical practices that were followed and practiced by local communities, such as Ayurveda medicine, Siddha medicine, Tamil medicine, folk medicine, and Unani medicine. These pioneering medical treatises cover diagnosis of illnesses, treatments, and the creation and process of making medicines.

The collection also consists of the largest number of manuscripts originating from the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. These manuscripts primarily consist of literary works, particularly a traditional folk theatre form called koothu. The researchers and subject experts that we consulted expressed that these are very rare and extant copies of such koothu forms. For example, Vathanamar Akaval, Vasanthan koothu, Pirathuman koothu, and Sarangaruban koothu are very unique to the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. Vasanthan koothu is significant to cultural heritage as it is centred on the agricultural economy and life of its people. It is performed by either 8 or 12 people using rods after harvesting. Several manuscripts from Kannankudah from the East also reveal rare agricultural heritage related information such as paddy cultivation, heritage seeds and varieties of rice that were used, farming and harvesting techniques, and management of labour. Manuscripts such as Kanchan Ammanai and Vathamana Akaval and many other manuscripts are still used in the religious rites and festivals in the temples. These manuscripts are living archives and are sacred, and they act not as mere knowledge carriers but as living cultures.

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. This text will be used on the EAP website.

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 appropriate treatment to the manuscripts as needed. We have also provided basic guidance about future maintenance/preservation of the manuscripts.

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 Noolaham Foundation's multimedia archival platform, <http://aavanaham.org/>

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

This text will be used on the EAP website.

Developing local capacity for field research, palm-leaf digitization, description, and project management was a key focus of the project. We established 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 and humanities backgrounds via this project. The team included a field researcher from the Tamil indigenous communities. The team was provided training in various areas including field research and ethics, data collection, manuscript cleaning, digitization and post-processing. One of the main objectives of this project was to enhance the capacity of field researchers to read, understand, and describe palm-leaf manuscripts in accordance with archival standards. During the course of this project, the field researchers were able to obtain the skills and experience to research and describe the manuscripts accordingly.

The EAP 835 team who worked at Noolaham Foundation shared their experience and contributed to the training as well. Previously, we also received training from the EAP 458 team based at the French Institute of Pondicherry related to the processing of palm-leaf manuscripts, which aided in further developing the training and capacity of the field researchers.

Expert guidance in identification and reading of the digitized palm-leaf manuscripts was provided by: 1. Mayooragiri Thiyagrajasharma, Sanskrit expert and editor of the newspaper Inthu Sathanam, 2. Dr. Sivashanmugaraja Sethumathavar, a Siddha and Ayurvedic medical practitioner, 3. Professor Krishnaraja Sellaiya, former head of the University of Jaffna's History Department, 4. Aitheepan Thevarasa, one of the Noolaham Field Researchers, 5. Mr. Shanmugam, a retired principal and *koothu* performance artist, 6. Mr. Maanahapodi, a local historian, and 7. Mr. Ketheesan, a mechanical engineer at the Ceylon Transit Board and palm leaf manuscript owner from Batticaloa.

Noolaham Foundation believes field research-based documentation is a critical capacity needed to document the knowledge resources of Tamil-speaking communities. This project contributed tremendously to building trained staff, a strong volunteer base and a community of practice for archiving. We also refined our digitization setup and metadata creation workflow. This has enhanced Noolaham Foundation's capacity to undertake 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.

Include references and links to content where possible.

Community outreach and events

Community outreach and creating awareness regarding the significance of palm-leaf manuscripts, and the need for preservation, was one of the primary aims of this project. The majority of Tamil community members in Sri Lanka have only heard of the palm-leaf manuscripts and have never seen them in real life, or even digitally. Thus, we held three community outreach events to engage the public in this project:

Major Exhibition

The most successful of these events was the palm-leaf manuscripts exhibition held on 22nd and 23rd of February 2021. It was held over a two day period and over 500 people attended the exhibition, including students, custodians, librarians, researchers, and the general public. More than fifty people provided written feedback about the event, which was overwhelmingly positive. The event received wide media coverage, including features in newspapers, television, radio and online media. The community outreach and media related to this project such as photos, articles, recordings and other media are compiled and archived on our multimedia archive, Aavanaham:

http://aavanaham.org/islandora/object/noolaham:eap_suvadi

Introductory Events:

1) Unit of Siddha Medicine, University of Jaffna, Kaithadi, Jaffna (March 2020)

Unit of Siddha Medicine, University of Jaffna held an exhibition in 2020 at Kaithady in which they allocated a stall for Noolaham Foundation. As the EAP project has digitized a good number of Sidhdha Medicine texts, this event was very successful as we were able to introduce it to the students who are direct users of these texts.

