SPOKEN TAMIL DIALECTS OF THE MUSLIMS OF SRI LANKA: LANGUAGE AS IDENTITY-CLASSIFIER

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Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic country. The Sinhalese, the predominant community in Sri Lanka, speak Sinhala (linguistically allied to the Middle Indian Aryan Vernaculars such as Hindi and Bengali). The ethnic Tamils, who speak Tamil and have it as their mother-tongue, come next in number. The majority of the Sinhalese are Buddhists, while the majority of the Tamils are Hindus. The Burghers, a very small community, speak English, which is also the link-language in Sri Lanka.

The Muslims are the second largest minority in Sri Lanka. Approximating to eight percent of the total population of Sri Lanka. The Muslims, for census purposes at least, group themselves under Moors and Malays, the latter being one-twentieth of the former in number. The home language of the Moors is Tamil while that of the Malays is Malay (strictly, an archaic dialect of Batavian).

Very small sub-groups among the Muslims of Sri Lanka are conversant with Urdu and Memonese (a sub-dialect of Sindhi). The religious language of the Muslims, of course, is Arabic; it is considered more a sacred, ritualistic language than as a living, robust tongue. The linguistic heritage of the Muslims of Sri Lanka includes words from Persian and Malayalam (a Dravidian language allied to Tamil). This is one key to the extraordinary richness of the spoken Tamil dialects of the Muslims of Sri Lanka.

THE RATIONALE FOR THE TAMIL LANGUAGE

The transport theory (i.e. the belief in the point of origin) of the Muslims of Sri Lanka posits a historical situation. It is generally believed that a party of Muslims, Arabs living in the Arabian peninsula were oppressed by the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān in the eighth century. As a result, these Arabs exiled...
themselves and settled down in India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia. As regards Sri Lanka, the places of settlements were "along the coast at Jaffna, Mannar, Kudremalai, Puttalam, Colombo, Beruwela, Galle and at the eastern coastal port of Trincomallee".\(^\text{11}\)

The question naturally arises as to why these Arabs, subsequently called the Muslims of Sri Lanka, should gradually drop Arabic and take up Tamil as their home language. Several theories have been advanced. A recent historian writes:

A large population of the Moor population in this country [Sri Lanka] is descended from the traders who arrived from Arabia and the lands around the Persian Gulf. Some of them brought their wives and families with them, as a statement of al-Balādḥūrī indicates, but the majority of them married local women, adopted the local customs and settled permanently.\(^\text{12}\)

There were other reasons, too. These can be schematically stated as follows.

(a) During the Middle Ages, the strong Muslim trading community, which spanned the Coromandel coast, used Tamil or rather, 'bazaar Tamil' as the lingua franca.\(^\text{13}\) An important centre for spices in the west of south India (at present the state of Kerala) used, and uses, Malayalam, which has been described as a sort of easy Tamil with a large admixture of Sanskrit-derived words.\(^\text{14}\)

(b) When the Portuguese came to dominate the political scene in South India and Sri Lanka after 1505, they looked upon the Muslims of Sri Lanka, in particular, as their religious rivals and commercial competitors. Hence, they imposed various constraints on the Muslims. In these circumstances, it was politically judicious for the Muslims of Sri Lanka to adhere to the Tamil language. Further, the only countervailing force against the Portuguese fleets was the navy of the Zamorin (the indigenous prince) of Calicut, whose navy was officered mainly by Muslims, speaking Malayalam. These included the redoubtable Kunjali Marikar family.\(^\text{15}\)

(c) Tamil was, perhaps, not without influence in the kingdom of Kandy, the principal indigenous kingdom of Sri Lanka (till 1815): when an indigenous king died childless, he was succeeded by Nayakars of South India, the family to which the widowed queen belonged. The Nayakars were the ruling feudatories in Telugu-speaking Andhra (of South India). (Telugu is, of course, a language of the Dravidian family which includes Tamil.)

(d) The Muslims of South India who are Tamil-speaking have much in common with the Muslims of Sri Lanka. Their personal names are
thoroughly similar; even name-qualifiers such as Marikar are the same.\textsuperscript{16} As I have written elsewhere:

The similarities of the socio-religious paradigms of the Muslims of South India and Sri Lanka are quite enormous.\textsuperscript{17} They may be summarised as follows.

