CHAPTER - III
Ethnic and political awareness was low among the Muslims for two reasons. First, they had emigrated to the island from various parts of the world. Secondly, they were mostly concentrated in trade and commercial activities. But the riots against Muslims in Sri Lanka forced political consciousness upon them, making them realize that the island is their only home. By then, Muslims were generally considered as Mohammedans in religion and Tamil in nationality. Ponnambalam Ramanathan as representative of the Tamil-speaking community represented both Tamils and Muslims in the Legislative Council (1879-1891). The Muslims, however, felt betrayed when after the riots, Ponnambalam Ramanathan spoke on behalf of the Sinhalese, stating that Muslims were opportunistic and hostile. I.L.M. Abdul Azeez criticized Ramanathan’s “ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon” and spoke of the “Arab blood” of the Sri Lankan Muslims as a counter to the Tamil claim of the Muslims being of Tamil origin. This was the beginning of the Muslims asserting their distinctness. The Muslim Associations, which had been formed for social and cultural reasons, adopted political objectives to achieve the demands of the community and acted as a pressure group on several crucial occasions. Also, the Muslim political leadership began to bargain for power in their political career, especially by joining the ruling majority party.

The present chapter traces Muslim representation in the Legislative Councils, State Councils and Parliament under the First and Second State Republic Constitutions until 1977. It attempts to explore the evolution of the political attitudes of Sri Lankan Muslims through various political activities and involvement. The chapter draws attention to the development of Sinhala-Muslim relations through the Language Policy introduced by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1956, Muslim affiliation in major political parties and how Muslim leadership performed as a pressure group and became a deciding factor of establishing power in governments.

The Emergence of Muslims' Political Identity

In the beginning, the island of Sri Lanka harmoniously blended the different social groups inhabiting villages and towns in clusters. But after the riots of 1915 the measures taken by the British government to suppress Muslims played a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of a Muslims identity in Ceylon. The rapidity with which the riots spread and the intensity of violence made the Muslims aware of the need for cohesion as a community. During the riots the community's leaders had been unable to generate the necessary momentum to control them. The British administration did not extend the representation of Indian Moors to the Council during 1925-30, blaming their involvement in the riots in 1915. Meanwhile, associations such as the Young Men's Muslim Association that had originally been formed for social and cultural reasons adapted to political objectives to achieve their demands. In 1918 four

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delegates represented the Muslim Young Men's Association at the National Conference organized by Ponnambalam Arunachalam.³

After the 1915 riots, the disagreements between Tamils and Muslims reached at peak. While there were, differences and disagreement between the Tamil and Muslim communities, the outer appearance of the relationship between the Tamils and Muslims in Sri Lanka up to independence in 1948 had been seems to be peaceful. After the 1915 riots, the statements made by the Ponnambalam Ramanathan⁴ at different times⁵ were disputed among the Muslim community. Some of the Muslims leadership felt that he had been unfair to them therefore; they became distrustful of the Tamils. This had led them to form separate political identity and make alienate from the Tamil community gradually. Muslim’s political profile also began to mingle, periodically with major political parties in Sri Lanka. With this background, Muslims community attempts to have separate ethnic identity and representation in legislative councils of pre-independence Sri Lanka.

⁴ P. Ramanathan had earlier represented the Muslims too in his capacity as representative of the Tamil-speaking people in the Legislative Council.
⁵ P. Ramanathan made a more comprehensive restatement of these views in 1888 in The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch, Vol. X, No. 36, 1888, pp 234-62, on “The Ethnology of the ‘Moors’ of Ceylon”. He observed that the language and culture traditions of the Muslims reflected their Tamil origin. He said that the Muslims were “‘Mohammedans’ in religion and ‘Tamil’ in nationality.” After the Sinhala-Muslims riots, he spoke on behalf of the Sinhalese from his position as the Educated Ceylonese Member of the Legislative Council; he saw the Muslims as opportunistic and hostile. The Muslims were already prejudiced against him as he had portrayed them as “Tamils in everything but religion”⁶. His speech, and indeed his intentions, were completely misunderstood by N.H.M Abdul Cader, who took amiss his desire to differentiate the Indian Muslim (as ‘Hambaya’) from the Sri Lankan Moor.
The First Legislative Council (1833-1912)

In the First Legislative Council, a Tamil member was chosen to represent the Muslim community. In 1889, a Muslim nominated representative was included in the council. The reforms of Governor Manning increased Muslim representation in the Legislative Council to three members. The Muslims, however, were to be denied the right of electing representatives to the Executive Council in spite of persistent demands. This trend continued during the Donoughmore Reforms. The Soulbury Commission also rejected the demand of a delegation of Muslims for communal representation.

In the Legislative Council established in 1833 different communities had only a nominal representation. When the Legislative Council was expanded in 1885, it consisted of nine officials and six non-officials (three Europeans, one Burgher, one Sinhalese and one Tamil).

Till 1889, the Tamil non-official member generally represented the Muslims as well. In that year, the number of members in the Legislative Council was increased with a view to include a Muslim representative and a Kandyan Sinhalese to represent their respective communities. M.C Abdul Rahaman was the first Muslim to represent his community in the Legislative Council. A.M. Sheriff, a proctor from the Eastern Province succeeded him. When he vacated the seat in 1900, W.M. Abdul Rahman replaced him. In 1917 N.H.M. Abdul Cader succeeded him and remained as a member till 1923. Both these nominated members were Indian Moors. In 1918, when

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the scheme of abolishing communal representation was proposed by the Sinhalese and Tamil members,\(^\text{7}\) Abdul Carder insisted that the Muslims would agree only on condition that two Muslim representatives would be nominated, one to represent the capital and the other to represent those in the rest of the country.

**Manning Reforms**

In 1920, Governor Manning's reforms provided for 23 non-official and 14 official members in the Legislative Council, the non-official members thus exceeding the official members for the first time. Muslims were denied participation in the Legislative Council to provide more opportunities to British citizens in Ceylon. The second instalment of Governor Manning's reforms in 1923 increased Muslim representation in the Legislative Council to three nominated members though the Secretary of State had directed that the community should chose its members by election. In 1924, there was no Muslim in the Legislative Council though there were three other nominated non-official members in the Executive Council—a European, a Tamil and a Low Country Sinhalese.\(^\text{8}\)

Chiefly because of the isolated nature of the Sinhalese and Tamil settlements, territorial representation on communal basis was introduced in 1923. As a result, eleven communal electorates were created along with 23 general electorates. In spite of elections being held in territorial electorates in 1921, the Sinhalese and Tamil communal representation was continued until 1931. Again, it was only in 1924 that

\(^{7}\) They were P. Ramanathan and H.M Fernando.


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Muslim representatives had the opportunity of participation in the elections. However, the communal portion had been maintained to elect three Muslims from the whole island. Although there was representation on communal basis, no Kandyan Sinhalese, Muslim or Indian could be registered as a voter. After the Muslims expressed their disappointment at being denied the right of electing representatives all over the island the Government issued a proclamation in an extraordinary Gazette of 21 February 1924, providing the right for the election of three Muslim members. The franchise, however, was limited to males with an income and general literacy qualification. H.M Macan Markar, N.H.M Abdul Cader, T.B Jayah, and M.L.M Reyal were the four contestants. The first three were elected to the Legislative Council.

