



Editorial

This relaunch of the *University of Colombo Review (UCR)* as a new series (Series III) coincides with the centenary celebration of Sri Lanka's modern university system. The publication is the fourth incarnation of an illustrious, yet checkered thread of journal-publishing associated with that system – a thread that has waxed and waned with the vicissitudes of academic life in the country. Its story is replete with much to celebrate, but even more to take cautionary note of. We start, therefore, by briefly summarizing its history for the lessons it offers.

Sri Lanka's modern university system began in Colombo in 1921, with the establishment of the Ceylon University College. Still under British colonialism, it offered the external degrees of the University of London. Once it had reached sufficient maturity, and after the Second World War had shown the impractical nature of the Colombo-London external affiliation, the University of Ceylon was established in 1942 through an amalgamation of the Ceylon University College and the Ceylon Medical College (which had been established in 1870 as the Colombo Medical School). The new university had four faculties and awarded its own degrees.

From 1952 onwards, the university gradually shifted to the Peradeniya campus. The Colombo campus, however, never fully disappeared. Some faculties were kept in Colombo, some were duplicated in both places, while others were gradually added on. The number of campuses in the country increased to four when Vidyodaya and Vidyalandara were established in 1959. Jaffna was added in 1974. In 1978, the campuses were made independent universities with several more universities established thereafter, along with more university colleges. Today, there are fifteen universities within the University Grants Commission's purview, five other state universities, and several private degree-awarding institutes. The expansion of the system in its first one-hundred years has been, for a small country, exponential.

A scholarly journal is an essential requirement for a good university. The nascent University of Ceylon fulfilled this requirement through two steps. First, it took over from the government the publication of the *Ceylon Journal of Science* to publish science-based articles. Second, it established the *University of Ceylon Review* in 1943 to serve "scholars in literary subjects" and be "a medium of publication for research in those subjects conducted in the University, and to provide a learned review of Ceylon."¹ The latter was to become the progenitor of this current series of the *UCR*. With the move to Peradeniya, the journal was based there from 1952 onwards.

From the 1960s onwards, however, several serious and successive intrusions into the institutional autonomy of the university system began to have an impact. The conversion of university management into a government bureaucracy also disillusioned many academics. The *University of Ceylon Review* was discontinued in 1967, and while the exact reasons for its cessation is hard to pinpoint, the overall changes taking place may have been a contributory factor. Journals such as the *Ceylon Studies Seminar* and *Modern Ceylon Studies*, however, took its place. The *Review* as a thread re-emerged only when, following the establishment of the University of Colombo in 1978, the *University of Colombo Review* was published in 1981 for the first time. The 1980s, however, proved to be the worst period of political turmoil in the country that led to an unprecedented closure of all Sri Lankan universities for about two and half years. In this environment, the journal could not continue for long.

The third attempt at revival occurred in 2006. By now, the difficulties faced by Sri Lankan universities had expanded to include significant economic and intellectual challenges. Against a background of an intensifying domestic war and a faltering economy, chronic university underfunding had become a fact of life. A policy that promoted Sri Lankan universities as primarily teaching ones and not centers of excellence for both teaching and research, as well as an academic promotion scheme which left conceptual, reflective and creative writing largely unrewarded and gave greater weightage to articles published in indexed journals also transformed academic writing.² Indexed journals were invariably the long-established, often overseas-based ones. As a result, locally published university journals in English found it hard to attract sufficient academic writing. This third attempt at a university-wide journal became unsustainable in this environment. It ended in 2010.

A decade later, in planning this current relaunch of the *University of Colombo Review*, the present editorial board has kept this history and its lessons foremost in mind.

The academic landscape today faces its own special challenges. The number of academic disciplines has increased exponentially, and each quite rightly professes its own epistemic premise, analytical methods and writing style which are essential for cogency and academic rigor. There is now a journal for almost every faculty, and an abundance of journals for each discipline globally although not quite the same abundance of academic writing locally. At the same time, there is an increasing need for inter-disciplinary work that stretches across traditional disciplinary frameworks and boundaries, and there is as much a need to transcend these as there is to uphold them. In this context, how does a university review journal embrace methodological pluralism while insisting on academic rigor and respect for disciplinary foundations?

