

The Socio- Economic Statuses of Tamil Speaking Muslims in Sri Lanka: A Comparative Study with Developing World

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to investigate whether the Muslims live as minority communities in many developing countries have higher level of capacity of peace building and economic development. This study intends to compare the Sri Lankan case with many developing countries where Muslims live as minority communities, using the data of Muslim dominant Ampara district. For this purpose this study uses both quantitative and qualitative techniques to concrete the results. Empirical study of 70 selected developing countries during 2000-2004 shows that Muslim population as a percentage of total population is negatively correlated with peace building capacity, democratic freedom, economic freedom, foreign direct investment, secondary education, tertiary education, per capita income, information and communication technology, infrastructure and inflation. It is only positively correlated with literacy rate and economic growth. Conflict, violence and war (less peace building capacity) is not a case of minority status of Muslim people live in developing countries. Arguably, when developing countries have low percentage of Muslim population they enjoy stable peace and economic development as compared to countries have higher percentage of Muslim population. These socio-economic issues of the international phenomenon are comparable to the Sri Lankan context. Even though the Tamil speaking Muslim people (TSMP) live throughout Sri Lanka as a minority, their presence in the North and East provinces is significant and they are majority community in Ampara district of the Eastern province. In deed, Muslim people have been living more peacefully as compared to other minorities in Sri Lanka. Contribution of Tamil speaking Muslim people to violence and war has been

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less in Sri Lanka. As a minority within Tamil speaking people in Sri Lanka, TSMP have avoided violence to get their political rights and united with ruling governments. As a result, as far as economic development is concerned TSMP have achieved significant benefits since 1948 until today. This non-anti government politics for peace building in their regions led them to enhance their socio-political and economic status. This cross sectional study based on secondary data statistically demonstrates that percentage of Muslim population among 19 Divisional Secretariats Divisions(DSDs) in Ampara district of Sri Lanka is positively correlated with status of secondary education, university education, permanent houses, cement floored houses, electricity for lighting, using gas for cooking, protected drinking water from private wells, land ownership, average land for agricultural activities, small scale agricultural activities, industrial establishments and persons employed in industrial sector. All these socio-economic status are better in Muslim dominated divisional secretariats divisions in Ampara. Nonetheless, some goods and services are mostly delivered by the government such as primary education, literacy, pipe line water supply, public wells and public jobs, are negatively correlated with percentage of Tamil speaking Muslim population in this district.

Key words: Sri Lanka, Tamil speaking Muslim people, socio-economic status, Peace, developing countries.

1. Introduction

Social scientists in the last half of twenty century have been focusing socio-economic factors which influence on economic status of

society. Race, religion, cast, ethnic division, gender, culture and ethics of society have been determining economic development of society. Generally speaking, the countries have more Christians population are developed countries in the world. In contrast, most of the countries which have Muslims as majority communities are developing countries. It is argued that East Asian rapid economic development occurred due to the dominance of Chinese people. In Singapore, majority of Chinese people have been enjoying higher living standards as compared to Malaysian Muslims where Muslims are majority. Does Muslim population make case for economic development in developing countries? Economic performances of developing countries can be explained by ethnic composition, ethnic division, religion, gender equality etc. Marshall and Gurr (2001, 2003 and 2005) show that peace building capacity in Middle East and Africa has been very low and these countries have low level of economic development. If we look at the ethnic composition of these countries, most of the countries are Muslims dominated nations. Muslims dominated countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan have been suffering due to severe social unrests and sporadic terrorist attacks and experiencing low level of economic development.

