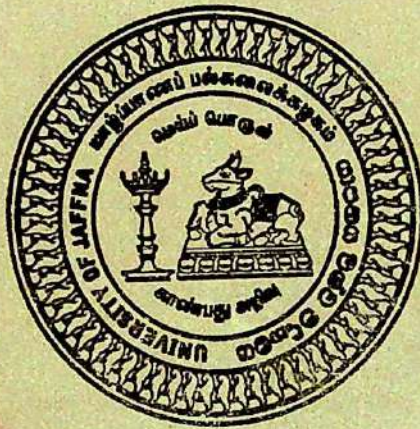


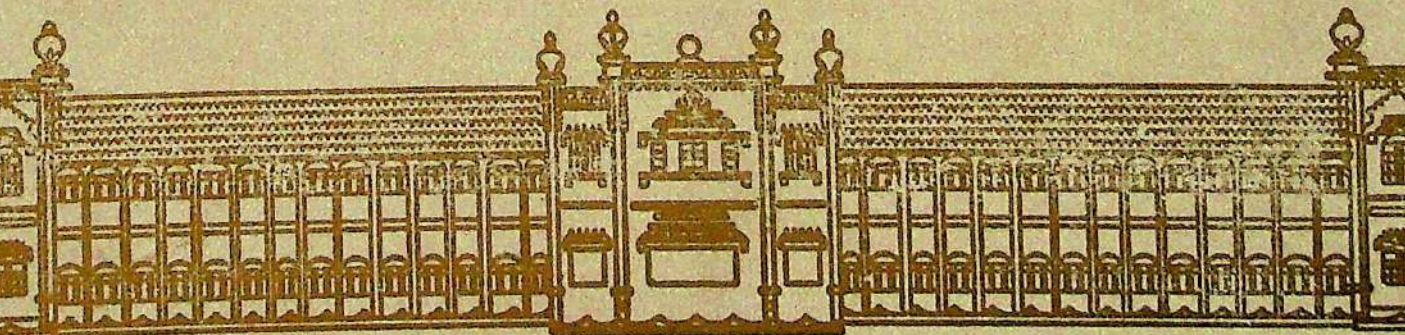
University of Jaffna: The 'Knowledge Shrine'

Fifty Years of Academic Pursuits



Edited by :

Prof. S. Srisatkunarajah
Rev. Prof. J. C. Paul Rohan



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- Fifty Years of Academic Pursuits -*

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Preface

Writing history is never merely an isolated project. Fundamentally, it is an attempt to document events, key figures, spatial and temporal details, and other quantitative facts that define the historical trajectory. While a conventional approach may focus on these aspects, such a perspective remains partial and fragmented. History, indeed, is far more than a mere collection of facts. It unfolds as a broader, multidimensional narrative, intricately connected to material, spiritual, and transcendental dimensions. In its wider perspective, history offers a deeper insight into the forces that shape existence and evolution, revealing the underlying currents that continuously impel change over time.

In this respect, writing the history of the University of Jaffna is an effort to document events, key figures, spatiotemporal details, and other quantitative facts that have shaped the historical trajectory of the University of Jaffna. While a conventional approach to history may emphasize these elements, such a perspective remains inequitable and incomplete.

Thus, in a broader perspective, the history of the University of Jaffna is closely connected to the material, spiritual, and transcendental dimensions, offering a deeper understanding of the forces that have influenced its existence and evolution.

Reflecting on the history of the University of Jaffna is, in essence, a retreat into the past, a journey backward, withdrawing from the present to its very genesis. It is an introspective examination, assessing whether the current path aligns with the vision and values that were once upheld as guiding principles in its earliest stages. It is a way of reconnecting with the ultimate goals that have shaped and defined the course of its journey.

The Golden Jubilee celebrations of the University of Jaffna have provided an opportunity to document the spatial and temporal dimensions of its existence, while reviving the collective memory of the current generation and aligning it with the dreams

and aspirations of the pioneers who tirelessly laboured and fervently advocated for a Tamil university for the Tamil-speaking people of the country.

