

Identity, Political Perspectives and Communal Relations of Muslim Minority of Sri Lanka: An Analytical Survey on Contemporary Discourse

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Abstract

This paper reviews key findings of existing scholarship about the question of identity, political thinking, and inter-community relationships of the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka. *By doing so, this review aims to explore* the broader dynamics of the socio-political and religious life of the community. As such, the findings show that the increasing religious consciousness and puritanism of contemporary Muslim societies emerged as a response to the general concern of preserving identity that existed among all communities in the colonial and post-colonial political contexts. Furthermore, those identity concerns had shaped the Muslim community's political strategy and demand to a greater extent. The irony is that their identity concerns helped to fracture the community from within more than to confront other communities in the long run. In addition to that, the findings of contemporary works further highlight that the increasing religious visibility of the Muslim community has helped to trigger anti-Muslim sentiments in the country. Yet, the exclusive ethnic-nationalisms and global Islamophobic tendencies have also played a vital role in making the phenomenon. Finally, this survey finds that current scholarship on the Sri Lankan Muslims minority still did not make any notable scholarly intervention in understanding civil society activism of Sri Lankan Muslims. Moreover, it finds a lack of available comparative studies between Muslims and other communities in terms of identity-making, political strategy, and inter-community relationships.

Keywords: Coexistence, Ethnic Nationalism, Muslim Minority, Political Strategy.

01. Introduction

Researching on the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka has been an attractive academic area of interest to local and international academics. One of the notable reasons behind this scholastic enthusiasm is that the historical, cultural, and political orientations of Sri Lankan Muslims are drastically different from their peers in the island. Therefore, researchers are showing curiosity in finding out answers to the question of how the Muslim community, as a second order minority, struggles to frame itself in relation to the other dominant ethnic groups such as Buddhists and Hindus whom claim deep historical footings on Sri Lankan soil in general. As a result, Muslim minority of Sri Lanka has captured tremendous intellectual scrutiny for last half a century at least. In particular, the post-war phenomenon of ethnic tensions between Buddhists and Muslims have pushed this enthusiasm even further. As a result, contemporary works have produced numerous data, arguments, and valuable findings regarding the internal dynamics of Sri Lankan Muslims. Yet, unfortunately, there has not been written any notable survey article analyzing existing narratives of the published works as far as this author is informed about. In this background, this paper attempts to focus

on some major works and their central arguments regarding identity, political perspectives, and communal relationship of the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka. By doing so, this paper seeks to achieve three key objectives. Firstly, this paper attempt to fix major arguments regarding dynamics of the Muslim community into a broader a frame. As such, it might help new researches in terms of getting an overall initial picture on the general arguments and the contested areas of debate about the subject. Secondly, it would guide contemporary researchers to find major research gaps for the future research projects. Thirdly and finally, these sorts of survey might help a general reader to put stereotypical views about the community aside and to expose himself more into well-researched scholarly perspectives about the dynamics that have been playing out within the community. Furthermore, this paper is divided in to six major sections. Along with this introduction, the section two discusses the data collection methods and materials. The section three is allocated to discuss about the debates on identity making and culture while the section four and five give a holistic picture about the political thinking and inter-communal relations of Muslim minority in Sri Lanka. The section six gives overall critical remarks on the existing arguments. Final section of the paper attempts to identify some lacuna in the existing body of knowledge regarding the subject.

02. Methods and Martials

Three major strategies are applied to pick appropriate materials for this review. Firstly, the review process included the most celebrated works of widely accepted prominent experts on Muslim minority in Sri Lanka, such as MAM Shukri, Vasundara Mohan, MAM Numan, Ameer Ali and Lona Dewarajah. Secondly, few important papers that were published in the reputed journals are selected. Thirdly, some book chapters and papers of reputed researchers on the subject were selected. Some of these materials are collected from online sources such as the research gate and academia websites. Moreover, this review follows the thematic content analysis method in analyzing data. It is because that thematic approach best fits with the intention of the paper. That is to produce a cohesive and holistic picture out of scattered narratives around three selected themes such as *identity making and culture, political thinking, and communal relations* of Muslim Minority in Sri Lanka. That said, key arguments of papers are fixed into a broader category of above themes this paper explores. In that sense, sometime an author’s same work might be cited many times if he deals with all three themes reviewed in this paper. Finally, this review included papers that were written in English language only.

