

## **A study on some of the selected bibliographies compiled covering palm-leaves literature in Sri Lanka**

**Rev.L.Piyarathana**

piyarathana1010@gmail.com

### **Introduction**

The history of the book, which is considered to be the most powerful tool in the transmission of human knowledge, goes back to the origins of the art of writing. It is believed that the origin of the art of writing took place about 5000 years ago (Gunasekara, 1990). Documents originated long before the advent of printing. They were handwritten and called as manuscripts. Writing can be described as the most powerful tool for providing information and knowledge to human beings. According to the Sinhala Dictionary, the art of writing is the writing of literary art and work. It refers to the art of writing articles and books according to a certain pattern or tradition (Sannasgala, 1961). Writing means cutting, scratching and digging (The Oxford Thesaurus, 2021).

### **Art of writing**

Some express that the oldest writing material in the world was rock (Weerasinghe, 2014). Since then, clay tablets have been widely used. Clay tablets were popular among the Babylonians (Weerasinghe, 2014). After clay tablets, papyrus came into multiple uses. Parchment came into use after papyrus. In addition, wood, bamboo, metal sheets, animal bones, and tree bark have been used as writing material in various periods and contexts (Perera, 1960). Among the Asian countries, palm leaf or Ola leaf was the most popular writing medium in the past in Sri Lanka, including in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. There is evidence that the use of palm leaves for writing in Sri Lanka dates back to pre-Mahinda era (Somadasa, 1959).

Thus, the tradition of palm leaf writing in Sri Lanka, which began in ancient times, continued uninterrupted until the early 20th century. However, with the introduction of the printing press by the Dutch in 1737, the art of parchment writing began to decline. The printing and publishing of palm leaf books is an event that can be seen in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Sinhala Sahitya Vamsa contains information on most of the books thus printed with the publication of the printing industry (Sannasgala, 1961).

Linguists acknowledge that written practice is based on human speech. E.B. Taylor and L.M. Morgan, anthropologists, writing and urbanization went parallel during the civilization (Pemananda, 1998).

Evidence shows that the art of writing has existed in Sri Lanka since ancient times. The art of writing is first mentioned in the story of Prince Vijaya, who established a settlement on the island in the sixth century. He sent a letter with gifts to King Padi asking him to bring the daughter of King Padi for his anointing. Mahavamsa (Buddhadatta Thero ed. 1959). Evidence for the use of documents in Sri Lanka dates back to the 6th century BC. It dates back to the 3rd century. That was in BC. With the introduction of Buddhism during the reign of Devanampiyatissa who ruled from 236-276. The short inscriptions in the caves that were dug and offered for the abode of the monks are considered to be the oldest inscriptions found today. Mahavamsa (Buddhadatta Thero ed. 1959).

Basel states that man first began the art of writing by writing on earth or sand (Weerasinghe, 2014). Later, various materials were used for writing. Pemananda mentions that the rock was the early oldest writing material in the world.

#### **Study of bibliographies covering palm leaf**

Ranasinghe (2011) pointed out, the tradition of palm leaf writing is mainly divided into two parts as the Chula tradition and the Maha tradition. The Chula tradition refers to works that do not take an abstract form, as well as documents written by ordinary people. Collective bibliographies were written by indigenous physicians, fortune-tellers, etc. can be referred to as works belonging to the Chula tradition. The palm-leaf books of the great tradition are classical Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit texts, including Tripitaka literature. The language of these is expressive. In recent times, local pamphlet books first came to the attention of the state in the last quarter of the 19th century. Thus compiled 'A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Pali and Sinhalese Literary Works in Ceylon' by Rev. James de Alwis was published the first volume of the book in 1870 under the direction of the then British Colonial Government. The Quantitative bibliographic descriptions of bibliographies compiled over a period mentioned in the 20 and 26 pages of 'Bibliography of Ceylon' by Ian Goonetilleke's first volume (Goonetilleke, 1970).

