Research Article

Social Interactions Among Undergraduates at State Universities: An Analysis of Experiences Post-Easter Sunday Terrorist Attacks

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Abstract. Sri Lanka is a religiously and ethnically diverse nation with a historical Muslim-Buddhist relationship spanning centuries. This diversity stems from its extensive history of various religions, cultures, and ethnic groups, leading to prevalent ethnic conflict. The Easter Sunday bombings on April 21, 2019, exemplified this issue. This study aims to determine if the criticism and hate speech following the attack influenced university students' social interactions. Researchers used a mixed-method approach, gathering data from 268 questionnaires and 25 unstructured interviews. SPSS software (version 26) analysed the questionnaire data while interview transcriptions were coded. Findings show positive social interactions between students of two religions, yet frequent meetings with same-religion peers and discouragement from religious peers hinder mutual contact. For healthy social co-existence, mutual understanding, comprehension of other religious beliefs, and interest in learning about other cultures are necessary. If this situation continues, tensions between Muslim students and those of other religions may arise at the university.

Keywords: Social interaction, Undergraduates, Post-Easter Sunday Terrorist Attack, Sri Lanka, Muslim-Buddhist relationship

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a nation-state with a government that has proclaimed itself to be a Buddhist nation-state; other faiths, people, and cultures living here will naturally feel marginalized by the teaming culture of the Buddhist majority (Stewart, 2014a). As Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda argues, it was the Sinhalese's imminent action at all levels and their extreme cultural nationalism that ultimately brought an end to the latest 30-year civil war in Sri Lanka (Uyangoda, 2011). Many countries that fought for their independence from colonial rule were divided between groups with contradictory values and views, which is why political violence has always been associated with resolving tensions. Often, political rulers think that they can only consolidate the power hold and visibility to the masses by evoking such ethnic conflicts through the campaigns of hate speech directly to other individuals (Jayasinghe et al., 2021). They expect ethnic or religious hate campaigns to be very effective in expanding and winning their power. At times, some political leaders have their fans in electoral politics to reach them to find convenience in killings, harassment, ethnic cleansing or spreading ethnic tensions. Among the techniques of winning voters' votes at the electoral turn is pulling the opposing ethnic members away during the campaigns. This mechanism becomes the base of the political system that becomes highly personalised towards the issues of ethnicity and political violence. Ultimately, they are deprived of their right to live their lives, and they have to migrate.

After a long period of colonial rule, racism with cultural nationalism as its political medium and a larger political agenda took up the suppression of minority communities as an essential tool in its hands. With this background, Sri Lanka is a unitary state with a multi-lingual and cultural heritage. Throughout history, the people here have preserved their religious and cultural identities and respected and

protected other communities' religious and cultural traditions. The fact that separate laws are enforced considering each community's religious, cultural and customary aspects indicates the diversity in applying the law.

The population comprised of the last census in 2012 indicates that Buddhists make up the highest number (70.29%) of the entire population that speaks the Sinhala language from the Indo-Aryan language family. Next in line are their ethnic brethren of Tamil origin (15.37%). Among Tamils from India and Sri Lanka, their ancestry is significantly different (Rathi, 2017). Sri Lanka's Eastern Province (eastern province) is the place where they are enrolled in large numbers. The third major minority in Sri Lanka is the Muslim population (9.4%), which is highly concentrated throughout the country (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). However, Muslims constitute the majority population only in particular provinces – Ampara (43%), Trincomalee (42%), and Batticaloa (26%) – as compared to Buddhists (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). Muslims can be of Sri Lankan, Indian and Malay descent, and therefore, in the history of Sri Lanka, Muslims were famously called "Moors" (Clifford, 2016). Besides that, they can speak Tamil, the language considered a member of the Dravidian family, and most use Sinhala daily (Kolipakam et al., 2018).

The relationship between Muslims and Buddhists has existed since before the arrival of Islam in Sri Lanka. The Arab merchants who came to Sri Lanka for commercial purposes married Sinhalese women and settled permanently (Razick et al., 2015). When Islam was introduced in the 7th century, the Arabs here embraced Islam and became Muslims (Razick et al., 2021). During the colonial period (before 1505 A.D.) and after (1505-1948 A.D.), Buddhist-Muslim relations were influential in national and international trade relations, defence and diplomatic relations (Long et al., 2023). On the one hand, geopolitical moves helped them land a deal with the Buddhist king, and the Buddhist people won over them with goodwill, prestige and trust, while on the other hand, the partition of the country after independence created a rift between Muslims and Buddhists in the name of ethnic representation in the political and educational sphere of the country. This was followed by a conflict between Buddhists and Muslims that took effect in the late 1900s. In 1915, a clash between Muslim merchants and Buddhist nationalists escalated into a Buddhist-Muslim riot (Perera, 2001). In 1976, the two groups had to fight over jobs, and a land riot started. People were also subjected to the random shooting, although this time, a lot of Muslims were involved. In addition, Nochiyagama Muslim shops were attacked in 1999, Aluthgama Muslim shops were burned down by Buddhist extremists in 2006, and Muslim properties were attacked during the Mawanella riots in 2011 (Stewart, 2014b).

