

History of Medicine in Northern Sri Lanka Collection

Project Title	History of Medicine in Northern Sri Lanka Collection
Project Number	NF/PG/2025/0002
Place	Sri Lanka
Project Duration	2025 June - 2027 May
Reporting duration	2025 June - 2025 December
Executive Organization	Noolaham Foundation
Project Budget	

1. Executive Summary

The *History of Medicine Collection in Northern Sri Lanka* project, led by the Noolaham Foundation, documents and preserves the region's rich medical heritage. Northern Sri Lanka's healthcare history spans Western medicine, traditional systems like Siddha, Ayurveda and evolving public health infrastructure, yet much of this knowledge and the contributions of key medical figures remain undocumented.

The project focuses on collecting oral histories, digitizing rare collections (books, Magazine, Research papers), photographs, and archival materials, and enriching them with metadata to create a comprehensive, open-access digital archive. This resource raises public awareness, supports academic research, and preserves cultural memory for future generations.

Through a combination of oral history collection, digitization of rare documents, metadata enrichment, and structured online access, this project seeks to build a comprehensive, open-access digital archive. These efforts aim to support education, research, and intergenerational cultural knowledge preservation.

By systematically preserving these records, the project highlights the achievements of Northern Sri Lanka's medical community, recognizes unsung pioneers, and provides a

platform for scholars, healthcare practitioners, and the public to engage with the region's medical history. Ultimately, it ensures that this heritage continues to inform, educate, and inspire future generations.

2. Project Background

Jaffna, the historical and cultural heart of Tamil society in Sri Lanka, holds a rich yet under-documented tradition of medical practices. Before colonization, indigenous healing systems were widely practiced and transmitted across generations, with Siddha medicine remaining a cornerstone of community-based healthcare.

This project documents the medical history of Northern Sri Lanka, tracing the evolution of Siddha medicine from the king's period to the present. Knowledge was preserved through paramparai (lineage) and later institutionalized via the Siddha faculty and BSMS programs. Colonial influences introduced Western medical systems, and administrative structures developed to support both Western and Siddha practices, creating a layered and rich medical heritage. By preserving key texts, reports, and oral histories, the project highlights the continuity, transformation, and institutionalization of healthcare knowledge in the region.

Despite this rich heritage, much of the historical knowledge remains undocumented and at risk of being lost. This project seeks to reverse that trend by systematically collecting, preserving, and sharing these invaluable records.

3. Objectives

Main Objective

To document, digitize, and systematically categorize rare and valuable medical knowledge from Northern Sri Lanka, including:

- 140 historical documents
- 14 oral histories
- 14 heritage-related photographs

Sub-Objectives

- Highlight the cultural and academic significance of Northern Sri Lanka's medical heritage.

- Collect both primary and secondary sources from across the region to preserve a comprehensive historical record.
- Facilitate research and public engagement by providing a centralized, open-access digital knowledge base.

4. Project Activities

A. Preliminary Activities

- Conducted virtual consultations with key informants, researchers, and stakeholders.
- Developed the project portal structure with clearly defined documentation themes.

B. Fieldwork and Collection

- Collected textual records (books, journals, archival documents)
- Documented oral histories and captured visual materials (Photos/Videos)
- Engaged with community members, institutions, and custodians to access and preserve historical knowledge.

C. Digitization and Metadata Development

- Digitized collected content with quality assurance procedures
- Created and edited metadata for each document
- Organized documents into thematic categories for online publication
- Authored biographical summaries of notable individual

5. Achievements

The project produced strong measurable outcomes across documentation, digitization, and outreach:

Activity	Output
Identified Documents	140
Digitized Documents	64
Categorized Documents	140
Oral Histories Recorded	14
Organizations Documented	2

Alumaikal (Professional Biographies)	8
Photographs	3
Metadata Entries Created	140
Documents Uploaded	140
Audio Clips Archived	1

Thematic Classification of Documents

- Developmental History of Western Medicine – 114
- Developmental History of Non-Allopathic Medicine – 26
- Personalities and Communities – 23
- Healthcare Institutions – 44
- Diseases and Specialities – 83

6. Project Highlights

This section captures the deeper impact of the project beyond numbers—emphasizing restoration, cultural identity, and research value.

- Reviving Forgotten Institutions
The project documented key historical institutions like *Thelippalai Cooperative Hospital* and *Point Petro base Hospital*, tracing their evolution and community influence.
- Voices of Healers and Key Contributors
The project documented Northern Sri Lanka’s medical pioneers, spanning traditional Siddha medicine and western healthcare. Contributors worked in psychiatry, oncology, respiratory and infectious disease, orthopedics, and hospital administration, preserving both indigenous knowledge and Western medical innovations for research and public understanding.
- Exhibition-Based Outreach on Northern Medical History
Through participation in exhibitions organized by CCIY and Yarl IT Hub, the project

was actively promoted to a wider audience, creating awareness about Northern Sri Lanka's medical history and the importance of preserving medical heritage.

- Rare Medical Literature

The project documents Northern Sri Lanka's medical and social history, from colonial Western medicine to contemporary Siddha traditions, through key texts and reports. It preserves critical materials, highlighting historical continuities and transformations in the region's healthcare practices. The project preserved critical yet overlooked texts.

- Integration of Medical Traditions

The documentation highlighted how Western and Non-Allopathic (Siddha, Ayurveda, Unani) systems coexisted and influenced each other in the region.

- Visual and Multimedia Archive

Photographs and audio recordings complemented textual records, helping to create a multidimensional picture of Tamil medical heritage. The project gained formal approval from the PDHS and RDHS and was discussed in IMHO and faculty meetings, ensuring institutional support for the collection and preservation of these materials.

- Global Accessibility

All content was enriched with metadata and published on the Noolaham digital platform, ensuring open access for scholars and the Tamil diaspora.

- Preservation = Empowerment

By reclaiming forgotten narratives of health and healing, this project restored dignity and recognition to marginalized knowledge keepers.

6. Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Challenge	Mitigation Strategy
Difficulty accessing medical institutions and professionals	Established networks with trusted contacts in the Jaffna medical community
Limited public awareness of the value of historical medical documentation	Conducted outreach and awareness campaigns through Noolaham's community channels
Restriction on relocating original documents	Digitized materials on-site using portable digitization kits

Extended time required for field-level data collection	Supported field researchers with dedicated mentoring and logistical assistance
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7. Conclusion

This project has laid a strong foundation for a living digital archive dedicated to the medical heritage of Northern Sri Lanka. By documenting institutions, practitioners, and knowledge systems that have long remained underrepresented, the Noolaham Foundation is not only preserving history but also restoring cultural memory and academic recognition.

The initiative demonstrates how community-driven documentation can contribute meaningfully to research, education, and heritage preservation. With sustained support, this project has the potential to evolve into a model for documenting medical and cultural histories in post-conflict and underrepresented regions.

We extend our sincere gratitude to our donors, advisors, field researchers, and community members whose contributions have made this work possible. Their support ensures that the medical heritage of Northern Sri Lanka continues to inform, educate, and inspire future generations.

8. History of Medicine in Northern Sri Lanka Collection portal link

[History of Medicine in Northern Sri Lanka Collection](#)