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A Study on the Contemporary Challenges and Development Opportunities in the Sri Lankan Tamil Publishing Industry

H.M.D. Malinda[1], Dr. K.P. Gamage[2]

[1] BA (sp) Mass Media (UOC), MSSC in Mass Communication (Kelaniya), MA in Media Research (UOC), Publication officer, National Library and Documentation Service Board Sri Lanka, dmherath1991@gmail.com

[2] BA (sp) Mass Media (UOC), MSSC in Mass Communication (Kelaniya), PhD (Wuhan), Senior Lecturer, Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, k.prabhashini@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The country of Sri Lanka has a long history of publishing, which has developed over the course of many centuries in various languages, including Sinhala, Tamil, and English languages, as well as in classical languages like Pali and Sanskrit. In the context of the diverse publishing sector of Sri Lanka, there is a unique niche filled by Tamil-language publishers as their role in preserving the language and literary traditions of the Tamil culture is significant. Nevertheless, over the past few decades, this field has been encountering various challenges related to socio-economic issues, changing reading habits, developments in digital media, and organizational issues. Thus, the objective of this research was to determine what kinds of challenges Tamil writers and owners of publishing houses face in Sri Lanka. The methodology applied in the research was a quantitative one where descriptive research was utilized to gather relevant information. Data were obtained from a sample of 100 Tamil authors and publishing companies using a questionnaire survey. The data gathered was subjected to analysis through the application of SPSS via descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages.

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Findings show that the greatest issues affecting Tamil publishers are high printing expenses (18.3%), low sales of the books (15.4%), lack of adequate assistance from the government (13.1%), reduction in readership (10.0%), and low payment of royalties to the authors (9.2%). Also, respondents highlighted the excessive usage of social and digital media (15.9%), lack of novel writers (9.5%), prevalence of entertainment media (9.3%), and scarcity of Tamil books in libraries (9.1%) among others as the factors influencing the decline of Tamil reading habits. In addition, 55% of the respondents viewed institutional assistance towards Tamil publishing industry as being poor. According to the findings, Book Publishers Association (21.2%), government institutions (19.6%), cultural and literary organizations (19.6%), and National Library and Documentation Services Board (16.8%) were found to be the least supportive institutions. The paper identifies the problems facing the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka as being multidimensional, including those economic, market-related, logistical, institutional, technological, and socio-political in nature. Government assistance, monetary incentives, efficient logistics operations, adoption of digital publishing, and building a sustainable culture of reading are some key factors needed to ensure the sustainability and growth of the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka.

1.0 Introduction

Sri Lanka is a multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic society and its linguistic diversity has a direct impact on the country's cultural and communication systems. Meanwhile, Tamil is recognized as an official language of the country and serves as an essential medium for preserving the cultural identity, literary heritage, knowledge systems and communication practices of the Tamil-speaking population. Since independence in 1948, Sri Lanka has been shaped by Sinhala-Buddhist majority nationalism (Gunasekera, 1999, p.5). Tamil claims, linguistic distinctiveness and cultural identity were gradually excluded from the institutional and constitutional frameworks of the state in favor of a recognition based on historical narratives of a Tamil kingdom (Dissanayake, 1999, p.94). Mendis (2025) points out that the Tamil media in Sri Lanka play an important role in affirming community identity, cultural rights and socio-political

representation. Furthermore, as Mendis argues in this regard, Tamil grievances over language policy, standardization of education, and land settlement programs intensified polarization, culminating in a civil war between the state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from 1983 to 2009.

"The Tamil publishing industry, steeped in a rich literary heritage spanning centuries, faces significant challenges in the contemporary digital landscape. While echoes of *Sangam literature* and narratives by celebrated authors such as *Kalki* resonate, the future of Tamil fiction remains uncertain" (Weerakannan & Vijayakumar, 2015, p.2). In this regard, the Tamil book publishing industry in Sri Lanka is a crucial one in the development, dissemination, and preservation of the language and literature. Despite the cultural significance of this industry, the lack of studies specifically addressing the issue of the publishing industry in Sri Lanka has been a significant obstacle. The importance of publishing as an important cultural industry that facilitates the process of knowledge production, dissemination and preservation has long been appreciated. According to Bhaskar, the publishing process acts as an intermediary between the creation and dissemination of ideas, thereby enabling the transformation of intellectual and creative output into culturally significant products (Bhaskar, 2013, p.18). In addition, minority language publishing industries make important contributions to the survival of cultures, language preservation and the formation of ethnic identities in multicultural nations (Nye, 2004, p.74).

In the past, Tamil literary movements in Sri Lanka were mainly carried out in the northern and eastern provinces, especially in cities such as Jaffna, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. These areas had already established themselves as leading centers of Tamil literature. However, although writers, publishers, printers and booksellers were all involved in the industry, there seems to be very little reliable information about the problems they faced in running their businesses. The information available suggests that difficulties associated with the publication, distribution, promotion and adaptation of books still persist. The available statistics further indicate the differences in the volume of publications among different languages in Sri Lanka.

From the analysis of the ISBN registration records from 2010 through 2014, one can note that the percentage of Tamil language publications formed only a minor portion of total publications in the country relative to Sinhala and English language publications (Bandara & Alahakoon, 2015, p.154). The existence of such limitations poses obstacles in the development of the Tamil language publishing industry. Some of the limitations include low demand for Tamil books.

Year	Sinhala	Tamil	English

2010	6003	296	1703
2011	7823	638	1775
2012	6483	508	2770
2013	6431	717	1846
2014	6377	677	1883

Table 1: Issuance of ISBN by language.

(Bandara & Alahakoon, 2015, p.154).

Bandara and Alahakoon (2015) analyzed the ISBN numbers issued in Sri Lanka between 2010 and 2014 and found significant disparities in the output of books published in the three main language categories. Sinhala language publications have been increasing year by year, while Tamil language publications have been significantly decreasing. The data also shows that English language publications have occupied an intermediate position. According to their research results, Tamil language books constitute only a small portion of the entire publishing output of Sri Lanka. The underdevelopment of Tamil literature is linked to the difficulties in the development of the Tamil publishing business such as the small size of the market, financial issues, distribution problems and the small number of readers. The results obtained show that Tamil publishing works under worse conditions than Sinhala language publishing. Thus, the development of Tamil literature can be regarded as problematic (Bandara & Alahakoon, 2015, p.154).

