

Recent Campaigns against the Muslims in Sri Lanka from Buddhist and Muslim Perspective

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Abstract: Sri Lanka is a diverse country. It is home to many religions, ethnicities and languages with Sinhala-Buddhists being the predominant ethnic group, constituting 70.19% of the total population. The Muslims are the second largest minority in this country. Sri Lanka's historical records undoubtedly prove the once cordial relationship between Buddhists and Muslims. However, the aftermath of civil war (1983-2009) brought about observable tension between these two groups. This is mainly due to recent campaigns by a number of Buddhist nationalist groups that strive to instill Buddhism or Sinhalese nationalism among Buddhists adherents. These groups have been protesting against Muslim social, cultural and religious practices and behaviours such as the issuing of Halal certification, slaughtering of animals for food, conducting prayer services, maintenance of places of worship, etc. On top of that, they have also disseminated misinterpretations about Muslims and their religion, Islam by spreading derogatory speeches among the Buddhists with the intent of splintering the Buddhists and Muslims apart. Bearing in mind the situation stated above, this study attempts to determine the views in regard to recent campaigns through the perspective of Buddhists and Muslims. The results of this study reveal that a quarter of the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka strongly opposes the Buddhist nationalist group's recent protests against the Muslims. Another 25% strongly support these campaigns and the remaining 50% maintain a moderate approach, neither opposing nor supporting the activities of these groups. In the case of the Muslims, even though the Buddhists had attacked some of them, they are still hopeful of reviving their once harmonious relationship.

Key words: Recent campaigns, Muslims, Sri Lanka, Buddhists, perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a multi-religious, social country with members of all communities living in peace and harmony, integrating well with one another socially. Each community practises and preserves its own religious and cultural beliefs while sharing each other's religious and cultural values. The Sinhalese are the main ethnic group in the country, constituting three quarters of the total population. The Sinhala-Buddhists make up 70.19% of this group and speak Sinhala, an Indo-Aryan language. The Tamils make up the second major ethnic group, constituting 15.37% of the population. This group consists of Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils, 12.61% of which are Hindus. Tamils live predominantly in the north-eastern part of the island. The Muslims in Sri Lanka

constitute 9.4% of the country's population and live in various parts of the country. In some regions, Muslims number more than Buddhists and belong to three different ethno-social backgrounds: Sri Lankan Moors, Indian Moors and Malays (Imthiyaz and Mohained, 2015). The Muslims are a multilingual ethnic and religious group and speak Tamil, a Dravidian language.

Sri Lanka has at various times portrayed itself as maintaining inclusive ethno-religious pluralism. There has been a general climate of tolerance and co-existence, such as in the case of local communities where people of different religions and ethnicities have historically co-habited (Dewaraja, 1994). Buddhists and Muslims especially have been closely linked socially and culturally since their settling down in the island more than one thousand years ago. Arab-Muslim traders and local

Muslims have contributed immensely towards the protection and expansion of the Muslim reign during the regime of Buddhist leaders (Dewaraja, 1994). During the 19 and 20th centuries, Muslim leaders and scholars toiled hard for Sri Lanka's independence from colonial rule (Farook, 2014). They protected the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country, irrespective of ethnic, religious and lingual differences. Post-independence, the relationship between Buddhists and Muslims was strong and they shared great mutual respect and understanding (Lebbe, 2010). The Muslims claim they are peaceful one and has maintained societal and ethnic harmonious relations with its neighbours. Furthermore, Muslims have also maintained a very good relationship with Buddhist rulers. This cordial relationship with Buddhists and their rulers puts the Muslim community in the country among the privileged. In fact, it is worth noting that the Muslims in Sri Lanka enjoy considerable fundamental rights as well as socio-cultural and economic privileges over other minorities in other parts of the world.

However, recently in Sri Lanka, especially during the aftermath of its government's victory (1983-2009) in the war against the Liberation Tigers Tamil Elam (LTTE), a series of tense situations had arised, affecting the relationship between the Buddhist and Muslim communities. All this started when Buddhist monkhood organisations such as Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), Sinhala Rawaya (SR), Rawana Balaya (RB) and Laity who make up the Buddhist nationalist groups began to question the ethnic and religious features of the Muslim community. Muslim rights pertaining to religious obligations were questioned endlessly through provocations by respective groups. These groups advocated the establishment of a pure Buddhist raj in Sri Lanka. During their rallies, the most prominent hard-liner groups used coarse, derogatory language to undermine and question Muslims and their religion and spread misunderstanding and misperception about them among the majority Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. There have also been several incidents involving attacks on Muslim religious places of worship which has caused difficulties for Muslims to practise their religio cultural identity, customs and fundamental belief. Talking about this issue, the Muslims have faced a number of challenges in the recent past in terms of anti-Halal (eating according to Shariah) and anti-Hijab (head and face covers) agitations, as well as the destruction and damage of places of worship, hindrance of the call for prayers from being played through loudspeakers, prayer service disruptions, anti-slaughtering movements, anti-Shariah agitations, etc. Furthermore, these groups have

propagated to and advised Buddhists to reduce or avoid socio-cultural and economic interactions as well as harbour any relations with the Muslim community. These incidents have created a tense situation rife with suspicion as well as a feeling of being marginalised among the Muslims, especially those who live in Buddhist-populated areas throughout the country. Moreover, these incidents have contributed to clashes in opinions and misunderstandings, further damaging the once healthy relationship between the Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka. Although, Muslims are seen as having remained largely loyal to the state during the 30 year ethnic conflict and civil war, they are currently expressing fear of religious marginalisation which has increased uncertainty of their co-existence and long-term cordial relationship with other major ethno-religious groups, especially Buddhists.