Table 01: The list of reviewed publications.

Author	Topic of the Papers/ Publications reviewed	Year of Publication
A.R.M. Imtiyaz, S. Ratnajeevan H. Hoole, Amjad Mohamed-Saleem V. Ameerdeen.	“Muslims in Post-War Sri Lanka: An Opportunity Lost for Conflict Transformation	2015
Ahmed Zarin	The Contours of Muslim Nationalism in Sri Lanka	2012
Ameer Ali	“Four Waves of Muslim-Phobia in Sri Lanka: c.1880–2009	2015
Ameer Ali.	“Political Survival: Past Strategies and Present Predicament of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka	1986
ARM Imthiyas	Identity, Choices and Crisis: A Study on Muslim Political Leadership in Sri Lanka	2012
Athambawa Sarjoon and Yousuf Mohamed	“Analyzing the Contributions of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and Its Founder–Leader to Muslim Politics and Community in Sri Lanka	2017

Dennis B McGilvray	Rethinking Muslim Identity in Sri Lanka	2016
Kumari Jayawardena	“Economic and Political Factors in the 1915 Riots	1970
Lorna Dewaraja,	The Muslims of Sri Lanka: One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony 900-1915	1994
MAM Nuhman	Understanding Sri Lankan Muslim Identity	2004
MAM Shukri	Sri Lankan Muslims: A Cultural Perspective	1986
Minna Thaheer,	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress: Politics of a Minority Ethnic Party	2018
MM Fazil	“Fragmentation of Muslim Politics in Sri Lanka: A Critical Analysis of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC)	2009
Mohamed Faslan and Nadine Vanniasinkam.	“Fracturing Community: Intra-group Relations among the Muslims of Sri Lanka’	2015
Shari Kneorzer	“Transformation of Muslim Political Identity’	1998
Vasundara Mohan	Identity Crisis of Sri Lankan Muslims	1987
Vijaya Samaraweera	Aspects of the Muslims Revivalist Movement in late nineteenth century Sri Lanka	1986

03. Muslims of Sri Lanka: Identity Making and Culture

What is the identity of Sri Lankan Muslim community? Is it based on language or ethnicity or historical origin or religion? How do they define their culture? what were the external and internal factors that played a significant role in shaping the identity and culture? These are some of the questions that this section seeks to answer by using the arguments of existing literatures in brief.

It is an accepted truth that history plays a vital role in tracing the elements of identity and cultural life of a community. One could even argue that it is the center of gravity in searching the roots of identity of a community. In this background, Shukri produced some important observations on the early roots of the cultural tenets of Sri Lankan Muslims. He argues that the Sri Lankan Muslims and their cultural life are made up of historical elements that came from Yemen, Iraq and India respectively. Here, Shukri challenges the commonly held narrative which aims to portray Muslims of Sri Lanka as ethnic Indian Tamils and their identity being based on the Tamil language. Instead, Shukri asserts that Sri Lankan Muslims are fundamentally Arabs in origin and brings some valid evidences to support his claim such as fluency and command in the Arabic language and popularity of Arabic literature within South Indian Muslims, including Sri Lanka, even in the 9th and 10th centuries (Shukri, 1986). Therefore, Islam as religion and Arabic as language had played a vital role in developing the culture and identity of early Muslims. It was only around the 14th and 15th centuries that South Indian influence steadily increased in the island. In explaining the background of emergence of South Indian influence among Sri Lankan Muslims, Shukri argues that the changing geo-political situation of the mainland of the Muslim world contributed for this new shift. Because Sri Lankan Muslims entered the Muslims world through Bagdad and aftermath of its fall, they were largely left alone without any strong backing from the Muslim world. Here, they saw that strengthening the relationship with the Indian counterpart as a credible protection shield and a safe-way-out from the internal isolation of the community. Consequently, this connection had left an impact on the Sri Lankan Muslims in terms of identity and culture. In that sense ‘one of the Main cultural consequences of this relationship that existed between the Muslims of Sri Lanka and the Muslims of Malabar was the emergence of Arabic Tamil as common language form among them’ says Shukri (Shukri, 1986). In the same period, Yemeni business communities used to come to the coastal area of Southern India for trading purposes and they remained and inter-married with the locals. This new phenomenon had an immediate effect on Southern India and then Sri Lankan Muslims as well. Yet, this time the effect was in terms of their religious outlook

of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. Especially, the Yemeni relationship brought the Shafiee school of thought and Tassawuf to the Island, which shaped the religious thinking of Sri Lankan Muslims for centuries to come, Shukry argues (Shukri, 1986).