Donoughmore Commission

The system of communal representation was finally abandoned with the introduction of the Donoughmore Commission on Legislative Reforms (1927-28). The Commission denounced communal representation on the ground that it was a barrier to communal harmony. Under the Donoughmore Constitution, a new style of State Council, which enabled the participation of all members in the actual processes of decision-making through a legislative body, was introduced. The first State Council under the Donoughmore constitution was constituted on 7 July 1931. It consisted of

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13 Ibid. p. 30.
50 elected members, 8 nominated members, and 3 officials of the administration. In nominating the communal representatives the Governor could use his discretion to appoint representatives of communities if they were not adequately in the quota of 50 elected members. Out of the 50 elected members, there were 40 Sinhalese, 9 Tamils, and one Muslim member represented. The population percentage at this time was: Sinhalese 65.5 per cent, Tamils 26.7 per cent, and Muslims 6.4 per cent.

At an All-Party Conferences in 1932, which had been organized by the Sinhalese nationalist leaders, the Ceylon Muslim League delegation was invited. At this conference, the Ceylon Muslim League declared its support for “Dominion Status with due and adequate safeguards for the Muslims”. The League’s annual general meeting that followed soon after on 17 July 1932 was presided over by N.H.M Abdul Cader. At the meeting it was regretted that the Muslims should have to depend on nomination for representation and the demand for adequate representation was reiterated. “It was evident that there was not one single constituency in which they had a majority position. There were only three (Colombo Central and two Eastern Province seats) in which they had a fair chance of success. As it was their worst fears were proved when only one Muslim won the election to the first State council.”

Mohammed Macan Markar of Colombo was elected for the Batticaloa South seat and the Council nominated Khalid Sultan.

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14 One of the required qualifications to be a member of the State Council was proficiency in the English language.
16 Figures quoted from the 1931 census data.
17 Serendib, November 1932, p. 9.
Since the Muslims were scattered all over the country, they lacked the opportunity of electing their representative based on their ethnic ratio. In 1931, a delegation of Muslims led by T.B Jayah visited the Secretary of State for the Colonies and presented him with a mammoth petition signed by some 10,000 Muslims of position and influence, without seeking any change in the structure and number of constituencies for the Muslims to be represented. The Malay deputation also declared that by putting the Malays among the Moors, no Malay had a chance of ever being returned unless he was a servant of the Moors.

Second State Council (1936-42)

In the general election held in 1936, not a single Muslim member was elected. The number of Tamils elected was also much less than their proportion in the population. Two Muslims were nominated, T.B. Jayah and A.R.A. Razik. Despite the attractive features of the Donoughmore report, the minorities—Tamils and Muslims—felt grossly underrepresented in the new system, and when the Donoughmore proposals came up for debate in the Legislative Council, all the minority representatives voted against its adoption, and the proposals were passed by a narrow margin of 19 to 17 votes. The Muslims of Batticaloa too asked for separate representation, with the argument that their occupation of farming was different from that of the Moor traders of other regions. In 1933, no member of the minority voted for the Memorandum of the Board of Ministers in the State Council, including the two ministers belonging to minority ethnic groups, Macan Markar (Muslim) and Peri Sunderm (Tamil).

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21 Debates of the State Council, 3 November 1933.
Agitating for political representation that was in consonance with their share of population, Muslim leaders of all shades of opinion—Malays, Moors, and Muslim Leaguers—came together in an All Ceylon Muslim Political Conference on 5 March 1939.

Soon after, the British Parliament brought in the Ceylon Independence Act of 1948. The Act conferred on the Ceylon Parliament full legislative powers and removed from Britain all responsibility for Ceylon’s affairs.22

Soulbury Commission

The Minister’s Draft Scheme23 of 1944 had attempted to reduce minority fears by providing representation on the basis of a certain amount of area. For example, one member was proposed for every 1,000 square miles. In January 1945, the leader of the State Council expressed his willingness to ensure adequate representation for the Muslims by demarcating electorates as small as 5,000-10,000 with a 75 per cent majority of Muslims.24 Having taken this into account, the All Ceylon Moors’ Association submitted a memorandum to the Royal Commission on Constitutional Reform, in 1945. In the memorandum, they pleaded that the Commission might sympathetically consider their political aspiration. They were not ‘over keen’ to secure communal representation, they said, but in a House of 100 members, there

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23 The scheme was improved upon with a second chamber and legislative safeguards for minorities by a visiting Royal Commission from Britain, the Soulbury Commission, headed by Lord Soulbury, see Command 6677 Ceylon: Report of the Commission on Constitutional Reform.
24 Dr M.C.M Kaleel, Member of the State Council, announced at the annual general meeting of the Southern Province Muslim Association held in January 1945 that the leader of the State Council had agreed to this provision. Vide A.H Macan Markar, Short Biographical Sketches, p. 335.
should be at least 12 Muslims.\textsuperscript{25} The Soulbury Commission’s amendment of the Minister’s Draft Scheme dealt with the problems faced by the minorities in multi-member constituencies “in any area of a province where a substantial concentration of persons united by a community of interest whether racial, religious or otherwise, but differing from the majority of the inhabitants of the area.”\textsuperscript{26}

The Soulbury Commission found that the existing constitution guaranteed the rights of the minority communities, and absolutely rejected communal representation as well as the 50-50 demanding policy of G.G. Ponnambalam. At the same time the commission recommended distributing the representation of the minority communities in Parliament to the provinces. Since the Muslims would be able to elect their members to Parliament under the newly carved Districts and Provinces basis, the appointment of member of Parliament (through allotted seats or through nominated membership) would not be necessary, the commission noted.\textsuperscript{27}

When the Muslim groups made representation to the Soulbury Commission, they made it on behalf of all Muslims, including Indian Muslims.\textsuperscript{28} In 1947, when the Delimitation Commission was asked to demarcate electoral boundaries, it had found that “the religious tie was stronger than the racial tie and that it was proper in assessing the Muslim strength to include Indian Moors under the category ‘Muslims’”. The Indians were an essential part of the Muslim electorate too, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[26] \textit{The Ceylon Constitution order in Council}, 1946, Section 41, subsection (4).
\item[28] The All Ceylon Muslim League and the Muslim Political Conference insisted that they represented the entire Muslim community, Malay, Ceylon Moor, and Indian Moor.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
commission noted. In demarcating the electoral district of Colombo Central it was stated:

Without the Indian Moors the percentage of the Muslims is 23.6. It would not be too much to rely on the probability that there would be added to this Muslim strength at least 1.5 out of the 7.4 Indian Moors and in this way the Muslim strength would reach the percentage of at least 25.1 necessary to secure a seat.29

