

Symposium

Interview on Editing and Publishing an Edited Volume

The *UCR* team considers it our responsibility to initiate and contribute to debate and discourse on research and publication in Sri Lanka. In fulfilling that responsibility, for this issue, we invited Emeritus Professor Jayadeva Uyangoda, a distinguished figure in Political Science at the University of Colombo, to share his insights and reflections on editing and publishing an edited volume in the Sri Lankan context. Professor Uyangoda's responses offer useful points of reflection for any academic interested in learning about the prospects and challenges of publishing an edited scholarly volume.

1. What are the aims of publishing an edited volume?

Edited scholarly volumes are usually published on a specific theme. The aims of publishing edited volumes can be general and specific. The general aim is to bring together a group of scholars who have worked on the theme of the volume. This approach allows for the presentation of several and even different perspectives on one theme to the reader in one publication. A book by a single author presents the perspective of only one individual scholar. Presenting a multiplicity of perspectives on a single theme also enables the reader to be aware of, and familiar with, diverse approaches, analyses and arguments about one theme. This diversity indicates an extensive body of scholars who have worked, or are working, on that theme. Moreover, an edited volume can contain chapters on different aspects of a general theme, written by scholars of varied academic backgrounds. The specific aim of publishing an edited volume, however, could be associated with the interests of the editor or the publisher.

To bring my own experience to this discussion, in recent years, I have been involved in publishing two scholarly volumes on Sri Lankan Politics. The first is *Political Parties in Sri Lanka: Change and Continuity* published with Oxford University Press (2018).¹ I coedited this volume with Professor Amita Shastri, an Indian-American scholar on Sri Lankan politics, teaching in an American university until recently. I very recently edited a two-volume book on democracy in Sri Lanka, called *Democracy and Democratization in Sri Lanka: Paths, Trends and Imaginations* published by Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies BCIS (2023).² These volumes had both those general and specific objectives I mentioned above.

¹ Shastri, A. & Uyangoda, J. (Eds) (2018). *Political Parties in Sri Lanka: Change and Continuity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

² Uyangoda, J. (Ed) (2023). *Democracy and Democratization in Sri Lanka: Paths, Trends and Imaginations*. Colombo: Bandaranaike Center for International Studies.

To elaborate on the general objective a little further, both publications wanted to fill a glaring knowledge gap on the themes around which their content was organized. When the book on political parties was published in 2018, there were only two scholarly books on political parties in Sri Lanka. The first had been published in 1967 by Calvin Woodward, entitled *The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon* (Brown University Press). The second, *Electoral Allegiance in Sri Lanka*, was written by a Sri Lankan scholar, Dilesh Jayantha. It was published in 1992 by the Cambridge University Press. Of course, there have been many journal articles on the subject. Yet, they were not easily accessible to readers. The specific reason for this edited volume was the personal interest both Professor Shastri and I had as political scientists on Sri Lanka. Both of us were keen to write a joint book on Sri Lankan political parties, yet neither of us had the time or resources to undertake fresh research to do a major scholarly work. So, our solution to that challenge was to set up a team of scholars who would write substantive chapters on Sri Lankan political parties from the perspectives of their own scholarly interests. After we approached several of our colleagues in Sri Lanka, we realized that it was a feasible project. In such edited volumes with chapters featuring diverse topics and perspectives, it is the responsibility of the editors to connect all of them. They do this by getting the individual authors to make adjustments to the content and orientation of the chapters to ensure thematic cohesion for the volume as a whole. This indeed is an important editorial responsibility. The 'Introduction' chapter written by the editor(s) in such a volume also seeks to frame the book as one with an overall thematic unity.

With regard to the book on democracy in Sri Lanka, it is a product of the fusion of both general and specific aims. Quite similar to the theme of political parties in Sri Lanka, the theme of Sri Lanka's experience of democracy is also one not academically explored adequately. Thus, the general scholarly aim of the book was to fill a crucial knowledge gap with regard to democracy in Sri Lanka, by producing a body of critical knowledge on the country's experience of democracy and democratization. The specific aim had two dimensions, institutional and personal. The institutional aim was associated with Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies, its publisher. BCIS Chairperson and the Board of Academic Affairs had made a decision in early 2020 to initiate a research program leading to the publication of a scholarly book on any significant thematic area in Sri Lankan politics.³ The Chairperson proposed that exploring the question why democracy had failed in Sri Lanka would be a crucially relevant theme for scholarly inquiry and commentary. The academic board members also recognized the urgency of the need to explore that question with a view to make a substantive contribution to updating Sri Lanka's social science scholarship on the country's contemporary politics.