The tensions between the majority Buddhist community and the Muslim community increased after the Sri Lankan Government and Tamil Tigers (LTTE) ended their nearly three-decade-long armed conflict in 2009 (Clifford, 2016).

Specifically, the Buddhist nationalist party represented by Mahanayaka Sanga monks criticized and questioned the religious and cultural customs of Muslims. The majority of them are either Sinhalese or are associated with Rawana Balaya. Muslims' dress code, halal confirmation, the Muslim Marriage & Divorce Act, Hijab, Niqab, naturalised Muslim identity, and cow slaughter have been blistered. Does Islamophobia exist? Muslimization is being tried out, trying to remove Muslims from the majority society. The pinnacle of this violence was undoubtedly the 2012 assault on the Dambulla Mosque. Reports from various domestic and international organisations indicate that by June 2014, roughly 65 Muslim places of worship had been targeted, with attacks also occurring in vital commercial districts such as Aluthgama, Beruwala, Dharga Town and Dehiwela (Imtiyaz, 2020). Notably, in the aftermath of Sri Lanka's civil war ending in 2009, a group of Muslim intellectuals emerged, engaging in an introspective analysis of Islamophobia, whilst the state, representing the majority, remained a silent observer (Elkassem, 2023). The Easter bombings have been recognised as the most significant attacks in Sri Lanka since the civil war's conclusion (Shaffer, 2023). On 21 April 2019, a coordinated series of suicide bombings, orchestrated by nine attackers, took place in Colombo and the Eastern Province town of Batticaloa (Attanayake et al., 2019). This matter concerns a group of 45 foreign visitors. That November night saw the most extensive bombing since the Civil War. ISIS claimed responsibility for this attack, though who did it was Zahran Hashim Imam (the leader of the National Towheed Jama'ath - NTJ) group (Imtiyaz, 2020).

This assault has faced the society of Muslims with various turmoil. The same people who had been extremists and Muslim citizens for the attacks were also the individuals involved. Consequently, the entire Islamic community was associated with the violent incidents that had occurred and viewed with distrust by other groups in society. This affected the way Muslims could live in harmony and harmony with other communities in a multi-ethnic society. Such situations can be observed in public places such as schools, universities, hospitals, and business centres. Muslim individuals might be confronted with problems related to their dress code as well. Wearing such attire as the burqa and niqab is forbidden, and in doing so, Muslims will be arrested under the emergency rules. It is worth noting that a woman wearing a burqa was arrested and detained after the attacks (Haniffa, 2019). Moreover, the Sri Lankan government has imposed numerous restrictions targeting Muslims, alienating them from the majority community. The Gotabaya-led administration enacted the Prevention of Terrorism Act No. 1 and 2 of 2021, banning masks worn by Muslim women, closing Arabic colleges, arresting and detaining Muslim youths without trial, banning 11 Islamic organisations, and confiscating their properties (Siddiqui & Nozell, 2021). Additionally, Muslim bodies that died of COVID-19 were cremated without proper handover (Bela Monis & Masooma, 2022). These actions have impeded the peaceful practice of religion. The government is also attempting

to abolish Muslim Personal Law under the slogan One Nation One Law. This research seeks to systematically examine the Muslim-Buddhist relationship, addressing questions about the influence of Buddhist nationalist movements on the intellectual community and future actions towards Sri Lankan Muslims. It also considers interpersonal contact, shared leisure activities, lectures, and university life.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks, there has been an increase in suspicion and the proliferation of hate speech and animosity towards the Muslim minority community. This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How does social interaction occur between Buddhist and Muslim students?
2. What is the level of understanding of Islam among non-Muslim students?
3. Has the propagation of hate speech and anti-Muslim sentiment influenced students' shared leisure time together, faculty environment interactions, and classroom activities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant literature from previous studies was reviewed. Some of these are as follows:

Md Kamruzzaman Bhuiyan. (2019). "The Bloody Easter Sunday Terrorist Attack in Sri Lanka: What Went Wrong?" This study identified the background of Easter Sunday attacks and the challenges faced by Sri Lanka. Specifically, the background to the Easter Sunday attacks revealed to the world the expectations of a few who desired political change in Sri Lanka and the support of Sri Lankan intelligence. Moreover, the study found that Sri Lanka has predominantly affected Muslims, and the suspicion towards the minority community in relation to them has been reinforced and propagated (Journal & Humanitiessocial, 2019).

