

Revived Jaffna Public Library

40th Anniversary -2021



Compilation

Mrs. Suganthini Sathasivamoorthy
Chief Librarian, Jaffna Public Library

Translation

Alavaiyoor Iraa Vickneswaran
Dubai

Sponsored by

Dr. Arum Sivanayagam
United Kingdom

**Revived
Jaffna Public Library
40th Anniversary - 2021**

**Compilation
Mrs.Suganthini Sathasivamoorthy
Chief Librarian, Jaffna Public Library**

**Translation
Alavaiyoor Iraa Vickneswaran
Dubai**

**Sponsored by
Dr. Arum Sivanayagam
United Kingdom**

Thanks

*We sincerely thank
Dr. Arum Sivanayagam, UK
for sponsoring the entire costs of printing
this book.*

*Mr. N.Asokan
Dr.K.Thavalingam
Alavaiyoor Iraa Vickneswaran
Old Boys of Jaffna Hindu College (1972)*

2021

Jaffna Public Library

"Please Listen to My Story"

Even though forty years have passed since I was set on fire and burnt to ashes, my grief still lingers. I have somehow regained my composure in the midst of many difficulties. It is my most sincere hope that you fearlessly visit me with confidence to quench your thirst for knowledge so that I might be able to reach my old state again. Until then the fire burning inside me shall not subside.

Hey, young ones! Have you all heard about me? You need to know what really happened in order to understand the difficulties that I have encountered. The late great intellectual K.C.Kularatnam once described my story as one of "crawling in a hut, began to take steps in one shop, moved on by a short walk to another shop and later on running around the terrace of a house and ended up shining in a beautiful building spreading the fame & glory all over the world and spotted as the best in South East Asia". The scars that remain from my injuries slowly disappear whenever I go down my memory lane and remember my long history of achievements amidst difficulties.

I was the brainchild of the late K. M. Chellappah, who grew up in Puttur and was the former Secretary of the Jaffna District Court. Those who subscribed whole heartedly to his noble idea

got together in the year 1933 and drew up a plan to build me slowly in stages over a period of time.

I am well aware that their dream was to make me a prominent institution that reflected Tamil culture. I was to be built in a well demarcated area in order to comfortably accommodate many and provide services not only for the people of Jaffna but also for the people of Sri Lanka. The late Sam A. Sabapathy, the former Mayor of the Jaffna Municipal Council, was the one who really wanted me to offer my best services to the world community and gain fame and glory. To this end funds were collected from private donors to develop me and in the year 1959 the then Mayor of Jaffna, the late Alfred Duraipappah initiated work on my main building in Jaffna esplanade.

I was to be constructed in line with international standards - India's leading librarian S. R. Ranganathan gave suggestions and I was designed accordingly by S. Narasimhan, an architect from Chennai.

After my physical structure was built tens of thousands of rare books and treasures came from all over the world to be with me. I should mention that many of them contained traces of Sri Lanka's history and hidden facts which had been kept in the dark for political reasons. People all over the world came looking to me for their research needs and they were able to learn the history of Eelam which I carried on my lap with pride.

In 1967, the US government sponsored Information Library at 4th Cross Street in Jaffna was merged with me. A children's

section was created for their well-being in 1967 and in 1971 the auditorium and the study hall were set up. In 1973 a second building was completed and opened. It is a well-known fact that over just a few years I expanded my services with multiple divisions.

A mob of thugs who did not want to see me grow and provide services to humanity set me on fire on 1st June 1981. The previous day, Sunday 31st May, three policemen had been shot and two of them had died in a rally organized by the TULF. That night riots started, initiated by the police and paramilitary forces. The riots lasted for three consecutive days and it was on one of those days that they unleashed fire on me as well.

I heard that the TULF office, which was then Jaffna MP's (the late V. Yogeswaran's) house, a Hindu temple, the Eelanadu press office and the statues of famous poets that stood at our junctions were damaged. Four innocent civilians were dragged out of their houses and murdered.

On 1st June 1981 paramilitary forces set me on fire and I completely burnt to ashes. More than 97,000 rare books and manuscripts that I housed fell victim to the fire. Everything I had that was witness to the history and culture of Eelam was destroyed. I lost the rare works of many Eelam scholars like Ananda Kumaraswamy and Professor Isaac Thambiah. These books are irrecoverable and their destruction caused me unbearable mental anguish.

The 'US Watchtower' and Amnesty International made a fact-finding visit to Sri Lanka in 1982. According to their report, the then UNP government had not carried out any investigations into the riots in 1981 and had not identified any culprits for the crimes committed.

Nancy Murray wrote in a 1984 article that several high-ranking security force officers and two ministers had been in Jaffna when I was burned down. She also stated that some uniformed security forces along with some in civilian clothes had been involved in my brutal burning. The state-run media, which pretended not to know what had happened, did not release any news at the time. They then published an editorial 20 years later in the Colombo based 'Daily News' which confirmed that my burning had been carried out by thugs hired by the government at that time.

