Cataloguing In Sri Lanka


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Country

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean with an area of 65,610 square kilometers having a population over 19,144,875. Sri Lankan society comprises of four major ethnic groups, namely, Sinhalese, Tamils Muslims and Burghers and is multi lingual. There are three official languages in the island with separate scripts: Sinhala, Tamil and English. It is also multi religious with four major religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The literacy rate of the country is about 90 per cent1.

The country has an unbroken recorded history of over 2500 years. The art of writing, the first prerequisite of any bibliographical activity, has been known on the island since the 3rd century B.C.2

Libraries

The advent of Buddhism in 3rd century B.C. marked the growth of an intellectual tradition that has flourished for centuries, under the influence of Buddhist monasteries in the major cities of the country. Indeed, learning and scholarship has been centered around these monasteries and temples.3 Hence, they quite naturally became centers for the production and protection of books. Recorded evidence shows that there have been a number of monastic libraries since the 5th century A.D. Although no information is available on these early libraries, except their existence, it can be assumed that they were involved in bibliographical activities such as the organization and listing of their collections4.

Ola leaves were the widely used writing material in the early era and books were made up by binding ola leaves together5. Sri Lanka was reputed for the production and distribution of valuable books. South India, China and Thailand from time to time obtained copies of Buddhist texts and commentaries from Sri Lanka and foreign scholars also came to the country in search of books6.

Despite the fact that there were books, libraries and scholarship in ancient Sri Lanka, no information is available of the catalogues, bibliographies or book lists of this period. Currently available records allow the tracing of the bibliographical tradition of the country only after the seventeenth century.
Sri Lanka came under the influence of Western powers for the first time in the sixteenth century. The Portuguese arrived in 1505 and ruled the maritime zone of the island until the Dutch captured it from them in 1658. Perhaps the “mindless destruction of places of worship sacred to other faiths” by the Portuguese tolled death knell of whatever local library system prevalent then.

Sri Lanka entered the era of printing during the period of Dutch contact of the country. The first Sinhalese printed book from the Dutch Press in Colombo, entitled “Singleesch Gebeede-Boek”, appeared in 1737. This printing press was taken over by the British when they became the rulers of the maritime zone of the country in 1796. Although the development of the printing industry was very slow during the first half of the nineteenth century under the British rule, the second half of the century saw a fast growth of the trade with the establishment of a number of printing presses for vernacular publications.

**Catalogues and cataloguing**

It was in the 18th century that a record of a library catalogue was found for the first time. Cornelis Joan Simons, the Dutch Governor in Sri Lanka in 1707, referring to the Council of Justice in Colombo stated that: “There is a very useful library in the Council chambers. As it was not very well looked after, I had a catalogue made of its contents…”

At the dawn of the 19th century, under the British occupation, a library movement on modern lines began to grow. In order to serve the reading and information needs of British and other European expatriates as well as English educated local elites a number of libraries, public, academic and research in nature were flourishing in various principal cities in the island throughout this period. The revival of traditional oriental learning based on Buddhist monastic principles had also contributed to the fast growth of libraries during the period. Especially, the need to collect, list and preserve the ola leaf manuscripts in the country had become a priority of this period due to this revival.

One of the foremost problems faced by libraries in 19th century Sri Lanka was the organization of their collections for quick and easy use by their clientele. Certainly this had also been a constant problem for libraries in the Western world. It was in the middle of the 19th century that organized efforts to formulate catalogue codes appear to have been made in England and America.

The preparation of library catalogues in the absence of internationally accepted codes was no doubt a difficult task, and early cataloguers therefore tried to evolve systems of their own, based on their experience and imagination.

It is interesting to note that most of the early library catalogues in Sri Lanka are in printed book form. These catalogues can be categorized into six groups: (1) Catalogues of Academic/ Research libraries (2) Catalogues of Subscription/ Public libraries (3) Printed catalogues for manuscripts (4) Catalogues of the national imprint (5) Subject catalogues (6) Sales/trade catalogues.
The first printed catalogue, according to my search of early catalogues in the country, published in 1827 belongs to the “Library and Museum of Medical Department on the service of Ceylon”. This is a catalogue of both the books in the library and the objects in the Museum of the then Medical Department in Sri Lanka. It is a rudimentary classified catalogue in which books are categorized under 13 broader classes giving (1) author’s name and title together (2) number of volumes in the library (3) size of the book and (4) where published. Although, no other information is available on compilation method, it can reasonable assumed that the printed catalogues of the British libraries during the period influenced the compiler.

