

CALL FOR PAPERS:

Environment And Society In Sri Lanka

The Social Scientists' Association invites submissions of between 2,000 and 5,000 words on the general theme of 'Environment and Society in Sri Lanka' for the forthcoming issue of its biannual English-language online and print journal, *Polity*.

As of mid-2017, some 1.2 million people are affected by many months of drought conditions particularly in the North-Central, Northern, and Eastern provinces but extending to 19 districts in all. In addition to the lack of drinking water, agriculture – and therefore incomes and livelihoods – is severely affected. The collapse in cultivation has increased imports of rice and therefore food prices with woeful consequences for producers, consumers, and public finances. In the throes of this calamity, politicians, policymakers, and urban classes appear resigned to the moods of the weather gods or even apathetic to the distress of faceless people in faraway places.

This latest disaster is only the current phase of a now regular and uninterrupted cycle of floods followed by droughts, which overlap at times. In May and June, floods and landslides affected districts in the Western, South-Western, and Southern provinces, claiming almost a hundred lives, displacing hundreds of thousands, and causing damage to property estimated at close to USD2 billion. In this instance, with the self-publicity of private television stations, there was an outpouring of public sympathy within affected districts and beyond. In the public sphere, there was some questioning on the anthropogenic antecedents of the devastation – the acts and omissions of state agencies, corporations, and private individuals in land use and flood water management – but it has spluttered out, at least until the next time the hills slip and rivers rise.

The spread of chronic kidney disease of unknown origin (CKDu), primarily in agricultural communities in the North-Central Province and beyond that are dependent on groundwater, was recognized by the

incumbent president in his election campaign and manifesto. With no known cure, and management beginning usually when the patient is in the terminal stage of loss of kidney function, the toll in deaths of male farmers, transport and medical bills, and cost of dialysis to the national health service (where available to the ill) is unbearable and mounting. There is some consensus within the scientific, environmental, and farmer communities of causal links between chemical fertilizers and the emergence of this new epidemic and the need to substitute clean water for drinking purposes. The ban on glyphosate-based chemicals is being resisted by the businesses that profit from its sale; and the tea industry that is hooked on its cost-effectiveness and ease of application as weedicide and insecticide. Meanwhile, rural households in the affected areas are trapped in sickness, poverty, debt, and drinking water shortages, with no exit from this 21st century plague in sight.

When the Meethotamulla garbage mountain collapsed around the traditional New Year celebrations, killing 32 people who along with thousands of others had nowhere else to live but in its shadow and the stench and pollution of its environs, there was an awakening of middle-class consciousness on the relevance of reducing, reusing, and recycling solid waste. Much angst was expressed on social media on consumer behaviour and the uncontrolled use of non-biodegradable packing products. Yet, the only official response appears to be to find new and more distant places to dump our refuse, and notice of a total ban on polythene and plastic from September onwards. There is no strategy of reforming lifestyle patterns that are celebrated as markers of capitalist modernity. A substantive response would mean confronting modes of production and consumption embedded in the dynamics of our current economic model; and that is simply not permissible.

Invocations of the 'environment' also figure in contestations over resources and demography among

other material interests. In the conflict in the waters around the Northern and Eastern coast of Sri Lanka between co-ethnics from Tamil Nadu and small-scale fishers on the other side of the Palk Straits, with its myriad dimensions, there are attempts to reframe the stakes as one of long-term or irreversible environmental harm through damage to the seabed and loss of breeding grounds for marine life. Meanwhile, the resettlement of displaced Northern Muslims in the Northern Province has provoked anxieties among Sinhala and Tamil groups who claim their concerns are not communal but altruistic ones to protect the Wilpattu National Park and forest reserves in Mullaithivu respectively from deforestation.

The Social Scientists' Association envisages to stimulate through the next issue of *Polity*, critical investigation and analysis of the relationship between society and environment in Sri Lanka. Contributions drawing on the discipline of political ecology are invited that illuminate the means by which control over resources and property rights "are defined, negotiated and contested within the political arenas of the household, the workplace and the state" (Peet and Watts 1993); and on the necessary labour and anticipated harvest of the assimilation of ecology into the method and practice of political economy.