In 1945 November when the Ceylon Moor Society gave its opinion on the Soulbury Commission it wanted that Muslims should be offered 12 seats in the national legislature. The Moors' Association, in its Memorandum to the Soulbury Commission, mentioned that in the 1924 constitution a separate Mohammedan electorate was created to return three members and further incorporated the Ceylon Moors in the territorial electorates. The three members elected to the reformed Legislative Council, of their own accord and without a mandate from their constituents, persuaded the Government to call the electorate a "Muslim" electorate. Under the heading "Privilege of Voting", the Donoughmore Commission stated that 'the privilege of voting should be confined to those who have an abiding interest in the country or who may be regarded as permanently settled in the island'. This Association was in full accord with that dictum.30

In 1946, the First Delimitation Commission31 divided the nine provinces of Sri Lanka into 89 electoral districts. The electoral districts were to comprise the same number of people as far as possible, but at the same time they were to reflect the aspirations of

31 Appointed on 11 August 1943, it had M. Wedderburn (Chairman), John Christopher Wilberforce Rock, Stanley Obeysekara KC, and W.W. Williams (Secretary) as members.
the people of the respective electoral districts under section 41 of the constitution of Sri Lanka. The Delimitation Committee was of the opinion that Muslims should have at least six members elected. Since the Muslims were spread throughout the island, there were doubts whether it was possible to create electorates in order to elect Muslim members. However, the 31.8 per cent Muslims of Colombo central had the opportunity to elect a Muslim member, as this constituency was created as a three-member seat. Steps were also taken to enable the Muslims and Tamils of the Eastern Province to elect three and four members respectively through multi-constituencies.

However, as the Tamils were in majority the situation was not favourable to the Muslims. In Mannar constituency, while the Muslims numbered around 10,500, the population of the Tamils was about 31,500, and the population of the province was about 53,300. In Puttalam electorate, which was created to make way for the Muslims of the Northwestern Province, the density of the Muslim population was around 10,700, out of the 31,200 people.

The Delimitation Commission believed that there would be opportunities for electing 4 Muslims, 13 Ceylon Tamils and 7 Indian Tamils. It also believed that while the Muslims would have an opportunity to influence two single-member seats, the Tamils as well would have the chance to elect two more members from multi-member constituencies.
### Table 3.1

**Details of Multi-Member Constituencies-1946**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Electoral District</th>
<th>Number of Constituencies</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Colombo Central</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>To cater for Muslims, Tamil and Sinhalese Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Ambalangoda-Balapitiya</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To cater for caste differences among the Sinhalese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabaragamuwa</td>
<td>Balangoda</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To cater for Indian Tamils and Sinhalese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Kadugannawa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To cater for caste difference among the Sinhalese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uva</td>
<td>Badulla</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To cater for Indian community and Sinhalese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although six Muslims\(^{32}\) were elected to Parliament at the First General Elections held in 1947 (see Table 3.2), at the elections held in March and May 1950, M.C.M. Kaleel and A. Azeez were elected from Colombo Central and Maskeliya Constituencies, respectively. When in early 1950 T.B. Jaya resigned his cabinet post Kaleel was appointed to his place.

In 1949, the Indian Muslims were removed from the electoral register, considerably altering the requirement provided in Section 41 of the Soulbury Constitution for adequate representation of the minority communities. Neither was clause 40(1) of the

constitution that provided for a delimitation commission to be appointed within one year after every census found attainable. Indeed, the first elections were based on the 1931 census and so were those of 1952. However, the Delimitation Commission was faced with its terms of reference—at least till 1978—which obliged it to give special consideration to the minority communities whether on racial or religious grounds. But the practical difficulties involved in securing proper representation of the Muslims, dispersed as they were throughout the island, were considerable. The appointment of the first Delimitation Commission manifested no evidence of seeking to ensure adequate representation for the Muslims, despite the efforts made by Muslims and especially the Moors’ Association.33 The result was far from satisfactory from the Muslim point of view. While multi-member constituencies had been created in Balangoda and Badulla for the Indian Tamils and in Amblangoda-Balapititya and Kadugannawa for the minority caste Sinhalese, only one was created for the Muslims in Colombo Central. The result was that in 1947 the Muslims secured only six seats at the elections.

Table 3.2
Muslim Candidates successful at the first General Elections, August-September 1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Candidate Elected</th>
<th>Party Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombo-Central</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>T.B. Jayah (2nd M.P)</td>
<td>UNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puttlam</td>
<td>North-Western</td>
<td>H.S. Ismail</td>
<td>UNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutur</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>A.R.A.M. Abubucker</td>
<td>UNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalmunai</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>M.S. Kariapper</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batticaloa</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>A.L. Sinna Lebbe</td>
<td>UNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pottuvil</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>M.M. Ebrahim</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


33 The members of the first Delimitation Commission were L.M.D de Silva, K.C. (a Sinhalese, Chairman), N. Nadarajah, K.C. (a Ceylon Tamil) and H.C. Jansz (a Burgher, i.e., a descendant of the Dutch settlers).
The Delimitation Commission appointed by the SLFP after the Census of 1959 made some effort to safeguard the minority interest, as spelt out in paragraphs 66-69 of its report. Headed by Walter Thalgodapitiya, it had a Muslim member. In the Eastern Province, three single-member constituencies were also provided for, of which Colombo Central in the Western Province, Mutur and Batticaloa in the Eastern Province, and Akurana in the Central Province could each return a Muslim. The Puttalam constituency was created in such a way as to provide the Muslims with a majority of votes. In other areas, such as Beruwala in the Western Province and Mawanella in the Sabaragamuwa Province, smaller pockets of Moors were included in the new electorates so as to enable Muslim voters to exercise maximum influence. Notwithstanding these efforts, the Commissioners could guarantee the Muslims only 4.6 per cent representation in Parliament. In fact, however, the Muslims did get the number of seats warranted by their numbers—ten in March 1960, ten in July 1960, and eleven in 1965. In 1970, however, the Muslim representation was reduced to eight.

**First and Second Republic Constitutions**

The system of delimitation passed unchanged into the new constitutional structure of the 1972 Republic, except for the provision that representation should be for every 90,000 rather than 75,000 persons. The Delimitation Commission appointed in 1976 included a Muslim to represent Muslim opinion. According to Urmila Phadnis, the

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34 The 1959 Delimitation Commission consisted of Walter Thalgodapitiya (a Kandyan Sinhalese, Chairman); G. Crossette Thambyah (a Ceylon Tamil), and C.A.S. Marikar (a Ceylon Moor).
36 The 1976 Delimitation Commission consisted of Noel Tittawella (a Kandyan Sinhalese, Chairman), C.Sivanathan (a Ceylon Tamil), and H.M.Z. Farouque (a Muslim). Farouque resigned in February 1975 to accept an appointment abroad and M.A.H.M Hussain was appointed to take his place.
commission "ensured reasonable chances of a proportionate representation to the Muslims by creating electorates in such a way as to grant them a seat even when it was not justified in terms of population".\textsuperscript{37} As far as minority representation was concerned, the substance of instructions laid down in the Soulbury constitution was more or less re-enacted. On this basis the nine provinces of the island were divided into 154 single-member constituencies and six multi-member constituencies to return 168 members in all. Once again, the number of Muslims elected to the National State Assembly of 1977 was twelve, approximately the number warranted by their population. According to the electoral delimitation of 1976, the Muslims constituted 5 per cent or more of the total number of registered votes in 57 electorates.