(a) Both these territories were ruled till 1948 by the British. Indeed, when the British Crown took over Sri Lanka in 1802, it introduced the 'Madras system of government' which proved a failure.\textsuperscript{18}

(b) The home language of Sri Lankan Muslims and those of Tamil Nad is Tamil.\textsuperscript{19} Even those Muslims of Tamil Nad whose home language is Urdu are fluent in Tamil.

(c) Generally speaking, the Muslim Tamil (spoken at home) in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nad is a dialect or quasi-dialect, in that it has a substantial number of Turko-Perso-Arabic loan-words. In its classical verse form, this Tamil is called Islamic Tamil Literature.\textsuperscript{20}

(d) This specific Tamil had a written form called Arabic-Tamil, i.e. Tamil written in (adapted) Arabic script.\textsuperscript{21}

(e) There are close cultural systems (mores) between the Muslims of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nad.\textsuperscript{22}

(f) Muslim missionaries from Tamil Nad throughout the ages have entered Sri Lanka and helped shape the religious thinking of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. These Muslim missionaries have also helped in the establishment of tariq. Most of the Qādiriyyah sub-fraternities in Sri Lanka derive from their headquarters in Kilakarai, Kayal Pattinam and Kottaru.\textsuperscript{23} Even the leaders of the Rifā'iyyah tariqah had their headquarters in the Laccadives (Androth) off Kerala, and the Jīffriyya\textsuperscript{24} sub-fraternity, whose mother-tongue is Malayalam were, and are, fluent in Tamil.\textsuperscript{25}

All these have relevance to the spoken Tamil of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. They give it, a permanency and a viability.

**THE TAMIL LANGUAGE: ITS STRUCTURE AND SCOPE**

Tamil is a very old language. documentation of its origin is not available because of the ravages of time.\textsuperscript{26} However, by c. 300 an academy of Tamil literature (called Sangam) had been established by the rulers of (present day)
Tamil Nad, successively at Thenmadurai, Kapatapuram and Madurai, principal cities of those days. Rather like a cross between the Academie Francaise and the Royal Society, the Sangam throughout its long history preserved the purity of the language and the prestige of its members. Membership was through acclamation and acceptance of the work of the would-be member. The aspirant would read his composition, usually an epic (puranad) in faultless Tamil verse, before the assembled members. Even a trivial fault, a solecism, meant rejection. Understandably, the kings gave their patronage to the Sangam.

In an interesting reversal of the normal practice among languages, the earliest grammar, the crown and flower of Tamil lexicography, had appeared before the establishment of the Sangam. It has been stated that Tholkappiam, written by the eponymous author, Tholkappiar, was in existence in the fifth century BCE, preceding the founding Father of Sanskrit grammar, Panini.

Tholkappiam is divided into three chapters, Elathathikaram (or chapter on Letters); Cholathikaram (or chapter on Words); and Porulathikaram (chapter on Meanings, Significance). Elathathikaram is in nine sections, dealing with such matters as vowels, consonants, phonology and 'letter-fusion'. Cholathikaram deals, in nine sections, with such incidents of grammar as verbs, nouns, particles and flexions. The third chapter, also in nine sections, is concerned with frontiers of language as traditional linguistics, prosody and the expression of emotions. It might also be considered an early exercise in semiotics.

Written in over one thousand, and six hundred terse stanzas, Tholkappiam has dominated Tamil lexicography to date. The practice and, indeed, the rationale of all subsequent grammars, has been to agree and, in some instances, to respectfully disagree with, the rules laid down by Tholkappiam. Hence, written Tamil over the years has enjoyed a comforting permanence of existing unchanging norms. Hence, too, the importance of spoken Tamil dialects, both as linguistic devices as well as sociological artefacts.