Rapid advancements in digital technologies have also revolutionized the publishing industry around the world. According to Thompson, digital publishing technologies have completely changed the conventional system of book publishing, distribution, and consumption processes (Thompson, 2012, p.287). In the case of Sri Lanka, growing usage of mobile phones, social media networks, and online reading applications by the youth has had an impact on the patterns of reading and information consumption. This has resulted in the need for Tamil publishers to adopt both print and digital forms of publication simultaneously.

Besides the changes occurring technologically, economic difficulties are also placing great pressure on the publishing industry. Also, many controversial issues have arisen regarding Tamil publications in the past. Among them are the lack of booths for Tamil publishing houses from book publishers' associations at the International Book Fair held during Literary Month and the emergence of numerous legal issues in the production of Tamil publications. Due to high costs of paper, printing, transportation, and market-related pressures, small and medium sized publishers face serious difficulties. In recent times, this problem has

become increasingly prevalent due to the national economic instability and inflation problems. Therefore, the issue of the sustainability of Tamil publishing has gained greater prominence within the industry.

Given the significance of Tamil publications within the culture and the issues that this publishing industry faces, it is quite surprising that there is no empirical literature that investigates the experience of stakeholders in this publishing industry. In this regard, most studies conducted on publishing in Sri Lanka have centered on Sinhala and English publications. Thus, the aim of the present research is to investigate the issue of sustainability and challenges associated with the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka based on the experience of stakeholders such as writers, publishers, booksellers, and distributors. This way, various challenges faced by the publishing industry will be identified. The paper will look at some of the problems that face Tamil publishing. It will try to find out what is behind their present state and look for possible ways of recovery. The aim of the work is to give an analysis of Tamil publishing and the problem it is faced with today from the point of view of its participants.

1.1 Research Problem

The publishing industry in any country serves the essential function of safeguarding the language, culture, knowledge, and literary legacy. As is the case with Sinhala, Tamil, being another official language in Sri Lanka, enjoys a vibrant literary tradition that helps preserve the cultural heritage of the community of Tamil speakers. However, despite the significance of these aspects, the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka appears to be faced with a number of challenges that have been observed concerning the process of production, distribution, marketing, readership building, technological adaptation, and sustainable functioning. Earlier research has demonstrated that publications in Tamil comprise only a fraction of the total output of the publishing industry in Sri Lanka compared to those printed in Sinhala and English languages (Bandara & Alahakoon, 2015, p.154). Recent studies into the state of the publishing industry suggest that the Tamil publishing industry still struggles to adjust to the digital world while maintaining its sustainability. Thus, there exists an obvious shortage of empirical data related to the problems and challenges faced by the Sri Lankan Tamil publishing industry at present. Therefore, focusing on this proposition, the central question of this study can be stated as follows. Namely, what are the main challenges affecting the sustainability of the Sri Lankan Tamil publishing industry and how do stakeholders perceive these challenges?

1.2 Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to examine the sustainability and challenges of the Sri Lankan Tamil publishing industry through the experiences of its stakeholders. In addition to that primary objective, it also examines the economic factors affecting the sustainability of Tamil publishing in Sri Lanka, assesses the impact of production, distribution and marketing challenges on Tamil publications, assesses stakeholders' perceptions of the future sustainability of the Sri Lankan Tamil publishing industry, and suggests recommendations to strengthen the sustainability and development of Tamil publishing in Sri Lanka.

1.3. Research Hypotheses

The main hypothesis used in conducting this research was that there is a significant relationship between economic challenges and the sustainability of the Sri Lankan Tamil publishing industry. In addition, the auxiliary hypotheses were that production and distribution difficulties significantly affect the sustainability of Tamil publishing in Sri Lanka and that marketing and readership challenges significantly affect the growth and sustainability of Tamil language publications.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Introduction

In this study, the quantitative method was used to analyze the problems encountered by Tamil writers and publishers in supporting the Tamil literature culture in Sri Lanka. Quantitative research design was chosen because it enables the gathering of numeric information, allowing researchers to identify patterns and relationships among variables related to the process of literary works creation, publication, and distribution. Descriptive research design was chosen in this case because it provides insight into the current problems encountered in the Tamil literary publishing industry. This helped to get a general perspective on the problems surrounding Tamil literary publication in Sri Lanka.

2.2 Research Design

A quantitative research approach was used in the study. Quantitative research is suitable for use in this study as it allows the gathering and analysis of numeric data that will assist in identifying the problems faced by the stakeholders in the Tamil publishing industry. This kind of research helps to identify patterns and trends in the data collected. This type of research is a descriptive research type since it aims at describing the current situations and problems facing the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka.

2.3 Research Approach

In this case, the research followed the deductive approach. This is because the study relied on existing theories and researches on the topic in question. From the literature review, data were collected from various sources to investigate how much impact these issues have had on the sustainability of the Sri Lankan Tamil book publishing industry.

2.4 Population of the Study

The study population comprised all those stakeholders who were part of the Sri Lankan Tamil publishing industry. Such stakeholders comprised Tamil authors and writers along with the owners/ managers of Tamil publishing companies. These stakeholders played an important role in producing, publishing, distributing, and marketing the literature produced in Tamil language. The number of stakeholders in the population is around 100.

2.5 Sampling Technique

In order to investigate the problems faced by Tamil language writers and publishing houses in Sri Lanka, two main sampling techniques were adopted in conducting this research. Namely, purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Here, purposive sampling was used to identify people who had direct involvement and experience in the Tamil publishing industry. Among them were Tamil writers and owners of Tamil publishing houses. Questionnaires were administered to the identified parties and information was collected. Thereafter, more parties were included in the sample through their affiliation. Snowball sampling was used for this. This approach was particularly useful since it was not easy to obtain a broad sampling frame for all Tamil publishers and Tamil writers.

2.6 Data Collection and Analysis

Two main methods were followed in collecting data related to the research. Firstly, secondary data were examined with the aim of identifying prior literature for this research. Secondary data were collected from academic journals, books, conference proceedings, industry reports, government publications and online databases related to publication studies, cultural industries and Tamil literary culture.