Based on his analysis, it is possible to conclude that Sri Lankan Muslim's identity and culture evolved along the history by incorporating three key components. Those are Islam as religion, Arab as an ethnic origin and, Arabic-Tamil as a distinct language and Sufism as a religious world view. All of those elements played equally critical role in shaping cultural life of Sri Lankan Muslims.

Having said that, the most contested question in the question of identity of Sri Lankan Muslims is how to understand the shifting loyalties of the community to different ethnic markers in the late 19th and 20th centuries. It is striking and interesting that Numan, Mcglivray and Mohan, the authors of all three major works that deal with Sri Lankan Muslim identity, critically differ among themselves on how to interpret the periodical shift in emphasizing different ethnic markers on the part of Sri Lankan Muslims over the period of last two hundred years. In this respect, Numan says it is a 'reactionary and exclusive process' while Dennis argues that it is a 'pragmatism of a minority'. Yet, Mohan identifies it as a 'crisis within the community'. This is a remarkable clash of perceptions from the three leading researchers on the issue. According to Numan, the struggle for separate identity of Sri Lankan Muslims in last century, by nature, can be characterized as an 'exclusive and reactionary' process that evolved in response to Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms. It means that they were forced to act pragmatically and to press on different ethnic markers in order to survive in the emerging post-colonial state setting. Initially, Ethnic Tamils tried to build an argument that Sri Lankan Muslims are linguistic minority based on Tamil language even though they are followers of Islam in terms of faith. Consequently, constitutional arrangements for Ethnic Tamils automatically include Muslims as well, Tamils argued. They pushed this narrative to downsize significance of separate Muslims political aspirations in the eyes of colonial governments. Muslims reacted to this emerging dominance of ethnic Tamils in political sphere by emphasizing their 'Arab origin' in 1930s. While emphasizing that they are a distinct ethnic group, they requested colonial government that they should be treated separately in the discourses of political rights of the new nation-state. In the post-independent era, the majoritarian state used all the means provided to oppress the ethnic Tamils rights and to ensure the majority Sinhalese community dominates the resources. As a result of this new phenomenon, nationalist parties' unleashed wave of anti-Tamil language campaign at a large-scale targeting Tamil speaking minorities. Responding to this new context, Muslims strived to develop a discourse that even though they share the Tamil language with the ethnic Tamils, it is not the ethnic marker of them. Rather, they are Muslims and fellow Islam irrespective of language they speak and cultural origin they adhere to. After the civil war started in 1980s between Tamil separatists and the state behind the nationalistic claims, Sri Lankan Muslims pursued a different sort of identity based on Muslim nationalism, which should be considered as a third shift of the community within a century, says Numan (Numan, 2007). This same historical observation is shared by other scholars such as Mohan and Dennis B Mcglivray although they differ with Numan in the interpreting each shift as noted above. At this juncture, Mcglivray advises the Sri Lankan Muslims that they should rethink their ethnic marker again in facing recent attacks on them on part of the Buddhist extremists. He (2016) says that 'in the current xenophobic situation, the priority would presumably be to assert a more distinctively Sri Lankan cultural identity with deeper ancestral roots in the island and in the South Asian region rather than emphasizing itinerant Arab seafarers or a connection with global Islam' (p.76).