The constitution of the Second Republic has completely changed the standard for electoral demarcation. Today the terms of reference to be placed before a Delimitation Commission pay no attention to the ethnic nature of Sri Lanka's plural society;\textsuperscript{38} instead, the Constitution merely provides for the country to be divided into not more than 24 and not less than 20 electoral districts. There is also no provision for the demarcation of electoral districts to take note of changes in population patterns after the taking of a regular census. Muslim representation other than from the Eastern Province would be impossible. Even in the Eastern Province it is significant that in 1936, Batticaloa district, which has the largest concentration of Muslims, did not elect a Muslim to the state Council.\textsuperscript{39} Likewise, the Muslims lost their seat in Batticaloa district in the 1970 election due to their split votes. In one two-member constituency

\textsuperscript{37} Phadnis, n.25, pp 27-48
\textsuperscript{39} Canagrattam (14,021 votes), a Ceylon Tamil, won the election for the Batticaloa South seat. The Muslim votes were divided between M.A.L. Kariapper (8,216 votes) and K.M Abdul Majeed (1,557 votes).
(Batticaloa), UNP and SLFP candidates split the Muslim vote so sharply that this constituency, which had always returned a Ceylon Tamil and a Muslim returned two Ceylon Tamils on this occasion.  

Muslims and the Ethnic Question

The Muslims began to establish their identity in terms of religion, not on the basis of language. When J.R. Jayewardene first introduced his language motion in 1943, there was much opposition to it on the grounds that it made no provision for Tamil. By the time the motion came up for debate in 1944, he had agreed to amend it to include Tamil along with Sinhala as the national languages. The amendment was debated and put to a vote on 25 May 1944. It was carried by 29 votes to 8. A.R.A. Razik in his brief speech on this occasion said:

I feel that in the best interest of Lanka, my mother country, I must stand up for the motion of the honourable member from Kelaniya (J.R. Jayewardene); that is that Sinhalese should be the official language of the country. However, there is not the slightest doubt that this cannot be done in a hurry, in a year or two, or even in 10 years. I certainly feel that in the best interests of Lanka and her people one language will bring unity among our people. We are really divided at the present moment. Each community has its own language. But if we all take to one language, then we will not think in terms of Tamils, Moors, Sinhalese, Burghers, Malays, and so on.  

In 1956, Razik voted for the Sinhala Only Bill. The Muslim members of Parliament representing Kalkudah, Pottuvil and Muttur (A.A. Macan Markar, M.M. Mustapha and M.H. Mohamed Ali) opposed it. When the language issue became an election

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issue, the Tamil Federal Party succeeded in getting two Muslim candidates elected in the Eastern Province. Dr. Badi-ur-din Mahmod, a founder Vice Secretary of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party has said, "The Muslims of Sri Lanka do not have any languages to be their mother tongue." After the official language policy became law, the Muslims reconciled themselves to the new language policy introduced by the S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike government.

Since the language issue was a burning problem of the island in 1956, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party government led by S.W.R.D Bandaranaike tried to win the Muslims' support by setting up a special government training school and by teaching Arabic at the primary level by qualified Moulvis appointed by the Ministry of education and paid by the State. Muslim leaders saw the importance of providing educational opportunities because Sri Lanka's political system from 1912 depended on a high educational qualification in English. In 1924, when the Muslims were allowed to elect three Muslims to the legislative Council, the qualification for voting was expanded to include the native languages.

'Sinhalese only' was obviously a tactic to displace the Tamils from the higher ranks of the public sector. The loss of status for the Tamil language did not have any cultural implication for the Muslims, whose language of communication is a dialect of Tamil. The Muslims of Sri Lanka have never involved themselves in any conflict concerning the language policy.43

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The Muslim politicians who got elected, however, became classic examples of turncoats and opportunists. When two Muslims were elected in 1965 on the Federal Party ticket, they crossed over to the winning SLFP coalition under Mrs. Bandaranaike. One of them later got a ministry in this cabinet. The Muslim candidate elected in the East in 1965 also crossed over to Sinhalese parties. This lost them credibility not only in their own community but also among the other communities, especially Tamils.

Yet there was no consensus whether the community should merge into the tradition of the larger Sri Lankan society or maintain its separate identity by adoption of its own cultural and religious symbols. Language was one of these. It was important not only in its own right but also because language was the vehicle through which Muslim religious distinctiveness was maintained. An increasing number of children being educated in Sinhalese had also brought about a gap between the older and the new generation.

**Affiliation of Muslims in Major Political Parties**

The Muslims were trying to survive by joining the Sinhalese. The alternative, as they saw it, was to remain isolated and forgo the benefits of political cooperation. The geographical distribution of the community within Sri Lanka, coupled with their trading and commercial interest, persuaded them to adopt a pro-Sinhalese attitude in an independent Sri Lanka. By supporting the new constitutions introduced in 1972 and 1978, they indicated their willingness to participate in the mainstream of politics. It was the first step towards a conscious policy of political integration. From the Government's point of view, the Muslims were not engaged in any organized
political activity. They did not put forward any hard demands and all they asked for was the freedom to educate their children in the way they wanted, to practise their religion wherever they lived, and to earn their living through their own enterprise and effort.

The Muslims sought and obtained membership and achieved positions of influence in all major national political parties, the UNP and the SLFP in particular. In almost all the general elections held between 1947 and 1977, Muslims obtained seats in Parliament on the basis of the Muslim pulation (see Table 3.3). The Muslim leadership, who had joined in the major political parties, gained the Ministerial posts till the last election (see Annexure A). But the very nature of the Muslim minority position made it difficult for a Muslim cabinet minister to help his community. The nature of his ministry usually also provided little opportunity for him to serve his community.

Table 3.3
Ethnic Distribution of Parliamentary Seats, 1947-1977

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seats due on the basis of Population</th>
<th>General Elections</th>
<th>Sinhalese</th>
<th>Ceylon Tamil</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Indian Tamil</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seats obtained</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats due on the basis of Population</td>
<td>1960 March</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats obtained</td>
<td>1960 July</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


a The total number of seats in the House was 101, 6 being reserved for ‘Appointed M.P.s’ by the Governor-General on prime ministerial advice.
b The total number of seats had been increased to 157, 6 being reserved for ‘Appointed M.P.s’.
c The total number of seats was 168; the class of ‘Appointed M.P.s’ was abolished in the 1972 Republican Constitution.
The Muslims were poorly represented in the governing bodies of Tamil political parties. The strength of the UNP's link with the Muslim community is reflected in the Muslim vote at every election since 1947 till the presidential election of 1994. The UNP always had more Muslim representation in Parliament than the SLFP till the 1977 elections (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4

