

# FINAL PROJECT REPORT

## Planning Grants

### Modern Endangered Archives Program (MEAP)

*This report template should be used as a final marker at the end of your MEAP project. This report should be sent at the same time as or after all digital files and metadata have been provided to the UCLA Library.*

The report consists of **FOUR PARTS**: (1) [PROJECT REPORT](#); (2) [PROJECT REFLECTION](#); (3) [FINANCIAL REPORT](#); (4) [ACCOUNTING REPORT](#).

The **Final Project Report** should detail work completed over the entire lifecycle of the project. We invite you to summarize the work of the whole project team, including training, digitization, metadata creation, and other project milestones. We also ask that you account for successes and challenges.

This is also an opportunity to reflect on the project as a whole. In the **Project Reflection**, we hope to learn about the key takeaways of the project. These takeaways might be focused on the local impact of the project: Is the local team ready to take on more digitization projects? Will the training and equipment help your archive continue to publish materials? Or, you may reflect more broadly on the successes of this work: What have you learned about the collection? What kinds of materials did you find? How will the publication of this material impact the shape of a field, community, or public narrative?

The **Financial Report** should account for all funds spent thus far and address how the final funding disbursement will be spent. Please note that the final MEAP funds will be disbursed after approval of this report.

The **Accounting Report** should be an official accounting of all MEAP funds from the beginning of the project. Only new receipts for hardware, software, or travel payments over \$500 should be included.

Submit report components in one email to [meap@library.ucla.edu](mailto:meap@library.ucla.edu).

**Date:** January 30, 2023

# MEAP Progress Report

**MEAP Number:** MEAP-2-0026

**Project Name:** Survey and Digital Preservation of Upcountry Tamil Archival Records

**Host Institution:** Noolaham Foundation

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## 1. PROJECT REPORT

1. **Is your project completed?** ☒ Yes ☐ No

*If not, what remains to be done?*

2. **Does your finished product match your anticipated goals?** ☒ Yes ☐ No

*If no, describe how your project outcome differed from the stated project goals.*

### **Project Details**

3. **Describe the primary results of your work**

*E.g. An item level inventory, collection report, preservation report*

The primary results of this project are as follows:

#### **1) Collection-level inventory**

The collection-level inventory consists of 207 collections (both individual and organizational collections) that our four field researchers were able to identify across the Upcountry region in Sri Lanka. The field researchers were based in

three different key geographical locations in the Upcountry - eastern, central, and western regions. The collection-level inventory reflects the diversity of the demographics and plantation economies across these regions. The inventory documents the following in both English and Tamil: date of survey, name of the surveyor/field researcher, title of collection, creator/guardian of collection, date(s) of collection, location of collection, country, collection summary, type of resource, extent, copyrights, and sample images from the fieldwork.

The collection-level inventory can be assessed here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/12JrMSdZ8Qq8MGbwvrR0LzwHUsOIk7EGK3dZiBoNIY9A/edit?usp=sharing>

## **2) Collection of short essays**

A collection of 26 short essays in Tamil were written by the four field researchers related to the key collections and items from the collections that they were able to locate and document from their respective regions. The essays provide an overview of the historical context of the collection/item and the scholarly, cultural, and evidentiary value and significance.

The collection of short essays can be assessed here:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1EspWVly1Z-gDOb\\_g-0WCis4uhBfhaY0eLn2I54J94g/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1EspWVly1Z-gDOb_g-0WCis4uhBfhaY0eLn2I54J94g/edit?usp=sharing)

## **3) Digitization samples**

We undertook digitization of a few collections for testing purposes in order to have representative examples of the materials that have been surveyed as part of this project. Some of the collection creators and guardians voluntarily offered us permission to undertake digitisation, and in circumstances in which it will be difficult to access the collections/materials in the future (i.e. the collection guardian is elderly or the materials are kept in deteriorating storage conditions), we have undertaken digitization for those materials to prevent their loss. We are primarily preparing these materials for the next phase of the project but have attached samples for your reference. Please note that these are raw tiff files and are not processed.

