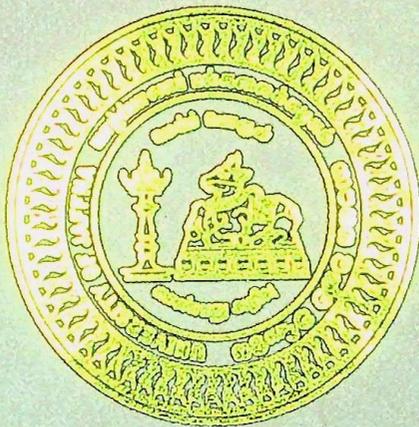


University of Jaffna: The 'Knowledge Shrine'

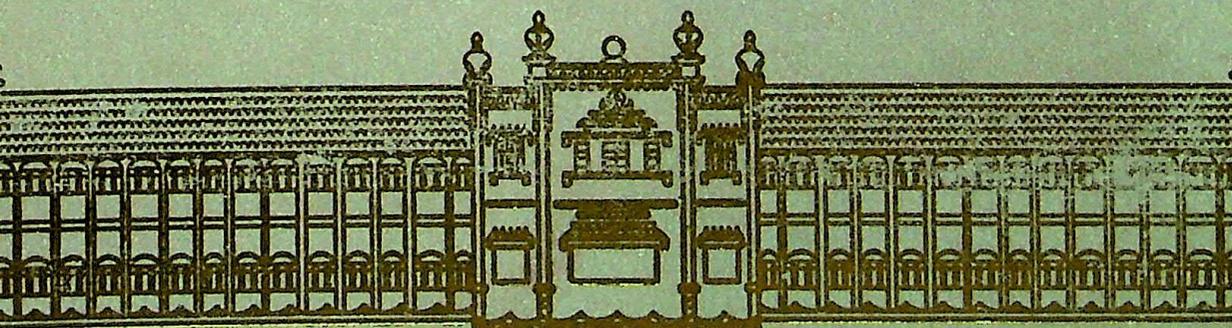
Fifty Years of Academic Pursuits



Edited by :

Prof. S. Srisatkunarajah

Rev. Prof. J. C. Paul Rohan



University of Jaffna: The 'Knowledge Shrine'

Fifty Years of Academic Pursuits



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University of Jaffna

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- Fifty Years of Academic Pursuits -*

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The Evolution of Research Culture at the University of Jaffna

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Research lies at the heart of any Higher Education Institution. While schools primarily emphasize instruction, universities distinguish themselves by integrating teaching with research, thereby fostering a dynamic academic culture in which both students and faculty are actively involved in the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge. In this regard, the University of Jaffna upholds a clear vision to be a centre of excellence in teaching, learning, research, innovation, scholarship, and community engagement. This vision is closely aligned with its institutional mandate, which emphasizes the pivotal role of research and innovation, knowledge transfer, and collaboration with industry and other stakeholders - particularly in addressing the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural challenges specific to the Northern Province of Sri Lanka.

Within this framework, research at the University of Jaffna, has emerged not as a peripheral activity but as a central pillar of its academic identity. From its inception, the university embraced the imperative of developing contextually relevant and globally resonant research. Even amidst the constraints of protracted civil conflict and resource limitations, a vibrant research culture has taken root, sustained by the dedication of its academic calibre, the enthusiasm of emerging scholars, and a progressively expanding research infrastructure. Over the decades, this culture has diversified and matured, encompassing fields such as health sciences, agricultural innovation, engineering, indigenous knowledge systems, language, religious and cultural studies, environmental sustainability, and information and communication technology.

As the University of Jaffna commemorates its fifty years of academic pursuits, it is essential to highlight the university's research journey - its evolution, perseverance, and contributions - as a testimony to its enduring role as a 'knowledge shrine', not

only for Northern Sri Lanka but also for the national and international academic communities.

