

The Recent Hate Campaigns whether impacted the Community Relationship between Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka?

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Abstract: Sri Lanka is a diverse country and is home to many religions, ethnicities, and languages. Sinhala-Buddhists are the predominant ethnic group in this country, constituting 70.19% of the total population, with the Muslims being the second largest minority. There are a wealth of records in history that prove the cordial relationship between Buddhists and Muslims in the past. However, the aftermath of civil war (1983-2009) caused tension to brew between these two groups. This is because of recent hate campaigns undertaken by a number of Buddhist Nationalist Groups (BNGs) through instigation of Buddhism or Sinhalese nationalism among Buddhists adherents. These groups have been actively protesting against the Muslim social, cultural, and religious practices and behaviours, such as the issuing of Halal certification, slaughtering of animals for food, conducting of prayer services, maintaining worship places, etc. They have also disseminated misinterpretations about Muslims and their religion, Islam, spreading derogatory speeches among the Buddhists. Given the above background, this paper has attempted to determine the impacts of recent campaigns on the traditional relationship between Buddhists and Muslims via an analysis of Buddhist and Muslim point of views. According to the Buddhists, the recent attempts instigated by Buddhist Nationalist Groups have not impacted their relationship with the Muslims in any way and that they still habitually maintain a cordial relationship with said community. Even the Muslims feel as strongly in terms of keeping a cordial relationship with the Buddhists. However, according to their point of view, these hate campaigns could potentially ruin their already harmonious relationship with the Buddhists, turning it into a conflicting relationship instead. Therefore, both the Buddhist and Muslim communities in Sri Lanka plan to be more vigilant against these harmful campaigns.

Keywords: recent tension, community relationship, Muslims, Buddhists, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka has a multi-religious social environment with members of all the communities living in peace and harmony, socially integrating well with one another. Each community practices and preserves its own religious and cultural life while sharing each other's religious and cultural values. The Sinhalese people represent the major ethnic group in the country, constituting three quarters of the total population. Among this group, the Sinhala-Buddhists make up 70.19% [1] and speak Sinhala, an Indo-Aryan language. The Tamils make up the second major ethnic group, constituting 15.37% of the population. This group consists of Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils, 12.61% of which are Hindus [1]. The Tamils live predominantly in the north-eastern part of the island. The Muslims in Sri Lanka constitute 9.7% of the country's population [1] and live in various parts of the country. In some regions, Muslims number more than the Buddhists; they belong to three different ethno-social backgrounds i.e. Sri Lankan Moors, Indian

Moors, and Malays [1].

Sri Lanka has, at various times, portrayed itself as a country that maintains inclusive ethno-religious pluralism. There has been a general climate of tolerance and co-existence, such as in the case of local communities where people of different religions and ethnicities have historically co-habited [2]. The association between Buddhists and Muslims, especially, has been tightly linked both socially and culturally since their settling down in the island more than one thousand years ago. Arab-Muslim traders and local Muslims have contributed immensely towards the protection and expansion of their reign during the regime of Buddhist leaders [2]. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Muslim leaders and scholars went through a colossal struggle to regain Sri Lanka's independence from colonial rule. They protected the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country, irrespective of ethnic, religious, and lingual differences. Post-independence, the relationship between Buddhists and Muslims was still strong, and

they shared great mutual respect and understanding for each other [3]. The Muslim group has been identified as a peaceful one that has maintained societal and ethnic harmonious relations with its neighbours. Furthermore, Muslims have also maintained a very good relationship with Buddhist rulers. This cordial relationship with Buddhists and their rulers has made the Muslim community in the country among the privileged. In fact, it is worth noting that compared to other minorities who are living with majorities in other parts of the world, the Muslims in Sri Lanka have enjoyed a host of fundamental rights, as well as social, cultural, and economic privileges.

Sri Lanka, in recent times, especially in the aftermath of the government's victory in the war [27] against the Liberation Tigers Tamil Elam (LTTE), has witnessed a series of tense situations among the Buddhist and Muslim communities. The Buddhist Nationalist Groups (BNGs), consisting of Buddhist monkhood organizations, such as Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), Sinhala Rawaya, Rawana Balaya and lay people, instigated these issues by questioning the social and religious features of the Muslim community. Muslim rights pertaining to religious obligations were heavily questioned via provocations from these respective groups. These groups advocate the establishment of a pure Buddhist Raj in Sri Lanka. During their rallies and conferences, the prominent hard-liner groups have not shied away from using coarse, hateful speeches to undermine and question Muslims and their religion, and spread misunderstanding and misperception about them among the majority Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. There have been several recorded incidents of attacks on the Muslims' religious places of worship, and as a consequence, the Muslims now face challenges in practicing their religio-cultural identity, customs, and fundamental belief. This is just one example of these anti-Muslim campaigns. In the recent past, the Muslims have also been faced with anti-halal (permission to eat according to Shariah) and anti-hijab (head and face covers) agitations, as well as destruction and damage of their places of worship, refusal of the call to prayers using loudspeakers, disruption of prayer services, anti-slaughtering movements, anti-Shariah and anti-Qur'an agitations, and so on. Not only that, these groups have also propagated and advised Buddhists to reduce or avoid socio-cultural and economic interactions, as well as ban any relationship with the Muslim community.

