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**Bodu Bala Sena's Charges Against Muslims After the Sri
Lankan Civil War**

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka has people of many ethnicities, faiths, and languages cohabiting peacefully. The Tamils, Muslims, and Christians comprise the remaining community members, while Buddhism makes up most of the population. Even though Buddhist and Muslim relations have been amicable for the past century, there has been a surge in anti-Muslim sentiment and violence in Sri Lanka following the end of the country's civil war. Many Buddhist Nationalist Groups have initiated negative sentiments and accusations against Muslim socio-cultural practices. The Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) has played the most prominent role. This study focuses on the five allegations that the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) has levelled against Muslims and the responses of Muslim organisations. The study aims to determine the true nature of the allegations and their repercussions for Muslims and explain Muslim organisations' strategies to accomplish the objectives. This study followed a qualitative methodology and relied on primary sources, such as interviews and secondary sources, which included research articles, dissertations, books, newspaper articles, websites, activity reports, and publications.

Key Words: *Buddhist-Muslim, Buddhist Nationalist Groups, Bodu Bala Sena, anti-Muslim sentiments*

INTRODUCTION

The Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), a Sinhala- Buddhist organisation, was founded in 2012. BBS means “Buddhist Strength Army” or “Buddhist Defense Force”. The BBS was established in May 2012 (Silva, 2006). Venerable Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero, Venerable Kirama Wimalajothi Thero, two unnamed persons, and lay Buddhist Dilantha Withanage were the founders. Wimalajothi, the founding President of the BBS, has since resigned, leaving Gnanasara as General Secretary, a *de facto* leader, and Withanage as CEO (Shirley, 2015). According to Bruno Marshall Shirley, these two individuals are the most influential spokesmen for the Bodu Bala Sena, and their press conferences, speeches, and interviews form the basis of the organisation.

Withanage studied information technology and worked as an advisor to the Minister of National Language and Social Integration. Wimalajothi has known Gnanasara since they were both members of the Sinhalese Buddhist delegation to a post-war reconciliation meeting in Norway in 2011. In 2012, he co-founded the Bodu Bala Sena with Gnanasara and Wimalajothi. The Ministry requested his resignation in 2013, and he has since worked full-time as the CEO of the Bodu Bala Sena (Shirley, 2015). Its founding leaders were Rev. Kirama Wimalajothi and Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, who had broken away from the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) because it was not militant enough to protect Buddhism (Silva, 2006). According to Venerable Professor Uttarawala Dhammaratana Thera of the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka, the function of the Bodu Bala Sena is a politically related organisation involved in many different political campaigns throughout the country (Zhang, 2016).

This organisation was founded and run by monks. Gnanasara claimed that they are supported by almost 80% of the monks in Sri Lanka (Shirley, 2015). Benjamin Schonthal stated that “*except for one lay member, who also serves as the organisation’s lay coordinator, all of the other members of the organisation’s executive committee are Buddhist monks from the deep south of Sri Lanka. Over the past several decades, the BBS has represented a progression of politicising monks who have intended to progressively politicise Buddhism as a rallying point for the safeguards of Sri Lanka’s Sinhala- Buddhist ethnic majority* (Silva, 2006).”

The leaders of BBS claimed that as a consequence of Sri Lankan Muslims, Sri Lankans had become unethical and had turned away from Buddhism (*Why Buddhist Extremist Groups like the Bodu Bala Sena Are Targeting Muslims in Sri Lanka — Quartz India*, n.d.). Therefore, the founders of BBS established this organisation. Dilantha Withanage, the organisation’s theoretician, mentioned their intention. They believe that “*although Sinhalese make up the majority of the population and Buddhism is acknowledged in the constitution, this is not the case in practice. We felt it was our responsibility to safeguard the Sinhalese and Buddhism: hence, the BBS was established... Although Sinhalese are the majority, they are becoming a global minority due to globalisation. All embassies will raise their voices if something occurs to the Muslims and Tamils, but there is no one to safeguard the Sinhalese if something happens to them* (Zuhair, 2016).”

The BBS’s vision is “*protection of Buddhism for Future Generations; the mission is ‘the BBS would bring together the four Buddhist congregations, Bhikkhus (Buddhist monks), Bhikkhunis (Buddhist nuns), Upasaka (layman), and Upasika (laywoman), to lead the nation in protecting, safeguarding, and sustaining Buddhist social values in the face of dynamic global trends of change, and to organise programs and projects in this regard in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of Sri Lanka (Bodu Bala Sena | Bodu Bala Sena BBS, n.d.)’*”

BBS has its headquarters in Colombo’s *Sri Sambuddhathwa Jayanthi Mandiraya*. The Buddhist Cultural Centre, which Kirama Wimalajothi founded, also owns *Sri Sambuddhathwa Jayanthi Mandiraya*. The centre has a variety of amenities, including a conference centre, modern administrative offices, and a well-stocked bookstore with various Buddhist books from Sri Lanka and elsewhere. According to reports, the organisation is supported by donations from the Buddhist community. It maintains close ties with Sinhala businessmen in Colombo and Sinhala immigrant community groups in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, Europe, and North

America (Silva, 2006). Robin Noel also stated that according to his findings, the BBS's support base is primarily male, young and based in urban or semi-urban areas (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015).

