

## EDITORIAL

As Sri Lanka faces a period of profound socio-political and economic challenges, and transition, the role of the Humanities and Social Sciences has never been more crucial. The events of recent years—marked by economic instability, political unrest, and a deepening social divide—have underscored the importance of these disciplines in understanding, interpreting, and addressing the complexities of our society. Therefore we need to reflect on the critical responsibility of academics and intellectuals in these fields to contribute to the national dialogue, offering insights and solutions that can guide the country through this turbulent period. The economic crisis that has gripped Sri Lanka has not only affected the daily lives of its citizens but has also exposed the vulnerabilities within our political institutions and social structures. In times of such uncertainty, the Humanities and Social Sciences offer essential tools for critical analysis, enabling us to dissect the root causes of these issues and explore the broader implications for our society. This journal stands as a platform for scholars to engage with these pressing concerns, providing a space for rigorous analysis and thoughtful reflection on the challenges we face.

The widespread disillusionment with political leadership, the erosion of democratic norms, and the rise of social tensions are symptomatic of deeper, systemic issues. The role of the Humanities and Social Sciences is pivotal in this context, as these disciplines are uniquely positioned to analyze the narratives, ideologies, and historical forces that have shaped the present moment. By understanding the past and its influence on contemporary realities, we can better navigate the path forward.

In the realm of social cohesion, the role of culture, language, and identity cannot be overstated. Sri Lanka's diverse society, with its rich tapestry of ethnicities, religions, and cultures, presents both challenges and opportunities. The Humanities, with their focus on cultural studies, linguistics, and history, can foster a deeper understanding of our shared heritage, promoting dialogue and reconciliation in a time of division. Social Sciences, on the other hand, can provide empirical insights into the dynamics of social change, helping to design interventions that strengthen the fabric of our society. Azmiya Yehiya's paper is about Islamophobia in the aftermath of the 2019 Easter bombings in Sri Lanka, which targeted churches and hotels, killing 259 people, including 45 foreign nationals, and injuring many more and which, significantly intensified Islamophobia against Sri Lankan Muslims. Social media, particularly Facebook, played a crucial role in spreading anti-Muslim and anti-Islam rhetoric post-bombings. Despite the impact of social media on societal discourse, there has been little research on how online language and discourse incited hatred and violence. Her study uses thematic analysis to examine social media interactions from April 2019 to December 2020, focusing on Islamophobic discourse. The

findings reveal that language was frequently used to express anti-Muslim sentiment, reinforcing negative stereotypes and presenting Muslims as outsiders who do not belong with the Sinhalese majority. The discourse was hostile, filled with profanities, racial slurs, and threats, further polarizing communities. The study highlights that these linguistic strategies, which construct negative images of Muslims and Islam, are part of a broader global trend that requires immediate attention.

This journal also carries a paper about a novel written by award-winning Sri Lankan born writer V.V. (Sugi) Ganeshanathan who recently also won The Women's Prize for Fiction for her novel set in Sri Lanka's civil war, "Brotherless Night". Bamunusinghe and Senaratne's study examines how the Ganeshanathan's debut novel "Love Marriage" uses lexical choices to express ideological perspectives and depict the marginalization of communities during the Sri Lankan war (1983-2009). By applying Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis, the research focuses on how vocabulary reflects ideological differences and social exclusion. It reveals that marginalization is represented through specific linguistic strategies, including noun phrases, synonymy and antonymy, overlexicalization, formality, euphemisms, pronouns, and reporting verbs. The study provides insights into analyzing literary texts from a linguistic perspective, demonstrating how vocabulary can convey complex ideological expressions.

As we move forward, it is imperative that scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences engage with the public, policymakers, and each other in meaningful ways. This journal aims to bridge the gap between academic research and real-world application, ensuring that the knowledge produced within these fields contributes to the betterment of society. In this context, Gunawardena's discussion on creativity is relevant. In the rapidly changing landscape of higher education, cultivating creativity is not just an option but a crucial requirement for developing innovative thinkers and equipping students for an ever-changing world. Her paper delves deeply into the current state of creativity skills among university graduates in Sri Lanka, framed within the context of shifting educational paradigms that stress the importance of these skills in the 21st century. By using a mixed-methods approach, the study outlines the constructs of creativity, evaluates the proficiency levels among students, identifies challenges in skill development, and suggests strategies for improvement.

The history of English language education in Sri Lanka is closely tied to the establishment of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) in 1980, which provided widespread access to English education. The 2009 National Policy emphasized the need for English proficiency in the 21st century, a necessity further highlighted by globalization and the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper

by Abeysekera and Wijesingha explores the adoption of an anthropogenic approach—focusing on adult education principles—in English language education within Open Distance Learning (ODL). It examines the historical context and proposes an online, student-centered English course designed to meet modern educational demands, contributing to the optimization of English language education in Sri Lanka's evolving ODL landscape.

The current socio-political and economic climate in Sri Lanka calls for a renewed commitment to the values of critical inquiry, social justice, and intellectual engagement. In 2022, growing public dissatisfaction with Sri Lankan political institutions led the country to the brink of chaos. In response, the government, led by Ranil Wickremasinghe, introduced the Anti-Corruption Bill to restore public trust. De Zoysa's study explores how the bill was used to mitigate the political and economic crisis, analyzing it through the lens of factors essential for effective anti-corruption agencies. The research employs qualitative methods, including document analysis and content analysis, to assess how the bill was intended to address corruption and stabilize the political situation. The findings suggest that the bill is a strategic effort by the government to regain public trust and reinforce the democratic framework.

In the same vein, Jayaweera's paper discusses the concept of natural rights, foundational to modern human rights, which originates from social contract theory and emphasizes their inviolability and universal nature. These rights have been central to political movements, but applying them fully in extreme situations can be challenging, leading to ongoing debates. While social contract theorists argue for the constant promotion of natural rights, they acknowledge that these rights may be reasonably restricted in certain dire circumstances, such as economic crises. However, any arbitrary infringement on natural rights by governments in chaotic situations is unjustifiable, potentially leading to the government's loss of legitimacy and the right to govern, which could, in turn, justify rebellion in the name of justice and freedom. Jayaweera's study confirms that natural rights do not lose their relevance during economic crises; instead, they become critically important, as neglecting to protect them could undermine the entire system of legitimate governance.

The Humanities and Social Sciences have a vital role to play in guiding the nation through these challenges, offering not just analysis but also hope and direction. This journal remains dedicated to fostering scholarly work that speaks to the issues of our time, contributing to a more informed, equitable, and resilient Sri Lanka.

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