University of Jaffna

Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan Memorial Lecture – 2024

titled

" Modern Muslim citizenship in 1940s Ceylon: Identity, politics, and community aspirations at the Moors Islamic Cultural Home "

by

Professor Farzana F. Haniffa,
Department of Sociology,
University of Colombo.

on

Wednesday 20th March, 2024 at 3.45 p.m

at

Kailasapathy Auditorium,
University of Jaffna.

Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan Memorial Lecture- 2024

" Modern Muslim citizenship in 1940s Ceylon: Identity, politics, and community aspirations at the Moors Islamic Cultural Home "

Professor Farzana F. Haniffa,
Department of Sociology,
University of Colombo.

20.03.2024

சீமாட்டி லீலாவதி இராமநாதன்

Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan

Message from the Vice Chancellor

Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan Memorial Lecture is an annual event which usually takes place early in the week following the Annual General Convocation.

This memorial lecture is held under an endowment instituted by Saiva Mangaiyar Sabai-Association of Hindu Women- funded by Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan in 1924. Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan was born in Australia and moved to Sri Lanka to quench her spiritual thirst. She finally found her Guru Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan a high Hindu intellectual personality. She was a living example to all the women who harnessed her husband Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan's great vision of knowledge and spirituality as her own. She was a devoted wife, who respected all the cultures and traditions of her second home land as her own mother land.

She contributed a lot to the Tamil speaking world in so many ways. Her untiring efforts on publishing Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan's lectures and several books including Ramayana in English version were marvelous.

We are indeed thankful to those who initiated this memorial lecture for giving the opportunity to cherish her services rendered our Tamil Community.

Speaker of Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan Memorial Lecture 2024, Prof.Farzana F.Haniffa is an eminent Professor in the Department of Sociology of the University of Colombo. She obtained her Ph.D in Anthropolgy from Columbia University, New York. She has published several number of research papers on social and political history of Muslim communities, on gender politics and on higher education reform in Sri Lanka. She was visiting fellow in commonwealth studies at the Center for South Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge. She was appointed to the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms by the Prime Minister's Office. Now she serves in the number of Associations, Trusts and is a trustee of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust in Sri Lanka. She was appointed to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka in 2023.

On behalf of the University of Jaffna I thank, Prof.Farzana F.Haniffa for accepting our invitation and delivering the Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan Memorial Lecture this year on the topic "Modern Muslim citizenship in 1940s Ceylon: Identity, politics, and community aspirations at the Moors Islamic Cultural Home"

All glories to God.

Prof. S. Srisatkunarajah,
Vice - Chancellor,
University of Jaffna.

Modern Muslim citizenship in 1940s Ceylon: Identity, politics, and community aspirations at the Moors Islamic Cultural Home

Farzana Haniffa (University of Colombo)

Good afternoon to you all. It is a great honor to be at the University of Jaffna, at the Kailasapathy Hall, delivering the Lady Leelawati Ramanathan lecture this year. I thank Prof. Raguram of the Dean Faculty of Arts for this invitation and to Professor T Shanathanan for facilitating this lecture. Lady Leelawati Ramanathan is of course best known for being the wife of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan. She was an Australian born theosophist who became a disciple of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, and later his wife. She was also a scholar and a writer in her own right. She published a book that was a commentary on the Gospel that was derived from the lectures of Sir Ponnambalam, and after Sir Ponnambalam's passing she wrote a version of the Ramayana. She was also for a time the principle of Ramanathan College.

I am very pleased to be here in Jaffna, speaking at the university as part of a necessary engagement across Sri Lanka's university systems, and I thank the university for appreciating my possible contribution and granting me this opportunity. I will speak today on the setting up of a somewhat famous Colombo institution : the Moors Islamic Cultural Home (MICH). I use the MICH as a vehicle to talk about the claims to middle classness that Muslims struggled to make in the early 20th Century and brought to fulfilment at the time of independence.

1. Introduction

The Moors Islamic Cultural Home (MICH) is housed in a 1960s office building at a prime location at Bristol Street in the old financial district of the Colombo Fort. The MICH is a respected community institution founded in 1944, prior to Ceylonese independence in 1948. Today it continues to exist and carry out activities with its groups of followers and its established institutional rituals. The MICH building is conspicuous among the late-colonial and mid-twentieth century office buildings due to the incongruity of the onion shaped dome -a nod to Islamicate architecture- on the top of a standard square edifice like others around it. The land for the building was obtained in 1944 from the government by the founders of MICH after making repeated requests and extensive lobbying of the colonial authorities and later in 1949, to the leaders of independent Ceylon. Acquiring such a plot in the very central Fort area was an achievement and represented Sri Lankan Muslim leadership claiming recognition from the Ceylonese state for Muslim cultural particularity at independence.

Writing in the 1980s, M.M.M Mahroof (2015) described the English-speaking Muslim elite as seeing themselves as communicating the (mostly Tamil speaking) communities' positions and perspectives to the elites of wider Ceylonese society. At the time of the MICH's formulation they were only just beginning to present themselves in such a role. This essay will argue that the establishment of the MICH indicated the emergence of a post-World War II English speaking Muslim middle-class sensibility in Sri Lanka that was asserting its position as leaders in the company of Sinhala, Tamil and Burgher elites. It will describe how Muslims in late-colonial and independent Ceylon negotiated the minoritization

initiatives of the newly independent state and its ruling elite while making claims to a dignified and thriving community existence. The MICH was one instance where the Sri Lankan Muslim leadership asserted the power of the English-speaking sections of the community as part of the wider Ceylonese elite and made specific Muslim and Ceylonese claims to citizenship and community.

Much of the Ceylonese Muslim population was Tamil speaking, and their religious and cultural expression was in Tamil and Arabu Tamil or Arivu (Tschacher 2018). They are seen in the literature as late to acquire the necessary English skills to participate in the political conversations that were taking place in nineteenth-century Ceylon (Samaraweera 1978). It is only early in the twentieth century that they begin to catch up, embrace English education, and produce an elite that could assert a collective presence among the other fellow elites of the country. The early refusal of English education and academic and professional training resulted in the highly consequential absence of Muslims in important spheres of society. (De Silva 1986) By the 1940s Muslims were more educated and far more sophisticated in their demand to be recognized as competent and contributing members of the soon to be independent Ceylonese polity. The launch of the MICH was one instance where their newly acquired acumen was demonstrated[1].

Qadri Ismail's (1995) work has critiqued the Muslim elite's self-representation as gendered and exclusionary of regionaly dispersed Muslim communities. Ismail claims that the Southern elite (some of whom founded = the MICH) were inadequately informed of other Muslim communities – the east coast Muslims

---

[1]Ibid.

who were agriculturalists for instance, when they repeatedly represented themselves as a trading community. They were also not representative of the larger Muslim groupings that they claimed to speak on behalf of and their assumption of authority was frequently contested. It is important that Ismail's critique is kept in mind while exploring this story of the MICH. As I will demonstrate, the MICH founders were only one part of the elite of the time and had very particular ideas about their community's future. Some of these ideas were widely shared and some were not. The founders themselves were also not responsive to all prevailing calls for community transformation at the time.

