

Sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims: Dealing with Different Dimensions of Muslim Society

Aboobacker Rameez

Department of Social Sciences, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL), Oluvil, Sri Lanka

Abstract: The study on sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims has hardly been the subject matter of sociology in any academic institutions in Sri Lanka. Although, very few studies have engaged in some of the socio-economic and political challenges confronting the Sri Lankan Muslims, they have not yet triggered a sociological discourse on Sri Lankan Muslims. The purpose of this essay is to explore the theoretical and conceptual contribution of studies on Sri Lankan Muslims to the enrichment of sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims. This essay also examines various challenges confronting the Muslims in the present context, particularly the toxic anti-Muslim campaign being undertaken by the Sinhala Buddhists nationalists across the country. This essay largely relies on secondary data which are analyzed in a descriptive and interpretative manner. This essay delves into the contestation of ethnic identity concerning the Sri Lankan Muslims. I argue that the ethnic identity of Sri Lankan Muslims is constructed on the basis of religion in response to anti-Muslim propaganda undertaken by the Sinhala Buddhist hardliners and Islamicisation of religious movements in the country at present. The essay also deals with stratification of Sri Lankan Muslims, particularly focusing on the caste and class issues. It becomes clear that the system of stratification among Muslims has undergone a dramatic change in view of modernization, globalization and Islamic movements and their propaganda against discrimination and inequality. This essay also unpacks the role of Islamic movements in the country and how their different religious interpretations contribute to tensions leading to conflict among the intra-religious groups as well as inter-religious (ethnic) groups. Nevertheless, it is apparent the process of Islamization is rapidly taking root among Sri Lankan Muslims thanks to emergence of Islamic movements. This is one of the inalienable factors that gave rise to the construction of Muslim identity in the country.

Key words: Construction of ethnic identity, challenges of muslims, social stratification islamic revivalist's movement, intra-religious group and inter-religious groups

INTRODUCTION

For coherence and clarity, it is worth recounting the nature of Muslims in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan Muslims are primarily a heterogeneous group comprising Sri Lankan Moors, Malays, Borahs and Memons and according to DCS. (2016), Sri Lankan Muslims account for approximately 9.3% of the total population occupying as the second largest minority groups in the country. The Sri Lankan Moors were the descendants of Arabs and South Indians during 7th century A.D (Nuhman, 2007), constituting almost 9% of the total population in Sri Lanka (DCS., 2016). The Moors of Sri Lanka share close linguistic and cultural ties with Tamil ethnic group including their Tamil language. Although, Sri Lankan Moors are widely dispersed across the country, one third of them are predominantly concentrated in the Northern and Eastern part of Sri Lanka and the rest of them are thinly scattered as a non-territorial minority in the predominant Sinhala speaking Southern regions. While

Southern Sri Lankan moors are involved various kinds of occupations, the North East Muslims are primarily engaged in agriculture and fishing.

Sri Lankan Malays were largely the descendants of immigrants of Malay Archipelago during the Dutch and British colonial period in the mid-17th to mid-20th century (Hussainmiya, 1990). There are about 40,189 Sri Lankan Malays at present which constitutes 0.2% of the total population in Sri Lanka (Census, 2012). Malays are highly concentrated in Colombo, Gampaha, Hambantota, Kandy, Badulla, Kurunegala, Trinomalee and Nuwaraeliya districts in Sri Lanka (Saldin, 2006; Hussainmiya, 1990). Borahs and Memons are North Indians business communities who settled in Sri Lanka during the British rule, living mainly in Colombo and Kandy and constituting <0.5% of the total Muslim population (Nuhman, 1997). They speak Gujarati and Urdu for their in group communication. The Muslims of Sri Lankan are primarily Sunni Muslims, following the Shafi jurisprudence, except the Borahs who belong to Dawoodi

Shia sect of Islam. But these followers of Shiat sect are very small in numbers with the population of 3000 and they are exclusively endogamous (Nuhman, 2007). Therefore, the phrase Sri Lankan Muslims or Muslims of Sri Lanka as a homogenous term is used throughout this essay to refer to a heterogeneous community. Specific emphasis could be made in specific places where a particular sub-ethnic group is peculiar and deserves special attention.

Although, very few studies have focused on the ethnic identity of Sri Lankan Muslims and some of the socio-economic and political challenges confronting them they have not triggered much sociological discourse in the scholarly circles. It should also be noted that there has been a lack of scholarship with critical academic fervor to deal with various issues on the sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims, so far. Therefore, the purpose of this bibliographic essay is to explore the theoretical and conceptual contribution of studies on Sri Lankan Muslims to the enrichment of discipline called sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims. This study also examines various challenges confronting the Muslims, particularly the virulent anti-Muslim campaign being undertaken by Sinhala Buddhist nationalists in the country.

The essay is mainly descriptive and interpretive in nature and relies on secondary materials such as academic journals, newspapers, reports from research centers and the internet. The sociological aspects of Sri Lankan Muslims are critically examined and reported in this essay in the form of direct quotations, quotations of others, summaries and the researcher interpretation all of which support the arguments developed in this study.

The first study of this essay deals with the contestation of Muslim identity in Sri Lanka while second section primarily delves into the stratification of Sri Lankan Muslims and their ethnic relations with other ethnic groups such as Tamils and Sinhalese and finally, the essay focuses on the role of Islamic movements in the country and how their different religious interpretations contribute to tensions leading to conflict among the intra religious groups as well as inter-religious (ethnic) groups. Thus, this essay of the sociology of the Sri Lankan Muslims is restricted to the following sub-headings or aspects:

- The question of Sri Lankan Muslim identity
- Stratification and class amongst the Muslims
- Patterns of ethnic relations and
- Muslim revivalist movements and their orientation

The following study delves into the sub-headings in relation to sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims extensively.

