Muslims in Post-War Sri Lanka: An Opportunity Lost for Conflict Transformation

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the post-war Sri Lankan conditions among Sri Lanka Muslims, also known as Moors. The article will attempt to argue that state concessions to Muslim political leaders who supported the successive Sri Lanka's ruling classes from independence through the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009, have meant an isolation of the community from the other two main ethnic communities. The concessions that the Muslim community has won actively helped the Muslim community to be proactive in their religious practices and thus paved the way for exclusive social and political choices. The rise of Islamic movements and mosques in the post-1977 period galvanized Muslims. In time this isolation has been reinforced by socio-religious revival among Muslims whose ethnic identity has been constructed along the lines of the Islamic faith by Muslim elites. Despite this revival it has been clear that the Muslim community has been reluctant to use Islamic traditions and principles for peace building, which could have helped to ease tensions, brought about by the 30 year old ethnic conflict. On the other hand this paper will briefly discuss some reactions from the majority Sinhalese to Islamic revival as well as some issues between the Tamils and Muslims and the reintegration of Muslims in the North. Finally, some pragmatic ways to

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ease tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the greater discipline of conflict resolution are explored using traditions within Islam.

1.0   Introduction

On May 17, 2009, the LTTE were defeated by the predominantly Sinhalese- dominated Sri Lankan security forces in their three-decades-old war to build an ethnic nation for the Tamils who mainly live in the northern and eastern territories of Sri Lanka, On May 18, the Sri Lankan security forces announced that the LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran, who led the campaign, was killed by Sri Lanka's military in a firefight.

The public in many parts of Sri Lanka, especially Muslims and Sinhalese, took to the streets to celebrate the effective end to one of Asia's longest-running military conflicts. There was hope amongst many including Sri Lanka's Muslims both at popular and elite levels that they would experience peace and stability in post-war Sri Lanka.

However, in the years following the end of the conflict, there arose a wave of Islamophobic rhetoric and acts of violence against the Muslim community. This was undertaken by extreme Sinhalese-Buddhists groups (led by Buddhist monks) with tacit support from politicians attacking places of worship and Islamic practices such as Halal food certification, cattle slaughter and dress code. These wanton acts dashed all hope for peace and stability. In addition to this, tensions between Muslims and the Tamils in the north and east, which emerged as a result of the conflict, have also not abated.

Questions are asked as to how the Muslims found themselves in this scenario? In particular, since they are considered to be a community that bridges the language gap between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, with a heritage of conflict transformation principles from the Islamic traditions, questions can be asked as to why they have not emerged as true peace makers in the country. Islam as a religion and a tradition is replete with teachings and practices of nonviolence and peace building. An example is the nonviolent response to the persecution faced in the first thirteen years of Islam by the early Muslims in Makkah. Kadayifci, Abu-Nimer and Mohamed-Saleem (2013) cover this in great detail.

Yet it is clear that the Sri Lankan Muslim community has not been empowered by the various Islamic values and principles of peace to contribute to build peace and to establish just social, political and economic systems. In fact it can be said that the opposite has happened. However, it is important to note that Sri Lanka Muslims feel themselves to be a vulnerable community with a significant portion of them still living under harsh economic and social conditions. Their unpleasant economic conditions further help reinforce Islamic faith building as an ethnic identity marker. Much of this has to be discussed from the perspective of Muslim identity formation in Sri Lanka and Muslims' consequent relationship with the other main ethnic communities.

2.0   The origin of Muslim identity in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan Muslim community are scattered across the island with the majority (62%) living outside of the north and east of Sri Lanka where the Sinhalese predominate, and with about 38% of the Muslim population living in the Tamil-dominated north and east. Initially the Muslims mainly inhabited the coastal areas of Sri Lanka but over time some of them moved into the interior. Today the majority (62 percent) live in the south of Sri Lanka, amidst the Sinhalese. The remaining 38 percent, though, are established in the Tamil-dominated north and east, the region claimed by the Tamils as their traditional

homeland (Imtiyaz, 2009). In a context where census-taking has become politicized, it is noteworthy that Muslims have become a majority in the Amparai District of Eastern Province, which is part of this region. (Department of Census and Statistics–Sri Lanka, 2008) When the Tamil insurrection flared up in the 1980s, most Muslims pointedly stood aside. This is one of the main reasons the Tamil Tigers (the LTTE or Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) were always opposed to Muslim participation in any peace talks.