All these incidents pose a question that to which extend the new re-emergence of extreme anti-Muslims sentiments have impacted on the social and cultural relationship between the Buddhists and the Muslims who have been maintaining historic and cordial relations in Sri Lanka which emphasizes an extensive academic investigation in the process of post-war ethnic and religious reconciliation in Sri Lanka. Since, there are no more academic research conducted on assessing the views in regard to recent campaigns through the perspective of Buddhists and Muslims focusing on the recent development in the ethno-religious politics in Sri Lanka, this research fills this gab by conducting a in-depth study with extensive field survey within selected areas in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study attempts to determine the views of recent campaigns against Muslims instigated by the aforementioned Buddhist nationalist groups during the aftermath of the civil war (1983-2009) in Sri Lanka via an analysis of the Buddhist and Muslim perspectives. In order to achieve the objective of this research, a total of 18 items were used with two questionnaires and these items attempt to examine the views of Buddhists on recent campaigns, specifically about the Buddhist nationalist groups including whether or not they were real representatives, or if they had obtained recognition from Buddhist societies prior to carrying out these campaigns, the purpose behind their campaigns, etc. Additionally, the study also explores the Muslim responses to the campaigns, particularly investigating the purpose behind the campaigns, the Muslim reaction during the campaigns, the efforts undertaken to explain the genuine intentions of Muslims living among the Buddhists, etc.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A questionnaire survey was conducted to ascertain the relationship between Buddhists and Muslims during the aftermath of the recent tensions in Sri Lanka. The survey includes the Buddhist and Muslim populations which resides in 14 major districts in the country, namely Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy, Matale, Kalutara, Matara, Anuradapura, Polonnaruwa, Ratnapura, Kegalle, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Badulla and Moneragala. These districts were selected because they are the few districts that are comprised of a Buddhist majority and a Muslim minority, both of which live together side-by-side. The participants of the survey are the general public and a non-probability, convenience based sampling technique was used in respective districts through the appointment of nominees for each respective district. The participants were selected based on the percentage of population in each district from the total population of Sri Lanka. In order to determine the views on the recent tension, 1219 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 835 Buddhists and 384 Muslims in the 14 districts. About 384 respondents were selected from a total of 1283039 Muslims in the selected districts which is the minimum sample that can be selected from a total population of more than one million, according to the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Moreover, about 835 Buddhist respondents were selected from a total population of 12027469 according to the same table. Two types of questionnaires were prepared separately; one for the Buddhists and another for the Muslims. From this number, only 672 Buddhist and 312 Muslim respondents submitted their questionnaires. The questions were organised into two main parts. Part One includes 10 items in the Buddhist questionnaire and 8 items in the Muslim questionnaires related to the views of both communities. Part Two includes 8 items which are related to the demographic detail of the respondents. The data was then analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Software. The views of the Buddhists and Muslims on the recent tension are presented in detail in the 'findings' segment of the questionnaire. To measure the aforementioned findings summation, frequencies, percentage, mean, mode and standard deviations were calculated from the received questionnaires. The discussion and interpretation uses the 18 questions of measurement involving the questionnaires as this study is a descriptive-type research.

Respondent's demography: The questionnaire yielded information regarding social and demographic variables of Buddhist and Muslim respondents such as age, gender,

marital status, religion, ethnic group, educational background, occupation and residential district. For the purpose of the study, 'age' was divided into six categories, i.e., 20 years old and below (5%), 21-30 (14%), 31-40 (18%), 41-50 (30%), 51-64 (28%) and 65 years old and >5%. Around 70% of the respondents were 31-64 years old, mainly because they are more recognised among the society and are mature in expressing opinions regarding social issues. As per the expectation of the researcher, about 76% of the respondents are 31-64 years. Also, the researcher attempted to acquire an equal amount of male and female participants but ended up with 46.9% male respondents and 53.1% female. The males who responded were about 9% fewer than the females. This shows that the males are not that interested compared to the females when responding to the given questionnaires. This might be attributed to the fact that the males might have been occupied with other matters such as work. Meanwhile, in terms of marital status, the married respondents made up 48.9% of the respondents while single respondents (including single parents and widows) made up 51.1%. In fact, the main objective of the researcher here is to gather at least 60% married respondents for this research, in order to explore balanced factual views on recent campaigns held in Sri Lanka. The reason for this is that, similar to the age factor, married people are more recognised and are given more preference in society. From the results, it could be observed that there is only a slight difference between the number of married and single respondents, i.e., 623 and 596, respectively.

In the questionnaire, the 'education background' study was divided into 5 categories, namely none (41%), primary (11%), secondary (14%), vocational (15%) and university level (19%) with the aim of obtaining more detailed results for this study. Almost half of the respondents in this research are uneducated. This is an advantage, since any misinterpretation of a particular argument or negative stereotype of another society would be believable from an uneducated person's standpoint, mainly because of his/her lack of knowledge in the respective arguments. Therefore, in this research, the objective is to examine the views on recent campaigns including those of uneducated participants. The university-level respondents were allocated 20% of the questionnaire (19% was received), so their views are also considered. About 41% of the responses were from uneducated respondents, while only 19% were from university-level respondents. Similarly, the 'occupations' section were divided into unemployed (19%), self employed (42%), student (24%), private sector (6%) and governmental sector (9%). Since, most Sri Lankans are

self-employed, this has translated to a sizable sample of self-employed people while the second largest consist of unemployed people and people dependent on societies. This data was collected to obtain an overall perception of the recent tensions in Sri Lanka.