Similarly, the idea of Islamic revivalism, which started in the mid-19th century, was a global phenomenon and its impact reached all over the world. How to respond to colonialism and externally imposed

westernization were the key questions that triggered the revivalist spirit within the Muslim community across the globe irrespective of majority and minority differences. This revivalist trend made its footprint on the way of conduct and thinking among Sri Lankan Muslims as well. It shaped their role and global relations at a large scale. In this regard, anti-colonial struggle of Sri Lankan Muslims against British was motivated by pan-Islamist ideologies of Jamal Deen Afgahani and Mohammed Abdhu (Numan 2007). Islamic revivalism increased the global solidarity feelings of Muslims minority in Sri Lanka and this was clearly demonstrated by their efforts to collect money for Ottoman Khalif's constrictions projects, their intense concern for Khalif's affairs and adoption of Turkish traditions (Zarin, 2012).

Against these developments, there were strong efforts to sideline the traditional and mainstream Sufi establishments in order to pave the way for pan-Islamic ideological foundations such as Islamization and the call for Islamic modernization (Samaraweera, 1986). From that fact, post-independent Sri Lankan Muslim community witnessed the emergence of socio-religious movements like Jamath E Islami, Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi Organizations which further shaped the identity of Sri Lankan Muslims towards more global communal discourses and Puritanism (Numan, 2007). Anyhow, both of those developments have created an atmosphere where fructuous competition emerged among religious-social movements of Muslim minority in Sri Lanka over the question of what the ideal version of Islam (Faslan and Vanniasinkam, 2015). Eventually, even-though pan-Islamist ideological movements have helped Muslim community to modernize itself along the line of Islamic perspectives, still it has its own share of effects in triggering anti-Muslim sentiments on the one hand and inter-community religious conflicts on the other (McGilvray, 2016).

04. Political Strategy of Sri Lankan Muslims

The political strategy of Sri Lankan Muslims is generally characterized as "Politics of Survival" (Ameer Ali, 1986). Furthermore, some others explain it as "opportunistic politics", and "accommodative politics" or "instrumentalist politics" (Knoerzer, 1998). Why Sri Lankan Muslim minority did switch to such survivalist politics, rather than resorting to the general atmosphere of right based ethnic politics soon after independence, had been seen as a puzzling question for many years. However, few scholars have tried to shed light on this issue in a descriptive manner. For them, the first ethnic riot against Muslim community in 1915, marked an eternal shock and imparted an understanding on the psyche of Muslim community that they can live peacefully in this country only if they co-exist with majority Buddhists. That is to seek a political path that does not challenge political ambitions and interests of the majority or else the Muslims should pick and choose their interest in line with interests of the majority (Ameer Ali, 1986). Furthermore, the accommodative political strategy was even facilitated by Southern Muslim businessmen and elitist political leadership's instant strategic calculations as well. Regarding that, Imthiyas (2012) says that they had close links 'with the Sinhalese in trade and business, and the Muslim strategy to win political and social benefits by cooperating with the Sinhalese, as well as the Muslims' fear of the Tamils sidelining them, prompted the Muslim elite to lean towards Sinhalese political establishments. This trend continued since independence in 1948' (p.55). Their priority was to protect their commercial lifelines at the expense of right based politics. Contrarily, the Eastern part of Sri Lanka consisted poor farmers, peasants, and masons. Elitist leaders of the west kept them out of the box of the political equation of the Sri Lankan Muslims by their monetary and lobbying power.

This trend changed since the civil war started between Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam and the state in the North-East part of Sri Lanka. North-East part of the island is the home to one third of Muslim population. Trapped in the intensifying civil war, politically marginalized Eastern Muslims were determined to unlock

