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Anti-Muslim Campaign in Sri Lanka and Responses of the Buddhists

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is a country where multi ethnic, multi language, multi religious people live. Buddhist is the predominant religious group in Sri Lanka, while the Muslims formed second biggest religious group, next to Tamils. The Buddhist-Muslim relationship has been prevailing and everlastingly for centuries, sbut for a couple of years, a disturbing trend has wide spread, between them. This conflictual nature has come to appear aftermath of the anti-Muslim campaign by few Buddhist Nationalist Groups (BNGs) in Sri Lanka. The basic purpose of the anti-Muslim campaign in Sri Lanka is to propagate bad image of Islam and the Muslims of Sri Lanka, to create a negative perspective among Buddhist public about Islam and Muslims and to distort the good relationship of Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka. In recent past years, few Buddhist Nationalist Groups, campaigned against Halal certification on consumer goods, Hijab of Muslim women, cattle slaughtering, worship places and prayer services in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, they have spread out the idea, that the latest Muslim developments within the country; especially in terms of religion; is a notable threat to Buddhism and to the Buddhist people. These wrong perceptions, ideas and point of views are major factors in Muslim-Buddhist bad relationship, in recent past years. This research attempts to analyze the point of views of few Buddhists, on recent campaigns, against the Muslims, undertaken by the BNGs, in recent past years, by conducting a semi structured interviews in 14 selected Buddhist majority districts of Sri Lanka. Based on the results, it is clearly affirmed that, the recent anti-Muslim campaign, by the BNGs, have created a suspicious nature Muslim stereotype among a group of Buddhists in the society, over a fact that a Buddhist-Muslim relationship in recent past years has damaged a lot. However, these campaigns have not changed the whole Buddhist's mood and point of views, in terms of maintaining a good relationship with Muslims in Sri Lanka, without any break, as the majority know and respect Muslim citizens of Sri Lanka, because of the behavior and support of Muslims towards the Sri Lankan state, during the civil war (1984-2009) and pre-war time in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Sri Lankan Muslims; Islam; Anti-Muslim Campaign; Buddhism; Buddhist Nationalist Groups*

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a diverse country, which is the home of many religions ethnicities and groups, belong to different languages. The Sinhalese are the main ethnic group in the country, constituting three quarters of the total population. Among them, the Sinhala-Buddhists are 70.19% (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012), and they speak Sinhala, an Indo-Aryan language. Tamils are the second major ethnic group, constituting 15.37% of the population. This group consists of Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils; 12.61% of them are Hindus (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). Tamils live predominantly in the north-eastern part of the Island. The Muslims in Sri Lanka constitute 9.4% of the country's population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012), and live in various parts of the country. In some regions, Muslims are more in numbers, compared to the Buddhists, and belong to three different ethno-social backgrounds: Sri Lankan Moors, Indian Moors and Malays. Others include, the Memons and the Bohras (Imtiyaz, 2012). The Muslims are a multilingual ethnic and religious group, and speak Tamil, a Dravidian language.

There exists a historical record of ethnic harmony in Sri Lanka. The relationship between Buddhists and Muslims have been tightly linked both socially and culturally since the early time of the arrival of Muslims to the country. Arab-Muslim traders and local Muslims have immensely contributed to protect and expand their reigns during the regime of Buddhist leaders (Dewaraja, 1994). During the 19th and 20th centuries, Muslim leaders and scholars toiled hard for 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 strong, and they shared great mutual respect and understanding (Lebbe, 2010). 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 made the Muslim community, among the privileged, in the country. In fact, it is worthy to note that, compared to other minorities; who are living with majorities in other parts of the world; the Muslims; in Sri Lanka; have

enjoyed a variety of fundamental rights, as well as socio-cultural and economic privileges.