These incidents have created a tense situation that is rife with suspicion. The Muslims have begun to feel marginalised, especially those who live in Buddhist-populated areas throughout the country. Moreover, these incidents have contributed to clashes in opinions and misunderstandings, thus further damaging the once healthy relationship between the Buddhists and

Muslims in Sri Lanka. Although Muslims are seen as having remained largely loyal to the state during the 30-year ethnic conflict and civil war [4], they are currently expressing fear of religious marginalization, which has increased the uncertainty of their co-existence and long-term cordial relationship with other major ethno-religious groups, especially Buddhists. Given the above backdrop, this study attempts to determine the impacts of recent hate campaigns undertaken by the BNGs, on the relationship between Buddhists and Muslims through an analysis of the Buddhist and Muslim point of view.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted on the recent hate campaigns against the Muslims undertaken by the Buddhist nationalist groups in Sri Lanka. All of these studies have been carried out as 'superficial' through content analysis such as Media news, as well as with statements from Buddhist nationalist groups and other Buddhist elites that were released in relation to these campaigns. This case has recently been held, and thus cannot be seen as an in-depth analysis through field surveys to point out the true nature of the views of directly related communities towards these campaigns. Nevertheless, this discussion can analyze the results of the available sources, as follows.

Fawsar [5] conducted a study on 'Ilankai Muslimkal: Thesiya Inap Pirachchinaium Adakkumuraium' (Sri Lankan Muslims: in the midst of ethnic conflict and repression). In this article, he investigates the challenges faced by the Muslims in the contemporary context of Sri Lanka, as well as the anti-Muslim campaigns unleashed by the Buddhist nationalist groups via several intervening factors, including Buddhism-nationalism, extremism, and fundamentalism, and how those factors have been seeding the Buddhists' minds. His view is that this was a political issue which advanced by the former president [26] and a few his officials for the purpose of their maintaining long-lasting political power. He lists out the timelines of the attacks on the Muslims' lives, and their business places and religious institutions, which were held in 2012 and 2013. He also explains that these anti-Muslim campaigns have started since 2011 to date, with the intention of destroying and removing old worship places, prohibiting Azan (Calling for Prayers) through loudspeakers, anti-Farda and anti-Halal agitations, threatening Muslims, boycotting and destroying Muslim owned trade stations, spreading out hoaxes about Islam and Muslims, conducting Buddhist conferences, rallies and pocket meetings with the purpose of insisting the Buddhists to be against Muslims, utilizing the media to propagate antagonism and threatening the Muslims to force them out of their traditional residential areas.

The report of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) [6] on 'attacks on places of religious worship in post-war Sri Lanka' primarily attempts to identify post-war [25] incidents of attacks on places of religious worship. As a report, it traces the incidents within the broader context of challenges and cited threats faced by religious groups in the country. It also seeks to understand the trends that arise from specific cases and discussions with persons interviewed for this report. This has identified the incidents of attacks on religious places and discussed the broader context of such attacks as a result of its commitments. Therefore, there were 65 considerable cases of attacks on places of religious worship listed in this report, including mob attacks on places of worship, robberies and vandalism of religious places, the killing of clergy, protests against religious communities and hate speeches on the Internet and in other media. The report finds that almost all representatives of all religions were interviewed for this report, and they have expressed the fear that their faith, and religious and ethno-cultural identity were under direct and indirect attack.

The United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour [7] prepared and released a report on 'International Religious Freedom Report.' This report has listed out the instances held in 2013 against religious minorities such as Christians and Muslims perpetrated by Buddhist nationalist groups. It finds that the societal abuse and discrimination is based on religious affiliations, beliefs, or practices, as well as the overall decrease in societal respect for religious freedom, as Buddhist nationalist groups have led campaigns targeting Muslims and Christians in recent Sri Lanka. The report expresses that the constitution and other policies and laws protect religious freedom. In practice, however, the local authorities have failed to take action successfully to decrease communal violence, including the attacks on members of religious minority groups, and consequently the perpetrators were not carried to justice.

Another study was conducted by Riza Yehiya in [8] on 'asymmetric relationship of Buddhist-Muslim bond in Sri Lanka'. He finds through his detailed review of the history of Sri Lanka that the relationship between these societies was tied, and unity had existed. However, some external pressures such as imperialism, colonialism, extremism, and inner politics have succeeded in dividing these two communities apart throughout the history of Sri Lanka. He explains that, deplorably, in the history of Sri Lanka, the religious difference was exploited by British colonialists and their affiliates to block the tested Buddhist-Muslim relationship as a scheme of divide-and-conquer. He also attempts to prove that nowadays in Sri Lanka, as happening throughout history, a few politicians use

religion as a tool to conceal their bankruptcy and draw their energy from the religious and cultural dynamism of the people in order to re-launch and re-brand them. He finds through the Muslims' point of view that this current tirade against Muslims that has been constituted by a segment of Buddhist society is not indigenous, but is rather an alien stirring by a third force that desires to attack the asymmetrical power balance that buttresses Buddhism and Sri Lanka.

The seventh annual report of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) [9], Islamophobia observatory on 'the incidents and manifestation of anti-Muslim sentiments and intolerance against Islam', which covers the period from October 2013 to April 2014, points out that Islamophobia, as a contemporary form of racism, continues to manifest itself through various forms of prejudice and discrimination against Muslims, both at the individual and community level, in many parts of the world, including Sri Lanka. The report expresses that the situation of Muslims in Sri Lanka is of concern to the OIC, as the persecution and discrimination against Muslims has become part of the local behaviour. It also mentions that these attacks have been driven by a series of high-profile hate campaigns targeting Sri Lanka's Muslim community and their practices such as banning on both Hijab (attire) and Halal certifications on consumer goods and campaigns, thus encouraging the Buddhist community to boycott Muslim-owned shops and businesses.