Finally, based on the questionnaire survey, the respondents were asked about their residential districts, so that the opinions from various districts in which Buddhists and Muslims live together are also accounted for. A total of 14 districts were considered with big boxes of questionnaires being distributed to the boundaries of particular districts. The questionnaires were distributed based on the percentage of people living in particular districts. A total of 139 out of 160 distributed questionnaires to the Colombo district were completed and sent back to the researcher. In the Monaragala district, a total of 43 out of 44 distributed questionnaires were completed and sent back. From this, it can be seen that the Monaragala respondents showed more interest in responding to the questionnaires and reaching out to the researcher compared to respondents from other districts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recent campaigns against the Muslims; the Buddhist perspective: In this segment, the views of Buddhists on recent tensions instigated by the Buddhist nationalist groups in Sri Lanka are defined. In total, about 10 items were used in the questionnaire and then analysed using simple frequencies and central tendencies (viz., summation, frequency, percentage, mean, mode and standard deviation. The mode of measurement is done by considering how Buddhists and Muslims express their views in regard to recent campaigns, using the following items: campaigns against the Muslims, attacks reflecting the Buddhists as a whole third party initiation, recognition of the Buddhist community, shameful to the Buddhists, Buddhism experiencing disgrace, purpose of campaigns, attempting to verify criticisms, understanding of opponent's religion and obstructions to developing a peaceful co-existence. A more detailed explanation of the Buddhist view on recent tensions are outlined item-by-item below.

In item 1, the respondents were asked whether or not they were accepting of the BNG's campaigns against the Muslims in Sri Lanka in recent years. The result (Table 1) shows that about 87.1% (585 respondents) strongly agreed with the actions of the BNGs in recent times while just 10% (67 respondents) disagreed. The researcher was hard-pressed to find respondents who 'strongly disagreed' with this item. At the same time, about 16 respondents (2.4%) expressed uncertainty about the

Table 1: Campaigns against the Muslims

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	585	87.1	1.3527	1.0000	0.9357
Agree	4	0.6			
Undecided	16	2.4			
Disagree	67	10.0			
Total	672	100.0			

campaigns against the Muslims. Meanwhile, five respondents in particular gave additional comments stating that they had not been misguided nor had been wrongly misled by any groups whether it be Buddhists or Muslims, in regard to Muslims and their religion in Sri Lanka recently. According to these results, it can be concluded that most of the Buddhists in this study's sample have accepted the fact that the minority Muslims have been under attack by the Buddhist monks and lay people within the past five years. Moreover, in the data set, all means, modes and standard deviations represent the most typical values. The results further confirmed a mean value of 1.3527 which slightly favours the agreement of the respondents. Also, the mode which is the highest frequent score, is 1.0000 which accurately reflects the strong agreement of the respondents with Item 1. At the same time, the value of standard deviation (0.9357) is closely deviated to the mean score. Moreover, there could be seen various views in previous studies on carrying out the severe attacks against the Muslims in recent Sri Lanka. Herath and Rambukwella discovered that the BNGs are seen as a form of hostility or prejudice against Muslims and Islam in most obvious way. For instance, in Dambulla on Friday the 20th of April 2012 a tense situation arose as regular Friday prayer at the mosque was prevented by a gang led by Buddhist monks. Highlighting the danger veteran leftist politician and former minister of national languages and social integration Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara said that "the global revolt against Muslim communities around the world led by imperialistic nations is raising its ugly head in Sri Lanka too. Certain groups of people in this country are opposing the Muslim minority, hiding behind the facade of Buddhism adding problems among communities when there are better ways to resolve any difference" (Farook, 2014). Therefore, the statistics of this field survey and public statements confirm the views of Buddhists that they strongly agree that the Muslims and their religion, Islam have been under attack by the monkhood and lay people for 5 years time in Sri Lanka.

Item 2 requested the respondents to verify whether or not they thought that the protests against the Muslims instigated by the BNGs reflected the sentiments of the entire Buddhist society in Sri Lanka, i.e., whether the campaigns had the full backing of the entire Buddhist community. According to the result (Table 2) about 81.7%

Table 2: Campaigns reflecting the Buddhists as a whole

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Agree	12	1.8	4.6920	5.0000	0.7068
Undecided	60	8.9			
Disagree	51	7.6			
Strongly disagree	549	81.7			
Total	672	100.0			

of the Buddhists strongly reject this statement. They believe these campaigns have not received the full backing of the entire Buddhist community. Only 1.8% agreed with this statement and the remaining were ‘undecided’ (8.9%) and in disagreement (7.6%), respectively. Also, the mean value tends toward strong disagreement and the mode reflects a value of 5.0000 which is the highest frequent score in the data. Meanwhile, the average deviation between the mean and the frequencies is 0.7068 which is quite close. In addition, found that this protest is an isolated event led by a group of Extremists, an event which was easily quell as it did not represent the sentiments of the majority Buddhist populace. Therefore, according to the results above, it has proven that the protests did not receive the full backing or support of entire Buddhist community. Also, they were adamant in that they would not recognise these campaigns at all. So, the group protests have no real substantial societal recognition even among their own people and their actions are therefore null and void in the post-war context of Sri Lanka.

The previous questions prove that these campaigns did not receive the full backing of the entire Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. Therefore, item 3 requests the respondents to verify whether or not they think that these campaigns were conducted by a third party and that the BNGs were wrongfully implicated in the process. In fact, this item attempts to discover if these campaigns had been carried out by a third party who are not true members of the Buddhist community or true followers of Buddhism. According to the result (Table 3), it could be observed that the respondents were reluctant in expressing strong agreement or disagreement. 93 (13.8%) respondents strongly agreed and another 90 (13.4%) merely agreed with this statement. Altogether, more than a quarter (27.2%) of the respondents believe that the campaigns are largely a third party effort that aims to sow dissension among two closely intertwined communities. So this quarter of Buddhists do not wish to recognise BNGs as members of the Buddhist community because of their past and recent atrocities against the Muslims in Sri Lanka. The decision further confirmed with Yehiya (2013) argument that these protests have been undertaken by a third force which local, regional or global and not likely belongs to Buddhist community and desires to attack the

Table 3: Third party initiation

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	93	13.8	2.8259	3.0000	0.9741
Agree	90	13.4			
Undecided	348	51.8			
Disagree	123	18.3			
Strongly disagree	18	2.7			
Total	672	100.0			

