

# ***Role and responsibility of the national library of Sri Lanka***

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## **ABSTRACT**

*National Library of Sri Lanka is functioning under the National Library and Documentation Services Board(NLDSB) which was established in 1970. Main objective of the National Library of Sri Lanka is to collect and preserve Sri Lanka's documentary heritage for the present and future generations. National Library collection is built up according to the collection development policy prepared by the NLDSB. To record the country's documentary heritage, the National Library maintains a number of bibliographic and documentation services including the Sri Lanka National Bibliography. In addition to the collection and maintenance of country's publications, National Library of Sri Lanka maintains a number of library development activities in national level. They are training of librarians, providing library advisory services, grading of libraries, formulation of library standards, reading promotion, development of library co-operation, conducting book exhibitions and providing assistance for book publishing. The international programmes includes the international book exchange programme, membership of main international associations and institutions in the library and information field, maintaining international projects such as ISBN,ISSN and ISMN. In addition, National Library of Sri Lanka serves as the focal point of the Memory of the World programme in Sri Lanka implemented by UNESCO. National Library of Sri Lanka has faced a number of problems in its development process. Lack of understanding about the national library concept, legal problems, financial problems, insufficient training of staff, problems in the utilization of information technology, preservation of the national library collection and inadequate space for the growing collection are the main problems. Despite the above barriers, National Library of Sri Lanka has achieved a considerable development for the last twenty five years.*

**Keywords:** National Library; Sri Lanka; Information; Library Resources; Documentation

## **INTRODUCTION**

When compared with the other countries of the world, the establishment of the National Library of Sri Lanka somewhat delayed. The preliminary activities for the establishment of the National Library of Sri Lanka were carried out in 1960s. As the preliminary measure for the establishment of the National Library of Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka National Library Services Board was established by an Act of parliament in 1970. The main objective of Sri Lanka National Library Services Board was to establish the National Library of Sri Lanka. The National Library of Sri Lanka was inaugurated on 27.04.1990. The National Library of Sri Lanka has been carrying out the internationally

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accepted national library functions successfully so far. New National Library and Documentation Services Board Act was introduced in 1998

### **Administrative Structure**

National Library of Sri Lanka is functioning under the Ministry of Education Services of Sri Lanka and governed by a Board of Directors. The Board of Directors consists of seven ex-officio members and seven members appointed by the Minister of Education Services. Chairman is the Head of the institution and the Director General is the chief executive officer. National Library of Sri Lanka consists of ten professional divisions and five supporting divisions.

### **Function**

According to the new Act of 1998, National Library of Sri Lanka is functioning under the National Library and Documentation Services Board. According to the Act the function of the National Library of Sri Lanka are as follows:

1. To make available for the use of all sections of the community, a national collection of library materials and documentation resources appropriate to their needs.
2. To preserve the national and cultural heritage of Sri Lanka through the establishment, development and maintenance of a national collection of library and documentation materials, published in or related to Sri Lanka.
3. To receive copies of Sri Lankan publication deposited in the Department of National Archives under the printers and publishers ordinance.
4. To acquire by purchase or otherwise, copies of publication published in, or relating to, Sri Lanka, or foreign publications relevant to the needs of Sri Lanka.
5. To provide bibliographic services, including national bibliographic services and to compile a national union catalogue of library material of libraries in Sri Lanka.
6. To establish and create a national bibliographic database of documents and publications, published in, or relating to Sri Lanka.
7. To publish the Sri Lanka National Bibliography.
8. To provide reference, information, referral, reprographic and documenting research services to all sections of the community of Sri Lanka.
9. To facilitate access to the library and documentation resources which are, or may in future become, available in or outside Sri Lanka to all members of the community.
10. To promote, advice and assist in the establishment, development and maintenance of library and documentation networks, including networks or public, school,

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academic, government and other libraries and documentation centers serving all sections of the community in Sri Lanka.

11. To promote and facilitate co-operation and resource sharing among libraries and documentation centers, at national and international levels including exchange of staff.
12. To promote the introduction and efficient application of new information technologies in libraries and documentation centers in Sri Lanka through the application of such technologies in the work on the centre and to provide advice, assistance and training to other bodies regarding the introductions of such technologies or promotional activities.
13. To undertake such projects and provide such facilities and services, in pursuance of the functions of the Board as the Board may from time to time require.

### **Major activities of the national library**

#### **Acquisition of library material**

Library materials are acquired for the National Library through three methods. They are purchasing, legal deposit copies and donations. In addition, library materials are also acquired through the local and international books exchange program. The Legal Deposit Law is implemented by the National Archives Department and under this law every printer is legally bound to deposit five copies of their publications in the National Archives Department. National Library receives one copy of these five copies.