2. The Establishment of the Moors Islamic Cultural Hom (MICH)

The approach of the men who established the Moors Islamic Cultural Home reveals key assumptions about community, identity, and citizenship. The four founders were A.R.A Razik, W.M. Hassim, A.H. Macan Macar, A.I.L Marikar and A.L.M Lafir (who was also the founder of the All Ceylon Moors Association). The assurance of a grant of state land in a suitable location for the institution was given by Sir Oliver Goonetillake, leader of the senate in 1948. At the first reading of the MICH incorporation bill in the state council in 1944, Fareed had the following to say:[2]

> The Moors in particular and the other Muslims of Ceylon, have suffered in the matter of religion, and economically, educationally and socially too by want of an institution of this nature, an institution similar to those of other communities here

[2]Retrieved from the MICH website (URL: https://www.michsl.org/history.html). The version of the speech published in the Silver Jubilee souvenir differs slightly.

which they established for themselves years ago. .....It is an institution founded on the model of the *Jemiyathul Subhanul Muslimeen* of Egypt, and of other great centres of Islamic thought and culture. The object in view is to provide a cultural centre worthy of Islam

The "objectives" of the MICH were stated as follows:[3]

1. To study and promote Islamic culture and religion;
2. To research and study the history, customs, traditions and habits of the Ceylon Moors;
3. To promote a spirit of fellowship among the members of the Moors Islamic Cultural Home and the inculcation in them of the principles of service to the community and the country;
4. The promotion of the cultural, moral, social and economic welfare of the island;
5. The provision of facilities for recreation.
6. The establishment and maintenance of a hostel for students, a guest house for visitors and a restaurant for the convenience of its members and other persons approved by the Board of Trustees; and
7. The construction and maintenance of a suite of rooms which are to be let for weddings and other social functions

Although the institution is formulated as a "members only" exclusive space, the objectives were aspirational of formulating a Ceylon Moor community identity that was informed of its Muslim past and cultural and religious heritage, and included a sense of community responsibility inflected by preoccupations of class mobility. The aspiration to be a modern Ceylonese citizen while also

[3]Moors Islamic Cultural Home Incorporation Ordinance No: 46, 1946. (MICH Souvenir Publication 1965).

being Muslim included seeing to the welfare of the country as a whole and was a claim making on the part of the Muslim elite. They claimed thereby to be part of the contributing citizenry of the country under the newly defined ideals of national citizenship. Such ideals of national citizenship at this particular time also involved forming such male only spaces to carry out the work.

3. Formative Histories and Networks of Moors and Muslims in Ceylon

Ceylon was under European colonial regimes since the early sixteenth century, as first the Portuguese (sixteenth century) then the Dutch (mid-seventeenth century), and finally the British (late eighteenth century) took control of the country's coastal areas. The Moors whom both the Portuguese and the Dutch powers considered competitors in trade were regarded as "problems" and legislated against with regards to religious practice and trade (Mahroof 2015; Dewaraja 1994). During the time of the Portuguese, outbreaks of violence against Moor communities were frequent and there was a substantial movement of Moors inland from the coastal areas. Under the Dutch too, Moors were driven out of Colombo and compelled to settle along the southern coast. Regardless of the laws, rules, and regulations promulgated against the Moors by several colonial powers, their presence in trade between the coast and the interior continued and writers report of trading communities thriving despite the restrictions (Devaraja 1994). The few Muslim commentators writing on this period, however, have drawn attention to how the restrictions and persecution negatively impacted Moors of that time (Mahroof 2015; Asad 1993). The advent of the British and their transformation of the colonial economy led to an easing of restrictions against native economic activity and led to better times for the Moors as well (Jayawardena 2000; Asad 1993). The

transformed economy under the British – from a mercantilist to a capitalist mode - occurred with the introduction of plantation agriculture and enabled capital accumulation among local populations as well and resulted in the growth of a wealthy Muslim trader elite.

The literature notes Moor settlements along the coast of Ceylon going back many centuries and the presence of different communities of the "Mohammedan" faith, including Moors, Coast Moors, Malays, Bohrahs, Khojas, and Pathans. Among the smaller groups professing the Islamic faith, Coast Moors have featured in the nineteenth century public debates regarding identity within the island and they have been marked as "different" from the Moors of Ceylon who claimed Arab ancestry (as opposed to being Tamil speaking converts only) and a longer history of residence on the Island.

The Tamil speaking Muslim communities on the island engaged with the late nineteenth century religious revivals among Muslim communities across South and Southeast Asia. For example, Ceylon Moor intellectual Siddi Lebbe's Tamil language Sufi text *Asrarul A'lam* ("Mysteries of the Universe") was a modernist Islamic text, a product of this moment and was widely read and critiqued among Muslim scholars on the Indian subcontinent and across East Asia (McKinley and Xavier 2017). South Indian reformist scholar Mappilah Lebbe Alim's influence is apparent in the *Fat hud dayyan: fi fiqhi khairil adyan* ("A Compendium on Muslim Theology and Jurisprudence") that he authored and was widely used among local Muslim families (Mahroof 2015). Mappilah Lebbe Alim is also known to have encouraged local mosque and madrasa building and renovation projects during the revival. The fact that Ceylon's Muslims were

imbricated in dense networks of scholars, religious pilgrimages, and trade linkages is established and needs to be better understood.

Influenced by colonial education, religious revivals as Hindu and Buddhist resistance to the impact of over a century of state violence and Christian missionary activity emerged on the island in the early nineteenth century. According to the literature, they predated the Muslims' movement by several decades (Bastin 1997) as Muslim communities across the island (with the exception of a few wealthy families) feared the proselytizing intent of colonial Christian education. However, it is important that we see early discussions as revealing just one element of the revival; the participation of the Colombo elite in an effort to encourage English language education among Moors. (Samaraweera 1978). Recent research has enriched this telling of the history of the Muslim revival with details of other actors. (McKinley and Xavier 2017). A fuller view of the Islamic religious revival of the nineteenth-century is therefore urgent.

4. The Moor - Muslim Debate: the Revival of an Anachronism?

The MICH's usage of the term "Moor" to establish an institution serving the country's Muslim population in the 1940s reflects the politics of naming at the time and how the founding leadership sought to intervene in defining the Ceylon Muslim community. The term Moor, and its suggestion of racial specificity as well as difference among the communities of Muslims on the island, was controversial at the time.

The use of the terms Moor vs Muslim as the group's preferred nomenclature has a history in elite rivalries and the issue of naming become salient in the archive at different moments. Nuhman

mentions that the issue is raised by Ponnambalam Ramanathan in 1885 in the Legislative Council at the debate on the Mohamedan Marriage and Registration ordinance. Then in 1924 the government appointed a committee to consider and report on the variations used in the spelling of the word "Mohammedan." (Nuhman 44) The committee- comprised of Muslim members of the legislative council -reported back that the term was not acceptable no matter what spelling was used and that the correct term must be 'Muslim'. (Nuhman 45) The term Moor is not commented upon by the committee but the importance of the term "Muslim" is asserted as suitable to "designate a person professing the religion preached by the prophet." (sessional papers #35, 1924. Cited in Nuhman 45). The Moor – Muslim debate becomes important in the 1930s again, due to rivalry between two prominent elite gem trader Muslim families who competed for a knighthood for the family patriarch. The Muslim League supported the candidate N.D.H Abdul Cafoor, while the disappointed rival Mohamed Macan Macar is said to have supported the founding of the Moors Association. . Macan Macar was ultimately awarded the knighthood in 1938. The Moor Muslim distinction is described by K.M.De Silva as based on the one hand on an umbrella term to encompass all of those professing the Islamic faith (Muslim) while the Moor designation attempts to "emphasise the historic origins of the community and their indigenous roots." (De Silva 1986. p463.) The divide along the Moor Muslim line also represented the most significant political bifurcation of the Muslim elites in the inter -war period. For instance, while there was little opposition from the Muslim elite to the political organizing of the broader Ceylon National Congress, political rivalries emerging from within the different Muslim communities were channeled through the Moor's Association, Muslim League divide. The figures taking leadership under the Muslim League were T.B. Jayah

and Dr. M.C.M Kaleel; the Moor's Association cultivated the younger A.R.A Razik (later Sir Razik Fareed). The MICH emerges as an institution supported by the elites from the All Ceylon Moors Association. However, the salience of the term Moor in the 1940s is attached to the political preoccupations of the time-where the community's "indigenous roots" become inflected politically in a manner different from the 1930s. I will present these politics as illustrative of the context within which the institution was founded. I do so to emphasize how state practices targeting different minority groups in this case the citizenship legislation of 1948-- have framed majority minority relations. They have significantly impacted how leaders of minority groups have strategized their engagement with the state at the anticipation of independence and after.

