

The Muslim Politics of Sri Lanka – From Bargaining Politics to Surviving Politics: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT. The Muslim politics of Sri Lanka has been a neutral and later a contested minority politics in the history of national politics in Sri Lanka. Until the mid of 1980s, the Muslim politics has been recognized as a supportive one to the politics of the major political parties in Sri Lanka. At the national level, it played a vital role without having or creating distinctiveness, therefore, number of Muslim politicians has been honored by responsible posts i.e, ministries, deputies, speakers, governors, mayors, ambassadors, heads and other posts. Therefore, majority of the Muslims and politicians have not considered creating a separate Muslim distinct political party and leading the Muslim community with religious guidance. However, the intense of ethnic conflict have come to severely impact in the East, the ethnic harmony and the coalition politics also became question. On this backdrop, the some of Muslim politicians in the Eastern province come forward to form a distinct Muslim political party not only to represent the Muslim community in the decision-making bodies but also to act as a safeguard for them.

During the intense of ethnic conflict and ethnic politics in Sri Lanka, the separate distinct Muslim politics (the politics of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress - SLMC) also played a vital role in Sri Lanka. One upon, it became as a queen making party in Sri Lankan politics which was never thought by a minority party under the present constitution. It tried to maintain this position for a decade. Four consecutive governments (in 1994, 2000, 2001, & 2004) have formed with the ultimate and utmost support of the SLMC. Its representative strength continuously increased. It bargaining politics was accepted by the majority Sinhala parties and it paved ways for immense development to the Muslim community. However, from 2004 onward, the Muslim distinct politics became to split and lose its positions at the national and provincial level. Further, its bargaining power also became decline continuously. For the last few years, it seems to be that the SLMC continue its politics only for its survival not for the shake of Muslim community and its development. This research would like to pay special attention by answering the question what factors have contributed to the decline of Muslim distinct politics to call it as politics of survival?. And what are the impacts of the present context? This research is a critical study based on interpretive analysis. The Information and date gathered from the desk analysis and field survey (interviews, questionnaire survey) have been used for the arguments for and against.

Key words: Muslim Distinct Politics, Ethnic Conflict and Civil War, Bargaining Politics, Politics of Survival.

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