A central aspiration of the Muslims in contemporary Sri Lanka, according to McGilvray (1997), is their desire to develop a non-Tamil identity based on Islam. Radically-shifting political developments, according to Ali (2006), 'have made them realize that their interest lies in holding fast to the religion of Islam and not to any ethnic category' But the Muslims of the north and east blame the Tamils for pushing them in this direction. Gripped by demographic anxiety and locked in competition with the Tamils for control over economic and land resources, they turned to religion as a way of bolstering their cohesion. This was a key factor in the formation of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) in the mid 1980s (at a time when the Muslims had established informal and formal contacts with the Sri Lanka state forces with a view to fighting against the Tamil Tigers).

However the Muslims living in the south and west of Sri Lanka have not shown any similar inclination to support an exclusive Muslim party, despite also being increasingly marginalized by the majority Sinhalese. Why not? There are two major reasons. First, the Muslims from outside the north and east believe that the Sinhalese-dominated United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) accommodate their needs, especially those of the Muslim political elites who lead them, because these parties have given some significant (and not so- significant) ministerial portfolios and positions to Muslims, in addition to substantial business benefits. Secondly, unlike their brethren in the north and east, these Muslims had not been confronted with organized violence at the hands of Sinhalese-Buddhist extremist groups targeting their identity and existence.

There are contradictions facing the identity of Muslims in Sri Lanka and how they are classified and classify themselves. This has been in opposition to how other communities have described themselves. The Constructivist Approach aptly describes identity formation. Constructivists view ethnic identities as a product of human actions and choices, arguing that they are constructed and transmitted, and not genetically inherited, from the past (Taras and Ganguly, P: 4). As quoted in Imtiyaz & Stavis' study on ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka (2009), "Max Weber was one theorist who stressed the social origin of ethnic identity. Weber viewed each ethnic group as a 'human group' whose belief in a common ancestry (whether or not based in genetic reality) leads to the formation of a community." Ethnic identity is not primarily a genetic phenomenon, but rather a result of circumstances and political environment" (John Stone, 1995). Various constructivists have suggested that the desire to build armies and improve military capabilities, the failure of industrialization to create a homogeneous cultural structure and market, and the development of standardized communication systems, all made it possible to imagine and invent communities. (Posen, pp. 80-124)

In Sri Lanka, because of Sri Lanka's ethno-nationalist identity politics, the Muslim community, led by its political elites, has been forced to define itself as an 'other' that is neither Sinhalese nor Tamil but Muslim. M.A. Nuhman (2007) states, "the Muslim identity is a reactive politico-cultural ideology that has been constructed and developed in relation to and as a response to Sinhala and Tamil ethno-nationalistic ideologies". These formations or how Muslims define themselves, are a byproduct of social and political mobilization to secure rights and markets. This mobilization that was born at the start of the 20th century has become more mature as a consequence of the ethnic strife with political representation, Muslim schools and so on (as discussed below). Yet the traditional definition of Muslim does not relate to an ethnic representation but to the religious connotation of someone who has become comfortable with the teachings of Islam and is following them in every aspect of life. Hence in Sri Lanka there is some controversy in determining whether the Sri Lankan Muslim identity is ethnic or

religious. Qadri Ismail (1997) in fact argues that the it has changed from a racial one into a religious one over the past few decades, stating that "the Sri Lankan Muslim social formation 'lost' its ethnicity in the post colonial period or to be precise 'lost' its racial/ethnic identity'."

Hence the situation today in Sri Lanka is that the Muslims are the only Sri Lankan ethnic group bearing a religious rather than a linguistic, ethnic or racial name, i.e. faith is not only a theological marker (a moral motivator) but also an identity marker (a communal galvanizer). Thus this means there remain tensions and fault lines along racial and religious lines. In defining themselves as such, Muslims' identity has been developed not only based on ethnonationalist tendencies but also from a theological and spiritual basis. This has caused some tensions of manifestation and representation especially in trying to navigate the heterogeneity that naturally exists within the Muslim community in Sri Lanka on an ethnic and demographic basis with the homogeneity that is being developed as a discourse on a pan Islamic basis that seeks to discuss the concept of the global Islamic community or *Ummah*.

3.0   State concessions to Sri Lanka Muslim elites

The close links the Muslims had with the Sinhalese in trade and business, and the strategy of political opportunism to win political and social benefits ensured security (mainly from the Tamils) and safeguarded their commercial interests. These benefits prompted the Muslim elite to lean towards the Sinhalese political establishments.