Five resolutions were enacted to safeguard Buddhism in the country while boosting the state's support (Silva, 2006). In July 2012, the BBS held its first national convention at Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall. Until the 2015 presidential election, the BBS eschewed direct political participation. In 2015, they returned Rajapaksa to the presidency, claiming that his campaign aligned more with the Sinhala Buddhist interests.

BBS started its processes to safeguard the country and Buddhism from the hands of Muslim conquerors. It had a strong claim that Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and the Maldives were previously Buddhist countries which became Muslim countries, and currently, Sri Lankan Muslims attempt to make Sri Lanka the next colony in a rising Muslim empire aimed at being built by the Wahhabi movement spreading from the Middle East, Pakistan, and Malaysia (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015). Furthermore, they claimed that the Muslims have multiple motherlands, which Sinhalese only see as Sri Lanka. So, they need to stand for a Buddhist country.

In these contexts, BBS started to spread anti-Muslim sentiments and violence across the country. Anti-Muslim sentiments of the BBS were reflected in numerous ways, such as anti- *ḥalāl* and Islāmic law (*sharī'ah*) opposition, anti-animal slaughtering, opposition to Islāmic clothing (*hijāb, niqāb*), and agitations, opposition to the practice of Islāmic principles and obligations, as well as attacks on worship places, allegations against Islāmic organisations.

BBS ANTI- HALĀL OPPOSITIONS

The Arabic term *ḥalāl* means 'permissible', while the Arabic term *ḥarām* means 'impermissible'. Islām made consuming *ḥalāl* one of the essential obligations to the Muslims. Therefore, the main theological decision-making body of Sri Lankan Muslims, All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), has monitored and issued *ḥalāl* certificates since 2000 (Yusoff & Sarjoon, 2017). *Ḥalāl* certificates are issued to verify whether foods contain prohibited substances and export business items on national and worldwide markets.

BBS started an anti-*ḥalāl* campaign in February 2012 and the Bodu Bala Sena's first major national campaign, launched in 2013, was against *ḥalāl* certification, which they described as Muslims' deliberate attempt to "destroy Sinhalese and Buddhist food habits and culture by replacing them with *ḥalāl* culture (Shirley, 2015)." BBS claimed that money from the *ḥalāl* food industry funds international terrorism (*Violent Buddhist Extremists Are Targeting Muslims in Sri Lanka | The Independent | The Independent*, n.d.). Further, they claimed ACJU profited from *ḥalāl* certification and used it for nefarious purposes. Dilantha Withanage explained, "when you buy *ḥalāl*, a small portion of your money goes to Islamic groups, and we have no idea what they do with it (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015)." It is argued that *ḥalāl* certification money was utilised to spread Islām, develop Islāmic society and construct mosques. Palitha asserted, in addition, that *ḥalāl* logos are considered as a preface to more ominous developments and "it is laying the groundwork for the spread of Islām in the country; it is the beginning of the Islāmization of Sri Lankan society (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015)."

BBS members had called for the boycott of *ḥalāl* consumer products until the entire practice was abolished. This movement took many forms, from calls to boycott Muslim companies and *ḥalāl* items to rallies outside Muslim-owned stores (*Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka – Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 2013). This campaign also had a solid online presence, a Facebook group, and pages on the ground.

Gnarasara further claims that *ḥalāl* certification is part of a "strategic plan" to Islāmize Sri Lanka, claiming that they wanted all Sinhalese businesspeople to acquire these certificates for their products. They persuaded all the hotels, restaurants, and other businesses to purchase these *ḥalāl* certificates; as a result, they profited handsomely. They attempt to replace Sinhalese and Buddhist food patterns and culture with Islāmic culture.

They accused the country appears less like Sinhalese and more like Muslim. That is what we intended to avoid (Shirley, 2015). Michael Jerryson explained that ḥalāl has an impact on society's culture. Every shop: ḥalāl food, ḥalāl restaurant... they make up only 10% of the population. As a result, we concluded that it is... a component of Islāmification (Shirley, 2015).

The BBS believes that the ḥalāl logo triggers issues about food, land, and economy, all of which are linked to a significant Muslim attempt to take over the country. Their argument against ḥalāl certification is that ḥalāl items have already been dedicated to a god and hence, cannot be used in *puja* (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015).

These nationalist forces used the internet to organise a network of Buddhist organisations to boycott ḥalāl-labelled foods. In between, meetings between the ACJU, the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC), and Buddhist monks were held through the intervention of some Sinhala and Muslim politicians linked with the government, and a settlement was reached on March 11, 2013. The ACJU would remove the ḥalāl logo from products sold for local consumption but would keep it on when exporting to Islamic nations where it is required. The BBS also turned down this offer, insisting on “the abolition of the entire Ḥalāl procedure (Silva, 2006).”

