

## Summary Report to the Noolaham Foundation

### Background and Aim of the Placement

The overall aim of the placement I undertook by collaborating with the Noolaham Foundation at the British Library from August 2025 to October 2025 was to identify and separate works published in Sri Lanka amongst the available Tamil printed catalogues in the British Library. In the British Library, Tamil-language works are generally grouped under a single classification 'Tamil', without distinction between regional or national origins. As a result, works published in Sri Lanka are listed alongside those from India, Malaysia, Singapore, and elsewhere, making it difficult to locate Sri Lankan Tamil publications. Therefore, this placement was undertaken to identify and create a metadata of Tamil works published in Sri Lanka from the British Library's printed collections.

### Summary of the work undertaken

As a result of this placement, metadata on the information of Sri Lankan publications was produced. During the placement, I created an Excel sheet, which includes key details like title of the work, name of the author, publication details and call numbers/shelfmarks. As part of my work, I separated around 360 Sri Lankan publications.

### Practical challenges

At present, there are 11 Tamil catalogues available in the British Library (see Figures 1 and 2). Of these 11 catalogues, 9 catalogues were scanned and submitted to Noolaham to continue identifying Sri Lankan publications, as 12 weeks was a short time to look into all of these catalogues. I was unable to scan the remaining two catalogues due to an unexpected international strike, which resulted in the closure of reading rooms at the British Library, denying me access to the reading rooms.

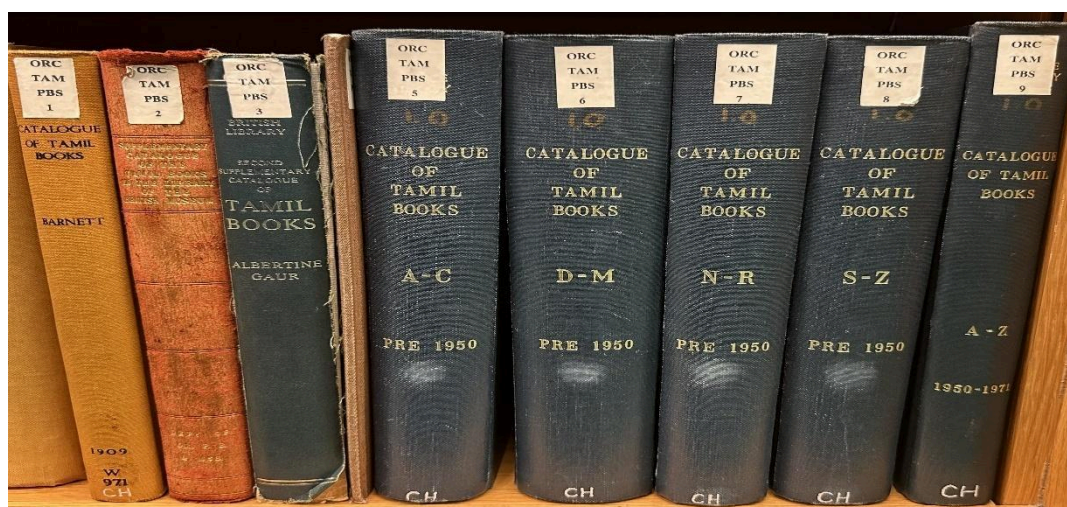
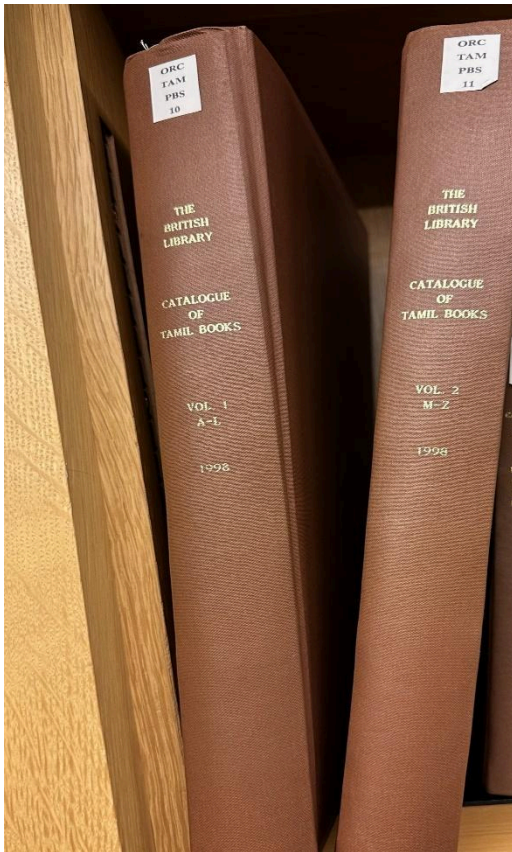


