

TAMIL MALAYSIANA COLLECTION: A NATIONAL HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT

The Tamil Malaysiana collection at the University of Malaya Library is a unique, comprehensive and renowned collection in the country. It has been an important source of reference for researchers since its inception in 1956, which was in line with the establishment of the Indian Studies Department. The earliest collection of this library dates back to 1882. The collection is deemed a national heritage from its historical and archival contribution. Nowhere in the country attempts has been made to capture and preserve the local scene and happenings in the Tamil language. It has been a vital source of reference for activities in the country such as story writing competition, preparation of speeches, exhibitions, scholarly writings, etc. This paper traces to the first compilation of local materials published in the Tamil language and discusses briefly the translated works from the Malay language. It also lays down the current efforts taken to sustain the local collection and future plans to reach out to the nation.

Keywords: University of Malaya Library; Local Tamil collection; Library heritage collection; Malaysiana; Collection development; Library services.

ABSTRAK

Koleksi Tamil Malaysiana di Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya adalah suatu koleksi yang unik, menyeluruh dan terkenal di negara ini. Ia telah menjadi sumber rujukan penting bagi penyelidik sejak penubuhannya pada tahun 1956, sejajar dengan penubuhan Jabatan Pengajian India. Koleksi terawal perpustakaan ini adalah pada tahun 1882. Koleksi ini dianggap sebagai warisan negara kerana sumbangannya kepada sejarah negara. Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya adalah satu-satunya pusat yang berusaha untukterus mengumpul dan memelihara kejadian dan peristiwa tempatan dalam bahasa Tamil. Koleksi ini adalah sumber rujukan untuk aktiviti-aktiviti di negara ini seperti pertandingan menulis cerita, penyediaan ucapan, pameran, tulisan-tulisan ilmiah, dan lain-lain. Kertaskerja ini mengesan kompilasi pertama bahan-bahan tempatan yang diterbitkan dalam bahasa Tamil dan membincangkan secara ringkas usaha

M. Vijayalatchumy & S. Janaki

penterjemahan kerja-kerja dari bahasa Melayu. Ia juga menggariskan usaha-usaha semasa yang diambil untuk mengekalkan koleksi tempatan ini, signifikansi koleksi ini kepada pengguna serta pelan masa depan untuk menjangkau pengguna.

Katakunci: Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya; Koleksi Tamil tempatan; Koleksi warisan perpustakaan; Malaysiana; Pembangunan koleksi; Perkhidmatan perpustakaan

INTRODUCTION

The National Heritage Act of Malaysia (2005) defines cultural heritage as any tangible form pertinent to the historical or contemporary way of life of Malaysians. In the library and information science context, Malaysiana refers to any written work about the country, or authored by a Malaysian. It also includes written work published in Malaysia. Heritage in this context refers to the collection of Tamil Malaysiana.

Dempsey (2001) describes archives, libraries and museums as memory Institutions for sustaining and preserving the memory of man, society, the resulting cultural heritage of all time. The Indian Studies Library at the University of Malaya has taken an implicit in national responsibility to preserve the memory, past and present of the Indian community in the country. The Tamil Malaysiana collection at the University of Malaya library currently has about 2,500 local documents in various formats. Moreover, the library also has nearly 49 bound journal titles published locally and externally, a collection of University of Malaya undergraduates' academic exercises from 1999 and a collection of local newspapers such as *Tamil Nesan*, *Malaysia Nanban* and *Makkal Osai* since 2008.

The collection development began with the establishment of the Indian Studies Department at University of Malaya (Singapore) in the year 1956. The first head of department, Dr M. Rajakannu was very passionate about classical works in the Tamil language. He travelled to various parts of Malaysia giving talks, donating books and funds to build up collection in that area. His passion inspired many in the country, both local born ethnic Indians and India born Indians to embark on writing short stories, reports for newspapers and magazines and various newsletters and bulletins.

TAMIL MALAYSIANA: THE LOCAL COLLECTION

The first person to compile a list of Tamil books and periodicals published in Malaysia-Singapore was Dr Rama Subbiah. He was the first Malaysian born ethnic Indian to head the Indian Studies Department at the University of Malaya.