On March 13, 2013, the government declared that the ACJU had no authority to issue ḥalāl certificates and that a new method of certifying ḥalāl products would need to be developed (*No Coercion, No Logo, Assures New Halal Body | The Sunday times Sri Lanka*, n.d.). The BBS, according to Ven. Gnanasara Thera recognises the need for ḥalāl-compliant export procedures, which might be implemented by the Export Bureau or the Sri Lanka Standards Institution. The ḥalāl compliance procedure before certification should be implemented for local products (*No Coercion, No Logo, Assures New Halal Body | The Sunday times Sri Lanka*, n.d.). The BBS declared success in its campaign against ḥalāl, stating that it would no longer bring up the ḥalāl issue. The Government officials failed to take any steps to quell or control anti-ḥalāl sentiments and protests. As a result, hostilities between Sinhalese and Muslims have deteriorated (Yusoff & Sarjoon, 2017).

MUSLIM WOMEN'S CLOTHING

The BBS had succeeded in its anti-ḥalāl campaign against Muslims and expressed their happiness on the decision over the ḥalāl certified logos. The BBS celebrated ḥalāl victory by lighting crackers in many urban areas (*Bodhu Bala Sena Begins New Campaign Against Attire of Muslim Women in Sri Lanka After Abolishing Halal Logos – Dbsjeyaraj.Com*, n.d.). Soon after this, the BBS started a campaign against women's clothing, such as *abāyah hijāb* and *niqāb* (face covering). While Muslim women in Sri Lanka wear various clothes, the dress that has enraged the BBS covers the entire body.

Venerable Kirama Wimalajothi Thero has said that the BBS will launch a new campaign against the attire worn by many Muslim women in Sri Lanka before March 31, 2013 (*Bodhu Bala Sena Begins New Campaign Against Attire of Muslim Women in Sri Lanka After Abolishing Halal Logos – Dbsjeyaraj.Com*, n.d.). The BBS considered these dresses' Arabized' dresses, and the *niqāb* (face covering) was termed “*gonibilla*”. The word “*gonibilla*” used in Sinhala means ‘monster’ to scare children. They mentioned that the black colour and the dress covering the whole body scared the children and some others, too (Farzana Haniffa, 2015). Also, this black-coloured and full-face cover dress is considered as unlucky to them.

Furthermore, they stated that these dresses symbolise an outsider, thus, transforming Muslim women into foreigners. This demonstrates that the Muslims are not attempting to live in harmony with the Sinhalese people but rather wish to exist as a distinct nation. Also, Chaminda argued that the burqa was inappropriate for Sri Lanka's climate. He implied that Muslim women began wearing burqas to conceal their pregnancy: “*I have one theory. They are attempting to boost the population. No one will know they are pregnant if they wear a burqa* (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015).” Likewise, Dilantha Withanage remarked, “*When I go in the street, I have a fundamental right to see a person's face (New Fears in Sri Lanka amid Anti-Muslim Campaign, n.d.)*.”

Therefore, the BBS commenced the anti- *abāyah* campaign on March 17, 2013, in Kandy. They demanded the government ban the *niqāb* and *abāyah* in Sri Lanka as they threatened security. Also, the attention to the dress was purely in keeping with its putative strangeness and differences within the Sri Lankan context (Farzana Haniffa, 2015). BBS supporters have also linked burqas to the illegal crossing of national borders. “*With that clothing, some criminal things could happen,*” Rev. Samitha predicted. “*They may be able to travel with illegal weapons on occasion.*” *They may travel with illegal narcotics like heroin or something similar* (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015).”

As a result, Muslim religious leaders watching the debate over women’s dress advised Muslim women to wear coloured *abāyah* instead of black for security concerns. Furthermore, Muqaddasa Wahid stated in her writing that “*the black abāyah and face covering (niqāb) cause friction between communities, some senior Sinhalese intellectuals who are interested in communal unity informed me. Please tell your people to quit wearing black abāyahs and niqābs since they are not part of Islām* (Wahid, 2021) .”

In response to such a statement, the Muslim Council of Sri Lanka sent an email in 2014 stating, “*The excessive visibility of the BLACK abāyah, which attracts unnecessary attention to themselves, is one of the key drivers of the onslaught on hijāb and niqāb.*” Some are also concerned that an alien culture is being introduced. We must encourage Muslim women to wear coloured (non-black) *abāyah* and head coverings in public and highlight our responsibility to preserve our Sri Lankan identity (Wahid, 2021).

However, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces have also pressed the government to establish limitations on wearing Islamic identity-based attire in public areas. Also, anti- *abāyah* sentiments are reflected across the country in numerous ways. Muslim girls are instructed and sometimes forced to remove their *hijābs* and long Panjabi trousers and conceal them in their school bags in many notable towns’ schools. Similarly, in several Sinhalese areas, there have been a few incidents of Muslim women being assaulted for wearing Islāmic clothing (Sarjoun et al., 2016).

Following the Easter Sunday assaults, Muslim women’s religious dress was especially controversial in a pluralistic society. In slightly over a week following the Easter Sunday attacks, the state-issued additional regulations under the Public Security Ordinance of 1947 (PSO). Wearing any garment, clothing, or another material covering the entire face is prohibited, according to regulation 32A. (1) (a), issued in the Extraordinary Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, No. 2121/1, on Monday, April 29, 2019 (*The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka*, 2019). As further illustrated in the Gazette, “*Public place*” refers to any public road, any building, any enclosed or open area, any vehicle, or any other mode of transportation; “*full face*” refers to a person’s entire face, including the ears; and “*public road*” refers to any roadway over a public bridge, as well as any pavement, drain, embankment, or ditch belonging to or appertaining to a public road (*The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka*, 2019).”