However, recently, in the context of Sri Lanka, especially during the aftermath of the civil war (1983-2009), a series of tense situations have been observed in terms of the relationship between the Buddhist community and the Muslim community. The Buddhist Nationalist Groups; Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) and Sinhala Rawayana and Rawana Balaya; posed questions about ethnic and religious features of the Muslim community. Rights of the Muslims' pertaining to religious obligations have been immensely questioned through provocations by respective groups. These groups advocated the establishment of a pure Buddhist raj in Sri Lanka. During their rallies, the most prominent hard-liner groups used coercion, derogatory language to undermine Islam and Muslims of Sri Lanka and asked questions about Islam and Muslims, and spread misunderstandings and wrong perception about them. Among the majority Buddhist community in Sri Lanka, there have been several incidents recorded, where the attacks took place on the religious places of the Muslims, which have consequently imposed challenges in practicing religious-cultural identity, customs and fundamental rights. In the recent past years, the Muslims have faced a number of challenges in terms of anti-Halal (permitted to eat according to Islam) and anti-Hijab (covering head and face for women) agitations, as well as destroying and damaging places of worship, refusing to call for prayers; using loudspeakers, disturbing prayer services, anti-slaughtering movements, anti-Sharia agitations and so on. Furthermore, these groups have propagated and advised Buddhists to reduce or avoid socio-cultural and economic interactions, as well as relations with the Muslim community of Sri Lanka.

The recent past incidents have created a situation that is suspicious and tense, as well as a feeling of marginalization among the Muslims, especially those who live in Buddhist-populated areas throughout the country. Moreover, these incidents have contributed to the clashes in opinions and misunderstandings, thus further damaging the once healthy relationships between the Buddhists and the 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, they are currently expressing the fear of religious marginalization, which has increased uncertainty of their co-existence and long-term cordial relationship with other major ethno-religious groups, especially Buddhists. This study attempts to explore the point of views of few Buddhists of Sri Lanka, on recent anti Muslim campaigns in Sri Lanka. A total of 03 major issues

were raised, in semi structured interviews, in order to achieve the objectives of this research.

Literature Review

Some of the previous studies; on the topic of this research; have argued that the protest of the BNGs' against the Muslims are acceptable and some argue that it is condemnable. The activities of the BNGs' were censured by most of the Sinhala-Buddhist politicians, such as the former president Chandrika Bandaranayka Kumarathunge, the current president his Excellency Maithripala Sirisena, the prominent minister Dr. Rajitha Senaratne, Vasudewa Nanayakkara, Dilan Perera, Palitha Thewarapperuma. Likewise, some prominent religious leaders of the Buddhism such as Wataraka Vijitha Thero, Dambara amila Thero, also criticized and expressed their negative opinions; as well; on the propaganda of the BNGs against the Muslims. Since beginning of the tension onwards, the local Media representatives and the international Media have been releasing the news about the effects of the Muslims due to anti Muslim campaigns in Sri Lanka. Also, the most of the Media have released the news that the BNGs in Sri Lanka recalled the trends of the terrorist events in the past.

At the same time, there are some researchers, who argued, that the matters of disagreement, forwarded by the BNGs, are justifiable. Accordingly, Samaranyaka (2013) criticises that the researchers undertook their studies in a sense that merely creating the allegations on the behaviour of the BNGs' and showing the mercy towards the Muslims, and he says that these ideas of the researches are unjustifiable and negative practices. On the other hand, he explains, the uncontrollable increase of the Muslim population, putting up mosques in areas where Buddhists live in majority, portraying the dresses of the pure Muslim women as ugly, and the negative results of it, ignored by the researchers, are aspects causing pains. While, the previous researchers indicate the BNGs' intolerable trends, they also pointed out the development of Muslims' and the exclusive form of Islamic religion, within Sri Lanka, in recent times.