In 1991 President Ranasinghe Premadasa publicly accused members of his own party of burning me. Let me tell you exactly what he said: - "During the District Development Council elections in 1981, some of our party members not only smuggled thugs from other parts of the country into the north and sabotaged the elections in the north but also the same group is still causing chaos. If you want to know who burned the precious books in the Jaffna library, look at the faces of those who oppose us (26th October 1991 Eelanadu Newspaper)". It is well known that President Premadasa was referring to the former ministers Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake of his UNP government who had filed an impeachment motion in parliament against him.

In 2006 then President Mahinda Rajapaksa also confirmed UNP's involvement saying: "I blame UNP for the riots against Tamils in 1983 and the imposition of votes in the Northern District Council elections and the burning of the Jaffna library. UNP was responsible for all those atrocities. The burning of the sacred library of the people of Jaffna is equivalent to the shooting of Lord Buddha. For these reasons the quiet voices of the Tamil people are now drowned in weapons."

In 2016 Ranil Wickremesinghe, UNP party leader and then prime minister, publicly apologized in parliament for my burning by his own party supporters, for which opposition MPs shouted slogans and bullied him.

My Rebirth

In 1982, just one year after I was burned, tens of thousands of books were brought to me during the Jaffna 'Public Library Week' organized by the Tamil community. At that time work had also begun on repairs to parts of my building.

In 1983 an anti-Tamil pogrom took place. Thousands of Tamils were massacred by Sinhalese mobs with the support of the then UNP government and state forces. These pogroms are remembered now as "Black July".

In 1984, I was rebuilt and re-opened for the public. Many of my possessions were taken to other places as there was fear that it would not be safe for me to house all these precious books in one place. Branches were opened in Chundikuli, Nallur, Moor Road, Vannarpannai and Guru Nagar. During this time I was also

injured in a series of bombings and shootings from the Jaffna Fort.

In 1985 I was caught in the crossfire in a militant attack on a nearby police station and bombed. For the second time numerous rare books which I housed were destroyed. After that, in the midst of armed conflict I had to take on various roles: first as a battlefield, then as a militant bunker and later as a high security area for the Sri Lankan army.

Again, I was revived

In 1998 in an attempt to regain the confidence of the Tamil people, President Chandrika Kumaratunga started rebuilding me. Sri Lankans and foreign governments assisted in this venture. Approximately US \$1 million was spent and 25,000 books were collected amidst many difficulties.

In 2002 I was reborn with some defects. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had reportedly opposed my reopening to the public in 2003. However, 21 Municipal Councilors led by then Jaffna Mayor Sellan Kandayan set a date of 14th February 2003 for my re-opening. There was controversy amongst Tamil political parties regarding my opening and eventually I was forced to remain closed. During my closure most of my repairs and rebuilding was completed and by the end of the year I was handed over to the Jaffna Municipal Commissioner.

Following my handover, the coordinator of the Tamil-speaking People's Movement for Human Rights and Development wrote a letter to the Municipal Commissioner on 3rd January 2004.

They stated that keeping me closed to the public and student community was not advisable and suggested that I be reopened without a formal opening with a celebration and so on as this would again create political controversy. They wanted me to be reopened on a normal day and suggested that the opening be on 15th January 2004.

Accordingly, I was opened to the public without any formalities and media announcements on 23rd February 2004 by the Municipal Commissioner. Since then, I have been working hard to provide services to you all.

Library Appearance

As one enters the entrance of the Library, the statue of Goddess Saraswathi (Kalaimakal), the Hindu Goddess of Learning beckons the visitors with her Majestic Appearance.

Two Towers on either side capped with three Domes, the Jaffna Public Library for a moment gives a glimpse of a 'huge Wedding Cake Symbolizing the State' and during the fall of Sun Rays, Gleaming White Structure adds value to the classical lines with beautiful proportions makes it as one of the architectural standouts of South Asia Region.

A Central Free Tamil Library in Jaffna.

I reproduce below for your information the appeal made by me in the press to the Tamil public of Ceylon for the establishment of a Central Free Tamil Library in Jaffna:—

"It is proposed to open a free Tamil Library at a suitable and convenient place in Jaffna. It is intended to buy Tamil and Sanskrit books of all authors, both ancient and modern, and also important English Books. This Library is also to serve as the National Library and as a Library for reference. It is proposed to procure and preserve all important ancient ola manuscripts.

I therefore appeal to the Tamil Public of Ceylon to support this undertaking. All those who are in sympathy with this move may send their willing contributions to my address and a receipt will be furnished. Books also can be presented in place of money.

The selection of the spot for the Library and the expenditure of the money collected will be determined at a meeting of the contributors. The necessary rules and regulations for the Library will be framed at the meeting. Notice of the meeting will be announced in the press.