Latheef Farook [10] published a book under the title of 'Muslims of Sri Lanka: Under Siege'. He summarizes that anti-Muslim campaigns unleashed by some Buddhist nationalist groups and their movements, unless brought to a halt, are likely to lead to a total breakdown in communal accord to the damage of the country, which has just emerged from a demoralizing ethnic war. Equipped with some evidential points, he attempts to prove that these campaigns have been undertaken by the abovementioned groups through being pushed up by the Israelis against the Muslims, and this has increased the Israeli presence in the country. He also notices that the Muslim community has currently become the victim of not merely highly offensive hatred speeches, but are also subjected to attacks on religious schools, mosques, *halal* food, female head scarves and face covers (*niqab*), slaughtered pigs thrown into mosques, urinating and burning on the Holy Quran, forcing Muslim students to kneel down and worship Buddhist teachers, and writing Allah's name on pigs' faces. These horrible acts threaten Muslims, who live in fear with a doubtful future.

Fawsar Aniffa [11] studied religious symbolism and politics in Sri Lanka: Muslim's Grievances. The paper analyses the present plight of the

Muslim community in Sri Lanka, and also attempts to highlight the major issues faced by Sri Lankan Muslims in the present scenario. The study finds that Buddhism nationalism has been on the rise since post-war Sri Lanka, and consequently some Buddhist nationalist groups and a portion of ruling elites claim that some Muslim Mosque areas belong to their holy land (Buddhism) under the constitutional act. He further discusses that the post-war situation could be described as a 'missing opportunity' for sustainable peace and for accommodating Muslim minorities into the state system.

The all abovementioned writings have attempted to investigate the nature of the recent campaigns, and also to find the associated factors related to these campaigns. Several researchers have also attempted to investigate the general impact of the recent campaigns within the country on the Muslim community, with specifying the purposes behind the campaigns. Therefore, these studies have failed to analyse the views of the communities which are directly involved in these hate campaigns in recent years through a field survey. Hence, there is a strong need to investigate the views and perceptions of the societies towards these hate campaigns. The result of this study suggests the ideas of Buddhists and Muslims through answering several questions on the people responsible for undertaking these campaigns, and answers questions such as: Is there any relation to the Buddhists and Buddhism? What is the purpose behind the campaigns? And what were the reactions from Muslims and Buddhists towards these hate campaigns?

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire survey was conducted to ascertain the relationship between Buddhists and Muslims during the aftermath of the recent tension in Sri Lanka. The survey involves the Buddhist and Muslim population that reside in 14 major districts in the country, namely Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy, Matale, Kalutara, Matara, Anuradapura, Polonnaruwa, Ratnapura, Kegalle, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Badulla, and Moneragala. These districts were selected because these are the few districts that comprise of a Buddhist majority and a Muslim minority, both of which live together side-by-side. The participants of the survey are the general public, and a non-probability, convenience-based sampling technique was used in the respective districts through the appointment of nominees for each respective district. To gauge the impacts of the recent tensions in Sri Lanka on the relationship between Buddhists and Muslims, a total of 1219 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to both Buddhist and Muslim participants in the 14 abovementioned districts in the later part of 2014. About 384 Muslim respondents were selected from a total of 1283039 Muslims in these selected districts, which is

the minimum sample that can be selected from a total of more than one million population according to the table of Krejcie & Morgan [12]. Additionally, about 835 Buddhist participants were selected from a total population of 12027469 based on this table as well. Two types of questionnaires were prepared separately for the Buddhists and Muslims in Sinhala and Tamil languages, respectively. 672 of these questionnaires were received from the Buddhists and 312 from the Muslims. The questions were organised into two main parts: Part One includes 6 items for both the Buddhist and Muslim questionnaires related to gauging the impacts of the campaigns on the Buddhist-Muslim relationship, while Part Two incorporates 8 items related to the demographic details of the respondents. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. To explore the aforementioned findings, simple frequencies, percentages and central tendencies such as mean, mode, and standard deviations were calculated from the questionnaires received. Discussion and interpretation of these results stem from the 12 items of measurement in the questionnaires, as this study is a type of descriptive research.

Analysis of Respondent Demography:

The questionnaire provides information regarding the social and demographic variables of Buddhist and Muslim respondents such as age, gender, marital status, religion, ethnic group, educational background, occupation, and residential district. For the purpose of the study, 'Age' was divided into six categories; 20 years old and below (5%); 21 to 30 (14%); 31 to 40 (18%); 41 to 50 (30%); 51-64 (28%); and 65 years old and above (5%). Around 70% of the respondents were between 31-64 years, mainly chosen because they had more recognition and maturity among the society when it came to expressing opinions regarding social issues. As per the expectation of the researcher, about 76% of the respondents were from the 31 to 64 age group. The researcher also attempted to acquire an equal amount of male and female participants. However, 46.9% of the respondents were males, while 53.1% were females. Meanwhile, in terms of marital status, married respondents made up 48.9% of the sample, while single respondents (including single parent and widow) made up 51.1%. Actually, the main objective of the researcher here is to gather at least around 60% married respondents for this research to explore factual views on the recent campaigns in Sri Lanka. The reason for this is that, as mentioned earlier, married people might have more recognition and are given more preference in society. In the questionnaire, 'Education Background' was divided into five categories, namely none (41%), primary (11%), secondary (14%), vocational (15%), and university level (19%), with the purpose of providing finer-grained details on the samples for this study as well as to gain

more detailed results. Similarly, respondent occupations include unemployed (19%), self-employed (42%), student (24%), private sector (6%), and governmental sector (9%). Finally, based on the questionnaire survey, the respondents were asked about their residential districts for the purpose of gaining overall opinions from the various districts in which Buddhists and Muslims lived together. A total of 14 districts were considered, with piles of boxes distributed within the boundary of particular districts. The questionnaires were distributed based on the percentage of respondents in the particular districts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Under this topic it is discussed the views of the respondents of Buddhists and Muslims after the analysis of the questionnaires. Analysis was done under two main sub topics that the impacts of recent tension on the relationship-the Buddhist's observation and the impacts of recent tension on the relationship-the Muslim's observation.