Figure 1: Catalogues 1-9



Of the available 11 catalogues, I was able to identify and separate Sri Lankan Tamil publications from only one catalogue, *Tamil Books in the British Library Catalogue* by Albertine Gaur (1980), given the very short duration of the placement. The creation of metadata was initially perceived to help researchers identify works published in Sri Lanka easily through the online catalogue in the British Library. However, when creating the metadata, I found some practical difficulties in sourcing the works listed in the metadata.

Firstly, there are discrepancies in the shelfmarks in the printed catalogue versus the online catalogue. For instance, consider the following example: In the printed catalogue (see Catalogue 3 by Albertine Gaur, p.) Civaratnam's *The Tamils in Ceylon* has the shelfmark 14171. E. 151, but upon searching

the online catalogue, I found that the same publication has a different shelfmark, which is X. 809/6890. T23929 (see Figure 3).

BOOK  
**The Tamils in early Ceylon.**  
 SIVARATNAM, C.  
 1968  
 Should be available . >

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**Details**

**Title** [The Tamils in early Ceylon.](#)  
**Creator** [SIVARATNAM, C.](#)  
**Subject** [Tamils -- Sri Lanka](#) >  
[Sri Lanka -- History](#) >  
**Publisher** Colombo  
**Creation Date** 1968  
**Physical description** xi, 187 p. ; 22 cm.

I want this

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 Readers who have registered or renewed their pass since 21 March 2024 can request items prior to visiting the Library by completing [this request form](#).  
 Please enter one of the shelfmarks below on the request form.  
 If your Reader Pass was issued before this date, you will need to visit the Library in London or Yorkshire to renew it before you can request items online.  
 This item may be in use or restricted for other reasons. If you would like to check the availability, [contact our Reference Services team](#), quoting the shelfmark below.

**Shelfmarks**  
 X.809/6890.  
 T.23929

Figure 3: Discrepancies in shelfmarks

Additionally, the search becomes easier if the titles of the works are in English. Consider the above example of Civaratnam's work – the given results are for the title of the work 'The Tamils in Early Ceylon' searched in the British Library online

catalogue. However, when I searched for the same work with the author's name, I did not get any results (see Figure 4 for the results I got).