The digitization samples can be assessed here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1PpMUqW2w22f3eMJyShJxDFvfi6uVesDV?usp=sharing>

## **4) Collection/project page description**

A collection-level description to use in the MEAP collection/project page is also attached herewith:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XQwpKVHJ111SoUxFzUvwoTdlZc4KQzWZ4Vfzq1NyfNg/edit?usp=sharing>

**4. Describe relevant findings from your work**

*E.g. You discovered materials not previously identified; materials are now organized and available for physical use on site*

As part of the first phase of this project, we were able to survey and obtain information regarding 207 collections (both individual and organizational collections) across the Upcountry region in Sri Lanka. The key findings are documented in detail in the collection summaries of the collection-level inventory.

Please note that the creators/guardians have requested the collections below to be private, thus we have not listed them in the inventory:

MEAP\_2022\_034, MEAP\_2022\_037, MEAP\_2022\_051, MEAP\_2022\_080,  
MEAP\_2022\_116, MEAP\_2022\_205, MEAP\_2022\_206

**5. Where is the collection now housed?**

*Please include details about the physical condition of the material. Will the material still be available on site? Are the materials too fragile to share?*

The physical collections remain in custody of the creators/guardians of each collection. At Noolaham Foundation, we take a post-custodial archiving approach, and we do not store any archival collections or records. We facilitate the digital preservation, digitization, and description process in-house and once this work has been completed, we return the materials to the respective creators/guardians. The materials surveyed as part of this project will still be available on site.

**6. Did you require additional funding to complete this project?** ☒ Yes <sup>10</sup> No

*If yes, please provide details, including whether additional funding allowed you to digitize more materials or other collections.*

The first phase of this project - the survey thus far - has been carried out using the MEAP planning grant. We conducted digitization of some collections for testing purposes as mentioned above. However, to complete the digitization of the surveyed collections, additional funding is required. We plan to apply for the MEAP project grant in the Fall 2023 to pursue this further.

**7. What do you see as the next steps for this project?**

*For example, if you aim to digitize the collection, will you apply for funds, will you work*

*with a local institution to start the work right away? Does the collection require physical preservation or conservation?*

- a. **Did you conduct any test or preliminary digitization?** ☒ Yes <sup>10</sup> No  
*If yes, add any relevant detail.*

Yes, we have attached digitized samples of the records for your reference.

- b. **Did you secure permissions to digitize as a next step?** ☒ Yes <sup>10</sup> No  
*If yes, add any relevant detail.*

Yes, we do have written permission to digitize part of the surveyed collections. We also obtained verbal permission to digitize the majority of the surveyed collections.

- 8. Describe any steps taken to engage the stakeholder community in this work.**  
*E.g. Workshops held, webinars and training sessions led, conversations and connections made with stakeholders*

From the conceptual stage to the execution stage of the project, we ensured the active engagement of the stakeholder community. We consulted community leaders and members during the planning stage of the project. Initial community outreach work was carried out by the PI and Co-PIs at the beginning stages of the project. Several partnerships and contacts have been established with Upcountry-based community organizations including Malaiyaha Thamilar Panpaatu Peravai, Malayagam.lk, Frisdo, and the Upcountry Teachers' Union. Throughout the project period, we continually sought to expand our networks and learn from community insights.

The advisory committee, mentors, trainers, and the research manager for this project were members of the Upcountry community. The project execution team comprised five staff members, all from the Upcountry Tamil community and based locally, including two recent graduates from local universities. The field researchers were based in their own districts and reported to the Noolaham Foundation's Upcountry office which also had local Upcountry staff members.

Throughout the project cycle and in the process of the surveying, we connected with over 200+ individuals and grassroots community organizations from the Upcountry region for this work. Further details can be found on the collection-level inventory. We conducted various formal and informal group Zoom sessions to introduce the project as well as obtain community insights and feedback.

## 2. PROJECT REFLECTION

**Please note: answers below may be published on the MEAP website.**

### **1. What do you see as the biggest success of the project?**

*Note what went well overall during your project. Have you found exciting materials? Has the project team gone through training?*

The biggest success of the project was identifying 207 collections that speak to the history, culture, and heritage of the Upcountry community. The materials identified provide grassroots insights into the plurality of the community, from their linguistics to artistic and folkloric expressions, and tell the story of a community that is built on and formed from indentured labour, colonial political economy, and exploitation. The conventional historiography of the upcountry Tamil plantation community of Sri Lanka is often centered on the narratives of colonial agents and local elites. Amidst persistent hardship, exploitation, and dire living conditions, the upcountry Tamil plantation community built a dynamic culture, manifested in the forms of music, songs, dance, folk theater, storytelling, and performance. This culture of orality, the oral forms of creating and disseminating knowledge through ephemeral records, remains a key focal element of everyday lives, often bypassing the influence of conventional textual forms of knowledge transition. The survey was able to capture a glimpse of those knowledge resources and infrastructures otherwise silenced or sidelined or erased from the collective histories and historiographies.