The Colombo Museum Library, since its inception in 1877, has produced a number of important printed catalogues in addition to its usual “slip catalogue”. It is to be noted here that one of the Librarians in this library, namely Gerard A. Joseph, had contributed a great deal to the development of the bibliographical tradition in Sri Lanka and his professionalism was recognized by the outside world. He was invited to the Diamond Jubilee International Library Conference held in London in 1897 and was appointed Vice-President designate. He contributed a paper on “The libraries of Ceylon” to this conference.\(^\text{14}\). Influence of Cutter’s Rules for a Dictionary Catalog can be seen in the catalogues prepared by Joseph. For example in the preface of the “Supplement No.2 to the Catalogue of the Colombo Museum Library, part ii: Printed books” published in 1899 gives the following objectives of the catalogue:

To enable anyone to find a book which either
(a) the author
(b) the title, or
(c) the subject is known

To show what the library contains:
(d) by a given author
(e) on a given subject
(f) in a given kind of literature

Although no acknowledgement has been made, these are direct quotations of Cutter’s objectives. Entries are also prepared in accordance with the rules of RDC.

The “Catalogue of Sinhalese Printed books in the Library of the British Museum, prepared by Don Martino De Zilva Wickremasinghe in 1901is based upon the rules of B.M. Code. The choice of main entries, the bibliographic description, the use of form headings such as “Academies”, “Periodical publications’ and the format of cross references strongly suggest this influence. For the first time in the history of cataloguing, this catalogue discusses the problems related to the use of Sinhalese personal names. Some libraries, have adopted the cataloguing methods employed in libraries in England at the time. For example the compiler of the Catalogue of the library of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Peradeniya states that the general plan of his catalogue is similar to that of the Cambridge University library.
Catalogues of Public libraries during the period are simple book lists. In most of them the bibliographic description is limited to author and title.

Printed catalogues for manuscripts of the period show a fairly developed stage of descriptive cataloguing. For example “A descriptive catalogue of Sanskrit, Pali and Sinhalese literary works of Ceylon prepared by James de Alwis and published in 1870 could be considered as the first descriptive catalogue of the country. Similarly “A catalogue of Pali, Sinhalese and Sanskrit manuscripts in the temple libraries of Ceylon prepared by Louis de Zoysa in 1885 is one of the finest descriptive catalogues of the period. It is “a remarkable example of a pioneer classified bibliography, based on careful research”

Origin of Catalogues of national imprint in Sri Lanka goes back to the year 1885 with the enactment of Printers and Publishers Ordinance. This particular Ordinance made it a compulsory requirement to publish the details of books received by the Registrar of books under the provisions of the law. The book list known as Quarterly Statement of Books printed in Ceylon was published as a part of the Government gazette. It is interesting to note here that regarding each book, under 13 areas, a comprehensive bibliographic description was given in this book list. These areas were:
1. The title of the book with a translation into English when the same is not in English
2. The language in which book is written
3. The name of the author, translator or editor of the book or any part thereof
4. The subject
5. The place of printing and the place of publication
6. The name or firm of the printer and the name or firm of the publisher
7. The date of issue from the press or of the publication
8. The number of sheets, leaves or pages
9. The size
10. The first, second or other number of the edition
11. The number of copies of which the edition consists
12. Whether the book is printed or lithographed
13. The price at which the book is sold to the public; and
14. The name and residence of the proprietor of the copyright or of any portion of such copyright

Bibliographic description

Bibliographic description of publications is the backbone of any catalogue or bibliography. The identification of described items relies on it. Although the catalogues in this review were produced in the absence of any accepted standard on bibliographic description such as ISBD, it seems that they followed at least two levels of description according to the type of the library.
In general, the catalogues of the research/academic libraries contained the following bibliographical elements in their entries:

1. Author
2. Title
3. Edition
4. Place of publication
5. Pagination/ Number of volumes
6. Note(s) (occasionally)

In certain catalogues, for example in the *Catalogue of the Sinhalese printed books in the library of the British Museum* (1901), publisher/printer also has been given in some entries. It is true that these elements were not fully described in the modern sense, yet, for the identification of the particular works described, they are sufficient.

The bibliographic description of entries in public library catalogues, on the other hand, seems to exist an elementary level. Many of them are confined to mere title-author or author-title listings with no other bibliographical details.