2) Akkaraipattu Book Fair (November 2021)

Noolaham Foundation participated in the event called Akkaraipattu Book Fair in which had a stall creating awareness on the EAP project. Community members including students participated in this event

Media Coverage

This project received considerable coverage from local and national media. Samples as follows:

Television Interview - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdGTTuyYRxI>

A news article, a news item and an editorial from Uthayan, a prominent newspaper

1. <https://noolaham.net/project/762/76119/76119.pdf> (Page 21 News)
2. <https://noolaham.net/project/762/76121/76121.pdf> (Page 10 Editorial)
3. <https://noolaham.net/project/762/76196/76196.pdf> (Page 19 Feature article)

Talks on Palm Leaf Digitization

Two online events were organized by Noolaham Foundation towards the end of the project

- Noolaham Talks with Balachandra Gnanasekaran on October 9, 2021 -

https://youtu.be/KIYuVxOw_gY

- Noolaham Talks with Bala Sivakadacham on November 20, 2021 -

<https://youtu.be/3qV0GD0BZfc>

Articles based on EAP1056/1260 collection

- Bala Sivakadacham's article on Mantkeni on Cekaracacekaram (Page 40)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G-S167sDk7Qfamiq-KlZergx_wEgncQG/view?usp=sharing

- Bala Sivakadacham's article on Thayveedu Magazine (Page 25)

https://thaiveedu.com/pdf/22/Jan_2022.pdf

7 State the steps taken to obtain any copyright clearance in the materials copied. Where available, please provide supporting documentation.

Please refer to the Grant Agreement.

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 (77) of all the collections digitized under this project.

8 Have any other funding bodies been involved in supporting this project? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, please provide details.

N/A

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

The EAP1260, the survey and digitisation of individual manuscript collections in Northern Sri Lanka has identified significant, and perhaps the largest, open and publicly accessible Sri Lankan Tamil and Sanskrit palm-leaf collections. These surviving endangered resources are a significant knowledge resource of the Sri Lankan Tamil speaking communities. This work would not have been possible without the EAP. The project team, Noolaham staff and volunteers, and the EAP program teams were instrumental in making this project possible and successful.

We have identified the following lessons learned as part of this project:

- When dealing with endangered resources, digitization/digital preservation should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity, preferably at the same time as surveying.
- We underestimated the amount of labour involved in cleaning and processing the manuscripts prior to digitization. Other Noolaham Foundation staff contributed in-kind labour to make this possible.
- Reading the manuscripts required specialized expertise, and these experts were often difficult to find or unavailable. We would engage language and subject matter experts earlier and throughout the project to avoid delays in project delivery.

- Close and detailed reading of the manuscripts was required to describe the material with a high degree of accuracy and consistency.
- From field work coordination, metadata creation to reporting, we relied on volunteer resources. Workflow improvements and staffing allocation are needed to reduce the workload on volunteers.

The EAP plays a critical role in preserving and making accessible knowledge resources from the Global South. We aim to build on this work in the near future.

We would like to conclude by translating the comment provided by the librarian, Mrs. Rupavathy Nadaraja, when she attended the palm-leaf exhibition outreach event. She was the former Chief Librarian of the Jaffna Public Library when it was burnt down in 1981 with 97,000 materials, 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 Kokuvil to 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 the staff who are undertaking this work with a community service mindset. My wishes and blessings."

Project Delays

- Covid outbreak started just 5 months into this project. Thus, organizing field work and coordinating the project got very hard. As we relied heavily on volunteers for the metadata work, there were significant delays to the project. Thus the project took 6 more months than planned.
- Main applicant was less involved in the project during the second half of the project because of personal reasons. Even though Noolaham Foundation carried out the project activities as usual, reporting and metadata related works were delayed as these activities were not carried out by staff in the past.
- As covid restricted movements, the volunteer participation was also restricted during the project period.

Notes on the expenditure statement:

- Even though the project took 6 more months than planned, as the expenses were paid based on the work done only, the project was managed within the budget. A second major exhibition planned could not be conducted because of covid restriction. Field work planned to for the Vanni region also was not carried out. Thus, the actual expenses of the project were 15% less than the budget.
- We received funds in total - £23,777 from the EAP (£14,632 on 17/09/2019 & £9,145 on 17/05/2021)
- The exchange rate used for the final report is £1.00 = Rs. 243.48. This exchange rate is the average rate of the first two instalments.
- The third and final instalment is £12,803.00. We spent £7,166.32 for the project thus far and the balance is £7,166.32
- A final instalment of £7,166.32 would cover the balance.

