

# Documentation Culture of Sri Lankan Tamils on bibliographic activities

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**ABSTRACT:** In Sri Lankan context, it is true that the current era envelops the understanding of the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups and encourages mutual respect and documentation of their existence. This study is confined to the bibliographical activities of Tamils to provide some evidences regarding the documentation works of Tamils living in and outside of Sri Lanka. Despite the fact that Sri Lankan Tamils have a rich tradition in art of writing which is prerequisite of any bibliographic activity, they did not actively pursue a systematic study of their past due to their lack of attention in documentation and preservation, colonial invasion and then the escalation of civil war. Objective of this study is to identify some evidences of the documentation culture of Sri Lankan Tamils through the bibliographical activities. Using exploratory research method and descriptive research method, this study explains the identified bibliographic tradition relevant to published and unpublished literatures. Findings outline selected important bibliographic activities as milestones in documentation culture of Sri Lankan Tamils.

**Key Words:** sri lankan tamils; bibliographic traditions ; documentation ; documentation culture;

## Introduction

Literature represents a record of achievements of the people in a society and forms source of information to serve the informational needs of various researchers. If the documentation is treated as synonymous to document the documentation culture of Tamils too goes parallel with the long history and tradition of Tamil literature. Documentation in its widest sense used to address the recording of data, events, information and even knowledge. In Sri Lankan context, it is true that the current era envelops the understanding of the both ethnic groups and encourages mutual respect and documentation of their existence. During the colonial period there were several evidences of documentation were reported in the Blue Book, which is an official publication of British government. Among the evidences, publications namely *The Ceylon governors* (in Tamil) of T.K.Pillai, Catholic *Almanac* and *Tamil Almanac* of Catholic Mission Press Jaffna were published in 1889, 1890 and 1991 respectively. Despite the fact that Sri Lankan Tamils have a rich tradition in art of writing which is prerequisite of any bibliographic activity, they did not actively pursue a systematic study of their past due to their lack of attention in documentation and

preservation, colonial invasion and then the escalation of civil war. This study is an attempt to provide some evidences regarding the documentation culture of Sri Lankan Tamils living in and outside of Sri Lanka.

### **Tamil and Tamils**

Tamil is one of the ancient languages extremely as old as Latin and it has its own literary tradition-poetic theory, grammar, aesthetics- which is long and indescribably vast and rich. As stated by Hart, the professor of Tamil at University of California, the quality of classical Tamil literature is such that it is fit to stand beside the great literatures of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Chinese, Persian and Arabic. The subtlety and profundity of its works, their varied scope, and their universality qualify Tamil to stand as one of the great classical traditions and literatures of the world. (Hart 2000)

Contributors to the Tamil literature are mainly from Tamil people from South India, such as from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Sri Lankan Tamils from Sri Lanka, Tamils from Malaysia and from Tamil diaspora all over the world. Freeman argues that the literary history of Tamil writers in Sri Lanka is far less voluminous than that of their Sinhala counterparts, due partly to a fractured historical presence on the island and the absence of an equivalent temple-based system of education, but the oral traditions cannot be said to be any less rich (Freeman and Seneviratna 2013)

### **Sri Lankan Tamils**

Sri Lankan Tamils are natives of the South Asian island state of Sri Lanka. According to anthropological evidences and archaeological evidences, Sri Lankan Tamils have a long history in Sri Lanka. They constitute a majority in the Northern Province, live in significant numbers in the Eastern Province, and are in the minority throughout the rest of the country. 70% of Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka live in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Sri Lankan Tamils are culturally and linguistically distinct and their settlements also culturally similar to early populations of ancient Sri Lanka. The speakers of the Tamil language in Sri Lanka are not a single homogeneous ethnic community. Among the Tamil-speakers, there are different specific groups. (Indrapala 2006)