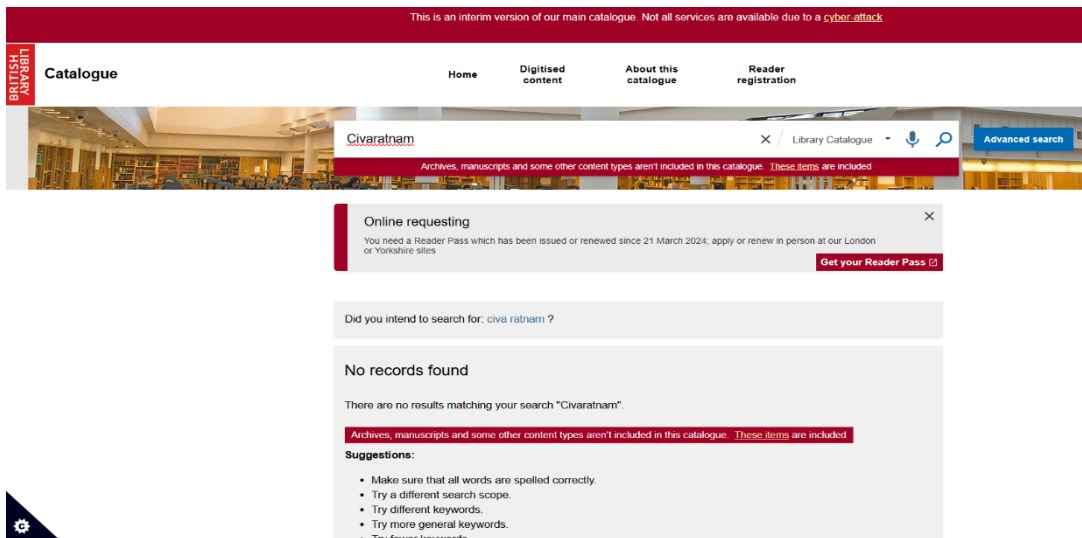


Figure 4: Transliteration Issues

This is because in the online catalogue, the name of the author is 'Sivaratnam and not 'civaratnam'. The issue with the transliteration of Tamil authors and their names to English and their differences causes further challenges in sourcing the texts in the British Library. Another example would be – in the printed catalogue 'Ilankai Vār̥ Tamir̥ar Varalāru', but in the online catalogue the transliteration is 'Ilankai vāḷ Tamīlar varalāru' (see Figure 5).

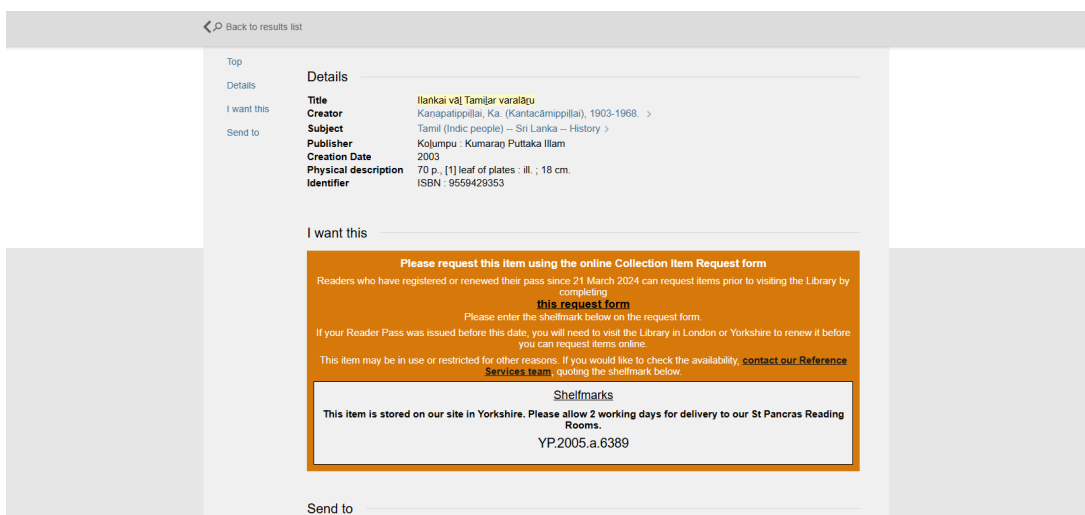


Figure 5: Transliteration Issues

This is another challenge in sourcing Tamil texts with Tamil titles and their author name transliterated differently in different catalogues. In the printed catalogue,

Ilankai Vār Tamirar Varalāru' is published in 1956, but as it is evident in Figure 5, the online catalogue has only the 2003 version. This leads to another issue, that there are some items in the printed catalogue missing in the online catalogue, increasing the challenges of finding texts. Another example is in the printed catalogue, Chitty, Simon Casie's *The Tamil Plutarch* (1946), Colombo: General Publishers, which has the shelfmark 14172. a. 121 cannot be found in the online catalogue. Instead, I found two other versions of the book – a 1859 version and a 1982 version, but not the 1946 version.