Then, primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire to further investigate the research problem. An online questionnaire was used for this. The questionnaire consisted of closed questions, multi-choice questions, etc. The questionnaire explored the sample's demographic factors, economic and financial

challenges, publishing and production issues, distribution and marketing difficulties, readership and market demand, etc. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS 22 version software.

2.7 Ethical Consideration

The research followed ethical principles throughout. The subjects volunteered to take part in the research and were made aware of the objectives and purpose of the study prior to answering the questionnaire. They were also made aware that they had the option of leaving the research at any point in time.

2.8 Theoretical Approach

The present research has been inspired by the Theory of Cultural Production of Pierre Bourdieu. The theory offers a theoretical lens through which the issues and sustainability of the publishing industry of the Sri Lankan Tamils can be analyzed more comprehensively. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1993), cultural production occurs within the framework of a social field wherein there are several actors who struggle for economic, cultural, and symbolic capitals. Under this approach, writers, publishers, distributors, bookstores, and consumers exist in a cultural field whereby they enjoy unequal access to opportunities. The production and sustainability of socio-cultural products such as books are determined by economic and social factors.

In the Sri Lankan Tamil publishing industry, the stakeholders exist in a smaller linguistic and cultural environment. The writers aim at seeking cultural and symbolic validation in their literature, whereas the publishers have to strike a balance between cultural considerations and financial viability. Thus, issues such as lack of readership, poor distribution networks, financial considerations, and competition from foreign books affect the existence of the stakeholders in the publishing environment. Through applying the Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Production along to the sustainability challenges within the Sri Lankan Tamil publishing industry, the research is able to address these challenges from cultural and economic perspectives.

3.0 Data Analyz

3.1 Introduction to Data Analysis

In this chapter, an analysis and interpretation of the collected data from the key stakeholders within the Sri Lankan Tamil Publishing Industry have been presented. The main purpose of the analysis has been to explore the problems of sustainability that the Tamil writers, publishing companies, distributors, and sellers face. The factors that influence the growth and sustainability of the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka have also been analyzed. The data have been gathered via a structured questionnaire. Statistical analysis

using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) has been applied. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations have been applied as descriptive statistics in order to analyze the variables of interest as well as the respondents' demographic characteristics.

These results are systematically provided in the form of tables, graphs, and other visual representations to make sure that there is clarity when discussing the information collected. This analysis highlights the demographics of the participants, publishing problems, financial issues, problems related to distribution, adaptation to technology, and opinions about the sustainability of the industry in Sri Lanka. Results found here are used as proof of the findings that are required to answer the research objectives and questions stated in the paper. These results are used in future discussion and conclusion as well.

3.2 Data analysis related to demographic factors of the sample

3.2.1 Data analysis on the professional roles of the sample members in the book publishing industry

Professional role in the book publishing industry		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Tamil writers/ authors	80	80.0	80.0	80.0
	Tamil publishing house owner	20	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Professional role in the book publishing industry

Source: Survey data 2026

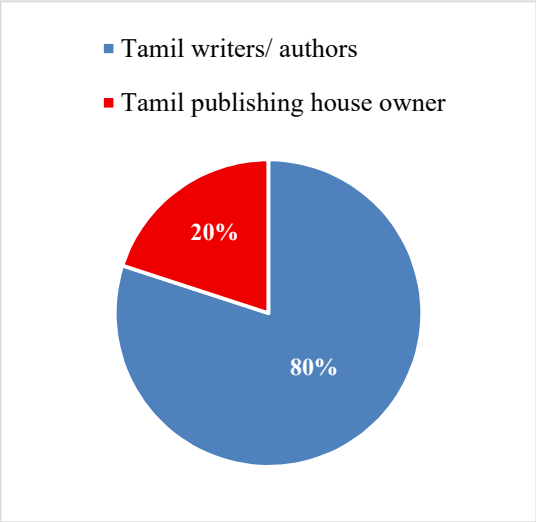

Fig 1: Professional role in the book publishing industry

The professional identities of the participants of the study can be seen in Table 2. In this regard, it should be noted that among the total sample of 100 respondents, 80% (n=80) were writers/authors, whereas the remaining 20% (n=20) were the owners of Tamil publishing houses.

The inclusion of both types of individuals in the sample makes sure that the study considers the experience of both major stakeholders in the industry of Tamil publications. This is because there is a large number of writers than owners of Tamil publishing houses in the industry under discussion. This way,

the findings of the study will have a more comprehensive view regarding the sustainability problems faced by the Tamil publishing industry.

3.2.2 The professional experience of the sample members in the book publishing industry

Years of Work Experience		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1–5 years	13	13.0	13.0	13.0
	6–10 years	29	29.0	29.0	42.0
	11–20 years	24	24.0	24.0	66.0
	Over 20 years	34	34.0	34.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Years of Work Experience

Source: Survey data 2026

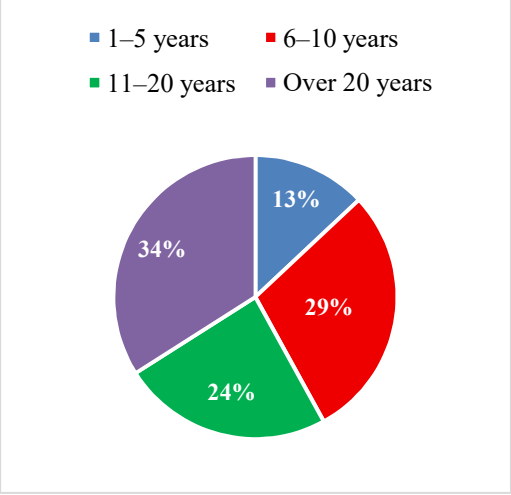

Fig 2: Years of Work Experience

Table 3 demonstrates the years of respondents' experience in the Tamil publishing industry. Of the total respondents of 100, 13% respondents (n=13) have between 1 and 5 years of experience, while 29% respondents (n=29) have between 6 and 10 years of experience. Moreover, 24% respondents (n=24) have 11 to 20 years of professional experience, but a large number of respondents, i.e., 34% respondents (n=34), have over 20 years of experience.