Further, the previous studies discussed the groups who are interested and involved in exposing the conspiracy against the Muslims in recent times. Specially, Riza Yehiya (2013) and Rifai Naleemi (2013) both have declared that these attacks were pushed, not only by the side of the Buddhists, and have said that there has been a 3rd party involvement, for their own benefits. At the same time, it is suspected that this 3rd party was instigated by the international forces and thus they are supported by the

foreign forces. In the same way, Farooq (2014) and Fowsar (2014) have concluded their studies that the attacks by the BNGs were backed by Israel. Also Dewasiri (2012) is of the opinion that these attacks were not really started with the help of the whole Buddhist community, rather it was done without the admission or support of the Buddhist community at large. Through a questionnaire survey, the same results have been observed, as about 28% respondents have stated that those who attacked Muslims do not belong to the Buddhist society, to be concerned, and at the same time, 50% respondents remained silent. (Razick et.al., 2016)

Generally, it can be assumed that a close relationship has been made between the Buddhists and the Muslims of Sri Lanka, and these relationships have made the both societies as a single unit, but the interruptions cropped up have now separated these societies. The information has already been obtained, through the questionnaire survey (Ibid), thus these are suddenly a rising nature among the respective societies. In the Buddhist society, some groups have accepted the propaganda campaigns against Islam and Muslims of Sri Lanka, but they are few in numbers. (Ibid)

Material And Methods

The topic of this research, attempts to analyse the point of views of few Buddhists of Sri Lanka, on recent campaigns undertaken by the BNGs against Muslims of Sri Lanka. It is an in-depth analysis through a semi structured interviews of approximately 28 Buddhist participants from the selected 14 districts of Sri Lanka. The interviewees were randomly selected as the samples of this research, as done the questionnaires for another research. The researcher directly visited to interviewees' residences with the nominees who already nominated to every selected district by the researcher and met the participants after they were identified and introduced by the respective nominees. It took around 40 minutes time for each interviewee and this was done in the months of November and December 2014. During the interview, a pocket video camera was used with the permission of participants for the purpose of simplifying to transcribe those interviews and to analyse it. So, in this interview the participants were asked to express their opinions and views on a number of Muslim socio-cultural aspects and to what extent the recent campaigns have influenced on community relationship with the Muslims in Sri Lanka.

Results And Discussion

This research is the description on the views of the selected participants on the recent BNGs campaigns against Islam and the Muslims of Sri Lanka; after the transcription of the interviews collected from them and coded manually. The Buddhist participants were asked about 3 major aspects (items) related to recent campaigns: general idea of the campaigns, primary actors of the campaigns, and the belief of misinterpretations about Islam and Muslims.

ISLAM AND BUDDHISM

Before going into the discussion about the Buddhist Nationalist Group campaigns against Islam and Muslims of Sri Lanka, it is pertinent to briefly describe the religion of Islam and Buddhism. Islam is the name of that religion which was revealed on the last Prophet Muhammad for the betterment of human beings in both worlds. Buddhism is the name of the religion which includes the teachings, beliefs and spiritual practices largely based on the teachings of Buddha.

Islam

Islam means a rule of human conduct, established by the communication of Allah the Almighty to the Prophet Muhammad, either of demand or a mere declaration, for the betterment of human beings in this world and in the hereafter. Rules are classified into two types: primary and declaratory. A primary rule is defined by Islamic jurists as a law that requires commission or omission of an act, or which allows for discretion as to the commission or omission of a particular act. Primary rules are divided into five types: imperative act, forbidden act, acceptable act, permissible act, and the discouraged act. A declaratory rule is defined by Islamic jurists as a law that declares anything to be the reason for, or the condition of or hindrance to, any particular act.

Declaratory rules are divided into three types: Valid, Voidable and Void acts, Cause, Condition and Obstacle and a rule and its exception (Nyazee, 2011).