Table 4: Recognition of the Buddhist community as a whole

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	3	0.4	3.8080	5.0000	1.0880
Agree	87	12.9			
Undecided	195	29.0			
Disagree	138	20.5			
Strongly disagree	249	37.1			
Total	672	100.0			

asymmetrical power balance that buttresses Buddhism and Sri Lanka. Besides that, more than half (51.8%) of the respondents were uncertain and had no clear idea about the issue. However, about 18 (2.7%) respondents strongly disagreed and another 123 (18.3%) merely agreed with the statement that these campaigns have been carried out with the support of the entire Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. The likely reason for this is that they are extremely patriotic towards or ethnically conscious of their Buddhist community or religion, Buddhism. These people hate the idea of betraying their community to non-Buddhists. Based on the results, since the mean value (2.8259) tends to quite closely move to the ‘undecided’ point and the highest frequent score is 3.0000, item 3 can be considered as ‘undecided’ as a whole.

Item 4 seeks to determine whether or not the respondents feel that the Buddhist community as a whole recognises the BNGs who have instigated the recent campaigns against the Muslims in Sri Lanka. The result (Table 4) shows that more than half of the respondents (57.6%) on behalf of the entire Buddhist community refuse to recognise the groups that have instigated the attacks. About 37.1% respondents strongly expressed that the Buddhists have not recognised the attacks against the Muslim minority in recent years. Also, 29% of the people were uncertain of the Buddhist community’s recognition towards these groups. Only 3 respondents (0.4%) strongly agreed and another 87 (12.9%) merely agreed with the statement. Since only about 90 out of 672 respondents perceive that the entire Buddhist community formally recognises these protests, it can be concluded that most of the Buddhists do not recognise the attacks as something they condone as a community. In addition, Yehiya (2013) argue that the BNGs have not been recognized and not supported by the Buddhists as a whole to act against the Muslims because they believe that Buddhists had a tight attachment with Muslims, since

Table 5: Shameful to the buddhist community

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	27	4.0	3.1562	3.0000	1.0212
Agree	144	21.4			
Undecided	279	41.5			
Disagree	141	21.0			
Strongly disagree	81	12.1			
Total	672	100.0			

historical time in this island and the Buddhists did not desire to abandon it forever. So the scholars expressed that this is a number of groups which isolated or not really associated with the Buddhist community. The above decision is further confirmed with a mean value of 3.8080 which tends to ‘agreement’ among the respondents. The data also shows that the highest frequent score is 5.0000. Therefore, according to the Buddhist point of view, the majority of them do not recognise or condone the BNG’s protests against the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka.

In Item 5, respondents were asked whether or not the Buddhist community felt ashamed of the recent protests instigated by Buddhist nationalist groups, against the Muslims who are part of their community. According to the result (Table 5) a quarter (25.4%) of the Buddhists agreed that the Buddhist community are ashamed of these campaigns. Rifai states that as to support the above result that “BNGs not only going to tarnish good name of the country but also good name of majority of Buddhists religious leadership as well.” Also, about 279 (41.4%) of the respondents expressed uncertainty, hence could not provide an exact opinion about the statement. About 222 (33.1%) of the Buddhists have disagreed with the statement. Also, for this variable, since the mean value (3.1562) tends to stay at the ‘undecided’ point and the highest frequent score is 3.0000, the respondents on average are not able to express a clear opinion about item 5, as they are still undecided. Some respondents also volunteered additional views on this statement. A respondent from the Monaragala District said that, “It is not necessary for the Buddhist community to feel ashamed of these campaigns because the BNGs have made great efforts to strengthen Buddhism’s hold in Sri Lanka.” Another respondent from Colombo stated that, “Only the groups responsible should be ashamed of their actions and not the community as a whole.” A respondent from the same district added, “Aren’t they nearly done with this whole thing? They are guiding the Buddhists toward a straight path after all.” Another respondent stressed that, “The Buddhist groups are not trying to rile up other communities but the researcher is certainly riling up the Buddhist community just by asking this type of question.” The above all statements have supported

Table 6: Buddhism experiencing corruption or disgrace

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	15	2.2	3.2009	3.0000	0.9872
Agree	129	19.2			
Undecided	333	49.6			
Disagree	96	14.3			
Strongly disagree	99	14.7			
Total	672	100.0			

to the disagreement that the Buddhists are ashamed of these protests. A respondent from Puttlam District points out, “I cannot condone certain ideas and behaviours of the BNGs that do not represent the Buddhist community. However, it is not wrong to rise up and defend Buddhism. When it comes to this, their approach is acceptable. At the same time, denouncing or misinterpreting other religions like Islam should not be allowed.” In fact, the above statement has indicated that the Buddhists are ashamed with worse activities of BNGs undertook in recent time in Sri Lanka. Hence, based on the survey results, nearly 50% of the Buddhists are of a moderate view in that that they do not really feel ashamed of these campaigns against the Muslims. At the same time, a quarter of Buddhists feel ashamed and another quarter do not.