Furthermore, economic performance of Muslims dominated countries is stagnant in comparing to other developing countries. Are there any relationship between Muslim population and socio-economic status of developing countries? Are there any relationship between Muslim population and socio-economic status of Muslims dominated divisional secretariats/divisions in Ampara district of Sri Lanka? This study tends to show that the countries which have Muslim population as minority in the developing world have been performing a better economic status than countries which have Muslim population as a majority. Our study on Ampara districts also reveals that though Muslims are minority community in Sri Lanka they enjoy greater socio-economic prosperity. Despite of ethnic

discrimination of public services such as education, health, water supply *etc.* on the regions which have minority people, socio-economic status of Muslims dominated divisional secretariats divisions in Ampara district of Sri Lanka have been enjoying better economic status than other DS divisions.

Minority status of Muslim people in developing countries has positive relationship with their peace building capacity and socio-economic status. In contrast, majority status of Muslim people diminishes their peace building capacity and socio-economic status. Even ethnic divisions have negative effect on national output in many cross country analysis. However, when countries have ethnic division with Muslim people are minority, Muslim people enjoy better economic status than majority. The inadequate support of the Government leads them to stand on their own legs and enhancing socio-economic status. As Lee Kuan Yew pointed out normally the support the Government have blunted people to achieve personal achievements but inadequate support of the Government to Muslim minority has pushed them to achieve personnel achievements¹. The history of the World also show that the minority which discriminated by their government fled to rest of world have been living with good economic status².

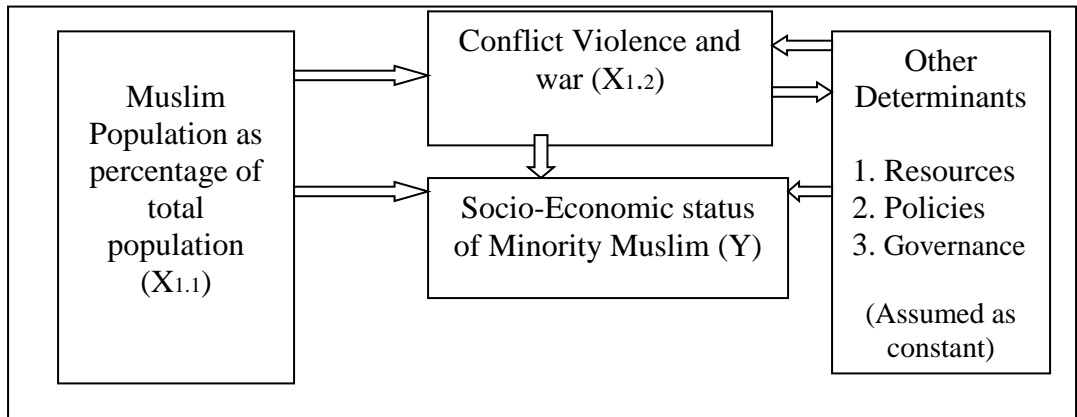
Easterly (2001) points out that ethnic diversity, measured by people under the same government speaking different languages, is negatively correlated with economic growth. The ethnic divisions result in redistributive conflicts that distract resources and attention away from growth. Recent empirical work by Easterly and Levine (1997) has also shown that ethnic diversity in a nation is associated with poorer economic performance. Easterly and Levine estimated a cross-country unbalanced, Seemingly Unrelated Regression (SUR) system, for the period from 1960 to 1990. They regressed annual real GDP per capita growth on a constant, regional dummy, initial income and its square, an education measure, a set of policy controls, and an ethnic diversity. They found

that even after introducing policy controls, greater ethnic diversity was significantly associated with slower economic growth. Specifically, their regressions indicate a 0.46–0.8 percentage point reduction in annual growth for the average level of ethnic diversity. Easterly and Levine argue that ethnic diversity leads to poor policy choices for the country as a whole, which in turn impacts economic growth. If such a causal link exists, the question then arises as to whether particular institutional structures exist which would ameliorate such negative effects of ethnic diversity. Zak and Knack (1999) show that low level of trust environments reduce the investment and the rate of economic growth. Trust is higher in economically, socially, and ethnically more homogeneous societies and in countries where social and legal mechanism for reducing opportunistic behavior are better developed. Bluedorn (2001) pooled decadal data analysis in 60 countries during 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s by using democracy measures. He shows that ethnic diversity has negative influences on growth.