It becomes evident from the results that there is an indication of the fact that a significant percentage of the respondents have extensive experience in the Tamil publishing industry. Almost half of the respondents, that is, 58% (n=58), have more than 10 years of experience, while 34% of the respondents have over 20 years of work experience. It is clear that the research involved the opinions of highly experienced individuals who have seen many changes in the Tamil publishing industry.

3.2.3 Data analysis regarding the provinces where the sample members live

	Primary Area of Work	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Northern Province	32	32.0	32.0	32.0
	Eastern Province	17	17.0	17.0	49.0
	Western Province	31	31.0	31.0	80.0
	Central Province	4	4.0	4.0	84.0
	Sabaragamuwa Province	4	4.0	4.0	88.0
	Other	12	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Primary Area of Work

Source: Survey data 2026

The table 4 below highlights the proportion of Tamil writers and the publishers who own the publishing houses among the sample in the island. From the research findings it was noted that the largest number of respondents was from the Northern Province. It therefore means that 32% (n=32) represented the Northern Province and 31% (n=31) represented the Western Province. In addition, the Eastern Province represented 17% (n=17) of the respondents, while 12% (n=12) of the respondents were from other provinces. On the other hand, Central Province and Sabaragamuwa province both had 4% (n=4).

From the above findings it has been noted that the Tamil publishing industry has its main concentration on the Northern (Tamil Population 1,056,386), Western (Tamil Population 412,342) and Eastern Provinces (Tamil Population 680,970) where these three provinces represent 80% (n=80) of the respondents. The reason for a high percentage representation from the Northern and Eastern provinces can be attributed to a high number of Tamils found in the two provinces. Furthermore, a large percentage from the Western Province represents the publishing activity in Colombo and surrounding areas.

3.3 Economic Sustainability Challenges in Tamil publishing sector in Sri Lanka

3.3.1. Printing Costs as a Challenge to the Tamil Publishing Industry

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	82	82.0	82.0	82.0
	to some extent	18	18.0	18.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Printing Cost Challenges

Source: Survey data 2026

Table 5 below shows the perception of the respondents concerning the challenges posed by the cost of printing books on the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka. It is evident from the results that printing costs form a significant challenge in the industry because most of the respondents, 82% (n=82), agree that they are faced with this problem. On the other hand, 18% (n = 18) perceive that printing costs only pose an insignificant challenge in the industry. None of the respondents disagree with the statement.

The above results indicate that there is a general agreement among respondents that printing costs form one of the biggest challenges facing Tamil publishing in Sri Lanka. The rising costs of printing supplies such as papers, ink, and printing services are putting a lot of financial strain on both publishers and writers of Tamil literature. This could be attributed to the fact that Tamil literature has a relatively small market, and high production costs mean increased prices.

3.3.2. The adequacy of royalty payments received by Tamil writers in Sri Lanka.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	14	14.0	14.0	14.0
	No	58	58.0	58.0	72.0
	Don't know	28	28.0	28.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Printing Cost Challenges

Source: Survey data 2026

Table 5 below shows the opinions of the respondents regarding the adequacy of royalties paid to Tamil writers in their works. According to the results, 58% (n=58) of the respondents are not convinced that the royalties paid to Tamil writers are adequate. On the other hand, 14% (n=14) of the respondents opined that

royalties are adequate, whereas 28% (n=28) reported that they were unaware of the matter. From the results, it is evident that the lack of adequate financial incentives continues to be an important issue in the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka. The fact that most respondents felt that royalties paid to Tamil writers were inadequate means that the writers could be underpaid for their work. This could affect the authors' willingness to produce literature sustainably.

Moreover, the research results also reflect the economic insecurity of the Tamil literary community working within an undersized publishing economy. Poor readership, less number of books sold, and inadequate market opportunities mean that it would be difficult for publishers to pay higher royalties. Therefore, it would be hard for the authors to earn a living from literary activities. It is noteworthy that the rather large number of people who chose the option “don’t know” (28%) could suggest that there was no clarity regarding their royalty rates or financial dealings of the publishing industry among its players.

3.4 Market and Readership Challenges

3.4.1. Relationship Between Primary Area of Work and Perceived Market Demand for Tamil Books in Sri Lanka

Area		Market Demand for Tamil Books in Sri Lanka			Total
		Very high	Medium	Low	
Northern Province	Count	4	10	18	32
	% of Total	4.0%	10.0%	18.0%	32.0%
Eastern Province	Count	4	2	11	17
	% of Total	4.0%	2.0%	11.0%	17.0%
Western Province	Count	16	1	14	31
	% of Total	16.0%	1.0%	14.0%	31.0%
Central Province	Count	0	0	4	4
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	4.0%	4.0%
Sabaragamuwa Province	Count	0	4	0	4
	% of Total	0.0%	4.0%	0.0%	4.0%
Other	Count	0	8	4	12
	% of Total	0.0%	8.0%	4.0%	12.0%
Total	Count	24	25	51	100

% of Total	24.0%	25.0%	51.0%	100.0%

Table 6: Area of Work and Tamil Book Demand

Source: Survey data 2026

Table 6 presents information about the market demand for Tamil books in Sri Lanka depending on the province to which the respondent belongs. In this connection, it should be noted that, according to the findings, 51% of the respondents stated that there was a low market demand for Tamil books, 25% stated a medium market demand and 24% very high.

Respondents from the Northern Province stated an overall pessimistic attitude toward the market demand. So, 18% of the whole sample stated a low market demand for Tamil books, 10% believed that it was medium and only 4% very high. Respondents from the Eastern Province also had a largely negative attitude toward the market demand. Thus, 11% reported a low market demand, 4% very high and 2% medium.

Respondents in the Western Province, on the other hand, had a relatively optimistic attitude toward market demand. Of all respondents from the Western Province, 16% regarded market demand to be very high, which is the highest percentage of respondents with such a perception. Nevertheless, another 14% believed that demand was low. The reason behind such a positive attitude towards market demand could be due to the presence of many publishing firms, bookstores, schools and large consumer bases in the Colombo Metropolitan Region. On the contrary, respondents in the Central Province believed that market demand was low (4%). Respondents from Sabaragamuwa Province agreed that market demand was medium (4%). Other provinces, whose data are analyzed separately, had respondents who believed that market demand was medium (8%) and low (4%).