THE QUESTION OF SRI LANKAN MUSLIM IDENTITY

The question of identity of Sri Lankan Muslims deserves sociological attention on account of its debates and controversies among the scholarly circles. In fact, it became a critical issue of debates during the colonial as well as post-colonial period in Sri Lanka. It should be highlighted here that scholars who argue on the identity of Sri Lankan Moors who are primarily referred to as Sri Lankan Muslims, distance themselves from the ethnic identity of Sri Lankan Malays who are the immigrants of Southeast Asia, though they share the same religion of Islam. Studies by Ali (2004) and Nuhman (1997) suggest that the ethnic identity of Sri Lankan Malays has been unique and significant in the light of social and ethnic formation of Malays based on language, culture and history in Sri Lanka. However, the debates lie primarily on the ethnic identity of Sri Lankan Moors, popularly known as Sri Lankan Muslims with a number of scholars focusing on the aspects in terms of different perspectives.

When Ismail (1995) examining the identity formation of Muslims argues that the formation of Muslim identity is founded explicitly on the basis of the hegemonic power of the Southern Muslim elite's desire to safeguard their economic and other interests as well as to ensure their security under the Sinhala nationalism, since, they are thinly scattered as a non-territorial minority in the predominant Sinhala areas. He further argues that Sri Lankan Muslims cannot be categorized either as a race or ethnic group, since, they possess no distinct language and other attributes of ethnicity and thus he is trying to argue that Muslim identity is an ideological construct, given the hegemony of the Southern Muslim political elite. This is an interesting argument with regard to the formation of Sri Lankan Muslim identity. However, it should be noted here that identity of an ethnic group is asserted or retained not solely based on the language but based on other attributes such as lineage (descent), religion and culture that play a significant role in defining the identity of ethnic group. Moreover, it is the ethnic group that has to determine their identity markers and not others even though external factors condition on their identity of an ethnic group.

Another research of relevance is that of Imthiyas and in relation to Muslim identity. They are largely critical on Muslim politicians and elites for promoting a non-Tamil identity of Muslims based on Islamic faith and Arab ancestry to win election and occupy ministerial portfolios in the government. They maintain that this attempt of promoting a non-Tamil identity of Muslims brings no fruitful results upon the Muslims but rather, it drives a

wedge between the Tamils and Muslims, especially in Northern Eastern part of Sri Lanka. They argue that the labeling as ‘Sri Lankan Muslims’ has narrowed them down as a mere religious group instead of empowering them as an ethnic group. The argument of Imthiyaz and Hoole with regard to identity of Sri Lankan Muslims is more or less identical to what Ismail has propounded on the Muslim identity. The proposition of Ismail and Imthiyaz and Hoole on the Sri Lankan Muslim identity has largely been debunked by Nuhman in his account.

In his account on “Understanding Sri Lankan Muslim Identity” (Nuhman, 2004) articulates the religion and ethnicity are inseparable feature or entity for Sri Lankan Muslims as they perceive the terminology of ‘Muslim’ not only as a religious category but also an ethnic category too in the Sri Lankan context. He argues that Muslim identity in Sri Lanka is the byproduct of various colonial, local, regional, national and global socio-political and religious factors (Nuhman, 2004). Those factors are: social transformation occurred in the 20th century from the feudal system to capitalism that led to a competition, due to the under developed economy of Sri Lanka, among different communities along the ethnic lines, the British educational and political system (colonial policies) based on divide and rule policies, a sense of insecurity in the psyche of the Muslims as they became the target of Tamil nationalism or militant forces in the post independent era of Sri Lanka and the leverage of global level resurgence of Islam as a political power that gave rise to consolidate the identity of Sri Lankan Muslims based on the religion. Thus, he maintains that the Sri Lankan Muslims consolidates their identity solely based on religion.

It is significant to note here that identity of an ethnic group is asserted or retained not solely based on the language but based on other attributes such as lineage (descent), religion and culture that play a significant role in defining the identity of ethnic group. Moreover, it is the ethnic group that has to determine their identity markers and the leverage of external factors accentuating identity of an ethnic group cannot be undermined. Thus, I would argue that the Muslims of Sri Lanka defines their identity based on their religion which has been perceived as religious and ethnic marker of their ethnicity in Sri Lankan context. More importantly, leverage of external factors, I argue, play a significant role in constructing the identity of Sri Lanka Muslims. Above the local, regional and global factors, it is the anti-Muslim propaganda by the Sinhala Buddhist hardliners and Islamicisation of Islamic movements in the country that give rise to the construction of Muslim identity based on Islam. Clearly speaking, the Muslim identity in the country is currently reinforced and constructed on the basis of religion in view

of the Sinhala Buddhist hardliners such as BoduBalaSena (Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force) constituted in 2012 by Buddhist clergies with several objectives, one of which was to promote Buddhism in the country and has been targeting minorities, particularly Muslims and Evangelicals going to the extent of unleashing violence against them. Aluthgama riot in 2014 is a case in point) advocating toxic anti-Muslim propaganda aimed at targeting their dietary practices, cattle slaughter, their outer garments/attire and places of their worship across the country. These hardliners are of the view that if the present trend is unchecked, Sri Lankan societies will be Islamicised and that Sri Lanka would become another Islamic country in South Asia. This is in my perspective, a fear psychosis and an orchestrated attempt to target the Muslim and their economy by subjugating them as “others”. The fact Muslims constitute 9% in Sri Lanka and others constitute 91% of which Sinhalese account for 72% do not indicate of Muslims dominating or capturing the country sooner or later. As noted above, the Muslim identity is constructed as a result of the Islamicisation project of Islamic movements in the country. This is aptly noted by scholars where they attribute deep-seated economic disparity among ethnic groups in the post-1977 open economy, militant Buddhism and ultra-religious orthodoxy of Muslims to this propaganda (Ali, 2014). The propaganda of Sinhala Buddhist hardliners against Muslims and Islamicisation of Islamic movements has accentuated and consolidated the identity of Sri Lankan Muslims on the basis of religion.