Muslim politics in Ceylon in the 1930s and 40s can be thought of as influenced by two preoccupations. The first is fear of the possible recurrence of the anti-Muslim violence of 1915, where Sinhala mobs targeted Muslim lives and property across the island over several days; the second is, anxieties about political representation. Muslim leaders have had different ideas about how to address the above. The formulation of a separate Muslim political party made little electoral sense due to Muslim demographic dispersion in small pockets throughout the island. A collective minority position-where Tamils and Muslims were allied, that was experimented with in the 1920s -was ultimately short lived (De Silva 1986, Haniffa 2022). Since independence, the Muslim leadership had to engage with a state that was involved with creating and maintaining largely antagonistic majority minority relations and of pitting minorities against one another for the maintenance of the majoritarian state.

The ideas of pan-Islamism that were gaining popularity across South Asia after the dismantling of the Caliphate are sure to have resonated with the Ceylonese Muslims as well and as Aydin states, pan-Islamism appealed to Muslims across the world as a means of preserving their dignity while suffering colonial oppression (Aydin 2017: 132). The Ceylonese elite move to expressing collective solidarity and calling themselves Muslim is already noted in the literature as indicating a shift in the Ceylonese identity discourse from categories of race to religion (Ismail 1995, 73).Fareed's own requirement of giving prominence to parochial local identity discourses while at the same time signalling engagement with global developments are ably captured in the naming of the organisation as belonging to Moors' and as being Islamic. In asserting the term Moor in the 1940s, Fareed was looking for a way to respond to very specific and transformative developments within the colony that had, initially, little to do with the majority of Muslims: the Ceylon Citizenship legislation of 1948. Muslim elite politics around the terms Moor and Muslim predate the 1948 citizenship debate but was impacted by it in ways as of yet inadequately explicated in the literature.

In 1950there were attempts made to fix the nomenclature through which the communities in Ceylon following the Islamic faith were hitherto to be named. S.L Mohamed, a member of the Moors Direct Action Committee, wrote a fiery pamphlet arguing for the preservation of the term "Moor" over the more expansive term "Muslim." Mohamed claims in his pamphlet that The Muslim League, together with the Ceylonese Muslim Union (an offshoot organized for this purpose alone), was attempting to legislate the latter name as the preferred name by which to refer to the communities. The arguments offered in support of preserving the

term "Moor" rather than Muslim are as follows (Mohamed 2011, 42):

> There are large numbers of Muslims who sojourn in this country: they are Mopplas, Memons, Hambayas, Bohras, Pathans etc. They have their Mosques, institutions, associations, and clubs. They have their racial differences. Of all the followers of Islam in Ceylon only the Moors and Malays claim Ceylon as their home. The Moors are not Indians, and no Indians or Pakistani is called a Moor in his country or anywhere else. By adhering presently to the word Moor, the *Marakkala or Yonaka* wishes to be classed as a member of the indigenous population and not of the floating stock (emphasis mine).

S.L. Mohamed uses the term *"Hambaya"* to refer to the Coast Moor. By doing so he is claiming the term Moor only for those of Ceylonese "stock" and disputing the usage of the term Coast Moor for Muslims of Indian origin. Indian Muslims had long been referred to as Coast Moors by the British and by most subsequent English language writings about the island. The Coast Moors had been a significant and thriving community in colonial Ceylon and was indicative of the broader South Asian world of connected Muslim groups of which Ceylon was a part.

Most of the country's elites participated in passing one of the first pieces of legislation in newly independent Ceylon: the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 (Shastri 1999). The Act referred to the citizenship of Indians resident in Ceylon and was known for being a sleight of hand to disenfranchise a significant part of the Left's vote base: the up-country Tamils. The up-country Tamil plantation labor force, first brought to Ceylon in the nineteenth-century to service the

new plantation industry, received the right to vote with universal franchise in 1931. They were a significant voting bloc in the hill country that invariably supported the left. What the legislation effectively did was to render a large percentage of Sri Lanka's upcountry Tamils non-citizens and for a time, stateless persons. It is noted here that the plantation Tamil community enumerated separately in the census since 1911, numbered 780,600 in 1946 while the Moors numbered 373,600. [4]The distinction then, between the terms Moor and Muslim in the late 1940s onwards was to draw attention to the fact that of the Muslims, the Ceylon Moors and Malays were indigenous, while other Muslims – presumably the Coast Moors (Hambayas), Mapplas, Memons, Bohrahs, and Pathans were not. The fear seemed to be that if all these different groups identified as Muslim and if the indigeneity of some of them was not established at the outset, they would all be considered foreign and forced to apply for citizenship. And the state had made sure that making those claims would be difficult for the poor upcountry Tamils, the large majority of the applicants. Muslim leaders were probably aware that large sections of the Muslim population too, if pushed, would not be able to properly respond to the bureaucratic demands of the process. Razik Fareed and the Moor leaders were then willing to draw attention to the foreignness of all "other" Muslims, and especially the Indian origin Coast Moors, in order ensure that the indigeneity of the Ceylon Moor and Malay would be made clearer. At a time when the substance of citizenship and identity remained undefined and in flux across South Asia (Chatterji 2012), it was possible to imagine that the Moors/Muslims,

[4]Available at URL: http:// www. statistics. gov.lk/ abstract 2020/ CHAP2 / 2.10. Accessed on June 16, 2023.

a group smaller in number than the up-country Tamils, might also be deemed insufficiently indigenous. Muslims, and not just those deemed Indian Muslims, were well known for their linkages with the outside of the island, their connections with wide Muslim networks that stretched across south and southeast Asia, and they self-identified as linked with the outside. The nation state at independence was not a place in which a celebration of Muslim itinerancy, and their wide-ranging connections and networks could be celebrated. As Wettimuny (2022) has noted recently, the othering of Muslims by both British and Sinhala writing during colonial times, as traders and as "different," was standard practice. It is therefore unsurprising that there was opposition to the adoption of the term Muslim by Moor's Association and the Moors direct action committee a mere two years after the introduction of the 1948 legislation. The 1948 legislation, one of the first pieces of law brought in to force by the newly minted state of Ceylon, rendered all those who could not claim indigeneity as not citizens and thereby disenfranchised. Therefore the Moor/Muslim debate that many have pointed to in previous writings about Muslims must also be understood as informed, after 1948, by the debate about indigeneity and citizenship.