வரலாற்று ரீதியாக, இலங்கையின் தமிழ் பேசும் சமூகங்களில் அறிவு உருவாக்கம், ஆவணப்படுத்தல், கல்வி போன்றவற்றுக்கான முதன்மை ஆதாரமாக பனை ஓலை கையெழுத்துப் பிரதிகள் இருந்தன. காலனித்துவம், பிந்தைய காலனித்துவ அரசியல் மற்றும் பொருளாதாரச் சிக்கல்கள் மற்றும் அதைத் தொடர்ந்து முப்பதாண்டு கால உள்நாட்டுப் போர் காரணமாக, இந்த வளங்களில் பெரும்பாலானவை அழிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளன. EAP1260 இன் கீழ் எண்ணிம மயமாக்கப்பட்டு பாதுகாக்கப்பட்ட 600 பனை ஓலைச் சுவடிகள் (100,210 பக்கங்கள்), இலங்கையின் தமிழ் பேசும் சமூகங்களின் வளமான மற்றும் சிக்கலான அறிவியலின் பாரம்பரியத்தின் வலுவான மாதிரியை பிரதிபலிக்கின்றன. இந்தத் தொகுப்பு, பொதுவில் கிடைக்கும் தமிழ் பனை ஓலை கையெழுத்துப் பிரதிகளின் மிக அரிதான மற்றும் மிகப்பெரிய எண்ணிம மயமாக்கப்பட்ட மற்றும் திறந்த அணுக்கத் தொகுப்பாகக் கருதப்படுகிறது. கையெழுத்துப் பிரதிகள் 18, 19 மற்றும் 20 ஆம் நூற்றாண்டுகளின் காலங்களை உள்ளடக்கியது. கையெழுத்துப் பிரதிகளின் கருப்பொருள்கள் இலங்கைக்கும் தெற்காசியப் பிராந்தியத்திற்கும் தனித்துவமான உள்ளூர் மற்றும் நாட்டுப்புற மருத்துவ நடைமுறைகள் முதல் நாட்டுப்புற நாடகம் மற்றும் நடைமுறைகள் மற்றும் இலக்கிய மற்றும் மதப் படைப்புகள் வரை உள்ளன.

ஏட்டுச் சுவடிகளை ஆவணப்படுத்த பிரித்தானிய நூலகத்தின் வழிகாட்டலில் நூலக நிறுவனத்தினால் முன்னெடுக்கப்பட்ட இரண்டாவது செயற்றிட்டம் இதுவாகும். இச்செயற்றிட்டங்கள் மூலம் இலங்கைத் தமிழ் பேசும் சமூகங்களின் அறிவுப் பாரம்பரியம் தொடர்பிலான விரிவான ஆய்வுகளை இலகுவாக முன்னெடுக்கும் சந்தர்ப்பம் தமிழ் ஆய்வாளர்களுக்கு உருவாக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது.

11 Statement of expenditure

	Amount awarded (£)	Amount spent to date (£)	Amount committed to end of project (£)	Total spend (estimated) (£)	Variance (+ or -) (£)
Fees & salaries	25,950.00	24,386.37	0.00	24,386.37	1,563.63
Equipment & consumables	3,050.00	1,442.62	0.00	1,442.62	2,997.38
Travel & subsistence	4,440.00	2,035.28	0.00	2,035.28	1,014.72
Training costs					
Other costs	3,140.00	3,079.05	0.00	3,079.05	60.95
TOTAL	36,580.00	30,943.32	0.00	30,943.32	5,636.58

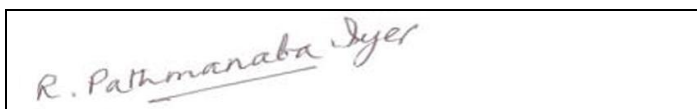
For Independent Researchers only

- ☐ Accounts from projects carried out by Independent Researcher must be validated by an appropriately qualified and independent professional before submission to the EAP office and accompanied by a letter of confirmation in English. Please check this box to confirm that the letter and receipts are attached.

For and on behalf of the Host Institution

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

Signature



Date

19 January 2023

Name

Rathina Iyer Pathmanaba Iyer

Email address

pathmanabhan@gmail.com

Position in Institution

Chairperson

Institution

Noolaham Foundation

Institutional stamp
(if available)


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

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

Signature of Project Lead

T. Kopinath

Date

19 January 2023