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NAVIGATING FAITH, REFORM, AND IDENTITY: ISLAMIC REFORMIST VOICES FROM COLONIAL CEYLON TO CONTEMPORARY SRI LANKA

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Abstract

Existing scholarship on Islamic reformist movements in South Asia has largely overlooked the dynamics within Sri Lanka, focusing primarily on the Indian Subcontinent. This paper addresses this gap by examining various currents of Islamic reform in the country. Specifically, it analyses four key Muslim thinkers who have significantly contributed to the development of Islamic reformist thought in Ceylon/Sri Lanka: Sidde Lebbe, A.M.A. Azeez, Mohamed Shukri, and Mohammed Mansoor. The selection of these thinkers is deliberate, as their intellectual projects represent distinct paradigms of Islamic reform. By situating them within both global Islamic reformist trajectories and local socio-political contexts, this study argues that Islamic reformist thought in Sri Lanka is not merely a passive recipient of Islamic scholarship from the Indian Subcontinent or the Arab world. Instead, it is an evolving tradition that engages in continuous dialogue with both local dynamics and global Islamic thought. Read together, these intellectual trajectories exemplify the diversity and plurality of Sri Lankan reformist Islam, resonating with Khairuddin Aljunied's conceptualization of the 'Islamic reformist mosaic', in which different currents-ranging from rationalist to neo-Sufi to post-Islamist tendencies-come together to enrich and sustain the broader reformist tradition. The study employs a comparative methodology, utilizing both primary and secondary sources for data collection. © 2025 The Royal Society for Asian Affairs

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