Suggested sub-themes include, but are not restricted to' the following:

- Discourses of the environment and their deployment, including the uses and abuses of 'local knowledge' and their location and dislocation from socio-economic practices and institutions;
- Explorations of the tensions between global discourses on environmental sustainability and local practices and perceptions of conservation and climate adaptation;
- Examinations of the gendered, class, caste, and ethnic dimensions of struggles in the household, community, sites of production, and the state over access to and control over land, water, forest resources;
- Ecological populisms (urban and rural) that romanticize pre-colonial/ pre-capitalist/ non-western social relations, including their relationship to state-building and nationalisms;
- Eco-governmentality: The practices and technologies of regulatory agencies such as the Urban Development Authority, Central Environmental Agency, Wildlife and Forestry departments including through the planning process, laws and regulations, environmental impact assessments, etc.;
- The reception and deployment of the 'environment' in the ideology and praxis of groups, parties, and movements (for e.g. Janatha Mithuro, the Organisation to Safeguard Life and the Environment, and the Green Party in the late 1980s/early to mid-1990s) through to its reworking in the political itineraries of Champika Ranawaka, Athuraliya Rathana Thera, and others; as well as in the contemporary environmental movement;
- The non-reception of an ecological critique of productivism in the Old and New Left, as well as its absence in social movements of women and minority nationalities, etc., and its consequences;
- The political, economic, and social implications of the framing of the environment as a political and economic rationale for 'promoting' and/ or 'developing' sectors such as tourism, tea, fisheries, etc.;
- Alternative conceptions of development within and beyond the now mainstream discourse of 'sustainable development', particularly in the course of contradictions, conflicts, and struggles over 'development', and the prospects for its liberation from capture and subordination by neoliberalism.

The editors are particularly interested in encouraging papers that highlight perspectives from various regions within Sri Lanka to achieve a spatial spread and diversity of discussion. Expressions of interest of no more than 500 words on submissions on 'Environment and Society in Sri Lanka' – as well as on unrelated topical issues of state and society – are requested before 15 September 2017. First drafts of commissioned essays, commentaries, works-in-progress, field notes, and reviews of arts and culture are anticipated by 30 October 2017. For further information please contact the Editors at polity@ssalanka.org.