Islamic law is comprised of four elements: the lawgiver, legal rule, the object of the law and the subject of the law. The lawgiver is Allah the Almighty. He is an entity whose existence must be believed in, complete in all good attributes and pure from all defects. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is the last messenger of Allah the Almighty and there is no messenger after

him. The basic sources of Islamic law are the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. Allah the Almighty says in the Holy Quran that:

“O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) and those of you (Muslims), who are in authority, and if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and his Messenger (Prophet Muhammad), if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day, that is better and more suitable for the final determination.” (Al-Quran, Al-Nisa 04:59)

Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion which is based upon the teachings of Buddha. It was introduced in India and later, spread to other parts of Asia. There are two main sects of Buddhism: Theravada and Mahayana. Most Buddhist people belong to Theravada group of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The scriptures of Buddhism are divided into: Pali and Sanskrit. The Pali text includes Tri-Pitaka, which is consisted of Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka and Abhi Dhamma. Sanskrit text includes Maha Vastu and Lalitavistara. The basic teaching of the Buddhism is called Nirvana, which is comprised of four elements; there is a distress in life, a distress is caused by a desire, a distress can be removed by following eight basic norms; a right thought, a right mindfulness, a right view, a right speech, right actions, right efforts, right livelihood and a right mediation.

ANTI-MUSLIM CAMPAIGN

Some Buddhist Nationalist Groups, have started campaigning against Islam and Muslims of Sri Lanka. The BNGs try to portray a bad image of the religion of Islam and the Muslims of Sri Lanka, to spread hatred in the Buddhist majority of Sri Lanka; against Islam and Muslims. BNGs attack the Islam religious teachings such as the veil of a woman, slaughtering cattle, Halal food certification, Muslims Prayers and the places of Muslims for prayers. This research has raised three main issues before the a few Buddhist people; does the anti-Muslim campaign is under their religious obligation and if no then is it condemnable? does this campaign run and supported by the majority of the Buddhist community or not? does the campaign of the Buddhist Nationalist Groups and their allegations and misrepresentations about Islam and Muslims of Sri Lanka is correct or not?

Religious Belief/Duty

The participants were requested to express their point of views on recent campaigns of BNGs against the Muslims in Sri Lanka and to verify whether that effort is acceptable or condemnable.

In fact, it could be explored the various types of views among the Buddhists regarding the above statement. A portion of Buddhists consider that this effort of the BNGs is unmistakable and supportable, because they think, that it is necessary to look at these campaigns as recognise them, in terms of obeying their religious leaders while monitoring the threats raised up to Buddhism and the Buddhists from the Muslim side, such as terrible growth of Muslim population, rapid spreading of Islamic religion within Sri Lanka, decline of Buddhism, conversion of Buddhists into Islam and situational needs of Buddhism renaissance.

A few Buddhists think, that the aforementioned aspects would be threat to Buddhism and the Buddhist society in terms of surviving as a majority community in Sri Lanka forever. Also, they emphasise that this effort by the BNGs is not undertaken with the purpose of insulting Islam or Muslims, but for protecting and preserving the Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

A participant from Colombo District expresses his views that:

“Generally, our Thero (monk) either whoever, they dedicate themselves for only the purpose of serving Buddhists-us. Because of a widespread of the Religion-Islam, our Buddhist people too have embraced that religion, this is what happening here. There is no record for embracing of Muslims the Buddhism, but a lot of Buddhists have embraced Islamic religion, while their original religion was Buddhism, so we cannot allow that situation. That’s why the Thero have undertaken this type of protests. Indeed, the Thero have made the awareness to the Buddhists. Actually, Thero stated, that if the Buddhists would be with careless, then, the Buddhist’s offspring would not have places to run away. So, I can recognize their arguments presented in recent time, because, these advices are for our betterment at large.”

A group of Buddhists have recognized and accepted the campaigns against Muslims undertaken by the BNGs, because, these Buddhists think that the BNGs articulate the voice of Buddhists and undertake their religious duty. They also consider, that these groups have launched the fight for preventing the aspects which disliked by the Buddhists and their religion within the Buddhist land, such as slaughtering of cattle, Niqab etc.

1. Extremism

At the same time, one point of view is to be observed which has been prevailing among the Buddhists, that point out the extremism towards both sides either Muslims or Buddhists as a reason for arousing tension among respective societies, with condemning their extremism. But the participants, who expressed their points of view, have emphasised throughout the interview that they couldn't be complicity for breaking up the friendliness and peaceful co-existence between Buddhists and Muslims. So, the point of view of the number of Buddhists' that the reason behind this tension is the emergence of extremism in Muslims and Buddhists communities, in recent Sri Lanka.