### **Concept of Documentation**

Documentation is defined as the study of the acquisition, handling, and communication of information, particularly relating to scientific reports; semi

published material, statistics etc. (Harrod 1987). Reitz has provided six kinds of definitions for the term Documentation based on librarianship, scholarly publication, archives, data processing, general aspects and Information Science. the first one refers that 'Documentation is the process of systematically collecting, organizing, storing, retrieving, and disseminating specialized documents, especially of a scientific, technical, or legal nature, usually to facilitate research or preserve institutional memory. (Reitz 2004)

Encyclopaedia of Information and Library Science provides 13 kinds of definitions for documentation. The first one refers to the recording of knowledge and the sources of knowledge, organising such records systematically so that they may be found quickly, and disseminating by various means both the knowledge and the sources of knowledge. The documentation committee in The Special Libraries Association in USA defines as "Documentation is the art comprised of document reproduction, document distribution, and document utilization" (Grosch 1972).

From the definitions described above one could come to the conclusion that the term Documentation could be considered as the a synonym for the term document and bibliography , a field of study, process of compilation of guiding tools to literature or even to mean all kinds of conventional and modern library techniques.

### **Objective of the study**

The objective of this study is to identify and explore some evidences in the documentation culture, especially through the bibliographic tradition of Sri Lankan Tamils starting from the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present times. The bibliographic activities of Sri Lankan Tamils could only be traced in the post independent era. The reasons for this situation are lack of active participation in the existing documentation centers established inside and outside the country by group of individuals interested in preserving the literary heritage of Tamils due to the changing attitude of Sri Lankan Tamils and Inadequacy of Institutionalized establishment of Archives and documentation centers for Sri Lankan Tamils.

### **Literature review**

The need for bibliographical guides to Tamil studies was felt by Father Thaninayakam and he assured that such guides have not been published before

even for any single field of Tamil studies. (Thaninayakam 1961). He compiled a bibliography of Tamil Studies and part of it was published in 1963 in the journal Tamil Culture.

A general study of the documents, extant in the Tamil language, which have a bearing on the historical background of the Jaffna Peninsula, does always evoke much cultural interest and afford abundant scope for valuable research. In this context the study made by Nadarajah in the field of Sri Lankan Tamil literature aims at studying *Vaiyapadal and yalpana vaipava malai*, the two ancient major documentary evidences in the history pertaining to Jaffna. (Nadaraja 1966)

The work namely "*Primary sources for history of the Sri Lankan Tamils: a worldwide approach.*" Is the first of its kind, documenting resources relating to the history and culture of the Sri Lankan Tamils available in various major libraries of the world and those resource centers. The outcome of this work reveals that there are quite sufficient primary resources available internationally to enable the future successful completion of a comprehensive history of the Tamils in Sri Lanka (Kunasingam 2005).

Another study attempts to focus that the documentation activities in relation to Sri Lankan Tamil documents and literature concludes that documentation activities of Tamil literature in Sri Lanka were not properly attended to (Maheswaran 2010).

Noolaham Foundation which has been successfully carrying out the task of documenting and preserving the knowledge bases of the heritages of the Tamil speaking communities in Sri Lanka organized an international conference on 2013 marking the completion of its 8th year on the theme "Documentation and Preservation in Sri Lankan Tamils" on the 27th and 28th of April 2013. This conference aims at identifying and discussing the goals that have been achieved so far and the goals that need to be achieved in the future in the areas of documentation, preservation and dissemination of knowledge. Fifty Educationists and researchers across Sri Lanka and from other countries contributed their research papers on ten different themes on documentation. (Noolaham foundation 2013).

## Methodology

Using exploratory research method and descriptive research method, this study explains the identified bibliographic tradition relevant to published and unpublished literatures. Basically exploratory research, which is conducted to

provide a better understanding of a situation, is used in this study. Using exploratory research method, it is hoped to produce hypotheses about what is going on in a particular situation. This study outlines the past practices and current developments of documentation culture of Sri Lankan Tamil people using the secondary data from published and non published materials. Further, descriptive research method also used to explain the identified milestones in bibliographic tradition of Tamils at Sri Lankan level with the analysis of relevant literatures and websites. Collections of evidences were made based on type of documents. Both published and unpublished materials were considered in this study.