#### **Bibliographic Services**

National Library of Sri Lanka compiles a number of bibliographic and documentation sources in national level. They are as follows:

1. Sri Lanka National Bibliography
2. Sri Lanka periodical Article Index
3. Retrospective National Bibliography
4. Authority list of authors
5. Authority list of titles
6. Sri Lanka Newspaper Article Index
7. Directory of Government Publications
8. Index to postgraduate theses in Sri Lanka
9. Index to Research Reports in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka National Bibliography is the official publication which consists of latest information on publications published in the country. Compilation of Retrospective Sri Lanka National Bibliography has also been completed. Retrospective National Bibliography includes information on publications published in Sri Lanka since the beginning of printing industry in Sri Lanka to the year in which the current national bibliography was started (1962). Sri Lanka Periodical Article Index includes information on periodical articles published in Sri Lanka. Authority list of authors and titles have been compiled to facilitate the librarians to create a uniformity in cataloguing activities. Sri Lanka Newspaper Article Index includes information on articles published in main

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newspapers in Sri Lanka. Directory of government publications contains information on publications published by government institutions. Index to Research Reports in Sri Lanka includes information on reports of research studies carried out by various institutions. Index to postgraduate theses in Sri Lanka includes information on postgraduate theses submitted to universities in Sri Lanka.

### **Conservation and Preservation Services**

Conservation and preservation services mainly focus on to preserve the national library collection and the assisting the conservation activities of other libraries. Conservation activities of the national library include book binding, fumigation, humidity control, cleaning, using pesticide and document conservation. Organizing training programmes on conservation is also carried out by this Division. In addition to the preservation of the national library collection, National library maintains a number of activities for the benefit of other libraries in the country

### **Information Technology Services**

The Information Technology Division handles all the computer activities of the institution. The activities carried out by the Information Technology Division include supervision and co-ordination of the computer activities of the institution, maintenance of the web server of the National Library, preparation of computer programmes, maintenance of National Library web page maintenance of the activities of the Alice for Windows.

Following online databases are included to the National Library website:

1. Sri Lanka Newspaper article index
2. National union catalogue of Sri Lanka
3. Postgraduate Theses Index
4. Sri Lanka conference Index
5. Devolution of power and ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka

These databases can be searched through the National Library website ([www.natlib.lk](http://www.natlib.lk)) Creation of library software is also carried out. A library software called *pothgula*(an ancient name for the library)was created recently. This was specially designed for school libraries. This software is used by about 50 school libraries at present. A training was also given to the librarians of these schools on the application of this software.

### **Library Research Activities**

Conducting research in library and information field in Sri Lanka is a responsibility assigned to the National Library of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, a number of research activities are carried out at present. Library research activities presently carried out are public library survey in provincial level conducting research studies on selected topics, compilation of the statistical handbook on libraries in Sri Lanka, organizing workshop on library research methodology for librarians, collections of media information on library activities in Sri Lanka.

In 2012, a study was carried out to understand the perception and attitude of library professionals about the resources and services of the National Library. In this study the attitude on different areas of the National Library such as services, membership

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procedure, staff efficiency were tested. Majority of the respondents (74%) have said that the membership procedure is satisfactory. 70% have said that staff efficiency is adequate. 90% of the professionals said that public relation of the national library staff is satisfactory. The research report titled "Study on attitude of library professionals on resources and services of the national Library of Sri Lanka" has been published by the National Library and Documentation Services Board. Implementation of some of the recommendations such as more staff training, digitizing the collections, amendment of the legal deposit law, improvement of the national library website have already been started.

Another research study was carried out recently on the reading habit among the students in secondary grades and above in government schools in Sri Lanka. The objective of the study is to examine the present situation of reading habit among school children in Sri Lanka. The study revealed that 83% of the students read materials other than text books. In reading high preference was given to novels, short stories, poetry, drama and educational books.

### **Resources and services of the National Library of Sri Lanka**

The main function of the National Library of Sri Lanka is to collect and preserve the documentary heritage of Sri Lanka for the benefit of present and future generations. Accordingly, National Library collects different types of information resources. The library materials collected are books, periodicals newspapers, manuscripts, audio visual material and electronic media.

