PREFACE

The interests of diverse ethnic groups vary in multi-ethnic states. There may be caste, class or religious parties in these states, which may cut across ethnic barriers. An ethnic group has its specific interests based on language or region or both, that would lead to the emergence of ethnic parties. Historical factors, the strength of the community, material and conviction, the attitude of the state towards the ethnic aspirations, and the attitude of other parties towards the group’s ethnic aspirations decide the structure and development of the parties. Moreover, the commitment of the party in terms of its organization, programme and mobilization strategies, and the ability of the leadership are factors that determine the formation and growth of these parties.

A minority ethnic party may represent an ethnic group or a region or both. Therefore, an ‘ethnic party’ represents a particular ethnic group as a whole or an ethnic group of a region. As a result, an ethnic party may also be a minority party. Ethnic minority parties will not accept complete fusion with the majority community. Some are separatist, others autonomist, others again federalist and some simply regionalist: so many descending stages within the same general tendency. Though minor parties in parliament, they are very strong locally, frequently occupying the position of dominant party or even of single party. In most cases, these parties function within the institutional framework of the state.

In light of the existing theoretical works on minority parties, the role of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), a Muslim minority party, is analysed in this thesis. The formation of the SLMC marks an important stage in the long process of
communalization of the Sri Lankan polity and society. The Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists are much perturbed about the rise of the SLMC. The Tamil nationalists are perturbed too. However, the formation of the SLMC is the inevitable response to both Sinhala and Tamil ethno-nationalism.

There are a large number of books dealing with the politics of Sri Lanka. Dissanayake’s book, *The Politics of Sri Lanka* (1994), discusses the current political developments in the island nation, focusing on the electoral behaviour of minority communities in Sri Lanka. Weerawardana, in *Ceylon General Election 1956* (1960), analyses the first general elections of Sri Lanka and examines the level of political participation determined by the language and communal issues in the country. However, he does not explain the role and participation of the Muslims in national politics. Woodward’s book, *The Growth of Party System in Ceylon* (1964), attempts to explain the background and growth of several political parties in Sri Lanka and enables one to learn the initial growth of party system in Sri Lanka. The book also analyses the elections held in the fifties and the sixties. However, it does not explain the minority role in the electoral system. Wilson in *Politics in Sri Lanka 1947-73* (1974) examines several factors that determined the Sri Lankan political history and ethnic problems in a historical perspective. Some of the conclusions are very useful to understand the political problems of the country. Wilson’s *Electoral Politics in an Emergent State: The Ceylon General Election of May 1970* (1970) analyses several aspects of electoral politics in Sri Lanka. He also examines the basic factors behind the genesis of conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. Russell’s book on *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution 1931-1947* (1982) deals with the constitutional development in Sri Lanka, especially the Donoughmore
commission and its aftermath. Attempts to define constituencies along communal lines brought into the political process more people of varied sections, resulting in power competition among communities. De Silva in *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance* (1993) deals with the functioning of the political system in Sri Lanka since the country emerged as an independent nation, with a firm commitment to the ideals of democracy and promotion of social justice.

There is no comprehensive work dealing with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. However, several publications related to Muslims in Sri Lanka may be traced. Ali’s book on *Plural Identities and Political choices of the Muslim Community in Ethnic Reconciliation* (2001) traces the development of identity crisis of Muslims in Sri Lanka and analyses the present predicament of the community in the context of the ongoing ethnic conflict. Mohan’s book on *Muslims of Sri Lanka: A Social, Economic and Political Profile* (1985) traces the history of the Muslims from the ancient period. The book provides comprehensive details on the Muslims’ socio-economic and political profile, which gives some insight into the political behaviour of the Muslims since the Legislative Council days in 1833. Vamadevan’s *The story of the Sri Lanka Muslims* (1999) analyses the history of the Muslims in Sri Lanka as well as the structural formation of the Muslim community in its manifold internal varieties. The author employs historical tools to distinguish the Muslim community from the other communities in Sri Lanka. Dewaraja in *The Muslims of Sri Lanka: One thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony 900-1915* (1994) analyses the Muslim community’s historical antecedents in the Island. The author attempts to trace the gradual evolution of a mutually beneficial relationship between the migrant Muslim traders and the agricultural Sinhalese from AD 900-1500. The book also deals with the process of
structural assimilation of the Muslims into the Kandyan body politic and discusses the condition of Muslims under the British rule. Shukri’s book on *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity* (1986) is an excellent collection of articles dealing with the origin and history of the Sri Lankan Muslims. It covers different periods, starting from the birth of Islam to the British colonial period in Sri Lanka. It emphasizes the unique socio-political problem of the Muslims in relation to other ethnic groups.