Sarjoon, Saujan & Hakeema. (2021). "Buddhist and Muslim Interaction in the Post-War of Sri Lanka" The study examines the social relationship between Buddhists and Muslims in the period after the Sri Lankan Civil War. The study aimed to determine that, whilst the external relationship between the two communities appears healthy in terms of transparency, internal tensions exist, leading to contradictions (Razick et al., 2021).

AS Long, ZA Rahman, AS Razick & K Salleh, (2017). "Muslim socio-culture and majority-minority relations in recent Sri Lanka" The research findings indicate that during the period preceding the civil war (1984-2009), Buddhist extremist organisations successfully cultivated animosity towards Muslims within the minority population. This was achieved by challenging and critiquing various aspects of Muslim religious practices, traditional attire, and the practice of cow slaughter (Long et al., 2017).

Zahir Khan, Muhammad Junaid Ghauri & Riffat Alam, (2021). "Exploring the 'Civil Repair' Role of Media: A Case Study of the Easter Bombings in Sri Lanka" This study aims to investigate how Sri Lankan-based dailies and foreign newspapers have influenced social harmony and co-existence in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. The study focused on Sri Lankan newspapers such as The Daily Mirror and the Pakistani newspaper The Express Tribune. The findings indicated that The Daily Mirror newspaper's aspirations have not significantly contributed to the co-existence of the people (Khan et al., 2021).

Apoorwa Sharadishashi Jayasinghe, A.V. Sathini Jayathma Jayawickrama & M.R. Pramudi Paboda Kumari, (2021) "2019 Easter Sunday Attack in Sri Lanka" This study found that the long-standing tension between Sri Lankan Muslims and other majority ethnic groups increased after the Easter Sunday attacks and led to the marginalisation of Muslims from the minority communities (Jayasinghe et al., 2021).

Thus, although studies focused on the challenges faced by Muslims in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks and the social relationship of Buddhist Muslims are prevalent, research on the relationship and social interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in the context of Sri Lanka's state universities remains inadequate. Accordingly, this study addresses this gap, and there is a high probability that the results of this study will contribute to fostering a healthy socio-cultural relationship in the university environment in the future.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

The present study employed a sociological approach, utilising mixed methods. Data for this research were collected through questionnaire administration and interview transcript coding. Quantitative data were employed to quantify the social relationship between non-Muslims and Muslims. Conversely, qualitative data were utilised for an in-depth understanding of the social interaction among Muslim and non-Muslim students following the Easter Sunday attacks context.

Questionnaire Data

In this study, Based on the Easter Sunday massacre, a self-administered close-ended questionnaire was used to investigate the social interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. There were approximately 25 questions that related primarily to five areas of Muslim life, which illustrated their attitude in a roundabout manner. Using a random sampling method, 300 graduates from state universities in Sri Lanka were selected for this study. In this case, these were lined up as the following: In this case, the manner of questionnaire distribution is lined up as the following:

Table 1: "Manner of Questionnaire Distribution"

No	Universities	The number of questions distributed		Total
		Buddhists	**Muslims**	
1	South Eastern University of Sri Lanka	15	29	44
2	University of Jaffna	20	24	44
3	University of Colombo	29	17	46
4	Eastern University of Sri Lanka	15	29	44
5	University of Peradeniya	30	16	46
6	Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka	25	19	44
	Total	**134**	**134**	**268**

In order to achieve the objective of the study, a 5-point Likert scale used in this questionnaire (5- strongly agree, 4 -Agree, 3 – Neither agree nor disagree, 2 – Disagree and 1 – strongly disagree) structure was used, and 300 students were distributed, and 268 questionnaires were withdrawn. Accordingly, 89% of the response rate was received.

Interview Data

In addition to the questionnaire data, qualitative data obtained from interviews were also used in this research. The participants became the data source through an informal interview with 25 field members selected randomly from the target sample. The purpose of the interview data was to gain an in-depth understanding of the findings made through the questionnaire. The selection of interviewees is detailed as follows:

Table 2: Details of interviews conducted

No	Universities	Number of Interviews Conducted		Total
		Buddhists	**Muslims**	
1	South Eastern University of Sri Lanka	2	3	5
2	University of Jaffna	2	2	4
3	University of Colombo	2	2	4
4	Eastern University, Sri Lanka	2	2	4

|				
5	University of Peradeniya	2	2	4
6	Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka	2	2	4
	Total	**12**	**13**	**25**

Moreover, in this study, journal articles, historical texts, research reports, electronic data, and the internet were used as sources of information to construct the study's conceptual framework (*Figure 1: Conceptual Framework*).