Figure 6: 1982 version

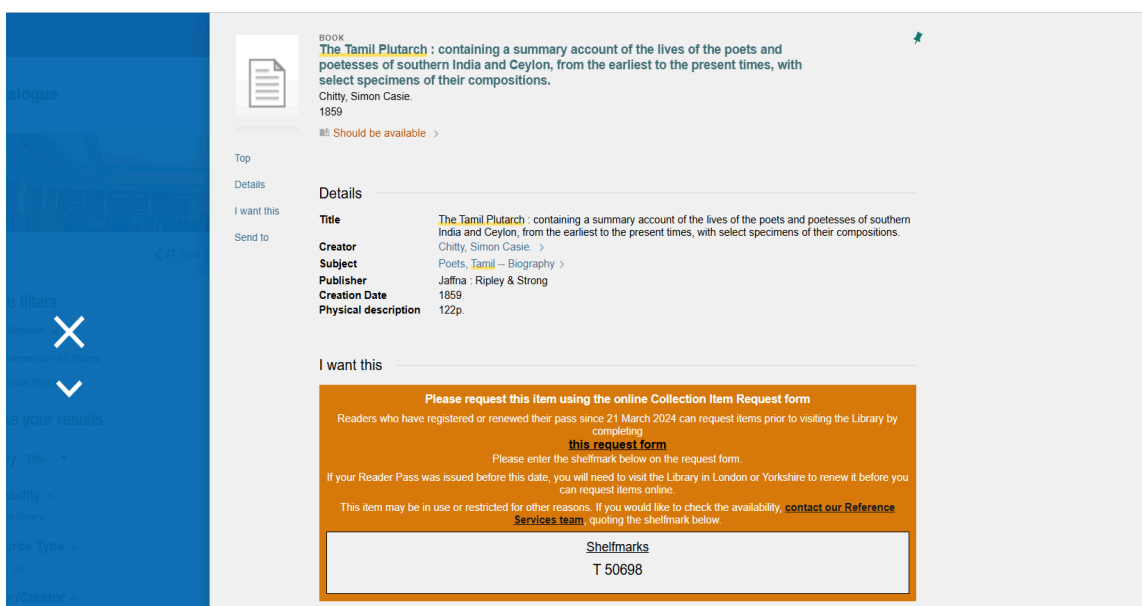


Figure 7: 1859 version 1

BOOK  
**The Tamil Plutarch**, containing a summary account of the lives of the poets and poetesses of Southern India and Ceylon, from the earliest to the present times, with select specimens of their compositions.  
 CHITTY, Simon Casie.  
 1859  
 Should be available >

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**Details**

**Title** **The Tamil Plutarch**, containing a summary account of the lives of the poets and poetesses of Southern India and Ceylon, from the earliest to the present times, with select specimens of their compositions.  
 CHITTY, Simon Casie. >

**Creator** CHITTY, Simon Casie. >

**Publisher** Jaffna : Ripley & Strong

**Creation Date** 1859

**Physical description** v, 119 pages ; (8°)

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 Please enter the shelfmark below on the request form.  
 If your Reader Pass was issued before this date, you will need to visit the Library in London or Yorkshire to renew it before you can request items online.  
 This item may be in use or restricted for other reasons. If you would like to check the availability, [contact our Reference Services team](#), quoting the shelfmark below.

Shelfmarks  
 14172.b.49.

Figure 8: 1859 version 2

## Future research initiatives

Considering the short duration of the placement, I could not identify and locate Sri Lankan publications amongst all the available catalogues. While this placement serves as a pilot project, this provides the initiative to explore more into the printed catalogues for Sri Lankan authors in the future. Possibly, Noolaham and the British Library could collaborate in digitising the Sri Lankan Tamil publication, which will be useful for researchers.