Muqaddasa Wahid mentioned that male Muslim religious leaders appeared on television, asking Muslim women not to wear the face veil and wear coloured *abāyahs* for security reasons. On the other hand, the idea of wearing coloured *abāyahs* was discussed in the Muslim community for years before the Easter Sunday attacks (Wahid, 2021).

On April 25, 2019, the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), Sri Lanka’s leading Muslim scholarly organisation, started responding to the face-covering prohibition. The summary mentioned therein, “This present situation may cause challenges for Muslim women who wear face covers in public. Thus, we must take every precaution in this unpredictable political situation to prevent opening the path for racial elements. So, the ACJU urges Muslim women, in particular, to avoid any potential inconveniences that wearing a face cover in public may bring and to act responsibly and seriously in light of the current situation (*Important Message with Regard to Face Cover of Muslim Women - ACJU*, n.d.).”

HIGH BIRTH RATE OF MUSLIMS

Another claim of BBS against Muslims was about them trying to take over the country with their high birth rate. Muslims will become the country's majority by 2100 as the community grows faster (*Facts And Fallacies Of Muslim Population In Sri Lanka - Colombo Telegraph*, n.d.), and Sri Lanka will be a Muslim country by 2050 (*Islam, Contraception And Myths On Muslim Population Growth In Sri Lanka - Colombo Telegraph*, n.d.).

Such misconceptions spread among the community. BBS monks mentioned in their many speeches that Sinhala – Buddhists will lose their majority as they have family-planning abortions, and the NGOs support that. Withange stated this to Michael Jerryson in an interview, “*there is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that supports decreasing Sinhala- Buddhist families and abortions; also, Sinhala-Buddhist had the family plan, but Muslims will not do so. Further, he stated, so we began this anti-family improvement against the slogan “the small family is a golden family,” and we promoted having more children; however, because of the government, economic structures, and other factors, it is extremely difficult for Sinhala families to have more Children. Also, education and employment play a major role in family planning. So, he demands that Islām exercise some population control* (Shirley, 2015).”

Furthermore, BBS members claimed that Muslims have a hidden agenda to reduce the country's Sinhala Buddhist population. Malinga, a young BBS supporter, speculated that Muslims support family planning programs. The government developed the *concept of punchi pawula rattaran [little family is beautiful]*. Muslims, on the other hand, provided the concealed concept. The ministers have collected money from Muslims to spread this ideology (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015). He also stated that healthcare companies and hospitals are profiting and promoting Sinhala people not to have children. The people are encouraged to have a C-section so they cannot have more than three children.

Buddhist monks commonly allude to the Muslim family's fecundity in disparaging terms; according to the Madegoda Abhayatissa Thero, Muslims have more than three children. In a Muslim family, the grandmother, grandchild, and mother are all pregnant simultaneously. The BBS monk stressed the significance of young people having children to protect Sinhalese in their campaigns while emphasising Muslim women. He said, ‘*if you meet a Muslim mother, she will have one child in her hand and another in her stomach, as well as a long line of them following her* (Farzana Haniffa, 2015).’

Therefore, large and noticeable Muslim groups are portrayed as over-sized ‘nuclear families’, whose number will lead them to displace the Sinhalese as the majority in this discourse. Also, there was an accusation across the country that Muslims are trying to reduce the Sinhala- Buddhist population in many ways. According to one allegation, certain Muslim-owned textile chains purposefully sell contraceptive-embedded underwear and freely give contraceptive sweets to Sinhala women to make them barren and facilitate the extinction of the Sinhala race (Silva, 2006).

Furthermore, the BBS has claimed that Muslim store owners have discreetly fed contraceptives to innocent Buddhist women. So, the BBS spread the message that the *Nolimit* clothing store gives away free sweets (toffee) during the new year. This toffee includes malic acid (E296), which will cause a pregnant woman's fetus to be aborted (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015). In this regard, on February 27, 2018, a Sinhalese mob stormed a Muslim hotel in Ampara, accusing them of mixing infertility drugs (*Wanda pethi*) with food supplied to Sinhala customers (‘*Wanda Pethi*’ *My Foot!* - *Colombo Telegraph*, n.d.).

Many followers of the BBS claimed that Muslim doctors intended to prevent Sinhala women from having multiple children (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015). On May 23, 2019, the nationalist Sri Lankan newspaper *Divaina* published a front-page story alleging that a Muslim doctor secretly sterilised 4000 Sinhala Buddhist women after cesarean deliveries (*Unsubstantiated Claims Muslim Doctor Sterilized Women Raise Tensions in Sri Lanka | Reuters*, n.d.). After two days, a doctor, Segu Shihabdeen Mohamed Shafi, was arrested. However, the occurrence is unethical since the relevant authorities were not permitted to undertake an impartial

investigation to discover the truth. These poisonous misconceptions, developed and disseminated around the country, are intended to weaken racial harmony and incite a new wave of violence to benefit unscrupulous politicians and others who seek to profit at the country's expense (*Facts And Fallacies Of Muslim Population In Sri Lanka - Colombo Telegraph*, n.d.).