Thus, written Tamil was elitist from its beginnings. Its complicated grammar, rigorous training of its practitioners, invariably of high caste and high status, did nothing to bring Tamil literature and language into the orbit of understanding of the mass of the people. In these circumstances, it seems natural that there was a proliferation of spoken Tamil dialects in South India and Sri Lanka. While in the case of ethnic Tamils, the differences of dialect-forms arose mainly as a result of regional differences, in the case of Tamil-speaking Muslims, the main causation appears to be the urge to preserve their religious and cultural identity. This is not to deny that mechanical causes were not at work. For instance, anyone with some knowledge of Arabic pronunciation tends to pronounce Tamil words somewhat differently than that of the Tamil indigene.
PRINCIPLES OF TAMIL DIALECTOLOGY AMONG SRILANKAN MUSLIMS

Dialectology in Tamil linguistics is still a Cinderella waiting for her prince. An important cause of this neglect is the entrenched literary view that dialects are Ilisanar Valakkū (practice of plebeians), the Tamil equivalent of dog-Latin. Any research into Tamil dialects resulted from spin-offs of work on regional studies, gazeteers and travel literature. A recent development is introducing Tamil dialects into Tamil novels and short stories in order to give verisimilitude. This is called man vaasanai (meaning in Tamil 'the flavour of the soil'). But this is recording; not studying dialectology.

Muslim Tamil dialectology both in South India and Sri Lanka suffered from many factors. The first priority was for the search, preservation, editing and publishing classical texts (usually in palm-leaf recensions and often decaying) of Islamic Tamil Literature. This work has been to some extent accomplished, perhaps, significantly through Sri Lankan scholars. The second priority was, and is, the publication of school texts. And the third is the preparation and propogation of scientific texts in Tamil. The fourth priority is the search, collection and publication of folk-poetry in Tamil.

Keeping these limitations in mind, it is possible to sketch some of the principles of Muslim Tamil dialects, before going on to discuss and categorize regional variations.

(a) The Impact of Arabic Phonology on Tamil Phonology

Since every Muslim child, in Sri Lanka, learns the arts of reading the Holy Qur’ān in the Qur’ān school, he or she absorbs some of the characteristics of Arabic phonetics.

Some of these effects are the following: Most Tamil indigenes lengthen the half-vowel e or a at the end of words so that, for instance Rāma would be pronounced as Rāmā. This is because Tamil grammar does not permit these half-vowels at the end of words, converting them into a final am. The Muslims invariably pronounce these half-vowels. Tamil assimilates za sound to sa, with the result that Tamil indigenes pronounce za hira as să hira. Muslims pronounce them correctly. Likewise, since there is no ba sound in Tamil, all ba sounds are pronounced as pa. Hence, for instance, Bangladesh becomes Panklades. So, with fa sound. Therefore, for instance, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Farukabad are pronounced as Pakistan, Panklades and Parukapad respectively. The Muslims pronounce them distinctly and separately.
Contrary-wise, under the influence of Arabic phonology, most Muslims pronounce sa as sha. Tamil has three l sounds; the dental, the supra-dental and the cacuminal (cerebral). Muslim-spoken Tamil assimilates all these variations into the dental l. The quasi-homonyms kili in their three states mean, 'fear', 'parrot' and 'tear (rip)' respectively. Muslim Tamil dialects adopt an interesting mode. They confine kili to 'parrot' and for other two variations use different words. (There is a flip-side to these assimilations. Because of indifferent teaching of primary Arabic, Arabic qa and ka are usually undifferentiated so that qalb is more often mispronounced as kalb. This is 'innocent misrepresentation' because most Muslims of Sri Lanka do not have sufficient Arabic to know the difference.)

Other modes of Muslim-spoken Tamil include the wide use of a great deal of Arabo-Perso-Urdu words. In fact, there is a strong contingent of pure Arabic words ever on the tongue of the Tamil-speaking Muslims of Sri Lanka. Tamil grammar used to look upon words not indigenized as a serious linguistic fault. Any literary style that insisted on the use of non-indigenized words was termed mani-pravalam and discouraged by grammarians. However, it is the stock of Arabic words in Muslim folk use which creates the particular flavour of Tamil Muslim dialectology.

The reasons for the persistence of Arabic and associated languages as word-stock, can be easily counted for. In the first place, Islamic rituals require the use of Arabic words. In the second place, equivalents (really quasi-synonyms) in the indigenous languages have different overtones. In the third place, the traditional belief that the Muslims of Sri Lanka (properly, the Moors) are descended from Arab settlers reinforces the attachment to Arabic words.

But most important of all, the Muslims of Sri Lanka are conscious of their Islamic identity and the superiority of their Islamic culture. Speaking in a different context, two observers of the Middle East wrote:

Perhaps most important of all, traditional Islam has no sense of inferiority with regard to other civilizations—quite the contrary.