I have been urged by several of my lawyer friends, teachers, Government Officers, and others to make this appeal. I have been assured of their support

Yours truly,
K. M. CHELLAPPAH."

Jaffna 22nd November 1933.

Since making this appeal I have started collecting contributions from the public for the purpose. There is an intense and patriotic desire on the part of our people to support this cause. A reference to the list of contributors to the cause appearing in the "Ceylon Free Press" of 9-12-33 will impress you that important men of our community are helping this movement. We therefore appeal to all our people in Jaffna, Colombo, Kandy, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mannar, Mullaitivu or any other part of Ceylon and also to our people resident in the Straits Settlements and in the Federated Malay States and call upon them to make every effort to realise a substantial fund towards this purpose. At least a sum of Rs. 10,000 is proposed to be collected. It is presumed that at least 1,000 persons among our community can be found who can afford to pay Rs. 10 each. It is also open to us to collect larger sums from our patriotic and rich benefactors and also smaller sums of money from the average people. It is also open to various Associations, Schools and Colleges to collect funds by arranging public lectures, concerts, or staging plays for the benefit of the fund. We are certain all will be anxious to join the cause and liberally subscribe towards it.

2. We propose to close the collection within 6 months. If there is any difficulty to pay the contributions at once, it could be arranged to be paid in 3 monthly instalments. It is our desire to avoid spending money on sending any collecting agents. It is therefore suggested that every agency, whether a Department, an Association, a School or a Town or a Village must organise themselves to the extent of their sphere of influence and collect the fund and remit it to me. Teachers must organise among themselves, Headmen among themselves, Pensioners among themselves, Clerks among themselves, Lawyers among themselves, each Village Committee members among themselves, Traders among themselves, Overseers among themselves, and similarly every class of people must pull their own weight. In the case of village collections, it is suggested that the village Headmen, the school master and a member of the Village Committee should work together to collect funds. Every individual must not content himself by subscribing to the fund but should also acquaint the matter to his friends and neighbours and secure more contributions. It is hoped that all schools, teachers and students will take a keen interest in this matter. I am sure all will make a determined effort.

3. The library is open free to all Tamil speaking peoples (Muslims included) and to all others who wish to use it. It must not be misconstrued that this is an attempt to undermine the study of other languages. The library expects to provide English and Sanskrit books as well.

to encourage Tamil learning in the land, to create an appreciable Tamil reading public, to suppress crime, to assist students, teachers, research workers, traders, physicians and others, to spread knowledge among the masses in the various branches of learning, an up-to-date, complete and concentrated library catering to the needs of all people is essential. There is need for small village libraries but the organisation of such village libraries can be left to each village. It is considered that a concentrated Central Tamil Library in Jaffna will serve the needs of the whole people in Jaffna and other parts. Therefore the combined effort and help of our people is necessary in this matter, and their support is earnestly solicited.

It is the desire of the supporters of this movement that the necessary fund must first be collected and banked before the details are worked out. The working of the details is left to the contributors themselves at a meeting to be convened for that purpose. The question of site, the nature of the library, whether an existing library should be improved or whether a library assisted by a local body or Government should be supported or one independent library should be formed—these and other matters have to be decided later by you. The public will also be given sufficient time and opportunity to discuss these matters publicly after the collection is made. Every one is asked therefore to keep his mind open and concentrate for the moment on the collection only. As the collection proceeds and the work assumes greater proportions, it is intended to appoint a Committee to be in charge of the collected fund. The appointment of the Committee will be notified in the press. In the meantime I am directed to proceed with the organisation and the collection. I therefore hope that you will have no misgivings about this venture and will help me to achieve our aim.

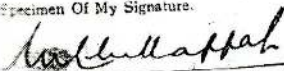
I therefore request all concerned to remit all collections or contributions to me together with names of contributors and the amounts contributed. The contributions will be acknowledged in the press. In addition, a printed and numbered receipt signed by me will be issued to every contributor. The funds collected will be deposited in the Post Office Savings Bank and in the Government Co-operative Bank in Jaffna. A summary of collections, expenditure and deposits will be published in the press monthly. All books and accounts are open for public inspection between the hours 4-30 p.m. to 5 p.m. daily. A list of subscribers showing their address and amounts subscribed may be first sent to me and then the collections, as they are recovered, may be remitted to me with details.

I am Sir,
Yours Sincerely,
K. M. CHELLAPPAH,
Organiser & Collector

Linka Home,
Jaffna 11. 12. 33.

Note: My Official Address:
K. M. CHELLAPPAH,
Chief Clerk, District Court,
Jaffna.

Specimen Of My Signature.



THAMIL NATIONAL PRESS

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS.

Amount

NOTICE.