In addition, BBS argued that Muslims' practice of polygamy increased their overall birthrate. According to Withanage, the fact that Sri Lankan legislation permits Muslim men to have up to four wives will limit the options available to Sinhalese men, resulting in the extinction of the Buddhist population (Shirley, 2015). The BBS website illustrates this with an infographic that if Muslim men can have up to four wives, some of them must be Sinhalese women. This will deprive Sinhalese men of possible wives, contributing to the "dying out" of the Sinhalese race.

Besides these allegations, misconceptions, and strategic intentions, there is a crucial point concerning the Buddhist birth control practised in Sinhala. Wickrema Weerasooria reviewed the book *Dreams of change: land, labour and conflict in Sri Lanka* by Sarath Amunugama. He mentioned that the family planning policy was implemented from 1977 to 1986. He stated how the population policy and implementation were introduced and who helped to exercise the policy (*Why Amunugama Is the Most Qualified to Pen 'Dreams of Change' | The Sunday Times Sri Lanka*, n.d.).

Furthermore, he mentioned that slogans which helped envelop the government printers ran as follows: "*Punchi Pavula Raththaran' -Api Dennai- Daru – Dennai*, which means in English "A small family is beautiful or golden – Two parents and two children (*Why Amunugama Is the Most Qualified to Pen 'Dreams of Change' | The Sunday Times Sri Lanka*, n.d.)." In addition, he extended his gratitude to Amunugama in this book review for the latter's contribution to raising awareness and achieving the goal of bringing family planning out of the private and public spheres. This family planning approach had widespread support from policymakers, politicians, and many ordinary Sri Lankans.

Mansur Dhalan mentioned in his interview at YA TV, "*the Muslims are the cause of the declining Sinhala population. Look at how many abortion facilities are springing up (Is Muslim Halal Prohibited (Haram) for Non-Muslims? On Vimeo*, n.d.)." Also, Chanuka Wattagama wrote an article entitled "*It is a vile lie to say that the Sinhalese may be a minority.*" He mentioned the reason why he stated it as a vile lie. According to his writing, "*the entire objective of the Sinhala racist political parties and groups that promote this myth is to instil dread in the naturally emotional and ancient Sinhala- Buddhist mindset and to utilise that fear to move them further in their political path. That is why this falsehood must be exposed. That is why it is essential to uncover what is truly going on in Sri Lanka's population pyramid*, n.d.)." Likewise, Nimal Siripala, an adviser to the National Statistic office on Solomon Island, wrote "facts and fallacies of the Muslim population in Sri Lanka."

WORSHIP PLACES

BBS started another claim against Muslim places of worship (Mosques), primarily in Buddhist-majority areas. Also, there is a claim that there are only 9800 temples in a country where Buddhists make up 71% of the population. Muslims, on the other hand, who represent 10% of the population, have 6300 mosques (Silva, 2006). Liyanage claimed that mosques have unofficially declared the number of Muslim towns as 'high-security zone's restricted to Sinhala and Tamil for social, economic, cultural and political activities (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015).

BBS portrays Muslims as a cultural threat, claiming they occupy sacred (Buddhist) space in Sri Lanka. They claimed that Muslims build mosques and residential areas near or on Buddhist religious places and destroy Buddha's images, which diminishes his physical and visible presence in Sri Lanka (Shirley, 2015).

BBS supporters accused the Muslims have established separate Islāmic zones. The minorities find it difficult to live and practice their faith in the regions historically and religiously significant to Buddhists. They considered

some public places sacred to Buddhists in Dambulla and Anuradhapura. There are efforts to declare them as sacred (*Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka – Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 2013). The Sinhala nationalist claims that the lands on these mosques were constructed and gifted to the Muslims by the ancient Sinhala rulers (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015).

On April 20, 2012, a group of 2000 individuals, commanded by the Mahanayaka of the Rangiri Dambulla chapter Venerable Inamaluwe Sumangala Thero, allegedly forced their way into the 50-year-old *Masjidul Kairiya* mosque, which they said was illegal. Friday prayers at the mosque had to be cancelled, and the building had to be evacuated under police protection [64].

In this case, they claimed that the area where they built the mosque belonged to Dambulla Raja Maha Viharaya. So, the Sri Lankan government ordered demolishing the mosque and relocating it to another area. However, senior Muslim politicians were outraged by the incident as the mosque was 65 years old and was legally contributed under the Waqf Act.

Likewise, a mob of over a hundred people, allegedly led by Buddhist monks, demolished a 300-year-old Muslim shrine at Anuradhapura. They stated that the shrine was demolished because local Muslims attempted to remodel it into a mosque. They said the area is holy and belonged to the Buddhists as the land was given to them 2000 years ago (*Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka – Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 2013).

According to the Attacks on 'Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka', many mosques were damaged around the country (*Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka – Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 2013). Several of these incidents are still under investigation; some offenders are unknown, and in others, Buddhist groups have claimed responsibility, particularly members of the Buddhist clergy, who are suspected of being responsible for more than half of the attacks.

