

## Revivalist Movements in Sri Lanka – A Comparative Study of Hindu and Islamic Revivalist Movements

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### Abstract

As in many parts of Asia, the origins of modern nationalism in Sri Lanka may be traced back to programs of religious revivalism which were a reaction to Christian missionary enterprise. ((Silva, 1998). The first phase in the emergence of nationalism in Sri Lanka would cover the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The early nineteenth century saw the beginning of the recovery of Roman Catholicism in the island after the rigorous suppression of it attempted by the Dutch when Calvinist intolerance by Roman Catholicism directed against the indigenous religious of the Sri Lankan littoral. This was a period in which missionary zeal led to a great increase in Christianity among the people, particularly on the western seaboard and in the Northern Province. Later in the century, however, a reaction occurred against Christian proselytise among the intelligentsia who woke to this threat to their beliefs. It has been noted that revivalist movements of Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims were beginning to emerge in Sri Lanka against Christian dominant of Sri Lanka. The Buddhist revival is perhaps described as the Buddhist reaction to the missionary onslaught. The early years of the Buddhist revival saw a concentration of activity in the south-west coast. Most notable of these is the prominent part played by the 'reform' movement within the wider theme of 'nationalist' agitation. 'Constitutionalist', 'moderate' and 'conservative' are some of the terms used to describe the 'reformers' and their political attitudes. Movements among Hindus and Muslims paralleled the Buddhist revival. The Islamic revival however, came late in the century and was less through going. The Hindu revival was far deeper and widespread and also begun much earlier. The Buddhists were soon followed by the Hindus and Muslims. Thus, unlike the Buddhists, the movements among the Hindus and Muslims did not develop to take political overtones. It can be identified some similarities and differences between the revivalism taken by three communities. The researcher tries to brief these features in this article. It is a pioneer studies incomparing the activities of revivalist movements in Sri Lanka. The research focusses on religious revivalism as the foundation of social movement activities since foreign rule. This paper is attempts to identify some revivalist movements taken by Hindus and Muslims of Sri Lanka with the comparing study of them.

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**Keywords:** Revivalism, Christianity, Hindus, Muslims, Sri Lanka

### INTRODUCTION

The Revivalist is 'one who promotes or leads religious revival or one revives practices or ideas of an earlier time. (Dictionary of the English Language. 2016)

The Ceylonese variant of Asian nationalism has several distinctive features of its own and one of the most notable of these is the prominent part played by the 'reform' movement within the wider theme of 'nationalist' agitation. 'Constitutionalist', 'moderate' and 'conservative' are some of the terms used to describe the 'reformers' and their political attitudes. Each of these has its uses.

During the last few decades of the nineteenth century various important changes were beginning to emerge in Ceylonese thought and social fabric, of which two made an important contribution towards a national awakening, and the rise, later, in the twentieth

century, of a nationalist movement. First, there occurred a religious revival among the Sinhalese-Buddhism, and among the Tamil Hinduism and Muslims. This caused, among other things, research into their heritage was equal to, and if not superior to, those held by their masters-Christianity. Second, the unification of the Island, politically, administratively and economically, particularly the development of communications, roads and railways, drew the various communities inhabiting different parts of the Island closer together, while the rise of national prosperity, shared by the Ceylonese, led to rise of a conscious and articulate middle-class which turned its attention increasingly to constitutional reform.

### Statement of the Problem

“There are having some similarities and differences among the Revivalist movements of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslims in Sri Lanka?”

### Research Objective

- To understand the factors of origin and development of Revivalist Movements of Sri Lanka.
- Brief introduction of Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic Revivalist movements of Sri Lanka
- To evaluate the circumstances of Islamic revivalist movements comparing with other two revivalist movements.

### Limitation of Study

This research topic has been limited for the period from 1800 AD to year of independence (1948).

### Research Methodology

This research being a historical one, there is necessity that it has to be based on primary sources and archival documents as well as secondary data. The first part of the data collection is based on a literature survey which author reviews most literatures available on the subject.

