

## **CHANGING DYNAMICS OF MUSLIM POLITICS IN SRI LANKA**

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This paper attempts to provide a detailed account of the changing social bases of Muslim politics from the early period to the recent past. It begins with the Muslim community's genealogy, and considers its distribution, economy, education, socio-political and cultural features. In order to illustrate the nature of Muslim society in Sri Lanka, it is necessary to detail out the way Muslims became an integral part of the Sri Lankan society over a long historical period. In this respect, I propose to explain briefly the issues of the origin of Muslims, the experiences of the community during the colonial period and the factors behind the recent awakening of Muslims.

Muslim representation in the Legislative Councils, State Councils and Parliament under the First and Second State Republic Constitutions until 1977 is discussed in the paper. The paper attempts to explore the evolution of the political attitudes of Sri Lankan Muslims through various political activities and their involvement in them. The paper draws attention to the development of Sinhala-Muslim relations through the Language Policy introduced in 1956, Muslim affiliation in major political parties, and how Muslim leadership performed as a pressure group and became a deciding factor in establishing power in governments.

The paper discusses the factors and the forces behind the formation and strengthening of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) as a political party. The Muslim Congress had to grow amidst strong opposition from the entrenched interests of the major national parties, which felt threatened by the rise of another minority leadership. The paper describes the political sociology of the SLMC leadership and its mobilization. The conditions that enabled the SLMC to emerge as a major ethnic political party in a leadership of civil war in Sri Lanka are also discussed. The paper also examines the Tamil-Muslim cooperation in the scenario after the Indo-Lanka accord, the SLMC response against violence, and analyses the impact of the ethnic conflict on the SLMC. While studying the dynamics of the SLMC's coalition politics, the paper concludes with a note on how the formation of the SLMC has paved the way for the expression of the grievances of the Muslims of Sri Lanka through party politics. The paper will finally describe ethnic mobilization and majority-minority as well as minority-minority relationship in Sri Lanka.