### **Findings of Study**

Different kinds of works were identified in this study as evidences. They were the output of person from different backgrounds such as library profession subject specialists, academics, journalists, writers, Folk Artist and Educationist. Since all the outputs derived from documentation have the reference value and they are treated as secondary information resources which are produced from primary resources, the resources taken into this study could be focused in Tool type documentation. These bibliographic activities could be classified on the basis of type of documents such as Books and periodicals, Books, Journals and magazines, Newspapers, Images Manuscripts Reference resources. Important bibliographic activities related to the documentation work by Sri Lankan Tamils for the past five decades could also be traced from the analysis of collected evidences.

### **Bibliographies**

#### **Subject bibliographies**

One of the pioneer work of 'A reference guide to Tamil studies could be regarded as one of the pioneer work of Father Thaninayakam in the field of documentation. This work consists of 1322 materials, arranged alphabetically by author under 14 subject headings with sub headings - Text, Anthropology, Archaeology, Arts, Christian Mission, Epigraphy, Social history, history of literature, Language, Lexicography, Linguistics, Religion and Philosophy, Travel and description, Bibliographies and Catalogues (Thaninayakam 1966). This bibliography is confined to printed books and booklets which exist in languages other than Tamil about Tamil Studies. This list is not complete, since it

has not been easy to trace books published some fifty years ago, especially those in India. The selection of the materials was made from the point of view of one engaged in literary and cultural studies. Father Thaninayakam's contributions to scholarship and society, to tamilology and tamiliana, are likely to stand the test of time. Author index has been provided at the end of the book. This is a systematic subject bibliography and each entries includes author, title edition, publisher name, place, year and page number.

The first year of 1970s has recorded the important work of Nadarajah 'the history of tamil literary works in Ceylon. The first chapter of the book analyses the works of Tamil under five headings based on the political period of history of Sri Lanka. The second chapter records six publications under the heading 'Classics'. The third chapter list 21 publications under the heading ' puranas' The materials analysed in the second and third chapter are descriptive in nature and it can be named as descriptive bibliography addressing various editions, details of the authors and their other literary contributions. (Nadarajah 1970)

The magnificent collection of Sanskrit books comprising law, mathematics, Astronomy and Medicine in the name of 'The bibliography of Siddha Ayurveda' was compiled by Murugaverl, the former librarian of University of Jaffna in 1984. It is an unpublished work and preserved in the archives of University of Jaffna as typed manuscript. According to the author, the genesis of this bibliography goes back to the early sixties based on the collection of Sanskrit books in the University of Peredeniya. The author has made significant contribution to the Sanskrit world by collecting from various places such as library of the college of Indigenous medicine, visiting various residences of a vedamahatiayas, and vaidyas in Jaffna and in and around Kandy to see their personal collections. This bibliography is precisely what it is meant to be a preliminary survey. Newspaper articles, catalogues of drug manufacturers and manuscripts are excluded. The attempt is essentially list the available materials in Sri Lanka on the subject. The work consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 lists works considered to be of reference value, other chapters list the available materials by the languages they were written in. Altogether there were 3454 materials documented in this work (Murugaverl 1984)

Bibliography of publications produced in educational zone of Kankesanthurai in Jaffna was compiled by Apputhurai, a school principal, and published as a part of the souvenir 'Kankeyan kalvi malar'. Works published in

all kinds of materials were collected and arranged alphabetically by author under 14 subject headings. Each entry includes Author, title, publisher name, place of publication and year covering the educational zone (Apputhurai 1985).

The Bibliography of Tamil books of Ceylon during the period of 1955-70 was first published in 1971 as a part of a book '*varatharin pala kurrippu*'. (Senthinathan, K 1971). The arrangement of entries were under Eleven subject headings Short stories, Fiction, Dramas, Biographies, Poetry, Religious songs, Children books, books on literature, Religious Articles, Other Books and Books of Navalar-established by the author himself. Each entry has been arranged by title followed by Author, year, publisher, place of publication and the price.