A Public Meeting of the people of Jaffna will be held at the Jaffna Central College Hall at 3 p. m. on Saturday, the 8th June, 1934 for the purpose of taking necessary steps for the establishment of a Central Free Tamil Library Jaffna.

All are Cordially Invited.

Agenda.

1. To elect a President and a Secretary pro tem.
2. Mr. K. M. Chellappah to render an account of the collections made by him from the public.
3. President to address on the objects of the meeting.
4. General discussion.
5. To appoint a "Committee of Management" representing various interests to do the following:-
 - (1) To organise and continue collections from the public.
 - (2) To establish a central free library in Jaffna.
 - (3) To convene meetings of the contributors, whenever necessary.
 - (4) To take steps in all other matters.
6. To elect a President, a Vice President, an Honorary Secretary, an Honorary Treasurer, and an Honorary Auditor.
7. To appoint, if necessary, a "Committee of Report":-
 - (1) To consider the appeal* of Mr. K.M.Chellappah and investigate further and recommend the nature and the scope of the Central Free Library,
 - (2) To report the nature and scope of Village Free Libraries, their organisation and their affiliation with the Central Free Library,
 - (3) To report on the formation and management of a Library Association in Jaffna,
 - (4) To estimate the cost of their recommendations in respect of each of the above proposals and to suggest ways and means of securing funds both for the initial outlay and the recurrent expenditure,and to request the 'Committee of Report' to submit their report to the "Committee of Management" as early as possible.
8. Any other business.

K. M. Chellappah,
Convener.

Jaffna, May 10, 1934.

(*Copy of the appeal appears overleaf.)

Tamil Nation Press

Notice A Public Meeting of the people of Jaffna

பலவரு வைகாசிமீ கருவு

விளம்பரம்.

யாழ்ப்பாணம் தீய இலவச தமிழ்நாற்சமகம்.

1934 ஆக ஆனிமீ 02 சனிக்குழை
பிற்பகல் 3 மணிக்கு யாழ்ப்பாணம் மத்திய
கல்லூரி மண்டபத்தில் யாழ்ப்பாண மக்
களின் பதவியான ஒரு கூட்டம் கூடப்
படும். அதற்குத் தீய யாழ்ப்பாணத்தின்
ஒரு மத்திய இலவச தமிழ்நாற் சமகம் ஏற்
படுத்துவதற்கு வேண்டிய ஒழுங்குகள் தீர்
மானிக்கப்படும். பொதுச் சனங்களுிடம்
இது விஷயத்திற்காக எண்ணூறு இலவசை
பும் சேர்க்கப்பட்ட பணத்தின் கண்கரம்
ஒப்புவிக்கப்படும்.

இத்தொழுகம் தமிழரின் முன்னேற்றத்
திற்கும் தமிழ்ப்பாணை அபிவிருத்தி செய்வ
தற்கும் பொதுச்சனங்களுிடம் அந்வு ஏற்
படுத்துவதற்கும் எங்கள் தேசத்தில் உயர்க்க
தமிழ்க்கல்வி பரீதற்படுவதற்கும் உதவி
பாய இக்கழகத்தை அமைத்தல் ஆவசியகம்.

இத்தொழுகம் யாழ்ப்பாணத்திலிருக்கும்
பல கொள்கைகளிற்கும் பொதுவாகவே ஏற்
படுத்தப்படும். எல்லாக்கொள்கைகளி லிருக்
கும் பெரியார் அணவனையும் தமிழ் ஆசிரி
யனையும் இக் கூட்டத் திற்கு அன்பாக
அழைக்கிறேன்.

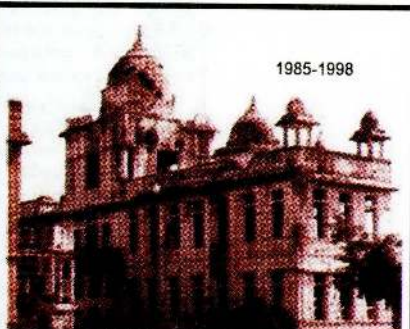
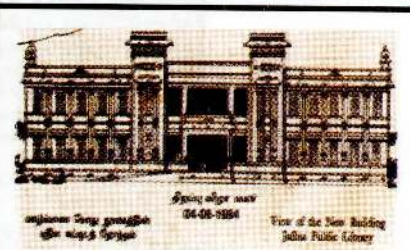
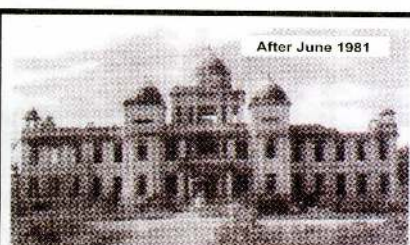
யாழ்ப்பாணம், க. மு. செல்லப்பா.
(Mia 48. 28-5-34) 23-5-34.