In summary, In Sri Lankan context, Muslims perceive that their identity is constructed based on their religion to delineate their markers of ethnicity from that of other ethnic groups. More importantly, I argue that the identity of Sri Lankan Muslims is now constructed on the basis of religion primarily in response to external factors, i.e., due to the current anti-Muslim propaganda of Sinhala Buddhist hardliners and Islamicisation of Islamic movements in the country.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AMONGST THE MUSLIMS

This is an area that has explicitly suffered an academic or scholarly neglect among Sri Lankan sociologists. However, very little studies of western scholars and a few essays of local writers have underscored the need of engaging more in scholarly discussions on the social stratification of Sri Lankan Muslims.

There is a common perception among the other communities, namely Sinhalese and Tamils that Sri Lankan

Muslims are affluent economically as they were the descendants of trading Arabs and Indian origins. In reality, however, it is not the case as others presumed. This can further be elaborated in the study on socio economic development of Muslims. There are significant approaches in the characterization of the class structure of contemporary capitalist societies (Ossowski, 1963) and they are relational and distributional theories. The first one recounts classes in terms of their constituting a system of structured relationship with each other. In other words, the classes are categorized based on the relation of power and domination (Wright, 1979). Distributional theories classify people into groups according to the similarity of characteristics that is on the basis of occupation and education as an index of class. Here, income, wealth, status, prestige and esteem are emphasized to classify people as upper, lower and middle class in the society. Most research on class structure in some of the Asian countries including Singapore have confined to the distributional approach and that the people are categorized based on their income (occupation) and education (Alatas, 2002).

In terms of ascriptive status, the Sri Lankan Muslim community as a whole is egalitarian and homogenous in nature (McGilvray, 1998). There have been no systematic scholarly research that attempt to demonstrate the class structure of Sri Lankan Muslims. However, in my opinion, a significant degree of concealed class structure that is squarely being practiced among the Sri Lankan Muslims. While elite gem trading millionaires, traders, podiyaars (paddy land owners) and Markkaayars (Muslim maritime groups who came from South India and settled in Sri Lanka during the pre-colonial period) are considered upper class people in the society, rural farmers, fishermen, boutique keepers and blue-collar workers are regarded as lower class people. Professionals, government servants, workers in the private sectors are considered as middle class people. Markkaayars are considered the descendants of maritime trading community from South India in the precolonial period in Sri Lanka. Their descendants or family members also bear this name and occupy some responsible positions in the society. McGilvray (1998) notes that it appears “both in leading Moorish family names as well as in the customary title of the office of mosque trustee” as leaders of the local Mosque of Sri Lankan Muslims.

In addition, podiyaars (land proprietors) in the agrarian Eastern Muslim society enjoy some privileged positions as upper class people in the social strata. This pattern of class stratification underlines the influence of not only the distributional approach of class but also, the relational approach of class upon the Sri Lankan Muslims.

However, much of this could be attributed to the effect of Marakkaayars of South India, Maapplias (A group of people from Kerala who settled in Sri Lanka as a result of trading business during pre-colonial period) of Kerala and the Mukkuvars (Mukkuvvars are the high caste Tamils settled in the Eastern province of Sri Lanka and some of them are believed to have intermarried with Muslims in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka) of Eastern Sri Lanka. As such, this is a significant finding and exploration in terms of the sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims.

Although, there is no formal caste system among the Muslims in Sri Lanka, it can be assumed that the caste system that is being practiced among the Hindus society in India and Sri Lanka has some implications upon the Muslims, especially among the Eastern Muslims in Sri Lanka. For instance, the Mowlaanaas who are believed to be the descendants of the prophet through his daughter Fathima or of his close companions like Abu Bakr are considered high on the social hierarchy (Hussein, 2007). The Mowlaana families can also be found in some Western parts of Sri Lanka as well. Unlike, the rest of the Muslims in Sri Lanka who traditionally follow matrilineal clan (kudi) system, the Mowlaanaas follow patrilineal descent and they are highly endogamous (Ibid: 203). Sociologically speaking, this is similar to the high caste like Brahmanar (Brahmanars are a group of high caste people who are involved in temple administration and respected positions in the society) in India and Vellalar (Vellalars are a group of high caste people who are also involved in temple administration and respected positions in the society) in Sri Lanka where people belonging to this category of caste are well-respected and elevated to the top of social strata in terms of social practices in the society. Similarly, Mowlaanaas are well respected and given priority in the social practices among the Sri Lankan Muslims. Interestingly, unlike the rest of the Muslims in the East who traditionally follow the matrilineal Kudi (Kudi or clan lineage traces to their descent in the maternal line. This system plays a vital role in the social affairs of the community, particularly in the Muslim weddings and circumcisions) system, Mowlaanas are patrilineal (descent) tracing their ancestry in the direct male line to the daughter of Prophet or to his companions such as Abu Bakr. However, the phenomenon about Mowlaanas is not common among Muslims living in various parts of Sri Lanka. In other words, the practice of respecting Mowlaanaas higher in social strata is not prevalent in all the areas, except in small pockets.