Conceptual Framework

The explanation of Easterly shows that ethnic divisions reduce real output in national level but within a country, a marginalized ethnic minority can enjoy better living standard than majority. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of variables considered in this study.

Figure1: Conceptual Frameworks.



Our objective variable- Muslim Population as percentage of total population- influences on the degree of violence and war and also influences on economic status. In addition to our objective variable, other determinants such as resources, policies, governance also influence economic status of people. For simplicity of study, we assume that they are constant.

3. Methods and Data

With the assumption of other determinants which influences the socio- economic status of people are constant, we can formulate a model as

$$Y = f (X1.....N)$$

Where, Y is socio- economic status of developing countries in cross section data analysis of developing world and socio economic status of divisional secretariats divisions in cross section data analysis of Sri Lanka. X1 is our objective variable, percentage of Muslim population in national population. Y stands for various measures which show the various socio- political conditions of the country and DS divisions. Each measure of socio- economic status is marked as follows.

Measures of socio-economic statuses for cross country analysis in the developing world

Y1 - Degree of democracy (Measure for political liberty)

Y2 – Degree of conflicts and war, violence (Measure for peace building capacity).

Y3 – Defense expenditure as percent of GDP (Proxy measure for peace).

Y4 – Degree of economic freedom (Measure for economic liberty)

Y5 - Per capita income (Measure for income of people)

Y6 – Telephones connections per 1000 people (Measure for physical capital)

Y7 – Percentage of registration for tertiary education (Measure for human capital)

Y8 –Total net FDI as percentage of total FDI in the world. (Measure for external technology)

Y2 – Degree of conflicts and war, violence (Measure for peace building capacity).

Y3 – Defense expenditure as percent of GDP (Proxy measure for peace).

Y4 – Degree of economic freedom (Measure for economic liberty)

Y5 - Per capita income (Measure for income of people)

Y6 – Telephones connections per 1000 people (Measure for physical capital)

Y7 – Percentage of registration for tertiary education (Measure for human capital)

Y8 –Total net FDI as percentage of total FDI in the world. (Measure for external technology)

Measures of socio-economic statuses for cross divisions’ analysis in Ampara District.

- Y1 - Literacy rate.(Measure for basic education)
- Y2 – O/L registration as a percentage of total educational registration (Measure for education)
- Y3 – A/L registration as a percentage of total educational registration (Measure for education)
- Y4 – Graduates as a percentage of total educational registration (Measure for education)
- Y5 - Semi government and Government jobs as a percentage of total jobs (Measure for employment)
- Y6 – Government jobs as a percentage of total jobs (Measure for employment)
- Y7 – Semi Government jobs as a percentage of total jobs (Measure for employment)
- Y8 –Permanent Houses as a percentage of total house unit.(Measure for status of houses)
- Y9 – Semi Permanent Houses as a percentage of total house units
- Y10 – Permanent houses as a percentage of total house units
- Y11– Cement floored houses as a percentage t of total house units
- Y12 – Electricity for lighting as a percentage of total households
- Y13 – Gas using households for cooking as a percentage of total households
- Y14 – No of households with taps from mainline as a percentage of total households
- Y15 – No of households with tap outside from mainline as a percentage of total households
- Y16 – No of households with protected drinking water from well as a percentage of total households
- Y17 – No of households with protected drinking water from inside well as a percentage of total households
- Y18 – No of households with protected drinking water from outside well as a percentage of total households
- Y19 – Land ownership as a percentage of total agricultural operators
- Y20 –Average Land holding of households–Acres
- Y21 – No of Coconut trees as a percentage of total coconut trees available in the district

- Y22 – No of Muslim owned industrial establishments to as a percentage of total industrial establishments in the district
- Y23 – No of persons engaged in industrial production as a percentage of total employment in the district

We hypothesize that
 $\partial Y / \partial X1 < 0$ when lower value of Y is good status and $\partial Y / \partial X1 > 0$ when lower values of Y is bad status

Data for the sample of 70 developing countries from all regions in the world have been taken from various sources such as World Fact Book, on line data base of the World Bank, Polity iv Reports and the data base of Heritage Foundation. Data of Sri Lanka have been gathered from various reports of the Department of Census and Statistics. After 1981, Ampara district was included in the Census only in 2001 due to the escalation of conflict since 1983. Therefore, this study uses 2001 Census data.