In summary, it can be stated that there exist major variations in regard to the perception of market demand for books written in Tamil language. Specifically, stakeholders in the Northern and Eastern provinces perceive relatively lower levels of market demand than their counterparts from the Western province. The reasons for such disparities could possibly include variations in income levels, distribution channels, accessibility to the book market, and literacy programs among others.

3.4.2. Reasons for the Decline in Tamil Book Reading in Sri Lanka

Reasons for the Decline in Tamil Book Reading in Sri Lanka	Responses	
	N	Percent
Increased use of social media and digital media	84	15.9%

Economic problems	34	6.5%
Decline of Works in Libraries	48	9.1%
Decline in new writers	50	9.5%
Changes in Reading Culture	39	7.4%
Distribution Problems	35	6.6%
Lack of Promotion	44	8.3%
Educational and Language Factors	32	6.1%
High price of books	44	8.3%
Decline in reading culture	39	7.4%
Lack of encouragement for reading in schools	29	5.5%
Increased use of entertainment media	49	9.3%
Total	527	100.0%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 7: Reasons for the Decline in Tamil Book Reading in Sri Lanka

Source: Survey data 2026

Table 7 below provides the views of the respondents on the contributing factors to the decline in Tamil book reading in Sri Lanka. It should be noted that the respondents had the opportunity to give more than one response; therefore, the number of responses is 527.

The results of the research reveal that the increasing use of social media and digital media is considered to be the most significant factor contributing to the decline in reading. This is evidenced by 15.9% (n=84) of the total number of responses. Thus, the popularity of the Internet has influenced not only the changes in reading habits but also the overall amount of time used for reading. Moreover, the lack of new writers (9.5%; n=50), the increasing use of entertainment media (9.3%; n=49), and the decreasing number of Tamil language publications in libraries (9.1%; n=48) are revealed as other significant contributing factors to the problem of declining reading.

In addition to this, another barrier to the reading of books included lack of promotion of Tamil books (8.3%, n=44) and expensive nature of the book (8.3%, n=44). Change in the reading culture (7.4%, n=39) was also mentioned as one of the causes that contributed to the decline in book reading. Other barriers to reading books as stated by the participants of the study included distribution of Tamil books (6.6%, n=35),

economic problems (6.5%, n=34), educational and language barriers (6.1%, n=32), and lack of encouragement to read at school (5.5%, n=29).

3.5 Distribution and Accessibility Challenges

3.5.1 Effectiveness of the Tamil Book Distribution Network in Sri Lanka.

Tamil Book Distribution Effectiveness		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	13	13.0	13.0	13.0
	No	27	27.0	27.0	40.0
	To some extent	55	55.0	55.0	95.0
	Not at all	5	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 8: Tamil Book Distribution Effectiveness

Source: Survey data 2026

The findings from the analysis carried out on the effectiveness of the distribution network for Tamil books in Sri Lanka can be found in Table 8 below. From the findings of this research, it can be noted that the majority (55%, n = 55) of the respondents agreed that the current distribution network of Tamil books in Sri Lanka was moderately effective. At the same time, 27% (n = 27) of the respondents were of the opinion that the distribution network was not effective while 13% (n = 13) thought that it was effective. Moreover, another 5% (n = 5) felt that the distribution network was not effective at all.

From the findings above, it is evident that although the current distribution network is moderately effective, it cannot be considered sufficiently effective for the requirements of the industry. This is due to the fact that only a few respondents (13%) felt completely satisfied with the current distribution network.

3.5.2 Sales Locations and Accessibility of Tamil Books in Sri Lanka

Tamil Book Accessibility	Responses	
	N	Percent
Bookshops	60	26.5%
Book fairs	46	20.4%
Internet	42	18.6%

Direct sales	31	13.7%
Publishing Houses	13	5.8%
Schools and Universities	20	8.8%
Other	14	6.2%
Total	226	100.0%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 9: Tamil Book Accessibility

Source: Survey data 2026

The results of the analysis regarding the channels from where one can access Tamil books in Sri Lanka are illustrated in Table 9. As the survey respondents could tick multiple answers, the total number of answers is 226.

The results of the study have revealed that bookstore is the first major channel through which people access Tamil books and the percentage share is 26.5% (n = 60). Thus, it can be said that traditional book outlets play an important role in ensuring accessibility to Tamil books. The second highest number of answers have come from book fairs and the percentage of answers is 20.4% (n = 46). The third highest number of answers is generated by the Internet, which has accounted for 18.6% (n = 42) of the total responses. This result suggests that Internet plays an increasingly important role in providing easy access to Tamil books. Besides, 13.7% (n = 31) of the responses have been generated from direct selling efforts. Low levels of accessibility were also found to be provided by the school and university sectors (8.8%, n = 20), other sources (6.2%, n = 14) and publishers (5.8%, n = 13). The limited contribution made by the school and university sectors and publishers towards ensuring access to Tamil literature could point to opportunities that were not utilized.

3.6 Institutional and Policy Challenges

3.6.1 Government and Organizational Support for Tamil Publishing

Institutional Support for Tamil Publishing		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	10	10.0	10.0	10.0
	No	55	55.0	55.0	65.0

to some extent	30	30.0	30.0	95.0
Not at all	5	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 10: Institutional Support for Tamil Publishing

Source: Survey data 2026

Table 10 represents the responses of the participants regarding the level of institutional support available for Tamil publishers in Sri Lanka. Based on the results, it can be seen that a higher number of the respondents, 55% (n = 55), feel that the support received by Tamil publishers is inadequate. At the same time, only 10% (n = 10) of the respondents believe that there is adequate support available to Tamil publishers in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, 30% (n = 30) believe that there is partial support available, while 5% (n = 5) believed that there is no support at all. The above results suggest that the support received by Tamil publishers is generally regarded as inadequate.