³ Prof Uyangoda is currently a member of the Board of Academic Studies of the BCIS.

2. What are the advantages or disadvantages of publishing an edited volume as opposed to other forms of academic publication?

An edited volume allows the work of several scholars on a connected theme to be published in one book. It also enables a diversity of approaches and perspectives on a specific theme to be brought together in one volume. This exposes the reader to a multiplicity of different analyses and arguments on a range of interconnected topics.

Academic journals are also an excellent forum for publishing. However, journals do not carry large numbers of articles on similar themes and topics in one issue, unless they are included in a special thematic issue, say for example, on 'Democracy in Sri Lanka.' We were initially planning 26 chapters and no academic journal would be willing to accommodate us to have a special issue with so many articles. There are other disadvantages in publishing in international academic journals. Such journals are quite expensive, and their accessibility can be quite restricted. Recent trends towards open access publishing have broadened accessibility, albeit at a significant financial cost to the authors. Publishing in authentic academic journals is always good for individual academics to achieve professional recognition, but with a rather restricted reach. We wanted our book accessible and available mainly to the Sri Lankan readers.

3. What is your intended audience for 'Democracy and Democratisation in Sri Lanka: Paths, Trends and Imaginations'?

This is also one of the first questions a book publisher will ask you when you submit a book proposal! It is a very legitimate question, because any book will aim at a particular community of readers. In both volumes I mentioned, the intended audience was a mixture of readers: academics, students, policymakers, journalists, professionals keen about Sri Lankan politics, and scholars and students abroad with interest in the politics and society in Sri Lanka. We were also aware that an academic book in English would have a limited domestic readership. We also began to talk about the need to translate the book into Sinhala and Tamil.

4. Why did you choose to publish locally and not internationally? Can you say something about academic publishing and publishers locally, regionally, internationally?

I wanted to publish both books internationally and locally simultaneously. Yet, international publishers we were in touch with did not agree with that proposal. There is no secret about the fact that all publishers want to maximize their profit. One publisher verbally agreed to give us permission to print the volume on political parties in Sri Lanka as a paperback edition. However, two conditions were proposed to us. The local edition was to be published two years after the first edition. Even

then, it was not to be sold outside Sri Lanka. It was not a bad proposal, yet it was only a verbal commitment by the junior staff who handled our book at the publishing house. When I was working on the book on democracy in Sri Lanka during 2020-22, I had that experience in the back of my mind. The international publishers we approached did not agree with the idea of publishing a low-priced Sri Lankan edition of the book simultaneously with the publication of a hardback edition abroad. Then BCIS decided to publish it in Sri Lanka, with BCIS as the publisher. BCIS is a reputed academic institution and had been publishing books, although not regularly. The need to make the book available at an affordable price to the Sri Lankan readers, particularly students, was foremost in our mind.

With regard to the second part of your question, publishing academic books internationally is quite challenging. To begin with, academic publishing is an organized industry, monopolized by a few global publishers dominating the field. Some Indian publishing companies have managed to break into that industry, but global publishing giants have acquired some of them. The Indian publishing industry has the advantage of having a massive domestic market for books in English as well as in vernacular languages such as Hindi, Bengali or Tamil. Sri Lanka's market for academic books in English, Sinhalese, and Tamil is quite limited. Therefore, the business of academic publishing in Sri Lanka is financially unsustainable, unless there is government or external donor support. This has led to a situation where local book publishers are reluctant to undertake publishing an academic book, unless the author sponsors the production process and protects the publisher from financial ruin. This has also led to a rather unhealthy practice among university academics to get a few copies of a book published at their own cost with the objective of submitting copies of them to university authorities as evidence of 'published work' when they apply for professorial promotions. Sadly, this has become a fairly widespread academic practice in Sri Lanka. This practice of self-publishing, however problematic it is as an academic habit, needs to be understood with some empathy with the academics who do so. It is a response, though inappropriate and even distorted, to a major lack in our university system, that is, the absence of a tradition or culture of serious academic writing and publishing. For example, there is no institutional support, including advising, for publishing post-graduate dissertations, although fee-levying post-graduate degree programs have proliferated. In the universities of the global North, post-doctoral fellowships are available for young scholars to revise their dissertation for publication. Some universities have partnership arrangements with academic publishing houses to publish doctoral dissertations. Yet, universities in the global South are not known for such support schemes for emerging scholars.