4. Results and Discussion

The percentage Muslim population of the total population is 31.4 percent in selected 70 developing countries. According to our study, the percentage of Muslim population is significantly correlated with the sociopolitical and economic status of the countries. Table 1 shows the relationship between Muslim population and socio political indicators.

Table 1: Relationship between Muslim population and Sociopolitical and economic status in developing countries

Socio-Economic Indicators(Ys)	Correlation between Muslim population as percentage of total (X1)and socio political indicators (Ys)
Degree of democracy	-0.60
Degree of Conflicts and War, Violence	0.45
Defense expenditure as percent of GDP	0.34

Degree of economic freedom	-0.46
Per Capita Income (US\$)	0.27
Telephones main lines per 1000 people	-0.33
Percentage of registration for tertiary education	-0.22
Total net FDI as percentage of world	-0.23

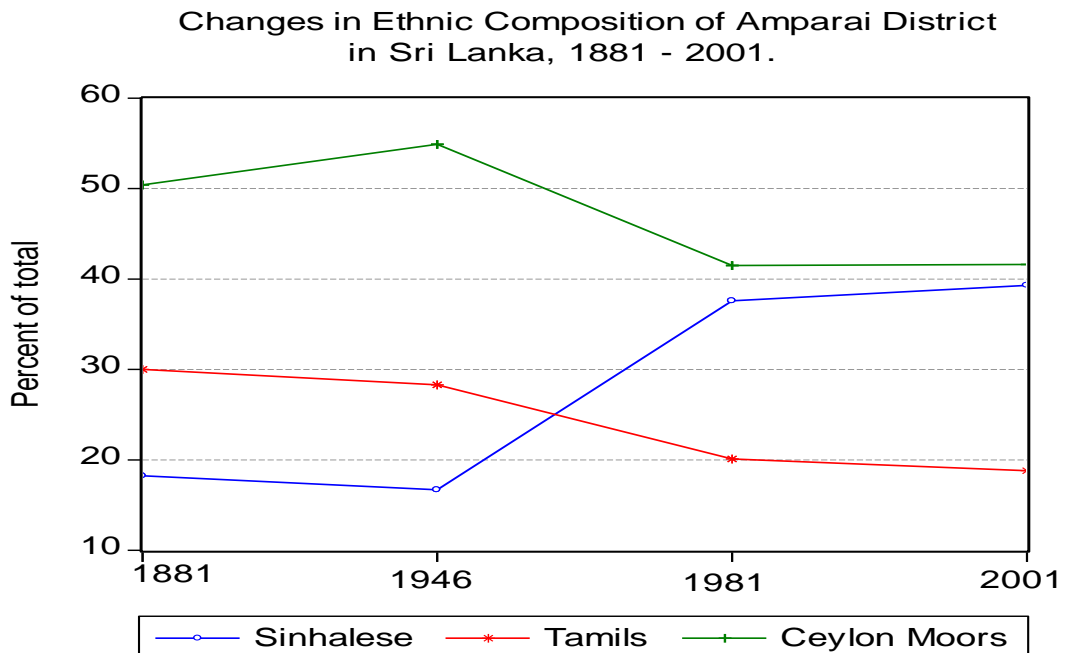
Computed from several data sources (average for 2000-2004)

There is a negative correlation (60 %) between Muslim population and degree of democracy in developing countries. Countries which have low level of Muslim population enjoy higher degree of democracy. Muslim population is also positively correlated (45 %) with the degree of conflicts and war. Higher degree of conflict and war in the developing countries is not a matter of minority status of Muslim population.