Qadri, in his article “Sri Lanka Ethnic Conflict and Muslims” (1985) discusses the role of Muslims in the ethnic conflict and coherently presents the violence against the Muslims and their response to the oppressive tactics of the LTTE. Hasbullah’s seminar paper, “Muslim and Ethnic Conflict: Dynamics of Muslim politics with special reference to the Indo-Lanka Accord” (1991) analyses how the Indo-Lanka Accord failed to recognize the problems of the Muslims and offer a guarantee to promote their ethnic interests. Hennayake’s article on “The Muslims in the Ethno-nationalist Conflict in Sri Lanka” (1995) examines the changing position of Muslim politics in Sri Lanka with special reference to the possible implications for security issues and political behaviour in the context of electoral dynamics of Sri Lanka. O’Sullivan’s article “Conflict as a Catalyst: The changing politics of the Sri Lankan Muslims” (1988) analyses the Muslim political change in the context of the widening ethnic conflict in the eighties. The article traces the origin of Sinhala-Tamil antagonism and discusses its long-term implications in shaping the emergence of a Muslim political identity. De Silva in his article “Portuguese Policy towards the Muslims of Sri Lanka” (1966) reveals how the Portuguese attempted to curb or break the monopoly of the Muslim traders. Various degrees of cooperation and assistance given to the King of Kotte by the Indian Muslims are also presented. Goonewardane’s article “Some Notes
on the history of the Muslims in Ceylon (before the British occupation)” (1959) provides a concise account of the history and trading activities of the Muslims under the rule of Portuguese, Dutch and Sinhalese rulers. Samaraweera’s article “The Muslim Revivalist Movement (1880-1915)” (1979) traces the history of persecution of the Muslims by the Portuguese and the Dutch on economic and religious grounds. The article notes the insistence on education by the then leaders like Orabi Pasha and Siddilebbe, which led to the formation of the Colombo Muslim Educational Society in 1891.

The present study focuses on the SLMC: its structure, ideology, policy, programmes and its impact on national politics. It considers the issues like the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis and the role of the SLMC, how far the SLMC has been successful in protecting the interests of the Muslims in Sri Lanka, the electoral performance of the party and the place due for Muslims in the context of peace talks. The study, covering the period 1981-2001, is liberally supplemented with background material from earlier periods. The study could not, however, pay adequate attention to leaders from the grassroots level and other minor leaders. It could not also capture much information about the activities of NUA, which evolved from the SLMC and later separated.

An attempt has been made in the present study to answer the following questions: What is the ideology of the SLMC? Did it operate effectively among the masses uniting them into one fold? Is the party purely communal in character? What is its structure and hierarchy? Who are the leaders who contributed to its growth? Who are the defectors? What challenges did the party encounter and how did it react? What are its basic objectives? What are its standpoints during critical periods?
The present study has the following objectives:

- To analyse the circumstances and compulsions, both social and political, that led to the birth of the SLMC and the process that has led to its consolidation as an ethnic party.
- To examine the ideological position of the SLMC on various national issues.
- To analyse the organizational structure and mobilizational strategies of the SLMC.
- To understand the role of the SLMC in the ethnic conflict and its implications for national integration.
- To study the SLMC’s perception of nationalism in the changing political context of Sri Lanka.

While analysing the SLMC as an ethnic minority party, an attempt has been made to cover all aspects dealing with the leadership, security and its stand on the nationalist idea. The study will test the following hypotheses.

- Minority ethnic groups remain politically inactive if they lack a strong leadership and their ethnicity is politicized.
- The rise of ethnic parties is a reflection of deep-rooted insecurity of their members arising out of inequality and multiple contests for power. The greater the insecurity of ethnic group members the larger their participation in politics.
- Political mobilization of an ethnic group in a deeply divided multi-ethnic society leads not only to the consolidation of its power but also assertion of its nationalism.
The work has been divided into eight chapters. Chapter One attempts to evolve a theoretical framework on the origin and growth of an ethnic minority party in a multi-ethnic society. This reflects upon the intricacy of majority and minority relations and their competition for power and dominance. Besides the organizational aspect such as party programme, mobilization strategy and leadership the chapter analyses the role of the history of the community and ethnic identity aspirations in trying to achieve power.

Chapter Two deals with the historical antecedents of the Muslims in Sri Lanka and the internal cleavages and unifying factors within the Muslim society. It describes the cultural peculiarities of the Sri Lankan Muslims, ethnic identity and the occupation structure to show the upward economic mobility of the community.

Chapter Three analyses Muslim politics in Sri Lanka since independence. This analysis is restricted to the emergence of the SLMC in 1981. More particularly, the Muslims’ affiliation with the UNP and SLFP, their electoral behaviour and representation at the centre, and their overall role in national politics is assessed.

Chapter Four discusses the historical and socio-political context of the formation of the SLMC. This chapter assesses the party’s structure and its working programme. It also analyses the process that SLMC underwent to strengthen itself at various stages. Chapter Five elaborates upon the means and methods adopted by the SLMC to consolidate its hold upon the masses, its strategies of mobilization of support and its leadership qualities. It probes into various strategies adopted by the party to break the chain of the conventional leadership.
Chapter Six analyses the SLMC’s political performance, especially at various elections (both national and local) since 1981 by using electoral data. Further, an attempt has been made to identify the support base of the SLMC.

Chapter Seven deals with the role of the SLMC in the ethnic conflict. In particular, it examines the SLMC’s response to various stages in the peace process and peace proposals; its reaction to the Sri Lankan Tamils’ demand for the recognition of “traditional homeland,” and the violence perpetrated by the LTTE on the Muslims of the North-East. The chapter also discusses the SLMC’s demand for a separate Provincial Council for the Muslims.

Chapter Eight, while summarizing the study, examines how Sri Lankan Muslims are emerging as a strong group of people with their own ethnic identity and nationalism under the guidance of the SLMC.

A historical-analytical case study design has been used to examine the problem. Primary and secondary data have been collected. The primary data includes original documents of the party and interviews with its leaders, the resolutions of the party’s annual and special conferences, election manifestos and leaflets, committee reports, writings and correspondence of the party leaders to the government, and parliamentary debates. Secondary data includes books, research articles, journals, magazines, newspapers and World Wide Web. Relevant theoretical works on the origin and growth of political parties have also been consulted.