In this context, an effort to document the history of the University of Jaffna is made with the purview of refreshing the memories, vis-à-vis the dreams and aspirations of those pioneers who had the vision for this institution and the effects they fondly looked forward to when they toiled hard to found this academia in Jaffna.

The primary objective of the commemoration of the Golden Jubilee is to revisit and document the history of the University of Jaffna, critically appraise its journey, and acknowledge its achievements, challenges, and contributions to society. As David Lowenthal emphasizes in his book, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), history's openness renders it a powerful tool for understanding societal evolution. In this context, the chronicle of the University of Jaffna offers profound insights into the interplay between education and societal progress. The institution has served as both a centre for knowledge dissemination and a crucible for cultural preservation and innovation, reflecting the rich heritage of the Northern Province.

As the 'Knowledge Shrine' of the Northern region, the University of Jaffna, stands as a testament to its vibrancy, prestige, and pursuits of academic excellence over the past five decades. The Golden Jubilee presents a fitting moment to retrace its journey, honour the pioneers and veterans, acknowledge the achievements, revisit the shortcomings, and reflect on missed opportunities. This momentous occasion is to draw strength from its founding ideals and ethos, reaffirm the noble goals and values, and move forward collectively as a family with renewed purpose and confidence.

Chief Editor's Note

As the University of Jaffna commemorates its Golden Jubilee, it is both an honour and a privilege to reflect upon its remarkable journey over the past fifty years. Established on October 6, 1974, as the sixth campus of the University of Sri Lanka, it has evolved as a 'shrine of knowledge', perseverance, and academic excellence in the country. To mark this historic milestone, we proudly present *University of Jaffna - The 'Knowledge Shrine': Fifty Years of Academic Pursuits*, a volume that revisits its half-century academic journey. Beyond merely chronicling events, this work critically examines the university's evolution, its perseverance amidst adversity, and its unwavering commitment to academic excellence.

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The inception and growth of the University of Jaffna are emblematic of the broader trajectory of higher education in Sri Lanka. The Western educational paradigms prevalent during the colonial era (1505 - 1948) culminated in the establishment of Ceylon University College in 1921. This institution, which prepared students for external University of London examinations, later became the University of Ceylon in 1942, marking a crucial moment in Sri Lanka's academic history. The historical journey of the University of Jaffna is integral to this national narrative, embodying a synthesis of historical legacy and contemporary aspirations.

The *de facto* establishment of the University of Jaffna can be traced to the visionary pioneers who recognized the pressing need for higher education in the region. Its establishment in 1974 was a testament to the drive to decentralize higher education and address the unique needs of the Northern Province. The inaugural Faculties of Science and Humanities laid the foundation, fostering intellectual growth and cultural preservation. Over the decades, this commitment has led to significant expansion, transforming the institution into a comprehensive university with twelve faculties, seventy-one academic departments, and multiple academic, service, and support centres and units. These entities have played a crucial role in adapting to the evolving educational landscape, meeting the diverse needs of students and the wider community.

From its origin, the University of Jaffna has championed knowledge, critical thinking, research, and community engagement. However, its journey has been closely tied to Sri Lanka's socio-political landscape. The nation endured four decades of prolonged civil conflict which posed unprecedented challenges to the University of Jaffna. Situated in the heart of the conflict zone, the university faced severe disruptions to its academic activities, extensive infrastructural damage, and the displacement of both students and staff. Such devastating episodes of civil unrest resulted in significant destruction and the heartbreaking loss of members of the academic community, marking one of the gravest chapters in the university's history. Despite these adversities, the university remained steadfast, demonstrating remarkable resilience and adaptability.

In the aftermath of the conflict, the University of Jaffna emerged not only as a centre for education but also as a symbol of healing and rebuilding. The establishment of the *Social Reconciliation Centre* is one among many efforts that reflect its dedication to national unity, coexistence, and peace-building.

Historiography, as posited by scholars like Arthur Marwick in *The Nature of History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), involves not only recording events but also interpreting past knowledge. The history of the University of Jaffna exemplifies this notion, encapsulating experiences that have shaped its identity. Its fifty-year journey offers profound insights into the resilience and determination of its academic community amidst numerous challenges.