National Library presently has the following collections:

1. Sri Lanka collection
2. Periodical collection
3. Newspaper collection
4. Reference collection
5. Legal deposit collection
6. Government Publications collection
7. Audio Visual collection
8. Electronic Resources collection
9. Ola leaf collection
10. Microfilm collection
11. UNESCO collection
12. Library and information science collection
13. Postgraduate theses collection
14. Martin Wicramasingha collection
15. Map collection
16. Collection on Intangible Cultural Heritage
17. Foreign collection
18. Manuscripts collection
19. Collection on china

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20. Rare books collection
21. Science and Technology
22. Collection on Iran
23. Brail books collection
24. collection on policies and plans

The National Library is a deposit library and receives copies of Sri Lanka Publications under the printers and publishers ordinance and through other methods such as purchasing and donations. Sri Lanka collection consists of publications, published in Sri Lanka, publications on Sri Lanka and publications written by Sri Lankan in foreign countries. Over 800 titles of Sri Lankan and foreign periodicals are available in the National Library. The Newspaper Collection consists of over 300 newspaper titles in Sinhala, Tamil and English. This collection consists of newspapers published since 1976 to date. The reference collection consists of reference material such as Encyclopedias, Directories, Indexes, Bibliographies, Glossaries, Gazettes and others. Legal deposit collection consists of library material received from the National Archives Department under the legal deposit law. According to the legal deposit law, five copies of every publication published in the country should be deposited in the National Archives Department. National Library receives one copy of the five copies deposited in the National Archives Department. Government Publications collection consists of gazettes, acts, bills, ordinance, hanzards, seasonal papers, administration reports, Sri Lanka law reports, commission reports and blue books. There is a separate audio-visual unit and audio visual collection consists of audio cassettes, video cassettes, CDs, DVDs, gramophone discs of Sri Lanka songs, documentaries, plays and teledramas. electronic resources collection consists of a number of on line databases.

Ola leaf collection consists of ola leaf manuscripts covering the areas such as Buddhism, Literature, Ayurvedic medicine etc. The microfilm collection consists of local and foreign microfilms and microfiches. Microfilms include local newspapers and books. Microfiches include books, administration reports, reports, statistical reports, parliamentary series, government accounts, bills, laws and Hansards. National Library of Sri Lanka received UNESCO publications since 1971 to 1990. This collection consists of UNESCO publications received to the National Library during this period. The number of books of the UNESCO collection is about 8500. National Library of Sri Lanka has the largest and most comprehensive library and information science collection in the country. This collection consists of large number of books, reference materials and reputed local and foreign periodicals in the field. Postgraduate theses collection consists of Postgraduate theses (M.A, M Phil, PhD) submitted to universities in Sri Lanka. Martin Wickramasinghe collection consists of books written by veteran author Martin Wickramasinghe and his personal collection. His personal collection consists of about 5000 books on different subjects like literature, Buddhism, Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology etc. This collection consists of over 1000 maps relating to Sri Lanka. These maps have been acquired from the Survey Department of Sri Lanka. Foreign collection consists of foreign books acquired to the national library collection. In the acquisition of foreign books, priority is given to books published on Sri Lanka, books published by Sri Lankans in foreign countries, books on library and information science and reference sources.

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Manuscript collection consists of manuscripts on folklore of Sri Lanka. They have been written on different aspects of folklore such as folk poems, folk songs, folktales, folk music, etc.. Collection on China consists of books and other library material on China. These books were received from China as donations. National Library of Sri Lanka acquires old and rare books from individuals. These books are selected by an expert committee appointed by the National Library. The prices of the books are decided by the committee. Factors such as rarity, contents physical conditions are taken into consideration in selecting the books. Science and technology collection consists of books and reference material on science and technology. This collection is much used by students of science and technology. Collection on Iran was started with the assistance of Embassy of the Republic of Iran in Sri Lanka. Embassy of the Republic of Iran donated books and other library material for the collection. Brail books collection is maintained for the benefit of visually handicapped readers. National Library of Sri Lanka is in the process of developing this collection through donations from various institutions which deal with blind and visually handicapped readers. The number of readers who used the National Library in 2013 was 18782.

#### **Collection Development Policy of the National Library**

Collection development activities are carried out according to the guidelines of the collection development policy. The objective of the collection development policy is to develop the national library collection in systematic manner. According to the collection development policy, following library material are acquired to the national library:

1. monographs
2. periodicals
3. newspapers
4. reference sources
5. manuscripts
6. ola-leaf manuscripts
7. audio visual material
8. stamps
9. maps
10. postgraduate theses
11. reports
12. government publications
13. pamphlets
14. Photographs
15. electronic media
16. micro forms
17. rare books
18. computer databases
19. circulars
20. paintings

According to the collection development policy, priority is given to acquire the following material:

1. Publications published in Sri Lanka

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2. Publications on Sri Lanka published in foreign countries
3. Publications compiled by Sri Lankans in foreign countries
4. Reference sources which are essential for research but cannot be acquired by other libraries
5. Publications on library and information science
6. Publications for the special collections

### **Services of the National Library of Sri Lanka**

National Library of Sri Lanka maintains a number of services for the readers. Through user education service readers are made aware about the resources and services of the National Library. This awareness is given through various methods such as seminars, study tours, video programmes, lectures etc. Under inquiry service readers can make inquiries through letters, telephone calls, fax messages, emails and by personally visiting the National Library. The information desk located at the ground floor deals with the inquiries to the readers. Through the reference service, reference information is provided to readers through various collections of the National Library. Photo copies of national library material are provided to readers on concessionary rates. The number of photocopies issued to readers in 2013 was 97256. National Library maintains an inter library loan service with main libraries in the country. For this purpose the participating libraries have to sign an agreement with the National Library. For these libraries, National Library lends books for a period of two weeks. At the moment 32 main libraries have combined to this service. Internet service is provided to the readers on a concessionary rate. National Library maintains an information repackaging service for the benefit of national library readers. Under this service information on different topics are collected and organized in such a way that readers could search the information they need conveniently. Under the current awareness service readers are made aware about the latest publications available in the National Library.

### **Membership procedure**

All Sri Lankans as well as foreigners are entitled to get the membership of the National Library. Membership is given under different categories. They are temporary membership, permanent membership, life membership and Institutional membership. The number of permanent members is about 3000 at present.

### **Conservation and preservation activities**

Conservation activities of the National Library are carried out by the conservation and preservation Division of the National Library. Conservation activities of the national library collection include book binding, fumigation, document repairing and humidity control, etc. In addition to the conservation and preservation of the National Library collection, the Conservation and Preservation Division implements the programmes for the preservation of other libraries as well. This activity includes advisory services on conservation, organizing training programmes on conservation, supply of conservation material etc.

### **Automation of the National Library**

Automation of the national library activities was started in 1993. An information technology committee was established in 1993 to get advice on the automation of the national library. On the instruction of the Information Technology Committee the first



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action taken was the establishment of an Information Technology Division for the National Library of Sri Lanka. The other activities carried out were the recruitment of information technology staff, purchasing of computers and other equipments, installation of local area network (LAN), installation of internet facilities for national library staff as well as the national library readers etc. A considerable development has been achieved in the automation of the National Library for the last two decades. Most activities of the National Library have been computerized. Some bibliographic and documentation services are available on line in the national library web site ([www.natlib.lk](http://www.natlib.lk)).

#### **International Relation**

National Library of Sri Lanka has achieved a considerable progress in maintaining the international relations in the library and information sector. National Library of Sri Lanka has obtained the membership of main international organizations in library and information sector. National Library of Sri Lanka maintains a book exchange programme with national libraries of other countries. Staffs of the National Library participate in foreign training programmes and conferences in library and information field. National Library of Sri Lanka serves as the Sri Lankan focal point of several international projects such as ISBN, ISSN and ISMN. The number of ISBN numbers issued in 2013 was 8993. National Library of Sri Lanka is also the focal point of Memory of the World programme implemented by UNESCO. A number of research studies have been carried out on the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Sri Lanka with the financial assistance of ICHCAP, a UNESCO affiliated institution. National Library of Sri Lanka has established an Iran Corner and a China Corner in the national library. Books and other library material and equipments for the corners were provided by the Embassies of the relevant countries.

#### **Library Development activities in national level**

##### **Human Resource Development in Library and Information Sector**

National Library maintains following training programmes for training of librarians in the country:

1. Training programs for public librarians
2. Training programs for school librarians
3. Training programs for pirivena (temple) librarians
4. Training programs on conservation and preservation of library materials
5. Training programs on Information Communication Technology (ICT)
6. Training programs on compilation of documentation sources
7. Training workshops on cataloguing and classification
8. Training workshops on library research methodology
9. Training programs on record room management
10. Training workshops for authors and writers

##### **Library Advisory Services**

National Library provides advisory services for libraries free of charge. Advisory services are provided on areas like building planning, conservation, automation, cataloguing and classification etc.

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### **Grading of Libraries**

Libraries are graded to different grades such as grade iii, ii, i and supra grade. The library standards compiled by the National Library and Documentation Services Board are made used of in grading the libraries.

### **Formulation of Library Standards**

The National Library and Documentation Services Board has compiled standards for libraries in Sri Lanka. These standards have been compiled for different grades separately. Standards have been compiled on different areas of library operations.