Impacts of Recent tension on the Relationship: The Buddhist's Observation:

This segment attempts to analyse the impacts of recent campaigns on the relationship between the Buddhists and the Muslims in Sri Lanka through the Buddhist point of view. Six items in total are measured from the questionnaire distributed to the Buddhists. The mode of measurement is done by considering how the Buddhist-Muslim relationship has been undermined as a result of recent campaigns using the following items: heedful of BNGs' propaganda, believing misinterpretations, consider the campaigns a conflict, disgust the Muslims and provoke them, withdraw interaction, and breaking up the relationship.

Item 1: Heedful of the BNGs' propaganda

For Item 1, the aim is to find the extent to which the Buddhist respondents are heedful of the propaganda of the BNGs against Muslims spread through the Media and rallies in recent years such as calls to boycott Muslim-owned teashops, trade stations, stopping of business deals with them, banning interaction with Muslims, etc. According to the results (Appendix I: Table 1), the majority (81.7%) of the respondents stressed that they did not take seriously the propagations of the BNGs to spread misunderstanding with Muslims and their religion, while only 7.6% of the respondents had concerns for these allegations during the course of these campaigns. About 8.9% were neutral. The Buddhists' huge number in this survey makes the respondents that have been misguided (7.6%) by the BNGs a relatively smaller in number in comparison. The above result further proves that the mean (4.5759) strongly revolves around respondent disagreement with the BNGs. The mode also reflects the highest frequent score, which also indicates strong

disagreement (5.0000) from the respondents. The value of standard deviation is strong as well and is closely deviated to the mean in this variable. Moreover, various views have been unearthed in previous researches regarding the above responses. Haniffa [13] found that in the current context of Sri Lanka, the Buddhist community have been turned away from, or diverted against the Muslims using misleading propagandas that paint Muslims as a horrible threat to Buddhism, in such a way that the Buddhists will be minoritised and the Muslims will become majoritised in the future of Sri Lanka. Rifai [4] expressed that since post-war times, the BNGs have gone to great lengths to paint the Muslims as the worst of people on the Buddhists' minds. Farook [10] also supported this same statement in his writings. Hence, the BNGs intention is to prove to the Buddhists in general that the Muslims are a grave threat to Buddhism and its survival in Sri Lanka [14]. Fowsar [11] argued that Sri Lanka's ex-government [24] had taken substantial deceptive actions to mislead the Buddhist public using the Buddhism nationalism agenda, so it would be foremost in their minds; all of this is to establish and secure a seat of political power for the Buddhist Nationalist Groups so that they may enjoy a long reign. Therefore, the previous studies confirm that a few of the Buddhist public have been misled by the BNGs in recent years. This indicator also reveals that the majority (83.5%) of the Buddhists have not heeded the misdirection of the BNGs and that they look at this effort as an attempt to ruin their relationship with the Muslims. If explained in a different manner, according to the people, these pronouncements against the Muslims are known to be misleading, hence they do not give due importance to these allegations by the BNGs.

Item 2: Believing false interpretations

The item requests the respondents to verify whether or not they believed the misinterpretations of Muslim behaviours and their religion, disseminated by the BNGs through the Media and Buddhism conferences during campaigns. Specifically, according to the results (Appendix I: Table 2), almost all (72.8%) of the Buddhists strongly expressed that they were not suspicious of the Muslims, while 7.6% of them believed the BNGs misinterpretations. This result is further reinforced with the mean value (4.4286), which tends to disagreement of the respondents with the BNGs. The mode also reflects the highest frequent score, indicating strong disagreement (5.0000) as well. The value of standard deviation (.99819) is also strong and is scattered closely to the mean for this variable. In the aftermath of war in Sri Lanka, the BNGs started disseminating misinterpretations of Muslims among Buddhist civilians in various ways, such as through their following. According to TV footage, a Buddhist monk, a member of BBS, stated that, "The Muslim-owned teashops serve tea to the non-Muslims who do

not worship Allah, especially Buddhists, by spitting into the tea cups thrice.”He continued, “This is the Shariah rule.”Furthermore, the General Secretary of BBS, Galagoda Aththe Gnanasar Thero, once expressed in a public meeting that the Buddhists cannot accept the buffoonery of the Muslim God-Allah, who is illegitimate, does not have parents, is not born, is not natural, and does not even have a specific place, history, or address. He also made a statement in another press conference that, “According to Shariah, animals should be slaughtered whilst the Muslims sit on a well-warmed iron plate, putting another plate on their head, which means that animal slaughtering is prohibited to Muslims.” Hence, it is no wonder then that these baseless accusations have given rise to Buddhists having the wrong perception about Muslims and their religion, as these wrongful allegations make the Muslims into a negative stereotype in the minds of the Buddhists. Herath and Rambukwella [15] discovered that due to the recent campaigns, the stereotypical Muslims that the Buddhists perceive, especially in the Western and Southern Provinces, is that the traditional Muslims (Elder) are peaceful while the newer sects are radical and potentially violent. Some of the Buddhist participants have expressed this view during the interview because in recent years, the BNGs have done their utmost best to prove that Islamic movements, which mostly involve youngsters, such as the “Sri Lanka Thawheed Jamaaath (SLTJ)”, is as a radical and violent group that acts against Buddhism. Consequently, this propagation has negatively impacted the views of Buddhists everywhere in Sri Lanka. At the same time, a number of press conferences organised by SLTJ have been conducted to question BNGs’ baseless accusations in the past year regarding the Islamic Shariah such as the Takiyya concept and the Islamic method of slaughtering animals. Also, a report by the Centre for Policy Alternatives [6] highlights another accusation on the Muslims, that they have been unethically converting Buddhists into Muslims through education, inter-marriage, and the organised purchases of land around Buddhist places of worship in an effort to counter the recent protests instigated by the BNGs. However, the field survey results for this study show that the Buddhists are not motivated to believe these misunderstandings about Muslims and Islam preached by the BNGs during the course of their campaigns. Therefore, this result proves that the Buddhists still believe in the cordial relationship with Muslims that they had fostered since their settling down in Sri Lanka a long time ago.