In order to analyse and research the literary pursuits of the eastern Muslims and their place in the development and growth of Sri Lankan Tamil literature, the work of Jameel, a renown academic, and his significant contribution of the publication '*Suvadi Arrtupadai*' is the major milestone.(Jameel 1994). This four volume book consisting 1977 materials is prepared with the aim to act as a handbook to help the researchers and to search for historical Islamic literature. These volumes contain the bibliographical details of all books published by the Muslims in Sri Lanka since the printing of the first book in 1868. It also contains the books published selectively about Muslims. The arrangement of this bibliography is based on chronological order covering hundred years of publishing of Muslim from 1850-2000. This effort has not been initiated so far in India, Malaysia or \Singapore with regard to Muslim writings. He is the only person among 2000 literary personalities lived and written in Tamil language on Muslim culture during the last 150 years, who has thought of and accomplished this task of documenting all Muslim publications, which will register a permanent place for him in the literary history of the country.

'*Elatthu Tamil Navalkal*' is a selective bibliography of Tamil fictions covering the period of 1885-1976 published in 1978. It has three parts consisting of 439 materials. First part consists of 210 books, second part covers 94 items published in newspapers and magazine and the third part lists the details of 135 novels which has no bibliographic details (Subramaniam 1977)

One of the most important works in the field of documentation was the '*Batalonia*' which is considered as the tedious and arduous task of Selvarajah, the former librarian of Batticalo public library. This bibliography contains published writings available in Sri Lankan libraries on the Batticalo and its surroundings. Variety of materials such as souvenirs, magazine articles,

institutional records, ephemeras and government records were collected and organised under 29 subject headings alphabetically (Selvarajah 1989)

**Noolthettam** - a bibliography of Tamil Books by Sri Lankan Tamil writers from home and abroad constitutes Sri Lankan Tamil repository of modern literary work. The aim of this bibliography is to bring together the published literature in Tamil language. The compiler of this bibliography, Mr.N.Selvarajah who was a librarian and now lives in London, has so far succeeded in bringing out 6000 Tamil books in six volumes in different periods (Selvarajah 2010). This massive project which should be a work of University or state department is being undertaken as one man project. The first volume of Nool Thettam containing around 600 pages is published annually since the year 2002. (Selvarajah 2002) Each of the volume contains the particulars of a thousand books, their authors and relevant information and the seventh volume is at present in process. He has published another work consisting 323 books of Tamil writers written in English language. This bibliography is the product of the new millenium and the compiler embarked on an attempt in 2000 to collect the publications of Sri Lankan Tamils scattered amid various parts of the globe, unconstrained within geographical or time factors, classify them and compile a series of bibliographical volumes.

### **Personal bibliographies**

'Navalarial' is a selective personal bibliography compiled by two library professionals listing of the writings by and on Arumuganavalar and his works. (Krishnakumar and Sivanesachelvan 1979). In this context numerous works have been made by the students of DIPLIS course conducted by Sri Lanka Library Association as a part requirement to complete the Diploma. Apart from this, there are notable published works carried out by Selvarajah, Nisamudeen, Thavamani devi etc at individual level.

The work carried out by N.Selvarajah on the Bibliography of Kailasapathy, the well known literary critic of Tamil society which consists of 238 works comprising books, magazine and articles has been divided into four parts. The first part consists of periodical articles written by the author. Second part consists of the Introduction, forwards, appreciations, critical appraisals provided by him to various publications. The third part provides the alphabetical list of the article. The fourth part includes articles published in souvenirs. (Selvarajah 1988).