their shackles and to play an assertive role in Muslim politics of Sri Lanka. Hence, Sri Lanka Muslim congress (SLMC) emerged as not only a dominant but also a unifying political force representing Eastern Muslims to seek their place both in the political imagination of Muslim minority and political landscape of Sri Lanka. Since the emergence of SLMC, Eastern Muslims and their politicians had become the center of gravity of the Muslim politics. They, suddenly, came under the spotlight of the international community as the only voice of Muslims of Sri Lanka (Knoerzer, 1998). In a way, it is argued that the civil war situation and SLMC as a unifying political force gave a monumental opportunity for Eastern Muslims to liberate themselves from decades of marginalization by the elite South Muslim leaders and their patronage politics. There are some works that focus on the overall impact of emergence of the assertive role of Eastern Muslims under the leadership of SLMC, as the right based political party, on the general political culture of Muslim minority of Sri Lanka, the new phenomenon totally altered the political thinking and slogans that had been pursued by Sri Lankan Muslim politics since independence. Hence, it opted to resort to divisive ethnic and religious discourses for political mobilization. Since then, the political strategy of Sri Lankan Muslims shifted from just begging majority parties for material benefits by showing loyalty to their political aspirations, towards rights based demanding Minority politics (Sarjoon, 2017). At least we can say that the new strategy pushed back the older reconciliatory approach. In a broader sense, it is possible to argue that ethnic conflict and growing insecurity of Eastern Muslims shifted the political leadership of Sri Lankan Muslims from West to East as the SLMC had become the voice of Sri Lankan Muslims in national and international forums (Thaheer, 2018). Moreover, from 1980 onwards, Sri Lankan Muslim minority started to emphasize that they too have distinct political identity. This development happened within growing complex and broader ethicized political climate of Sri Lanka (Thaheer, 2018). Afterall, the right based political discourse of SLMC did not dissociate itself totally from the strategy of their political predecessors. Hence, SLMC made very strong alliances with SLFP to get important ministerial positions and mobilize public around its image, says Imthiyas (Imthiyas, 2012).

In answering the critical question of why bargaining politics of Muslim minority under the leadership of SLMC have been under constant decline over the last two decades, Kneorzer argues that SLMC, being a regional party, dreamed to become a national party and it backfired (Kneorzer,1998). Thus, the new shift made it vulnerable to internal split and popular criticism on many fronts. In addition to that, some others explain the phenomenon saying that Muslim minority politics led by SLMC lost its charismatic leadership, after the sudden death of its founder leader M.H.M Ashraff, which created a leadership vacuum that prompted a power struggle within the party. As a result of new dynamics, SLMC fractured into various minor parties and the new reality has become an instrument on part of the successive governments to manipulate by putting one against another to weaken the Muslim minority (Fazil, 2009). On the other hand, Minnath Thaheer brings a different explanation for decreasing political power of SLMC. She says that the current leader of SLMC Rauff Hakeem originally comes from the cosmopolitan city of Kandy. Hence, by nature, he shows a keen interest in consolatory politics over the bargaining politics after the civil war ended. It means that the post-war dynamics of Muslim politics of Sri Lanka clearly shows that it failed to produce a consensus under the leadership of Hakeem on the future direction and strategy of Muslim politics (Thaheer, 2018). This phenomenon, eventually, has led to fragmentation of Muslim minority politics led by SLMC.

05. Sri Lankan Muslims and the Ethnic Conflict and Co-Exitance in the Modern Sri Lanka

Having said that, Sri Lankan Muslims have a history of cordial ethnic relationship with other religious and ethnic communities for more than thousand years. Historian Lona Dewaraja's arguments in 'The Muslims of Sri Lanka: Thousand years of Ethnic harmony' depict the different and colorful pages of Sri Lankan

Muslims that surpassed the general approach to history, which merely focus on power shifts, war and invasion of a community over another. The core-argument of her thesis is that Sri Lankan Muslims had maintained cordial relationship with the majority community and integrated well in the prevalent socio-political systems throughout the history. They never challenged the nation or its integrity and instead, empowered the island's multi-ethnic orientation and co-existence. She brings very rare evidences to endorse her arguments and elaborates how Muslims enriched Sri Lankan economy, international relations and national security and thus, were considered as loyal strategic assets in the eyes of the Sinhala Buddhist kings of those days (Dewaraja, 1994). The matter of the fact is that the Lona's work did not cover the tensest period in terms of inter-ethnic relationship in the recent Sri Lankan history. Hence, she closes her historical analysis with 1915, when the nascent nation-state of Sri Lanka began to evolve and modernize.