Data Analysis

Because the study employed a mixed method, two distinct analytical techniques were applied. They are descriptive analysis (interview) and descriptive analysis method (questionnaire). With the aid of the program, the data gathered via the questionnaire was thoroughly examined, and the mean, median, and standard deviation were estimated and displayed in the table. A coded approach was used to examine the data, and letters and words were used to interpret the qualitative data.

Conceptual Framework for Social Interaction

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework
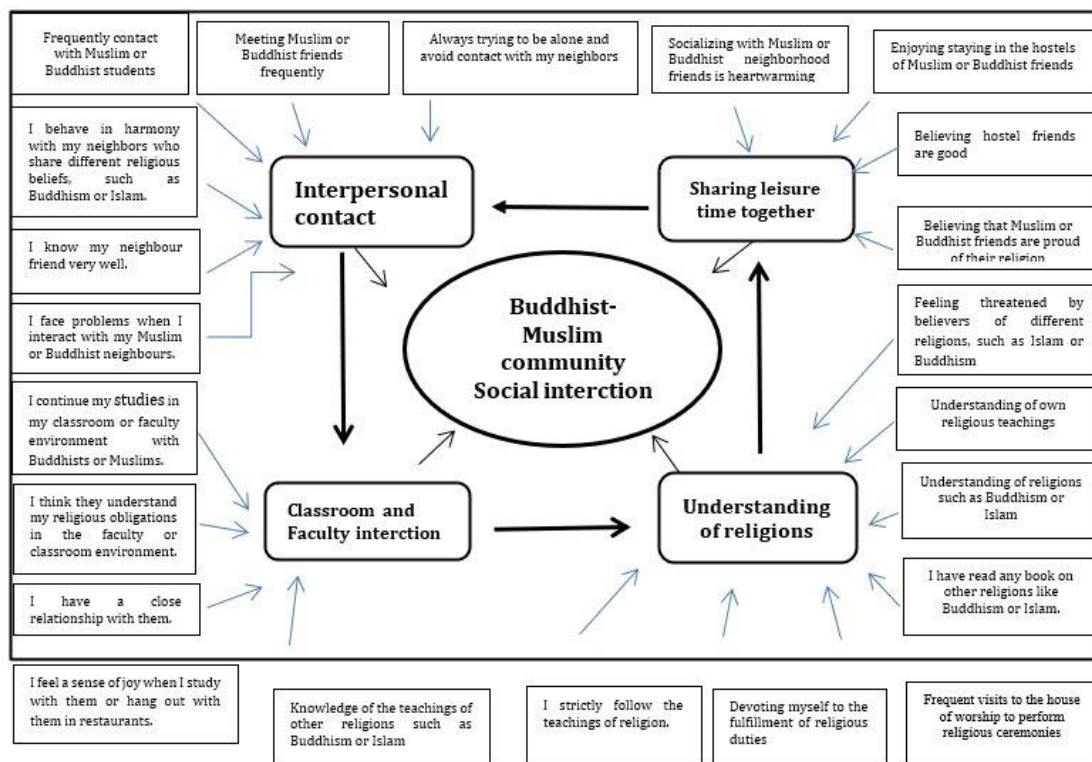
The researchers have drawn up the above conceptual framework to achieve the purpose of the study. The conceptual framework is modelled on the framework already used in the study of Buddhist And Muslim Interaction in Post-War Sri Lanka by Sarjoon et al. (2021). The conceptual framework used in this study is divided into four main parts. They are interaction, sharing leisure time, understanding religions, and classroom and faculty environment communication. The first part consisted of six questions to reconcile interaction, four to identify whether leisure time is shared, eight to assess the understanding of religions, and seven to assess classroom and faculty relationships in two categories. The discussion area of the study has been divided into four parts according to this theoretical framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section on Results and Discussion has been mainly divided into two parts. The first part deals with the details of the samples. The second part explains and discusses the data obtained from data analysis.

Socio-Demographic Details

Data Range No.	Criteria Background	Received Questionnaires	Percentage
1. Gender			
	Male	135	50%
	Female	133	50%
Total		268	100%
2. Civil Status			
	Single	246	92%
	Married	22	8%
Total		268	100%
3. Religion			
	Buddhism	120	45%
	Islam	148	55%
Total		268	100%
4. Ethnicity			
	Sinhalese	120	45%
	Muslims	148	55%
Total		268	100%

The table provides information regarding gender, marital status, religion, and race under analysis for studying samples' socio-demographic characteristics. In analysing the details of the sample, the data makes results reproducible and applicable to other methods. In this way, it becomes possible to determine if the

factors have influenced the participants' social interaction and to get some generalised conclusions.