The issue of privileging the term Moor was one on which there was no consensus, among the Muslim elites. The two political groupings referenced above-the Moors Association and the Muslim League-had rival and competing visions as to the nature of the Muslim community of Ceylon and their future. Their enmity has been recorded in the literature as the sole reason for the Moor-Muslim tension among the Muslims of the time. A.M.A Azeez, member of the Muslim League, opposed Razik Fareed's position and disputed his claim that the new legislation required Muslims to

claim indigeneity. Azeez accused Fareed of taking advantage of the lack of education among the larger Muslim community to push a spurious idea in support of his own position on the Moor-Muslim debate. Azeez did not entertain the fear of disenfranchisement and loss of citizenship that haunted Fareed. Since there had been no government directive stating that the citizenship of Muslims in general would be brought under scrutiny Azeez did not fear the possibility. Azeez accused Fareed of pushing a racialist idea of Moorness over the religious ideal of Muslim solidarity for political ends (Nuhman 2007). Azeez's learned and somewhat trusting position with regards to the state's intention has overdetermined earlier analyses of the Moor-Muslim controversy and it has been written as an elite squabble of no greater significance. [5]However, it should be understood as part of the far-reaching consequences of the Ceylonese political elite's decisions with regagrds to how minority communities will be governed in newly independent Ceylon.

During the two decades after independence when the citizenship issue and the Moor/Muslim controversy remained fraught, Fareed was vilified among Muslims across the country for acting to divide them. Razik Fareed's biographer speaks of the issue thus[6]:

---

[5]M.A. Nuhman describes the Moor-Muslim controversy in terms of the political rivalry between the Muslim League and the Moor Union. Citing the speech by A.M.A Azeez that I too have referenced, Nuhman presents Fareed's preoccupation with the term as emerging from his need to establish the prominence of the Moor Union over the Muslim League. While Nuhman mentions T.B. Jayah, a Malay, as having suffered from the Moor Muslim distinction, he does not consider the issue of the citizenship legislation of sufficient importance to explore why Fareed may have claimed to be responding to it. See Nuhman 2007, 37-44.

[6]M.C.A. Hassan, Sir Razik Fareed (Colombo: Sir Razik Fareed Foundation, 1968), 186.

As the leader of 800000 Moors, he could not afford to possess the dividing instinct. What he hoped to do and increasingly succeeded in doing was to bring all the Muslims under one banner, while affording the Ceylon Moors, who were becoming victims of all the sins of omission and commission of the Indian Moors, a separate entity, and a national consciousness. *Having established for the Moors a definite identity and a permanent habitat he wished to work for the welfare and progress of all Muslims* (emphasis mine).

The insistence on the term Moor in the title of the MICH is a reminder that at one point in Muslim community history, Fareed and his followers were convinced of the need to foreground Muslim claims to the island and their means of doing so was to insist on the Ceylon Moor nomenclature as indicative of difference, specificity, loyalty, and most of all, indigeneity.

5. The Ceylon Moors and English Language Education

Muslim refusal of English education and the consequences for the entire Muslim population of the country has been stressed repeatedly in writings on Muslims in the early twentieth century. (Samaraweera 1976; Nuhman 2007; Jayawardena 2000). Prominent late 19th century Muslim intellectual I.L.M. Abdul Azeez wrote many an entreaty to his Muslim brethren regarding the importance of Muslim education.

According to Abdul Azeez writing in 1907, English education was necessary for commercial prosperity, good citizenship, professional knowledge, and government employment. [7]Abdul

[7]Cited in A.M.A. Azeez, I.L.M. Abdul Azeez birth centenary address. MICH Silver Jubilee Souvenir. 1944-1969.

Azeez stated that businesses cannot face their competition without employing a *"kanakapulle"* or accountant, and for supervision of such an accountant a background in bookkeeping is essential. It is with English, the new "commercial language of the world," that such a background can be achieved., [8]Abdul Azeez also stated that to be good citizens a knowledge of the law (in English) is necessary and at that time, there were only two advocates and five proctors for a population of 300,000 Muslims. He also stated that as a result some important aspects of Muslim law were "either not known or ignored" by the Muslim population." Further, the Muslim community of the time did not have any doctors, engineers, representatives in the civil service or any civil list officers-all positions that required English language education. Additionally, he anticipated that the next set of legislative reforms would bring about territorial and professional representation through elections and not communal representation through nominated members. Abdul Azeez worried that there would be no qualified (English educated) Muslims to stand for elections[9].

Abdul Azeez's lament recounted by A.M.A Azeez is indicative of the early 1900s attempts at "modernising" Muslims through English education. The first "Anglo Mohameddan" boys school Al *Madrasathul Khairiyathul Islamiya* had been established in 1884, but had failed to take off. Another illustrative example of Muslim "backwardness" in the late nineteenth century was the fact that the definitive Muslim response to Ramanathan's *Ethnology of the*

[8] Ibid, 18.

[9] Ibid. A.M.A. Azeez, summarizing Abdul Azeez's 1907 article in 1967, states that Abdul Azeez's words ring true even at that time.

Moors of Ceylon emerged from I.L.M. Abdul Azeez himself only in 1907, twenty years after Ramanathan's publication by the Royal Asiatic Society. Ramanathan's treatise, in which the author claims that Moors were really Tamil, was a response to the colonial government considering a seat in the legislative council for Muslims. Ramanathan claimed that such a seat was not necessary because the Moors, being ethnologically Tamil were not a distinct community. Abdul Azeez had responded many times to Ramanathan's claims through newspaper articles over the years. However, such rejoinders were no match for the gravitas of a presentation at the Royal Asiatic Society and a publication in their journal. There were no competent well connected Muslim intellectuals to respond to Ramanathan in 1888. Abdul Azeez's fully worked out monograph length response to Ramanathan was published by the Moor Union in 1907. (Republished by the MICH in 1951).

By the 1930s, the Muslim elite had established Zahira College and attempts to cultivate an English-speaking community of Muslims had had some success. I see the Muslim elite of the 1940s through the MICH and through other means - through establishing their English language publications for instance-as claiming the successes of the lager Muslim community's attempts to catch up and assert themselves as equals among the rest of the Ceylonese elite. The lamentations that I will look at from the 1930s and 1940s are similar in tone to that of Abdul Azeez noted above. However, what they aspired to and what they claimed had changed significantly in the intervening decades.

6. The MICH and Ceylon Moor Elite Aspirations

In the Star of Islam newspaper, launched in 1939, there was little or no reference to the term Moor. The term - salient at the time had been decisively rendered absent in the newspaper. They were instead using 'Ceylon Muslim' and 'Indian Muslim'. Arguably the editorial board favored the term pushed for by the Muslim League in relation to the Moor-Muslim divide. I take the articles in the Star of Islam as indicative, however of the prevailing mood among the wider Muslim elite regarding their fellow coreligionists on the island. In the Star of Islam of September 16th, 1939 there was an article entitled the "The Pathetic Condition of the Ceylon Muslims." The author of the article, S.M.Sheriff, was chairman of the Young Muslim Progressive Association (Al Lujunnathul Shubannul Muslimeen). Sheriff bemoaned the fact that the "Muslims of Ceylon are not at all taking any action to improve themselves socially politically and morally, while Sinhalese Tamils and Burghers are striving for their social political and religious rights." In the article, Sheriff points out:

> About 75% of our brethren, Muslim sisters and children are in destitution: a good number are starving and some are even homeless. The position of virgins, widows and orphans are very unsafe. Today, unlike the days of the past the Muslim community has the honor of counting among its numbers, many educated men with distinctive qualifications, such as MA, BA, CCS. Doctors, Lawyers Judges etc. and even the distinction of a knight. But what have these men done for their community? Is there a Muslim missionary home? Is there a hospital for Muslims? Especially for Ladies? Is there a home

for the aged for Muslims? Is there a broadminded Muslim religious lady teacher?[10]

This lament, when seen as aspirational, has two points worthy of note. The first is that it claims that social political and moral improvement of a community of people are to be achieved through service and support for the destitute and the marginal in that group. The elite are asked to establish community serving pastoral institutions to fulfill their community obligations. The institutions called for are hospitals, missionary homes, and homes for the aged. The second point is the comparison with others. Here, Muslims again aspire to be of a similar stature to other communities who are named as being more advanced. The comparison, however, achieves the task of asserting comparability. Now Muslims are not talking just about fellow Muslims; but of fellow citizens within the country among whom they consider themselves to be equals. Drawing attention to the plight of women in the community is also indicative of the importance women's place had taken on at that time as a marker of modernity and progress. There is a call for the Muslim eliteto build institutions for their own and thereby claim partnership in the new forms of community that are being proposed across the island.

Two other statements made in the Star of Islam are illustrative of the gamut of Muslims aspirational claim making to be part of a national elite. An anonymous contributor in 1946 has the following

---

[10]S.M. Sheriff, "The Pathetic Condition of the Ceylon Muslims," Star of Islam September 16, 1939

to say, from a perspective that locates Muslims among their fellow citizens who are not Muslim:[11]

> The Muslims of Ceylon have failed to secure for themselves a place in the esteem of the country just as surely as they have failed in solving every one of the problems they have been faced with. The Muslims of Ceylon have not produced one single thinker. They have produced only one lawyer of first-class repute. Bankrupt of social and moral values living in an atmosphere of trivialities and inanities fit only to make money but without that philosophy which makes the earning of money a laudable enterprise the Muslims have only themselves to blame for their complete futility and insignificance.

Again, if read not only as a lament but as aspirational, the statement indicates the need for an educated elite of "thinkers." The invocation regarding Muslims being "properly" wealthy through having "the philosophy to make the earning of money a laudable enterprise" I read as following from the earlier claim. I hear in this call to "philosophy" the call for a wealthy elite to support not just pastoral institutions as seen in the earlier case, but learning and culture within the Muslim community. The comparison with other communities on the island continues to be important. While on the surface it is framed as a complaint and a lack, I see it also as a claim making regarding the possibility of Muslims being like all others, culturally and intellectually. The wealthy and newly sophisticated Muslims are being urged to claim their status within a community of equals as facilitated by the nation-state form.

The next intervention that I want to look at is by "Sheikh" in 1939 and is yet another aspirational lamentation cast this time in the

mode of the Islamic reformists. It is different from those cited above in the very specific reference that it makes to Muslims' religious failings.

> The one and only cause in my opinion is that the general body of people called "Ceylon Muslims" today are (barring of course some noble exceptions) Muslims only in name and not Muslims in the real sense of the term. The Muslims of today (I am referring to Ceylon Muslims only) have discarded the teachings of the Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet and have taken up instead to worthless trash imparted by self-seeking and self-glorifying pseudo Alims and so-called spiritual leaders. The Quran and the Holy Traditions, the live wires of Islam, the books of guidance for the Muslims which wrought marvels in the world are now called into action to be recited parrot-like during the month of Ramazan or by the bedside of the dying or at the graveyard of the dead. The institution of Zakath-the practical ideal of Islamic Socialism-which did away with poverty in the days gone by among the Muslims-has become today an institution for pompous exhibition once a year-of the wealth of the swell headed Mudalalis. The dispensation of Zakath as practiced today has encouraged poverty amongst the Muslims and has placed a premium on begging. Everything un-Islamic finds its place in the Muslim body politic and everything Islamic ordained by the teachings of Islam is practiced to the very letter by the non-Muslims[12].

---

[12] "Sheikh" 1939. Muslim Decadence: A Telling Indictment. Star of Islam July 29, 1939

Calling attention to "pseudo Alims and spiritual leaders", as well as critiquing the Quran's use being restricted to "recited parrotlike," and the invocation of Zakath (almsgiving or charity) as an exhibition of wealth that encourages poverty, the statement is calling for a reform of Islamic practice. The articulation of such sentiment is evident of such - probably Salafi thinking–being available in Ceylon in the 1940s and given space in a popular English langauge newspaper.[13] The compulsion to comparison that is utilized in this moment is familiar from the earlier quotes but is inflected differently; the inversion of the non-Muslim as the quintessence of practice reinforces the difference between the two. The Muslim is shamed by invoking the "other," the non-Muslim, the infidel, as the model of Islamic practice. Here the principle for improvement invoked is not the colonial modern of the local other, but proper Islamic practice.

I understand these interventions as indicative of a sensibility that exists within the Muslim community in Ceylon in the late 1930s and early 1940s as the context within which the MICH emerges. As Lapidus (1997) and others have noted, Islamic reformists' periodic search for ways to incorporate an Islamic way of being into that which is new is reflected in the commentary present in nearly independent Ceylon as well. The first intervention called for the elite to establish institutions for pastoral care of the less fortunate. The second call was for the wealthy to support learning and culture. The

[13] "Given the networks of the Tamil speaking literary Muslim communities of south Asia that Muslims in Ceylon were a long part of there is no reason to think that such ideas were not prominent in Ceylon in the 1940s.

third was the call to reform Islamic practice. The Muslim leaders looking to establish the MICH then, were responding to both global and local issues relevant at the time within a Muslim framework articulated in ways that are particular to the political and economic experience of soon to be independent colonial Ceylon.

It should be noted here though, that the reformist calls to transform religious practice was not uppermost in the MICH agenda as revealed in the archive. The preoccupation with state recognition of Islamic practice was considered more urgent. Therefore, modes of improvement that were showcased in the 1960s, twenty years after the MICH's initial founding were different from standard religious reformist priorities.

7. The MICH as an Index of Muslim Thriving

This section will outline some the ways in which the aspirations discussed above were reflected in the institution's activities in the years after its initial setting up. Arguably, Muslim survival as Muslims in Ceylon was dependent on the state recognizing and accommodating their Muslimness. As such, great effort was exercised to render the Muslims visible to state processors and for gaining institutional recognition for Muslim religious and cultural practices. While the MICH presented itself as an institution formed by the English speaking Muslim elite, like any other local community it was essential that it also functioned in the local languages. For Muslims, being mostly Tamil speaking in a country anticipating the formalising of Sinhala as the main administrative language (in 1956), choosing the language through which they will carry out their work was especially fraught. The MICH chose therefore to carry out programs in all three national languages.

In 1948 the MICH board decided to ask the government to provide land for the organization to build its own premises in Colombo, Fort. In making his claim Fareed argued that the government already granted such land to the Young Men's Buddhist Association. In September 1948 the Senate passed a motion to allocate land in the Fort for this purpose.[14] By garnering state support for the establishment of the MICH, A.R.A Razik and the other founders ensured that the Muslims created a precedent of accessing state resources for community upliftment. They thereby institutionalized a strategy of pushing for state recognition and support for Muslims as a means of holding at bay the inevitabile minoritization that many were anticipating.