Item 3: Consider recent tension as conflict

Item 3 investigates whether or not the respondents considered the recent tensions as a sort of conflict. This indicator analyses the extent to which the Buddhists consider recent protests against Muslims as a conflict between Buddhist and Muslim communities.

The result (Appendix I: Table 3) revealed that the majority (71.5%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that the tensions were a significant conflict among the Buddhist-Muslim communities in Sri Lanka. This result is further supported by the mean value (4.2634), which slightly moves to the point of strong disagreement among the respondents. The mode also reflects the highest frequent score, which is 5.0000, indicating strong disagreement of the respondents as well. On the contrary, various findings have predicts of there being disfavours among the Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka in the recent future as a result of these tensions. According to Herath and Rambukwella [15], there is emerging religious confrontation and developing radicalism among the Buddhist-Muslim societies instigated by a number of Buddhist and Muslim groups in the current context of Sri Lanka. Also, it is predicted that the Sinhala-Tamil conflict [23] that is currently unfolding is headed in a dangerous trajectory, though possibly not on the same scale as the emerging radicalism. Although the Muslims in Sri Lanka have already integrated with the Sinhala-Buddhists in countless ways, the BNGs have the potential to disrupt this integration, changing its very nature into a situation of conflict [15]. However, the results of this survey reveal that the Buddhists do not want to consider this unrest as a conflict between the Muslims and themselves. They look at the efforts that the BNGs carried out in recent years as something insignificant and not worth considering. Therefore, these results tell us that there is no fear of conflicts occurring among the Buddhists and the Muslims, particularly among the people.

Item 4: Hatred and antagonism

This item investigates whether the respondents hate and are angered by the Muslims because of BNGs instigation against this community in the recent years. According to the results (Appendix I: Table 4), almost all (87.9%) of the respondents noted that they were neither angered with nor hated the Muslims because of these campaigns, whereas 4.9% of the respondents expressed anger and hatred. Also, 7.1% of them were indecisive. Furthermore, this result is strengthened by the mean value (4.6027), which tends to strong disagreement of the respondents with this statement. The mode also reflects the highest frequent score, which is 5.0000, indicating strong disagreement as well. The standard deviation (.82339) for this study also supports the results in that it is very strong and closely scattered to the mean for this variable. The Colombo Telegraph Secretariat for Muslims [22] reported that these campaigns have caused antagonism between the Buddhists and the Muslims. This is a result of the instigations directed towards Muslims within Sri Lanka, riling up the Buddhists to hate and become angry with them [4]. In one case, Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero expressed to the Media that, “There is a concept

named Al-Thakiyya in Islam, which has been taught to non-Saudi Muslims in the Middle East. Takiyya means that the Muslims must be deceptive and deceive non-Muslims out of their homes and hijack their properties. The leaders of Muslims usually act according to such Qura'nic teachings." From this, it can clearly be seen that the BNGs have undertaken several efforts to provoke the Buddhists' anger against the Muslims using this type of derogatory and unsubstantiated claims about the Muslim religion. Herath and Rambukwella [15] found that the Buddhists are in conflict with the 'Sri Lanka Thawheed Jamaaath' group and the Buddhists who live in Western and Southern provinces perceive the group as a newer sect in Sri Lanka that appear to be radical and violent. The Buddhists feel that this might be because of BNGs instigation against respective Muslim groups, which have put this issue in the forefront of Buddhists' minds in recent times. There are a number of TV footages that prove the propagation of BBS against SLTJ using the Media and through Buddhism conferences. Therefore, this survey shows that the Buddhists do not want to make Muslims their enemies. Hence, there has been no overt show of hate or anger towards the Muslims among the people; Buddhists, especially, have no motivation to be antagonistic towards Muslims even during the recent unrest.

Item 5: Withdrawing social interaction

Item 5 seeks to determine the respondents' view on withdrawing interaction with the Muslims soon after hearing misinterpretations about Muslims from the BNGs during the course of their campaigns. The result (Appendix I: Table 5) shows that almost all (79.9%) of the respondents answered negatively, stating strongly that they have not stopped or withdrawn from interacting with the Muslims in their surroundings. Furthermore, another 10.7% of the respondents expressed the usual disagreements with the statement, while just only 1.3% of them agreed that they have stopped interacting with the Muslims. 8% were indecisive or neutral. These results are confirmed with the mean value (4.6920), which tends to strong disagreement of the respondents with the statement. The mode also reflects the highest frequent score (5.0000), which indicates strong disagreement as well. The value of standard deviation (.67446) is also strong and is very closely scattered to the mean for this variable. However, Dewarsiri [14] expressed that, "The recent campaigns, especially the 'Dambulla' incidents [21] undertaken by BNGs, did not evolve into a communal clash, but it exposed serious fault lines existing at the structural level of inter-religious relations in Sri Lanka. These worrying contradictions are concealed by the facade of the official rhetoric of religious harmony." Imtiyaz [16] found that, in Sri Lanka, a growing uncertainty and apprehensiveness about community relations and their future is evident, especially in Buddhist-majority areas.