### **Bibliography of reference resources**

A bibliography compiled by Karunanantharajah tried to document the reference resources published in Sri Lanka covering more than 135 years of productions. A bibliography of Directories, Encyclopedias, yearbooks published in Sri Lanka during 1850-1985 was compiled as the part requirement for the Post Graduate Diploma in Library and Information Science conducted by University of Kelaniya. This work is descriptive in nature covering full bibliographical details followed by a brief account of the nature of the publication (Karunanatharajah 1986).

### **Selective bibliography of books and other resources**

It is a worthwhile noting the assignment by Thavamani devi, the librarian of Eastern University of Sri Lanka. She compiled a selective bibliography of Nadarajah who is one of the few Tamil Literary giants among Tamil scholars and his scholarly contributions to the Tamil world includes more than 14 books, about 200 essays and many research papers presented at National and International Seminars, notably in Malaysia and India. It is not only timely but also confers a privilege and an opportunity to the Tamil community in general to acquaint themselves with his valuable contributions. Arrangement of this bibliography follows chronological order under four sub headings - articles, speeches, forwards to books and appreciations. Materials in which the year of publication is unknown are listed alphabetically under each sub headings. (Thavamani Devi 1991)

### **Bibliography of Ola leaf manuscripts**

Contributions of Mr. Murugaverl to documentation culture particularly in the field of Ola leaf manuscripts could be treated as an important contribution made in the 1990s. He has compiled a catalogue of Ola leaf manuscripts available in University of Jaffna. It was published as two volumes in different periods. The first one was published in 1992 and the second one was in 1997. It has three parts. In the main body of the text, 207 ola leaf manuscripts have been listed based on numerical order covering bibliographical details of title, the starting and ending of text, number of leaves, the size of the leaves and other physical descriptions and notes. A title index has been provided to facilitate the use of this text. The second part provides title index and the third part subject index which has 54 subject headings established by the author (Murugaverl 1992).

### **Online bibliographies**

Viruba.com is a comprehensive database functioning in the name of 'Tamil puttaka takaval tirattu' since 2005 comprising the details of Tamil publications worldwide. It is one of the very important contributions in the field of online documentation by Kumaresan, a Sri Lankan Tamil living in Madras. This database has so far documented details of Tamil books(3451), Authors (1500), Publishers(640), Type of documents (121), Critical reviews(207), Translations (121).(www.viruba.com 2014)

### **Indexes**

#### **Index on Journal Articles**

An Indexing work devoted to Research Articles from the Journal 'Cintanai' is another documentation activity by Satiyaseelan (1994) an academic from University of Jaffna covering 126 research articles written by the academic staff of University of Jaffna on various subjects from 1976. It has been arranged alphabetically.

#### **Index on Souvenirs Articles**

In Sri Lankan Tamil publishing, Souvenirs publications play important roles as other materials like books, Pamphlets, magazines, newspapers which are published for various purposes. The main purpose of souvenirs is to document the events of an organisation concerned with the souvenir publishing. Souvenirs are also published to mark the silver, diamond, golden jubilee celebrations of organisations and individuals and carry very valuable articles in various aspects. In this context, It is appropriate to quote the work of Selvarajah, who has collected 2202 articles from 150 souvenirs published in Sri Lanka and indexed them under classified sequence. (Selvarajah 2005).

### **Conclusion and Suggestion**

The present study revealed the fact that most of the bibliographic activities were carried out by the persons with good subject background but lack of professional skill in documentation. They compiled the bibliographies with the system they devised on their own based on their experience and imagination. However considering many evidences, which shows documentation culture of Sri Lankan Tamils are still in developing process with the support of institutions and individuals.

No evidences could be traced in the documentation of materials in scientific disciplines like natural sciences, Social sciences and Agriculture. Early works of documentation covers the Sri Lankan literature under the title 'Tamil Studies' covering Social Sciences and Humanities. However recent works includes scientific publications too.

This study emphasizes on the need of the national policy on the development of documentation culture for both ethnic groups of Sri Lanka. This could pave way for mutual understanding and play as an evidence for the historical development of specific ethnic groups. Deep researches of this kind could be encouraged for the documentation about documentation culture of this nation.

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