Editorial: Purposes of education, trust and academic publishing

The experience of finalizing this issue for publication gave us the opportunity to reflect on the linkages between an appreciation for the purposes of higher education and the attribute of trust in academic publishing. Academic publishing is designed to create opportunities for advancing the purposes of higher education which include questioning the status quo in a given area of inquiry and developing new knowledge. These endeavors are to be undertaken within verified norms of generating knowledge. In journal publication, double and anonymized peer review remains the standard for the publication of such contributions.

While publication and research ethics as well as organizational checks and balances apply to this process, ultimately, this entire process is undertaken on the basis of trust. Authors, editorial teams, peer reviewers and content editors all work on the basis of trust with the aim of contributing to the advancement of higher education, through the generation of knowledge. Where there is a high level of trust and reliability, the process works smoothly and meaningfully. Today, however, our ability to trust each other is being undermined in at least two related ways. One is due to the decline of standards in academic publication and the second is due to the reliance on artificial intelligence in academic writing.

Journals, by design, are self-regulated. As a result, in regions like South Asia where very few journals are indexed, it is not easy to distinguish between journals that strive to maintain standards and those who do not. If most journals are willing to publish submissions that do not meet academic standards, journals that do aspire to maintain academic standards find it harder to maintain a rigorous standards at each stage of the process.

Maintaining academic standards in academic publications can only be achieved through collective effort. Authors, editorial teams, reviewers, content editors and production editors ought to be familiar with and convinced of the aims of academic publishing. We must be critically aware of the purposes of higher education, be cautious about the threats to higher education and develop an appreciation for journal publication within the broader purposes of higher education. Except in exceptional circumstances, the external scrutiny and accountability of the academic publication process is limited. Whether peer review is robust, whether authors incorporate revisions proposed by peer reviewers and whether content editing is undertaken at all etc are steps that are mostly self-regulated in academic publication. If we are not

committed as individuals to maintaining standards and are not accountable to each other these standards could be compromised quite easily.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic writing is a related issue. The region's multilingualism adds a layer of complexity, since digital programmes are not yet adequately sophisticated to be able to function in the region's many languages. We do not intend to debate here whether or how AI ought to be used or not in academic writing. But what is essential is that we ought to be able to trust each other about the authenticity or lack thereof of our academic work. Of course, any organization may subscribe to software in order to detect plagiarism or the use of AI, which functions in English, but in academic publishing (compared with student assignments) we ought to be able to trust each other to declare whether or not authors have used AI.

Imagine a scenario where we are unable to trust each other about the authenticity of our academic writing, a task that is fundamental to being an academic. If we cannot trust each other in this way, what impact would this have on academic publication, our own thinking and the life of the mind? What happens to academic communities and our collective endeavors? To us, as much as we need to equip ourselves from a technical standpoint to deal with the rapidly advancing technology of AI, we ought to revive a dialogue about cultivating trust within the academic community, particularly in relation to the authenticity of our work. We think that this is essential in dealing with these technological advancements as well for ensuring that we remain focused on the purposes of higher education.

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In this issue too, *UCR* includes all three sections: articles, reviews and symposia. Our first article is 'Conservation Status, Crop Damage and the Distribution of the Hog Deer (*Axis porcinus Zimmermann*, 1780) in Galle District, Sri Lanka' by Shashi Madhushanka & Kithsiri B. Ranawana. This is an important study of Hog Deer, a critically endangered mammal of Sri Lanka. The authors present survey results of observations of the species with the aim of evaluating its threats, studying perceptions of farmers, and proposing conservation measures. Our second article is by a geographer, Sumaiya Fathima who examines the effects of urban heat island effects in relation to Colombo and is titled 'Urban Heat Island Phenomenon in Colombo: An Analysis of Its Causes, Impacts, and Mitigation Strategies.' The third article is from Indigenous Medicine and offers insights into the approach in Ayurveda to fertility, menstruation and reproduction among women. This article is by Pushpa Kulanatha.

We carry three reviews in this issue. One is from Indigenous Medicine, by Sahzmin Hazari and Pushpa Jayakody titled 'A comprehensive review of vitiligo: Integrating modern Medical insights with Ayurvedic concepts'. It offers a comparative

reflection on the approaches in modern medicine and Ayurveda in both explaining the causes of and the treatment for Vitiligo. The second review 'Nursing Students' Challenges and Perceptions of COVID-19 and Readiness for Future Pandemics' by M.G.S. Nishara, T. A. Asurakkody, H.M.H. I Herath, J. M. L. Shavindi and P.P.M. Lakrandi is a valuable addition to the journal, synthesizing 39 articles to present the challenges that nursing students faced during Covid19 pandemic. The review proposes recommendations that will be useful for diverse stakeholders in the field. The third is a review of Nadeera Rupesinghe's book, *Lawmaking in Dutch Sri Lanka: Navigating Pluralities in a Colonial Society* by Gehan Gunatilleke published by Tambapani Academic Press in 2024.

This issue's Symposium section includes three sections that epitomize the multidisciplinary ethos of the journal, carrying a memorial lecture on education by a medical scientist, a response to that by an anthropologist and a poem on the same topic by a physicist. Together, the three parts of the Symposium section focus on the challenges of education in the complex world we live in today, and we hope this will generate discussion and debate on the issues presented.

Dinesha Samararatne   Kaushalya Perera
Editor   *Assistant Editor*