### Origin of Revivalist Movements in Sri Lanka

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Buddhism and Hinduism had suffered from the British conquest. "On the whole the influence of Buddhism and Hinduism appears to have waned during this period and many Sinhalese and Tamils appear to have considered it more fashionable to call themselves Christian."(Mendis, 1960)

The early nineteenth century saw the beginning of the recovery of Roman Catholicism in the island after the rigorous suppression of it attempted by the Dutch when Calvinist intolerance by Roman Catholicism directed against the indigenous religious of the Sri Lankan littoral. (Mendis, 1960). This was a period in which missionary zeal led to a great increase in Christianity among the people, particularly on the western seaboard and in the Northern Province. Later in the century, however, a reaction occurred against Christian proselytism among the intelligentsia who woke to this threat to their beliefs.

The Buddhist revival is perhaps better described as the Buddhist reaction to the missionary onslaught. Instances of sporadic Christian missionaries were reported as early as the 1840s but it was really in the 1860s that the Buddhists began to organize themselves and to turn against the Christians the very weapons they used to castigate the Buddhists- public debates, mission organization, the printing press and education. (De Silva, 1997)

A number of famous Buddhists, for instance, Paramadhammacetiya prevena, Sumangala, Ratmalane Dharmaloka, Dharmarama, and Pandit Batuvantudavede Arakshita led this movement and

fought for, and defended their beliefs; journals and newspapers were published, printing presses established, schools founded and societies formed. Great public debates and discussion ensued between Buddhist and Christian priests: "the Buddhist bhikkhus did not stop at public controversy. They began to follow the methods of the missionaries themselves to counteract their evangelical work."(Mendis,1960).Thus, Buddhist leaders, while critical of the Christians were not by any means among those who advocated the breaking of links with Britain. Even the temperance movement which grew as an offshoot of the Buddhist revival and became a genuinely popular movement in the southwest, while being criticise of Western values, stopped short of attacking British rule in Sri Lanka. Perhaps this had as much to do with the economic and social aspirations of the low country leadership as the singular lack of enthusiasm with which the Buddhist reform movements were received by the Kandyan elite, and the *siyam nikaya*, neither of whom was willing to accept the emerging non-*goyigama* new rich aspirants for leadership. (De Silva, 1997)

### Hindu Revivalism

At the same time as the Buddhist revival took place among the Sinhalese, similar developments occurred with Hinduism among the Tamils. The recovery of Hinduism in nineteenth century Sri Lanka began a whole generation earlier than that of Buddhism. In a sense Hinduism was in a more advantageous position in resistance to missionary encroachment because it was possible to draw on the tremendous resources of Hinduism in India. Nearly all the Hindu temples in the Jaffna peninsula and the littoral had been destroyed But the Portuguese and the Dutch, and those that had survived were in a state of decay and dilapidation in the nineteenth century. The Hindu temples of Sri Lanka, unlike those in India, are of modest proportions and have rather slender resources for their maintenance. The restoration of the temples was not followed by a restitution of the lands that belonged to them in pre-colonial times. The reconstruction of these temples has continued in contemporary Sri Lanka and is a prominent feature in Hindu life in all parts of the island. Among the Hindus the temple has been and still continues to be the centre of cultural activity in the villages, with the annual temple festival the most notable religious and cultural event of the year. Nevertheless in the first half of the nineteenth century-and for that matter even later- the missionary organizations were much stronger in Jaffna and its environs than in most other parts of the island. There were fewer sectarian conflicts among the missionaries working in the north, and their network of schools was far more efficiently run. It would appear that the colonial government was less sensitive to potential risks of occasional or general outbursts of popular hostility to missionary activity in the Tamil areas of the country

than with the reaction to mission work among the Buddhists.

Parallel to the revival of Buddhism there was a recovery of the other indigenous religions of Sri Lanka – Hinduism and Islam. While the revivals of these religions had much in common with the processes of Buddhist resurgence, there were features in them which set them apart from the Buddhist experience. While the Islamic revival benefited greatly from the presence in the island of a charismatic Muslim exile, the Hindu recovery was much more self-reliant and self-sufficient than either the Buddhist or the Islamic recovery. But much more important was the fact that neither the Hindu nor the Islamic revival developed any political overtones, in the sense of a potential anti-British or anti-imperialist attitude. (De Silva, 2007)

The arrival of Protestant Missionaries on a large scale to Sri Lanka (then called 'Ceylon') beginning in 1814 was a primary contributor to the development of political awareness among Tamils. The activities of Missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Methodists and Anglian Churches led to a revival among Tamils of the Hindu faith.