1. Research Journals: Platforms of Scholarly Dissemination

As the research culture at the University of Jaffna matured, academics across disciplines increasingly sought avenues to disseminate their findings both locally and internationally. These efforts aimed not only to contribute to the global body of knowledge but also to respond to the specific socio-economic and cultural needs of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. In order to institutionalize this scholarly momentum and provide a dedicated platform for critical discourse, the University took the essential initiative of launching its own academic journals. These journals became essential instruments for advancing research, promoting interdisciplinary dialogue, and elevating the visibility of research produced in the region.

The 'Sri Lankan Journal of South Asian Studies', the first peer-reviewed journal of the University of Jaffna, was launched in 1978 under the visionary editorship of Dr. K. Indrapala, with R.S. Thambiah serving as Managing Editor. Focused primarily on the disciplines of history, culture, society, and language in the South Asian context, this publication emerged from the Faculty of Arts intending to encourage rigorous scholarship and make the region's unique perspectives accessible to a wider academic audience. Its establishment marked a historic milestone in the university's journey towards research excellence.

Building on this foundation, the journal 'Cinthanai' was inaugurated in 1983 under the editorial leadership of Dr. Sithampalam. Published thrice annually, 'Cinthanai' provided an important intellectual forum, particularly for Tamil studies, literary criticism, and the humanities. It fostered a vibrant environment for critical engagement in Tamil, offering scholars a space to explore language, culture, and philosophy with academic excellence.

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In 1986, the Faculty of Science contributed to the university's expanding scholarly portfolio through the establishment of 'Vingnanam: Journal of Science', founded by Dr. S. Kandiah of the Department of Botany. This journal became a cornerstone for scientific inquiry within the university, offering faculty and students a credible and consistent outlet for publishing research in the natural sciences. 'Vingnanam' reflected the growing emphasis on empirical research and its application to regional and national challenges.

In the subsequent decades, the University of Jaffna continued to diversify and professionalize its journal offerings, aligning them with emerging disciplines and research priorities. Among the notable additions were the 'International Journal of Accounting and Business Finance', launched in 2015, and the 'Journal of Business

Studies', launched in 2005. Both journals, published by the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, have become important vehicles for disseminating contemporary research on financial systems, business practices, and economic development, with special relevance to developing economies and post-conflict reconstruction.

Within the field of agriculture, the 'Journal of Dry Zone Agriculture', launched in 2010 and published by the Faculty of Agriculture, addresses critical issues related to sustainable agriculture and innovation in the dry zone ecosystem, contributing to food security and environmental resilience in the region.

Together, these journals exemplify the commitment to research dissemination, academic excellence, and knowledge production of the University of Jaffna, rooted in local realities yet engaged with global academic conversations. Through these scholarly platforms, the University continues to play a vital role in shaping academic discourse within and beyond Sri Lanka.

2. Jaffna Science Association and Its Contributions to Research

626 The Jaffna Science Association (JSA), established in 1991, has emerged as a key institution in the promotion and consolidation of a research-oriented academic culture within the University of Jaffna. Founded under the visionary leadership of Professor A. Thurairajah, then Vice Chancellor of the University, and a cohort of senior academics, the JSA was conceived as a platform to nurture scientific research and disseminate scientific knowledge across the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Professor Thurairajah, who was unanimously elected as the first President of the Association, envisaged JSA not only as a scholarly body but also as a civic and intellectual engine of regional development.

From its inception, the Jaffna Science Association positioned itself at the intersection of academia and community engagement, seeking to bridge the gap between scientific advancement and public understanding. Operating within the University of Jaffna, it has functioned as an autonomous academic society fostering interdisciplinary research and regional scholarly productivity. The Association is structured into four primary sections: Section A for Pure Sciences, Section B for Applied Sciences and Technology, Section C for Medical Sciences, and Section D for Social Sciences.

The mission and vision of Jaffna Science Association clearly underscore its commitment to the research and dissemination of scientific knowledge among intellectuals and the general public in the Northern Province. The research contributions of the Jaffna Science Association are both substantive and far-reaching. One of the most important milestones in the evolution of the Association was the adoption of 'Sustainable Development' as its core thematic concern in 2010.