Whilst the cooperation of the Muslim elite with the Sinhalese ruling class won important ministerial portfolios for Muslims in successive governments, the resulting economic and social benefits ensured their freedom to practice their religion (such as to establish mosques and madrasahas, and issue halal food certification). Thus the Muslim masses largely remained untroubled by the conflict (except those in the north and east directly engaged with the Tamil community). By 'appeasing' the Muslims, mainly those outside of the north and east of the country in this manner, the identity of the Muslims was further compounded within a socio-cultural and religious framework.

The identity of Sri Lankan Muslims was further influenced as a result of the global Islamic reformation process that took place, post-Iranian revolution, coupled with Middle Eastern petrodollar funding, spurring large scale movements to spread Islam and migration of people for Middle Eastern employment. It is important to note that the United National Party's economic policies to liberalize the Sri Lankan economy in 1978 opened the doors for economically weaker sections of Muslims to seek job opportunities in the Middle East general iand Saudi Arabia in particular. Our communications with Muslims who found jobs in the Middle Eastern countries suggest that they became more religious when they were in the Middle East. During the eighties, Sri Lankan ethnic conflict between the Tamils and Sinhalese triggered instability and thus seriously destabilized the country. Muslims who live in the North and East confronted challenges. According to Ameerdeen (2006: 7), Eastern Muslims 'offered refuge to the Tamils who were displaced by the onslaught of the security forces. They protected the Tamils, their belongings and even the fighters in times of danger.' Further, studies on the Sri Lanka Muslims maintained that Muslims even subscribed to the Tamil militant ideology and joined the Tamil Tigers' military wing. The Tamil Tigers enjoyed some good support from the Muslim villages and opened branch offices and eventually won popularity among certain sections of the Muslims. During the mid-1980s more than 100 Muslim youth joined the ranks of the Tamil fighters from Eravur to fight the Sri Lanka state and continued to support the Tamil Tigers even after the Tamil Tigers' 'murdering over a hundred surrendered Muslim policemen' (Hoole, 2001). Interests from some Muslim youth in the Tamil struggle to win a separate state alarmed both the Sinhala-dominated government. Muslim politicians-used this situation to gain political mileage and did not want Muslims to be part of Tamil struggle. The position from Muslim politicians with regard to the Tamil quest for separate state was not complicated. They believed that Muslims of Sri Lanka, both elites and masses, should not support the Tamil demand for separation. Muslim politicians' concerns need to be understood in the context of the second order minorities in ethnically and/or religiously divided societies where there is competition for power, land

and markets between powerful ethnic or religious groups. In Sri Lanka, elites representing Muslims (also known as Moors) actively constructed identity based on faith (Islam) for political mobilization.

With emphasis on religious identity now being thrust upon its political and social circles, the Muslim community was able to extract cultural concessions from the state, which only served to harden this 'ethno-religious' identity and provide a solid platform for an Islamic 'exclusivism'. It is this 'exclusivism', which has served to widen the gap between the Muslim community and the Sinhalese Buddhist community.

A recent study by Imtiyaz & Mohamed-Saleem (2015) on post-war Sri Lanka argues that religious tensions, especially between the Buddhists and Muslims, have increased for a variety of reasons including political expediency on the part of the Government, and the growing religiosity and exclusivism of the Muslim community. The coordinated hate campaign developed by Bodhu Bala Sena (BBS), an extremist Sinhalese Buddhist organization, resulted in violence against Muslims in June 2014. BBS has largely targeted symbols of Muslim identity including mosques, halal certification and the women's dress code. Much of BBS's rhetoric has also laid blame at this exclusivity. In retrospective analysis, the actions of the BBS represent backfiring of the cultural state concessions the Muslims had previously won.

Muslims expected peace in post-war Sri Lanka. They celebrated war victory against the Tamil Tigers who expelled entire Muslims of the Northern region with short or no notice in October 1990. However, anti-Muslim activities by Sinhala extremists groups such as BBS shattered Muslim hopes in post-war Sri Lanka. The BBS actively targeted Muslim identity symbols such as mosques. Muslims found they were on the receiving end of political moves in the post-war Sri Lanka.