It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that the purpose of the catalogue, according to the type of library, was a determining factor in the selection of both elements of description and the level of description.

**Headings for the arrangement of entries**

The heading, “a name, word, or phrase placed at the head of a catalogue entry to provide an access point” serves as a key to the bibliographic description of any entry in a catalogue. Headings are based on the user approach to publications; a cataloguer or bibliographer may choose to arrange his entries under a heading that represents the most popular user approach of the time.

It seems once again that the type of library influenced the determination of headings for the arrangement of entries in the catalogues under review. In research/academic library catalogues a tendency to use either the surname of authors or titles for anonymous works as headings can generally be observed. Quite contrary to this practice, the arrangement of entries under titles as headings can be seen in the public library catalogues.

**Entry element**

Although there was no set of rules to determine on which element of a heading an entry was to be based, a general practice of using surnames of authors with or without initials can be observed in many of these catalogues. However, in title entries two practices are visible:

1. Direct title entry (transcription of the title as it is)
2. Inverted title entry (transcription of the title by using a “catch word” from it as the entry element)
3. Title inversion is widely seen in the public library catalogues; indeed, this method of inversion under a “catch word” served to bring together all related entries under one heading, in the absence of subject headings lists for this purpose.

The following is an example of inverted title entry extracted from the Catalogue of books in the United services library (1901):

**Ceylon**, and its capabilities by J.W. Bennett
- Hansard 1885, 1885, 1887
- Civil service manual- Dickman
- Handbook and directory, by Ferguson
- Map of Kandy Districts of, by Colnel Fraser

**Arrangement**

Except for a few (for example, the catalogues compiled by Gerard A. Joseph) the majority of these catalogues had their entries arranged alphabetically under a few broad subject headings. Although no classification system was used for the purpose, it can be assumed that this arrangement was a reflection of the shelf arrangement of books in particular libraries of the day. However, the classified catalogue system used in the country today can be traced back to this “alphabetico-classed” system.

**Vernacular titles**

Multilinguality of the national imprint appears to be a problem for the compilers of these catalogues in general. There was no consensus among library community on the recording of publications in vernacular languages. Although the transliteration of vernacular titles in Roman script was not absent, many compilers being expatriates or English educated elite, preferred the recording of vernacular titles in their English translated forms. This practice is an inexcusable drawback evident in these catalogues, because the translated titles of vernacular publications do not serve the purpose of identification of the described items. However, there are some catalogues, for example the Catalogue of the Sinhalese books in the Library of the British Museum, that give titles in transliterated forms as well as in their original script.

**Catalogue Codes**

No concrete evidence is found to state that Sri Lanka has produced any code of cataloguing. It seems that there was a system of listing of ola leaf books in ancient times. However, no information on such a system is available at present. On the other hand even after the Western influence no codes of cataloguing were developed in the country. This can be easily understood. People involved in the task of cataloguing were English educated elites. It is quite natural they turned to the catalogue codes in English language when compiling their catalogues.
**Anglo-American tradition**

It was during the middle of the twentieth century the Anglo-American cataloguing tradition began to exert its influence on cataloguing practice of Sri Lanka. It seems that Sri Lankan librarians educated at the School of Librarianship and Archives in London were instrumental in this process. The first Sri Lankan librarian graduated from London Library School in 1932 was Mr. R. L. Enright, Librarian of Ceylon University College. In the following year librarian of the Colombo Municipal library joined the London School of Librarianship. This trend was continued and by 1960s Sri Lanka had a number of qualified librarians.

Ceylon University College, the first university of the country was started in 1921 and till 1934 its library did not have a proper catalogue. The influence of the *Joint Code* or the *Cataloguing rules : Author and Title entries* can be seen in this catalogue. However, certain modifications have been made to suit to the local condition. One such important modification was the entry of Sinhalese books published before 1900 under title. Until the adoption of AACR1 in 1979 this catalogue was a simplified one which only author, title, imprint and series were given.

The libraries in two new universities established in 1959 adopted *A.L.A. Cataloging rules for author and title entries* and *Rules for descriptive cataloging in the Library of Congress* together. They did not hesitate to adopt AACR1 and AACR2 whenever they appeared. Now, all university libraries follow AACR 2 rules in compiling their catalogues. Apart from university libraries, almost all libraries in the country including the National Library now use AACR2. Use of AACR2 in the compilation of Sri Lanka national bibliography has been an influential factor in this regard. On the other hand syllabi of cataloguing in all Sri Lankan institutes involved in library education are based on AACR2. Hence the Anglo-American tradition has become a predominant tool of cataloguing in Sri Lanka.