The companies that provided the data were analysed based on the owners' gender; 50% were male and 50% were female. One of the most compelling points is that the figures show parity in terms of gender as well. Secondly, when marital status was considered, 92% of the participants were found to be unmarried, while 8% were with partners. Analysis of the religion data revealed that most forms were filled out by those with a Buddhist background, while a significantly lower percentage were filled out by people with an Islamic faith (45% versus 55%). The socio-demographic table, which displays racial proportions at equal rates, makes this clear.

Buddhist-Muslim community relations after Easter Sunday attacks

Nevertheless, communities that had friendly relationships with Muslims tended to conflate all of them with acts of terror and look at them as people of interest (Benazir, 2021). The study focused on undergraduate students from Sri Lankan state universities to assess the level of Buddhist-Muslim community relations after the Easter Sunday attacks. Accordingly, the four levels of study are student interaction, sharing of leisure time together, understanding of religions, and communication in the lecture hall and faculty environment. Let us look at these under the following separate headings.

Interpersonal contact

A significant consequence of the Easter Sunday attacks was the infringement upon Muslims' cultural rights, which has hindered their ability to coexist harmoniously with other communities in a diverse society (Benazir, 2021). The bombings exacerbated post-war ethnic tensions, highlighting how social media posts containing hate speech, misinformation, and racist remarks by various ethnic groups, including Sinhalese, Muslims, and Catholics, are perceived to impact society (Piyumali, 2021). This section examined and evaluated six questions that assessed the interconnectedness of test samples.

No of variables	Valid										Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree					
	F	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	F	%				
Section-1: Interpersonal Contact														
1. I know my neighbourhood hostel friend very well.	49	5.6%	95	35.4%	16	6%	6	2.2%	2	0.7%	4.43	5.00	5	0.768

Statement										Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.
2. I am friendly with my neighbours who have different religious beliefs like Buddhism or Islam	71	3.8%	66	24.6%	25	9.3%	0	0%	6	2.2%	4.48	5.00	5	0.841
3. I frequently interact with Muslim or Buddhist students	110	41%	84	31.3%	44	16.4%	24	9%	6	2.2%	4.00	4.00	5	1.067
4. I often visit my Muslim or Buddhist friends	82	30.6%	79	29.5%	61	22.8%	40	14.9%	6	2.2%	3.71	4.00	5	1.120
5. I face problems when I interact with my Muslim or Buddhist neighbours.	9	3.4%	26	9.7%	70	26.1%	60	22.4%	103	38.4	2.17	2.00	1	1.145
6. I always try to be alone and avoid contact with my neighbours.	17	6.3%	23	8.6%	39	14.6%	36	13.4%	153	57.1%	1.94	1.00	1	1.278

In common, the university community is pluralist, with multiple cultures and religious backgrounds. In addition, the people and society can practice this transportation mode for interaction. Students find hostels in Sri Lankan universities and stay there so they can continue their studies simultaneously. The issue was whether the students at the hostel knew to whom they belonged since their friends from the hostel followed other religions while staying there. This was accepted by most of the respondents (mean: 4. 43, median: 5. 00, standard deviation 0. One of the most basic levels of the construction of healthy neighbourly relationships is recognising and knowing who one's neighbour is. In the same vein, it can be seen that there is a good situation between research samples. On the one hand, some residents of developed cities are in that same situation; they are so close to people that they do not even know who their neighbours are.

Most of the samples (mean: 48, median: 5. 00, standard deviation: 0. 841) expectedly exhibited friendly behaviour between them while they were tested if all of them were going to get along with their fellow religious brothers. This is a picture of the behaviour of the learned societies in both social layers. Moreover, no incident has been reported in the university or abrupt clash between Buddhist-Muslim students after the Easter Island Attack occurred on the premises of the university.

It can be known that most students (mean: 4. 00, median: 5. 00, standard deviation 1. 067) create appropriate learning environments when students are in any circumstances of meetings with others. Although this tends to happen more in predominantly Buddhist universities, it could also happen to other students. The study revealed that the girls were more eager to initiate contact than the boys.

Studies of the intersection of specimens with each other have significant research; Models (mean: 4. 00, standard deviation 1. 120) are involved. The majority of the students are not keen on organising these meetings. When examined why it was so, they revealed that there is a pool of people who will miss them during the university period, but it is improbable that they will walk on the same path by then because they will be taking different life directions. Therefore, no family visits, wedding invitations, or funeral occasions will occur. The difference in religious beliefs and customary practices of the topic models is the reason for such a statement, in addition to the laws of decency in the family, which makes friends of individual models impermissible.