### **2. Share some of the challenges you faced completing the project**

*Where did your team struggle and how did you work around or overcome those struggles?*

The primary challenges that we encountered have been both global and local. At the beginning of the project, we had to tackle COVID-19 pandemic related lockdowns and restrictions during the recruitment and equipment purchasing processes. Establishing our project team and the interview process took a bit longer due to COVID-19 restrictions as we were unable to conduct in-person interviews. A written exam was conducted and the candidates were shortlisted from the pool. Internet coverage difficulties and monsoon rains in the Upcountry region caused unstable internet connections when conducting interviews on Zoom and delays in candidates responding to the written exams. However, we were able to finalize and establish the project team soon thereafter.

The fieldwork part of the project was also affected greatly by COVID-19 pandemic related lockdowns. We had to take extra precautions for the health and safety of our team as well as of the (primarily elderly) people to whom we were connected in relation

to locating collections across the Upcountry region. We were able to work using alternative ways of connecting and communicating via phone calls and Zoom.

Toward the end of the project, Sri Lanka was hit by a severe economic crisis. Transport and internet services were stalled and limited, and there were continual power cuts. There were delays in terms of compiling project outcomes and finalizing the collection-level inventory. The field researchers would not have access to the internet or electricity to work on their computers for days at a time. We were able to gather as much information as possible through phone and texts and completed the project.

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

The project team comprised five staff members, all from the Upcountry Tamil community and based locally, including two recent graduates from local Sri Lankan universities. One of the project coordinators/field researchers was one of the first graduates to complete a university degree in his family and within his tea plantation community. We conducted a series of training sessions for the project team members. The sessions included Noolaham Foundation staff, mentors, and board members in addition to scholars from local and global universities. The topics covered ranged from field research methods, Upcountry community histories, metadata creation, survey best practices, etc. Throughout the project, we had weekly meetings via Zoom and feedback sessions during which the field researchers received feedback on the work by experts and scholars from local and global academic and archival institutions. The team gained theoretical as well as practical and applied research skills and knowledge that would be applicable to any humanities-related discipline/career.

**4. 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.*

The first phase of the project primarily consisted of surveying and creating a collection-level inventory. We plan to share the survey results among the local and global academic and research communities in the following months through participation in various conferences and seminars. We will disseminate the project results and the materials to the wider public once we begin the digitization of the project in the second phase.

**5. Can you describe one object or a set of objects from the collection that have particular meaning to you and the team?**

The field researchers have identified and written about 26 key collections/items that have some particular meaning to them. The essays are originally written in Tamil. We plan to translate selected essays into English in the following months.

**6. How should users approach the collection? What do you see as the main takeaways of this collected material?**

As this is still the first phase of the project, the users will only have access to the collection-level inventory. Once the identified collections/materials are digitized, users will have the opportunity to explore the collected and archived materials.

The main takeaway of the survey is that when you seek silenced voices and alternative primary sources produced by the source community itself, you will find them in unusual places. Where traditional histories and historiographies fail to reflect the totality, complexity, and the vibrancy of such communal existence, this survey tried to capture and document that existence through ephemeral archival records. Users should approach the collection and survey results as a multifaceted voice and grassroots history of the Tamil plantation community in Sri Lanka, a form and mode of resilience and resistance.

**7. What is something that surprised you about doing this work?**

*Please share something about the project that stood out to you as important, interesting, or challenging.*

What surprised me greatly while undertaking this project was how the history of colonialism and coloniality that connects the past and present, the indentured servitude and plantation economies brought by the British Empire, still lingers in spectral forms. The Upcountry Tamil communities are the descendants of nineteenth-century Indian laborers brought to work on Sri Lanka's British-owned tea, coffee, and rubber plantations. This community has historically suffered political disenfranchisement and continuous discrimination on all fronts, and adequate healthcare, education, and economic opportunity remain inaccessible to them to this day. If we look back at the colonial politics and political economy, and the history of the creation of these tea plantations, they were created to serve the colonial purpose.

