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Editorial: Academic Publishing and Responding to Cyclone Ditwah

At the time of developing this editorial, in Sri Lanka, 635 lives have been lost to Cyclone Ditwah and 366 remain missing (Disaster Management Centre 9 December 2025). The loss to property, in some cases the loss of entire communities and the severe damage to infrastructure, is unprecedented in terms of severity as well as its widespread nature. Many questions are being asked and hopefully, will continue to be asked about this tragedy. Here at *UCR*, we grapple with several questions: what are the dynamics of journal publication, in our case a multi- and interdisciplinary publication, in times of crises of this nature? How do we continue to publish under such circumstances? Should we publish under these circumstances at all? What responsibilities should we take for crises of this nature, if at all?

It is safe to say that our state and private higher education institutions are delivering qualifications at a rate never seen before. These range from diplomas to PhDs and seem to be increasing in quantity. The same can be said of journal publication in Sri Lanka. To what extent does the increase in credentials and proliferation of academic publication impact life, beyond that of the individual who carries these credentials and seeks credibility through publication? As Sasanka Perera asked in his keynote address at the University of Colombo's Annual Research Symposium this year, *who are we publishing for and to what extent are we actually contributing to knowledge through this process?* In the wake of Cyclone Ditwah, we ought to ask, to what extent do our academic endeavours engage with issues of the day, beyond the section or chapter on 'conclusions and recommendations' that we so often see in theses and academic papers? To be clear, academic endeavours need not be consequentialist. That is to say, as long as it satisfies methodological requirements of a discipline, it need not be justified with further reasons. This is also because methodologically, we are required to justify why we undertake research and publication - the research problem and research gap being two examples of aspects we ought to satisfy. In any event, after more than seven decades of domestic higher education, we ought to reflect on how our academic efforts interact with the world around us in actual terms. This includes considering why, whether and how any knowledge we generate or conceptualize is used (or not) by policymakers.

In its report, *Publishing Futures*, (2025) Cambridge University Press makes the point, among others, that academic publishing is at a moment of reckoning due to the proliferation of journals, increased strain on the peer-review process, as well

as due to advancements in Artificial Intelligence. *UCR* is increasingly experiencing this challenge. As the report notes, retaining meaning in academic publication requires collective efforts including through publishing less, strengthening the peer-review process and advancing open access. To what extent are we engaging with these challenges here in Sri Lanka? In our case, with most issues, we have had to hold back a submission we had ear-marked for publication because of problems encountered with the integrity of the submission when engaging in content-editing. In such instances, we have settled for publishing less and maintain our standards for publication. At the same time, we are compelled to plan for increasing our publication frequency in our efforts to improve the standing of *UCR* internationally.

Need for inter/multi disciplinarity

Crises such as this cyclone underline the necessity for interdisciplinarity including for identifying the causes, interpreting the manifestation of the cyclone and in planning for recovery. The lack of public notices in Tamil in the initial official announcements is but one example of the need for different types of specialists and experts to work together (Hattotuwa 5 December 2025). Here at *UCR*, we are mindful that substantive inter-disciplinary research remains minimal in Sri Lanka and much more needs to be done to encourage and support such research. The need for such research is, in many ways, self-evident and pressing. Doing so, however, also means engaging with and countering institutional policies that continue the siloed nature of our universities.

Affect, Social Responsibility and Ethics

Cyclone Ditwah reminds us of another plane of life experience that is often a footnote in research, teaching, publication and public engagement: emotions. How do we understand and deal with the suffering generated due to this cyclone? To what extent have we learned about how to deal with our collective trauma in this land? The people of Sri Lanka present a challenging puzzle in that, historically, we have experienced severe forms of violence, natural disasters as well as remarkable forms of generosity. For instance, we actively pollute the environment and yet continue the practices of *shramadana*. From the individual to the institutional, how are we linking knowledge with ethical and socially responsible conduct? State institutions report on how they are working towards sustainable development on an annual basis. Yet, are we, as a people and as institutions, willing to bear the actual cost of sustainable development and fundamentally alter our choices? On the one hand we promote wellbeing and mindfulness, while on the other, we feel the need to sustain institutional priorities that disregard student and staff well-being. Here too, the question for *UCR* is, what is our responsibility to respond to this tension and conflict, between knowledge and practice and how should that be reflected in academic publishing?

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To some extent, the articles, reviews and the symposium section respond to the issues we discuss above. 'An Analysis of Portuguese Colonial Representations of Sinhalese Women' by Chandra R de Silva and Ramani Hettiarachchi uses some images produced during that era to interpret the lives led by Sinhalese women. The article is a compelling correction to the marginalisation of women in historical accounts and provides significant insights to how Sinhalese women negotiated their lives at the time. This article has useful insights for legal history and sociology. 'A case study of Memoni as a lesser-known language of Sri Lanka' by Romola Rassool highlights efforts taken by the Memoni community to preserve their language. It illustrates the language policy challenges that a numerically-smaller community faces when they live in a multilingual country and a globalized world. 'Nutrigenomics: Linking Diet, Genes, and Health for a Personalized Future' by D.A.S. Elvitigala offers a timely and significant review of the prospects for Nutrigenomics, the bringing together of the study of nutrition and genomes, in the Sri Lankan context. Here too, the implications for the other disciplines are strong. Elvitigala notes, for instance, that knowledge in this field has been mostly generated through the study of populations in the global north and the study of these aspects among the Sri Lankans is long overdue. This includes, for example, the ways in which cultures impact our nutritional choices. 'Emotional Intelligence and Nursing Education: A Review' by W A Rupa Pathmini Menike and G V H H Sewwandi, reviews relevant literature to make the case for including training in emotional intelligence in the training of undergraduate nursing students. Apart from its significance for development of empathetic and self-aware professionals in health care, the value of this review is underscored by the point we made above about affect and knowledge. Rev. Nikapitiye Nandarathana reviews the book *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression* positively, presenting the value of mindfulness to psychotherapy, and pointing to the empirical basis of the book's content.

For the first time, we are publishing reviews of two judgements by the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka under our section on reviews. The review of *Silva v University Grants Commission* (more commonly known as the Ragging case) by Paba Piyarathne provides an explanation and assessment of a judgement that has very specific implications for all universities, academics, administrators and students. *Weihana v Judge of the High Court* is the first judgement by the Supreme Court of a case filed under the relatively new *Anti-Corruption Act* of 2023 and is by Michelle Handy and Gayathri Mohan. The authors assess the ruling by the Court on the procedure that ought to be followed in issuing orders to freeze assets of those charged under the Act. In these ways, these reviews seek to clarify these two significant developments in public law in Sri Lanka to the *UCR* readership.

As usual, in our Symposium section, we present a locally relevant aspect of academic publication. *UCR* interviewed Sandagomi Coperahewa, Senior Professor at the Department of Sinhala of the University, about the recently published edited volume on linguistics, written in Sinhala. The interview discusses the need for such a book as well as the challenges of publishing qualitatively-high academic books in Sinhala. It ends with a reflection on institutional resources needed to build high-quality academic publishing in local languages.

We step into a new year in the weeks to come, under pressing domestic and even international circumstances. May our truth-seeking endeavours provide us with hope as we step into 2026.

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30 November 2025

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