This timely focus emerged in response to the pressing need for integrated, locally informed development strategies in the aftermath of civil conflict. Under this rubric, the Association initiated a series of research-informed discussions and publications addressing regional priorities such as environmental sustainability, water resource management, adolescent health, non-communicable diseases, and the relevance of Essential Public Health Functions (EPHF).

The Jaffna Science Association has published several key materials aimed at both the academic and general public. The Applied Sciences section (Section B) publishes *பிரயோக விஞ்ஞானச் சூடார்* (Pirayoga Vingnanach Chudar), a bilingual magazine devoted to applied scientific knowledge. The Pure Sciences section (Section A) introduced *யாழின் தேடல்* (Yarlin Thedal), a magazine that presents scientific content in an accessible format for students and lay readers. In addition, JSA disseminates a biannual newsletter that highlights recent activities and accomplishments, and it publishes two annual volumes of proceedings from its sessions, one containing abstracts of current research presentations and the other compiling the presidential address, the section chairperson's remarks, and popular talks from previous years.

Many of the Jaffna Science Association members have been nationally recognized for research excellence, including recipients of the Presidential Research Awards. The prestigious Prof. K. Balasubramaniam Gold Medal, awarded annually by the JSA, continues to honour outstanding contributions to science and inspire emerging researchers.

Through its integrated academic and civic role, the Jaffna Science Association has significantly influenced both the scholarly landscape of the University of Jaffna and the broader socio-cultural fabric of the Northern Province. By fostering research excellence, nurturing interdisciplinary dialogue, and ensuring that knowledge remains grounded in real-world concerns, the Jaffna Science Association has become an institutional cornerstone in the evolution of the university's research culture.

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3. Research Conferences and Symposia: Cultivating Academia and Institutional Visibility

From its formative years, the University of Jaffna has actively fostered scholarly engagement through symposia, academic colloquia, and pioneering conferences on South Asian Studies organized by individual faculties or departments. These early initiatives laid the groundwork for a vibrant research culture, nurturing critical dialogue and collaborative inquiry within the university community and with scholars from beyond its immediate academic sphere.

As the university matured, it recognized the need to further institutionalize research dissemination and interdisciplinary engagement. In response, the university

launched its first university-wide 'Annual Research Symposium' in 2010, marking a milestone in its commitment to promoting a research-oriented academic environment. This symposium provided a dynamic platform for academics and students to present their research findings, forge interdepartmental collaborations, and enhance scholarly communication. It reflected a deliberate institutional effort to embed research into the fabric of academic life at the University of Jaffna.

Building upon this initiative, the Jaffna University International Research Conference (JUICe) was inaugurated in 2012 under the visionary leadership of Professor Vasanthy Arasaratnam, then Vice Chancellor of the university. The inaugural JUICe, held from July 20-21, 2012, carried the timely and impactful theme 'Capacity Development in a Post-war Context'. This conference signified a turning point in the university's engagement with international academia, inviting scholars from various disciplines and countries to share insights and collaborate on knowledge production relevant to post-conflict transformation.

Following the success of the inaugural event, JUICe evolved into a biennial international conference, with each iteration centered on a strategically chosen theme that addressed contemporary regional and global issues. The second JUICe, held from December 18 - 19, 2014, focused on 'Accelerated Regional Development', emphasizing the role of academia in supporting the socio-economic resurgence of the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. The third JUICe, conducted on August 12 - 13, 2016, was themed 'Towards a Greener Future', underlining the university's growing commitment to environmental sustainability and eco-conscious innovation. Continuing this momentum, the fourth JUICe, held on September, 27 - 28, 2018, explored the theme 'Towards a Safer Future', engaging with topics related to public health, disaster resilience, and social security in a rapidly changing world.