Therefore, the government created regulations to control the establishment and activities of religious places, including mosques. Some Muslim groups have been accused of establishing mosques and madrasas without informing the authorities. The 2008 circular states the need for authorisation from the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and religious affairs to build new mosques (*Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka – Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 2013). This originated from a fear of 'Muslim expansion' and 'distrust of Muslims' socio-religious activities.

According to the data from the Waqf Act and the Ministry of Muslim religious and cultural affairs, the registered mosques of Muslims in Sri Lanka are below 2200. There are few unregistered worship places, such as other religious groups in the country (*Muslim Worship Places ACJU.Pdf*, n.d.).

ISLAMIC ORGANISATIONS

BBS have claims against the Islāmic organisations which are functioning in Sri Lanka. They accused Islāmic organisations of promoting extremism through their activities, programs and concept throughout the country. These accusations were made strong after the Easter Sunday attacks as three Islāmic organisations, National *Tawhīd Jamā'at* (NTJ), *Jamaathe Millaathe Ibrahim* (JMI), and *Willayath As Seylani* (WAS), were banned by the Sri Lankan government following the terrible attack.

The Sri Lankan government banned another eleven Islāmic Organisations, including the Islāmic State (ISIS) and Al- Al-Qaeda, for their links to extremist activities in the country (*Sri Lanka Bans 11 Extremist Groups, Including ISIS and Al-Qaeda - The Hindu*, n.d.). The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, dated April 13 2021, published the names of the eleven Islāmic Organisations.

Moreover, BBS publicly accused the Islāmic organisations of funding international terrorism with funds from *Halāl*-certified food industries. It was also stated that profits from *Halāl* certification were utilised to fund the

Islāmic fundamental operations in Sri Lanka and overseas (Silva, 2006). The BBS followers accused ACJU of these claims that they are doing these Islāmic fundamental activities in Sri Lanka.

The General Secretary of the BBS gave a talk to *Hiru TV* on May 28, 2019, concerning Islāmic organisations in Sri Lanka. He listed all the Islāmic organisations in the country and claimed that all these organisations are Wahabi organisations, which means extremist organisations. He also presented a document: “*Saudi intelligence stated not to build on an individual as the leader of Wahabi organisations in Sri Lanka, and they are touching with fifty-odd organisations (Hiru News - YouTube, 2019).*” The BBS supporters mentioned that there are 400 Muslim organisations in Sri Lanka now, and Saudi Arabia funds them (Robin Noel Badone Jones, 2015).

In addition to that, on July 5, 2021, there was a special media conference organised by BBS. The secretary of BBS mentioned, “we met the president and Director of the Defense Ministry by submitting a special report to ban all these Islāmic organisations in Sri Lanka”. Further, he claimed that these organisations are divided into *Salafi* and *Wahhabi* and made destruction in this country. He mentioned that *Jamaat-e-Islām i*, which started in 1954, has many branches across the country which aim to convert Sri Lanka into a Muslim country (*Special Media Conference of Bodu Bala Sena !,2021*).

Following these accusations, ACJU arranged a media conference on 2013 February 8 regarding the allegations against Islāmic organisations, including ACJU. They attempted to give a clear picture regarding the activities of Islāmic organisations in the Sinhala Language, which is the country's official language (*01 Allegations Against Muslims & ACJU - YouTube, 2021*). Despite the clarifications, there are still numerous complaints against them, specifically, the sponsorship of terrorism and Islāmic fundamentalist activities.

VIEWS AND RESPONSES OF ACJU AND NATIONAL SHOORA COUNCIL (NSC)

The ACJU and NSC, both Islamic organisations, regard the BBS as an agent of some internal or external organisations or a political gain tool. Their charges against Muslims are not just their thoughts but reflections of everyday Islamophobia, political advantage, and some baseless imaginations and proofless phobias.

However, the ACJU attempted to clarify these claims and misconceptions to the BBS, its officials, the Buddhists and other Sri Lankan groups through various methods. They attempted to provide clear explanations by releasing booklets, books, and declarations and interacting with essential society leaders such as religious leaders, government officials, and intelligence agencies.

The ACJU, in particular, met with the BBS General Secretary Ven. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thero on multiple occasions to clarify their claims about Islam and Muslims. In addition, booklets, publications and online sources were used to clarify the misconceptions and accusations disseminated throughout the country. This includes assistance from other Islamic organisations as well.

Similarly, the NSC makes efforts to outlaw the BBS by writing to the IGP. Furthermore, the NSC believes that Sufi and X-Muslim groups promote BBS to gain more biased views about Islam and Muslims and that they pose a threat to the Muslim community. However, the NSC maintains that they should not provide explanations or establish discussions with the BBS since it is futile to converse with or respond to paid servants who are mercenaries.

However, both organisations believe that most Buddhist-Muslim problems and disagreements result from the BBS's anti-Muslim sentiments and campaign, as evidenced by numerous research studies.

