

Book Launch and Review Event

The Development History of Jaffna City (1621–1948)

Toronto, May 24, 2026

The Canadian launch of *The Development History of Jaffna City (1621–1948)* - an important historical study authored by architect and Tamil Wikipedia pioneer **R. Mayooreanathan** - was held on Sunday, May 24, 2026, at the Council Chamber of the Scarborough Civic Centre. Organized by the **Oraayam Foundation**, the event attracted a capacity audience and brought together scholars, community leaders, alumni associations, and representatives of Tamil cultural organizations.

The gathering marked a significant milestone in Tamil historical scholarship within the diaspora and highlighted the growing interest in documenting and preserving Tamil history.

Drawing upon hundreds of sources—including historical documents, maps, architectural evidence, literary references, and administrative records—the book examines the evolution of Jaffna City under Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial rule. Using the concept of the **Built Environment** as its analytical framework, the author explores how the city's physical structures reflect broader social, economic, political, religious, and cultural developments.

The study examines:

- Residential architecture
- Fortifications and military structures
- Roads and transportation networks
- Water management systems
- Temples and churches
- Public spaces
- Administrative buildings

and demonstrates how these elements collectively shaped the historical development of Jaffna City.

The event opened with a Land Acknowledgement, followed by a minute of silence and a welcome address by **K. Premachandra**, President of the Oraayam Foundation.

Three invited speakers presented critical reviews of the book.

V. N. Giritharan, architect, writer, and literary activist, discussed the scarcity of historical documentation relating to the Tamil people, the disappearance of many of Jaffna's historic

architectural landmarks, and the transformation of Nallur, the Jaffna Fort area, and the colonial urban landscape. He commended the book's rigorous, evidence-based approach.

Arunmozhivarman, writer and social activist, focused on the social history revealed through the study. He highlighted the book's treatment of caste structures, land use patterns, water resources, agriculture, trade, occupations, religious transformations, and social movements, demonstrating how urban history provides insights into wider societal changes.

Dr. Maithili Thayanithy, literary scholar and book reviewer, emphasized the book's interdisciplinary methodology, extensive use of primary sources, analytical depth, and its importance as a foundation for future research on Jaffna's history and heritage.

Following the presentations, the author, **R. Mayooreanathan**, joined the audience virtually and delivered his keynote response. He explained that the completion of 400 years of Jaffna City's documented history in 2021, and the absence of any significant effort to commemorate that milestone, inspired him to undertake this project.

He noted that while the book focuses on a colonial period, the history of a city is ultimately the history of its people and their way of life. This perspective formed the central theme of his presentation and the intellectual foundation of the study.

The success of the event was made possible through the generous support and collaboration of several Tamil, educational, and community organizations in Canada:

1. University of Moratuwa Tamil Alumni Association – Canada
2. Jaffna Vaidyeshwara College OSA – Canada
3. Stouffville Tamils' Association
4. Toronto Tamil Book Fair
5. Canadian Tamil Sangam
6. Padimurai Tamil Federation
7. Tamil Literary Garden
8. Jaffna University Alumni Association Canada
9. Association of Sri Lankan Graduates Canada
10. Jaffna Hindu College Association Canada

The participation of these organizations reflected the strength of collaboration and shared commitment within the Tamil community toward scholarship, culture, and heritage preservation.

As a special highlight of the event, the first copy of the book was presented to **M.Arumugasamy**, former teacher of Jaffna Hindu College. Special presentation copies were subsequently presented to several individuals who have made notable contributions in the fields of education, community service, literature, and culture.

The audience discussion that followed generated thoughtful exchanges on a number of important themes, including:

- How colonial-era architecture should be interpreted and preserved
- The need to broaden Tamil historical studies beyond purely political narratives
- The importance of an English translation for younger generations
- The role of urban history in shaping collective identity

It was also announced that preliminary work is underway to prepare an English edition of the book.

The event concluded with a vote of thanks.

More than a book launch, the gathering served as an important intellectual and community initiative that advanced Tamil historical scholarship and encouraged deeper engagement with the heritage and history of Jaffna. The Oraayam Foundation, together with event moderator **Arasi Vigneswaran**, played a key role in successfully coordinating and delivering this memorable and meaningful occasion.