Conversely, there is another group of people in the Sri Lankan Muslim society that is called Ostas (This group of people is considered lower or inferior not merely based on their birth but primarily based on the job they

do. Their traditional occupations include circumcision, hair cutting (barber) but chery and ritual tonsure of infants) who are considered inferior or lower in the social strata, a similar to that of Sutra (this group of people is considered lower caste in the social strata in India which is determined based on their birth and occupation they involve) caste or untouchable in India or Karayaar (Karayaar caste people are considered lower in the social scale as they involve in fishing and other lower job in the society) caste among Hindus in Sri Lanka. Oostas are highly endogamous in nature. It is peculiar to note that Oostas are marginalized in the society, since, a lot of Muslims are not prepared to have meals with them and inter marrying with them. Although, they are dispersed in different parts of the country, their presence is felt in most of the Muslim major towns including the Eastern Province. Butchers are another category of people in social strata of Muslims who are regarded low/inferior in terms of status and are socially marginalized, may be because of their sanguinary occupation in the society. However, the mainstream Muslims have less antipathy towards this group of people compared to that of the Oostas. They do not even engage in any other menial jobs except butchery and meat selling.

Again, it is difficult to draw generalization of all the Muslims living in various parts of Sri Lanka with this hierarchy of caste and class. However, this stratification system, similar to that of caste among Hindus has come under a dramatic change over the years due to modernization and Islamic revivalism or revivalist movements among the Sri Lankan Muslims. To be precise Islamic movements founded in Sri Lanka in 1950s but swept through South Asia and South East Asia including Sri Lanka in 1970s with the Liberal Economy in the country being introduced. They propagated that there is no difference among people on the basis of birth or profession one does in the society and spurred on the equality and fraternity among Muslims. As such caste division similar to that of Hindu society has almost ceased among the Muslims in Sri Lanka.

Moreover, Sri Lankan Muslims also cherish matrilineal system and matrilocal marriages resulting from the trading relations and intermarriages of South Indians Marakkaayar, Maappilas from Kerala and Mukkuvars from Eastern Sri Lanka even before colonial period. The nature of matrilineal system and matrilocal marriages is strongly perpetuated in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka where a system of exogamous ranked matriclans, matrilocal residence and de facto pre-mortem matrilineal transmission of houses and lands to daughters through dowry is followed by the Tamil Hindus as well (McGilvray, 1989). It is noted that this practice of

matrilineal system and matrilocal residence is adopted by Muslims across the country, except the Bohras who follow a contrary to patrilocal rule (McGilvray, 1998). Another form of social organization prevalent among Sri Lankan Muslims is the Kudivali or clan lineage that comprises of about 18 kudis which trace their descent in the maternal line, not necessarily in the paternal line (Hussein, 2007). Thus, every individual member of the family, regardless of sex, belongs not to the clan of his or her father but rather to the clan of his or her mother. While, a child takes the father's name as first name he or she is deemed to belong to the kudi of his or her mother. These kudis or matriclans are characterized by exogamy which is to say that one cannot marry into one's own kudi but should marry outside of it. Another salient feature of kudi system is that the husband is expected to reside in his wife's house after marriage (matrilocal residence). It has been noted that there are almost 45 kudis in practice among the Eastern Muslims resulting from the interaction of Hindu society (Majeed, 2000). This is quite a surprising and significant descent pattern pervasive among the Sri Lankan Muslim society, since, this pattern of kinship or descent cannot be witnessed among the Muslim communities in the world, except Muslims in India and Sri Lanka.

In fact, this is a rich source of materials and findings to the sociological exploration and much further studies should be undertaken to explore the reasons and its implications upon the society. However, there is no doubt that much of this kinship pattern derived from the influence of the Hindu society with the intermarriages of Marakkaayar and Maappilas from India and Mukkuvars on Sri Lankan Muslims due to their trading relations during the pre-colonial and colonial period. However, it should be noted that this kinship or descent pattern, similar to that of Indian society has been facing some challenges and losing its grips among the Sri Lankan Muslims in the recent years due to modernization, globalization, educational development and Islamic revivalism or revivalist movements among the Sri Lankan Muslims.

ETHNIC RELATIONS OF SRI LANKAN MUSLIMS

Sri Lankan Muslims are considered as a harmonious society as they never resorted to violence or armed struggle to win their legitimate demands and to ensure their security in the Buddhist dominated country. Conversely, the Tamil minority resorted to armed struggle which resulted in gruesome consequences on all the communities living in Sri Lanka to win their legitimate concerns, since, the rulers continuously marginalized and

subjugated them. Sri Lankan Muslims have been maintaining their healthy relationship with other communities beginning from pre colonial period to date. The next study deals with the ethnic relations of Muslims with Tamils (Hindus) and Sinhalese in a number of aspects mentioned.

- Common language
- Public worship and religious collaboration
- Medical lore, magical beliefs
- Farming and trading activities(related to economics)

In the Sri Lankan context, language and religion played a significant role in the ethnic identity formation during the colonial and post-colonial period. While Sinhalese and Tamil communities define their ethnicities based on mainly by languages as they speak Sinhala and Tamil respectively, the Muslims define their identity mainly through their religion (Nuhman, 2007). It is true that the Muslims have been sharing the Tamil language as their mother tongue in Sri Lanka from the pre-colonial period due to their contacts with South Indian Muslims in terms of trade and business they never resorted to assert or retain their identity based on language (Ibid:14). However, the scenario seems to be steadily changing in the present Sri Lankan context, since, Muslims who are thinly scattered as a minority in the Sinhalese dominated areas in the Southern part of Sri Lanka tend to adopt Sinhalese as a language of education and business. It is noted that almost 40% of Muslim students in the Southern part of Sri Lanka pursue their studies in Sinhala medium (Ibid: 112). This could, perhaps, lead to a stage where we can find a Sri Lankan Muslim society which may linguistically be divided with majority of Muslims in the Southern part continuing to get exposed in Sinhala language and the Eastern Muslims opting to continue their socio-economic ties in Tamil language with Tamil people in the East. However, sociologically speaking, unlike other communities, Sri Lankan Muslims are becoming multi-lingual and they have been able to nourish their relationship with both Sinhalese and Tamils smoothly along the lines of language as well.