3.6.2 Institution Perceived as Providing the Least Support to Tamil Book Publishing

Least Supportive Institutions in Tamil Book Publishing	Responses	
	N	Percent
Government	35	19.6%
National Library and Documentation Services Board	30	16.8%
Book Publishers Association	38	21.2%
State Archives	8	4.5%
Private publishing institutions	21	11.7%
Cultural or literary organizations	35	19.6%
Other	12	6.7%
Total	179	100.0%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 11: Least Supportive Institutions in Tamil Book Publishing

Source: Survey data 2026

Table 11 below summarizes the respondents' views on the institutions offering least support in Tamil publishing activities in Sri Lanka. Respondents were given an opportunity to choose more than one response hence a total of 179 answers were recorded.

The results show that the Book Publishers Association is the institution giving least support to the Tamil publishing industry, which represents 21.2% (n = 38) of the total responses. From this, it is evident that the major stakeholders feel that the Book Publishers Association does not offer enough support in meeting the needs of the Tamil publishers, authors and others in the industry. In addition, 19.6% (n = 35) of the respondents said that both the government and cultural or literary organizations do not provide adequate support.

The National Library and Documentation Services Board accounted for 16.8% (n = 30) of the responses, indicating that stakeholders perceive the limitations of the institution's role in supporting Tamil publishing through registration services, bibliographic documentation and industry development initiatives. Furthermore, private publishing houses represented 11.7% (n = 21) of the responses, while the State Archives represented only 4.5% (n = 8). Another 6.7% (n = 12) of the respondents identified that other institutions do not provide adequate support.

3.7 Production and publishing infrastructure of the Tamil publishing industry

3.7.1 The nature of the printing houses that commonly print Tamil books

Nature of Printing Press	Responses	
	N	Percent
From a printing press in Sri Lanka	87	73.7%
From a printing press in India	31	26.3%
Total	118	100.0%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 12: Nature of Printing Press

Source: Survey data 2026

The data analyses conducted on the nature of the printing presses that are usually employed for printing Tamil books have been presented in Table 12. It has to be noted that the total number of responses collected from the participants was 118 owing to the fact that respondents were permitted to select more than one answer. Consequently, the outcome of the research shows that most of the respondents, specifically 73.7% (n = 87) utilize printing presses that are located in Sri Lanka to print Tamil books. It means that the local printing capacity continues being the major source of book production for the Tamil publishing industry. Nevertheless, it can be seen that 26.3% (n = 31) of the respondents use printing presses based in India for printing Tamil books.

3.7.2 Most Cost-Effective Printing Houses for Book Production

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	From a printing press in Sri Lanka	38	38.0	38.0	38.0
	From a printing press in India	62	62.0	62.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 13: Cost-Effective Printing Houses

Source: Survey data 2026

Data analysis on the most cost-effective printing press to print Tamil books has been done, and the results are shown in Table 13. The research findings show that the largest number of respondents at 62% (n=62) regarded Indian printing presses as the most cost-effective means for printing books. On the other hand, 38% (n=38) of the respondents believed that Sri Lankan printing presses are more cost-effective.

The results suggest that there is an appreciable number of individuals who think that Indian printing houses have an edge economically in comparison with local printing. Cost effectiveness, economies of scale, competitive pricing, expertise in Tamil language printing and printing technology might explain the choice made by some stakeholders.

3.8 Challenges Facing the Tamil Publishing Industry in Sri Lanka

Challenges Facing the Tamil Publishing Industry in Sri Lanka	Responses	
	N	Percent
High printing costs	88	18.3%
Increase in paper prices	42	8.7%
Low book sales	74	15.4%
Distribution difficulties	41	8.5%
Lack of funding	33	6.8%
Decline in readership	48	10.0%
Lack of promotion and marketing	21	4.4%
Impact of digital media	39	8.1%
Lack of publishing support	29	6.0%
Lack of government support	63	13.1%
Other	4	0.8%
Total	482	100.0%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 14: Challenges Facing the Tamil Publishing Industry in Sri Lanka

Source: Survey data 2026

Table 14 shows the views of the respondents on the key challenges faced by the Tamil Publishing Industry in Sri Lanka. Because the respondents were given the opportunity to provide several answers, a total number of 482 responses were gathered.

The results obtained through this research show that high cost of printing became the most critical problem, being stated by 18.3% (n = 88) of the respondents. Therefore, the increase in production costs causes a considerable financial burden on publishers and writers. The next most frequently mentioned challenge is low book sales, which accounts for 15.4% (n = 74) of all the responses collected. It means that weak market interest and poor business performance are still serious problems for the Tamil Publishers' community. Lack of government support is another issue that should be mentioned as it is viewed by 13.1% (n = 63) of the respondents as an important problem.

Moreover, declining readership (10.0%, n = 48), a phenomenon that has resulted from changes in reading habits and stiff competition from various other media channels, emerged as another challenge to be considered. Also, rising cost of paper (8.7%, n = 42) and problems in the distribution process (8.5%, n = 41) were noted by respondents as some of the major hurdles facing the industry. Effects of digital media were reported by 8.1% (n = 39) of respondents, suggesting that technological changes have had an effect on the conventional processes in the industry. Lack of funding (6.8%, n = 33) and lack of publishing assistance (6.0%, n = 29) were mentioned as other significant challenges to the development of the industry. While a relatively low number of respondents (4.4%, n = 21) regarded lack of promotion and marketing as a challenge, others made up just 0.8% (n = 4) of the total responses.

In general, it can be stated that the results show that economic factors constitute the major issues faced by the stakeholders involved in the Tamil publishing sector. Printing expenses, lack of buyers, lack of support from the government, and the decrease in readership are the factors that form the biggest hindrance to the viability of the publishing sector.

4.0 Discussion

The publishing industry and its history in Sri Lanka are deeply intertwined with the wider development of literacy, education, religion, governance and socio-political transformation. “Although the printing press was invented in the world in 1440, historical evidence reveals that printing and publishing were carried out through various methods even before that. The printing press, which was invented in the mid-15th century, was introduced to the East and Sri Lanka only with the Dutch invasion of Sri Lanka in the 18th century” (Herath, 2024, p.529). However, “the origins of Sri Lankan print culture can be traced back to ancient

epigraphic traditions and manuscript practices that predated the introduction of modern printing technology. Archaeological and historical evidence suggests that written communication in Sri Lanka was possible through Brahmi inscriptions as early as the third century BC, and that religious and literary knowledge was preserved for centuries through papyrus manuscripts, mainly maintained in Buddhist monasteries" (Gamage, 2022, p.265). "The introduction of the first printing press to Sri Lanka during the Dutch colonial period marked a significant turning point in the history of Sri Lankan publishing" (Yapa, 2011, p.62).