Economic freedom also is negatively correlated with Muslim population. Higher percentage of Muslim population could not allow to liberalize the economies in the world. But, countries which have low level of Muslim population have more liberal economic policy. Physical capital, human capital and technology are also negatively correlated with percentage of Muslim population but they are not showing strong correlations.

Muslims constitute second largest minority in Sri Lanka. But, in comparing other minority communities, their socio- economic status in the country is significantly high. Figure 2 shows the ethnic composition of Ampara district. After independence, both Tamil and Muslim population have declined while Sinhalese population has increased. However, Muslims have managed their majority status in this district until now.

Figure 2: Ethnic composition in selected district in Sri Lanka.



The Table 2 shows the percentage of population in 19 divisions of Ampara district on the basis of religion.

Table 3 shows the socio- economic status of ethnic groups of Ampara district. A/L registration as a percentage of total educational registration, graduates as a percentage of total educational registration, permanent houses as a percentage of total house units, cement floored houses as a percentage of total house units, electricity for

lighting as a percentage of total households, gas using households for cooking as a percentage of total households, no of households with taps from mainline as a percentage of total households, land ownership as percent of total agricultural operators and Average Land – Acres are shown in the Table 3.

Table 2: Composition of religious groups in 19 divisional secretariats divisions of Ampara

D.S Divisions	Muslims %(X1)	Buddhists%(X2)	Hindus%(X3)
Dehiattakandiya-S	0.21	99.2	0.1
Padiyathalawa-S	0.61	98.96	0.09
Mahaoya-S	0.44	99.33	0.03
Uhana-S	0.09	99.55	0.04
Ampara-S	1.21	96.58	0.4
Lahugala-S	1.17	90.52	7.87
Damana-S	0.51	98.66	0.08
Pothuvil-M	77.66	2.99	15.77
Sammanthurai-M	85.6	0.54	13.07
Kalmunai-M	61.13	0.74	33.69
Sainthamaruthu-M	99.53	0.21	0.17
Ninthavur-M	94.3	0.26	5.3
Addalaichenai-M	91.7	6.06	1.8
Irakkamam-M	89.32	6.95	3.29
Akkaraipattu-M	95.98	1.4	2.47
Alayadiwembu-T	1.26	1.48	88.45
Thirukkivil-T	0.21	1.27	90.88
Navithanveli-T	26.67	6.82	56.86
Karaitivu-T	36.25	2.43	60.31

Source: Compiled from Various Reports of the Department of Census and Statistics.

No of coconut trees as a percentage of total coconut trees available in the district, No of Muslim owned industrial establishments as a percentage of total industrial establishments in the district and No of persons engaged in industrial establishments a percentage of total employment in the district are higher in divisions in which Muslims maintain their

majority. However, some indicators such as semi government and government jobs a percentage of total jobs, semi permanent houses as a percentage of total house units and no of households with protected drinking water from outside well as a percentage of total households are not higher in Muslim populated divisions.

Table 3: Socio- Economic status of religious groups of Ampara district of Sri Lanka

Socio-Economic Indicators	Average of district (19 DS divisions)	Average for Buddhist Majority (7 DSs) (X2)	Average for Muslim Majority (8 DSs) (X1)	Average for Hindu Majority (4 DSs) (X3)
Y1	83.94	85.64	82.52	83.8
Y2	12.78	12.5	12.5	13.75
Y3	6.21	5.48	6.72	6.4
Y4	0.43	0.45	0.51	0.22
Y5	20.7	23.63	19.35	18.29
Y6	18.32	21.15	16.96	16.09
Y7	2.38	2.48	2.38	2.19
Y8	94.87	97.54	94.11	89.9
Y9	30.38	53.96	14.1	21.54
Y10	64.53	44.6	80.1	68.38
Y11	72.9	52.54	87.75	78.9
Y12	47.01	36.56	61.56	36.04
Y13	7.04	3.69	12.01	2.98
Y14	6.9	9.7	6.91	2.0
Y15	1.67	2.6	1.4	0.44
Y16	74.5	57.0	82.9	88.0
Y17	46.8	19.0	64.4	60.5
Y18	27.67	38.0	18.6	27.5
Y19	62.23	53.6	68.6	65.97
Y20	3.54	3.09	4.1	3.24
Y21	5.26	1.84	7.39	7.0
Y22	5.26	5.31	6.5	2.75
Y23	5.26	5.47	6.53	2.37