Yet, Kumari Jayawardan's striking analysis gives us some important insights to ponder on the first ethnic riot against Muslims in 1915. She depicts how the climate of transitional phase of Sri Lanka towards a fully-fledged nation state and the subsequent feelings of alienation on the part of majority Buddhists had triggered the conflict and violence against Muslims. Her central argument is that although the riot was presented as a Buddhist majoritarian rampage against increasing dominance of Islam in Sri Lanka, the underlying factor of the riot was nothing to do with the religious atmosphere of Sri Lanka and it was all about perceived so called 'economic superiority' of Muslims over majority Buddhists, she explains (Jayawardana, 1970). In this context, famous narrative of 'Son of the Soil' put forward by Buddhist revivalists which implicitly meant that Muslims to be expelled or stripped out of any privileges of the new nation state, with whom they lived for more than thousand years without any notable confrontation.

The 1915 riots marked a turning point in the Sri Lankan history in terms of generating suspicious perceptions about Muslims on part of Majority Buddhists. It appears that the perception of Muslims as a community of economic exploitation and cultural colonization was popularized over the time since the riot and that set the background and eternal justification for many more ethnic riots to come. As such, within the last hundred years, Muslims of Sri Lanka faced four major waves of ethnic riots and all of those were triggered just to marginalize the minority from the main stream socio-political developments of the country and to sustain a psychological shock within Muslim community that they cannot live peacefully in this country as long as they are not the majority. In this respect, while comparing the uniformity and differences of motives behind the each of the four waves of anti-Muslim violence in the 20th century, Ameer Ali concludes that if it was the perceived economic dominance of Muslims over majority Buddhists that played a key role in triggering the riot in the 1915s, it was again the perceived dominance in education sector on part of the Muslims was the triggering factor behind the second wave of ethnic riot in the 1970s. The next wave of anti-Muslim ethnic violence had been initiated by 1980s but this time under the supervision of Tamil Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam in North and East. Since Muslims did not support their ethnic separatist demands, they were punished by collective ethnic cleansing. In terms of the fourth ethnic violence against Muslims in the post-war context, it is fascinating that the author precisely distinguishes it from the previous ones in the light of growing contemporary international climate of Islamophobia, negative image of 'Political Islam' and 'Islamic Shariah'. According to his observation, the unfavorable global environment created an atmosphere for Buddhist extremists to justify their false allegations against Muslims. Thus, paradigm of justification for violence had shifted from local to global domain in the post-war context (Ameer Ali, 2015).

There is a growing debate whether the post-war anti-Muslim violence has anything to do with post-independent Islamic revivalist narratives and religious exclusivism of Sri Lankan Muslims. Participating in this discussion, Imthiyas, Amjad, Hoole and Ameerden point out that cultural exclusivism and puritanism

of Sri Lankan Muslims, which was a by-product of government concessions to Muslim politicians in order to win the hearts of second order minority Muslims against Tamil Separatists in the war period, also contributed to the emergence of radical elements within majority Sinhalese (Imthiyas et al., 2015). Moving further, Faslan and Vanniasinkam endorse that phenomenon of increasing religious appearance of Sri Lankan Muslims has led to the current anti-Muslim violence (Faslan and Vanniasinkam, 2015). It is because that the majority Sinhalese interpret the increasing religious visibility as a cultural invasion on their land and an indicator for increasing Muslim population that has a potential to overrule the Buddhist cultural heritage of Sri Lanka. Yet, they further explain that the ever-increasing religious visibility of Sri Lankan Muslims should not be viewed as an ‘invasion’ or ‘population growth’; instead, it is a silent indicator that the Muslims community in Sri Lanka has been fracturing along the line of religious interpretation and schools of thought. Everyone is trying to justify their version of Islam. Further, Sri Lankan Muslims have been living with clear understanding that their increasing religious consciousness and visible practice are not against the national security or Buddhist cultural supremacy in the island as extremists portray (Faslan and Vanniasinka, 2015).

06. Critical Remarks

This review attempted to put dynamics of the Sri Lankan Muslim minority regarding aspects of identity, political strategy, and inter-communal relationship into a larger perspective. Hence, it would lead us to explore some casual connectivity/disconnectivity among those aspects in making the socio-political and religious life of the community. After outlining major arguments in terms of identity, political perspectives, and communal relationship of the community in the previous sections, now this part of the article turns in to make some important analytical observations regarding the subject under investigation.

