



Coping with A Majoritarian Ethno-Nationalist State

An Analysis of Strategies of Muslim Minority
Leadership in Sri Lanka

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Contents

- Majoritarian Ethno-Nationalism in Sri Lanka: An Overview
- Muslims of Sri Lanka: A Brief Introduction
- Anti-Muslim Violence in Sri Lanka
- The Discourses of the Muslim Leadership on Majoritarian Ethno-Nationalist State
- Conclusion

The Ethno-Nationalism in Sri Lanka: An Overview

- **Damma Deepa** – The Land of Buddhist Philosophy / **Darma Rajya** – The Kingdom of Buddhism / **Sinha-Deepa** – The Island of Sinhala Race
- **Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism (SBN)**
- Sri Lanka is a sacred land where Buddhism is preserved in its pristine form.
- The state shall give foremost preference to Buddhism (art. 9, 2021)
- Emergence of *Political Buddhism*
- Minorities are distorting the purity of the land.
- **SBN is the structural root cause of political marginalization of Minorities.**
- Violence against *Christians (1900-1950), Hindus (1950- 2000), Muslims (2000 onwards)*





Muslims of Sri Lanka: A Brief Introduction

- 8 % of the population (02 Million)
- Sunni Muslims
- Religion as the Identity Maker
- Eastern Sri Lanka consists of the largest percentage of the Muslim population
- Morocco, Yemen and South India

Anti-Muslim Violence in Sri Lanka: Movements and Activism



- *Buddhist Defense Force,*
 - *Movement for Protecting the Sinhala Blood*
 - *Ravana Force*
1. *Racism is legitimate if it is against Muslims*
 2. *Repealing Muslim Personal Law*
 3. *Closing-down Islamic financial institutions*
 4. *Anti - Halal Movement*
 5. *Boycotting Shops owned by Muslims*
 6. *Riots*

Muslim Leadership

1. *Society of Muslim Theologians (ACJU) - 1925*
2. *Muslim Council of Sri Lanka (MCSL) - 2004*
3. *National Shoora Council (NSC) - 2014*

Discourses of Muslim Leadership on Majoritarian Ideology : The Key Finding

- Towards a Strategic Reconciliation between majoritarian ideology and minority aspirations.
- **Accepting the Reality of a Majoritarian State**
 1. *There is a legitimate case for the Sri Lankan state to declare itself as the protector of Buddhism.*
 2. *Bringing the discourse of True Buddhism against Violent Buddhism, which is the source of anti-Muslim violence.*
 3. *Ideology is not the only independent structural factor for anti-Minority policies. Instead, manipulations of politicians/ bureaucrats and geo-politics are primary factors.*
- **Challenging the Practical Implications**
 1. *Demanding the right to religious freedom on the issues of banning face veil, Madrasas etc.*
 2. *Proposing constitutional amendments to protect cultural expressions of minorities..etc*
 3. *Personal Engagement with radical Buddhist nationalist leaders, politicians and movements.*

Conclusion

1. ML thinks that Muslims can win over the rights through reconciliation and engagement rather than radically demanding equality and justice confronting the majoritarian ideology.
2. Contrary to popular wisdom that argues that minorities would challenge the majoritarian ideology in their struggle for equality, an analysis of the case of Sri Lankan Muslim leadership provided an alternative argument. It is that while some communities might challenge majoritarian narratives of the state, others might choose to reconcile with it in convenience of their survival.