Source: Estimated from Various Reports of the Department of Census and Statistics

Table 4 illustrates our important hypothesis that percentage of Muslim population (Muslims who are minority in the national level and majority in some divisional secretariats divisions in Ampara district) is positively correlated with socio – economic statuses of DSs. Permanent houses as a percentage of total house units, electricity for lighting as a percentage of total households, gas using for cooking as a percentage of total households, no of households with protected drinking water from inside well as a percentage of total households and average land to household are highly correlated with the percentage Muslim population positively. A/L registration as a percentage of total educational

registration, graduates as a percentage of total educational registration, land ownership as a percentage of total operators, No of coconut trees as percent of total coconut trees available in the district, No of Muslim owned industrial establishments as a percentage of total industrial establishments in the district and no of persons engaged in industry as percentage of total employment in the district are correlated positively but correlations are not strong.

Table 4: Correlations between Muslim Population and Socio- Economic Statuses in 19 DSs

Socio- Economic Indicators	Correlations between percent of Buddhist population(X2) and	Correlations between percent of Muslim population (X1)and	Correlations between percent of Hindu population (X3)and
Y1	0.22	-0.27	0.029
Y2	-0.07	-0.05	0.18
Y3	-0.30	0.25	0.12
Y4	0.05	0.19	0.32
Y5	0.27	-0.14	-0.17
Y6	0.07	0.03	-0.13
Y7	0.56	-0.026	-0.75
Y8	0.83	-0.71	-0.26
Y9	-0.74	0.75	0.096
Y10	-0.81	0.74	0.20
Y11	0.33	0.02	-0.46
Y12	-0.39	0.64	-0.25
Y13	-0.39	0.61	-0.24
Y14	0.17	-0.05	-0.18
Y15	0.36	-0.19	-0.27
Y16	-0.65	0.42	0.40
Y17	-0.77	0.60	0.34
Y18	0.52	-0.53	-0.07
Y19	-0.30	0.25	0.14
Y20	-0.50	0.56	0.002
Y21	-0.66	0.37	0.46
Y22	0.00	0.29	-0.24
Y23	0.02	0.19	-0.21

Source: Estimated from Various Reports of the Department of Census and Statistics

All correlations confirm that Muslim population as minority in Sri Lanka has been enjoying better socio- economic statuses than other communities in Ampara. These results are parallel with developing country’s experiences in which lower Muslim population have better economic development. There are many reasons for minority Muslim population has better socio- economic statuses than other ethnic groups. Firstly, Muslim people as minority has been living very active population in economic activities in all over the world³. This phenomenon is similar to Sri Lanka. Muslim people as minority have been very active role in

economic activities in Sri Lanka⁴. Secondly, Muslim political parties in Sri Lanka have been with the government as a coalition partners. This pro- government politics led them to generate more development opportunities to their regions from the government⁵. However, some public services such as public well water and public employment which are delivered by government in this district negatively correlated with Muslim population implies that coalition politics have not been make public employment and other public services in favor to Muslim regions. Thirdly, the two major ethnic groups- Sinhalese and Tamils-

engaged confrontational politics even before independence, and engaged in a bloody war since 1983 (Athukorala and Jayasuriya, 1994). However, by and large Muslims, the third majority community, avoided direct confrontation against these two major ethnic groups and make use of this opportunity for their economic development. Fourthly, like the politics of Muslims in other countries, Sri Lankan Muslim politics is not infused with radical religious ideology or sectarian Jihadism. This flexible religious based political ideology led them to make peace in spite of some violence against Muslim by various groups. This flexible religious based political ideology led them to increase their economic status than other minority communities in Sri Lanka⁶.