Therefore, it is understandable that there could have been incidences of Buddhists stopping their interaction with the Muslims and that communal clashes might even occur given time. However, the result of this survey signifies that the Buddhists have not withdrawn from interacting with the Muslims; the opposite is actually true; the relationship between them is still strong (for further information please refer the paper [17]). The Buddhists do not give credence to the accusations or claims from the BNGs about Muslims and their religion in Sri Lanka.

Item 6: Breaking up the relationship

Item 6 investigates the respondents' view on the breaking up of the relationship between Buddhists and Muslims because of the tense situation in Sri Lanka at present. According to the results (Appendix I: Table 6), nearly all (74.5%) of the respondents responded that the existing relationship among the communities is still intact, while 11.2% of them felt differently. Another 14.3% of them were neutral. The above result is supported by the mean value (4.2813), which slightly tends to strong disagreement of the respondents with the statement. The mode also reflects the highest frequent score of 5.0000, which also tallies with strong disagreement between the respondents. Moreover, according to Herath and Rambukwella [15], in the Western and Southern Provinces of Sri Lanka, the Buddhists maintain a peaceful relationship with the traditional Muslims (Elder), who are the mainstream Muslims in this country, but they are dissatisfied and are at conflict with newer sects, which are a small group among Muslims known as the "Sri Lanka Thawheed Jamaaath" (SLTJ). It is noteworthy, SLTJ used to oppose the BBS' arguments since post-war times onwards. Fowsar [11] points out that in Sri Lanka nowadays, the BNGs such as the BBS and Sinhala Rawaya (SR) have gone out of their way to break up the peaceful societal relationship among the communities of the country. Dewarsiri [14] posits that there are serious fault lines in the relationship between Muslim and Buddhist political elites. However, according to the results of this study, any signs of the breaking up of Buddhist-Muslim relationship due to recent tensions cannot be confirmed. Also, this survey proves that the Buddhists still harbour a lot of goodwill towards Muslims and the strong relationship between them cannot be destroyed through mere baseless provocations.

Impacts of Recent Tension on the Relationship: The Muslim's Observation:

In this section, the researcher attempts to determine the impacts of the recent tension in Sri Lanka on the relationship between the Buddhists and the Muslims through an analysis of the Muslims' point of view. In total, six items were used to determine these impacts. These are 'distresses caused during campaigns,

perceiving Buddhists as racists, anger and hatred towards Buddhists, decline in the existing relationship, strength of the campaigns, and breaking up of relationship'. In fact, in this section, the researcher attempts to determine the extent to which the relationship between these two communities is impacted because of the recent campaigns in Sri Lanka.

Item 1: Distresses caused during the hate campaigns

Item 1 looks at the extent of distress the BNGs' attacks have caused to the Muslims, widely disseminated using hate speeches against Muslims and their religion at pocket meetings, rallies, using the Media, and Buddhist conferences in most villages and cities in post-war times. According to the results (Appendix II: Table 1), nearly 97.4% of the respondents have suffered great distress during the course of these attacks against them. Besides that, the mean value (1.0833), which steadily tends to strong agreement of the respondents with this statement and the mode, which accurately reflects the highest frequent score (1.0000), both lend support to this statement. The standard deviation (.53143) is also strong and is very closely scattered to the mean for this variable. In fact, during the course of attacks, the Muslims became shocked and upset because even though both societies had been close-knit historically, one side is now attacking the other. The Muslims have suffered through these attacks, all the while questioning the reasons why the Buddhists would provoke and put them through this ordeal [4]. Fowsar [11] points out that the recent anti-Muslim campaigns in many parts of the Island that protest over mosques and Shrines of historical importance has created a kind of fear psychosis and uncertainty among the Muslims of this Island nation. Also, approximately half of the Muslims now feel that their security has been severely compromised since the security forces have not reacted to the Buddhist Nationalists' violence [16]. Therefore, the above discussions and results of this survey confirm that the Muslim community are distressed over the recent campaigns in most of Sri Lanka.

Item 2: Buddhists as racists

Item 2 requests the respondents to verify whether or not they think that the Buddhists are racists because of these campaigns. The results (Appendix II: Table 2) reveal that almost all (88.5%) of the respondents expressed disagreement with this statement with 85.3% strongly opposing it. This means that the Muslims have never thought of the Buddhists as racists. Only a very small amount (6.4%) of the respondents confessed that they considered the Buddhists racists. These results are further confirmed from the mode, which reflects precisely the highest frequent score, 5.0000. The mean value (4.6603) strongly tends to strong disagreement between the respondents. The standard deviation (.88210) is also strong, dotted very

closely to the mean for this variable. It is worth mentioning here that just two Muslims strongly felt that the Buddhists were racists as a result of these attacks. Besides that, Imtiyaz [16] also found that around 10% of the youngsters from the Muslim community felt that they had been encouraged to act violently against the BNGs as a form of revenge. This might be taken as the Muslims labelling the BNGs as a racist group because of their derogatory behaviours against Muslims, but it is worth noting that this is still a very small percentage of the entire Muslim society. Therefore, according to the results of this study, the majority of Muslims in Sri Lanka do not perceive the Buddhist community as a racist one, even though they have been attacked by a segment of these Buddhists. Throughout history, there has been no incidence of distrust between the communities, and the same is true even now [2].