**Problems**

However widely used, the Anglo-American tradition has a number of problems with regard to the application of national context. These problems can be observed both in the bibliographical description as well as choice of access points.

This paper deals only with some major problems associated with the use of uniform titles.

**Conflict between AACR2 rule 1.1B2 and rule 25.4**

According to rule 1.1B2 if the title proper includes a statement of responsibility…and it is an integral part of the title proper (i.e., connected by a case ending or other grammatical construction) it has to be transcribed as part of the title proper.

In Sri Lankan context most of the titles of works created before 1900 contain author’s name as an integral part (grammatically connected) of it. However, these works are
commonly known by their titles without authors’ names. Authors’ names are added at the head of titles just to show the importance of the work.

For example in “Siri Rahal Himiyange Selalihini sandesaya”, the title of the work is Selalihina ansdesaya. Siri Rahal Himi is the author. Ge is the connecting preposition. In English this means “Sir Rahal thera’s Selalihini Sandesaya.”

If we adhere to the above rule it is inevitable that we have to use uniform titles for all such titles (perhaps more than 75 per cent) as per the rule 25.4. In reality these works are commonly known under their titles without the name of the author. Therefore, it is absurd to use uniform titles for these works taking their commonly known titles proper as uniform titles. These works, indeed do not need uniform titles as no Sri Lankan would look under titles beginning with authors’ names. However, in case of doubt whether the work will be searched under the title with author’s name, a reference can be made from that title to the exact title proper of the work.

**Time periods for individual titles**

In AACR2 for individual titles are grouped under two time periods, i.e., works created after 1500 and works created before 1501. In the first category title in the original language by which a work has become known through use in manifestation of the work or in reference sources becomes the uniform title. In the second category, the title in the original language by which it is identified in modern sources becomes the uniform title. When such a title cannot be established, the use of title found in 1. modern editions, 2. early editions, and 3. manuscript copies as the uniform title is recommended.

In the context of vernacular publications in Sri Lanka this kind of time period grouping seems to be unnecessary. Title of the original language by which the work has become known through use in its manifestations can be used as the uniform title without any problem. If this is not possible the title commonly used in reference sources can be taken as the uniform title.

If any time period division is needed, the year 1900 would be the most suitable time line because most of the vernacular publications created before 1900 are commonly known under their titles.

**Buddhist scriptures**

Majority of ancient Sinhalese literary works are based on Buddhist scriptures. Pali canon in Sinhalese script, Pali canon in Sinhalese translations, Sinhalese Commentaries on Pali canon, adaptations or rewritings of Pali canon in Sinhalese are some of the most common manifestations of Buddhist scripture in Sri Lanka. As such the rules 25.18F-25.18F3 in AACR2 for the uniform titles for Buddhist scriptures seems insufficient. Works such as Milinda pangha, Pretavatthu that are considered as part of Pali canon have not been treated in the existing rules. Therefore, Sri Lanka needs a separate set of rules for uniform titles for Buddhist scriptures.
Use of uniform titles may vary from country to country and from language to language. The solution to problems pertaining to the use of uniform titles is to prepare an authority list of such titles and guidelines by particular national agencies.

**Conclusion**

At present the cataloguing in Sri Lankan libraries is based on AACR 2 in spite of problems associated with the application of rules for the national imprint. These problems could successfully be addressed through the establishment of a national policy of cataloguing. It is imperative to have national guidelines for cataloguing even if we use an International code of cataloguing.

**References and notes**

Most information contained in this report are drawn from the author’s M. Lib. Thesis presented to the University of New South Wales in 1994.


3. Ibid.

4. For a description of these monastic libraries See Piyadasa, T.G. (1981) Libraries in Sri Lanka : their origin and history from ancient times to the present time, Delhi, Sri Satguru Publications, chap.1

5. De Silva, H., p.9

6. Ibid, p.9


8. De Silva, H., pp.9-13

9. Ibid, p.27

10. Simons, Cornelis Joan (1914) Memoir of Cornelis Joan Simons, Governor and Director of Ceylon for his successor Hendik Becker, 1707, translated by Sophia Anthonisz, Colombo, Government Printer, p.20

12. Ibid

13. Ibid

14. Piyadasa, p.71


17. Piyadasa, p.87