Muslim Candidates in the General Elections, 1947-1977

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>UNP</th>
<th>SLFP/MEP</th>
<th>FP/TC</th>
<th>TULF</th>
<th>CP/LSSP</th>
<th>Other Parties</th>
<th>Independents</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2**</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960 March</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8**</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960 July</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2^c</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20^c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28^b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30^d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* One of the independents, M.S. Kariapper, later joined the UNP.
+ In the March 1950 by-election for the Maskeliya seat, Abdul Aziz contested as a candidate of the Ceylon Indian Congress and won. Similarly, Dr. M.C.M. Kaleel was returned from the Colombo Central (2nd M.P.) constituency as UNP candidate in the May 1950 by-election. This by-election was also contested by M.S. Abubakar as a LSSP candidate and (Mrs.) Ayesha Rauff as an Independent.
** 'Tamil Speaking Front' candidates.
++ Of the 8, 7 candidates were fielded by LPP and one by the Ceylon Democratic Congress.
a M.E.H. Mohamad Ali, who had contested as a UNP candidate and lost at the 1960 (July) elections, won the Muttur (1st M.P.) seat at the June 1962 by-election as a FP candidate, defeating S.A. Hameed, who had contested on SLFP ticket.
b M.L.M. Aboossaly, who contested the Balangoda seat as UNP candidate at the October 1966 by-election, lost. (Mrs.) Gaffar Sattar contesting as an Independent from Negombo lost the July 1967 by-election. M.C. Ahmed won the Kalmunai seat as SLFP candidate at the February 1968 by-election, defeating S.Z.M. Mashoor Moulana (FP) and M.A.L. Kariapper (Independent).
c Islamic United Front candidates.
d M.H. Naina Marikkar was elected in the by-election of October 1972 from Puttalam as UNP candidate, defeating two Muslim candidates, viz., Abdul Latiff (SLFP) and Mohammad Farouk (Independent). Naina Marikkar had lost in the 1970 General Elections from the same constituency. M.S. Abdul got elected in the February 1974 by-election from Mannar under a UNP ticket, defeating another Muslim candidate S.A. Carder (Independent). Abdul Rahman had lost in the 1970 General Elections from the same constituency.

A.A. Sheriff, contesting as an Independent candidate, lost the October 1972 by-election from Colombo North.
Till the mid-1980s, the Muslims did not contest at the parliamentary election under a single flag. Though the All Ceylon Muslim League and All Ceylon Moor Society had existed for a long period, they were steering the community “without taking part in parliamentary activities”. Generally, Muslim political leaders hail from the Western Province. W.M. Abdul Rahman, Bakeer Markar, M.H. Mohammad, T.B. Jayah, Sir Mohamed Macan Markar, Sir Razik Fareed, Dr. M.C.M. Kaleel, Dr. Badi-ud-din Mahmood and A.H.M Fawzi are examples. Also, only Muslims from wealthy families were engaged in the national politics.

The incorporation of the Muslim League into the UNP at its very inception was a gesture symbolic of the Muslim leadership’s belief that “so long as there are political parties divided on questions of policy the majority of today might become the minority of tomorrow and vice versa”. In politics processes are not evaluated for what they are but for the outcomes they produce. The rationale behind Muslim behaviour must therefore depend on the way both these processes affected their lives. The Muslims were compelled to form a united front for political expediency. Socially, however, the distinctive identities of the various groups of Muslims have been preserved, and they continue to be essentially endogamous. The Muslim representatives who were elected by the Sinhalese, showed more concern about general matters rather than about the problems of the Muslim community.

46 During the decade 1955-64 there was an annual average of 263 interracial marriages registered (i.e., 4.9 per cent) among the Muslims. Of this 143 were between Ceylon Moors and Indian Moors, 86 between Ceylon Moors and Malays, 5 between Indian Moors and Malays, and 29 others; vide Reports of the Registrar-General of Ceylon on vital statistics for 1960 and 1965.
Unlike other ethnic groups, Muslims did not hesitate to change their political alliances. For instance, M.S.M. Kariyappar of Kalmunai contested in the 1947 general elections as an independent candidate and lost. At the 1956 elections he was a candidate under the Federal Party and lost. In March 1960 he was an LLP candidate and lost again. He did not contest at the 1960 July elections. In the parliamentary elections held in 1965, he contested under the UNP and won. In the 1970 elections, too he was a candidate on the UNP ticket and was successful.

In 1946, D.S. Senanayake did not wish to ignore the two prominent Muslim leaders when constituting his United National Party. Both Jayah and Razik were included in Parliament, though the latter had lost his contest at Pottuvil. Jayah was made Minister of Labor and Social Services. Razik was given a seat in the Senate. In 1947 he was selected to Senate membership and contested at the elections held on 25 April 1952 as an independent candidate, in the Colombo Central electorate. He was returned to Parliament along with UNP's Dr. M.C.M. Kaleel. In the 1956 elections Razik contested on the UNP ticket in Colombo central and won though the UNP was defeated as a party. In the elections of March 1960 he contested under LPP and lost. In the elections of 1965 though Razik was not contesting he was nominated as an MP, by the UNP-Federal Party coalition government.

Since the Muslims could represent a 'floating vote' vis-à-vis the main political parties, the parties contesting the elections could not afford to ignore them. Since the introduction of the presidential system based on a direct country-wide poll, since Sinhalese candidates from either the UNP or the SLFP could not expect to mobilize extensive support from the Sri Lankan Tamils who constitute about 12 per cent of the
electorate, the Muslim vote appears to have gained importance. Records relating to selection of candidates, electoral alliances and no-contest pacts, delimitation of electorates, and the award of government indicate that the main political parties have been alive to and responsive to these realities.

This perhaps explains the varying attitudes of Muslim politicians to the official language policy. In 1955, H.S. Ismail of Puttalam and Mohamed Ali of Muttur resigned from the UNP because of that party's Sinhalese only stand. Others, such as M.S. Kariapper and M.M. Mustapha were to join the F.P. At the same time, A.R.A. Razik and C.A.S. Markikar became steady supporters of "Sinhalese only".

Such variety of Muslim politicians' responses was evidenced on other policies as well. While Tamil leaders were asking for 50:50 representation, the Muslims were pleading that there could be assured, satisfactory safeguards for the minorities. The Sinhalese did not give any such assurance. However, the Sinhala Maha Sabha, an organization set up by S.W.R.D Bandaranaike, who later became Prime Minister in 1956-59, in principle agreed to the Muslim leaders' suggestion and later directed them to Sir Baron Jayathilaka. T.B Jayah supported G.G. Ponnambalam in the demand for 50:50 representation. A.R.A. Razik, on the other hand, joined the D.S Senanayake group. Razik was denied nomination to Colombo Central area, which was given to T.B. Jayah. Razik was forced to contest from Pottuvil, where he had no political base, and consequently he lost heavily to his rival M.M. Ibrahim, who belonged to that area. His defeat provoked Razik to turn against M.A.C.M. Saleh of the Muslim League, who was a candidate for the Kalkudah seat. Razik asked the Muslims to vote for K.W. Devanayagam against Saleh. The emergence of the Islamic Socialist Front as a branch
of Bandaranaike’s SLFP in 1960 also took its toll on the community’s integration. The party lacked charism or specific ideological content to mobilize the Muslims in political consciousness. It merely affected the electoral prospects of the Anti-Marxist Muslim United Front led by M.H. Mohamed, a leading member of the UNP. Mohamed attracted many Muslims within the SLFP stronghold to his side. By competing for Muslim votes, he challenged the Muslim members of the UNP to take a more proactive attitude, but with mixed results.

