

Preserving Literary Heritage: The Role and Challenges of the *Noolthettam* Bibliography

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Publications serve as critical indicators of an ethnic group's cultural values and intellectual pursuits. National libraries and archives worldwide systematically document the publications of their respective communities. However, Sri Lankan Tamils, a globally dispersed ethnic group, largely depend on institutions within their host countries to record and preserve their literary contributions, often under the influence of dominant national narratives. In this context, *Noolthettam* has functioned as the national bibliography of Sri Lankan Tamils since its inception in April 1990 by Mr. N. Selvarajah in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. This study examines the role of *Noolthettam* in documenting and preserving the literary heritage of the community, while also analyzing the challenges encountered in its continuity. Historical and document review methods were adopted for this study. Since the publication of its first volume in 2002, *Noolthettam* had cataloged 18,000 books authored by Sri Lankan Tamil writers worldwide, with the 18th volume scheduled for release in 2025. Despite its significance, *Noolthettam* had not gained adequate recognition among Tamil writers and intellectuals in Sri Lanka, nor had it received institutional support from public and academic libraries. Furthermore, bibliographic documentation efforts faced sustainability challenges, as seen in the discontinuation of H.A.I. Goonetilleke's bibliographic work at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Without a structured organizational framework, *Noolthettam* may also face a similar fate after its founder's lifetime. To ensure the continuity of this bibliographic initiative, collective responsibility is essential. Sri Lankan publishers, printers, and author-publishers must actively contribute by submitting copies of their publications. Universities, public libraries, and the National Library of Sri Lanka should incorporate *Noolthettam* as a reference resource in their collection. In addition, booksellers should feature it in trade bibliographies and media advertisements, while educators and researchers should advocate its use among students and scholars. The preservation of Tamil literary heritage must be a proactive effort, one that safeguards history for future generations rather than leaving them searching in the dark.

Keywords: *Bibliography; Cultural preservation; Documentation; Eelam Tamil literature; Noolthettam*