A participant from Ratnapura District expresses his views that:

“There are few Buddhists and Muslims, as they are functioning extremists who do not like their opponent religious people. So, these groups were motivated to create problems among the societies, actually, only a few people create these kinds of problems for the public at large, from both sides; Buddhists or Muslims. These are worse activities by the respective groups, also we cannot accept this undue clashes. We do not like the clashes which underway between Buddhists and Muslims. We cannot say that this is a big issue between Muslims and Buddhists.”

Another one from Anuradapura says that: “In my point of view, problem makers among the societies are Buddhist and Muslim extremists”.

The extremism of the Buddhist community is proved here with the activities of BNGs, conducted in recent time in Sri Lanka. In contrast, the Muslim extremism is not proved, hence; no Muslim group has acted against the Buddhists community in current Sri Lanka. However, the Muslims here have been alleged by the group of Buddhists as extremists though the Muslims had not undertaken any anti-Buddhist activities in Sri Lanka. So, it is necessary to find the reason behind the above statement of Buddhist participants. The point of view of the researcher is that, at the time of the interview, the Buddhists have expressed the Muslim extremism within the country, because, in recent time, the Minister of Power and Renewable Energy Mr. Patali Champika Ranawaka and General Secretary of Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) Gnanasara Thero declared; through the Media; that:

Since recent time onwards, the Muslim extremism and terrorism have been emerging and developing within Sri Lanka, and the outbreak of Aluthgama and Beruwela unrest (Attacks against Aluthgama and Beruwela

Muslims in 2014) is a result of pressure of Muslim terrorism in Sri Lanka. Also they pointed out that the Sri Lanka Thawheed Jamaaath (SLTJ) is an extremist and terrorist organization, functioning in Sri Lanka for the purpose of undertaking terrorist activities within the country, while there are no evidences to prove or to confirm above terrorism activities of SLTJ in governmental investigation records.

Also, very recently, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo has proved that there are no jihadist organizations functioning in Sri Lanka (<http://www.sltj.lk/ina-aayvu-niruvanam/>). In the meantime, during the course of campaigns since 2011 to 2014 SLTJ often conducted the series of sessions and seminars to expose the reality of BBS's misinterpretations about Islam and Muslims towards non-Muslim communities. Aftermath of war against the LTTE, the government of Sri Lanka is being well watchful of terrorism activities from any of the parties, under the observation of Crime Investigation Department (CID). Therefore, it can be understandable here that in Sri Lanka, a number of Buddhists believe that the abovementioned unproved information is actually the points of view of the political and religious leaders in connection with the emergence of Muslim terrorism within the country. So, there is a possibility to think that the above number of Buddhists have expressed the stipulated opinion that there is extremism and terrorism from Muslims, because of a motivation by the recent declarations of the abovementioned superiors. However, it cannot be denied here that, according to some academic investigations, among the Muslims, an exclusive form of religious nature has been developed and this would be an attribution for emerging religious clashes among the societies in recent Sri Lanka (Imtiyas & Slaeem, 2015). On the other hand, it could be noticeable another point of view from some other participants through the interview that a number of Buddhists did not care about the protests by the BNGs, and apparently they did condemn those protests carried out against the Muslims.

A participant from Kurunegala says that:

"I don't care about the campaigns by the BNGs and I have never listened to the speeches of these groups and did not watch the rallies held in recent times. Actually, these are unnecessary behaviours by them, here we have a lot of other problems to be solved in the society. I, as a Buddhist, strongly condemn the widespread separatism activity of the BNGs."

Here it could be understandable that a sizable Buddhists vehemently condemn the activities of the BNGs, especially, the way they have used to carry out the protests which affect other communities and make the Buddhism under censure and disgracefulness. Furthermore, according to this participant's point of view, there are a number of issues within the Buddhist society to be resolved by the Buddhist religious leaders, thus, the BNGs should concern first on those issues to fix them before carrying the protests against other societies.