Item 6 investigates the respondents on whether or not they feel that the Buddhism religion has become corrupt and disgraced as a result of the campaigns against the Muslims in Sri Lanka. According to the result (Table 6) like the previous item, half of the respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the statement, while less than a quarter of them agreed. About 29% felt that Buddhism had not been corrupted or disgraced because of the recent events against the Muslims. Approximately 50% of the respondents had no clear idea or notion about the issue, while around 22% of them gave negative responses. The mode value (3.0000) accurately reflects the ‘undecided’ feeling of respondents regarding the statement, while the mean value points to the same thing. In fact, it is possible for followers to keep their religion corruption-free, specifically the leaders. These leaders have an enormous responsibility to retain the integrity of their religion, especially positioning it in a positive light in the minds of its adherents and other religious followers. However, in the case of Sri Lanka, a group of monks are leading the laity and Buddhists in rallies and protests against the Muslims (Farook, 2014). Senior lecturer of University of Jayewardenepura Ven. Dambara Amila Thero criticizes in a Media conference that “due to the atrocity of a few Buddhist monks the Buddhism religion has been humiliated, disgraced and corrupted in the current context of Sri Lanka. The behaviours of a few who with monk’s orange robes and who pretend as Buddhist monks themselves have caused stigma to

Table 7: Purpose of campaigns

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	72	10.7	2.9732	3.0000	0.9914
Agree	99	14.7			
Undecided	300	44.6			
Disagree	177	26.3			
Strongly disagree	24	3.6			
Total	672	100.0			

Therawada Buddhism which preserved for 2500 year. So it has to be removed their robes of monkhood and should be degrade their status of it. The Buddhists here have therefore been misguided by part of this monkhood and have been initiated into their folds with the aim of propagating Buddhism-nationalism among them. There are also a few Buddhist adherents who have been thoroughly brainwashed by the monkhood. Thus, it is impossible to decide whether or not the adherents have managed to safeguard the integrity of their religion since they might have been misled from the true path of Buddhism.

In item 7, the aim is to find the extent to which the respondents believe that these campaigns have been intentionally carried out by a segment of monkhood with the purpose of splintering Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka apart, when once previously they had lived in harmony together. Table 7 elucidates that about a quarter or 25.4% of the respondents agreed with the statement, selecting ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’. This result further confirmed with Yehiya (2013) argument through the Muslim’s point of view that these protests have been undertaken by a third force with the purpose of enfeebling Sri Lanka by creating divisions between well bonded Muslims and Buddhists to garner some individuals own advantages. Also today Buddhism politicized as a launch for personal growth of political elites and the Buddhism is coming to be seen as the vehicle of the corrupt in Sri Lanka (Yehiya, 2013). About 44.6% said that they did not have a perfect opinion about it. Besides that, more than a quarter or 29.9% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, expressing a respondent from Colombo district that, “The Buddhist nationalist groups may have less than honourable intentions towards this issue but they have been at the forefront of securing our religion (Buddhism) in Sri Lanka.” Three respondents gave additional justifications. Moreover, since the mean value (2.9732) is close to being “undecided” and the mode accurately reflects the same, it can be concluded that the majority of Buddhists in Sri Lanka have retained a moderate view on the purpose behind the campaigns conducted by BNGs.

Item 8 discovers the percentage of Buddhist respondents who have attempted to verify the criticisms towards Muslims and Islam, recently directed at them by

Table 8: Attempting to verify criticisms

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	12	1.8	3.4643	2.0000	1.2251
Agree	204	30.4			
Undecided	96	14.3			
Disagree	180	26.8			
Strongly disagree	180	26.8			
Total	672	100.0			

Table 9: Understanding of opponent’s religion

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	39	5.8	3.0000	2.0000	1.1308
Agree	234	34.8			
Undecided	165	24.6			
Disagree	156	23.2			
Strongly disagree	78	11.6			
Total	672	100.0			

the BNGs in Sri Lanka through rallies and the Media. Table 8 shows that about 32.2% (206) of the respondents attempted to verify the criticisms through different ways such as with known Muslims, friends and through the Media. Also, about 14.4% (96) of them could not exactly say that they had attempted to verify the criticisms or not and, more than half of the Buddhists (53.6%) did not even try to verify the criticisms propagated by the above groups. Further, the mean value (3.4643) normally tends to disagreement of the respondents towards this statement. It is important to note that by not even trying, we do not mean that the respondents are suspicious of, or believe in the criticism because a number of respondents might simply have been uninterested to verify such criticism. Also, in this data set, since the mode accurately shows that the highest frequent score is 2.0000, then it is possible to assume that a sizable amount of Buddhists have attempted to verify the criticisms towards the Muslims and their religion, Islam, directed to them by BNGs in recent years.

In recent times, the BNGs have spread misinterpretations about the Muslims and their religion, Islam among Buddhists through the Media and organised rallies (Farook, 2014). For instance, a Thero (monk elder) spoke out at a Buddhist meeting that at Muslim-owned tea shops, the tea makers usually spit saliva thrice into tea cups which specifically prepared for Buddhists. Also another monk even misinterpreted the method of slaughtering bulls or cows for their meat according to Shariah, i.e., the Muslims must slaughter the animal whilst sitting on a warmed iron plate without sandals and with keeping the same above the head. Thus, item 9 requests the respondents to verify whether or not they understood the aforementioned misinterpretations. So, the (Table 9) describes that >40% of the Buddhist respondents understood the wide-reaching Islamic law and Muslim habits in Sri Lanka, especially the ones that had been incorrectly disseminated among them by the

Table 10: Obstructions to developing a peaceful co-existence

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	90	13.4	2.9286	3.0000	1.0716
Agree	99	14.7			
Undecided	294	43.8			
Disagree	147	21.9			
Strongly disagree	42	6.3			
Total	672	100.0			

BNGs. Therefore, 40% of the Buddhist respondents still have a clear understanding of Muslims and their religion. Also they still have a favourable opinion on Islam and Muslims in Sri Lanka and about 73% percent of them have interests to learn Islam. The same result has been proved with the highest frequent score as well. However, about 11.6% have a severe lack of understanding, while another 23.2% have no knowledge about it at all. This situation has proved with another research which done in Monaragala District that the Buddhists didn't have knowledge of other religions, especially about Islam. Hence, the Muslims have a responsibility to enlighten the Buddhists and make them realise the misperceptions propagated by the Buddhist nationalist groups using the Media and direct methods.