4.0   Crisis between Tamils and Muslims

In Jaffna, the Tamil heartland, the Muslims had a healthy presence until Oct. 1990 when they were expelled by the LTTE. The Ancient Kingdom of Jaffna, subscribing to Hindu Agamic norms of city architecture had different streets for the different castes. It was a system that was dynamically evolving to meet new situations and like the Goldsmith Street, the Paraya Street and the Drummers' Street, developed a Chonaha Street (i.e. Moor Street) and later a Parangi (Firingi) Street as Muslims and Europeans moved in. It showed how integrated the Muslims had been.

The hierarchically stratified Hindu caste system placed Tamil speaking Muslims and Christians at the bottom although these groups have their own "origin myths" that claimed and explained that they were not low caste. Notwithstanding the truth of the matter, the fact remains that Hindus consider non-Hindus low caste. While peace activists will hark to the ancient presence of Muslims in Jaffna to show good relations, it was never as equals but with a looking down attitude from the majority Hindus. With electoral politics being mooted in late-nineteenth century by the British, all parties emphasized ethnic identity as a means of increasing electoral strengths. Accordingly Tamils emphasized the Tamilness of the Muslims based on the language they speak while Muslim leaders saw themselves as a separate ethnic group based on Islam (although Muslims in neighboring Madras State identified themselves as Tamil) and Arab bloodline. This sowed the seeds of the idea among Tamils that Muslims are not loyal, even traitors, whereas like all politicians they were building and consolidating their own base. Accordingly Tamils said very uncivil things about Muslims. In Jaffna itself, social intercourse between the Tamil Vellalas who dominate Tamil intellectual life and the Muslims was limited except within the realm of service delivery as the Muslims were essentially a service caste to the landowning Vellalas, being their tailors, cobblers, butchers and grocers. At elite schools like St. John's College, the missions had encouraged the admission of targeted castes like Parayas and Palanquin Bearers in the school neighborhood, and also Muslims. By the 1960s, the privatization of schools (and also the creation of Muslim schools as part of cultural concessions to the Muslims) meant that these tailors (and

others) went to government (Muslim) schools and the Muslims at elite schools had become but a handful.

Thus by 1970 there was little in common between Muslims and Tamils in Jaffna except that many older Muslims were stalwarts of the Tamils' Federal Party whilst many others were increasingly voting for Alfred Duraiappah, an independent, business-friendly politician who made deals with the government in power to become mayor of Jaffna.

Enter the Tamil militancy in the 1970s and the recipe was right for the Tamil-Muslim disaster that followed. The Tamil Militants assassinated Alfred Duraiyappah the Mayor of Jaffna. The Muslims were isolated in their cloistered areas (Chonaha Theru, the Grand Bazaar and Small Bazaar). With state violence against Tamils on the rise in the early eighties, Tamils increasingly saw their future in a separate Tamil part of Sri Lanka, either separated from or federated within Sri Lanka. The Muslims whose trade necessitated dealings with the other communities of Sri Lanka were less sanguine about separation whilst those in the parts outside of the north and east, saw themselves very much with the government of Sri Lanka. As Tamil guerrilla operations widened, the army using an ever-wider network of informants was able to mount counter operations. In a time of tension and weakness for Tamils, it was both easy and natural to look for simplistic explanations and solutions: the Muslims were portrayed by the LTTE as the Fifth Column in their midst and ordered out within 24 hours in Oct. 1990. An estimated 60,000 - 90,000 Muslims were expelled from the north. With the Muslims gone for almost 3 decades now, their properties have been encroached on. Given the circumstances of their expulsion, few Muslims have their deeds. Worse, most Tamils are not prepared to cede the enormity underlying what was done to them in the name of Tamil nationalism. To date no evidence has been presented that Muslims were passing on information to the Sri Lankan army but many Tamils are passionately convinced they did and vociferously justify the expulsion as a military necessity.

Now, six years after the war ended in May 2009, Muslims come to Jaffna to inspect their lands but there has been no major effort to reclaim/reoccupy them. Many who were expelled are still in refugee camps in Puttalam. There has been no movement regarding resettlement. The reason is that there is really no exchange between the Tamil and Muslim communities, which is rather surprising because their problems are so similar – the rise of anti Muslim rhetoric and violence as evidenced by the BBS; the inadequate use of the Tamil language, joblessness in the North-East, the poorly developed and inadequately staffed universities of the North-East, etc. Indeed, the common problem of being dispossessed of their lands and the building of Sinhalese settlements has the potential to bring the two communities together but has not except for some movement in securing the chief ministership of the Eastern Provincial Council with the help of Hon. R. Sampanthan, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) leader, who is also said to have campaigned for Muslim candidates in the East because post-LTTE the climate is ripe for fearlessly emphasizing the common interests of the communities.