The recovery of Hinduism in nineteenth century Sri Lanka began much earlier than that of Buddhism, and took the form of a brahmanical resistance to Christianity. In a sense Hinduism was in a more advantageous position from the point of view of resistance to Missionary encroachment were much in that it was possible to draw on the tremendous resources of Hinduism in India. Nevertheless in the first half century of British rule in the island, the Missionary organizations were much stronger in Jaffna and its environs than in most other parts of the island; there were fewer sectarian conflicts among the missions working in the North, and their network of schools was far more efficiently run. (De Silva 2007).

The leadership in the first phase of Hindu recovery in Sri Lanka was given by Arumuga Navalar, Saivaite scholar and one of translator of the Bible, a man educated in the Saivaite tradition and the Modern system of education provided by the mission schools – St Paul's Wesleyan school in Jaffna to be precise. Arumuga Navalar led a Hindu religious revivalist and reformist movement as a defensive response to the threat to their native culture posed by the British colonial and missionary activities. The structure of Hindu society in contemporary Sri Lanka has been largely influenced by him. From his association with the missionaries he had grasped the fundamental fact that education was the indispensable instrument of religious recovery. In fact, Navalar's greatest contribution to the recovery of Hinduism was the publication of a large number of Saivite religious

texts. These have helped substantially in sustaining the ideals and preserving the heritage of the Hindus in Sri Lanka primarily, but in South India as well. In 1870, a rival English school at Vannarponnai was opened at Jaffna to counteract the well-entrenched mission schools existing in the peninsula. This was followed by a scheme for the establishment of schools in every village where Saivaite education could be imparted in a purely Saivaite environment with the aid of school text-books specially prepared for the purpose. At the same time he was not unmindful of the values of an English education. In 1872 he founded the Saivangala Vidyalalai where English could be taught along with the religious background necessary for Hindu children. In 1883, the Shiva Paripalana Sabhai, the Society for the propagation of Saivism, was established; later, the *Hindu Organ*, an influential Tamil newspaper, began publication. Many other newspapers were also published, conferences and public lectures were and text books were printed: "Education up to this time had been a monopoly of the Mission, and had been the chief means of conversion to Christianity. So the Sabhai began to concentrate on Education. In 1890, it took over the Town High Schools (Jaffna) which under its management, developed later into Jaffna Hindu College." (Mendis, 1960)

The success of this effort led the Tamils to think confidently of themselves as a community and prepared the way for their awareness of a common cultural, religious and linguistic kinship in the mid-nineteenth century. For these contributions to the Tamil people, Arumuga Navalar has been described as a leader who gave his community a distinct identity.

### **Islamic Revivalist Movements in Sri Lanka**

**Terms of Revival and Modernism – Islamic view**  
ISLAMIC MODERNISM and revival are two of the many intellectual responses, operating within an Islamic framework, to Western colonial influence and to the eighteenth-century political decline of Muslim powers. Islamic modernists, while acknowledging with varying degrees of criticism or emulation, the technological, scientific and legal achievements of the West, aimed to overcome a perceived impasse in the development of Islamic societies. Islamic revivalists objected to Western colonial exploitation of Muslim countries and the imposition of Western secular values. They aimed to reassert 'original' Islamic values.

Islamic revival (*ihya'*) refers to the support for an increased influence of Islamic values on the modern world as a response to Western and secular trends. Accordingly, a return to Islam in its purest form is seen as the solution for the ills of Islamic societies

and modern society as a whole. One expression of *ihya'* was the Salafiyah movement, especially in its Wahhabi form.