### **Reading Promotion**

Promotion of reading among the Sri Lankan community is a responsibility of the National Library. It is the generally accepted opinion that the reading habit among the Sri Lankan people has declined. To overcome this problem. National Library and Documentation Services Board started National Reading Month program in 2004. On the recommendation of the National Library and Documentation Services Board, the government of Sri Lanka declared the month of October as the National Reading Month since 2004. During the National Reading Month National Library and Documentation Services Board implements various reading promotion programs throughout the country with the assistance other libraries in the country.

### **Development of library co-operation**

Action have been taken to improve the co-operation among the libraries. A separate division has been established for library co-operation. Under this a number of projects are implemented to improve the inter library co-operation.

### **Assistance for book development**

A number of projects are implemented to assist the book development in the country. One project is providing financial assistance to authors to publish their books. Under this project manuscripts are accepted from authors and they are sent to experts in the relevant fields for inspection. The successful manuscripts are provided financial assistance for publishing. National Library has provided financial assistance to publish about 3000 books so far under this project. The amount spent for the project in 2013 was Rs.1,387,345. Another project is the purchase of new printed publications as an assistance to sell their books.

### **Sale of books and library stationary on concessionary prices**

Books and library stationary such as catalogue cards, book pockets, book cards, date labels, equipments and tools needed in book binding etc. are sold at concessionary prices in the National Library Bookshop.

### **Problems Encountered By the National Library of Sri Lanka in its Development Process**

The National Library of Sri Lanka has faced a number of socio economic problems in its development process. National Library of Sri Lanka was established twenty three years ago and it is still a growing organization. Following are the major socio economic obstacles presently faced by the National Library:

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### **1. Lack of understanding about the national library concept**

Although the National Library of Sri Lanka was established twenty three years ago, the understanding of the national library concept has not gone the Sri Lankan community so far. The idea of the most people is that the national library is just another library. Therefore, awareness raising on the national library concept is a timely requirement.

### **2. Legal problems**

The main legal problem is the weaknesses of the Legal Deposit Law. The Printers and Publishers Ordinance of 1885 and the Newspaper Ordinance of 1839 have not been amended so far and it is still functioning as the legal deposit law. According to this law, five copies of every publication published in Sri Lanka should be deposited in the National Archives Department. National Library receives one copy of these five copies. However, some printers do not deposit the publications because the fine charged for not depositing the publications is very low. As a result, National Library does not receive many publications. Also, the present legal deposit law does not cover some material like audio-visual and electronic media. Therefore, the amendment of the legal deposit law is an urgent requirement.

### **3. Financial Problem**

National Library depends on government allocations. Although the institution earns a little income through its various activities, maintenance of the institution mainly depends on government funds.

### **4. Insufficient Training of the national library staff**

Insufficient training of the national library staff is a major problem faced by the National Library. Most of the officers have not acquired an adequate professional training on library activities. Only few officers have obtained foreign training. Therefore, a systematic staff development program is necessary to improve the manpower.

### **Problems in the Utilization of Information Technology**

Although the computerization of the national library activities was started 1993, national library has faced many problems in the utilization of information technology for the last twenty years. Most of the computers presently used by the institution are old and outdated. There are problems in providing speedy internet facilities due the financial constraints. There is a strong need to obtain new computers to carry out the services satisfactorily.

### **Problems in the Preservation of national library collection**

Preservation of the national library collection has to be ensured for the present and future generations because the national library collection consists of the documentary heritage of the country. Due to the financial constraints, the preservation of the national library collection has become a challenge. Some old newspapers are deteriorating rapidly. Digitization of these materials is an urgent requirement.

### **Space for the growing collection**

Due to the rapid expansion of the national library collection, inadequacy of space is becoming a serious problem. Specially the newspaper collection, legal deposit collection

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and Sri Lanka collection are growing rapidly. Therefore, the additional building space is needed.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

National Library of Sri Lanka has achieved a considerable development during the last few decades. When compared with other countries of the world, the establishment of the National Library of Sri Lanka was somewhat delayed. However it has been able to identify the internationally recognized national library functions and implement them in Sri Lanka. However, according to the research studies carried out by the National Library certain areas need further development. The areas such as collection development, automation, preservation, international relations, staff and staff efficiency, library research, etc. have not developed into a satisfactory level and they need further improvement. In addition, awareness raising about the national library concept among the Sri Lankan community also needs improvement. The understanding about the national library concept and its role has not spread among the Sri Lankan community adequately. Presently National Library of Sri Lanka performs all the internationally recognized national library functions despite many difficulties. Our objective is to develop the resources and services of the National Library into a considerably advanced status within the next few years.

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