Sampanthan's intervention is a rare positive sign and shows the rise of moderate forces at the helm of the TNA, which was the creation of the LTTE. The TNA has now moved away from LTTE ideology and is firmly under the leadership of Sampanthan who has kept those with LTTE sympathies in check. M.A. Sumanthiran, MP, a Sampanthan protégé, has been heard vocalizing an apology to the displaced Muslims, stating "the eviction of the Muslim community from the North within 24 hours was nothing but ethnic cleansing." This is a major departure from Tamil silence on that dark LTTE period and offers hope for serious and lasting reconciliation between the two estranged communities.

To bring the two communities together again, the following actions must be undertaken by non-Muslim peace builders:

1) Tamils must show empathy for Muslims concerns for their own safety and the need for devolved government, which are based on the same safety concerns on which Tamil aspirations for safety and devolved government are based.

2) Integrate returning Muslims into A-grade schools in Jaffna so that there is real dialog between the peoples at the educated and intelligentsia levels.

3) Consolidate the joint political work for unity ongoing in the Eastern province.

4) NGO groups ought aggressively to push for the return of agricultural lands under army occupation and help those dispossessed of their lands by treating the problems of the two communities as the same. This involves community work such as in getting land titles.

5) Avoid shallow ideas of inter-religious understanding because the Muslim and Hindu religions are so different that Muslims will resist trying to make out similarities.

6) There should be a credible mechanism to look into accountability of what happened during the conflict period, it should be a combination of both domestic and international to bring some useful recommendations including legal and policy reform and assistance to Muslim victims and implemented in an inclusive manner that factors in the grievances of the Muslims and affected communities, can be an effective tool to bring the transition towards reconciliation.

5.0 Easing tensions between Muslims and Non-Muslims

The homogeneous element (or Ummah as described above) is being seized upon as a negative trend (especially with the BBS) arguing that the 'Islamization' of Sri Lanka opens the door to extremist tendencies. Yet it perhaps can also be a 'saving grace' to see how tensions can be eased by Muslims between Muslims and non-Muslims. In order for this to happen, one must look within the Muslim community, understanding their own traditions, principles and values.

Using the fact that faith is both a moral motivator and theological marker, we can use the concept of a developing Islamic jurisprudence principle, called fiqh al-aqaliyy'at (jurisprudence of minorities). This has been used so far to look at the situation of Muslim minorities living in the West facing the challenges of a secular law and culture as well as issues of identity and citizenship that have taken a turn for the worse in the aftermath of 9/11.

The fiqh (jurisprudence) tradition has engaged in considerable detail with the status of non-Muslim minorities living in Muslim majority societies but not with the position of Muslim minorities residing in non-Muslim majority countries. Large scale migration of Muslims to Western countries as a twentieth century post-colonial phenomenon has for the most part, prompted the rethinking of this condition which has applicability's for the Muslim context in Sri Lanka.

In essence the tradition reaffirms the notion and provides theological paradigms that guide Muslim minorities who are expected to observe the ethical guidelines of Islam and its essentials as well as the guidelines of the Qur'an and Sunnah concerning their relations with the followers of other religions. In short, they must accordingly cultivate mutual respect and friendship with their host communities. Many Muslim scholars of standing have subscribed to the view that Muslims living in non-Muslims majority countries must live as law-abiding citizens. They are also expected to be honest and trustworthy, and remain open to beneficial changes that help them live in peace and harmony.

Fiqh al-aqalliyāt is widely regarded as a new field of study. Yet many scholars who have spoken on the subject have considered it as an extension of the rich edifice of fiqh. Nevertheless, the objectives of fiqh al-aqalliyāt are somewhat more specific due to the new conditions and challenges faced by Muslim minorities and it is important that Islamic texts and scriptures are read and interpreted in the light of historical and contemporary developments.