The Museum Library was established in 1877 with the integrating of the collection of the Government Oriental Library. Compiled by Mahmudali Lewis de Zoysa, Librarian of the Museum produced the Catalogue of Pali Sinhalese and the Government Press published Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Ceylon

Government Oriental Library with 26-pages list in 1882. Therefore, it can be called as the first bibliography compiled for the Colombo Museum Library.

The Museum Library Collection named as List of Pali, Sinhalese and Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Colombo Museum Published by Reese Davis in 1882, pages 46,58 of the Pali Books Magazine's short list was considered as Second Dictionary. This list is based on the catalog compiled in 1876 by Mahamudali Lewis de Zoysa. Then in 1992 by the Colombo Museum was published the 'Catalogue of the Colombo Museum Library Part I. Pali, Sinhalese and Sanskrit Manuscripts' contains with 20-pages publication entitled the Second Directory of the Museum Books Collection. Simon F. Gunawardena was Compiled the 'Catalogue of the Colombo Museum Library: List of Pali, Sinhalese and Sanskrit Manuscripts' in 1894 with 5 pages was considered as about Fourth Dictionary of short list Museum palm leaf Book Collection.

The Catalogue of Pali Sinhalese and Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Colombo Museum Library and it was the Fifth Catalog of the Colombo Museum Books is a collection of books with 47 pages compiled by Henry M. Gunasekara, which was, published in 1938. Of all directories, the most detailed and scientific one was the Catalogue of Palm Leaf Manuscripts in the Library of the Colombo Museum, Vol. 1 that was prepared by W.A. Silva from the Government Press in 1938. This book is the sixth in a series of list Museum palm leaf Book Collection.

Mr. K.D. Somadasa has also compiled a catalog of palm leaf books by referring palm leaves where the placed in the temples of Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, it was considered as only list of books. However, not considered as detailed bibliography. Nilantha Hettige has compiled a detailed bibliography of the Colombo National Museum Library Books, which can be considered as the Seventh Directory (Hettige, 2011).

There are also a large number of palm-leaf books in private possession. Some of the palm-leaf books have already been lost or destroyed as no action has been taken to preserve the temples and books in the possession of the people. For covering, these palm leaf a comprehensive bibliography or individual bibliographies have to be compiled based on their contents and organization.

Many a palm leaves have been taken to foreign countries and the core problem that can be identified that the reader has to face challenges when study about palm-leaf. There is a lack of adequate information about them. Therefore, it is important to conduct a bibliographic study or survey on palm-leaves. Creating printed directories is easy, but making catalogs for palm-leaf books is a difficult task.

The reason for this is that bibliographic information has to be obtained by flipping through copies of palm-leaf books.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, actions have to be taken for the bibliographic control of palm leaf literature in Sri Lanka. One-step is the compilation of bibliographies covering these palm leaves. Students both undergraduate and postgraduates should be encouraged to do studies and research on palm leaf literature. Since compilation of annotated bibliographies is not suitable to cover palm leaf, it is much better to compile bibliographies covering basic bibliographic elements of palm leaves. The annotation may vary from the author-to-author or interpreter to interpreter especially the religious literature and work so that commencing and ending paragraphs with other bibliographic and physical elements can be used when compiling these bibliographies. It is much better to use ICT for compiling these bibliographies. However the following a proper bibliographic standard is much better. When considering the palm leaves research and management, it is much better to consider the preservation of the originality, information security and safety, information organization and transfer.

### **References**

- Anglo-American Concise Catalogue Rules (1998). Canadian Library Association.
- De Silva, W.A. (1938). Memories of the Colombo museum Catalogue of Palm Leaf Manuscripts. Ceylon Government Library.
- Godakubura, (1980). Catalogue of Ceylon Manuscripts. The Royal Library.
- Gunawardana, Sirani (1997). Palm Leaf Manuscripts of Sri Lanka. Sarwodaya Vishwaleka.
- Lois Mai Chan (2007). Cataloguing and Classification. The Scarecrow on Press, Inc
- Ranasinghe, Piyadasa (1994), Sri Lanka National Bibliography: A Historical and Critical Study.
- Somadasa, K.D. (1937). Catalogue of the Hugh Neville Collection of Sinhalese Manuscripts in the British Library. British Library.