In this spirit, the University of Jaffna stands as a microcosm of Sri Lanka's broader struggles and aspirations. Its perseverance in the face of adversity, commitment to academic freedom, and dedication to community engagement exemplify the transformative power of education. As we celebrate this Golden Jubilee, we honour not only its past but also its enduring promise to future generations.

It is imperative to acknowledge the unwavering dedication of the university community - past and present. Their collective efforts have been the cornerstone of the institution's achievements and esteemed reputation. Looking ahead, the University of Jaffna remains committed to its mission as a 'Knowledge Shrine', fostering an environment where academic inquiry thrives, cultural heritage is preserved, and societal progress is championed.

As the University of Jaffna celebrates its Golden Jubilee and advances confidently into the future, it records with deep appreciation the unwavering support of the University Grants Commission in responding to the requests of its Council. The University has diligently endeavoured to implement the proposals outlined in the UGC's Corporate Plan, aligning its growth with national higher education objectives. Profound gratitude is also extended to the Council members, successive Chancellors and Vice Chancellors, administrators, academics, non-academic staff, alumni, well-wishers, and the wider community of beneficiaries. Their collective dedication, commitment, and goodwill have been instrumental in nurturing, developing, and sustaining the University

over the past fifty years, enabling it to stand today as a vibrant 'Shrine of Knowledge' and a symbol of resilience, service, and academic excellence.

Looking ahead, the University remains steadfast in its mission to expand the frontiers of knowledge, foster unity in diversity, and serve as a transformative force in society - continuing its journey as a centre of learning that enlightens minds, shapes character, and inspires generations to come.

To conclude, this volume *University of Jaffna - The 'Knowledge Shrine': Fifty Years of Academic Pursuits* is not just a commemoration; it is a living testament to the spirit of an institution that has weathered storms and emerged stronger. This volume, which revisits the fifty-year journey of the University of Jaffna, stands not only as a tribute to its rich past but also as a beacon guiding its future endeavours. May the University of Jaffna continue to illuminate the path of knowledge and contribute to national and global progress for years to come.

All Glories to the Almighty!

Prof. S. Srisatkunarajah

Editor-in-Chief

University of Jaffna - The 'Knowledge Shrine': Fifty Years of Academic Pursuits

Associate Editor's Note

It is with deep reverence for the 'Knowledge Shrine' - the University of Jaffna - and a profound sense of purpose that I present this historical volume, *University of Jaffna - The 'Knowledge Shrine': Fifty Years of Academic Pursuits*, in honour of its Golden Jubilee. More than a record of institutional milestones, this work is a revisiting of the University's history for eternal memory - a tribute to the people, ideas, and events that have shaped its remarkable fifty-year journey.

This volume unfolds through carefully curated thematic and chronological sections, beginning with the global evolution of the university as an idea, and tracing the development of higher education in Sri Lanka. It captures the impassioned call for a Tamil university in the Northern Province, the founding of the Jaffna Campus, and its transformation into a dynamic, multifaceted university. The volume further explores the rich history of its faculties, centres, and units, as well as the spiritual, cultural, and administrative dimensions that contribute to the University's distinctive character.

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This undertaking is not merely academic; it is also commemorative. It stands as a repository of memory and meaning, bearing witness to the resilience of an institution that endured four decades of civil conflict and its disastrous effects like displacements, loss of property, brain drain, etc., yet emerged transformed and continues to shine as both a shrine of knowledge and a symbol of cultural identity. The testimonies captured in these pages - of scholars, administrators, and community leaders - testify to the collective spirit that has sustained and strengthened the University of Jaffna through the decades.

History is a rich and multidimensional narrative that reveals the material, spiritual, and deeper forces shaping human existence and change over time. It exposes who we are and why we are the way we are (McCullough, D. (2005). Knowing history and knowing who we are. Address presented at the Hillsdale College National Leadership Seminar, Winston-Salem, NC). As the University of Jaffna steps beyond its Golden Jubilee into the next chapter of its journey, may this volume remain a lasting chronicle, anchoring us in our past, enriching our present, and illuminating the path forward.

Rev. Prof. J.C. Paul Rohan

Associate Editor

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