இந் து சா தனம்

யாழ்ப்பாணம் பலவரு
வைகாசிமீ கருவு திவகட்குழை

Damage and reconstruction - Building of Jaffna

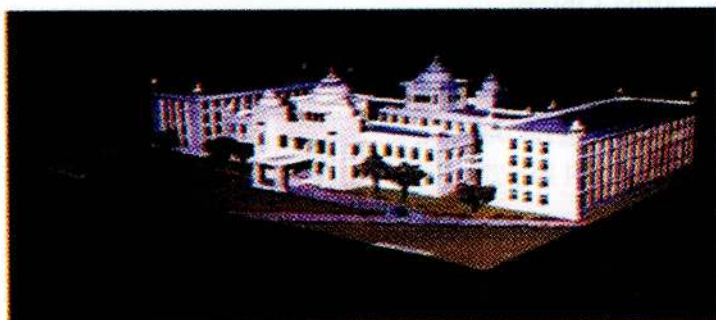




Mobile - Library Service



Google View - Jaffna Library



Proposed National Library - Jaffna



Proposed National Library - Jaffna

Murder

Originally written in Tamil by Prof. M. A. Nuhman, the translation is by S. Pathmanathan (from Lute Songs, edited by Chelva. S. Kanaganayakam).

Murder

Last night

I dreamt

Buddha was shot dead

by the Police,

guardians of the law.

His body drenched in blood

on the steps

of the Jaffna Library

Under cover of darkness

came the ministers.

“His name is not on our list,

why did you kill him?”

they ask angrily,

“No sirs, no,

there was no mistake.

Without killing him

it was impossible

to harm a fly –
Therefore...,” they stammered.
“Alright, then
hide the corpse.”
The ministers return.
The men in civvies
dragged the corpse
into the library.
They heaped the books
ninety thousand in all,
and lit the pyre
With the *Cikalokavadda Sutta*.
Thus the remains
of the Compassionate One
were burned to ashes
along with the *Dhammapada*.

40th Anniversary Memoir

Why the fire had not been extinguished as yet?

(Originally written in Tamil and translated by Alavaiyoor Iraa Vickneswaran)

Goddess Kalaimakal's unique temple and is our treasure of Jaffna

Sits in the form of a Majestic White House in the middle of the city

Four decades after being caught in the clutches of fire,
why the fire still not extinguished in my mind, even though
glorified and revived?

Created by the famous architect, preserved and protected books,
manuscripts aged old back to the Thamil Sangam period covering
Art, Science, General Knowledge Philosophy religion
shares thousands of books to many had finally fallen prey to the
murderous rowdies and thugs

Recognised as the best Library in South East Asia accommodated
and provided

the thirst of knowledge to all who seek including the Children,
adults and intellectuals

Enabled many to graduate in their chosen fields providing access
to a great knowledge pool

The voice that I hear in my inner heart whenever I walked into
Our Temple,

“Do not run around and wander in search of books, notes and or
relevant documents

Visit me, for all that is needed, I have enough for you all to pick
and choose to achieve success” still fresh in mind but when I
visualise the charred scene, still remains in my heart

It is true that you were born again with a new look and regained
your glory

I cannot forget the fact that great treasure of ours once converged
with the fire

Several years passed, the thugs committed crime got scot-free
perhaps even dead and gone

Believing that time will one day give a good answer, Let me Pray
Goddess Kalaimakal to heal

my wound in my chest and I ask the ignorant politicians:

Why the fire had not been extinguished as yet?

Timeline

History of the Jaffna Library

1842

A public library was established in Jaffna in 1842 by a gentleman called F C Grenniyar who was High Court Secretary at the time. Over a period of time it ended up in ruins.

1933

The then court secretary K. M. Chellappah had an idea to establish “A Central Free Tamil Library in Jaffna” and expressed his thoughts to a youth development association (The Progressive Hundred) and sought their assistance. Together they went door to door and collected books.

11.11.1933

Jaffna Public Library was established on 11 November 1933.

11.12.1933

K. M. Chellappah released a report titled ‘A Central Free Tamil Library in Jaffna and Books Association’ on 22 November 1933. In it he emphasised the importance of establishing a free library in Jaffna.

09.06.1934

A meeting was convened by intellectuals and senior government officials on 09 June 1934 at Jaffna Central College. The Honourable Justice S. Cumaraswamy was in attendance and it was decided that a committee would be formed to establish a free

library. That day "A Central Free Tamil Library Association" was established.

28.07.1934

A Central Free Tamil Library Association conducted its first meeting on 28 July 1934. They decided to rent shop premises at Rs.300 per annum for the library on the southern side of the power station on Hospital Road and to open the library on 01 August 1934.

01.08.1934

The library was opened in the shop premises opposite the power station on Hospital Road. Due to a lack of space people had to stand among the crowd and study books while some read books while seated on wooden boxes.