The Arabic terms *iḥyā'* (revival) and *tajdīd* (renewal) are often used concurrently, but renewal is more akin to *iṣlāḥ* (reform) than revival, which is more concerned with re-awakening of certain Islamic practices or ideas. Both terms are also used in the context of modern Islamic movements, but they also have important premodern roots. Premodern renewal was usually associated with a specifically designated purifier who, according to the *ḥadīths* (Prophetic traditions), would come at the “head of each century” to renew the faith and practice of Muslims. Many puritanical reformers were, as a result, identified by their followers as the designated re-newer or *mujaddid* of the era. Revival had a stronger sense of a strengthening of the spiritual dimensions of faith and practice, as seen in the writings of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111CE). In the modern era the terms refer to the attempts by Islamic modernizers and Salafiyah advocates introducing more Islamic influences into the lives of Muslims who have been subject to Western currents of thought and practice, particularly in the wake of the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt. Shaykh Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār (d. 1834/35), an Egyptian cleric who worked closely with the French experts who accompanied Napoleon, may have been one of the first reformists/revivalists when he said: “Our countries should be changed and renewed [*tatajaddadah*] through knowledge and sciences that they do not possess.” A distinction should be made here between the strict and orthodox Salafiyah trend and the reformist trend championed by people such as Muhammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905). The early calls for revival and renewal emanated from multiple origins, depending on the local context of these different movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Ahmad Dallal (1993) has shown. These movements included, among others, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb of Arabia (d. 1787), Shah Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī of India (d. 1762), ʿUthmān Ibn Fūdī (a.k.a. Usuman Dan Fodio) of West Africa (d. 1817), and Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Sanūsī of North Africa (d. 1859). The common feature of their thought was to rejuvenate the Islamic community they were living in or to carry an Islamic missionary message to non-Muslims, especially in Africa. These calls did not reflect a concern with the West at that point. (Oxford Islamic Studies online)

### Revivalism in Indian Subcontinent

At the beginning of the 18th century when the Indian Muslims society was in a state of decadence due to the disintegration of the Moghul empire after the death of Aurangzab, the religio-intellectual leadership of Muslim India passed for the time into the hands of theologian in the person of Shah Waliullah whose

aim was to reach the erudite Muslim public throughout the Muslim world. He founded a tradition of religious scholarship, and a school, which was to influence the religious thought in Muslim India for the next three centuries. But the impact of his teaching was neither felt in South India nor in Sri Lanka. In the same manner, the Egyptian thinker Sheikh Abduh who made a substantial contribution to modern Muslim thought did not create any impact on this region. But both waliullah, and Abduh exerted their influence on Indonesia and Malaysia. The father of Malay Muslim Renaissance Seyyed Sheikh al- Haj (d.1867) met Sheikh Abduh and was inspired by his thoughts.(Shukri, 1986)

It is rather difficult to reconstruct the cultural history of the Muslims of this period due to the paucity of materials and such other factors. But one may assume that during this period, Muslims must have lived in a state of fear and tension, in clusters, centred around the mosques, because in any Muslim social set-up, masjid or mosque forms the nucleus around which the Muslim social organization is build up. Thus inspire of difficulties, political and economic experience by the Muslims, the socio-religious organization centred on the Jumma Mosques though without any central direction or elaborate rules of procedure was kept intact. This was made possible on account of the strong religious consciousness and piety of the local Muslims, and the role played by the religious scholars who wielded a great influence on the Muslim society and thus the integrity of the Muslims preserved.(Azees, 1966)

Although the Dutch attitude towards the Muslims in trade and commerce relaxed towards the end of the 18th century, the Muslims were not enjoying the freedom which they had during the reign of the Sinhalese kings. Moreover, the Christian missionary activity, which had started in 1534 under the patronage and continued under the Dutch, was not favourable to the adherents of Islam. However, neither the intensive Christian religious propaganda nor the rules framed by the Dutch affecting inheritance and succession could make much headway in getting converts of the Muslims. The Muslims struggled against heavy odds to maintain their religious identity. After the arrival of the British, the Muslim began to emerge gradually from the de-grateful, ignoble, and sordid state. The Muslims found themselves, on the whole, in a much better position than they had been under the Portuguese and Dutch. The cultural contacts between the Muslims of Sri Lanka and Muslims of South India assumed a new proportion and a new dimension.

### Sufi thought for Islamic revivalism

An interesting feature of the religious and cultural life of the Muslims of this period was the spread of the

Sufi Tariqas, and a powerful impact of the Sufi thought in Muslim society of Sri Lanka. The Sufi Tariqas such as Qadiriyya, Shadhliyya, Rifaiyya, Chisthiyya, and Nagshabandiya were introduced into Sri Lanka by the Muslims of South India. These Sufi Tariqas and Sufi scholars also had compiled a number of scholarly works on Islamic theology, Law, and Mysticism in Arabic and Arabic Tamil. These works exerted a powerful influence in shaping the religious thought and life of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. (Shukri, 1986)

