

**Collection, Preservation and Provision Access to Palm Leaf Manuscripts in Sri Lanka**  
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**Abstract:** Palm leaf, also known as ola leaf, has been the principal career of knowledge in Sri Lanka from early Anuradhapura period to 20<sup>th</sup> century, for more than 2300 years. Although no original manuscripts written by the ancient authors are not available at present, copies of such manuscripts made in later periods, especially from 17<sup>th</sup> –early 20<sup>th</sup> century are scattered throughout the country in Buddhist temples and sometimes with individuals. Certain concerted efforts made during the colonial period as well as after the independence resulted in collecting and preserving some of the manuscript copies in a few. It is to be noted here considerable number of palm leaf manuscripts are collected and preserved in foreign soils also. The present study is an attempt to assess the efforts taken in Sri Lanka in the sphere of collection, preserving and provision of access to such manuscripts. Ultimate objective of any document is to divulge its contents to interested users. In order to this two pre-requisites are to be completed. They are the collection of documents and preserving them for future users. This applies to palm leaf manuscripts also. Transition from an old medium of recording to newer medium, always leave behind a certain amount of documents produced in the old medium untouched. When printing was introduced into Sri Lanka not all palm leaf manuscripts found their way to printing. Only selected manuscripts were put into print and the rest was left behind. This makes it necessary to collect those forgotten manuscripts as well as the base manuscripts of printed works if we really need to benefit from the intellectual heritage of the country. Collection demands organization and preservation. Provision of access to manuscripts can be made successfully once collection and preservation is completed. In Sri Lanka collection and preservation of palm leaf manuscripts are still in a poor stage. Except those collected in libraries no concerted efforts have been taken by the government or private sector for the purpose. It was found that at present only the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya is engaged in the collection and preservation of palm leaf manuscripts in digital form. The collection is around 500,000 leaves. However, the provision of access to manuscripts collected in certain libraries has been done successfully through extensive bibliographies. Catalogues to the collection of manuscripts in Colombo Museum Library is an example. Somadasa's catalogue of Palm leaf manuscripts in Ceylon is just a title list of manuscripts found in Buddhist temples in the country and the list has little use at present as some of the temples are not in existence and the listed works are not found by now in most of the temples. As most of the palm leaf manuscripts are on the brink of extinction it should be a national priority to collect, preserve and provide access to them using modern technology. Libraries have a big role to play in the process.