M. Vijayalatchumy & S. Janaki

He began this arduous task in the year 1966. The *Checklist of Tamil books and periodicals published in Malaysia and Singapore* (Figure 1) was published by the Library rendered possible by a generous grant from the All Malaya Nattukkottai Chettiars' Fund. The earliest local publications began way back in years 1893 and 1887, during the era of Singapore-Malaysia. One of the early books was about the Postal Office services in Malaya-Singapore published in 1904. There was a conference proceeding in 1922, the *All Malaya Tamil 2nd Conference* in Penang. There was one discussion about the future of Indians in this country in 1936. A book on the Formation of Malaya by Palanyappan Chettiar was in 1937. There was a case report in Penang General Hospital published in 1941.

Inspired by the enormous myths, legends and tales hallowing around the Tamil culture and language, many of the local publications are attempts at novel writing. The first Tamil novel published in Malaysia was in 1917, written by Venkateratnam. The *Dream of the Education* was written in 1936 by Sivagnanam. Since then more than 500 novels and short stories have been written by local born ethnic Indians. In fact, popular Indian authors such as Sivasangari and Satyamuthi have written about the beauty of Malaya. These works were distributed both in India and Malaysia. Annual reports of local political parties, schools, companies and temples, reflect the diversified Malaysian way of life. Academic exercises by undergraduates vary from religion, politicians, and famous people in the country.

The first Malay translated work was in 1946 when the infamous historical book titled *Sejarah Melayu* was translated by Rama Subbiah. Again it was funded by the All Malaya Nattukottai Chettiars' Fund. In 1964, the *Malay-Tamil-English dictionary* was compiled by Vellusamy. *Sajak-sajak Melayu dan terjemahannya* by Selvam Joseph in 1976, *Persidangan Pertemuan Penulis-Penulis Melayu, Tamil dan Tionghoa*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 1976 and *Puisi Tamil* in 1977 are some examples of translated works.

The earliest newspaper in the country was *The Muslim Naisen* (Figure 2) published 1882. It was a collaborative effort by The Penang Indian Muslims who came to Malaya as early as 18th century (Seeni Naina Mohamed, 2011). Other newspapers include *Malaya Mitiran* in 1932, *Desa Nesan* in 1933, and *Malaya* in 1957. The *Tamil Murasu* newspaper which is now no longer in production, printed the Merdeka Special in August 1957.

M. Vijayalatchumy & S. Janaki

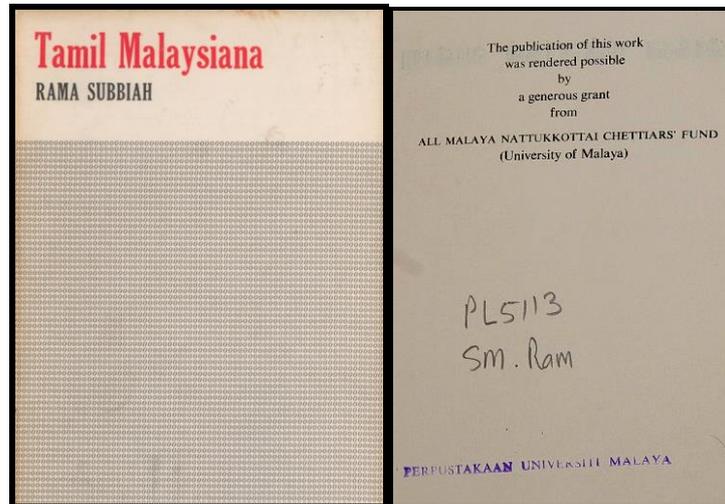


Figure 1. *The checklist of Tamil books and periodicals published in Malaysia and Singapore*