The tendency of Muslim political leaders not to identify themselves exclusively with a particular political orientation may be seen in a positive light, as a means of providing integration among the leaders and activists at a national level. D.S. Senanayake had appointed a Muslim in his cabinet, Badi ud din Mahmud. But when S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike broke away from the UNP to form his Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Mahmud joined him, ensuring Muslim representation at cabinet level in a possible alternative government. This kind of politics may be seen as ensuring overarching cooperation between the different communities in a multi-ethnic society, helping to remedy the ever-present disposition towards centralization. Implicit in this politics is also the assumption that the political leadership of a community has its complete confidence. This can be certainly said of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. Generally, the Muslim political leaders have sought to ensure the religious and cultural rights of their community.

The benefit of political flexibility was shown when the Muslim leaders who had at first stood for 50:50 demand agreed to settle for more than the proportionate share of seats in the legislature for themselves. They were promised eight seats but finally won
only six, and they settled for the number provided under the Soulbury Constitution. A large factor in creating confidence in the 1947 system was the formation of the United National Party by D.S. Senanayake.\(^{47}\) He convinced the minority ethnic groups that their interests would be honoured. In the same way J.R. Jayewardene’s restored UNP gave a more significant hearing to the Muslim community’s specific concerns at the national level. In a different scenario, these issues could have otherwise given rise to controversy in the post-1978 politics.

C.A.S. Marikar’s and Mahmud’s participation in the SLFP is also a similar story of close ties with their political party. Marikar’s appreciation of Sinhalese culture was well known. Temperamentally, therefore, he was attuned to sympathize with Bandaranaike’s nationalist mind. Marikar was a founder member of the SLFP and was the only minority member to hold a cabinet post in the 1956 Parliament. Mahmud, very much a Muslim nationalist in his political attitudes, saw his role in the SLFP as an attempt to prove that the Muslims could think independently and need not identify with the UNP unquestioningly. Mahmud functioned as the General Secretary of the SLFP in 1960 and helped organize the party. Under Mrs. Bandaranaike’s leadership of the party, he was always nominated to Parliament, and given a cabinet post of considerable importance.

A remarkable aspect of Sri Lankan politics is the acceptance of Muslims by Sinhalese voters in electorates where Muslims comprise less than a fifth and quite often less than a tenth or a twentieth of the total voting strength. Muslims are regarded as being

so clearly integrated into the Sri Lankan political community that the Sinhalese will vote for them on party grounds against Sinhalese opponents. In 1947, for example, H.S. Ismail was the only member to enter Parliament uncontested from Puttalam. In 1965, M.H. Mohamed was the UNP candidate from Borella, and was appointed Minister of Labour and Social services. In 1977, Abooosally was successfully returned to Parliament as the UNP candidate from Balangoda. None of these three electorates is a typically Muslim area, and it is possible to say that in the case of Borella and Balangoda, a large measure of the victory was due to the fact that the member belonged to the UNP. In Borella and Puttalam, Muslim victories were possible because of the solidarity of the Muslim vote.

Nevertheless, the main Sinhalese parties have had the effect of benefiting from the division within the Muslim community rather than promoting its unity. To a large extent the nature of the present political system makes it so. For instance, members of the Muslim League can use their influence to help the UNP come to power. ISF leaders on the other hand favour the SLFP. While the institution of a single Muslim party would considerably limit leadership potential, the division into SLFP and UNP factions can benefit from those positions of power.

In the 1950s, the UNP suffered reverses on the Muslim front because of its unexpected policy change from supporting a balance between Sinhala and Tamil for official purposes to one of recognizing Sinhala as the only official language of the country. This alienated some Muslim leaders, some of whom chose to contest as independent candidates and the others on the Tamil Federal Party ticket in the ensuing elections.48

In the 1956 elections the SLFP put up only one Muslim candidate, who won. The MEP won a landslide victory. Four other Muslim candidates also were returned to Parliament. These were Sir Razik Fareed, Colombo Central, UNP; M.S. Kariapper, Kalmunai, FP; M.M. Mustapfa, Pottuvil, FP; and M.E.M. Mohamed Ali, Mutur, Independent. In July 1960 the Federal Party fielded two Muslim candidates—A.L. Sinnalebbe (Batticaloa) and M.C. Ahamed (Kalmunai). On being defeated, Sinnalebbe changed his party affiliation and won in the next election as a UNP nominee. Ahamed resigned from the Federal Party in 1961 on the plea that its policies were not “in the interests of the Muslims.”

There are many factors that inhibit the independence of Muslim legislators. As members of the Sinhalese-dominated political parties, the Muslims will not press too hard views which may be considered regional. Most of the Muslim candidates who win elections from Sinhalese areas are constituencies of mixed communities. It began with C.A.S. Marikkar for the SLFP, and Abdul Jabbar for the same party. While Marikkar won easily in a double-member constituency (Kadugannawa, 1952-59), Jabbar won in a single-member constituency in which Muslims formed only 4 per cent of the voters.

Muslims given cabinet appointments were also not particularly known to be sympathetic to the cause of the Muslim community. Three of the five Muslims appointed to cabinet posts, were not typical representatives of their community. C.A.S Marikkar of the SLFP was known as “Sinhala Marikar” for his sympathy with the

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50 This was the Galagedera seat which Jabbar won in July 1960. Marikkar had won it in March 1960.

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Sinhalese culture, seen by many as excessive. He represented constituencies in which the Buddhist population was considerable. Marikar was given the Ministry of Broadcasting and Culture, a position from which he was expected to help the Sinhalese. Mahmud was not answerable to constituents as he was appointed Member of Parliament, and could therefore promulgate daring policies. Even he did not dare establish a simple policy of direct affirmative action for the Muslim, which the Tamils might have agreed to. The policy he actually implemented covertly helped the Kandyan Singhalese. Admittedly, regardless of Ministry, the presence of a Muslim in the supreme policymaking instrument of the State does help to convey the Muslim point of view at plenary sessions of this body. Also, the Muslims probably could wield a larger measure of influence in the body politic by joining individually political parties already functioning in the country, whose policies do not conflict with the principle of Islam.

In the 1965 election, the Federal Party fielded three Muslims nominees, of whom only one won. The lone successful candidate was M.E.H. Mohamed Ali, who later moved over to the UNP. Both in 1970 and 1977 the party had little success so far as the Muslim candidates fielded by it in the eastern province were concerned. "As a representative of the subnational sentiment of Tamils, the Federal Party—the major constituent of the TULF—did not seem to make headway in eliciting the support of

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51 Significantly, Mohamed as Minister of Education in 1960 nationalized denominational schools. Then as Minister of Health and Housing in 1964, he stopped the right to private practice amongst government doctors.


the Tamil-speaking Muslims." There was also an important difference in the basic approach of the Tamil and Muslim communities in advancing their cause. The Tamil community in its quest for equality and the protection of its identity engaged in struggle and confrontation. The approach of the Muslim community was one constructive accommodation and cooperation. There were benefits and costs in each of these strategies. Their different approaches, however, resulted in a great deal of distrust and suspicion between the two communities, the cruel consequences of which are being felt today.