In the sphere of public worship (McGilvray, 1998) notes that there are some Tamil Hindus and Sinhalese who made vows and offering at the tombs of Muslim saints (awliya) located in mosques and small chapels. Of the most important tombs of Muslim saints are located in Dewatahaha mosque in Colombo and 40 feet Auliya Dharga in Ampara and they are highly respected and regarded by all three communities living in Sri Lanka. Sociologically speaking, these tombs of saints have become a significant boon to unite these different ethnic

groups divided by many attributes. Furthermore, while both Sinhalese and Tamils take part in the Kalmunai Sahul Hameed mosque festival annually, Muslims take part in the Pandiruppu Thiraloupathi Amman Kovil fire festival as well (Abdullah, 2004). The relationship between the ethnic groups is largely founded along the lines of religious ceremonies of this nature.

Moors and other communities have been able to share similar the folk medicine derived from the Siddha and Ayurvedic traditions (McGilvray, 1998). There are specialists in local community level who are referred to as 'curers' (parichaari or wedamahattaya). At the level of ghosts and malevolent spirits (Muslim jinn), all these communities share a similar construction of the supernatural. There are experts in these communities to control demonic forces which are called manthiravaathis and there is a propitiatory cult of local female spirits conducted by Muslim women as well. Despite Islam forbids astrology, some Muslims still consult Tamil astrologers concerning marriage, career and other personal problems. Surprisingly, similar guidance or service is also available within Muslim society as well in certain villages where Muslims are predominantly concentrated in Sri Lanka. However, this is not a general phenomenon of Sri Lankan Muslims as this practice is not pervasive among Muslims across the country now. What is important here is the fact that Muslims and other communities have been able to share or integrate closely in terms of folk medicine and other spirits healing practices.

In the sphere of economy, there is a strong bond among these communities. Sri Lankan Muslims still employ Tamil washer men for domestic laundry services and Tamil Blacksmiths still render agricultural tools and bullock cart wheels for Muslim farmers (McGilvray, 1998). In addition, Tamil and Moor cultivate paddy on adjacent tracts of land in which case they would also participate together on irrigation committees. It is still observable that the Muslim landlords (podiyaars) still employ Tamil laborers for their land cultivation purposes and a great number of Tamil barbers have set up their shops in many Muslim areas. Sinhalese also involve in trading and fishing activities in Muslim areas, especially in the coastal regions of Sri Lanka. Abdullah is of the view that 'the Sinhalese market their chena cultivation products such as vegetables, corn, sugarcane and mangoes in Muslim areas. They have also recently begun to market their catch of freshwater water fish in Ampara and Trinomalee districts among the Muslim's. All of these suggest the volume of interaction that these communities maintain in the realm of economy.

However, this healthy relationship between Tamils and Muslims has not remained unaffected in the course of interaction. With the rise of Tamil militant movements in 1980s, the relations that were founded on various aspects as shown above, among these communities began to be faded or eroded and schism between ethnic groups along the lines of ethnicity became stronger. From 1985 onwards, the Muslims began to suffer at the hands of Militant movements and the economy, education and employment of Muslims were seriously affected. (Abdullah, 2004). Killing of hundreds of Muslims inside the mosque in Kattankudy and Eravur, respectively in the Eastern province by the Tamil militant movements in 1990s, a forcible expulsion of Muslims, numbering hundreds of thousand people (almost 100,000) from Jaffna peninsula in the North by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) in 1990s (Hasbullah, 1996) drove a wedge in the relations between the Tamils and Muslims in Sri Lanka. Conversely, though the Muslims maintained a healthy relationship with Sinhalese, intermittent tensions or riots between Muslims and Sinhalese that took place with or without the support of the government in different parts of Sri Lanka also affected the cordial relationship between these communities.

The end of civil war in 2009 indeed does not auger well for the minorities in Sri Lanka in terms of ethnic integration and reconciliation and shows signs of ethnic tension rearing its ugly head once more. Sri Lanka's minority Muslim community is coming under intense pressure from hardline Buddhist organizations of monks such as Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force/Army) and Sinhala Ravaya (Roar of Sinhala) who have declared themselves as guardians of Buddhism and the unofficial police force to protect Buddhism and they were allegedly linked to certain powerful individuals in the former government led by President Mahinda Rajapaksa. These fascist Buddhist movements lash out at the Muslims, demanding an outright ban on several Muslim practices including the traditional Muslim dress of women, halal dietary practices and cattle slaughter. The situation seems to be spiraling out of control. The virulently strident anti-Muslim agenda is gaining currency with the relentless targeting of Muslim economy, business establishments and other sectors all with the tacit approval of the former government. Thus, it is apparent that the ethnic relation between Sri Lankan Muslims and Sinhalese, particularly in the post war scenario has not been as healthy as one would expect. Although, the regime changed in January 2015 for which minorities made a huge contribution, anti-Muslim propaganda has not ceased at all, instead it continues in a subtle way to create a schism between Sinhalese and Muslims. Some are of the view that the

security and the very existence of the Sri Lankan Muslims will be at stake if the present trend against Muslims remains unabated.