In item 10, respondents were asked whether or not they thought the campaigns instigated by the BNGs were significant barriers to developing a peaceful co-existence among the communities in Sri Lanka. Table 10 describes that, in fact, 28.1% (189) of the respondents agreed and among them 13.4% (90) strongly felt that these events have become significant barriers to the advancement of peace and social harmony within Sri Lanka. Dewasiri argues that the clergie's aggressive campaigns have been potentially dangerous for the peaceful co-existence of different religious groups in Sri Lanka. Also he considered the counter debate which held in 2003 between influential Muslim Minister late M.H.M. Ashraff and popular monk Gangodavila Soma Thero, has contributed certain extern as rootstock to whip up anti-Muslim campaigns in post-war Sri Lanka. CPA report considered this Buddhist nationalism upsurge is a larger hurdle undertaking the peace process within the country. However, about 28.2% of them stressed that the aforementioned campaigns could not be seen as barriers to advancing the peace among the communities. So these Buddhists felt that the BNGs have made great efforts to secure the Buddhism's hold in this country, but they are not trying to rile up other communities or faiths. Besides that, about 43.8% of the respondents had no clear opinion about the statement. Also, the values of mean (2.9286) and mode (3.0000) show that the respondents have a moderate opinion regarding this statement.

Table 11: Muslims and their religion under attack

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	255	81.7	1.4327	1.0000	1.00575
Agree	16	5.1			
Undecided	8	2.6			
Disagree	29	9.3			
Strongly disagree	4	1.3			
Total	312	100.0			

Recent campaigns in Sri Lanka; the Muslim perspective:

Since the main objective of this study is to examine the views of Buddhists and Muslims on the recent tension in Sri Lanka, this section covers the Muslim's point of view on respective events. In this study, 8 items were used in total to investigate the views of them including how they have coped with the attacks, how they view the recent tensions, what they feel about their fellow Buddhists, etc. Specifically, the mode of measurement is done by considering how the Muslims express their views on recent campaigns using the following items: Muslims and their religion under attack, representatives of the Buddhist society, breaking the communities apart, purpose behind recent campaigns, survival of Muslims in the motherland, thoughts about providing the proper explanations, evidence of efforts to explain Muslim genuineness and obstructions to developing a peaceful co-existence. A more detailed explanation of the Muslim views on the recent tensions are outlined item-by-item below.

Item 1 seeks to determine whether or not the respondents noticed that the Sri Lankan Muslim community including their religion and culture have recently been under attack by the Buddhist nationalist groups. Table 11 shows that about 81.7% of the respondents have noticed that they are under attack, while 9.3% of the respondents have not noticed. The mode value of 1.0000 which is the highest frequent score in this variable and the mean value (1.4327) tend to agreement among the respondents with the statement. Most of the writings prove the situation featured currently to the Muslims in Sri Lanka, especially Farook (2014), Imtiyaz and Mohamed (2015). Dewasiri argues that these attacks against the Muslims apparently isolated occurrences can very well be located in the context of the "Buddhist revival" that has been underway in the last decade and half in Sri Lanka. This revival upsurges of extreme Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that is very well supported by members of these new social layers. Imtiyaz and Mohamed (2015) discovered that in their field survey, most of the Muslims are being targeted by the Sinhala-Buddhists extremist forces especially who have close links with the Buddhist traders in the areas where Sinhalese are majority. So, the Muslims of Sri Lanka have

Table 12: Representatives of the Buddhist society

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	6	1.9	4.7372	5.0000	0.7784
Agree	2	0.6			
Undecided	22	7.1			
Disagree	8	2.6			
Strongly disagree	274	87.8			
Total	312	100.0			

yet to impart the true reality of the campaigns they had been facing in the last five years to the Media and international audience. However, they do plan to reconcile with the Buddhists (Imtiyaz and Mohamed, 2015).

Item 2 evaluates the respondent’s opinion on whether or not they identify members of the BNGs as real representatives of the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. Table 12 shows that about 87.8% of the respondents were against recognising these groups as true members of the Buddhist community. According to the result, only 8 people acknowledged the groups as representatives of the Buddhist community. The mean value (4.7372) reflects the strong agreement between the respondents in that they do not recognise the BNGs as real representatives of the Buddhist community. Also, the highest frequent score i.e. the mode of 5.0000 and the standard deviation strongly supports this finding as well. In fact, the BNGs are not truly associated with the Buddhist community, but they are aliens who misguided with a global power such as Western or Israel with the purpose of making gap among the societies (Farook, 2014; Yehiya, 2013). The Muslims are probably of this opinion because in recent times, the behaviours and the actions of a segment of monkhood on Sri Lanka have contradicted the teachings of Buddhism, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, they are averse to recognising these groups as actual members of the Buddhist community.

Item 3 attempts to investigate the Muslim point of view on recent campaigns whether or not these were initiated to create dissension that leads to discord between the communities in Sri Lanka. According to Table 13, almost all of the respondents (89.1%) expressed that the campaigns were definitely instigated to drive the communities apart, especially the Buddhists and the Muslims. The mean value (1.2564) also tends to respondent’s agreement with the statement and the mode strongly reflects the highest frequency which is 1.0000. Eastern Muslim University Teacher’s Association for Human Rights has reported to the Media that, “the aftermath of the war in the country, the Buddhist extremist forces like Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) and Sinhala Ravaya (SR) whipping up anti-Muslim campaign or hysteria with the tacit approval of the government aims at wrecking the cordial and congenial relationship between

Table 13: Breaking the communities apart

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	278	89.1	1.2564	1.0000	0.7764
Agree	4	1.3			
Undecided	16	5.1			
Disagree	12	3.8			
Strongly disagree	2	0.6			
Total	312	100.0			

Table 14: The purpose behind recent campaigns

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	246	78.8	1.4936	1.0000	1.1982
Agree	12	3.8			
Undecided	20	6.4			
Disagree	34	10.9			
Total	312	100.0			

Sinhala-Buddhists and Muslims. Also, at Aluthgama and Beruwela incident the BBS general secretary Gnanasara Thero asked his audience to fight against Muslim minority. He said in his speech during respective incident that “if one marakkalaya (Muslim) lays a hand on not a monk but at least on a Sinhalese (Buddhist) that will be the end of all of them” to a rousing and cheering crowd. So it can be easily understood with his inciteful, fear mongering speeches above, the purposes behind these campaigns that triggering to fight the Buddhists with the Muslims. In fact, the BNGs have succeeded with it’s goal of creating fault lines between theses societies that already integrated in terms of relationship. Therefore, according to the results, it can be assumed that the Muslims duly recognise the division among these two societies as a result of these campaigns and they have also attempted to circumvent the negative impacts of these campaigns on the public.