If the constitutions of Sri Lanka of 1948, 1972 and 1978 established a procedure of governmental operations which the Muslims could accept as legitimate, there were numerous other factors which further encouraged the Muslims to seek accommodation with the dominant Sinhalese Buddhist majority. Foremost among these was the historical past of peaceful coexistence between the two communities. Within the community, that inhibited the growth of national solidarity. Next, because of the indifference and lack of politicization of the Muslim electorate it was possible for an overarching cooperation of consociational ties to be effected between the leaders of the two communities. The Muslim community did not view the Sinhalese as being the politically dominant group provided their members were left undisturbed in their principal occupations of international trade, internal commerce, and agriculture. On the other hand, "In the day-to-day activities, the community hardly cooperated with the Federal Party and its political successor, the TULF. In the 1977

elections, the TULF fielded a few Muslim candidates, but all of them were decisively defeated. Moreover, the UNP and the SLFP were vying with one another in wooing the Muslims.”57 Badi ud din Mahmud, with the express purpose of eroding into Muslim support bases, in 1965 started a leftist organization known as the Islamic Socialist Front (ISF). Having introduced political views in line with the Islamic standard, Mahmud attempted to wean away the Muslims from the UNP. However, the concept of Islamic Socialism he put forward soon evaporated and the Muslims who left UNP found shelter in the SLFP.

When an ethnic group rises to challenge the legitimacy of a system, the coercive dimension of the system is blatantly revealed. In Sri Lanka the Sinhalese are indeed the “controllers of the value system and the prime allocatees of the rewards system”. The subordinate ethnic group’s strategic decisions are in large part responses to the State’s capacity to project its legitimacy. The Muslims’ capacity for protest, however, is considerably limited on account of their being numerically weak and geographically dispersed. Much of their protest movement has been made possible by the active Sinhalese-Tamil conflict that has dominated the island nation’s politics since independence.

There is a point of view that satisfactory political representation of a community renders a system legitimate in the eyes of that community. In Sri Lanka, the scattering of the Muslims in small clusters rendered their representation difficult. The problem was overcome by the provision for the representation of “a community of interest whether racial, religious or otherwise, but differing in one more of these respects from

57 Suryanarayan, n.41, p.142.
the majority of the inhabitants of the area".58 This clause has been effectively utilized by the Delimitation Commission of 1959 to enable Muslims to obtain their due representation. This principle was also followed by the 1976 Commission. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson notes:

The Muslims who have a large concentration of population in the Eastern Province obtained five seats there and three to four seats in the Sinhalese areas.... In a number of other constituencies in both Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamil areas many Ceylon Moor villages were brought into the electorates carved out so as to give Muslims a strong voice, if not to enable them to return members of their choice to Parliament, on a possible split of votes in the opposing camp.59

The net result has been that Muslim representation has generally been proportionate to their population figures. While dispersal is generally a source of weakness, it has been effectively utilized by sympathetic clauses in the various constitutions to become a source of strength to the Muslims.

This trend has also been aided by the development of two major Sinhalese political parties—the UNP and the SLFP—between whom the control of government has alternated, with each of these parties including important Muslim leaders among its membership. The significance of the Muslim vote in determining electoral results has forced the larger Sinhalese-based political parties to vie with each other for Muslim support.60 The Muslim Leaguers joined the UNP at its inception. Mahmud, a Vice President of the SLFP, founded the Islamic Socialist Front. By rendering the SLFP as a viable alternative, Mahmud provided the Muslims with a choice. This alternative

59 Wilson, n.40, p. 55.
was welcomed in 1970 when Puttalam, Beruwala, Kalmunai, and Colombo Central saw the election of Muslim SLFP representatives.

Nevertheless, the nomination of a Muslim candidate by a Sinhalese party means that his views have already been checked for compliance with the Sinhalese views, a fact that ensures the candidate’s obedience to the party’s political philosophy. For instance, there was little opposition to the Sinhalese Only Language Act, which was not only discriminatory but also a breach of faith in terms of the language debate of the 1940s that had recognized equally both Sinhalese and Tamil as the ‘national’ language of Sri Lanka. Of greater consequence to the Muslim community was the acquiescence of Muslim leaders such as Mahmud and Halim Ishak with the nationalization policies of the SLFP that brought under public control those areas of trade that had been traditionally under Muslim control. For a Muslim elected from a mixed constituency it is difficult to ignore communities other than his own in his constituency. In the first place, his religious orientation may not have been the primary reason for his being preferred as a party candidate in an election, though the party does try to benefit electorally from the fact.

For the elected Muslim legislator, the very fact that he belongs to a minority community weakens his position. Party discipline and the fear of not being nominated at the next election will induce him to be party to policies even where he is not in agreement. The pressure to toe the party line is even greater for those nominated to Parliament. Bandaranaike used the nomination provision to obtain Muslim support

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61 The provision for nominating members to Parliament ceased with the promulgation of the 1972 Constitution (the First Republic).
for his policies. Mrs. Bandaranaike's nomination of Mahmud and his elevation to the position of a minister enabled the construction of a pro-SLFP front amongst the Muslims. Mahmud was probably the most radical member thus appointed, but his loyalty to the party was undeniable. It is significant that the UNP has generally played down this nomination provision in the 1948-72 constitutions.

Three major factors determined the democratic position of Muslims as minorities. These were (a) the position accorded by the constitution, (b) relationship with Sinhalese, and (c) relationship with the Tamils. The last two factors required considerable diplomacy and tact to form coalitions, which the Muslims seem to have lacked. The historical result was that the early Muslim parties such as the Islamic Socialist Front led by Badiuddin Mahamud formed in the early 1960s and the Muslim United Liberation front led by Fazil Majid formed in the late 1970s supported the SLFP and the Tamil Federal Party. Also, though the hegemony of the nationalistic majority over the East was evident, the Muslim representative from the UNP since 1977 did not express his reservations about the discriminatory policies of the government.62

**Power and Demands**

At the elections of March 1960 Razik Fareed contested under the LPP and lost. In the elections of 1965 he did not contest but was 'nominated as an MP by the UNP-Federal Party coalition government. He explained his changing of political parties as intended not for advancing his own interests or power but to serve the people by

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joining the ruling parties. Elaborating further, he stated that "The Muslims of Sri Lanka have been shown to be having an instrumentalist approach towards politics and their leaders as changing parties with more ability than any other groups." 63

It may be noted that the Muslim minister in the SLFP government of 1960-65 and 1970-77 was a nominated member. It is equally significant that three of the Muslim representatives in Parliament were from Sinhala-majority electorates, two of these being ministers. The dangers of cooption are therefore inevitable. In a merit-oriented system, when a backward community cannot hope to compete in open competition because of historical circumstances, it is easy to pretend egalitarianism when the system of equality begins to operate only at a higher level.