MUSLIM REVIVALIST MOVEMENTS AND THEIR ORIENTATION

The ethnicity and religion of Sri Lankan Muslims are inseparable and they had a reciprocal impact on the development of each other, since, Islam is the primary marker of the ethnic identity of Sri Lankan Muslims as we discussed above. Islamic revivalism has a long history in Sri Lanka that can perhaps be traced back to colonial period where the Muslim educated elites were in the forefront promoting religious awareness for the social mobility and ethnic consolidation of the Muslims. It was with this motivation that the first Islamic movement, the JamiyathulIslamiya was constituted by the Muslim elites such as SiddiLebbe and ILM Abdul Azeez with the objective of promoting Islamic awareness among the Muslims in order to consolidate the Muslim identity and working towards the social and political development of the Muslims in Sri Lanka (Ameen, 2000). However, it is pertinent to note here that the underlying ideology of the formation of this Islamic organization was the Islamization of Sri Lankan Muslims at that time. This proposition can be proved with certain programs of JamiyathulIslamiya that spearheaded in eliminating socio-cultural and religious practices which they considered un-Islamic or superstitious. As such this Islamic movement was in the forefront of expressing its strong objection or reservation of the shrine worship, belief in devils and spirits, dowry practices and folk customs and ritual of healing through its publication called Muslm Nesan and religious talks. Thereafter, the Madrasathul Bari, the first Arabic college was established in 1884 at Weligama by Seyed Mohamed IbnuAhamedLebbe, popularly known as MappillaiAlim, an influential South Indian scholar (Nuhman, 2004). Being a follower of Qadiriya Tariqa, he was also instrumental in the establishment of several takkiyas (small mosques) and Sufi meditation centers in different parts of Sri Lanka and he also became the architect of Qadriiya Tariqa in Sri Lanka (Ameen 2000). Following the establishment of this Arabic college, a significant number of Arabic colleges were established across the country. There are more than 200 Arabic colleges functioning in Sri Lanka at the moment, out of which almost 1000 students are passed out as religious scholar/Ulema annually (Nuhman, 2004). It is also worth mentioning in my understanding here that there are almost 2000 mosques in the Island with a great number of devotees in each of it.

The beginning of the post-independence period can be considered the second phase of the development of Islamic revivalism among the Sri Lanka Muslims as the post-independence Sri Lanka saw a vast number of Arabic colleges being established across the island and several Islamic dawah movements were also emerged especially in the 1950s. Next section sheds light on the various dawah movements that function across the island and their Islamic orientations that led to frequent conflicts within the organizations on the basis of their Islamic ideology.

Sufism: Sri Lanka has a strong history of Sufism dating back several centuries, although some of its forms are more modern imports (Hussein, 2007). Sufism is seen as a more mystical and ascetic form of Islam, although, it subscribes to all the main theological tenets. A major element is the reverence of saints (Awliya, heads of sufi sects and sufi leaders) who are seen as intermediaries between the people and Allah. There are many shrines to these saints around the island, the most famous perhaps that of Sheikh Usman Siddique at the Dawatagaha mosque in Cinnamon Gardens, Colombo. A significant number of shrines are also there across the island and people continue to worship them as well. Many Muslims visit these shrines with small offerings of money or food and supplications for a good harvest, a child or other material needs. As noted above, the first Qadiriya Tariqa was formed by MaappillaiAalim during the colonial period.

Tabligh: The dominance of Sufism has been undermined by the increasing popularity of other Islamic sects over the past 50 years. Perhaps the most popular of these is Tabligh Jamaat which has evolved as a mass movement in the last two decades but has been active, since, the 1953. Nuhman (1997). It has eschewed overt political activity and concentrated on encouraging Muslims to engage more actively in religious rituals. They show no real interest in social research or the political problems facing the Muslims in Sri Lanka. Instead, they are mostly engaged in promoting religious rituals. They own their code of ethics and attires for their members and their membership cuts across the society. Although it has had limited political impact, it seems certain that Tablighmembers have encouraged a more conservative view of Islam among many Sri Lankan Muslims.

Jamaat-i-Islamiyya: Tabligh appeals across social classes and includes many urban professionals but anecdotal evidence suggests their rather simplistic approach to religious belief and their resistance towards political and

social action is the reason of their less popularity among educated, middle-class Muslims to whom the more intellectual approach of Jamaat-i-Islamiya (JI) has greater appeal. Although, JamaatiIslami has been functioning in Sri Lanka from 1947, it was officially established here in 1954 with an idea of Islamicising the Muslim community in all its social aspects. Nuhman (1997). It has attracted a considerable portion of educated middle class and youth and has a few branches and numerous study circles island wide. In Sri Lanka it has not openly advocated radical political ideas but has largely concentrated on religious orthodoxy and developed a new generation of sympathetic Muslim scholars. It is very influential in Islamic colleges and directly controls five major Arabic colleges (Nuhman, 2004). JamathiIslami as a well organized establishment has its own publication and propaganda machinery. I was able to directly witness the engagement of JI members in social research, particularly in the aftermath of tsunami that devastated the coastal areas of Sri Lanka in 2004.

Tawheed or Wahhabism: Ultra-orthodox Islamic movements that fall into the broad category of Salafi movements are often referred to locally as “Thawheed” group and sometimes also as Wahhabis. It was founded in 1947 by Abdul Hameed Al Bakry, popularly known as Dharvesh when he returned from Saudi Arabia having studied Islamic Sharia. It has its own Arabic college in Paragahadeniya (Nuhman, 1997). As Wahhabists around the world, they accept only the Quran and Sunna and reject all the customary folk religious practices from shrine worship to religious feasts as Shirk and bit’at. Abdul Hameed and his disciples went to the extent of destroying some shrines in his village and as a result a case was filed against them in the District court in 1948 (Ibid:60). This incident becomes a clear manifestation of the extremist activity of Wahhabisim in Sri Lanka. Unlike Tabligh or JamathiIslami, Wahhabis are not completely divorced from political life but their involvement in electoral politics seems limited. Their preaching has also focused on purging what they call as deviations (bid’ah) ingrained among the Sri Lankan Muslims from the original form of Islam emerged from the Arabian Peninsula.