Arkam Nooramith explained that ‘it is an organisation of a foreign country or any other agent to attain specific goals and disrupt the co-existed society in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, they aimed to create a fearful and uncomfortable atmosphere to gain a political advantage; thus, they carefully planned and carried out all accusations.’(Arkam Nooramith (in discussion with the Author, June 01, 2021) Similarly, Riza Yahiya stated, ‘this is a post-war invention that was paid for by geopolitical factions and international paymasters. They also

have ties to Zionism, Israel, and others who aim to polarise people, notably Buddhists and Muslims.’ (in discussion with the Author, June 19, 2021)

ACJU’S RESPONSE TO BBS CLAIMS

According to interviewees, when the ḥalāl issue arose, BBS gave two primary justifications for their accusations: ACJU benefits in the millions from this ḥalāl certification and uses this money to fund terrorism.

Interviewee Two was the secretary of the ḥalāl division when this situation arose and was well-versed in this subject. He noted that because this problem threatened peace and unity, ACJU authorities met the Honorable. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the former Defense Secretary, debate the matter. We spoke openly about the tariff and profit and asked for an audit to see this. Following the request, they performed an official financial inspection of the Ḥalāl certification process division and ascertained the truth. However, they again claimed that we coerced non-Muslims to obtain this ḥalāl certification, that Arab countries do not require this certification, and that only Sri Lanka requires it.

As a result, we held press conferences and debates and offered all required clarifications. During this press conference, ACJU described the aim of the ḥalāl certification, its latest income and profit after expenses, and how the income will be used to improve the international standards of the ḥalāl certification mechanism. ACJU further proposed that the government take over the entire Halal certification process and urged the government to create an acceptable structure for all stakeholders. The head of the ACJU also stated that the decision was made to avoid a “continued debate on this sensitive matter, which could undermine the peaceful co-existence of the people.” The ACJU further stated that the government might model the Halal certification procedure on the systems used in Singapore and Thailand, which are implemented with the assistance of the state government (*Halal Issue ACJU Press Meet, 2013*). These explanations are provided in English, Sinhala, and Tamil.

Murshid Mulaffar mentioned, ‘finally, ACJU urged the government to accept ḥalāl certifying authority instead of ACJU in this procedure, but the government declined. Thus, a private company is now conducting this procedure. Therefore, we request that anyone interested in assuming control of this process come forward. (in discussion with the Author, June 02, 2021)

According to interviewees one and Three, the ACJU conducted conversations with BBS monks to emphasise the significance and necessity of this Ḥalāl certification. They all remarked that ACJU had given up ḥalāl certification authority to resolve the Muslim community’s issues and ensure the country’s national unity.

MUSLIM WOMEN’S DRESS CODE

The ACJU’s Council for Coordination and Cooperation (CCC) Affairs issued the ‘Social Dialog’ book series to encourage Sri Lankans toward peace and co-existence on some major accusations against Islam and Muslims. Under important topics, these book series were published in both Tamil and Sinhala. According to Arkam Nooramith, ACJU organised a group called ‘Unity Hub,’ with the responsibility of releasing books on significant claims by BBS. (in discussion with the Author, June 01, 2021)

‘Extremist Islamic clothing’ is one of the booklet’s topics. This book clearly explains women’s clothing not only from an Islamic perspective but also from scientific and religious perspectives of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, the accusations levelled at the niqāb and ḥijāb, international opposition to the niqāb, and more. All interviewees cited the book written to answer every doubt and question about women’s dress, such as the ḥijāb, niqāb, and burqa. What makes people fear the burqa? Should the burqa be banned? This book discusses all of the features and points of view. This book was given to the BBS’s General Secretary, Venerable Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero, and IntelliGenesis and Authorities.

HIGH BIRTH RATE OF MUSLIMS

Similarly, the 'Social Dialog' book series 'Fear of the growth of Muslim population' was mentioned by all the interviewees, as this was published to answer the claims by BBS regarding the growth of the Muslim population. According to the Interviewees, this book responds to four significant claims, including Muslims consciously increasing their population. The Sinhalese will expand by 25.4 per cent if they grow at the same pace as Muslims. Since Muslims are consciously advancing their population, they will be the majority race in this country by 2040. The Muslim population has rapidly increased in a few districts.

According to Murshid Mulaffar, the booklet was released primarily to explain points made in the Sinhala book entitled 'In the Face of the Destruction of a Dynasty.' We highlighted the reasons behind their population decline by referencing the Sinhalese professors' quotations. Furthermore, all components are statistically and mathematically proven. (In discussion with the Author, June 02, 2021) Further, Mohamed Farhan stated that this book had been extensively researched, appropriately presented, and distributed in hard and soft copies around the country. (in discussion with the Author, June 07, 2021)

PLACES OF WORSHIP

According to BBS, there has been an increase in the number of Muslim places of worship in the country. They also mentioned a statistic on Muslim places of worship. Arkam Nooramith stated that the statistics they mentioned are false, and we provide the government with the actual statistics of the Muslim worship Places in Sri Lanka. (in discussion with the Author, June 01, 2021)

All interviewers cited the book "Extraordinary spread in Muslim mosques," written in reaction to the BBS's charges against Muslim mosques. Murshid Mulaffar summarised the book by discussing its contents. He said, 'In that book, we discussed how our social, religious, and educational activities are built on mosques, as well as the reasons to construct mosques nearby, Mosque Laws, and All Religious Thoughts Regarding Religious Places. In addition, we looked at the laws governing mosques and how all religious traditions view religious places'. He added that the information on Muslim places of worship is based on data provided by the Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs and the Sri Lanka Wakf Board. (in discussion with the Author, June 02, 2021)

MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS

According to the BBS, Islamic organisations receive global funds and also provide funding for extremism. Interviewees stated unequivocally that the ACJU has a firm policy of not accepting funds from overseas sources. As a result, they have received no money so far. As a result, ACJU is not required to respond to BBS on this matter.