When asked about the problems faced when interacting with other religious brethren (mean: 2.17, median: 2.00, Standard deviation: 1.145), most of the sample reported problems when the interviewer asked why. When examine maintaining close relations with a brother of another religion. There are instances of religious friends reprimanding, looking at them with different eyes, and making sure students are meeting in groups and being warned. The underlying reason, they said, was the natural fear of Muslim or Buddhist friends drawn to the religious and cultural practices of a friend of another religion. This impedes research models are hindered from establishing interactions, and there is a group of people who have a religiously discriminatory attitude, even among students.

When the study samples examined the preference for solitude in brothers of other religions (mean: 1.94, median: 1.00, standard deviation: 1.278), most sample members were unwilling to stay away from the relationship. This has created a healthy environment for building co-existence. It is also against the critical notion that Sri Lankan Muslims are isolated. However, in both cases, many students have been identified as inclined to be isolated. When searching for this, the research models of both religions presented two different reasons. Reasons for Muslim students: Natural fear of Buddhist students (attacks by Buddhist chauvinists in Sri Lanka), dress culture, food habits, etc. The reasons put forward by the Buddhist research models were appearance and dress, suspicion and fear of Muslim students after Easter Sunday attacks, religious restrictions, and a greater preoccupation with seclusion and distancing. Overall, there is a healthy correlation between study samples from the two religions. However, a lack of interest in frequent meetings and threats by friends while contacting friends of other religions have hindered the establishment of mutual contact.

Sharing leisure time

The sharing of leisure time together was studied to assess Buddhist-Muslim community interaction. Accordingly, the results obtained can be considered in the following analytical table.

No of variables	Valid										Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree					
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%				
Section II: Sharing leisure time														
1. Socialising with my Muslim or Buddhist neighbourhood friends is heartwarming.	29	3.1%	104	38.8%	29	10.8%	0	0	6	2.2%	4.31	4.00	5	0.837
2. I am happy to stay in the hostels of my Muslim or Buddhist friends.	4	5.1%	86	32.1%	63	23.5	19	7.1%	6	2.2%	3.91	4.00	5	1.033
3. I believe my hostel friends are good.	129	48.1%	103	38.4%	26	9.7%	8	3%	2	0.7%	4.30	4.00	5	0.822
4. I hope my Muslim or Buddhist friends are proud of their religion.	120	44.8%	85	31.7%	41	15.3%	14	5.2	8	3%	4.10	4.00	5	1.035
5. I feel threatened by believers of different religions, such as Islam or Buddhism.	14	5.2%	16	6.0%	39	14.6%	51	19%	146	54.5	1.86	1.00	1	1.190
6. I always try to be alone and avoid contact with my neighbours.	129	48.1%	104	38.8%	29	10.8%	0	0	6	2.2%	4.31	4.00	5	0.837

Five questions were posed to the respondents in this area. When questioned about their experience communicating with non-religious hostel mates, most of the group (mean: 4.31, inter: 4.00, standard deviation 0.837) said they felt this way. The study's author reported that they were less anxious and more relaxed. Thus, the point is the clarity and confidence each research sample has in each other. This means that the students can concentrate, and the problematic noise will be reduced in the study area.

When asked about feeling happy while staying at the hostel of a non-religious brother, the majority of the study sample (mean: 3.91, Median: 1.00, standard deviation 1.033) admitted feeling happy. This operation is the opposite of the mistrust and tension between the two communities outside the university. On the other hand, some people say that they are scared. They stated that they had fear, especially when they saw students with long clothes and beards, as the identity of the perpetrators of the Easter Sunday attacks was unveiled in the media. They stated that remaining in a hostel with friends with that face was terrifying (interview). This states the reason why the attack affected the students' thinking.

Do you think the hostel friend is good? When this question was raised among the samples, most samples (average: 4.30, median: 4.00, standard deviation 0.822) were commented as good. This is because of the knowledge of the connection between the necessary research models. On the contrary, Muslims are a group in Sri Lanka that is mistrustful, and the overwhelming majority views it as a misguiding and false opinion. The idea that future generations will be aware of the importance of understanding the Muslim community will help to overcome the criticism that may be directed towards Muslims in the future. Furthermore, the universities will be the best places to establish good relations between the two communities.

Most respondents (mean: 4.10, median: 4.00, standard deviation 1.035) agreed when asked whether the respondents are proud of their respective religions. When searching for the reason for this, the research samples are due to their attachment and belief in their religion. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the model does not tend to revive one's religion by denigrating other religions. Ethnic and religious discrimination is at the root of the conflict between Sri Lankan Buddhists and Muslims. If this mentality is deep-rooted, religious extremist sects will likely emerge in both communities.