In parallel with the biennial JUICe conferences, numerous faculties, departments, centers, and academic units of the university have consistently organized national and international conferences, focused symposia, and thematic colloquia aligned with their respective disciplines. These decentralized scholarly events have played a crucial role in promoting subject-specific research, fostering academic networks, and contributing to the evolution of disciplinary knowledge. Detailed records of these conferences and symposia are documented within the institutional histories of each faculty, department, and academic unit.

A significant transformation occurred in 2022, under the leadership of Professor S. Srisatkunarajah, the current Vice Chancellor of the University of Jaffna. Recognizing the need for strategic coordination and greater institutional visibility, Professor Srisatkunarajah restructured JUICe into a comprehensive umbrella event. This reorganization unified all university-wide research activities, including conferences, symposia, and workshops organized by various faculties, departments,

the library, and centers, within a unified institutional framework. This integration not only streamlined the planning and execution of research events but also elevated the university's academic profile, reinforcing its status as a leading center for scholarly exchange in Sri Lanka.

Through JUICe and its associated scholarly platforms, the University of Jaffna continues to foster a culture of critical inquiry, interdisciplinary dialogue, and global academic engagement. These conferences and symposia serve as intellectual crossroads, where research meets application, and where local realities are examined in light of global perspectives, ensuring that the university remains at the forefront of academic innovation and public relevance.

4. Upholding Integrity: Institutionalizing Research Publication Ethics

In an era marked by the rapid proliferation of scholarly outputs and the increasing importance of research metrics, the University of Jaffna has demonstrated commendable academic foresight in reinforcing ethical standards in research publication. In 2021, under the leadership of Professor S. Srisatkunarahah, the Vice Chancellor, the university embarked on a significant initiative to institutionalize mechanisms for safeguarding the quality, authenticity, and ethical rigor of its research publications.

This proactive endeavor was initiated in response to directives from the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka, which urged all state universities to establish clear frameworks to ensure research integrity and publication credibility. Rising to this national call, the University of Jaffna became a pioneer by formulating and adopting a formal regulatory framework for evaluating and maintaining publication standards. This positioned the university as a pioneering institution in Sri Lanka's higher education landscape, setting a precedent for others to follow.

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Central to this initiative was the collaborative engagement of the University Library, which played an instrumental role in conceptualizing and operationalizing a comprehensive mechanism for the assessment of scholarly journals. This framework emphasized not only adherence to international norms of academic publishing but also context-specific considerations that ensured the relevance and integrity of research emerging from the university.

A major milestone in this institutional reform was the drafting and Senate approval of a Publication Ethics Circular, referenced as S/453/04/ACA/ii. This official document outlined ethical guidelines for authorship, peer review, editorial responsibility, and publication transparency. It also established procedures for identifying predatory journals, discouraging duplicate submissions, and mitigating academic misconduct such as plagiarism and data fabrication.

By embedding ethical standards into its research culture, the University of Jaffna reaffirmed its commitment to academic honesty, intellectual accountability, and global research credibility. This initiative not only fortified the university's internal quality assurance processes but also enhanced its national and international reputation as a center for ethical and responsible research.

Through this institutionalization of publication ethics, the University of Jaffna continues to nurture a scholarly culture rooted in integrity, ensuring that the pursuit of knowledge remains guided by principles that uphold the dignity and trustworthiness of academic inquiry.

5. The University Research Committee

The University Research Committee (URC) of the University of Jaffna stands as an essential governance mechanism in fostering, coordinating, and sustaining a healthy research culture within the institution. Constituted as a Standing Committee of the Senate, the URC is mandated to steer the university's research agenda in alignment with both national priorities and global academic standards. Appointed by the Senate, this committee serves as the central academic body entrusted with developing policies, providing strategic direction, and ensuring the integrity and relevance of research and scholarly activities undertaken by the academic community.