As a summary, the point of view of the Buddhists is that the efforts of the BNGs through the campaigns are acceptable in order to protect Buddhism from outside challenges and to improve internal religious consciousness among the Buddhists, when and if it is carried out with proper methods unless disturbing or attacking other faiths. Also, the Buddhists did not allow or recognize; to be accomplished; this renaissance, of Buddhism with carrying attacks against other communities, especially such attacks against the Muslims in recent time. Furthermore, they have well thought-out that an internal revivalism is needed to mitigate outside challenges which aroused against Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Remarkably, through this interview, one important result was found that a particular number of Buddhists, even they have been severe supporters of the BNGs, they had not been expressed the favour to lose interpersonal relationships with the Muslims which has been preserved since unknown time onwards in Sri Lanka.

2. Primary actors of Anti-Muslim Campaign

The participants were also requested to respond and to express their point of views on; who are the primary actors of these campaigns and to verify that whether there has been recognition of Buddhist society as a whole towards the campaigns. At the time of the interview, it was identified that there are two types of Buddhists among the society; as per the expression of opinions to the above investigation. The first group extremely supported the allegation against the primary actors of these worse campaigns and the BNGs and expressed their point of view against the primary actors of anti-Muslim campaigns by the BNGs and the next group extremely opposed the allegations against the BNGs aiming to protect them and accept them as guardians of Buddhism.

The first group considers that the primary actors behind these campaigns are the BNGs and those are few groups that they could be identifiable as a third party who do not have factual societal membership and they are some Buddhists, and it is not the actual practices of the

Buddhism and the general practices of the Buddhists of Sri Lanka. Also, these groups get efforts to seek individual benefits and deliberately try to break the majority-minority relations within Sri Lanka. Furthermore, according to Buddhists, these campaigns have not been carried out by the Buddhists as a whole and not by/with actual members of the Buddhists and these campaigns have been seen as worse activities of the BNGs.

A participant from Anuradapura District says that:

“Although they look like having consciousness with the Buddhism, they are the people who seek individual benefits and strategically planning to collapse the co-existence between Buddhists and Muslims.”

Another one from Kandy expresses that: “I think that among the society, there are some mentally ill people living. Also, we cannot expect from a society that its whole members are being good people”.

Further, most of the Buddhists consider that the BNGs have not received the admission from the society as a whole, to undertake these campaigns against the Muslims and at the interview most of the participants very often pointed out that:

“True Buddhists do not carry these types of worse activities and Buddhism does not allow the persecution of other faiths, and these campaigns are a view or opinion of a segment of Buddhists, not from all Buddhists, this is not a whole Sinhalese (Buddhists) opinion or view.”

Another participant from Monaragala says that:

“All Bodu Bala Sena, Sinhala Rawaya, Rawana Balaya are not true Buddhists or Sinhalese, they are trying to create problems among Buddhists and Muslims. Also these groups are backed by International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) to make efforts against Muslims within Sri Lanka. According to the teachings of the Buddhism, there should have, among the adherents of it, the habits of respecting all other religions and faiths and have a sense that keep interconnections with non-Buddhists, if they are being true Buddhists.”

According to a sizable Buddhists, the BNGs have not carried a real membership from the society and have got un-Buddhism behaviour with a rejection of Buddha’s original teachings. And also the Buddhists consider that these groups have been supported by/through INGOs to act against the

Muslims and the campaigns carried out by them surely with the purpose of breaking the community links within Sri Lanka.

Besides this, according to the second group's point of view, that arising challenges against the Buddhism is the true reason for this recent tension and the BNGs could not to be signed as the primary actors to this unrest among the societies in Sri Lanka. On the contrary, they consider that the BNGs are the guardians of Buddhism and the real members within Buddhist society unless calling as a third party.

The BNGs dedicate them-selves to motivate the Buddhists to protect their Religion-Buddhism in contemporary challenging context of Sri Lanka. Further, these participants think that the campaigns have been undertaken with the support of Buddhists as a whole against Muslim renaissance.