Next, when examining the feeling of being threatened by non-religious brothers, most of the sample (mean: 1.86, median: 1.00, standard deviation 1.190) denied this. This is because the universities in Sri Lanka are independent systems, and there is a tendency to unite based on students, so the chances of doing so are meagre. However, there is no denying that a few incidents occur in the name of parody.

Overall, the study sample reports that they spend their leisure time together with a fearless mind and testify that their friends are good. These are the best

appendices found in research models. However, staying in a friend's room and taking pride in their religion can affect the relationship in the future.

Understanding of religions

This situation has also fostered an environment where Muslims are depicted as terrorists both domestically and globally. In particular, the post-conflict violence and systematic Islamophobia have heightened anxiety and suspicion amongst non-Muslim groups generally, and the Sinhalese specifically, towards Sri Lankan Muslims (Imtiyaz, 2020). The research examined the participants' religious comprehension, focusing on two primary aspects: their understanding of their own faith and their knowledge of other religions.

No of variables	Valid										Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree					
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%				
Section III: Understanding of Own Religion														
1. I understand my own religious teachings.	11	3.7%	45	16.8%	2	0.7%	4	1.5%	6	2.2%	4.68	5.00	5	0.769
2. I often visit my house of worship to perform religious ceremonies.	26	7%	88	32.8%	32	11.9%	15	5.6%	6	2.2%	4.16	4.00	5	1.027
3. I dedicate myself to the fulfilment of my religious duties	192	71.6%	48	17.9	18	6.7%	8	3%	2	0.7%	4.53	5.00	5	0.946
4. I strictly follow my religious teachings.	170	63.4%	66	24.6%	19	7.1%	8	3%	4	1.5%	4.44	5.00	5	0.908

In the study of understanding their religious teachings, most of the sample (mean: 4.68, median: 5.00, standard deviation 0.769) accepted that they understood them. Islam and Buddhism generally preach mutual co-existence and forbid religious denigration of other religions. Being an educated community, they are familiar with their religious teachings.

Most of the samples (mean: 4.16, mean: 4.00, standard deviation: 1.027) were engaged in daily worship when they were surveyed on the house visits to the places

of worship to fulfil their religious duties. Hence, religious temples' teachings on co-existence, reconciliation and social harmony perfectly suit research models.

Most of the samples were accepted when asked if you somewhat fulfilled your religious duties with some dedication (mean: 4.53, median: 5.00, standard deviation 0.946). It reveals the fact that someone is devoted to that specific religion. Also, these deeds of devotion can result in religious repression. The rigid reasoning and the absence of a clear religious education path are the main reasons for the Easter Sunday attacks. Moreover, it is just as important to note that many study samples (mean: 4.44, Mean: 5.00, Standard Deviation: 0.908) agreed with this when they were studying a strict practice in fulfilling religious teachings.

Although it is commonly thought that being religious is suitable for research specimens, going to places of worship regularly and attending religious events, one should be cautious of this factor since the strict attitude in religious matters can lead to religious extremism.

Understanding of other religions

The Sinhala-Buddhist extremist organisation utilised the Easter attacks as a pretext to quickly commit unprecedented acts of violence against the Muslim population, while the Christian community, which was directly impacted, stayed mute. This section looks at how well the samples' specifications are understood. They can be observed in the following table.

No of variables	Valid										Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree					
	F	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	F	%				
Section IV: Understanding of other religion														
1 I know the teachings of other religions, such as Buddhism or Islam.	7	3.7%	103	38.4%	71	26.5%	11	4.1%	6	2.2%	3.87	4.00	4	0.951
2. I am interested in other religions like Buddhism or Islam; I have learned about them.	8	3.1%	115	42.9%	58	21.6%	11	4.1%	1	0.4%	3.72	4.00	4	1.056

3. I have an understanding of a religion like Buddhism or Islam.	80	29.9%	128	47.8%	44	16.4%	9	3.4%	6	2.2%	3.99	4.00	4	0.928
4. I have read any book on other religions like Buddhism or Islam.	58	21.6%	99	36.9%	47	17.5%	51	19%	13	4.9%	3.51	4.00	4	1.166

One theatrical performance talks about the long-term effects of Muslim communities' absence in the relationships with other communities while Muslims suffered in the developmental aspects of economic and cultural life. Most conflicts occur because of mistrust or animosity among the devotees of various religions in the country. In this regard, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are prevalent religions in Sri Lanka. The range of non-religious individuals, such as Buddhism or Islam, in the given knowledge level is analysed, and there is a shortage in most of them (Mean: 3.87, median: 4.00, standard deviation: 0.951). Informing and educating people about the diversity of religions is also a reason for misinterpretations. This phenomenon remains a confounding factor, even after the end of the Sri Lankan civil war. These Apr 30, 2019 attacks are the most substantial evidence that people have become more resolute than ever.