Islamic orientation of Thawheed ideology is so extreme to the extent that it causes not only intra-religious tensions leading to conflict but it stokes tensions and clashes between Muslim and Tamil communities as well. Anti-Tamil rhetoric is sometimes more strident in conversation with Eastern Thawheed leaders. For instance, the case of dowry, a Muslim culture is believed to have derived from Tamil culture and that is viewed as contrary to Islamic tenets can be seen as a focal point of

tensions, since as followers of Thawheed movement pursue the forceful rhetoric against Tamils citing their culture. Both in the late nineteenth century and even today, the scathing attacks on “un-Islamic” practices can be viewed not only as a result of the influence of global Islam but also as part of the self-definition of Muslims vis à-vis Tamils.

This growing trend of Thawheed ideology has led to the misconception of Islam among the non-Muslims, given their various practices based on the literal perspective of the Quran and Qatheeth stir up violence and extremism in the name of Islam. Their orientation or different interpretation of Islam serves to trigger tensions and violence among intra-religious groups (Islamic movements). For instance, In October 2004, some young Muslims who were influenced by Thawheed ideology demolished a mosque and several houses and buildings belonging to a Sufi sect which was led by Payilvaan an Islamic scholar who wrote extensively against mainstream orthodoxy (Imthiyas and Hoole, 2011). Furthermore, in December, 2006 when Payilvaan died these youth shaped by the orientation of Thawheed ideology objected violently to him being buried in the Tharikathul Mufliheen Mosque’s burial grounds in Kattankudy. The corpse of Payilvaan was later exhumed and buried instead in the common Muslim burial grounds (Ibid: 220). Most importantly, a recent clash in 2009 between the Thawheed members and members of Kaathirya sect of Sufism inside the mosque belonging to the Wahhabi movement in Beruwala (Can watch the post-Beruwela clash reaction of Wahhabi preacher in this You Tube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFH5GfSgy_4) resulted in the death toll of two and injuries to many people. This has been the continuing trend in some part of Eastern Sri Lanka even now, particularly Kattankudy where a clash broke out recently between the followers of Thawheed movement and sufi movement during the religious campaign of the former. It resulted injuries to many people and ended up in court and subsequently in imprisonment of many. It should be noted here that the different interpretation of religion in the form of excessive views and literalistic perspective, contributes to disharmony among intra-religious groups.

Interestingly, the members of Sri Lanka ThawheedJama’ath staged a demonstration in Colombo recently against the move to amend the Muslim Personal Law, enshrined in the constitution of Sri Lanka as a requirement to regain GSP plus from European union. The demonstration drew a large of number of people including women and children with raising placards in favor of their demands (Daily news ‘Minimum age for marriage not Practical: SLTJ’ 03 November, 2016. Available

online: <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Minimum-age-for-marriage-not-practical-SLTJ-118638.html> (accessed on 08 November, 2016). However, the contents of the speech delivered by the leaders of the movement at the demonstration has drawn a lot of flak not only among the mainstream majority community but within the Muslim community as well, they were so, harsh and critical of Galagoda Atte Gnanasara Thero (The Secretary of BoduBalaSena, a Buddhist monk who is in the forefront of spearheading anti-Muslim campaign) and degraded his behavior in public which prompted certain individuals from majority community, i.e., Sinhalese to come out in front of Pettah Railway Station, Colombo and to lash out against the Muslims to the extent of threatening to kill them. The speech made by certain individuals of Sri Lanka ThawheedJama’ath (SLTJ) at the protest triggered a lot of controversy among the mainstream Buddhists because they ridiculed the Monks which the Buddhists have had hard times to subscribe to it despite they were critical of BBS and its rhetoric.

Moreover, some scholars of the view that visible appearance in the form jubbas and niqabs propagated by these Islamic movements created an illusion of an increase of Muslim population in the island, adding to the fear and suspicion among the majority community. These individual prejudices have sharply been exploited by the extremist nationalist groups like Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) to incite hatred towards and violence against the Muslim community.

Therefore, it can be noted that if this extremist orientation of Thawheed ideology continues to persist, then it is likely to drive a wedge between Muslim and other communities in Sri Lanka that may escalate the healthy reconciliation existed between these ethnic groups over the years. It may also likely exacerbate the tension within intra-religious groups as well. This is indeed, the present dilemma of Sri Lankan Muslims as they encounter challenges in terms of religious ideologies or sectarian clashes. Worse enough, the ideology of religious movement triggers tensions among ethnic groups in the country that could, perhaps, lead to an outbreak of major conflict across the country.

Nevertheless, there is an important fact that we should not overlook, i.e., the process of Islamization of Sri Lankan Muslims taking root as a result of the emergence of these Islamic revivalist movements. This is in fact, one of the inalienable factors that gave rise to the construction of Muslim identity in the country. Despite the fact there is a serious ideological difference between the Islamic dawwa movements, they have played an indispensable role in the development of religious