A participant from Kandy District says that:

"They are the voice of Buddhists towards achieving the aspirations of Buddhists and they are the people showing us the outside challenges and threats against the Buddhism within the country. They cannot be considered as third party or nominal members of Buddhist society, but they try to wash the brains of Buddhists towards Buddhist patriotism and show the directions in order for preserving their religion for long lasting in this country."

At the same time, throughout the interview, the participants have not failed to emphasize the interaction and co-existence among the societies with an attempt to understand other cultures. So, the Buddhists hope that each and every religion should be respected by the whole parties and should be needed to abandon the social dissimilarities and differences in terms of religion, race and ethnicity.

One participant from Monaragala says that:

"According to the Buddhism, it is necessary living interactively with non-Buddhists and with respect to other faiths among all the parties. Everyone should have to try to understand everything as much as possible and if they live accordingly, then, it doesn't happen any incidents, even whoever spreads out anything. I could not express any answer to this question, but I would like to emphasize here the co-existence among the societies, and also having the Buddhists hospitality with others is the needed situation in Sri Lanka."

Here it is emphasized by the Buddhists that the religious understandings among the whole citizens of Sri Lanka to live with peaceful co-existence.

3. Misunderstanding about Islam and Muslims

The respondents were asked, whether they believe and aware about the misinterpretations against the Muslims and their religion, which spread out by the BNGs by/through the Media and rallies. According to the interview, there were several point of views, among the Buddhists. A group of Buddhists have strongly believed and agreed the spreading misinterpretations about the Muslim stereotype, portrayed by the BNGs, while some other strongly opposed the above and stated that the point of views of the BNGs are right against Muslims of Sri Lanka. Another group of Buddhists, took a plea, that the matter of misinterpretations about the religion of Islam and allegations against the Muslims of Sri Lanka should be investigated rationally.

A portion of Buddhists in Sri Lanka believe and accept the allegations of BNGs about Islam and the Muslims of Sri Lanka. To certain extent, these Buddhists have heard the unethical behaviours of few Muslims on the Media. Also their view is, as Sri Lanka is a democratic country, any of the parties have got ample freedom to express their thoughts and to share their opinions and could be dedicated them-selves for their religious welfares, according to the constitution of Sri Lanka.

A participant from Colombo says that:

“I have heard from the newspapers that a Muslim medical Doctor had tried to sexually harass a Buddhist woman, and also few Muslims planned to decrease Buddhist population in number in Sri Lanka. Also this is a democratic country, if it is true then we have an enormous right to express our opinions and thoughts. Our religious leaders do this and they are expressing the facts which held in recent Sri Lanka.”

Another participant from Kurunegala says that: “I could hear from Media news that our Buddhist children had been addicted off an anaesthetic drugs mixed with cake by Muslims.”

An important thing to be pointed out here is that the above noted facts, if truly held, a number of Buddhists here failed to look at those events as a result of individual behaviour, on the contrary, they have seen these happenings as racism perspective that the Muslims had tried to insult and dominate over Buddhists in Sri Lanka. It is to be noted here as well

that, the same information regarding the abovementioned happenings had been presented by the BNGs among the Buddhists during the course of campaigns (Jones, 2016).

Besides that, a large majority of Buddhists, do not believe the allegations of the BNGs including the disseminating of misinterpretations about Muslims in recent past years, even though it had been proved by the researcher with a video clip in which a Thero (Buddhist religious leader) talks that, “at the Muslim owned tea shops, teas are supplied to Buddhists with spitting thrice on it.”

A respondent from Ratnapura District says that:

“A group of people who dedicated them-selves towards a particular religion, can never spread out these types of interpretations, nevertheless, this is a fiction made by some outsiders with the purpose of alleging the Muslims of Sri Lanka.”

It can easily be understood that, the Buddhists are reluctant to posit the facts which held recently, this might be because, the Buddhists have no interest in betrayal of the BNGs before the public with rejecting the allegations against them. In contrast, the Buddhists think that these allegations were fabricated by some anonymous people who had got jealous on their efforts in collecting Buddhists towards their renaissance of Buddhism. This situation could be seen as a result of the extreme trust on the BNGs.