Interest in learning other religions was found to be less attractive in most sample subjects (mean: 3.72, mean: 4.00, standard deviation 1.056). Co-existence and calm starter-up: It is required to know the religion and worship methods of others and to be willing to attend inter-religious discussions. Through refusal to learn the other religion, followers of the entire population are wrongly held liable for the misdemeanour of a few privileged individuals or groups, a situation that has ensued. This exact scenario happened on the Monday when the perpetrators of the attacks were apprehended.

In summary, regarding the knowledge and understanding of the equivalents of research models, there is generally some knowledge of one's religious teachings. However, the lack of knowledge and understanding of other religions and the lack of effort to understand them remains a significant drawback.

Lecture Hall and Faculty Context Interaction

The relationship between the research women in the lecture hall environment was studied in this area. For this purpose, six questions were asked through a questionnaire with the research samples. The following table makes them apparent.

No of variables	Valid										Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree					
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%				
Section V: Lecture Hall and Faculty Context Interaction														
1 I continue my studies in my classroom or faculty environment with Buddhists or Muslims.	48	5.2%	60	22.4%	13	4.9%	18	6.7%	29	10.8%	4.04	5.00	5	1.359
2. I have a close relationship with them.	17	3.7%	75	28%	39	14.6%	20	7.5%	17	6.3%	3.95	4.00	5	1.206
3. I feel a sense of joy when I study with them or hang out with them in restaurants.	120	44.8%	100	37.3	28	10.4%	9	3.4%	10	3.7%	4.15	4.00	5	1.031
4. I think they understand my religious obligations in the faculty or classroom environment.	95	35.4%	133	49.6%	24	9%	10	3.7	5	0.4	4.12	4.00	4	0.900
5. In my classrooms or in the campus environment, friends are disunited and divided into religious groups	16	6.0%	51	19%	65	24.3%	36	13.4%	99	36.9	2.43	2.00	1	1.323
6. I think my college Buddhist or Muslim friends are backwards.	10	3.7%	25	9.3%	64	23.9%	55	20.5%	113	42.2%	2.11	2.00	1	1.174

When the study samples were examined to see if they were engaged in learning activities with other religious brethren in the lecture and faculty environment, more of the study samples (mean: 4.04, intermediate: 5.00, standard deviation 1.359) were found to be more, and some samples disagreed. Notably, most of those who have accepted this are from the Faculty of Management and Commerce and the Faculty of Technology. During the interview, it was revealed that they are working together on lecture activities related to the subject and preparing for the examination. The majority of the sample (average: 3.95, median: 4.00, standard deviation: 1.206) indicated that they maintained such contact even after they graduated from university.

When the sample tested whether they felt joyful or fearful when they made connections for teaching and learning activities or engaged in public spaces, more participants reported happiness (mean: 4.15, median: 4.00, standard deviation 1.031). This shows the close relationship between the students.

When the majority of sample samples (mean: 2.43, median: 2.00, standard deviation: 1.323) completely disagreed. This shows that the doors to reconciliation and understanding religions remain open in the university environment. Most of the samples (mean: 2.11, mediocre: 2.00, standard deviation: 1.174) disagreed with the study of regressive thinking in a pagan brother. This shows that research models understand each other in a faculty environment.

In the lecture and faculty environment of the research samples as a whole, the students engage in learning activities with each other without religious differences, and they are not afraid when they interact. Besides, it is also worth pointing out that they do not have the attitude of the religious groups division, and the learning activities are not the same as the hijackings.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to examine the extent to which anti-Muslim activities conducted by minority ethnic extremists following the Easter Sunday attacks have affected the social interactions among university students. The key findings are as follows: The interaction between the two religious groups remains healthy, with negative impacts diminishing when positive relationships are formed with friends of different faiths, and their religious peers are not perceived as threatening. When comparing leisure activities, the study participants report spending time together without fear and attest to the excellent nature of their friends, indicating favourable auxiliary factors in the experimental models. However, staying in a friend's room and expressing pride in one's religion may impact future relationships. While the research subjects possess some knowledge of their own faith, they lack an understanding of other religions, which is a significant shortcoming. The students learn through social interactions in lectures and faculty settings, where they engage in joint learning activities without religious distinctions. They do not exhibit a

tendency to form religious groups for academic pursuits. Nevertheless, the closeness between the samples prior to the Easter Sunday attacks suggests a fracture in attitudes such as one-on-one trust. If this trend persists at the university level, there is potential for future conflicts and disagreements within the institution.

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