Fifthly and finally, Muslim leaders have been working with major political parties of majority Sinhala community. Importantly, Muslim political leaders have been always sharing ministerial posts in the Governments. As a result, Muslims regions have been benefited much as far as economic development is concerned⁷.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the correlation between the percentage of Muslim population and socio-economic status in developing countries is comparable to Sri Lanka as well. Economies which have a smaller percentage of Muslim population in developing countries have been enjoying better economic status in compared to Muslims dominated countries. Despite the allegations of giving priority in the provision public services to Sinhalese dominated regions, socio-economic status of Muslim dominant divisions of Ampara district is far better than other divisions. This commendable status has been achieved by hard working and the collaboration with government rather than adopting antagonistic politics toward the government. Muslims as a minority community play an important role in peace building measures and greater economic development in developing countries as well as in Sri Lanka.

Footnote

¹Lee Kuan Yew said that “from the late 1960s, I have visited Hong Kong almost every year, to study and to understand why Hong Kong people work with so much more drive and vigorous than the people in Singapore and to learn something from them....through the Hong Kong experience, I concluded that state welfare and subsidies blunted the individual’s drive to succeed...I resolved to reverse course on the welfare policies which my party had inherited or copied from the British labor party’s policies”. (Michael,2000)

²Even though Jews were expelled from Germany, they live through out the world with higher living standard.

³This is not applicable to countries where Muslim people live as majority. For example, Muslims dominated Pakistan, Bangladesh and some countries in the Middle East do not have economically active population to greater extent and as a result experience sluggish economic development.

⁴My personal observation is that most of businesses in major cities in Sri Lanka are belongs to Muslims and Muslim who were evicted by the LTTE from the Northern province in 1990 have rebuilt their economic activities mainly in Putalam district to greater extent with in a short period of time.

⁵Muslim politicians emphasized coalition politics with mainstream Sinhala parties (Dennis and Mirak , 2007)

⁶ Sri Lankan Muslim politics is not infused with religious ideology or sectarian Jihadism. There are no well funded Muslim religious political parties operate in Sri Lanka, like in Pakistan and Bangladesh. There is no conclusive evidence of militant or violent Islamist movements has been funded in Sri Lanka (*Ibid*.p.3)

⁷ By playing politics with the existing national political parties, the Muslim leadership of post independence Sri Lanka shrewdly guided their community to attain a level of progress which is unique in the history of any contemporary ethnic minority(*Ibid*.p.16)

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| 1.Nepal | 14.Russia | 26 Bolivia | 37.Algeria |
| 2.India | 15.Azerbaijan | 27.Colombia | 38.Iran |
| 3.Indonesia | 16.Georgia | 28.Guatemala | 39.Egypt |
| 4.Pakistan | 17.Tajikistan | 29.Peru | 40.Jordan |
| 5.Sri Lanka | 18.Kyrgyzstan | 30.Dominican | 41.Morocco |
| 6.Philippines | 19.Turkmenistan | 31. El Salvador | 42.Tunisia |
| 7.Cambodia | 20.Ukraine | 32.Honduras | 43.Burundi |
| 8.Bangladesh | 21.Uzbekistan | 33.Jamaica | 44..D.R.Congo |
| 9.China | 22.Latvia | 34.Nicaragua | 45.Angola |
| 10.Laos | 23.Lithuania | 35.Ecuador | 46.Eritrea |
| 11.Thailand | 24.Romania | 36. Haiti | 47.Nigeria |
| 12.Vietnam | 25.Kazakhstan | | 48.Uganda |
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