The absence of a properly developed academic publishing industry has also contributed to the continuing state of underdevelopment of the art of academic writing in Sri Lanka. The fact that the local market for such books is limited is the

main barrier. The Sri Lankan book publishing industry is so limited in its size and capacity that the local publishers do not have active networks with international distributors.

There is another reason, which I would call rather unfortunate. It is the lack of commitment on the part of the Sri Lankan academic community to publish with ‘reputed academic publishers’ who invariably happen to be international book publishers. The so-called reputed publishers maintain strict academic and quality standards in the books they publish. Peer review, revision, re-submission after revision, and even rejection of the book manuscript are elements of their publishing protocol. Most Sri Lankan academics in the social science and humanities disciplines are averse to going through the process of double-blind peer review and revisions of the manuscript to meet the international quality requirements. Their total unfamiliarity with international academic publishing standards has made the situation still worse. Another contributory factor is the extremely poor, arbitrary, and unprofessional review practices adopted by our senior academics in evaluating the publications submitted along with the applications for professorial promotions. The UGC, a few years ago, made an attempt to stop, or at least control, the malpractices in professorial promotions by blocking the technical loopholes in the relevant promotion circular. Defining reputed publishers, indexed as well as refereed journals, and invalidating vanity and predatory publications were among the new measures introduced. Soon after the reformed policy was announced, the university academic community and their trade unions forced the UGC to withdraw those quality safeguards with regard to academic publications and other promotion requirements. Thus, the UGC, university administrations, academic trade unions, and senior academics appear to be in an unholy coalition to maintain the poverty of the culture of academic writing and publishing, making it immune to critique and reform.

5. Can you comment on the time period it took for completing this work?

Each of the two publications I mentioned above took nearly three years for the completion. This is not an inordinately long or unusual delay. In fact, it was an achievement that the delays we encountered were not wholly disruptive. For both book projects, some short deadlines had been set at the beginning for the first, revised, and finalized drafts of the chapters and the completed book manuscript. Those short deadlines reflected the excitement and enthusiasm we had about the overall project. What we realized later was that when working with a team of authors, the concept of deadlines needed to be interpreted with some flexibility.

When we were working on the book on democracy in Sri Lanka, there were also two unanticipated interruptions that had the potential to delay the book manuscript further. The first was the Covid-19 pandemic, which broke out in early 2020. It prevented many of the chapter contributors from commencing their archival

and field research. Due to public health restrictions, libraries and archives remained closed. Family members of some of the chapter contributors had even contracted the deadly fever severely affecting their families, and their capacity to engage in intellectual work and academic schedules. The second interruption was the political upheaval and the excitement caused by the citizen's *Aragalaya* ('Protest') of 2022. Interestingly, the *Aragalaya* compelled us and also made it possible for our team of contributors to develop new perspectives on the checkered experience of democracy in Sri Lanka. Against the backdrop of *Aragalaya*, I as the editor had to rethink, revise, and refine some propositions I had initially developed in the original book proposal while encouraging the chapter writers also to think afresh. I found this adjustment to be an excitingly rewarding experience, because the citizens' direct democratic activism showed us that the Sri Lankan people had come forward to make the point that rescuing democracy from the control of the self-serving and corrupt political elites was a major democratic concern. In fact, 2022 was the year of Sri Lanka's *demos* came forward to reclaim democracy. No serious academic work on democracy could ignore it.