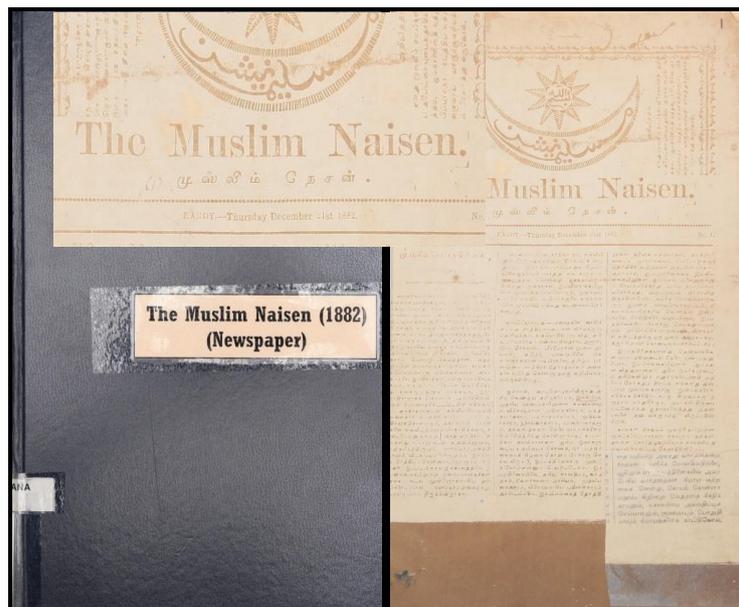


Figure 2. *The Muslim Naisen* published 1882

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MALAYSIANA COLLECTION TO THE NATION

The Tamil Malaysiana Collection is the most comprehensive collection in the country for scholars and researchers. Four public universities and six teachers'

M. Vijayalatchumy & S. Janaki

training colleges in Malaysia currently provide Tamil programmes either graduate or postgraduate level. Studies on the history of Malaysian Tamil literature, especially novels, short stories, poems, researches on culture, religion and Malaysian Indian society's beliefs mostly are based on this resource. Teachers who continue their studies through open universities also refer to this collection for their assignment and research.

The Tamil Malaysiana Collection is also significant in ensuring the sustainability of local information. Local events which take place from time to time are archived from local newspapers, conference proceedings, scholars and students' research, periodicals and others include reports of non-governmental organizations, biographies, autobiographies, pamphlets, pictures, audio visuals and oral history in the form of taped interviews. The Tamil Malaysiana Collection at the library is kept separately from the main collection. A special label for this collection 'Malaysiana' (Figure 3) is affixed to the spine of the book. These books are inventoried as 'Tamil Malaysiana Collection' and displayed in library OPAC (Figure 4). Exchange programmes with National Library of Singapore, Malaysian Tamil Writers Association and at times personal contact with local Tamil writers are other efforts taken to build and sustain the collection.



Figure 3. Sample monograph with 'Malaysiana' label

M. Vijayalatchumy & S. Janaki

Detail

Select an Action

Muthala:vathu Ulakath Thamil-matai A:ra:ycci Ma:nha:t:u-Male:ciya: 2005 held on 17-19 Jun 2005 in Batu Caves, Selangor

Title: Muthala:vathu Ulakath Thamil-matai A:ra:ycci Ma:nha:t:u-Male:ciya: 2005 held on 17-19 Jun 2005 in Batu Caves, Selangor
Conference Author: Muthala:vathu Ulakath Thamil-matai A:ra:ycci Ma:nha:t:u (1st: 2005: Batu Caves, Selangor)
Publication Information: Batu Caves : Malaysia Thamilar oringkinaippu iyakkam, 2005.
Physical Description: 1000 p., 24 cm.
General Note: Tamil script. Tamil Malaysiana. UMP. Koleksi Persidangan. Theme: Thamil- matai. Thiruvalluvar thantha thirukkuralukku "Thamilmarai" enum peyarai munnetuthu ulakalavil natathu appatta muthalavathu araycci manatu. Study on Tirukkural, ancient Tamil didactic poetry, by Tiruvalluvar, Tamil poet.
Personal Subject: Tiruvalluvar. Tirukkural-Congresses. Tiruvalluvar-Ethics-Congresses.