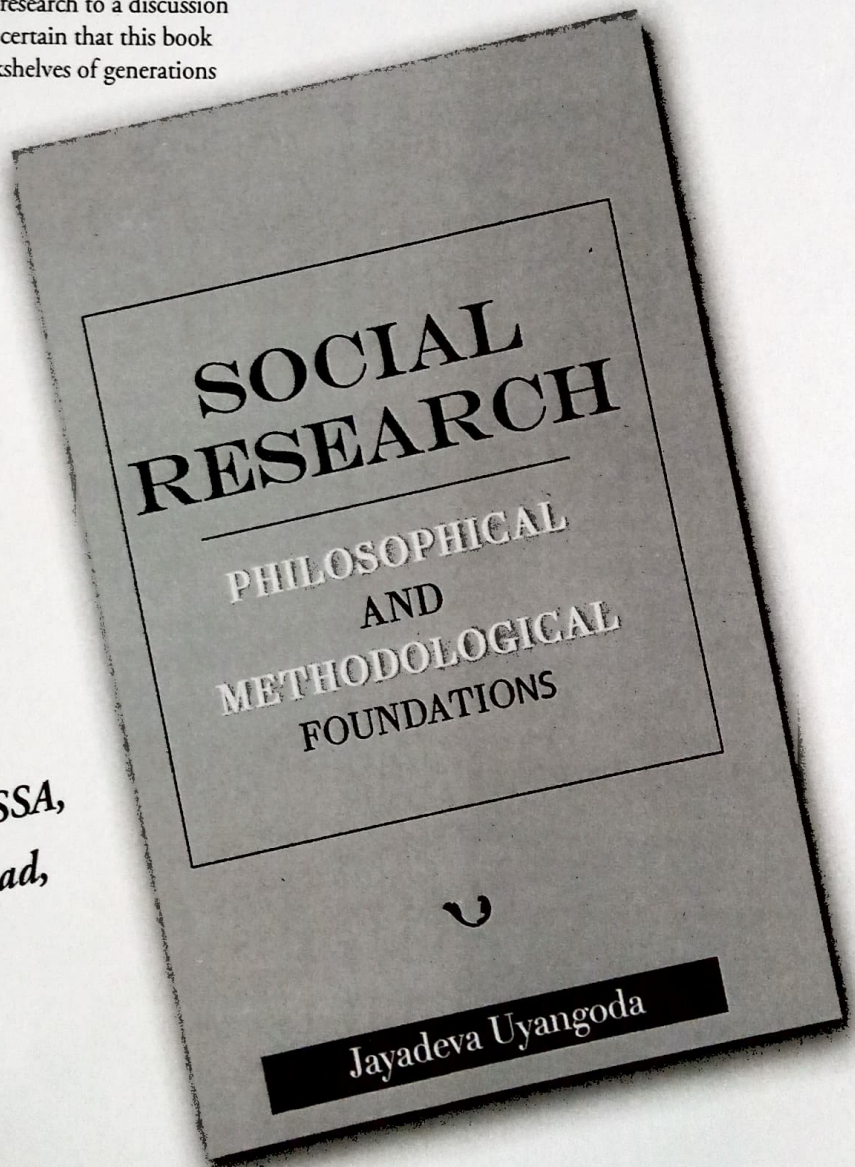
Praise for Jayadeva Uyangoda's latest publication: *Social Research: Philosophical and Methodological Foundations*

This is an immensely important and useful contribution to teaching and learning about Social Science research. The timing of this could not be better. Social Science education and research in Sri Lanka (and, indeed, globally) is under assault, and is generally perceived to be of low quality and relevance. This book will be extremely beneficial for challenging some of those perceptions. More importantly, it challenges the Social Science research culture, especially in Sri Lanka; it shows the diverse theoretical and philosophical foundations of Social Science research and forces us to look beyond the positivist tradition of research that has been dominant for far too long. It is readable and accessible to all interested in research, and takes the reader from the theoretical and philosophical debates that informed Social Science research to a discussion on methodologies and methods. It is certain that this book will earn a valuable place on the bookshelves of generations of Social Science researchers.

*Harini Amarasuriya,
Senior Lecturer in Anthropology,
Dept. of Social Studies,
Open University of Sri Lanka*

This book is not a mere guide for those engaged in research in the social sciences. It is a philosophical analysis of the practices of research and also a critical introduction to the philosophies and methodologies of Social Science. It comes from a veteran practitioner of the discipline who has several decades of experience in teaching and research at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This book also challenges Social Science researchers to be aware of the philosophical and methodological dimensions of their work.

*Asanga Tilakaratne,
Professor of Pali and Buddhist Studies,
University of Colombo*



**Now available at the SSA,
58, Dharmarama Road,
Colombo 06.**

CALL FOR PAPERS: Environment And Society In Sri Lanka

Polity, the online and print magazine of the Social Scientists' Association, invites submissions exploring the relationship between society and environment in Sri Lanka.

The editors solicit expressions of interest for articles, notes, reflections, work-in-progress of between 2000-5000 words which draw on the discipline of political ecology to illuminate the means by which control over resources and property rights "are defined, negotiated and contested within the political arenas of the household, the workplace and the state" (Peet and Watts 1993); and on the necessary labour and potential harvest of the assimilation of ecology into the method and practice of political economy. Expressions of Interest should be emailed to polity@ssalanka.org no later than the 15th of September, 2017. Final drafts are anticipated by the 30th of October, 2017 with a view to publication in the March 2018 issue of *Polity*.

To read the full Call for Papers for Volume 8 Issue 1 of *Polity*, please refer page 81-82 of this issue, email: polity@ssalanka.org, or visit www.ssalanka.org.

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