We attempt to answer this question by introducing, as a key objective of this new series of the *University of Colombo Review*, an inclusive publication space that is conducive to reflection and criticality, and to re-imagining and reconceptualizing our world in a manner that engages with academic disciplines and their practices on a more conceptual footing. Today, academic journals compete intensely with each other for empirical findings and original conclusions which are limited in number within Sri Lankan universities given

the limited funding for research and availability of researchers. One area that falls between stools in this milieu is the place for more reflective, conceptual and exploratory writing. This should, in fact, be quite worrisome to the academia as such writing is the necessary launchpad of innovation and, in a hyperpaced society in which everyone is clamoring for speed, there are few to watch out for new directions. When an overwhelming majority of journals want empirical methods only, where is the opportunity for review and reflection?

It is for these reasons that this new series of the *UCR* will also be theme-based, an approach that permits a multidisciplinary discussion on a particular concept-subject and its practice. We invite all our academic colleagues, both at the University of Colombo and elsewhere, our postgraduate students and public intellectuals to look out for the announcements of future themes and to submit articles if these coincide with their interests. The new series of the *UCR* proposes to be inclusive and invites both research articles as well as conceptual, reflective and exploratory writing related to the announced theme.

The *UCR* (Series III) is committed to appropriate disciplinary rigor and ethically sound writing. It provides an independent, double-blind peer review process and careful editorial feedback. It aims to publish two issues per year (November and May), in both online and print formats, and adopts a policy of open access and online archiving. In order to enable wide academic dissemination of its articles, it has chosen the Creative Commons category CC BY-NC-ND.³ We are confident that this framework will enable the *UCR* (Series III) to be published regularly and in a timely manner, with the ability to generate interest and facilitate engagement amongst academics and society in general. The journal will, hopefully, become the nidus around which significant academic discussions will take place, as well as a record thereof.

The theme for the first issue of this new series is “Global Connectivities”. In the context of a global pandemic caused by COVID-19 that crossed international borders with ease and resulted in their closures, a fundamental shift has taken place in our experience and commonplace perceptions of a global order based on interdependence and connection. The articles published in this issue engage with this shift in different ways – a diversity that also underwrites how they are clustered in this issue. The first group of articles addresses the context of a pandemic. Saroj Jayasinghe, in his article on “The COVID-19 Pandemic and Complexity Science” discusses the virus and its spread through a systems science approach that emphasizes interconnectedness when the Earth and its biodiversity, urbanization, global mobility and a transmissible virus converge, while T. M. Zameer-Careem’s article on “The History of Smallpox Epidemics in Sri Lanka” provides an overview of another, prior infectious disease, viz., smallpox, and highlights how both its spread and its eradication were due to global flows of imperial voyages, trade and medical information. “The Impact and Challenge of Medical Journalism” by Nafeesa Noordeen and Dineshani Hettiarachchi examines the important role of medical journalism, including during a public health crisis such as the one we are currently in, while “Disability Exclusion during the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) in Sri Lanka” by Binendri Perera, Niro Kandasamy and Karen Soldatic explores how the COVID-19-related lockdown impacted persons with disabilities.

The second group of articles examines “Global Connectivities” in relation to human rights and international law, foreign policy, migration and translation. “Protecting Human Rights against Industrial Water Pollution” by Kokila Lankathilake Konasinghe and Asanka Amitharansy Edirisinghe, and “Can I Switch Off? I Can’t Breathe!” by Nadunie Wanigasinghe review specific human rights and comment on Sri Lanka’s position in relation to these rights as well as to international law. Shakthi De Silva’s article “Making Sense of the Haze: Hedging and its Discontents” and “Sri Lankan Out-Migration: Five Key Waves since Independence” by Pavithra Jayawardena address the journal’s theme by reviewing foreign relations and migration patterns, while Dinithi Karunanayake’s article on “Global Narratives, Local Realities: Probing Justice through Theatre Translation as Renarration” provides an analysis of how, through translation, an art form such as theatre travels across cultures and contributes to global discourses.

This issue of the *University of Colombo Review* offers, therefore, a compelling spread of articles generated by its first theme. To us, this is a handsome vindication of the thematic approach, the timely announcement of the need for conceptual, reflective and exploratory academic writing, as well as a welcome demonstration of academic talent. We hope that this inaugural issue of the *UCR* (Series III) will encourage you to join our re-commenced journey and contribute to the enrichment and sustainability of journal-publishing in the Sri Lankan university system.

Neloufer de Mel & Panduka Karunanayake

November 2020

-
1. Editorial. (1943). *University of Ceylon Review*, 1 (1), i.
 2. With the increasing number of journals and use of computers in the USA in the 1960s, citation indexing was introduced. For an interesting recollection of its emergence, see <https://clarivate.com/webofsciencelibrary/essays/history-of-citation-indexing/>.
 3. This category allows re-users to copy and distribute the article, as long as the article remains unchanged, in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes and with due acknowledgement and correct citation.