20.12.1934

The association convened a special general meeting on 20 December 1934 to seek permission from members to hand over the control of the library over to the Jaffna Town Development Board from 01 January 1935.

01.01.1935

A colourful celebration was organised to mark the official handover of the library to the Jaffna Town Development Board. This included the handover of 844 valuable books of which 694 books had been donated by the general public. The library began to function in an area that was a part of a Town Development Board workshop.

31.5.1935

A Central Free Tamil Library Association was dissolved on 31 May 1935.

1936

The library was relocated to rented premises on the upper floor of a two-storey building comprising of a large verandah and two big rooms with good ventilation facilities obtained for a monthly rental of Rs.65 from the Puththoor Malavarayar family. This building was situated on the southern side of Jaffna Rest House adjoining the Hindu Educational Development Association's office. The library functioned very well in this building.

16.05.1952

A governing council was established under the name of "Jaffna Central Library Association".

16.06.1952

The Mayor of Jaffna, Sam A Sabapathy, convened a public meeting on 16 June 1952 which discussed the development prospects of the library.

29.03.1954

Five people (the Jaffna Mayor Sam A Sabapathy, Rev.Father T.M.F. Long, British High Commissioner Sir Cecil Sayers, US Ambassador Philip Grove and First Secretary of the Indian High Commission Sri Siddhartha Charry) got together and laid the foundation stone in the open space in front of the Veersingha Muniappar Temple for the construction of the new library. The Asian Development Fund, Indian High Commission and many

other individuals and organizations donated funds for its construction. Many small contributions were collected and carnivals were organised to collect funds for the construction of the library.

11.10.1959

As the library's space crisis continued, even before the completion of the construction of the upper floor, Mayor Alfred Durayappah held an opening ceremony for the library in the lower hall. Collections of ancient texts and books were received in memory of Kopay Vanniyasingam and Pandit Rasaiyanar. Many rare books were also purchased from Mudaliar Kula Sabanathan.

1967

A US government sponsored information library was functioning well at the time at 4th Cross Street in Jaffna. Most of the books, magazines and resources in it were brought from the United States. In 1967 the US government decided to hand over the library to Sri Lankans and it was merged with the Jaffna Public Library.

03.11.1967

The childrens section of the library was opened by the former Senator and Minister of local government Mr M Thiruchelvam.

1972

The Navandurai branch of the library was established in 1972 by then Mayor Mr Alfred Durayappah to extend the library service of the Jaffna Municipal Council for the benefit of the people of

Navandurai. Initially, it was started as a study hall where daily newspapers and magazines were placed. This was supervised by Mr K. Francis. The people of Navandurai later requested that the library be maintained like other branch libraries and work commenced on 01 July 2008 for the construction of a new building. The construction work stopped halfway through and only resumed in 2016. After the construction was completed the opening ceremony presided by former Municipal Commissioner Mr P.Vaakeesan was held on 30 July 2017 and the library was officially opened by the former Chief Minister of the Northern Province the Hon. C. V. Vigneswaran.

1973

In 1971 the auditorium and the study hall were set up in the main library and in 1973 the library's second building was completed and opened. Jaffna Library expanded its services with several divisions.

01.06.1981

Sinhalese nationalist thugs set Jaffna library on fire. More than 97,000 texts and rare manuscripts were destroyed. The then government ministers Gamini Dissanayake and Cyril Mathew were involved in this act. After hearing about this incident, Father Singarayar David died of a heart attack on the same day.

13.06.1981

The Jaffna Public Library was closed and the surviving books were collected by the Commissioner of Jaffna Municipal Council, Mr. C.V.K. Sivagnanam and kept safely in the Town Hall. Most of the library's buildings had to be renovated and it

was estimated that it would cost Rs. 15 lakhs. Committees were formed by the Jaffna Municipal Council to examine and report the damages, losses and suggest required actions. The public were told that whoever had been able to collect books from the library that night should look after the books temporarily until the librarian placed a notice to return them.

17.06.1981

It was decided that the library would be reopened at the former Cycle Shed area on 17 June 1981. This decision was made the previous day at a special meeting held by the Municipal Council.

03.07.1981

Mayor of Jaffna, Raja Viswanathan, inaugurated the newspaper section and children's section in the town hall.

19.06.1981

The following notice to retrieve books was placed on 18 June 1981: "I request that all books received from the Jaffna Public Library be returned to the library immediately. Receipts can be obtained for the books handed over at the Library Office from 9 am to 5 pm. Holders of books belonging to the library are also kindly requested to hand them over to the Library Office. C.V. K. Sivagnanam, Municipal Commissioner, Jaffna, Municipal Office Jaffna."

07.02.1982

The foundation stone was laid for Jaffna Public Library's third building.

22.02.1982

Library Week and Flag Day were organized in Jaffna from 22 - 28 February 1982.

15.05.1982

“Jaffna Public Library Week” was held from 15 - 21 May 1982 in Colombo.