Editing a scholarly work with chapters by a large number of authors can be as time and energy consuming as producing a single-author book. Preparing and finalizing an edited volume is perhaps a little more complex and complicated. In the case of a book by a single author, the author has full control over the progress of the book manuscript. This is not the case with an edited book with many chapter contributors. The complex challenges that the editor will have to manage usually begins with the selection of the panel of chapter writers. Who to include and who to exclude is not an easy exercise given the limited intellectual resources available in Sri Lanka. Even those included might drop out later due, for example, to the pressures of unanticipated personal crises, professional commitments or family emergencies. Filling those chapter gaps in the planned volume after the project has gone some distance is not easy. In such a context, the editor will have to manage a not-so-minor spell of anxiety, knowing that any alert book reviewer might notice the thematic gaps in the book.

The syndrome of uncertainty from which the editor of a volume might suffer includes managing several, or sometimes a large number of, chapter contributors, getting the chapter drafts in time, and gently persuading the authors to revise the chapter drafts without much delay in response to editor's and reviewers' comments. Copy editing of chapters, and then getting the authors' approval for edited versions without hurting the feelings of anyone requires some measure of patience and prudence on the part of the editor. Similarly, persuading unresponsive colleagues to honor deadlines for submitting chapter drafts during different stages of chapter development and to do it without jeopardizing friendships of long years requires some rudimentary diplomatic skills too.

6. What resources did you require for this project?

Money is always an insurmountable challenge for publishing scholarly books in Sri Lanka. Money is needed for the research, production and finalizing of the manuscript, copy-editing, and for printing and publishing. Due to the recent economic crisis, the cost of production has gone up dramatically. If it is an edited volume, the availability of a team of scholars with similar academic interests is an essential pre-condition for success. All chapter contributors of the book on democracy are Sri Lankan. All, except three, were residing in Sri Lanka. We, at BCIS, had made a decision at the very beginning to invite only Sri Lankan academics to contribute chapters to this volume. My justification of that decision is somewhat methodological: it was to give priority to the Sri Lankan scholars who have lived through and personally encountered and witnessed various stages of the crisis of democracy of Sri Lanka. The rise and fall of democracy in Sri Lanka as a lived experience is an integral part of their life as a phenomenological experience. From a methodological point of view, that element of intimate subjectivity is indispensable to make sense of what has gone wrong with democracy in Sri Lanka, or in any other society.

When we began the work on the volume on democracy, I did a literature review on the theme ‘Democracy in Sri Lanka’. That review highlighted some major limitations of the existing scholarship on democracy in Sri Lanka. For example, Sri Lanka’s political science community had not yet benefitted from new trends of theorizing and conceptualizing democracy developed in other parts of the world. Democracy scholarship in Sri Lanka had only recently begun to look for critical alternatives to the philosophical and theoretical framework of liberal democracy. Regular exchanges with chapter contributors were very useful to broaden and update the approaches to democracy studies in Sri Lanka.

With regard to financial resources, the democracy volume was really lucky to have BCIS and Bandaranaike National Memorial Foundation as its institutional sponsors. The book on political parties in Sri Lanka was not so lucky. For that volume, my co-editor and I managed to get a small grant from a research group to hold workshops and meetings. All the chapter contributors on political parties had donated their intellectual labor free of honoraria. Our international publisher bore the production cost. Perhaps they were confident that the cost incurred could be recovered from the sales.

Academic research and book publishing in Sri Lanka have always faced financial difficulties. As I have already mentioned, support through the University Grants Commission and the universities has not been part of state policy. Meanwhile, the kind of capitalism developed in Sri Lanka has not given rise to a philanthropic culture of supporting higher education or production and dissemination of knowledge. That is one reason the publishing of high-quality academic work by Sri Lankan

scholars in Sri Lanka continues to remain so dismally infrequent. When they are produced abroad by internationally reputed and prestigious publishing houses, they come with prohibitive price tags. Not even our university libraries can afford to buy them. That is the risk we at BCIS decided to avoid by publishing *Democracy and Democratisation in Sri Lanka* locally, and by subsidizing its price.