A.R.A. Razik, founder president, was also one of the most important Muslim politicians of the time and was instrumental in pushing through a series of measures that guaranteed Muslims' visibility to and recognition by the state. After the establishment of the MICH Razik involved the institution in the activism. Razik was instrumental in forming a chair of Arabic at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, and agitated to preserve the *Unani* system (the ancient Muslim system of medicine) at the College of Indigenous Medicine in Ceylon. Additionally, Fareed opposed the parliament not adjourning at six on the days of the Ramazan fast to facilitate Muslims breaking of the fast, not adjourning at 12 noon on Fridays to facilitate mosque attendance, agitated for the institution of the Prophet Muhammed's birthday as a public holiday, and that it be termed *Meelad-un Nabi,* for the *zakat* (Muslim alms tax) to be

---

[14]"Moors Islamic Cultural Home Diary of Important Events." *May 25, 1948. MICH Souvenir Publication* 1965, 128.

exempted from income tax, and attempted as early as 1938 to have the government institutionalize the relaying of the Friday afternoon Jumma prayer sermon or the *kothuba* over Radio Ceylon. On 5th June 1947, Radio Ceylon for the first time broadcasts the *azaan* or call to prayer over the radio to break the fast during Ramazan. This was at the request and lobbying by the MICH. The MICH with Razik's leadership also supported the formulation of the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act of 1951 and the "Muslim Mosques and Charitable Trusts" or *"Wakf Bill"* of October 1956. Fareed was also instrumental in institutionalizing the provision of leave for Muslim men to attend Jumma prayers on Friday afternoons. This practice continues today in all state institutions. Fareed was also instrumental in instituting a Muslim stream within the education system and in establishing government Muslim schools in many Muslim villages across the country. This stream too has survived and there are "Muslim" schools across the island that teach primarily in the Tamil language medium and have their own calendar with holidays for Ramazan[15].

The MICH souvenir publication that provided information on many of the activities of the institution described in this article was also a vehicle for the MICH's research output. They published both original research work and republished previously published work on the history of Ceylon's Muslim communities. Thereby they aimed to cultivate an appreciation of history writing and literary production among a set of Muslims. They translated Siddi Lebbe's Sufi treatise *Asrarul A'lam* ("Mysteries of the Universe") into

[15] M.C.A Hassan, "Crusader for Islam," in Sir *Razik Fareed* (Colombo: Sir Razik Fareed Foundation, 1968), 131-153.

English in the 1950s, as stated above they republished I.L.M Abdul Azeez's Criticism of Ponnambalam Ramanthan's Ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon (1951), and also published several other volumes of interest including Personages of the Past by Mohamed Sameer Bin Haji Ismail Effendi (1965), and *Muslim Mosques and Shrines of Ceylon* by M. Thowfeek. The souvenir collection remains an important archive of writing on Ceylon's Muslim communities and I have relied on them for this essay.

Among the many activities that named and marked community at the MICH, was the publication of the MICH almanac. In 1947, the first full year of activity after its incorporation, MICH began publishing the annal almanac with the following information: Islamic calendar juxtaposed with the Gregorian Calendar; dates of religious significance; noteworthy events in Islamic history; dates relating to outstanding Muslim personalities in fields of religion, philosophy, science, medicine, and art; phases of the moon; times of sunrise and sunset are all recorded for each day. Additionally, prayer tables, latest available census information relevant to Muslims, as well as geographical distribution of all Muslim communities on the island are included. The names of Muslims in public life—the legislature, the judiciary, the administrative service, the local authorities, corporations, boards, commissions, armed forces, professions, and vocations are also listed. Also included are lists of Muslim institutions, organizations and clubs with their objectives and office bearers, and also names of *ziyarams* and other Muslim pilgrimage centers.

The MICH almanac/diary was compiled annually (and continued till 2021), advertisements were solicited and received

from a substantial set of businesses (in 1965, 225 businesses were listed as "regular advertisers.") . The diary was popular and produced a profit to be used for other activities of the MICH. The rhetorical base for this 'community' was drawn from community not just on the island but of the world. Events in Islamic history and the outstanding Muslim personalities were drawn from everywhere around the world. Further, the Muslims that were celebrated were not religious figures alone. They were those that had contributed to notions of modernity and progress. The emphasis on making information about the Ceylonese Muslim community available, as in notable appointments, demographic figures, geographical spread of the community etc. should also be noted as contributing to inculcating a wider collective sensibility among the users of the diary. Chapman, in her study of Almanacs in francophone Canada from the 18th Century to contemporary times, argues that almanacs were instrumental in embedding the habit of reading within the home (Chapman 2016) and helpful for formulating ideals of community among settler communities, migrant groups and diaspora populations. (Chapman 2016, 352). According to Chapman, as a "cultural product in the home", the almanac helped build and sustain a sense of 'national' belonging. It is not difficult to assume that the MICH too, produced its almanac with such an intention (Chapman 2016, 352).

The MICH leadership also dabbled in the standardisation of Islamic knowledge for children through producing a Tamil language reader. In 1947, a Tamil language reader with an Islamic background designed for primary school students was produced in a collaborative endeavor between S.P. Saminathan and A.L.M Ismail. The book titled Muslim *Palar Vaasakam* ("Reader for Muslim

Children") was launched on July 1, 1947. The Reader was approved by the Educational Publications Board for use in Muslim schools.[16]

The following are some attempts at introducing institutional rituals that were specifically religious at the MICH. On 27th June 1949, the first day of the month of Ramazan, a canon loaned by Mr. A.C. Abdul Raheem was fired at the MICH premises to signal the advent of *sahar* and *iftar* (it is not clear for how long this practice was continued). In 1948, an annual Qur'an recital contest was established to train people to be *hafils*. The same three people won the contest during its first few years and participation remained low. In 1953, mission work was started with Muslim inmates in the prisons. In 1955, there was a proposal to translate the Qur'an into Sinhala in anticipation of the language legislation of1956. In 1956, the translation of the Qur'an into Sinhala was begun and government assistance is provided through the Department of Cultural Affairs. In 1959 the committee proposes to look into having the government fund quarters in Mecca for pilgrims from Ceylon.[17]

Integrating requirements of a particularly Muslim temporality into state time keeping was another achievement of the MICH leadership. Time off for all Muslims on Friday afternoons for Jumma prayers, national holidays for Eid and Meelad un-Nabi, providing the month of Ramazan as holidays in Muslim schools,

---

[16]The book was sold at a profit from 1947-1965 with periodic improvements. The state takes over the publication of school textbooks in 1965 and the sales for the book drop significantly. There is no mention of its publication after 1965.

[17]"Moors Islamic Cultural Home Diary of Important Events." August 30, 1959. MICH Souvenir Publication 1965, 132.

ensured that Muslim time was integrated into the government's national calendar.

The following are some instances where the social service arm of the MICH was operationalized to provide the pastoral care that was also part of the community aspirations for the institution. In August 1947, the MICH building was given over to those displaced and affected by floods. In 1955, the Maligakanda Free Wedding Home was established in Dematagoda, a low-income borough of Colombo with a large Muslim presence. The hall ws made available free, with free electricity provided for five days to any bride or bride groom of the area (regardless of community or creed). When not booked for weddings, the hall was used for needle work classes, running free medical clinics and for celebrations on the date of the Prophet Muhammed's birthday for children of the area. Then in 1955, the MICH was given land and a house in Makola by Lady Fareed (the wife of A.R.A Razik) for the establishment of the Lady Fareed Home for the Aged. The Home is ceremonially opened by former Governor Sir Oliver Goonetillake on 22nd September 1956. The Lady Fareed Home continues to function today. The collective charitable actions carried out previously by mosques alone were now dispersed to institutions such as the MICH as well. The lament noted earlier in the discussion regarding the Muslims lack of such pastoral institutions was addressed to an extent through these actions of the MICH.