630 The core objective of the URC is to promote and nurture a vibrant research and innovation culture across faculties and disciplines. It is tasked with setting standards of scholarly excellence and developing comprehensive policies and best practices to guide academic inquiry. Among its key responsibilities are the facilitation and oversight of research grants and projects, the implementation and monitoring of the university's strategic research agenda, and the organization of annual research symposia, conferences, seminars, and workshops. In its wider operational framework, the URC supports the submission of patent applications, promotes applied and problem-oriented research, and facilitates commissioned research in collaboration with state and non-state institutions. It also provides guidance to academic staff on proposal writing, research methodologies, statistical analysis, and the dissemination of research findings, often in collaboration with the Staff Development Centre (SDC) and national bodies such as the National Centre for Advanced Studies (NCAS). Furthermore, the committee is instrumental in designing and implementing incentive structures, including appraisal and reward systems, to recognize and celebrate research excellence among faculty.

Complementing the URC at the institutional level, each faculty maintains its own Faculty Research Committee (FRC), thereby decentralizing the promotion and governance of research while maintaining alignment with the broader university research strategy. Together, these committees serve as the nerve centres for academic

inquiry and innovation. They are also responsible for managing the academic allowance allocated by the University Grants Commission to encourage research among permanent academic staff and to support faculty-led symposia, colloquia, and intramural research grant schemes.

In essence, the University Research Committee plays a transformative role in advancing scholarship, supporting capacity building, and positioning the university as a leading center for research and innovation in Northern Sri Lanka and beyond.

6. The Research Repository: Preserving and Disseminating Scholarly Heritage

The Research Repository (RR) of the University of Jaffna, curated and managed by the University Library, serves as a vital instrument for preserving, showcasing, and disseminating the university's scholarly output. Designed as an open-access digital archive, the repository plays an indispensable role in enhancing the global visibility, accessibility, and impact of academic research produced by the university's scholars. It represents a strategic institutional commitment to knowledge dissemination in the digital era and serves as a bridge connecting local research with the international academic community.

In recognition of the fact that traditional print publications often remain underutilized in global academic networks, the University Library undertook a proactive initiative to digitize and archive earlier print-based scholarly materials. This ambitious effort includes retrospective digitization of faculty publications, conference proceedings, and journal articles, thereby preserving the intellectual contributions of past decades and rendering them discoverable on global platforms. The repository also adheres to international metadata standards and open-access protocols, further strengthening its visibility through academic search engines and databases.

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At present, the Research Repository hosts the entire spectrum of the university's institutional scholarly production. This includes all conference proceedings organized by the university and its faculties and departments, academic journals published by various departments, centres, and faculties, as well as research articles, monographs, and working papers authored by the university's academic staff. In addition, the repository selectively includes student research outputs, such as postgraduate theses and dissertations, thereby offering a comprehensive and accessible archive of the university's intellectual contributions.

This digital infrastructure ensures long-term preservation of knowledge while fostering a culture of openness and accountability in scholarly communication. By enhancing citation potential, institutional visibility, and collaborative reach, the repository not only contributes to the university's research profile but also aligns with

global academic trends emphasizing transparency, equity, and inclusivity in knowledge production. A comprehensive account of the functions and significance of the Research Repository is presented in the detailed write-up found in the Library chapter of this volume.

7. Research Publications in Indexed Platforms

The University of Jaffna has steadily established itself as a vibrant hub of scholarly productivity, with its research publications increasingly gaining recognition in internationally indexed platforms. Among these, Scopus stands out as a significant benchmark for measuring academic performance and global visibility. As of August 2025, the University of Jaffna has achieved a notable milestone, with 1,638 research publications indexed in Scopus (Elsevier B.V, 2025). These publications reflect not only the quantity of output but also the quality and influence of research conducted at the university. The Field-Weighted Citation Impact (FWCI) of 1.17 indicates that the university's publications are cited 17% more frequently than the global average for similar research in comparable fields - an indicator of scholarly relevance and impact.

The total number of citations received by these publications has reached 10,787. Such metrics underscore the influence of the university's academic contributions within the global research community. Moreover, 11.3% of these publications fall within the top 10% of most cited scholarly outputs worldwide, reflecting the high impact and international recognition of the university's research. Equally significant is the fact that 47.1% of these publications involve international collaboration, highlighting the university's commitment to cross-border academic partnerships and knowledge exchange. These collaborations enrich the research ecosystem at Jaffna, fostering interdisciplinary innovation and enhancing its global academic footprint (Elsevier B.V., 2025).

