

Lee Kong Chian Research Fellowship

Curious about the National Library's Lee Kong Chian Fellowship? Find out what our fellow, Mr Venket Narayanan (Maalan), has to say about the fellowship and how his research has benefitted from this opportunity.

NL: You have served as a National Media Advisor in The Hunger Project. Could you tell us more about this project?

Maalan: The Hunger Project is a global organisation, headquartered in New York, with a mission to end chronic hunger and poverty through sustainable, grass-roots, women-centred strategies. Chronic hunger differs from acute hunger in that it is caused by the lack of access to food rather than the availability of food. In India, the third tier of government — village councils — was created in 1992 through a constitutional amendment. Further, it was mandated that a third of the seats in village councils be reserved for women. This brought one million women, most of them for the first time, into local governance. The Hunger Project intervened to empower these women and address the issue of chronic hunger through them.

I led a team to create media awareness on issues related to women empowerment at the grass-roots level. We interacted with the media and trained the newly elected representatives on how to handle the media. I was also involved in the publication of books and edited two volumes of *Thus Spoke the Press*.

NL: Could you tell us about your current research?

Maalan: Since its independence in 1965, Singapore has undergone dramatic but impressive and astounding changes in its economic, social and cultural arenas. These changes have impacted every Singaporean in some way and influenced a generation. My current research examines and presents how the Singapore Tamil literati responded to these changes through their works.

NL: How has the National Library's collection helped you in your research?

Maalan: The Tamil resources in NLB were my primary sources of research. The digital collection of Tamil books on BooksSG (eresources.nlb.gov.sg/printheritage) was very helpful as I was able to access books with just a mouse click. The digitised newspaper collection on NewspaperSG (eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers) and the oral history interviews at the arts repository, NORA (eresources.nlb.gov.sg/arts), were two useful resources as well. The NLB staff were very helpful in guiding me on how to access the books and documents. In short, the resources and support for pursuing my research were overwhelming.

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NL: What kind of impact do you hope your fellowship will have?

Maalan: I hope that my research will provide the Singapore Tamil literati with a comprehensive picture of past writings and life in Singapore. I shared some of my findings over four talks (three were organised by NLB), which were attended by eminent writers, poets, academics, publishers and journalists. Many of them told me that they gained new insights.

Personally, I have been able to enrich myself with first-hand knowledge of the journey of Singapore Tamil writing. As a person interested in diasporic Tamil writing, I have greatly benefitted.

NL: Would you recommend this fellowship to your peers and why?

Maalan: Of course, and with great pleasure. Having visited a few libraries in the world, I would, without any hesitation, say NLB is a good place for research with its enormous collection and supportive staff — the Lee Kong Chian Research Fellowship is a great opportunity.