0 Likes

Place Hold

Available:2

Library	Material Type	Shelf Number	Status
P14-Pengajian India/Indian Studies Library	Restricted Book	PL4758.09 TSMUT 2005	Tamil Malaysiana Collection
P14-Pengajian India/Indian Studies Library	Book/Buku	PL4758.09 TSMUT 2005	STACKS
P14-Pengajian India/Indian Studies Library	Book/Buku	PL4758.09 TSMUT 2005	Being transferred between libraries

Figure 4. Sample record in library OPAC for Tamil Malayiana material

The Curriculum Development Division, which operates under the Ministry of Education, is responsible for formulating and developing the school curriculum to enhance the quality of education in line with the National Education Philosophy. There are seven languages that operate under the supervision of the Deputy Director of Humanities Field devoted to drafting the Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (KSSR) and the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools (KBSM). In 2011, when KSSR was designed to Tamil schools and KBSM for Secondary School Tamil education, the Curriculum Coordination Unit used the Tamil Malaysiana collection as a source of reference to prepare modules and supporting materials. The comprehensive collection allowed them to make the best choice in selecting local Tamil novels and short stories for STPM paper 2 and also for preparing notes for Tamil grammar. In addition, materials for reading comprehension, and moral education for KSSR syllabus, which reflected the atmosphere of Indian community in Malaysia also used the Tamil Malaysiana collection as a source of reference.

Local medias such as Tamil Newspapers, television channels like RTM, Astro Vaanavil also refer to Tamil Malaysiana collections while preparing documentaries for their broadcasts. RTM and Astro Vaanavil for instance

M. Vijayalatchumy & S. Janaki

regularly broadcast documentaries on Indian communities in Malaysia and they use Tamil Malaysiana collection to get more comprehensive information. Documentaries of local writers, Tamil scholars, Tamil books, and the history of Tamil society either government bodies like MIC or NGOs also use the collection of Tamil Malaysiana. Others include the television documentaries such as '*Vidiyalai Nokki*' – the RTM documentary which touches contributions of Malaysian Indian community to the nation since the British era to this day; '*Thai Manne Vanakkam*' – also a RTM documentary about Malaysian Tamil politicians; and '*Tottam Sollum Kathai*' - an Astro Vaanavil documentary about the social and economic conditions of Malaysian Indians who migrated from the estates to the cities.

Local exhibitions on the theme of local personalities, language, religion and culture, require reference materials that is accurate and comprehensive. The richness of this collection plays an important role in providing a wealth of information that can provide insight to the exhibitioners to design and display their exhibitions. The remarkable depth and diversity of this collection provides a unique opportunity for the exhibition conductors to catch a glimpse of resources that have largely been 'hidden treasures'.

UMUC (University of Malaya UNESCO Club) organized an exhibition in conjunction with the celebration of "Hari Bahasa Ibunda" in 2012. The exhibition was held to emphasize the importance of "Mother Tongue" among the youths, especially students of University of Malaya. During that event, Tamil Malaysiana collection was chosen to showcase the history of Tamil literature's growth in Malaysia. Again this depicted the illustration of richness of information and variety in Tamil Malaysiana collection.

Palm leave manuscript collection within the Tamil Malaysiana which tells the story of several chapters in the Ramayana, the techniques and the importance of meditation and knowledge of astrology is written by Tamil community in Malaysia. The Indian Studies Department used these collection for an exhibition during the International Conference of Siddha Medicines in 2010.

Malaysian Press Institute is a non-governmental body responsible for recognizing the work and journalism products through Malaysian Journalism Awards. The Malaysian Press Institute utilizes the Tamil Malaysiana collection to select the best Tamil articles from Tamil newspapers and journals published in Malaysia. This clearly demonstrates that this collection is crucial in offering a comprehensive reference materials for teaching, learning and research not only within the university but also for the whole nation.

M. Vijayalatchumy & S. Janaki

MANAGING, DEVELOPING AND PRESERVING TAMIL MALAYSIANA COLLECTION

Tamil Malaysiana collection serves as a depository agent of Tamil materials, old and new, for future generations. Continuous efforts of preservation should be long lasting due to the intrinsic value of that heritage which is being preserved (Ekwelem, 2011). For instance, Umar Pullavar Tamil Language Centre in Singapore has a significant Tamil collection within their library. This library establishes its own heritage collection of Tamil language as there is a dire need to develop the heritage collection. Indians, as early immigrants to Singapore, contribute towards nation building, history of the Indian settlers—their culture, literary and art traditions collected in a systematic manner in the library. This library offers a vast amount of scholarly monographs and journals for research into Tamil history (Malarvele Ilangovan & Susan, 2003).