10.12.1982

As a temporary measure a section of the library was renovated and the children's section and the reference section began to function.

14.07.1983

The book lending section began to function.

10.01.1984

Library membership, which had previously been restricted to those within the Municipal limits, was extended to the entire Jaffna district.

05.06.1984

An opening ceremony was held for the renovated Library

1985

The Jaffna Fort area was declared a war zone. A decision was made to shift the Jaffna Library to the Hindu hostel building in Nallur. It was decided that branches of the Jaffna Public Library would be opened elsewhere due to safety and security concerns.

23.03.1985

The library's first branch in Chundukuli was relocated on 23 March 1985 to the YMCA building. It had previously been functioning since 1981 at the Community Center on Raqqa Road. The library was eventually abandoned due to people's displacement in large numbers during the civil war of 1995 and as a result the library was badly neglected and damaged. This branch was permanently closed in 1998 due to a proposed plan to establish an interim Jaffna Public Library at the Jaffna National Housing Authority Building under the Jaffna Public Library Reconstruction Project.

23.03.1985

Another branch of Jaffna Public Library, known as the Muslim Branch Library, was opened on 23 March 1985 in a private building in the predominantly Muslim populated area. Subsequently a building for the library was purchased at a low price on Osmania College Road due to the great efforts taken by the former councillor Janab Abdul Qadir. In this building, a library carrying out all library services was opened on 16 July 1986. In October 1990, following the expulsion of Muslims by the LTTE, the library was closed and later reopened in a private building on Moor Road and functioned there until 1995.

24.04.1985

Another branch of the library opened on 24 April 1985 in a private building in front of the Nallur Hindu Hostel building by the Municipal Commissioner Mr.C.V.K. Sivagnanam.

09.05.1985

On 9 May 1985 the Sri Lankan Army launched an attack in the direction of the main library in retaliation to an attack on the Jaffna Fort with a rocket launcher by a youth. The librarian at that time, Miss Slochana Ragunathan, brought this matter to the attention of the Municipal Commissioner, Mr CVK Sivagnanam and he then contacted the Army Commander and told him that students were studying inside the library and that they need to be evacuated and requested for some time and wanted the students to leave immediately. There were around 80 students in the library at that time and all of them evacuated at around 4.30pm. The librarian also reported that on the same day at around 9.30pm a massive noise was heard in the direction of the library. These incidents about the attack on the library building were recollected by Miss Sulochana Raghunathan in the documentary film - 'Burning Memories' released by Someetharan.

12.05.1985

The library was bombed by the army at midnight. The local newspaper 'Eelamurasu' reported that the bombing that day as follows: "The library was bombed at midnight. The building, doors and windows were shattered. A bomb exploded at the Jaffna Public Library just after midnight yesterday, causing severe damage to the centre part of the Library".

30.05.1985

Attempts were made to establish a library in the Vannarponnai area to cater to the needs of the readers and scholars in the area. As a result, a library branch was opened on 30 May 1985 in a private house on Iyanar Kovil Road. Later a permanent building

for the library was constructed on Vannai Siri Kamatchi Ambhaal Temple Road and opened on 21 July 1988 thus library services were expanded in that area.

09.06.1986

At the request of intellectuals and academics, the Jaffna Municipality agreed to start a special library to collect and preserve all books relating to Tamil literature, language, culture and customs. Accordingly a cultural library (the Tamil Hindu Cultural Library) was established on 09 June 1986 at the Saiva Periyar Arumuga Navalar Memorial Hall in Nallur.

25.08.1986

The library was shelled. The 'Eelamurasu' newspaper published on 25 August 1986 stated "Jaffna Library damaged! The city was in darkness all night. Yesterday afternoon, the old public library building was badly damaged by a "shell" attack from the fort. The new library building that was being built near this library is also believed to have been damaged."

28.09.1986

The Guru Nagar Library branch was opened by Father Theogupillai on 28 September 1986. This building recently underwent renovations from 2018 to 2020.

19.01.1992

Steps were taken to shift the library office to the Nallur Branch Library which was functioning in the Hindu Hostal building. Due to the space crisis and an increasing number of readers and in order to consolidate the library services, all other Jaffna

Municipal Council divisions functioning in the Hindu Hostel building were shifted out and the entire building was used to accommodate the library. The expanded paramedical section and a separate children's section were opened in the new area on 19 January 1992.

1995 October

The libraries were abandoned in October 1995 when the entire administration were displaced as a result of the civil war. When people returned to Jaffna in April 1996 they found that the libraries had been damaged. The Chundukuli Branch Library and the Moor Road Branch Library were the most severely damaged. Newly made furniture and books were damaged and some had disappeared.