Item 4 requests the respondents to verify whether or not they think that these campaigns are being created for the apparent purpose of tearing down the cordial relationship between Buddhists and Muslims. Table 14 describes that about 78.8% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. They obviously believe that these campaigns have a hidden agenda which is to destroy the harmonious Buddhist-Muslim relationship via propagation of Buddhist or Sinhala-nationalism among the Buddhists in general (Fawsar, 2013). Only about 10.9% of the Muslims disagreed with the statement and none strongly disagreed. The mean value of this variable (1.4936) tends to respondent’s agreement with the statement supported by the highest frequent value of 1.0000. Also, the above result confirmed with Fazil’s finding that there are majority ruling class and radical movements behind this attack, especially BBS which create turbulent nature among Buddhists and Muslims through questioning Muslim’s fundamental rights. Hence, according to the results, the Muslims perceive these

Table 15: Survival of Muslims in the motherland

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	272	87.2	1.3462	1.0000	0.92590
Agree	2	0.6			
Undecided	8	2.6			
Disagree	30	9.6			
Total	312	100.0			

campaigns as not being instigated by the Buddhist community as a whole. On the contrary, they are carried out by third parties with a hidden agenda-tearing down the cordiality which is to earn the goodwill of particular politicians by instilling Sinhala-nationalism among the Buddhists in Sri Lanka (Fawsar, 2013).

Item 5 asks the respondents to verify whether or not they feel that these campaigns would threaten the survival of Muslims in their mother land, Sri Lanka. Table 15 shows that 87.2% of the respondents realise that these campaigns have shaken and threatened the existence of Muslims in Sri Lanka while only 9.6% of them had no realisation of this. The mean value (1.3462) slightly tends to respondent agreement and the mode (1.0000) accurately reflects the highest frequent score which also correlates to a strong agreement between the respondents. Nowadays in Sri Lanka the life of Muslims has been in danger because of violence against them (Imtiyaz and Mohamed, 2015). Besides that, the historical origins and antiquities of Muslim people have been badly questioned by the BNGs. Some deliberate attempts have been made to create doubt and suspicion about historical origins of the Muslims. Also a strange mystery has been created in the mind of the Buddhists that minority people do not belong to this island and this country belongs only to the majority people alone. Therefore, according to the results, it can be understandable that the Muslims in Sri Lanka now live in fear because of these campaigns that target them.

The aim of item 6 is to determine the extent to which the respondents intend to provide proper explanations to the Buddhist public thereby removing the misinterpretations about Muslims and their religion, disseminated by the BNGs. Table 16 expresses that 91.7% of the Muslims intend to remove the misunderstandings that prevail among the Buddhists. About 63.5% strongly intend to eliminate these misinterpretations, while the rest have not had the luxury to think about it. The mean value (1.5192) tends to agreement between the respondents, while the highest frequent score of 1.0000 also supports this finding. In addition, the standard deviation (0.8370) is very close to the mean value, so it can be concluded that the Muslims do intend to peacefully address these misunderstandings with the Buddhists instead of angering them, even if a segment of Buddhists had

Table 16: Thoughts about providing the proper explanations

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	198	63.5	1.5192	1.0000	0.8370
Agree	88	28.2			
Undecided	4	1.3			
Disagree	22	7.1			
Total	312	100.0			

Table 17: Evidence of efforts to explain Muslim genuineness

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	16	5.1	2.6603	2.0000	1.0175
Agree	182	58.3			
Neutral	8	2.6			
Disagree	104	33.3			
Strongly disagree	2	0.6			
Total	312	100.0			

instigated these campaigns in the first place. This is a noble feeling and sentiment from the Muslim side. Additionally, they want All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU) to take initiatives to expose the truth behind the anti-Muslim violence engineered by the BNGs among Buddhists because the BNGs financially supported by the western forces and Zionist elements to harm Muslims and to destabilize the state and peace among the communities (Imtiyaz and Mohamed, 2015). From their views, it can clearly be seen that one thing the Muslims stubbornly hold on to is the idea of not letting go of their harmonious relationship with the Buddhists despite everything that has happened or will happen. They are also ever ready to realign the negative Buddhist sentiment and foster a better relationship with them.

In item 7, respondents are asked whether or not they had expended any effort to explain the genuineness of Muslims and their religion, Islam, toward the Buddhists during these campaigns. The results (Table 17) describe that 63.4% of the Muslim respondents had made as much effort as they could to explain the genuineness and loyalty of Muslims to the Buddhists through direct speeches, personal approaches, etc. Among them about 58.5% of the Muslims had worked hard to eradicate the suspicions and allegations towards Muslims and their religion. Significantly, Muslim journalists in Sri Lanka have worked hard through the news Media to prove Muslim's loyalty to this country which recorded throughout the history. And also Muslim religious and social organizations have sufficiently contributed to accomplish the same among the Buddhists such as ACJU, SLTJ and the Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum. However, one-thirds of the Muslims had not put in any effort to clarify the misinterpretations that prevail among the Buddhists. In addition, the mode for this study accurately reflects the highest frequent score (2.0000) which points towards agreement between the

Table 18: Obstructions to developing a peaceful co-existence

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Mode	SD
Strongly agree	282	90.4	1.1731	1.0000	0.5801
Agree	12	3.8			
Neutral	12	3.8			
Disagree	6	1.9			
Total	312	100.0			
Strongly agree	282	90.4			

respondents. Therefore, it can be assumed that the majority of Muslims in Sri Lanka favour maintaining a better relationship with the Buddhists at all times without any interruptions.