When tackling newly emerging issues among minorities in quest of a response to the challenges they face, the jurist is advised to pay attention to considerations of public interest (maÎlaÍah) that include the interests of these groups as well as the communities and nations in which they reside. It is also acknowledged that some of the issues faced may need to be addressed in a wider context, even outside the scopes respectively of fiqh and law due to the need to move abreast with the dynamics of

political and economic developments affecting the lives of Muslim minorities. In sum, fiqh al-aqalliyāt would be unable to meet its desired objectives without a degree of openness to the influence of other disciplines and non-fiqh sources, such as sociology, economics, medicine, law and political science. To meet these challenges, Muslim scholars and researchers are similarly advised to take into consideration the higher goals and purposes (maqasÎid) of Shariah, and the resources also of the legal maxims of fiqh. Fiqh of minorities should aim, according to several leading maxims, at bringing ease and relief to minorities to enable them to overcome their difficulties. Muslim minorities should be able not only to preserve their religious identity but also perform their civic duties as good citizens of their respective countries. It is imperative then to vindicate justice and fair dealings as the higher objectives of Islam and the pillars of peace and honorable living for all those who wish to live in peace and harmony with one another.

In this aspect, the second part is to understand the conceptual Islamic framework for peace, which is epitomized from its heritage, and traditions, which can be summarized as reconciliation of hearts. In this manner principles such as stewardship; appreciation of diversity; pursuit of justice; compassion and mercy become important. Tools such as dialogue and mediation can be useful.

Scholars on social constructions argue that identities are not inborn, but they are effectively constructed. In Sri Lanka, Muslim elites successfully led the campaign to win their identity based on Islam during the British colonial period. Such identity constructions gained further political legitimacy since independence. Muslim elites won significant political and religious concessions from the state. It is particularly obvious since 1970. Such concessions were made possible to Muslims mainly to woo Muslim votes and to win Muslim support both at home and abroad to fight the Tamil Tigers. Sri Lanka has been gaining military support from some Muslim countries, particularly As Imtiyaz (2013) pointed, Muslim majority countries such as Pakistan supported Sri Lanka's war against the Tamil Tigers. It is important to note that when India turned down President Rajapakse's request in 2006 for specific arms supply, Pakistan, ever looking for opportunities to embarrass or create trouble for India, immediately saw an opening and rushed US$150 million worth of weapons that included a fleet of battle tanks with heavy guns and an air defense system. For almost five years Pakistan has been supplying weapons and equipment suited for counter-insurgency operations against the Tamil rebels in the north-east. Some of the deadly Pakistani cargo arrives as 'gifts'.

The problems of the second order minorities need to be managed with careful understanding. If those minorities' identity was used by ruling elites during the crisis situation and/or war against the major minority or group which would rebel against the state, ruling elites should not create any conditions for those minorities to lose trust in the system. In Sri Lanka as mentioned above, Muslims are being identified with Islam. There is a likelihood of manipulation of the Muslim identity by external Islamic forces. Moreover, Muslim elites in Sri Lanka need to seek better ways to manage tensions both with Tamils and Sinhalese. Muslim political leaders in Sri Lanka are no exception to Downs' theory that political leaders make choices or 'formulate policies in order to win elections' (Downs, 1957: 28). However, Muslim politicians should avoid manipulating Muslim symbols to win power.

However these have to be rediscovered by the Muslim community in Sri Lanka and contextualized for their own problems. As discussed above, due to the nature of politics and the conflict in Sri Lanka, the Muslim community has been forced to define itself and seek its own discourse. While Muslims are aware of the challenges they face, they have to be able to understand where they have gone wrong. Whilst there is a realization that exclusive social practices and value-practice among Muslims themselves have to be curtailed this has to allow for the beginning of a potential conversation in ensuring that tensions can be alleviated. Understanding better the principles of conflict resolution from within their own traditions whilst looking at jurisprudence theories as a minority could help to answer some of these questions.

6.0   Conclusion:

In Sri Lanka, the process of modernization triggered violence and chaos rather than trust and stability. In deeply divided societies where there is a functioning or competitive electoral democracy that exists, politicians resort to all forms of strategies to win votes. Sri Lanka experiences suggest that Sinhalese leaders formulated some anti- Tamil policies to attract the sympathy of the Sinhalese. The result was violent Tamil mobilization. During the war, Muslim elites and politicians chose to side with the Sinhalese and successive regimes to win their rights and positions. On the other hand, his Tamil polity controlled by the violent Tamil movements denied justice to the Muslims. Thousands of Muslims were expelled forcefully from Jaffna in October 1990; 300 Eastern Muslims were killed at prayer time inside their mosque in 1991 and Muslim wealth confiscated in the Jaffna, Baticolaoa and Amparai districts of the North- Eastern Province. But a conflict resolution process supported by the global community does not give due space to the Muslim representation. As noted (Imtiyaz, 2009) "Muslim elites and intellectuals might have constructed a Muslim identity, but such construction could have made less impact if the Muslims had been treated humanely by the Tamil polity. Therefore, un-making or re-constructing the Muslim identity may not help build peace between the Tamils and Muslims as long as Muslims patch their differences and problems with the Tamils."