The MICH hosted several banquets at important political moments in independent Ceylon. For instance, on the 15th of February 1948 there was a reception at the Galle Face Hotel organized by the MICH to celebrate Ceylon's independence. Guests

include the Viscount Lord Soulbury who headed the commission that drew up the constitution of Ceylon, the Prime Minister D.S. Senenayake, the Sir Oliver Goonetilake and the Maharaja and Maharani of Baroda. The MICH too participated now in the established practice of Muslim grandees entertaining the elites of the colonial administration with welcome and farewell dinners. Another event of note was the public dinner hosted at the Grand Orient Hotel on Novermber 9th 1951 to celebrate Sir Razik Fareed, then Senator, and the conferment of Knighthood by King George IV. Fareed was presented with a gold medal with the MICH crest at the dinner.. The MICH also organized less formal social events such as carnivals as fundraisers where persons from all communities participated. For instance, fundraising for the MICH building was carried through the formulation of a "sweep" a lottery, which was drawn at the first MICH carnival in May 1951. The prize was a Ford Prefect Car won by Mr. Charles Singho of Kadugannawa.[18] Through its banquets and carnivals the MICH projected itself as the location both of elite power and of elite largess.

Leisure was highlighted and competitive sports for men were cultivated. As many have noted the place of sports and sports teams in the building of national masculinity and group identity is significant (Appadurai 2015). Further, native engagement with colonial sports has also been studied as a form of resistance. Sports was a significant part of the MICH elite's claim to being modern. Billiards, snooker and wrestling were encouraged at the MICH. The MICH had teams for both Billiards and wrestling and were

[18]"Moors Islamic Cultural Home Diary of Important Events," May 19-22, 1951. *MICH Souvenir* 1965, 129.

successful at the club level. The MICH billiards team won the Ceylon A division championship in billiards in '48, '49, '51, '52 and '53. The MICH wrestling tournament was introduced in the 1950s.[19]

At the time under discussion, there was much that was of concern to the Muslim male leadership regarding the place of women. Writers to *The Star of Islam* cited above referenced women in their discussion of the lack of pastoral institutions for less advantaged members of the Muslim communities. In addition, the newspaper featured many polemics regarding the need for education for women, the role of a Muslim wife, and the plight of educated Muslim women in conservative families. As I have argued elsewhere, Razik Fareed's philanthropy also extended to the founding of Muslim Ladies College, one of the earliest and most prominent Muslim girls' schools in the country. Fareed donated the land on which the school still stands (Haniffa 2013). In the context of the above the MICH representatives choosing to depict Ceylon Moor aspirations to being modern and contemporary, (and by the 1960s to be already modern), in relation to women is unsurprising. . The MICH golden jubilee souvenir, printed on the MICH's 25th anniversary in 1969 has a series of photographs of the celebration. Some of these were of the "Pageant of the Moors of Lanka – Al Mashhad." This pageant featured a series of tableaus. Among them were the depictions of Moorish weddings in the "nineteenth century" and in "modern times." The nineteenth century wedding is depicted with a bride seated on a chair with a veil on her head, her head is bowed, and the veil covers her face. The bride groom's party

---

[19] *Silver Jubilee Souvenir.* 1941-1969. MICH 1970, 151-153.

are seated on mats on the floor. They are wearing conical hats *(Surat Thoppi)*. The caption reads: *"Bridegroom and party in Surat Thoppi squatting on mats. Modest bride with eyes cast down seated on bridal throne with elderly ladies by her side."* The "modern" wedding is featured with the bride with her hair exposed, sitting upright on a decorated dais, a "throne," and engaging in conversation with the bridal party of young women seated on chairs around the bride. They are also not covering their hair and are dressed in sarees with short sleeved blouses-the upper-class fineries common to all elites. There is nothing that is identifiably "Muslim" in the second tableau. And the caption states *"Ladies sans perda with modern hairdos."* By the 1960s then, the Muslims at the MICH were presenting themselves as already modern and like everyone else. There are other photographs in the souvenir from 1965 that depict ladies in sarees with a part of the saree over their heads. The uncovered heads in the tableau therefore are significant. Calling attention to the modernity of the Muslim women as indicative of the modernity of the broader society is a gesture familiar from other parts of the Muslim world. The Islamic reformist project was held in abeyance in popular practice in Sri Lanka during that time when parts of the Muslim world was experimenting with other modes of being and belonging including secularism and socialism. Among the Sri Lankan Muslim elites too such ideas may have been more relevant. At this moment in the 1960s the uncovered heads of Muslim women, especially among the Colombo elites was considered one among the many indications of Muslim modernity. It is perhaps the too recognizable success of this self-presentation of being modern that generated the widespread resentment against the reintroduction of the hijab in the 1980s.

8. MICH's Legacy for Muslims in Sri Lanka Today

Today, the MICH continues to be a noteworthy Muslim institution. In addition to its building-a real estate landmark- the MICH has a public presence through its social service activities conducted via its Pasha Villa branch at Dematagoda. The MICH has an active women's wing which runs a women's hostel in the suburb of Wellawatte providing housing for 82 young women attending universities. The hostel is hosted in another important asset of the institution, a six story building constructed with initial funding raised from the United Arab Emirates.[20]

Periodically the MICH also holds meetings honoring various local political leaders -at either its two main buildings or at public halls. . Many prominent individuals, including professionals and business leaders from among the Colombo Muslim elite, continue to hold membership at the MICH to date. It continues to be a prominent and well-known institution among the English-speaking Muslim population of Colombo and Sri Lanka more broadly broadly.

In this essay, I have argued that the Moors of Ceylon attempted to establish, through the MICH, that Muslims were a significant part of the national elite and that as citizens who were educated, cultured and committed to the upliftment of Muslim and Ceylonese community, were a substantial part of the modern Ceylonese nation. However Muslims' claim to be modern and committed to the nation comes under scrutiny in the 1980s. The transformations that occur in

[20] Funding was provided by Her Highness Sheika Fatima Bint Mubarak , wife of His Highness Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan the late President of UAE. See https://www.michsl.org/history.htm

the country as a whole with the adoption of a neoliberal economic model after 1977 and the escalation of the ethnic conflict after 1983 impact Muslims as well. Reform movements make substantial inroads in the 1980s transforming Muslim communities in Sri Lanka. After the war in the north between the Tamil nationalist rebels the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Sri Lankan state ends with great brutality in 2009 the simmering anti Muslim sentiment explodes in a highly organized form across the country. The success of the movement is such that it becomes significant in deciding electoral politics for the following decade. Since the end of the ethnic war in 2009, Muslims have become the target of majoritarian Sinhala Buddhist ire in the form of an organized hate campaign and, after the Easter Bombings of 2019 by ISIS inspired local Islamic militants, the focus of punishing state legislation. As such, stereotypes of Muslim perfidy available globally with some choice local variations abound. Even local activists from non-Muslim backgrounds allying with aggrieved Muslims continue to harbor ideas regarding "Islamic fundamentalism," and of Muslim women oppressed by dress practices. Ideas abound about the transformation of piety practices brought about through reformist activism in the 1980s and there is a constant harking back to a time when Muslims "looked like everyone else" and moved closely with the Sinhalese. This "traditional Muslim" is the Sri Lankan version of the West's "good Muslim" who continued to refuse the inroads that the reformists attempted to make, have been celebrated, and their Islam—less distant from ethno-religious others and less distinct in their assertion of difference-has been sought after. This attempt to write about an earlier moment, when the Muslim leadership was realizing their positioning within a soon to be majoritarian context and were attempting to set in place processes that would ensure their

recognition as equals in terms not just of citizenship but as contributors to the country's intellectual and cultural life, has been difficult.