7. How did you navigate the issue of language in this project?

This question alludes to our post-colonial predicament, or paradox. Even to criticize the colonial project and the colonial past, we have no hesitation to use the language of the colonizer. I want to elaborate this paradox a little bit from the point of scholarly writing in English which all of us regularly engage in. Although I may be a bit of an exception, most of us think and write only in English with little or no consideration for communicating our academic ideas to the ordinary citizens either in Sinhalese or Tamil, which are the two languages used by most of the people of our society. That shows that as academics we continue to communicate with small English-speaking communities, at home and abroad. There is an inherent and inescapable elitism too in this habit among a vast majority of our colleagues.

As a bilingual academic, I have been trying to address this paradox by writing and publishing in Sinhala and making regular attempts to persuade my academic colleagues to communicate with the ‘people’ in the local languages. One option available to us is to translate our academic work into Sinhala or Tamil. That is a task easier said than done, because there are many barriers to translating academic work. The Sinhalese academic vocabulary has been developing for the past few decades and it is quite rich. But the real issue is the paucity of trained translators who can re-state in Sinhala the social science academic literature in a manner that is easily understood by the vernacular reader. The new words coined and given in the dictionaries and glossaries are in most cases directly taken from Sanskrit, which make no sense to the reader. Many translators are also reluctant to coin simple Sinhalese terms because they have no expertise in vocabulary-making. Two solutions are available to overcome this challenge. The first is to coin simple Sinhalese terms for academic words and theoretical concepts. The second is to publish glossaries that describe the corresponding English academic terms with their Sinhala or Tamil renderings in brief descriptive essays on each term for the benefit of the non-academic reader. Yet, this is a daunting task. It requires resources – money, expertise, and a community of academics committed to shouldering the burden of making our post-coloniality really ‘post’. There is also the urgent need to produce a body of South Asian social science and humanities theory knowledge derived from, or inspired by, the classical and popular South Asian philosophical, social, cultural, and aesthetic thought. In fact, our democracy volume proposes a pathway to construct a South Asian framing of the democracy question, relatively independent of the dominant Western paradigm.

With regard to the second part of your question, language editing is needed regardless of whether a scholarly book is published in English, Sinhalese or Tamil. Clarity in language is central to academic analysis, argument-making, and theorizing. Elegance in prose is also an asset in any form of writing in any language. All chapter contributors to our two volumes had the background in academic writing in English. At the same time, all chapters needed language editing, and that is not unusual. Publishers will do it for chapters and books written even by authors whose first language is English. Language editing is a specialized vocation associated with publishing. We obtained the services of two professional language editors. Even then, the volume editor had to go through all the language corrections one by one, and liaise between the language editors and chapter writers. Since the language editors were not subject specialists, they were understandably careful not to make any changes that would alter the content or meaning of the sentences. Therefore, content editing that involved a little bit of editing the conceptual language too was the sole responsibility of the editor.

Content editing usually involves tasks such as ensuring theoretical and conceptual soundness of the analysis, maintaining the structural balance of the chapter, shortening unnecessarily long chapter texts, detection of content repetition, refining and ensuring the clarity of arguments and conclusions, and suggesting to the authors how the analytical and scholarly quality of the chapter could be enhanced. These are tasks that require a great deal of understanding, collaboration and cooperation between the editor and all the chapter writers. What motivates an editor to attend to all these tasks without a complaint is the realization that at the end of the day, it is the editor who is responsible, and even blamed for, shortcomings and mistakes in language and content alike of the chapters and the entire book. This is a professional hazard which no editor should take the risk of ignoring. However, it is a hazard worth enduring because of the intellectual satisfaction it offers at the end.