Apart from the Sufi orders that were introduced into Sri Lanka from India, the Sufis Yamen and Hadramauth, came to Sri Lanka during this period and contributed immensely towards the religious and cultural life of the Muslims. Muslims of Sri Lanka, during this period, seem to have had a very close cultural link with Yemen and Hadramauth during the period under review. Sheikh Ismail Izzadeen Yamani, popularly known as Arabi Appa, visited Sri Lanka, and through his popular religious discourses, and spiritual assemblies, created a religious reawakening. His son Sheikh Yehya al-Yemani continued his father's tradition and became famous not only as a popular preacher, but also as a renowned calligraphist. His hand-written Quran is still being preserved in the Matara Jumma mosque. Ash Sheikh Abdullah ibn Umar Badheeb al Yemeni, another eminent Sufi and scholar from Yemen arrived in Sri Lanka in 1840, and after a short stay, returned to Yamen. He arrived in Sri Lanka again in 1858 and died in 1892. His activities were mainly confined to the central province, having his centre, the village of Madulbowa in Hemmathagama. He fought vehemently against the distorted ideas and wrongful practices that had crept into the Muslim society in the name of Islam. His book entitled "Sailul Warid" was mainly directed against these un-Islamic practices. (Shukri, 1986)

The Sufi orders occupied an important place in the Sri Lankan Muslim society during this period. Each Sufi Tariqa had its own religious centres known as "Zaviyas" or "Takkiyas" which functioned as centres of religious learning and spiritual training. Masjid or the Mosque in Muslim society functioned mainly as a centre of religious worship where daily prayers are conducted, whereas Zaviyas and Takkiyas served as centres for each Sufi Tariqa for the voluntary devotional activities prescribed by each Tariqa. The Sufi Tariqas had great social significance on the Sri Lankan Muslims society and made a valuable contribution to the intellectual life of the community. The works of great Muslim Sufi such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Abdul Karim Jili and other works on Muslim theology and Islamic jurisprudence were introduced into Sri Lanka mainly by Sufi scholars of South India, Yemen, and Hadramauth. The Muslims of South India, during this period, were very

intimately familiar with the works of illustrious scholars who flourished in the Islamic world during the medieval period. Most of these scholarly works of great Muslim thinkers of the medieval period were introduced into Sri Lanka mainly by South Indian scholars who frequently visited Sri Lanka during this period. (Kamaldeen, 1979)

One of the eminent scholars of Sri Lanka, and the first translator of the Quran into Arabic, Sheikh Mustafa received Shekh Umar (1801 A.D.), another renowned scholar of Kayalpattanam of South India, at Beruwala, and became a disciple of him. Ash Sheikh Mohammad alim Sahib, popularly known as Kasawatte Alim (1898 A.D.) was another great scholar of Sri Lanka. Seyyed Muhammad Mapillai Alim (1316/1898) of Keelakarai of South India was a great Sufi scholar and a literary figure that had made an immense contribution to the religious and cultural awakening of the Muslims of Sri Lanka during this period. When he observed the backwardness of the Muslims of Sri Lanka, he devoted all his time to work for the religious awakening of the Muslim community. He established a number of mosques in Colombo and other main cities of Sri Lanka. His compendium on Islamic law and theology in Arabic Tamil such as "Maghani", "Fathud Dayyan" became the main source book for the Muslims to know their religious practices in a language which they understood. He also established the first Arabic madrasa in Weligama in 1884. This was the period that witnessed great reawakening on the part of all the communities of Sri Lanka.

#### **Muslims and other Communities with Christianity**

In the nineteenth century the Muslims of Sri Lanka, like the Buddhist and Hindus, faced the challenge of Protestant Christianity, but to a much greater extent than both of them, the Muslims were notable for a refusal to succumb to the blandishments of Christianity. This resistance to conversion to Christianity persisted throughout the nineteenth century, but the survival of Islam in Sri Lanka had been secured, in a sense, at the expense of social if not economic advancement of its adherents. For almost three centuries, the Muslims of Sri Lanka struggled against all odds to preserve their religion and retain the religious identity in the face of Christian religious aggression, while the other indigenous religions succumbed to attractions and advantages of Christianity.