The publishing industry that began in this way went through various eras to reach its present-day development. There was even a motivation among the people to publish in all three languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English. An analysis of ISBN data shows that approximately 10,000 books are printed annually due to the significant contribution of both the public and private sectors to the development of the publishing sector. According to data obtained from the ISBN.lk website, the annual ISBN demand from 2021 to 2024 is as follows.

Nature of publications	Year			
	2021	2022	2023	2024
Print Publications	7905	7462	8826	8243
E-Copy Publications	404	438	1124	523

Table 14: Number of ISBN numbers issued

Thus, the above figure indicates that around 10,000 books are published each year. Consequently, there is a decrease in the publishing industry for the Tamil language. Each year, a book fair is organized in Colombo, in the month of September, whereas other book fairs are organized in Kandy, Galle, Matara, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, and Badulla. But there are few Tamil books in them. The issuance of exhibition stands for Tamil publishing houses is also minimal.

Accordingly, this study titled A Study on the Contemporary Challenges and Development Opportunities in the Sri Lankan Tamil Publishing Industry was conducted with the aim of investigating this issue. The main objective of this study was to examine the challenges affecting the sustainability of the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka and the experiences of writers and publishers in this regard. The results revealed that the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka faces a number of complex challenges at the economic, market, distribution, institutional, technological and socio-political levels. When these findings are compared with the existing theoretical and experimental literature in the field of Publishing Studies, it is clear that the

sustainability of the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka is affected by multidimensional factors. Several key issues were identified.

Economic Sustainability Challenges

The results of this study revealed that the main challenge facing the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka is issues related to economic sustainability. 82% of the respondents stated that the increase in printing costs is having a serious impact on the industry and the highest percentage was reported in the multiple choice analysis "Challenges Facing the Tamil Publishing Industry in Sri Lanka". Also, the increase in paper prices, lack of funds and low book sales were identified as major factors affecting the economic stability of the industry. As Feather (2006) points out, the sustainability of a publishing industry directly depends on its production costs, market efficiency and distribution system. The recent economic crisis in Sri Lanka (which occurred during 2022-2023 and its impact is currently more or less ongoing) has had a special impact on the Tamil publishing industry due to the increase in paper, printing ink and transportation costs. Furthermore, 58% of respondents stated that the royalties received by Tamil writers were inadequate, raising concerns about the economic security of creators. According to Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) Cultural Production Theory, the lack of economic capital in cultural production sectors can be an obstacle to the long-term sustainability of creative activities. Important findings were also reported regarding printing infrastructure. While 62% of respondents stated that printing presses in India are less expensive, 38% stated that printing presses in Sri Lanka are more profitable. This is evidence of the competitiveness and efficiency issues in the local printing industry. It was also revealed that Tamil writers and publishing houses in Sri Lanka use printing presses in India to print their works.

Market and Readership Challenges

Another important finding of this study is the limited market demand and readership for Tamil books. 51% of the respondents stated that the market demand for Tamil books is low. Especially, a majority of the respondents in the Northern and Eastern provinces indicated that the market demand is low. This finding is consistent with the results of a study conducted by Bandara & Alahakoon (2015) based on ISBN data. According to their study, the number of ISBN registered publications in Tamil during the period 2010–2014 was significantly lower compared to Sinhala and English publications. This situation reflects the limited market base for Tamil language publications.

The study also revealed changes in reading culture. The use of social media and digital media has been identified as the main reason for the decline in Tamil book reading. The decline in new writers, the use of

entertainment media, the decline in the number of works in libraries, and the rise in the price of books have also been identified as factors affecting the decline in reading culture. As Thompson (2012) points out, digital technology and the new media environment have fundamentally changed the consumption patterns of the publishing industry.

Distribution and Accessibility Challenges

Another important issue revealed by the study is the limitations in the distribution and accessibility of Tamil books. 55% of the respondents stated that the Tamil book distribution network is only "somewhat" successful, while 27% stated that it is not successful. This shows that the process of reaching Tamil books to readers is not fully efficient. As Michael Bhaskar (2013) points out, the publishing system is a system that builds the connection between content creation and consumption. When there are shortcomings in its distribution, the connection between the writer and the reader breaks down. According to the results of this study, the main channels of acquiring Tamil books are bookstores, book fairs and the Internet. However, schools and universities, as well as publishing houses, play a limited role in this process. This limits the opportunities for taking Tamil literature to new readers.

Institutional and Policy Challenges

The results of this study indicated that the majority of respondents felt that the institutional support received by the Tamil publishing industry was inadequate. 55% of the respondents stated that there was no institutional support, while 30% stated that it was "somewhat" present. Furthermore, the Book Publishers Association, the government, cultural and literary organizations, and the National Library and Documentation Services Board were identified as the institutions providing the least support to Tamil publishing. This situation indicates the need for policy interventions and special development programs for the Tamil publishing industry.

According to RTI Data (2026), out of 2,497 registered printing and publishing institutions in Sri Lanka, 2,076 (83.1%) operate in Sinhala and only 276 (11.1%) operate in Tamil. The data in this regard is shown in Table 14 and Table 15 below.

Press ownership	Count
Sinhala	2076
Tamil	276

Muslim	145
Total	2497

Table 15: Press ownership in Sri Lanka

When this data is broken down by province, it is also seen that Sinhala-owned printing presses are more numerous while Tamil/Muslim-owned printing presses are less numerous. Data obtained from the National Archives Department through the Right to Information Act shows that only in the Northern and Eastern provinces are Tamil/Muslim-owned printing presses more numerous.