January 14, 1998

A temporary library at the District National Housing Authority Building was opened at 9.00 am on 14 January 1998 by Sri Lankan parliamentary ministers Mr Mangala Samaraweera, Mr Richard Pathirana and Mr Bertilal Premaratne in the presence of the British High Commissioner, the British Council Director, commanders of the three forces, clergymen and Jaffna Library presidential committee members Mr Yogendra Duraiswamy and Mrs Peter Kenaman.

1998

Action was taken in 1998 to estimate and repair damages caused to the library since 1985 as a result of the armed conflict. These included bullet holes from cannons and artillery shells.

14.02.2003

An opening ceremony for the Jaffna Public Library was scheduled to take place on 14 February 2003 during Chandrika Bandaranaike's presidency. At that time there were series of upheavals in Eelam Tamil politics. The opening ceremony was announced during a period of relative peace during a ceasefire agreement. The Mayor of Jaffna at the time, Mr. Sellan Kandayan, extended an invitation to a Tamil Member of Parliament for Sri Lanka, Mr. V. Anandasangari, and he was to open the renovated Jaffna Library. However, at the last minute the opening ceremony was cancelled.

31.12.2003

Most of the remaining repairs and construction work for the Jaffna Public Library buildings were completed by 31 December 2003 and the library was handed over to the Municipal Commissioner.

23.02.2004

The library was opened to the public by the Municipal Commissioner on 23 February 2004 without any ceremony or any formalities.

2010

A plaque was made with inscriptions in three languages stating that the Jaffna Public Library was declared open on 14 February 2003. But it was not placed on the building because the formal opening ceremony did not take place. The plaque was subsequently placed on the library building after seven years in July 2010.

2019

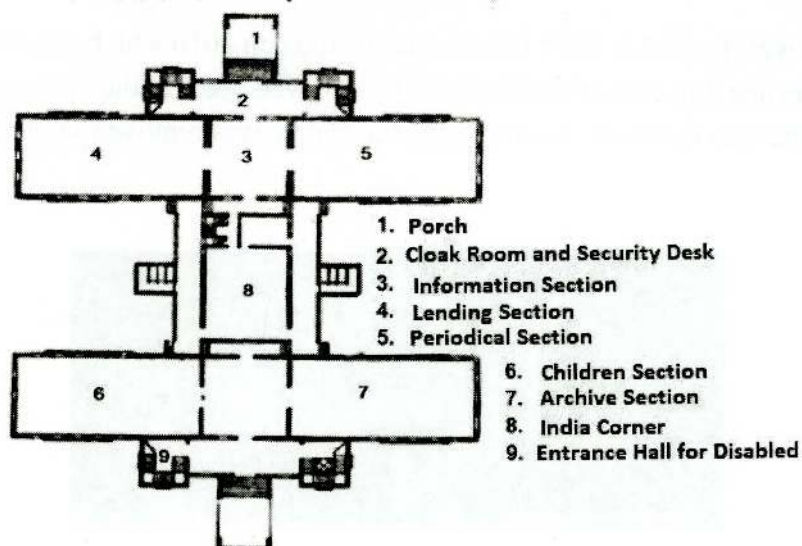
It was decided in 2018 that the plaque fixed in 2010 which carried the opening date of the library to be removed because the opening date was incorrect. Accordingly, the plaque was removed in 2019.



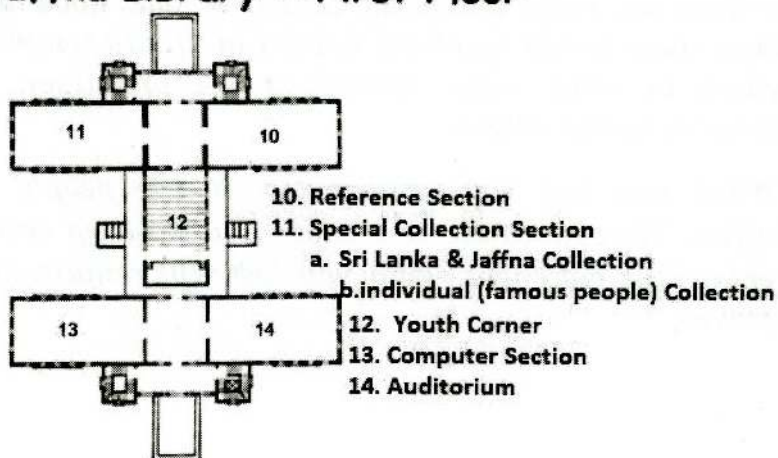
"The history of the Tamil people was incinerated, including valuable books of great Hindu Philosophers, irreplaceable ancient texts, and scrolls written on palm leaves of centuries old. Good old days, these works had been housed in Hindu temples, which in some ways served as the precursor to libraries in the island."

"What was lost will remain lost to the people of Jaffna. We could add new books, but nothing could replace the old books, what was lost will remain lost forever."

Jaffna Library - Ground Floor



Jaffna Library - First Floor





1933 - 2021
(88 Years)