To institutionalize and further augment this momentum, the University of Jaffna established a Ranking Enhancement Committee, the first of its kind among Sri Lankan state universities. Chaired by the Vice Chancellor, this strategic body brings together key academic stakeholders, including the Chairperson of the University Research Committee, academic librarians, chief editors of university journals, web administrators, and senior researchers involved in scholarly publishing and university ranking initiatives. This committee plays a central role in formulating strategies to enhance institutional visibility and in positioning the university more effectively within international ranking systems. A formal Terms of Reference has been developed to guide the committee's activities, ensuring systematic coordination and sustained progress.

As a result of these collective efforts, the University of Jaffna has begun to make its mark in prominent global and regional ranking platforms. In the *Quacquarelli*

Symonds Asia Rankings 2025, the university was placed at 462 among the Asian universities (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2025). According to the SCImago Institutions Rankings (March 2025), it achieved a global rank of 3312 and was ranked 3rd overall among Sri Lankan universities. Within the national context, the university ranked 1st in innovation, 7th in research, and 6th in societal impact, highlighting a well-balanced profile of research productivity, knowledge application, and public engagement. These rankings collectively reflect the university's ascending trajectory in terms of academic excellence, innovation, and relevance (SCImago, 2025).

Beyond conventional metrics, the university's growing digital footprint and societal outreach have been further evidenced through data from Altmetric Explorer, a platform that tracks the online attention received by scholarly outputs. As of June 2025, a total of 672 research outputs affiliated with the University of Jaffna were tracked among the whole online publications and among which 431 received 2,512 online mentions. The majority of these mentions - 1,972 - originated from social media platforms such as Twitter (X), with additional attention from news articles and blogs (254 mentions) and, significantly, from policy documents, guidelines, and patents (182 mentions). These figures highlight the wider societal and policy-level influence of the university's research, demonstrating its capacity to inform public discourse, influence policy decisions, and contribute to applied innovation (Altmetric.com, 2025).

Together, these achievements illustrate the deepening commitment to academic excellence, international collaboration, and societal impact of the University of Jaffna. By continuously strengthening its indexed publication portfolio, enhancing research visibility, and aligning with global benchmarks, the university reaffirms its role as a leading institution of higher learning and research in South Asia.

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8. Citations in Policy and Guideline Documents

The research produced at the University of Jaffna has increasingly demonstrated not only academic merit but also tangible relevance to policy formulation and institutional decision-making at both national and international levels. A particularly significant indicator of this influence is the university's growing presence in policy and guideline documents, which attests to the practical application and societal utility of its scholarly output. Such visibility underscores a vital dimension of the university's research mission: to contribute meaningfully to evidence-based policymaking and the advancement of public welfare.

Among international bodies referencing the University of Jaffna's research, the World Health Organization (WHO) stands out prominently. As of 2025, WHO policy documents have cited research affiliated with the university on 75 separate occasions. This consistent recognition by a global health authority affirms the scholarly credibility and real-world applicability of the university's work, particularly in fields related to

public health, epidemiology, community medicine, and sustainable development. These citations reflect a deliberate orientation of academic research towards urgent global priorities such as health equity, communicable disease control, nutrition, and maternal and child health.

In conclusion, the evolution of the research culture at the University of Jaffna reflects a profound commitment to bridging theoretical inquiry with practical application. As evidenced by its sustained efforts across disciplines and its responsiveness to regional and national priorities, the University has cultivated a research environment that not only advances academic knowledge but also contributes meaningfully to policy, development, and social transformation. By aligning scholarly pursuits with pressing challenges in governance, public health, education, and environmental sustainability, the University of Jaffna continues to affirm its role as a dynamic intellectual hub, shaping both local progress and global academic discourse.

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