In the early stages of development of this collection, the main challenge was the difficulty in obtaining locally published Tamil materials. Most of the materials published are distributed by the author themselves. It takes a relatively long period to identify and contact the authors to get their works. The library relies heavily on advertisements in the local Tamil newspapers to find out about book launches and to get information link to the purchase. The method is not very encouraging to build a comprehensive collection where titles can be left out.

The other challenge is to ensure that the collection can be leveraged by many for which the aspects should be intensified. Promoting library services is very important because some libraries have a good and comprehensive collection but not many users are aware of the existence of the collection (Norasiah Haji Harun, 2006).

FUTURE PLANS

Collaboration with technical based institutions like INFITT (International Forum for Information Technology in Malaysia) and HYO (Hindu Youth Organization) will certainly help to move this library service to a higher level. Collaboration with INFITT will undoubtedly benefit the library for various academic related materials in various formats such as Tamil Unicode Softwares, Tamil Translation Softwares, updates on new Tamil open softwares and so on. There were varieties of resources and information about Tamil open software derived from INFITT through earlier collaboration. The recent collaboration with one of the local NGOs namely 'Hindu Youth Organisation' (HYO) Port Klang helped to set up Tamil, Arabic and Chinese writing scripts in thin client software of the main library PCs. Collaboration with INFITT is the future target to strengthen and increase the number of Tamil Malaysiana collection in digital form.

M. Vijayalatchumy & S. Janaki

Collaboration with external parties can also make an impact on the accumulation of a larger, strong and extensive collection in a variety of formats. The South Asian Studies Centre in Sydney has contributed primary sources of the Portuguese, Paris, Dutch, British, American Mission, Sri Lankan and Indian manuscripts in the form of microfilms and microfiches dating 15th to 20th century. This centre holds over a million of primary sources related to mainly South Asia and specifically Sri Lanka. This type of collaboration will certainly help to add more value to the collection and broaden the scope of the Tamil Malaysiana collection.

Information preparation in the form of digital via “global network infrastructure” is an important factor in the development and provisions of the use of this collection (Kathryn & Lee, 2013). This implies a swift switch from the traditional role of the library as a 'clearing house' and service center for printed publications, into or towards a role of a supplier of network services for digital information resources. In this context, this collection could be entirely 'virtual', mediating between the knowledge requirements of internal and external users.

Net generation users will give more emphasis to easy access compared to on-site access (Lynch, 2008). This indicates that the status of the library depends on the service compared to the amount or quality of the collection. Therefore, if the library intends to serve as a 'knowledge mediator' to local Tamil heritage collection, then it must ensure the use of accurate mechanisms to meet the needs of users. Efforts such as digitization will increase the visibility and usage of this collection. Creating electronic versions of the materials and making them available online, for current work, study or leisure, will also ensure the perseverance for future generation (Graham, 2003).

The future success of this library service is also highly dependent on the relationship between the library and users. A greater understanding of the type of information resources, services and facilities needed by the researchers would be useful. One easy way to reach out to library users is using social media services such as Wiki, Blog, Facebook and Twitter (Mishra, 2008). The latest information about new titles and book launches in Malaysia as well as response to user inquiries will add a sense of belonging to the library users. The exploitation of existing web technologies further reduces the gap between users and the library that will ensure the sustainability and continual use of the collection.

CONCLUSION

Tamil Malaysiana collection is nearly 130 years old national heritage value. The entire library collection is also commonly accepted as one of the largest Tamil book collection in Southeast Asia. The Tamil Malaysiana collection has played important roles in facilitating references, knowledge development, academic

M. Vijayalatchumy & S. Janaki

writing and history in this country. This effort should be continued as it will ensure its strength. Warm, welcoming and friendly spaces will also be a remarkable opportunity to become a place to exchange ideas by the scholars and researchers. This library also holds the biggest responsibility to raise the awareness of the importance of literacy (all kinds) to its research community by demonstrating necessary skills to locate, select, organize, and document information using appropriate technology and information systems and analyse, evaluate, and apply relevant information from a variety of sources. Collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations will also help to improve the facilities and services offered and enhance access by local and foreign researchers. Considering the unique history of its existence, maintaining and improving the library functions in line with technological developments and customer needs should be given high priority.

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M. Vijayalatchumy & S. Janaki

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