9. Conclusion

The founding of the MICH follows the founding of similar institutions by other local community groups. The Dutch Burghur Union, for instance had been established much earlier on in 1909 and the Buddhist Congress in 1918. The YMBA that Razik invokes when making a request for land for the MICH, was formed in 1898 (a Moors sports club had been formed in 1908 and its first club house opened in 1939). [21]The objectives of the MICH were somewhat similar to those of the DBU and aspired to emphasize Muslims' capacity to engage with ethnic others on equal terms. In so doing the organization also aspired to mold a particular kind of middle-class Muslim-Moor. The MICH aspired to represent and also bring forth a modern middle-class Muslim where religion, social service, fellowship and recreation would be equally important and would be similar to the already modern Ceylonese, like the Dutch Burghurs, for instance. Yet as I have attempted to show, Muslim thriving had to be achieved in the context of looming institutionalization of the majority minority distinctions that would have severe consequences for all non-Sinhala Buddhist communities in the country.

[21] The Burgher recreation club, first known as the Bambalapitiya recreation club was renamed as the Burgher recreation club after 1915 and only those eligible to vote under the Burgher electorate could be members

References

Aydin, C. (2017) *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Appadurai, A. (2015). Playing with modernity: The decolonization of Indian Cricket. *Altre Modernita,* (14), 1-24.

Asad, K. (1993) *The Muslims of Sri Lanka under British Rule.* Delhi: Narvrang.

Bastin, R. (1997) "The Authentic Inner Life: Complicity and Resistance in the Tamil Hindu Revival." In Michael Roberts, ed., *Collective Identities Revisited.* Volume 1 Colombo: Marga Institute.

Chapman, R. (2016) Almanacs in Francophone Canada: Adaptation and Survival. *The Modern Language Review,* 111(2), 352–372. https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.111.2.0352

Chatterji, J. (2012). South Asian Histories of Citizenship, 1946—1970. *The Historical Journal,* 55(4), 1049–1071. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23352190

De Silva, K. M. (1986) The Muslim minority in a democratic policy : the case of Sri Lanka. In M.A.M Shukri ed. *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity.* Beruwela: Jamiah Naleemia Institute. p 453-472.

Dewaraja, L. (1994) *The Muslims of Sri Lanka: One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony* 900-1915. Colombo: Sri Lanka Islamic Foundation.

Hassan. M.C.A. (1968) *Sir Razik Fareed.* Colombo: Sir Razik Fareed Foundation.

Haniffa, F. (2020) *Activism in a Time of Uncertainty: Revisiting the "Good Minority" Classification Today.* A.M.A. Azeez Memorial Oration, Zahira College Auditorium, Colombo. URL: https://azeezfoundation.com/home/wp-content/uploads/ 2020/02/Azeez-oration-2020-book.pdf

---. (2014) *Ayisha Rauf: A Pioneer of Muslim Women's Emancipation in Sri Lanka.* Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.

Holt, J. C., Ed. (2011) *The Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Ismail, Q. M. (1995) "Unmooring Identity: The Antinomies of Elite Muslim Self-Representation in Modern Sri Lanka." In Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (Eds.), *UnMaking the Nation.* Colombo: SSA. Pps. 55–105.

Jayawardena, K. (2000) "From Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeiosie in Sri Lanka." Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.

Lapidus, I. M. (1997) "Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient. Vol 40. No 4. Pp. 444-460.*

Macan Markar, A.H. (1965) "Beyond our Fondest Dreams" MICH Souvenir publication 1965. Colombo: Moors Islamic Cultural Home.

McKinley, AA and M. S. Xavier. (2017) "The Mysteries of the Universe: The Tamil Muslim Intellectualism of M.C. Siddi Lebbe." South Asia: Journal of *South Asian Studies.* Pp. 1-18.

Mahroof, M.M.M. (1990) "Impact of European-Christian Rule on the Muslims of Sri Lanka: A Socio-Historical Analysis." *Islamic Studies* 29:4. Pps. 353–73.

---. (2015) "Impact of European Christian rule on the Muslims of Sri Lanka." In *Exploring Sri Lankan Muslims: Selected Writings of M.M.M. Mahroof.* South Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

McGilvray, D. B. (1998) "Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32:2. Pps. 433–83.

Mohamed, S.L. (2011). "Who are the Moors of Ceylon?" In John Clifford Holt, ed., *The Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Moors' Islamic Cultural Home Souvenir 1965. (1965) Colombo: Moors Islamic Cultural Home.

Moors' Islamic Cultural Home Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1944-1969. (1970) Colombo: Moors Islamic Cultural Home.

Moors' Islamic Cultural Home Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1944-1994. (1994) Colombo: Moors Islamic Cultural Home.

Nuhman, M.N. (2007) *Sri Lankan Muslims: Ethnic Identity within Cultural Diversity.* Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Ràmanáthan, P. (1888) "The Ethnology Of The 'Moors' Of Ceylon." *The Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 10:36. Pps. 234–62.

Samaraweera, V. (1978) "Some Sociological Aspects of the Muslim Revivalism in Sri Lanka." *Social Compass* XXV 3-4. Pps. 465-475.

Shastri, A. (1999) "Estate Tamils, the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and Sri Lankan Politics." *Contemporary South* Asia 8:1. Pps. 65–86.

Sivasundaram, S. (2013) *Islanded. Britain, Sri Lanka and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Shukri, M. A. M. (1986) *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity.* Jamiah Naleemia Institute.

Tschacher, T. (2018) "From Script to Language: The Three Identities of 'Arabic-Tamil." *South Asian History and Culture* 9:1. Pps. 16-37.

Wettimuny, S. (2022) '"The Jews of Ceylon": Antisemitism, Prejudice and the Moors of Sri Lanka." Presented at the New Research in Sri Lankan History, Series 3.

Farzana Haniffa is Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Colombo. Haniffa obtained her Ph.D in Anthropology from Columbia University, New York. Her research and activist interests have concentrated on the social and political history of Muslim communities, on gender politics and on higher education reform in Sri Lanka. She has published on the Islamic reform movements, the history of minority involvement in electoral politics, Northern Muslims' place in discourses regarding return, resettlement and reconciliation, and on the post-war mobilizing of anti Muslim rhetoric. Haniffa's writings on gender have looked at women in the Islamic piety movement in Sri Lanka, militarization and masculinity among eastern Muslim communities and the gendered nature of post-war anti Muslim sentiment. Haniffa was visiting fellow in Commonwealth studies at the Center for South Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge (2018/19). In January 2016, Haniffa was appointed by the Prime Minister's Office to the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms. In 2016, Haniffa was also a visiting research fellow at the Leibniz Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin. Haniffa serves on the management council of the Social Scientists' Association, the Board of Directors of the Law and Society Trust, and is a trustee of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust in Sri Lanka. In July 2023, Haniffa was appointed to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka.

Guru Printers, Thirunelvely. 021 222 8266