According to Murshid Mulaffar, BBS accused the profits from Halal certification of supporting terrorism. However, they conducted an official audit of ACJU's accounts and learned everything they needed about funding, income, and other matters. He stated that if we received funds from other sources, we would only receive the funds from the banks after providing a report on the expenses. We have never received funding from Arab countries. (in discussion with the Author, June 02, 2021)

Also, Salman. P.L mentioned that we have organised many dialogues with the General Secretary of BBS regarding the activities and nature of ACJU and clarified that we do not encourage terrorism or extremism in our teachings or guidance. However, he only accepts our explanation after the meeting and then claims in a public speech that we are encouraging terrorism or extremism. Furthermore, whenever allegations or problems occurred in Islam and unity, the ACJU took necessary actions by collaborating with the Defense Ministry and the Chief of National Intelligence and maintaining a healthy relationship with them. (In discussion with the Author, December 07, 2021) The author explained these five claims in the preceding chapter with clear evidence of their actuality and the arguments against those allegations.

GOVERNMENT'S STAND ON THE PROHIBITION OF BBS

Many studies, including those cited by the author and others, show that the BBS statements cause most Buddhist-Muslim confrontations, yet the government has not taken any steps to ban the BBS. Many online petitions have been started, as have several requests from Islamic organisations, research, and public pressure to ban BBS, but the government has remained silent on the subject. However, in Sri Lanka, under a part of Sri Lanka's Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), the government has banned eleven Islamic extremist organisations were considered extremist organisations.

Despite the recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) in the final report of the 2019 bombings, the BBS is categorised as a religious extremist organisation that should be prohibited. Furthermore, certain Cabinet officials believe that the BBS organisation should not be prohibited. However, the Government Spokesman and the Minister of Mass Media, Keheliya Rambukwella, stated: "According to the PCoI report, the suggestions are to be adopted within the President's prerogative and would be carried out through general action plans. Suppose there are inadequate reasons to consider the BBS or any other institution specified for a prescription. In that case, the President will decide according to his power (*BBS, To Ban or Not to Ban: Decision in President's Hands, Keheliya - The Morning - Sri Lanka News, n.d.*)"

In this regard, the BBS general secretary stated that they did not commit any crimes in order to be banned; they raised their voices against Islamist extremism. He was granted a presidential pardon in the last months of former President Maithripala Sirisena's rule. While he has been widely accused of encouraging inter-communal violence, including two deadly anti-Muslim pogroms in June 2014 and March 2018, he was convicted of contempt of court for a separate event and sentenced to six years in prison.

Ethnic and religious leaders have manipulated the ethnic and religious vote to stay in power or regain power. For fear of alienating their support base, successive governments have hesitated to take serious action against extremist preachers and wider intolerance. For fear of alienating their support base, successive governments have hesitated to take serious action against extremist preachers and wider intolerance.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on particular BBS allegations after the civil conflict in Sri Lanka. In addition to a brief introduction to BBS, five major claims of BBS were examined, including anti-*ḥalāl* oppositions, opposition to Islamic clothing (*ḥijāb*, *niqāb*) and agitations, a high birth rate among Muslims, attacks on religious worship places, and allegations against Islamic organisations. In addition, the stances of the ACJU and NSC on these five allegations and the actions they took in response to these five claims were clarified.

The most challenging obstacle for Muslim leaders and communities in Sri Lanka is overcoming the BBS's claims about Islam and Muslims because if they arrived to disprove an older allegation, the BBS would establish a new one. This analysis demonstrates that BBS's statements are more biased and primarily the product of their imagination. Consequently, the explanations and justifications regarding their allegations have not been clarified. On the other side, religious leaders attempted to clarify their statements and misconceptions in various ways. Notably, ACJU adopted unique concepts to clarify allegations made regarding Muslims and their activities.

In this context, it is suggested that the government and related authorities implement PTA laws impartially. It should apply to both majority and minority religious problems. As with every religion, there are few extremists, and most of the Sri Lankan community continues to seek a peaceful, harmonious, and coexisting existence with all communities. Therefore, the Sri Lankan government should consider the BBS, a Sinhala-Buddhist extremist organisation.

Regardless, Islamic organisations have acknowledged the necessity for a system that fosters mutual understanding and trust across racial and religious lines, and they are pursuing various coexistence strategies in

Sri Lanka. However, interreligious organisations and religious leaders could effectively and sustainably preach the message of peace. Systematically, interfaith education initiatives should attempt to reconcile ethnoreligious differences and develop a discourse of understanding. To prevent religious violence and foster social harmony in Sri Lanka, the government should also execute the constitutional and legal framework for interreligious coexistence.

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