

THE MUSLIMS OF SRI LANKA

ONE THOUSAND YEARS OF ETHNIC HARMONY

900-1915

LORNA DEWARAJA

M.A. (Sri Lanka), Ph.D. (London)

formerly Associate Professor in History - University of Colombo

Rhodes Fellow - St. Annes' College, Oxford

Fulbright Scholar-in Residence - University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

Published by

THE LANKA ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

496, Galle Road,

Colombo 06

Sri Lanka

E H Carr writes: "The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like on the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him". He also observes: "It used to be said that facts speak for themselves". This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them. It is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context. It was, I think, one of Pirandello's characters who said that a fact is like a sack-it won't stand up till you have put something in it".

Dr. Dewaraja points out that "historians have traditionally been attracted by wars and rebellions whereas the peaceful co-existence of groups of people over long periods tends to be overlooked. She adds: "In the history of Sri Lanka few are aware of the harmonious relationship which had developed between the Sinhalese, its indigenous inhabitants, and the Muslims who initially were foreigners, and that both have lived together peacefully for over a thousand years. Perhaps because it was such a peaceful relationship, it has passed unnoticed by the historian."

Analysing the writing of history in India, Romila Thapar has deplored contemporary ideology intruding into the interpretation of history. It is the duty of the historian to avoid "giving the floor" to conflicts, to the exclusion of, what I would call "confluence".

Unlike in India where Islam made its entry as a conquering proselytizing force, in Sri Lanka it appeared as the personal faith of a peaceful trading people who in course of time earned the goodwill, confidence and trust of the indigenous people. Buddhist ideals of tolerance and accommodation too were contributory factors. Besides, there was hardly any economic factor that could have caused conflict. Therefore, Muslim integration into Sinhala society proceeded at an even pace for which there are few parallels elsewhere in the world.

I am confident that Dr. Dewaraja's work will make a substantial contribution to Sinhala-Muslim understanding immensely, vital today to confront new and complex problems.

A C S Hameed, M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs

FROM THE PUBLISHER.

The Lanka Islamic Foundation takes pleasure in presenting this work by Dr. Lorna Dewaraja.

The Sinhalese possess their Mahavamsa, the Culavamsa and the Rajavaliya and the Tamils their Yalpanavaipavamalai. The Muslims of Sri Lanka have no chronicle of their own and are without a historical tradition. This is a serious lacuna which has to be filled, in the interests of the Muslim people and of the country.

Ours is only a modest effort in the enterprise of recording a part of the history of the Muslim people. It is encouraging to note that several attempts have been made in this direction. Sri Lankans on the whole have to be made known of the history of the Sri Lankan Muslims. That would, it is our view, greatly promote harmony and understanding.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not place on record the valuable contribution made by the late A.A Latiff. His experience and knowledge have contributed in no small measure towards Dr. Dewaraja's efforts.

We do hope this work will be a modest contribution to the promotion of goodwill and amity among the people of Sri Lanka.

A.C.A.M.Nuhuman.

President

The Lanka Islamic Foundation

Contents

Foreword

From the Publisher

Acknowledgments

			Page
Chapter I	Introduction	- -	01
Chapter II	Merchants and Pilgrims	- -	22
	The Foundations of Racial and Religious Harmony c. 900 - 1500		
Chapter III	The Cross meets the Crescent; Penetration into the Interior. 1505 - 1796	-	55
Chapter IV	Muslims in the Kandyan Kingdom; Structural Assimilation c. 1600 - 1815		88
Chapter V	Contributions to the Society	-	120
Chapter VI	A Hundred Years of British Rule; 1815 - 1915.	-	140

Bibliography

151

Abbreviations

BM

British Museum

CHJ

Ceylon Historical Journal

JRASCB

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
Ceylon Branch

MICH

Moors Islamic Cultural Home

PRO/CO

Public Record Office Colonial Office

SLNA

Sri Lanka National Archives

STR

Service Tenure Register

UHC

University of Ceylon History of Ceylon

History is said
to be a little more
than a record of the crimes,
foibles and misfortunes
of humanity and historians have
traditionally been attracted
by wars and rebellions
whereas the peaceful
coexistence of groups of people
over long periods
tends to be overlooked.

Hence history
deals more with the arts of war
and much less
with the arts of peace.

In the history of
Sri Lanka few are aware of
the harmonious relationship
which has developed between
the Sinhalese its indigenous
inhabitants and
the Muslims who
initially were foreigners,
and that both have lived together
peacefully
for over a thousand years.

Perhaps because
it was such
a peaceful relationship,
it has passed unnoticed
by the historian.

ISLAMIC BOOK HOUSE



History is said
to be a little more
than a record of the crimes,
follies and misfortunes
of humanity and historians have
traditionally been attracted
by wars and rebellions
whereas the peaceful
coexistence of groups of people
over long periods
tends to be overlooked.

Hence history
deals more with the arts of war
and much less
with the arts of peace.

In the history of
Sri Lanka few are aware of
the harmonious relationship
which has developed between
the sinhalese its indigenious
inhabitants and
the Muslims who
initially were foreigners,
and that both have lived together
peacefully
for over a thousand years.

Perhaps because
it was such
a peaceful relationship,
it has passed unnoticed
by the historian.

ISLAMIC BOOK HOUSE