Now, war with the Tamil Tigers is over. There is a relative peace in the island, but Tamil opinions argue that the conditions that triggered tensions and war at popular level between the Tamils and Sinhalese as well as Muslims remain unresolved (Interview with seven Tamils living in Toronto, Canada). On the other hand, the Muslim democratic representations need to play 'genuine and responsible' political roles in the national affairs concerning Tamil and Muslim relations. In this regard, Muslim political forces should seek policies both to calm the fears of Muslims concerning the Tamils and to develop cooperation with the Tamils at the elite level to seek a political solution conducive to all. Also, Muslim politicians need to understand the consequences of employing symbolic religious slogans to win the votes of the Muslims who value religious identity over other traits. It is very likely that too much dependency on religion to just win elections could transform the society into the stage where commitments to non-violence can be discouraged. It is important to note that transnational Islamic movements may find Sri Lanka a convenient place for their recruitment. The recent development concerning the death of a Sri Lankan Muslim in Syria shocked Sri Lanka Muslims in particular and Sri Lankans in general. One of Sri Lanka's leading newspapers, The Nation (Jayawardana, The Nation, 2015) reported that the dead fighter, known inside ISIS by his nom de guerre Abu Shuraish Seylani, is thought to be a 37 year old karate master from Galwela, Kandy." He left Sri Lanka last year, 2014, after telling his family that he was going to Turkey to engage in social service work for victims of Syria's civil war. Therefore, it is very important for Muslim politicians not to use religious symbols for their power mobilization. It is the fact that the current world is highly connected by technology and thus people who have access to modern technology would be able to read and to know the trends that take place beyond their own boarders. Generally speaking, Muslims are religiously sensitive. When politicians manipulate those religious sensitivities to win power, politicization of religions can trigger tensions and/or potential vacuum can be created in which political forces both at home and transnational level would find opportunities to gather sympathies at popular level. Sri Lanka needs peace and stability, but societies would confront tensions and polarization if and when politicians continue to use symbols to outbid their opponents in elections or fail to address the grievances of minorities, including the Muslims.

Our study argues that Muslims in Sri Lanka seek to form an identity based on their faith - Islam. During the war, Muslim elites and politicians chose not to support the Tamil demand for separation for obvious political and social reasons   discussed above. On the other hand, the Tamil polity controlled by the violent Tamil movements denied justice to the Muslims. When the LTTE was defeated by the regime in a gruesome war, a section of Muslims celebrated the death of the LTTE leader. But there was frustration and anger among Muslims when Sinhala extremists targeted Muslims in the so-called post-war period.

We argue that there should be conflict resolution strategies applied to the conflict and crisis faced by minorities and the Sinhalese majority. The fears and anxiety of these communities should be addressed in a way that would help build reconciliations. Any future conflict resolution process should give due space to the Muslim representation.

On the other hand, as mentioned by Imtiyaz (2009) the Muslim democratic representations need to play 'genuine and responsible' political roles in the national affairs concerning Tamil and Muslim relations. In this regard, Muslim political forces should seek policies both to calm the fears of Eastern Muslims concerning the Tamils and to develop cooperation with the Tamils at the elite level to seek a political solution. Also, Muslim politicians need to understand the consequences of employing symbolic religious slogans to win the votes of the Muslims who value religious identity over other traits. It is very likely that too much dependency on religion to *just* win elections could transform the society into the stage where commitments to non-violence can be discouraged. It may be hard for political parties to freeze some easy access to power, because they formulate policies. Also, as suggested by the ICG (2007), a democratic Muslim political establishment needs to monitor the activities and behaviors of the Muslim armed groups in the East. If democratic Muslim political representation would fail to deliver the needs of their own constituencies and ease the existing fears among Muslims about the future prospects and mobilization from the Sinhalese and Tamils, Muslim elites and politicians would be blamed for spoiling the opportunity for conflict transformation from tensions to no-tension polity.

7.0   Funding

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