What is identified in the current literature on Sri Lanka as the 'revivalist Movement' of the Muslims of the late nineteenth century was by no means an isolated phenomenon. In many respects, it could be subsumed under the broader social activism that encompassed all the traditional religious groups of the island at this time. The activism of the Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims alike reflected, at the

fundamental level, a reaction against the dominance achieved by Christianity and Christian under British rule. This reaction was heightened by the attacks which were made on the traditional religious beliefs by overtly confident Evangelical Christian elements; superiority of Christianity over the other religious was asserted and their words and actions betrayed contempt for 'Oriental' institutions, customs and traditions. (De Silva, 1948). The brunt of the attacks had to be borne by the Buddhists. This was not surprising: they were not only the predominant religious group in the island but had also been the focal point of British policies in general as the inheritors of the legacy of the pre-colonial Sinhalese kingdoms. It was this group which emerged to challenge the 'alien' religion and its followers and the resultant 'cultural revivalism' gained wide currency among the adherents of what was claimed to be the religion of the founders of the nation. It was quickly evident that this social movement would not remain purely a cultural or religious affair; it took political overtones and had considerable ramifications for the emergence of the nationalist movement of Sri Lanka. (Malalagoda, 1976) The Buddhists were soon followed by the Hindus and Muslims. Like the Buddhists, they emulated the Christians in their organizational and agitational techniques - herein lay the critical factor that explains the common complexion of the three movements - and they also drew from the Buddhists who effectively acted as the pace-setters. The three movements were stimulated by and drew strength from one another. Yet, each had its own distinctive qualities. Thus, unlike the Buddhists, the movements among the Hindus and Muslims did not develop to take political overtones. again, the Buddhists and Hindus displayed a self-reliance and self-sufficiency that was not within the grasp of the Muslim activists. This latter point is particularly important in understanding the role the revivalist movement played among the Muslims. (Samaraweera, 1986)

It took many years (1892) for a Muslim revival of real significance. The word "revival" is, perhaps, inaccurate for what in fact was resurgence in educational activity rather than a renaissance of the Muslim faith. The Muslim community was numerically less than the Sinhalese and Tamils. It had survived the conversion propaganda of the Portuguese and the persecution of the Dutch. Under the British rule the Muslims were given greater facilities to trade and helped the administration to obtain information of conditions in otherwise inaccessible parts of the island at the time. As traders and businessmen they eschewed clerical posts under government and were, therefore, not attracted by Missionary education in English. (Weera Sooriya, 1971)

The Tamils and Sinhalese, mainly - had been taking advantage of the English education introduced by the Europeans since early seventeenth century, when the Christian Missionaries had started setting up schools. Such schools had increased in number gradually offering a variety of subjects for study. Since the education provided in the schools was primarily an English one, the Muslims of Sri Lanka tended to reject it because of dangers they perceived of a potential erosion of faith in Islam among the younger generation, for education was not only in English but was also largely Christian in content. This manifestation of their zeal for their ancestral faith had rather regrettable consequences for they deliberately sacrificed the social and material benefits that accrued to other communities in the island from the educational process, and by the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the more enlightened Muslim leaders were profoundly disturbed by what they regarded as the backwardness of their community.

The Buddhists as well as Hindus had a long and much cherished cultural and historical tradition behind them. The respective collective memory and self-identity of these two social groups can be traced back to the pre-Christian times - these had been reinforced again and again through interaction with one another, peaceful at times and hostile at other times, as well as through competition and conflict with foreign elements, and their respective group consciousness had even taken ideological dimensions. (De Silva, 1973) Thus, the Hindus and Buddhists possessed within themselves a considerable reservoir of inner resources which they could draw upon in meeting the challenges they faced in the nineteenth century. The Muslims lacked such means. This necessarily has to be explained in terms of their pasts. (Samaraweera, 1986) Although the British too permitted evangelistic activity, they did not, by and large, lend state support to proselytization. Once the Christian missionary activity was not given political support and ceased to be a threat to Islam, the Muslims took steps to improve their trade and commerce. Before long, the Muslim community achieved economic prosperity in a peaceful atmosphere devoid of religious or economic persecution. But the Muslims were failing behind the other people of the island in one respect: education, while, the Tamils and Burghers took advantage of the English education introduced in the Island by the British, the Muslims deliberately kept their children away from the Christian missionary schools on account of their fear of the nature of education offered by such schools. They did not want to endanger the faith of their children in Islam as the education in the Christian schools was not only Western but also Christian in content. (Mohan, 1986).

By the time of British rule the settlements pattern of the Muslims in Sri Lanka had become well

established. They were thinly spread out through -out the island, though there were notable concentrations, in particular in the Eastern province. The scattered geographical distribution perhaps reflected the central import trade carried within the community. It was certainly consistent with the image that persisted in British times.

