

**CHALLENGES FACED IN DEVELOPING THE
PALM LEAF MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION IN THE
LIBRARY OF UNIVERSITY OF SRI JAYEWARDENEPURA**

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Palm leaf manuscripts are historically valuable documents that include indigenous knowledge of our ancestors. Most of the palm leaf manuscripts are about language, literature, Buddhist culture, medicine, astrology, yantra mantra, fiction, customs, and ceremonies. In Sri Lanka, original palm leaf manuscripts are found mostly in ancient temples and with individuals belonging to aristocratic families. Palm leaf manuscripts are made from palm tree leaves that contain natural organic materials. Therefore, they are naturally susceptible to be damaged. Palm leaf manuscripts at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ) Library are nearly 300 – 400 years old. Hence, it is a requirement to treat the palm leaf manuscripts without delay to avoid further deterioration. Light, heat, moisture, fungi, insects, and air pollution are some of the known factors for deterioration of palm leaf manuscripts. The objective of this study was to identify the challenges in the process of developing the palm leaf manuscript collection. Nature of the study was descriptive. As the initial step, a unit was established for the preservation and conservation of library materials considering the national requirement. As the other end of the process, digitization of identified palm leaf manuscripts and making them accessible to readers was the objective. In between these two ends, there were many processes to be performed including making aware of the project, collecting manuscripts from various places in the island, appreciation process of the donors, cost determination, cleaning, reading, categorizing, inventorying, cataloguing and digitization of palm leaf manuscripts. Forming of a few committees and formulation of related policy documents were essential tasks. Categorically the challenges were in the form of human capital, infrastructure, funds and technology. It is expected that building awareness about these challenges will be beneficial for librarians those who are interested in developing palm leaf manuscripts collections in their libraries.

Keywords: *Conservation and preservation; Digitization; Palm leaf manuscripts, Sri Lanka; University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.*