Item 3: Aversion and anger

Item 3 seeks to verify the respondents' view on whether or not they have felt hatred and anger towards the Buddhists in general because of the activities of BNGs such as Buddhist rallies and conferences against Muslims. According to the results (Appendix II: Table 3), more than half (56.4%) of the respondents strongly disagreed with this statement, while another 9.6% of them expressed disagreement. Therefore, in total, 66% of the Muslims in Sri Lanka felt no hatred or anger at the Buddhists in general even with the recent campaigns carried out by the BNGs. 22.4% of the respondents stressed that they have felt hatred and anger towards the Buddhists in general because of the aggressive nature of a segment of the Buddhist society during the course of their attacks against the Muslims. The mean value for this variable stays at 4.0000, which further confirms disagreement between the respondents. The mode reflects the highest frequent score of 5.0000, which also indicates strong disagreement of the respondents. The religiosity of the Muslims could be observed in this situation, in that they strictly adhered to the Islamic tenants, which is not to respond in kind and to be patient during these ordeals regardless of threats. However, the perpetrators, according to their belief, will be punished by Allah the Almighty [16]. During the course of these campaigns, several Muslims were reflective in the sense that they considered that the Muslim community had not done anything to aggravate the Buddhists [16]. Therefore, taking into account this particular point, it is understandable that the Buddhists are willing to prevent any discord and maintain goodwill among the societies. In addition, looking at the results of this study, the same nature can be seen on the Muslim side as well in that an approximate amount of Muslims (66%) still want a peaceful coexistence with the Buddhists instead of sowing anger, hatred, and violence (for further information please read the paper [18]).

Item 4: Withdrawing social interaction

In this item, the respondents are requested to verify whether or not they have attempted to withdraw from their relationship with the Buddhists, soon after the recent attacks instigated by the BNGs against the Muslims. The result (Appendix II: Table 4) shows that the majority of the respondents did not withdraw from their current associations with the Buddhists. Precisely 64.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement and 7.1% expressed disagreement. Here, just 18.6% of the respondents have taken extra efforts to avoid fostering a relationship with the Buddhists because of the BNGs' attacks. In the meantime, the mean value (4.1346) for this variable, which slightly tends to the point of disagreement, and the mode, which accurately reflects the highest frequent score (5.0000), further confirm the above statement. Besides that, it is important to express the view of former Chief Justice Sarath N. Silva [20] on the willingness of the Muslims to interact with the Buddhists. He said, "The Muslim society is willing to interact with other religious and ethnic groups, cordially interlinking these cultures with their own culture while polarising their own culture. This is applicable." (Quoted by [11]). Also, Imtiyaz and Saleem [16] point out that almost the entire Muslims look at the hate campaigns as a risk to community interests that would trigger further tensions between the Buddhists and Muslims in the areas where the Buddhists are the majority. Likewise, according to this survey results, the Muslims actually desire to live harmoniously together, cherishing the nature of their relationship instead of destructing their social life within the country. Hence, more than 70% of Muslims have not even thought of withdrawing their relationship with the Buddhists even with the recent attacks.

Item 5: Hate campaigns as a strong tool

In item 5, the respondents were requested to verify whether or not the recent violence carried out by the BNGs could act like a sharpened chisel and tear down the strong relationship between the Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka. According to the results (Appendix II: Table 5), most of the Muslims feared that the recent violence could be a strong tool that would break the Buddhist-Muslim relationship. Therefore, almost all (81.4%) of the respondents noted that the recent discord could break down the relationship between the two communities, though it has weathered many storms historically. Furthermore, only about 8.3% of the respondents felt that these campaigns had no substantial power to weaken the Buddhist-Muslim relationship. The mean value (2.3077) slightly moves to the respondents being "undecided", while the mode (2.00) reflects the highest frequent value, showing agreement between the respondents. Besides that, the Muslims strongly believe that the hate campaigns and derogatory statements of the BNGs could unleash an ethnic violence similar to the one in 1983 where

Sinhala-Buddhists riots destroyed many neighbourhoods and displaced around 100,000 Tamils from Colombo city. Based on this, the Muslims feel that they will be the next target soon after the victory in 2009 against the Liberation Tigers Tamil Elam (LTTE) [10]. In addition, the Muslims feel that the recent campaigns could become a powerful weapon to destroy the peaceful Buddhist-Muslim relationship, due to failure of the government to implement the rule of law and of security forces to react to the perpetrators during the course of these attacks against Muslims [19]. So, the Muslims feel that the security has been severely compromised since security forces did not react to the Buddhist Nationalists' violence [16]. Therefore, the result of this study prove that these campaigns could be a powerful tool to divide and disrupt societies because related authorities are not taking any action to stop them. From this, it can be observed that the Muslims have become more vigilant in keeping traditional linkages and interpersonal relations, whilst taking care of any threats to this relationship in present Sri Lanka. Therefore, responsible personnel, especially the government, should be attentive towards any risks to the cordial relationship between the communities and attempt to preserve the harmonious environment in the country.

Item 6: Breakdown of the relationship

The last item (6) requests the respondents to verify whether or not they think these campaigns have caused the traditional relations between the Buddhists and the Muslims to breakdown. The results (Appendix II: Table 6) show that approximately 75% of the respondents strongly thought that the Buddhist-Muslim relationship had not broken down. They expressed confidence that cordiality with the Buddhists is still evident. However, a quarter of the respondents felt that in this specific context of present Sri Lanka, the traditional relationship between the respective societies has indeed broken down. The former result is further confirmed with the mode, which reflects the highest frequent score of 5.0000 and the mean value (4.1987), all of which slightly tends to strong disagreement between the respondents. There are some differing views on this respective aspect among scholars, especially Dewarsiri [14] who stated that a serious fault line in the relationship between Muslims and Sinhala-Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka could be observed. However, according to this survey, which represents the 14 Buddhist majority districts in Sri Lanka, the people do not see the recent tensions as a decisive factor in breaking down the traditional relationship between the Buddhists and the Muslims in Sri Lanka.