The last item 8 attempts to find out the extent to which the respondents view the campaigns as obstructions to developing peace and co-existence among the communities in Sri Lanka. Table 18 shows that about 90.4% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement in that they looked at these campaigns as barriers to building a peaceful co-existence among the communities whereas 3.8% of them simply agreed. Only 1.9% of Muslims feel that these campaigns are not barriers to peace in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this result shows the strong support of Muslims towards a peaceful coexistence with Buddhists by avoiding controversial problems in the country. It can also be observed that the Muslims are upset with the recent conflict occurring in Sri Lanka (Imtiyaz and Mohamed, 2015). The mean value (1.1731) points toward a strong agreement between the respondents with the mode (1.0000) reflecting the highest frequent score. The standard deviation (0.5801) strongly supports this finding as well. The BNGs have instigated wide-reaching campaigns against the Muslims by attacking their places of worship, questioning Halal certifications, destroying Muslim-owned businesses, attempting to create an anti-slaughtering environment and so on (Farook, 2014). Additionally, they have also conducted a number of pocket meetings, Buddhist conferences and road rallies in order to recruit more Buddhists to their cause which is to pit the Buddhists against the Muslims, using a powerful tool in the form of Buddhists or Sinhalese (race) nationalism. Therefore, the aforementioned activities carried out by certain segments of the monkhood are the worst barriers to advancing peace and social harmony among the communities in Sri Lanka.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, almost all of the Buddhists in this study's sample have accepted that the campaigns against the Muslims in recent years had been carried out by a segment of the monkhood and laity. In the same vein, the Buddhist respondents do not view these campaigns as

actions that receive the full backing of the entire Buddhist community, hence these campaigns do not represent them. Besides that, they hesitated to come to an effective decision as to who are the prime instigators and what their specific reasons are behind these recent campaigns. Also, they were reluctant to express their sentiments regarding whether or not these campaigns have brought shame and humiliation to the Buddhists and their religion as a whole, obstructing the peaceful co-existence they had with the Muslims. This is the nature of the response from about 50% of the Buddhist respondents in this study. According to this result, it can be assumed that the same number of Buddhists maintain a moderate view in expressing their opinions regarding the campaigns, supporting neither the Muslims nor the Buddhist nationalist groups. Of note are the significant number of Buddhists who have attempted to verify the misinterpretations of Muslim religious practices and true nature of the Islamic religion. In fact, a quarter of Buddhists have reacted very strongly against the recent damaging activities of the Buddhist nationalist groups in Sri Lanka. These are the Buddhists who intend to maintain a better relationship with Muslims. They aim to denounce the activities of the Buddhist nationalist groups against the Muslims. Nevertheless, a quarter of them still strongly support the activities of these groups. Therefore, it can be assumed that this particular group of people are the fervent supporters of Buddhist nationalist groups that participate in rallies, conferences and pocket meetings. In short, these people do not wish to maintain good ties with the Muslims in Sri Lanka.

The Muslims in this study have various opinions of the recent campaigns. Firstly, the Muslims as a whole look forward to exposing the current tense situation instigated by a segment of monkhood and laity that is still going on in Sri Lanka. The Muslims feel that these groups should not be acknowledged as part of the Buddhist community since they commit atrocious acts against Muslims. According to them, these groups have worked hard to divide and stop interactions between Buddhists and Muslims by instigating campaigns that in still Buddhism or Sinhalese nationalism into the minds of Buddhist adherents in Sri Lanka, soon after the war against the Liberation Tigers Tamil Elam (LTTE). In addition, the Muslims are apprehensive and stressed as they can no longer survive in Sri Lanka as a result of these campaigns since they have been treated very badly, their behaviour and religion misinterpreted through the Media and rallies. Once, a Buddhist Thero declared in a Buddhist conference that all the Muslims are Arab progenies, so they should go back to their Arab ancestors in Saudi Arabia. Besides that, the Muslims point out that these

campaigns are definitely obstructions to a peaceful co-existence among the communities, especially among the Buddhists and Muslims. Remarkably, even with the Buddhist nationalist group's attacks on them, the Muslims still intend to dispel the misunderstandings that have spread in the Buddhist communities via sufficient explanations and various efforts, so as to provide clarity that in Sri Lanka, Muslims and their religion, Islam have genuine intentions towards the prosperity of the country.

Indeed, the end of the 30 year old civil war was a significant opportunity for the country to build-up a peaceful co-existence among its various societies and to carry development projects within the country. Nevertheless there are a range of campaigns that have hindered these advancements within the country. Therefore, these campaigns have been threats to the rule of law and the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Sri Lankan constitution and have threatened religious and ethnic co-existence in the country. If we express this in a different manner, there exists a situation established within the country that every society could not adhere to its own religious and cultural activities as its fundamental right, especially the religious ministries of the country. Also, these campaigns always recall the fears on these societies in relation to advancing their religious practices and trading activities, since the post-war period, onwards. The Muslims have been in a situation that could not be contributed to the country's economic development because their commercial activities are under threat via the consequence of the recent campaigns. Furthermore, a probability exists that the mentioned 50% Buddhists who expressed their views moderately on the campaigns will convert as supporters and followers of the Buddhist nationalist groups and will act against the Muslim

minority. Therefore, at that point, unrest among the societies will intensify and will result in conflict among these societies. Thus, policy makers, the government and related authorities should pay great concern toward these ongoing issues and should take action to maintain a reconciled and peaceful nature within the country.

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