Firstly, the available literatures give us some important insights about the history of identity making process of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. Hence, cultural identity of the Sri Lankan Muslim minority is historically shaped by three major elements such as Sufism, Shafiite legal theory and Arabic-Tamil linguistic tradition. Yet, the colonial venture and the emergence of nation state reshaped harmonious social systems that had been prevailing for centuries across the communities. As such, just prior to and aftermath of the independence, ethnic Tamils attempted to secure their place in the newly emerging state while Sinhala majority attempted to monopolize the system by replacing the Tamils. These developments had led to project and emphasize their respective identities to claim rightful place in the modern state. It should be noted that identity politics is a product of fear psychology about the future and it automatically inculcates a tendency of exclusion within a particular society. As such, it is possible to understand that the same psychology left its impact on the Sri Lankan Muslims as well. That said, in the same period of history, the Muslim community had resorted to religious denominators and puritanistic ideas in the name of protecting their identity and socio-religious foundations to assert itself as opposed to new strange developments.

Secondly, the existing scholarly narratives elaborate that this discussion of separate identity among Muslims had created an ample impact on their political strategy in the post-independent Sri Lanka. Interestingly, the Muslims did not think of separate political arrangement to ensure continued survival of their cultural life. They thought that it could be realized via maneuvering existing political equations. Hence, Muslim politicians demanded state’s support to their cultural rights provided they would support the mainstream political parties. Afterall, it would not be an accurate observation to reduce casual basis of the post-colonial political strategy of the Muslim community into a single factor of identity concerns. Apart from that, socio-economic interests of the business elites and ethnic Tamil leaders’ attempt to homogenize the Tamil speaking community into a single identity under language factor were also played its role in shaping the

political response of Muslims. According to the arguments of the existing literatures, Sri Lankan Muslims did not connect their cultural identity with radical political demands until 1980s. Thus, formation of Sri Lankan Muslim Congress paved the way for such a turn and the party had changed the center of gravity of Muslim politics from South to the North-Eastern Sri Lanka. It is interesting to note that even aftermath of inception of Sri Lankan Muslim Congress, political language of the community did not take a hardcore radical flavor. Instead, they preferred to stick to old strategy of making alliances with mainstream parties while maintaining mild radical nationalistic political demands. In addition to that, some of the exiting works explain reasons for mostly contested phenomenon of waning power of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress for last two decades.

Thirdly, the crucial point to ponder at this juncture is that it is a fact of the matter that Sri Lankan Muslims have been driven by cultural and religious concerns throughout last century and their political strategy facilitated, for some extend, to strengthen those interests. Yet, the community maintained a sharp understanding that their identity concerns should not be directed against the majority community or their cultural manifestations. Paradoxically, that very unifying factor of religious consciousness has turned into a polarizing element that fractured the community from within in the long run. In terms of anti-Muslim sentiments in the country, the current scholarship rightly argues that it is not possible to single out Muslims' religious visibility and political strategy as the root cause of the phenomenon. Instead, it has rooted also in exclusive nationalist tendencies that has been operating in the country since it had become a modern nation state as well as in the growing global anti-Muslim tendencies aftermath of the cold war.

07. Gaps in the Existing Scholarship

The existing works cover some important aspects of collective socio-political life of the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka. It has produced reliable findings about the dynamics of nexus between identity making, political strategy and communal relations of the community. Yet, there are observable gaps to be filled in future studies. Firstly, current scholarship must be updated by some comparative studies. That said, some more accurate causal aspects about the community's socio-political and religious life can be discovered by comparing their experience with other two communities in the country. To put it differently, there should be research project focusing on how modernity has shaped the traditional harmonious social life across all the communities in the Island and how it has created new mode of presentation in terms of their identities. Secondly, the current state of scholarship did not pay much required attention to role of mainstream Muslim civil society organizations in shaping and directing aspirations of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. Hence, a critical study on their discourses, strategies and its implications could produce more nuanced understanding on the internal dynamics of the community. Thirdly, this survey observes that it is not possible to highlight any notable work that deal with the socio-political developments of Muslim minority in Sri Lanka in comparison with other minorities in the world. Therefore, based on the aforementioned observations, this review paper suggests that scholars who work on this domain, should produce more critical review papers evaluating the contemporary status of scholarship on Sri Lankan Muslims covering major areas such as culture, politics, religion, and communal relationship.

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