Providence	City	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	Total
Western	Colombo	897	103	69	1069
	Gampaha	432	13	7	452
	Kalutara	135	0	3	138
Southern	Galle	58	0	1	59
	Matara	55	0	9	64
	Hambantota	27	0	0	27
Sabaragamu	Rathnapura	51	1	0	52
	Kegalle	42	0	8	50
North Central	Anuradhapura	36	0	0	36
	Polonnaruwa	13	0	0	13
North west	Kurunegala	101	0	4	105
	Puththalam	55	4	2	61
Uwa	Badulla	28	4	3	35
	Monaragala	14	0	0	14

Eastern	Ampara	6	3	11	20
	Trincomalee	2	5	3	10
	Batticaloa	0	8	4	12
Central	Kandy	87	12	17	116
	Matale	26	1	3	30
	Nuwara Eliya	11	13	1	25
North	Jaffna	0	97	0	97
	Kilinochchi	0	0	0	0
	Mannar	0	3	0	3
	Vavuniya	0	9	0	9
	Mullaitivu	0	0	0	0
Total		2076	276	145	2497

Table 15: Press ownership in Sri Lanka (By province)

(RTI Data, 2026)

This numerical imbalance illustrates that the Tamil publishing sector is a system with structurally limited resources.

Socio-Political Challenges and Freedom of Expression

Another important point revealed by the secondary data analysis of the study is the socio-political challenges faced by Tamil writers and creators. It was noted that Tamil media personalities in Sri Lanka were exposed to legal and security challenges as highlighted by Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders (RSF). The online safety act, the ICCPR Act, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) were mentioned as some of the legal mechanisms that have at times been utilized to stifle freedom of expression and speech. Recent examples of this include the cases involving *Ahnaf Jazeem*, *Pradeepan Theepachelvan* and other Tamil writers, which illustrate the risks to freedom of creative expression. This situation can lead

to the development of self-censorship among creators and can hinder the growth of Tamil literary production.

Sustainability of the Tamil Publishing Industry

On a whole, this research shows that sustainability of the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka depends on a number of economic, market, institutional, technological, and political factors. In line with the Cultural Production Theory developed by Bourdieu (1993) and the Publishing Theory introduced by Bhaskar (2013), such issues can be viewed as a result of structural problems in the cultural production process. Therefore, in order to ensure the sustainability of the Tamil book publishing industry, it is important to minimize costs associated with printing, give the necessary state assistance, create avenues for marketing, adopt digital publishing, promote new writers, and allow freedom of expression. The implementation of multiple approaches will enable the sustainability of the Tamil book publishing industry in Sri Lanka.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This research examined the challenges facing the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka and the factors affecting its sustainability. Based on the experiences of Tamil writers and publishing house owners, economic, market, distribution, institutional, technological and socio-political challenges were analyzed. This chapter summarizes the main findings of the research and presents conclusions and recommendations.

5.1 Conclusions

According to the findings of this research, several obstacles face the Tamil publishing industry in Sri Lanka, which impedes its sustainable development.

Firstly, economic difficulties were stated to be the primary obstacle to the success of the industry. Specifically, increasing printing expenses, growing paper prices, low number of sales and lack of sufficient funds hampered the development of the Tamil publishing industry. Additionally, the insufficient royalties paid to Tamil authors also influenced the process negatively.

Secondly, it was discovered that the market and readership potential of the Tamil publishing industry is rather small. Growing use of social media and digital media, change of reading habits, decrease in the number of new writers, and limited number of Tamil literature in library collections led to the deterioration of the reading culture.

In third place, it has been shown that the book distribution chain of Tamil books is not entirely efficient. While bookshops and literary festivals are the major sources through which Tamil books can be accessed, the role of schools, universities, and other educational institutions has been proved to be insignificant.

Fourthly, it was found that the lack of institutional support and policies was perceived by the majority of the respondents as an impediment for development. According to the findings, the government, National Library and Documentation Services Board, Book Publishers Association, and cultural organizations cannot provide sufficient support for the Tamil publishing sector.

Fifthly, as seen from the RTI data, only about 11% of publishing companies in Sri Lanka publish Tamil literature, while most Tamil publishing companies operate in the Northern and Western regions. It illustrates the difficulties associated with building an effective publishing sector due to its structure.

Last but not least, it has become evident that the legal and social problems facing Tamil authors and creators influence the industry's development. The findings have proved once again that freedom of speech, right to share views, and protection of cultural expression are the key conditions for creating a sustainable publishing sector.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made.

Implementation of an economic support mechanism.

That is, a special publishing fund should be established to encourage Tamil publishing houses and writers. In addition, tax concessions or subsidies for paper and printing materials should be considered in the printing of works and financial assistance programs should be introduced for the publication of works by new writers. Also, necessary legal and regulatory measures should be taken to provide a fair share of authors for writers.

Strengthening the reading culture

To popularize books written in Tamil in the society, programs that promote the reading of Tamil books should be implemented at the school and university levels. Also, a special state policy should be formulated to increase the number of Tamil language works in libraries. Furthermore, more attention should be paid to Tamil literature in programs such as National Reading Month, Book Week and Literary Festival. In addition, reading promotion programs targeting the youth should be organized.

Improving Distribution and Accessibility

Since many problems in the distribution network of Tamil books were identified here, a national level network for the distribution of Tamil books should be developed. And under it, special distribution programs should be implemented to reach Tamil books to rural and remote areas. In addition, e-commerce platforms and online bookstores should be developed for the sale of Tamil books and access to Tamil books should be increased through schools, universities and public libraries.

Institutional and Policy Development

The time has come for the government and other parties involved in the publishing sector to come together and formulate a national policy for the Tamil publishing sector. Also, the National Library and Documentation Services Board should introduce special support programs for Tamil publications. The representation and participation of Tamil publishers, especially in the Book Publishers Association, should be increased. It is also essential to implement promotional activities for Tamil literature through the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and other relevant institutions.

Digitization and Innovation

There should be incentives for the production of Tamil e-books, audio books and digital publishing sites and programs should be developed for the digital publishing skills of publishers and authors. Social media campaigns should also be planned to promote Tamil literature.

Protecting Literary Freedom

Since the Constitution in force in Sri Lanka has enshrined freedom of speech and expression as a fundamental right, the institutional framework should be further strengthened to protect freedom of speech and literary freedom. Also, appropriate changes should be made in policy measures to minimize unnecessary pressure on writers and artists by law. A multicultural policy that guarantees literary and cultural freedom to the Tamil people should be formulated at the state level.

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