#### **Revivalism towards Education development**

The Muslim community as a whole displayed the same frigidity to conversion during the early period of British rule as they had during the Portuguese and the Dutch periods. The financial depression of 1847, heightened by the coffee slump and the difficulties created by the 1848 rebellion, induced the government to hand over even some of the government schools to Missionary bodies. (Report of the Select Committee on Education, 1943) The Muslim of Ceylon had been for their refusal to succumb to the blandishments of Christianity. A Baptist Missionary reported in 1849 that "...the conversion of Muhammedans in Ceylon is rarer than the conversion of Jews in England. Indeed...not more than two or three cases occurred in the last fifty years..." The resistance to conversion had persisted throughout the nineteenth century but the survival of Islam in Ceylon had in a sense been secured at the expense of social and economic advancement. Since the education provided in the schools was primarily an English education, there was among the Muslims of Ceylon an attitude (natural to a conservative and coherent community) of rejecting it because of the danger of the impact of a foreign culture on Islam. Besides education was not only English, it was also largely Christian in content, and for that reason they were not prepared to endanger the faith of their children even at the expense of sacrificing the material benefits that an English education brought.

During the establishment of the British rule in this country at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Muslim community prospered under the benevolent measures taken by the British towards them, although their prosperity centred round commercial activities, their political, social and educational backwardness was striking at the third quarter of the nineteenth century. "The educational backwardness of the Muslims which resulted in their stagnation in the political and social fields was due to their attitude towards the Christian missionaries and the system of education practised in these schools. The Muslim indifference to missionary and English education was that they as a community rejected it in order to protect their religion from the possible encroachments of a foreign western culture. Second cause for this apathy towards the English Education was the trading interests of the Muslims developed at the expense of their intellectual attainments." (Samaraweera, 1976)

When the Muslims were in a backward situation in education, politics and community structure during British rule, they keenly observed the contemporary Buddhist and Hindu revivalist movements in full swing. These two movements gave a great inspiration and momentum to the revival of the Muslims. The leaders of these two movements realised that the backbone of the Christian dominated English education could be broken up only through well organised Buddhist and Hindu schools. The Muslims very well understood that leadership and leaders were necessary in a muslim revival. They found two leaders, viz: M.C. Siddi Lebbe (1838-1898) and Arabi (Orabi) Pasha an Egyptian exile in Ceylon from 1883-1901.

Siddi Lebbe was a Proctor by profession, who with his instinctively keen insight and intellectual background was able to observe the changes that were taking place around him, and this led to his realization of the fact that the salvation of his community lay in education. The arrival of Ahmad Orabi, was a great source of strength to the mission of Siddi Lebbe. The establishment of the first 'Anglo-Mohammedan school (Al Madurasathul Khairiyyatul Islamiah) at Maradana in November 1884 marked the beginning of the Muslim educational movement.

The following years of the century saw the opening up of several other schools which provided an English education (including Al Madurasathu Zahira at the site of the dormant Al Madurasathul in 1894). The Muslim educational movement was modernistic in Orientation, though in keeping with the religious sensibilities of the Muslims some key traditional elements were given the pride of place.

The revivalist movement led to a Cultural and Literary activity among the Muslims during the first decade of the twentieth century. Numerous literary and friendship societies were established during this period. It would be pointed out that the Muslims revivalist movement had a great impact in the political consciousness among the community, and led to an organized political movement towards the representation of the Muslims in the Legislature and the attainment of independence for Sri Lanka from the British domination.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The revivalist movements of Sri Lanka in British period could be subsumed under the broader social activism that encompassed all the traditional religious groups of the island at this time. The activism of the buddhists, Hindus and Muslims alike reflected, at the fundamental level, a reaction against the dominance achieved by Christianity and Christians under British rule. It was quickly evident that this social movement would not remain purely a cultural or religious affair; it took political overtones and had

considerable ramifications for the emergence of the nationalist movement of Sri Lanka. The Buddhists were soon followed by the Hindus and Muslims. Thus, unlike the Buddhists, the movements among the Hindus and Muslims did not develop to take political overtones.

The importance of Islamic revivalist movements of Sri Lanka could be identified at two levels, ideological and functional. These were not mutually exclusive – indeed, they were complementary to one another. The initial focus of Islamic revivalism was to be on education.

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