Except affiliating with a national-level party, did the Muslims have a choice? In the beginning the matter of choice was not a serious one, since the UNP was an influential party in national politics and the Muslims identified themselves with its policies. Later the SLFP was formed as an alternative party to the UNP. Badi-ud-din Mahmud, a founder member of the SLFP, was appointed as one of its three Vice Secretaries. In the third parliamentary elections of 1956 the SLFP came to power but in matters of interest to the Muslims there was little to choose between the UNP and the SLFP, though to serve its own purposes the UNP put more Muslim candidates than the SLFP in the different elections.

The 1977 general elections were a turning point for the minorities in Sri Lanka. In this election, of the 11 Muslims who contested on the UNP ticket 10 were returned. From

the SLFP only Haleem Ishaque was elected. The UNP offered some cabinet posts to the successful Muslim candidates, but this does not mean that the UNP was favouring the Muslim community. These leaders were not interested either in the needs or problems of the Muslims. Also, in the powerful Presidential system they lacked sufficient strength to raise their voice against the injustices meted out to the community. In the 1977 elections, the UNP swept to power under the leadership of J.R. Jayawardene. Subsequently the constitution of 1972 was replaced with a new constitution bestowing much power on the President, derogating from the powers of Parliament. Certain sections of this constitution injected reservations in the minds of Muslims.

Among the sections that the Muslims found objectionable was Section (96)(1), which says that Sri Lanka shall be divided into not less than 20 and not more than 24 electoral districts within the provincial boundaries. If electorates are divided, it shall be to make way for the election of four members from each electorate (Section 96(4)). If either registered parties or independent groups fail to receive less than 12.5 per cent of the cast votes in an electoral district, they will be removed from the election (Section 99(5)). If a seat becomes vacant by reason of a sitting member’s death or if a sitting member is unseated, the relevant political party will have the right to appoint another person of its choice to fill the vacant seat (Section 99(13)bb). This is deemed to be a step to overcome the fear that Muslims cannot be elected. Under the proportional representation system, though the Muslims of Ampara, Batticaloa and

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64 Ibid, pp. 156-7.
65 Mohan, n.62, p57
66 The 22 electoral districts are Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Mahanuwara, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Galle, Matare, Hambantota, Jaffna, Vanni, Batticaloa, Digamadulla, Trincomalee, Kurunegala, Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Moneragala, Ratnapura and Kegalle.
Trincomalee districts—where they are predominant—are able to elect Muslim members from their own political parties, the contesting Muslims of other regions have to depend on the majority community for votes, owing to the 12.5 cut-off system. (It has been changed to 5 per cent.)

Until the late 1980s, the Muslims had no ‘ethnic’ political party of their own. Neither the All Sri Lanka Muslim League nor All Ceylon Moors Association became Muslim political parties in the years after independence. By contrast their contemporary the Tamil Congress continued as a Tamil political party and was indeed the principal Tamil political organization on the island until the mid-1950s.

Muslims, in striking contrast to Tamils, have had no distinct ethnic or religious political parties of their own till the appearance of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress to contest seats to Parliament in competition with, if not in opposition to, the main national political parties. Instead, their political organizations preferred to work in association. The result was that the Muslim community, although numerically much smaller than the Tamils, had far greater bargaining powers electorally than their numbers seemed to demand.

The Muslims’ coalition with the Tamils proved to have been short-lived and a failure in the long run. The Muslim United Liberation Front was enjoying amicable relations with the Tamil Federal Party, which reached its peak during the general elections of 1977. Ashraff being one of the active leaders in the front suggested coalition with

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the party. In the political propaganda stage, he was quoted to have promised to secure Tamil Eelam in case Amirthalingam failed to do it\textsuperscript{68}. Four candidates of the Front competed from within the Federal Party, and all of them lost. Still, the Federal Party preferred to have strong ties with the Front. Ashraff entered into an active membership of the Federal Party but the relationship soured during the election for the District Development Council. Ashraff preferred to constitute a council at Ampara district led by a Muslim\textsuperscript{69}, but the Federal Party had difficulties in accepting his suggestions. Ashraff saw this as a sign of Muslims being let down by another numerically significant minority.

**Conclusion**

The Muslims of Sri Lanka until the twentieth century were not taken as a separate political entity but subsequent events made them a deciding factor in the country's politics. The Muslims from the beginning were generally well behind the Tamils and Sinhalese in the formulation of political demands and pressure for constitutional reforms.

The general attitude of Muslims towards the other communities, especially the Tamils, changed after the Sinhalese-Muslims riots of 1915. The Tamil leadership of Ramanathan was often inclined to talk on behalf of the Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka and he emphasized the notion of Muslims being a Tamil nationality. This caused the Muslim community to incline towards the Sinhalese.

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\textsuperscript{68} Mr Ashraff used to explain about the Tamil-Muslim relationship during the 1989 election meetings in eastern province. I attended one of these meetings where he made this statement. 

\textsuperscript{69} Interview with SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem in March 2005 in Kandy.
In the absence of a political party identified as representing Muslim interests, various Muslim organizations which serving as pressure groups protected the interest of the Muslim community. Although the Muslims played a vital role as a deciding factor in the electoral politics of Sri Lanka on numerous occasions, it took a long time for the community to think in terms of having its own representative political party. Until that happened, the leaders from the Tamil and Sinhalese communities benefited from the votes of the Muslims. Nevertheless, the political leaders representing Muslims, including especially M.C. Abdul Rahman, A.M. Sheriff, W.M. Abdul Rahman, Mohammed Macan Maker, T.B. Jayah and Khalid Sultan played a vital role in the first phase of Sri Lankan national politics.

The political association between Tamils and Muslims came apart over conflicting attitudes to the transfer of power, with the Muslims supporting the Sinhalese leadership and the Tamils reacting to it with understandable antagonism. Since 1956 Tamil leaders were uncomfortable with the separate identity maintained by the Muslim community as distinct from the Tamils.

The increased support offered by the Muslims to both the major Sinhalese parties also served as to amplify the role played by them. The benefits were very much visible in terms of the concessions they received from the ruling governments. Various developmental activities were carried out in Muslim-majority areas. The emergence of many Muslim leaders at the national level also helped in increasing their bargaining power.
The ability of the Muslim political leadership to mobilize their constituencies at the national level obviously depends on the strength of the links prevailing among them at the local and national level. In spite of the intra-group cleavages among the numerically small ethnic minority of Muslims, such as those of ethnic origin and religion, the links among them appear to be somewhat more pronounced and more important as a determinant of their political behavior in the national politics.

The Muslims with their political panache sought and obtained membership in all major national political parties, the UNP and the SLFP in particular, and achieved positions of influence. Most of the Muslims cast their vote for the UNP. The UNP has always had more Muslim Members of Parliament than the SLFP but Muslim members of the UNP cabinets generally held rather unimportant portfolios such as Labour, whereas Muslim cabinet Ministers of the SLFP were entrusted with more important areas of responsibilities such as Health and Education. Until 1980, no distinct ethnic or religious political parties appeared among the Muslims, till the appearance of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. The new party has not taken a long time to accommodate itself into Sri Lanka’s organized political system and to make its mark as a representative of Muslim political interests and aspirations.