CONCLUSION

In summary, a total of 12 items were used; 6 items designed for the Buddhists and another 6 for Muslims, with two questionnaires distributed to 14

selected Buddhist-majority Districts, to determine to what extent the traditional relationship between the Buddhists and Muslims has been impacted because of the recent campaigns undertaken by the BNGs in Sri Lanka. In fact, these are the underlying questions that are asked throughout this survey. Most of the Buddhists made no room for any groups or movements to destroy their existing relationship with the Muslims. According to the results, the majority of the Buddhists did not take seriously the misinterpretations about Muslims and their religion brought about by the BNGs' recent campaigns. The Buddhists were also not easily fooled into believing the misleading and baseless accusations about Muslims and Islam. Furthermore, they have not made any drastic changes in regard to the Muslims i.e. they did not attempt to withdraw from their traditional relationship with the Muslims. Besides that, the Buddhists feel that even with these campaigns, their relationship with Muslims has not been tarnished, and is still cordial much like the past. Also, according to their view, these campaigns cannot be deemed as a conflict between Buddhists and Muslims, because they do not feel anger or hatred towards the Muslims despite the misinterpretation about them. Lastly, according to Buddhists' point of view, the recent instigations of the BNGs did not impact their traditional relationship in any way; on the contrary, the Buddhists still maintain personal relationships with the Muslims, as per usual. The Buddhists responded to all the items with strong disagreement. From this, it can be concluded that the recent campaigns have not significantly impacted the traditional relationship between the Buddhist and Muslim people in Sri Lanka.

In the case of the Muslims in this study, indeed, the Muslims strongly believe in keeping the cordial relationship with Buddhists. From the results, weak points in the Muslims' traditional relationship with the Buddhists could not be identified even with the attacks that have been going on. Most of the Muslims did not feel anger or hatred towards the Buddhists because of these atrocities. However, they did feel distress over them, because of the sudden and unexpected nature of the attacks. Also, the Muslims did not look at the Buddhists in general as racists even with the campaigns. However, according to their point of view, these hate campaigns could gain enough power to destroy the traditional relationship with the Buddhists and could also cause conflict between the Buddhists and the Muslims in Sri Lanka. Although both the Buddhists and Muslims of Sri Lanka have not given credence to the recent undermining attempts undertaken by the BNGs, there is still a chance that the Buddhists could turn against the Muslims or vice versa due to the provocations from one community to the other in present Sri Lanka. Therefore, the government and related authorities must be extra vigilant and take the necessary proactive measures to avoid conflict among

the communities and indefinitely preserve the traditional and peaceful nature of the Buddhist-Muslim relationship, so that all political functions run smoothly.

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APPENDIX I

Table 1: Heedful of the BNGs'propaganda

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Agree	51	7.6	4.5759	5.00	.93780
Undecided	60	8.9			
Disagree	12	1.8			
Strongly Disagree	549	81.7			
Total	672	100.0			

Table 2: Believing false interpretations

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Agree	51	7.6	4.4286	5.00	.99819
Undecided	99	14.7			
Disagree	33	4.9			
Strongly Disagree	489	72.8			
Total	672	100.0			

Table 3: Consider recent tension as conflict

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Strongly Agree	3	.4	4.2634	5.00	1.12178
Agree	75	11.2			
Undecided	114	17.0			
Disagree	30	4.5			
Strongly Disagree	450	67.0			
Total	672	100.0			

Table 4: Hatred and antagonism

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Agree	33	4.9	4.6027	5.00	.82339
Undecided	48	7.1			
Disagree	72	10.7			
Strongly Disagree	519	77.2			
Total	672	100.0			

Table 5: Withdrawing social interaction

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Agree	9	1.3	4.6920	5.00	.67446
Undecided	54	8.0			
Disagree	72	10.7			
Strongly Disagree	537	79.9			
Total	672	100.0			

Table 6: Breaking up the relationship

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Agree	75	11.2	4.2813	5.00	1.07668
Undecided	96	14.3			
Disagree	66	9.8			
Strongly Disagree	435	64.7			
Total	672	100.0			

APPENDIX II

Table 1: Distresses caused during the hate campaigns

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Strongly Agree	304	97.4	1.0833	1.00	.53143
Undecided	2	.6			
Disagree	2	.6			
Strongly Disagree	4	1.3			
Total	312	100.0			

Table 2: Buddhists as racists

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Strongly Agree	2	.6	4.6603	5.00	.88210
Agree	20	6.4			
Undecided	14	4.5			
Disagree	10	3.2			
Strongly Disagree	266	85.3			
Total	312	100.0			

Table 3: Aversion and anger

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Agree	70	22.4	4.0000	5.00	1.25777
Undecided	36	11.5			
Disagree	30	9.6			
Strongly Disagree	176	56.4			
Total	312	100.0			

Table 4: Withdrawing social interaction

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Strongly Agree	10	3.2	4.1346	5.00	1.27850
Agree	48	15.4			
Undecided	32	10.3			
Disagree	22	7.1			
Strongly Disagree	200	64.1			
Total	312	100.0			

Table 5: Hate campaigns as a strong tool

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Agree	254	81.4	2.3077	2.00	.73161
Undecided	32	10.3			
Disagree	14	4.5			
Strongly Disagree	12	3.8			
Total	312	100.0			

Table 6: Breakdown of the relationship

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Strongly Agree	2	.6	4.1987	5.00	1.22367
Agree	58	18.6			
Undecided	22	7.1			
Disagree	24	7.7			
Strongly Disagree	206	66.0			
Total	312	100.0			