An exercise that turned out to be slightly tedious and time-consuming was the style-editing and standardizing of the style. This is a practice generally ignored in Sri Lanka and therefore a few words about it are not entirely out of place. If an edited volume carries different referencing or bibliographical styles in its individual chapters, that shows that the editor has not followed the recognized international publishing standards. Maintaining the uniformity in the style in the entire book is a must and it is also the joint responsibility of the editor and the publisher. Although BCIS had its own in-house style guide, most chapter contributors had not strictly followed it. It is not unusual for academic writers to have their own writing styles and style habits. Making a sudden transition to a new technical style with regard to referencing, footnotes or endnotes, bibliography, spelling, sub-titling, citations etc., is quite demanding. The chapter contributors of the democracy volume could not be exceptions to this more or less general rule. This is where I as the editor found the

help of the copyeditors and the support staff of BCIS most valuable. A lesson I learnt in this process is that editing of an academic book should never be undertaken on the wrong assumption that the editor alone can attend to all the nitty-gritty of producing a camera-ready book manuscript. An edited volume is a product of collective labor at several different stages of the process. Of course, in the universities of the global North, university professors have the privilege of being helped by their graduate students, research assistants or teaching assistants. But not so in the global South.

8. What are some points that a novice editor would have to keep in mind when publishing locally?

Let me highlight a few practical lessons learnt.

The first is that the panel of chapter writers for an edited volume should not be too small or too big. The initial panel of chapter contributors for the book on democracy in Sri Lanka had 26 authors. It was a little too big a number to manage, since it required a great deal of coordination and correspondence. While a small number of chapters and chapter contributors is manageable, there is always the risk of one or two of them dropping out due to unforeseen reasons. Therefore, it is always safe to have in mind a few possible replacements.

The second lesson is the need to maintain a strong team spirit with the panel of chapter writers throughout the entire process of producing the volume. This places a huge responsibility on the editor to possess a capacity for patience and bonding with each author without allowing the editor's own ego to disrupt the framework of collaboration that was initially built. The value of mutual understanding between the editor and the chapter writers is key. It becomes starkly clear when the editor has to repeatedly torment them to revise and refine the chapter drafts within short time frames.

The third lesson is that the editor should not attempt to impose his or her own views and understandings of issues on the contributors, except in relation to the need to sustaining the academic quality, standards and rigor of the volume.

The fourth lesson which would be useful for novice editors is that intellectual collaboration with a number of fellow academics to jointly produce an academic book is a challenge worth undertaking. In Sri Lanka, academic culture encourages solitary activity at the expense of collective and cooperative efforts. Editing a volume which requires collaborative teamwork is like swimming against the tide, because of the spirit of individualism and the sense of insecurity that is so widespread as a cultural trait among our university academics. To successfully conclude a project of editing an academic volume, one has to have a strong commitment to the belief that intellectual achievements are also products of collective labor.

Finally, publishing locally is a colossal challenge, particularly in the context of Sri Lanka's on-going economic crisis. The cost of printing has increased dramatically, and the book prices have gone up too. As a result, the domestic market for academic

books has been shrinking. Scholars will have to explore alternative platforms for academic publishing.

9. Academia in Sri Lanka has almost always worked in a broader context of crisis. How should we think about the ethics, politics and demands of academic publishing when in (permanent) crisis?

Your question, it seems to me, is not only about academic publishing, but also about how academia should respond to Sri Lanka's never-ending crisis. This issue surfaced during last year's *Aragalaya* as well. The question was posed in a specific way: why was the Sri Lankan academia not alert to, or even unaware of, the massive economic, social, and political crisis that produced conditions for an unprecedented citizens' uprising? Actually, it was a damning indictment on academia. The professional economists did not know that a debilitating economic crisis was in the making. Sociologists were unaware that a massive degree of social discontent was building up. Political scientists could not sense that something like a pre-revolutionary situation had been rapidly developing in the country. After the *Aragalaya*, there was a re-awakening in academia that the academics should have a social role to play by being responsive and sensitive to the country's permanent state of the crisis.

Academic publishing is a highly institutionalized domain of intellectual activity. It is controlled by elite universities and powerful publishing houses in the West. International publishing protocols are also defined by them. Can there be moves towards democratizing the publishing industry? Can the power of the big publishing houses be challenged? When we at BCIS were talking to international publishers about our book, these questions were implicitly there in our minds. They appeared before us in the form of two questions: should a book on democracy in Sri Lanka be published abroad making it inaccessible to the Sri Lankan readers? What kind of democratic politics would it be if a book on democracy in Sri Lanka is not affordable to Sri Lankan readers, particularly students? These are questions that we should reflect on when we consider academic publishing.

Jayadeva Uyangoda

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