The laborers were brought from India to clear the extensive dense mountain forests in the central highlands of Sri Lanka to create these plantations. These plantations were intentionally designed to be separated from the nearby villages and towns. A project recently carried out at the University of Basel on Critical Urbanisms extensively explores these issues, the tools of empire - how infrastructure shapes territories and governs the movements and processes within and across them. How infrastructure excludes, and also contains, curtailing the freedom and mobility of colonized peoples. The coloniality of that infrastructure has not changed, even a century after its formation. This greatly



influenced and affected the survey that we carried out, in terms of mobility and access, and reaching out to individuals and communities from remote plantations. Some of these plantation communities are settled high up on mountain ranges with no paved road access, and others have only recently been connected to the electricity grid. The constant question that I had was how best to archive the histories of these communities that have been, and continue to be, isolated and exploited for over a century and are the remnants of the British Empire and colonialism.

**8. If the language of the project was not English, please provide below a summary of the aims and achievements in the language(s) of the project.**

*This will be used to enhance discoverability of the digitized material online.*

The project was bilingual in Tamil and English.

### 3. FINANCIAL REPORT

<b>Total Project Budget:</b>	USD 15,000
<b>Total Amount Received:</b>	USD 13,500
<b>Total Amount Spent:</b>	USD 14,652
<b>Do you want to report a change in the budget that alters the final payment? (e.g. You need less money to cover the remainder of the project; you need more money based on actual expenses?)</b>  Please note additional funds are not guaranteed, but some additional funds related to Covid-19 delays may be available.	<input type="radio"/> <b>Yes</b> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <b>No</b>

<u>BUDGET CATEGORY</u>	<u>APPROVED BUDGET (USD)</u>	<u>FUNDS SPENT (USD)</u>
Salaries and Benefits:	8,460	7,699
Travel and Expenses:	1,400	1,635
Equipment and Consumables:	4,790	5,318
Training:	350	In-kind

Other Costs:	N/A	N/A
Total:	15,000	14,652

#### 1. Final Disbursal

*Describe how the final disbursal of funds will be spent. Will they cover expenses, salaries, or other payments already made?*

The majority of the amount of approved funds has already been spent in order to complete all project activities. These funds were provided (in advance) from Noolaham Foundation's operational budget; thus, the final disbursement will be a reimbursement of funds already expended per the above. The rest of the funds will be used to translate the selected essays written by the field researchers into English.

## 4. ACCOUNTING REPORT

**Attach a financial accounting report that details all funds spent thus far.**

*The report should be organized according to budget categories as detailed in your most recent Legal Agreement (see Attachment A - Statement of Work and Budget).*

Please see our detailed MEAP-2-0026 accounting report here:  
<https://tinyurl.com/2tfrbc9u>

Please note the difference in the approved versus funds spent in the categories of salaries and benefits, travel and equipment related expenses.

The purchasing of equipment and supplies (laptops in particular) took longer than anticipated as the Sri Lankan government had implemented import restrictions on electronics due to COVID-19. The supply of electronics was scarce, and we had to reach outside our regular suppliers to purchase the necessary equipment. The prices of the electronics, particularly laptops (for the use of field researchers) had also drastically increased due to the unavailability in the local market.

We also incurred additional travel expenses due to COVID-19 travel complications, as on several occasions the field researchers had to rely on private transport options. The costs of these options were also higher than usual due to scarcity and COVID-19 lockdown policies.

In order to remain within our original proposed budget, Noolaham Foundation allocated in-kind services of our core team to this project, i.e. our general Program Manager,

Research Manager, and Communications Coordinator offered their time and expertise in-kind for operations and execution of this project.

Training for the MEAP team was also offered by the Noolaham Foundation staff, mentors and board members, and other local and global experts/scholars in-kind.

**Please include new receipts for expenses over \$500.**

Please see below the receipts of expenses over \$500:

1. <https://tinyurl.com/4vsafunu>
2. <https://tinyurl.com/nhabs37f>
3. <https://tinyurl.com/2h3wujv4>