However, there have been another portion of Buddhists who think reasonably and wisely towards the campaigns of BNGs, including misinterpretations spread out by the BNGs. A few of them think moderately towards these efforts and express that it could be decided rationally whether these are true or false.

A participant from Matara says that:

“According to Buddhism, it cannot be believed invaluable talks of somebody or their incorrect ideas unless conducting a strict verification on it. We know, Sri Lanka is democratic country and everybody have got freedom for the expression of ideas. Although they have expressed so, we are so rational and we know which of the talks are believable and which are not. We need to decide with an overview on those interpretations.”

Another one from Colombo says that:

“I do not believe wrong ideas, but I agree with some true information from the BNGs, for example, slaughtering of cattle.

Here my decision is as per my attitude. In fact, I have a better opinion about the Muslims in Sri Lanka. So, this opinion could not be replaced in my mind with bad efforts of some groups and attitudes. But we should be watchful of day by day happenings that the attempts to be made to create quarrels among the societies in current Sri Lanka.”

Another participant from Anuradapura says that: “Human beings have enough capability to understand right and wrong. If anything, we try to verify first; whether is it true or false, after that we decide either to accept it or reject it.”

Therefore, it is very clear that the majority Buddhists of Sri Lanka do not favour to make clashes among the societies and most of them wish to be prevailed peaceful and co-exist among the societies in Sri Lanka. That’s why, some other Buddhists have severely condemned these types of behaviours of the BNGs with rejecting their propaganda against Muslims.

A participant from Badulla says that: “I have not believed the misinterpretations about Muslims and not followed the talks of these groups and we have never tried to decrease or eliminate the interaction with Muslims.”

Also I have never watched these BNGs’ speeches or rallies. Actually, these are unnecessary behaviours. Also, it/this cannot be considered a Buddhist-Muslim clash and it could not be so. If so, we should have been followed it, so these campaigns are a view or opinions of a segment of Buddhists, not from all Buddhists. I say once again this is not a whole Sinhalese (Buddhists) opinion or point of views.”

One participant from Matara says that: “I have never heard about the Muslims that they behaved badly and I do not care about these kinds of misinterpretations forwarded by the BNGs.

Another one from Kegalle says that: “We have never followed the propaganda of the Buddhist Nationalist Groups, they have presented a few things either wrongly or correctly, we never believed it.”

So, it could be adhered that a number of Buddhists among the society do not believe and do not aware about the talks and misinterpretations which are undertaken by the BNGs and they do not welcome for raising a conflictual nature among the societies in Sri Lanka.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research analyses the point of views on recent disturbances against the Muslims in Sri Lanka. 28 Buddhist participants were selected from 14 Districts of Sri Lanka, where the Buddhists live in majority and Muslims in minority. From each district, 2 participants (Buddhists) were selected to conduct a semi structured interview. The research identifies that there are two types of Buddhist groups. One group expresses its support to the BNGs' and their activities against Muslims and the other group does not express its support to the BNGs and their activities against the Muslims of Sri Lanka in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the BNGs have somewhat succeeded in their efforts to convince the majority Buddhist population of Sri Lanka, that their campaigns have been organized by the name of Buddhism and Buddhist Nationalism, as a sharp weapon, to collect the Buddhists together, against the Muslims in Sri Lanka. The seeding of a wrong perception about Islam and the Muslims of Sri Lanka have rooted in the minds of the Buddhists is also observable. This trend is spread to cause disruption in the majority-minority relations in current Sri Lanka. Besides this, the problem effects the economy of Sri Lanka and if it continues will harm the economic growth of Sri Lanka. Also, the freedom and fundamental rights of a man is under interrogation and also peaceful and harmonious situation is moving away from the present position. So it is necessary to prevent this unpleasant situation for national betterment. This all rest upon the shoulders of the present Government of Sri Lanka, the relevant authorities, and the social organizations.

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