awareness and in consolidating the ethnic consciousness or ethnic identity based on religion among the Sri Lankan Muslims during the past two to three decades.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Sri Lankan Muslims are a harmonious society sharing cultural and linguistic stocks of other communities, namely Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka without compromising their identity. The Sri Lankan Muslims have explicitly enriched their culture by interacting with other communities and have enormously been able to contribute to socio-economic and political development of Sri Lanka. Muslims perceive that their identity is constructed based on their religion to delineate their markers of ethnicity from that of other ethnic groups. More importantly, the identity of Sri Lankan Muslims, I argue is now constructed on the basis of religion in response to other factors, i.e. due to the current anti-Muslim propaganda of Sinhala Buddhist hardliners and Islamicisation of religious movements. Clearly speaking, the post war scenario has witnessed a significant marginalization of minorities, especially the Muslims, inaction of government to resettle the evicted Muslims from Jaffna Peninsula by the LTTE in 1990s, slow phase of resettlement of Muslims affected by the tsunami that afflicted the coastal belt of Sri Lanka in 2004 with no constructive measures taken by the government and rhetoric of certain extremist elements in the Sinhala Buddhist community which have sharply targeted places of Muslim's worship, their dietary practices, their cattle slaughter, their attires/dress, their economic establishments or trading centers and Muslim personal law. Moreover Islamic movements have been carrying out their project of Islamicising the Muslims in the nook and corner of the country. This has sharply reflected in the way the Muslims wear dresses and adopt dietary practices. As such these are the factors, I argue that give rise to the construction of Muslim identity in the present context of Sri Lanka. This is a significant source of finding to the enrichment of sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims, particularly in terms of their ethnic identity.

The present anti-Muslim propaganda espoused by the Sinhala Buddhist hardliners could be attributed to several factors, the myth or negative perception that the Sinhalese developed against Muslims that they are economically sound or ahead over Sinhalese, militant Buddhism, rigid Islamic orthodoxy and religion used as a fodder for political constituency. It is indeed clear that this propaganda creates schism of ethnic relations between Sinhalese and Muslims and recipes for major disaster in the country. Pathetically, Sri Lankan Muslims

are entangled with intra-religious clashes along the lines of different interpretations or ideologies. Worse enough, these different interpretations have triggered tensions and clashes bringing about major casualties in the intra-community level in the recent past. The different interpretation of religion-Islam propagated by Islamic movements serves a source of conflict not only within the Muslim community but with inter-community level as well given the fact that Sinhala Buddhist hardliners have sharply been manipulating to incite hatred towards and violence against the Muslim community. Thus, it is important to check the prevailing religious tension among the Muslim community that has potential of leading to an outbreak of major conflict across the country. As such it can be noted that these are sociologically significant insights into the terrain of sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims.

It becomes clear that the system of stratification such as caste, class and kinship/descent derived from the Tamil/Hindu community has been encountering some challenges and losing its grips among the Sri Lankan Muslims in the recent years due to modernization, globalization, educational development and Islamic revivalism or revivalist movements among the Sri Lankan Muslims. Moreover, Muslims have had a cordial relationship with Tamils in the past in the aspects of common language, religious collaboration/rituals, medical practices and trading activities. However, this healthy relationship between Tamils and Muslims has gone under dramatic change in the course of interaction due to the influence of Tamil Militant forces and armed forces of the government. The same is the case between the relations of Muslims and Sinhalese. These are some of the significant inputs that the essay has unearthed in order to enrich the discipline of sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims.

Having discussed the various facets of Sri Lankan Muslims it becomes clear that the terrain of Sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims has not been traversed intellectually. It appears that even some of the studies undertaken by various scholars lack theoretical and conceptual application in the study of Sri Lankan Muslims. Most importantly, a significant proportion of the works on Sri Lanka cited above are not academic in nature except two or three, though they often do make sociological statement and contain sociological insights. Thus, these studies will not be able to contribute to the process of policy formulation or implantation on the socio-economic and political development of Sri Lankan Muslims in Sri Lanka. In these circumstances, this essay of Sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims is an attempt to sketch out its sociological vistas or provinces where further studies

could be undertaken in terms of Sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims. The following areas or aspects could be considered for further research on the sociology of Sri Lankan Muslims in line with the theoretical and conceptual framework.

Sociology of gender on Sri Lankan Muslims: This field suffered a significant neglect among the discourses of various scholars. The question of Islamic perspective on equality of women, women empowerment in terms of socio-economic and political development, role of women in upbringing children and stable family and feminist issues have not properly been touched by any scholars in relation to Sri Lankan Muslims. Thus, this is an area of scope that should be undertaken by sociologists on Sri Lankan Muslims.

Sociology of religion and Sri Lankan Muslims: There is a lot of discussion on extremist Muslims and moderate Muslims in the Orientalist discourses. However, this has never been refuted or debunked by either sociologists in Sri Lanka or Sri Lankan Muslim scholars. Further, role of various religious dawah movements in the bonding (intra-ethnic relationship) and bridging social capital (inter-ethnic) has not been properly studied so far. Thus, this is a solid arena of sociology of the Sri Lankan Muslims that could be explored further by sociologists.

Sociology of development and Muslims: Although, the role of Muslims in the socio-economic development of the country is enormous it has not been studied or highlighted by proper studies under sociological perspective. Poverty and unemployment and under development of Sri Lankan Muslims are some of the scope that could be explored further.

Social stratification of Sri Lankan Muslims: This is another area that has suffered a serious neglect in the mainstream discourses of sociologists, especially by the Sri Lankans. Studies on stratification along the lines of class, caste, ethnicity and so on of Sri Lankan Muslims should be undertaken by sociologists in line with various theories.

Sociological theories and alterative discourse: It appears that many non-Muslim sociologists focused on studies of sociological theories that attempted to deal with Sinhalese and Tamil society and their economic prosperity or backward position. However, this comparison or exploration of sociological theories in relation to Sri Lankan Muslims has not specifically been done by sociologists. Moreover, unlike the theories of Western discourses, alternative theories or discourses of various

scholars in the Southeast Asia and South Asia have hardly become the subject of scholarly discourses or debates among sociologists in Sri Lanka. So, this is an area of great prospect for sociologists, especially in relation to Sri Lankan Muslims that could significantly be engaged or explored further.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This essay is self-funded by the researcher.

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