This is equally true of the Muslims of Sri Lanka.

(b) Dynamics of the Language Matrix

It is convenient to look upon the spoken dialects of the Muslims of Sri Lanka as a matrix in the following shape.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Sinhala</th>
<th>Tamil</th>
<th>Malay et al</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The languages in this context have the following meaning;

(i) Arabic = Classical Arabic and the 'filtered' Arabic of the maulavi, i.e. the madrasah graduate.

(ii) Tamil = Literary Tamil, the Received Standard Tamil (RST), i.e. the literary spoken Tamil used by the educated, and the predominant (non-Muslim) spoken Tamil dialect in each locality.

(iii) Sinhala = Literary Sinhala, the Received Standard Sinhala (RSS), i.e. the literary spoken Sinhala used by the educated, and the predominant (non-Muslim) spoken Sinhala dialect in each locality.

(iv) English = Literary English, the Received Standard English (RSE), i.e. the literary spoken English used by the Sri Lankans who had studied English as the first language, and the 'spoken English' as perceived in each locality.

(v) Malay and other languages = Dialect of old Batavia (which is at present used by the Malays in Sri Lanka) and other peripheral languages such as Malayalam.

The role of Arabic in the folk speech of the Muslims of Sri Lanka has been indicated above. There was an opportunity earlier in the interaction of Tamil and Arabic, that a new language, a co-mingling of both languages (such as Malayalam evolving out of Tamil) would have been born. But this was aborted by the development of Arabic-Tamil (i.e. Tamil written in Arabic script), as I have written elsewhere:

During the three centuries after the eighth century, the practitioners of Arabic-Tamil (in South India and Sri Lanka) had the following theoretical options.

(a) They could have siphoned off the vocabulary of native Tamil words, except for key verbs and particles. Thus the language would be mainly Arabic underpinned with a Tamil grammar. It would be a symbiotic language with an Arabic (Semitic) word-stock on a skeletal Tamil (Dravidian) grammar frame. A similar process, it seems, has taken place in the case of Urdu.

(b) The practitioners of Arabic-Tamil could go further. In addition, they could have pruned verb proliferation in Tamil.

(c) On the other hand, the practitioners of Arabic-Tamil could keep the study of Arabic separate from the study of Tamil. And yet,
they could acclimatize Tamil letters to cater for Muslim needs by incorporating new letters (by modifying extant Tamil letters).

(d) The Arabic-Tamil practitioners could write Tamil in the Arabic script by modifying some Arabic letters to accommodate sounds nonexistent in Tamil.

The practitioners of Arabic-Tamil chose the last and the most ineffective mode. . . !

Since, at present, Arabic in Sri Lanka, as far as systematic study is concerned, is limited to madrasah students and those limited few who read Arabic, whether as internal or external students, its impact on the folk Tamil of the Muslims could not be expected to be substantial. It is surprising that the Middle East returnees, whose number is considerable, have not introduced new Arabic words into the Tamil Muslim dialects.

Briefly, then, the characteristic contribution of Arabic is the massive cohort of Arabic words, to some extent, deflected by 'peculiar' meanings by Sri Lankan Muslims. Some of these words are in the course of being replaced by English or Tamil or Sinhala equivalents. For instance, the Arabic mas'alah is frequently substituted by the English problem or by preshna, a Sanskrit derived word, common to both Sinhala and Tamil. This process has been hastened by a greater familiarity with English words, or by school medium being Sinhala or Tamil or by exposure to the electronic media.

The impact of English on the Tamil dialects of the Muslims of Sri Lanka has been continuous. English came into use in Sri Lankan administration and trade when the British assumed control over the maritime provinces in 1796 and continued, officially till 1948 when Sri Lanka emerged independent from British rule. Subsequently, English continued to be used by the élite and the administration, since an international language was a necessity for an import-export economy which Sri Lanka was and is.

English passed from the stage of missionary (Christian) discourse to that of integrated study of its language incidents (accidence, syntax, idiom) and literature, an exercise confined to the élite and then to the stage of an international communication tool and the key to much of television programmes available in Sri Lanka. In that last aspect, television English programmes have faith and cultural implications for the Muslims of Sri Lanka, which need a separate analysis and discussion.

Upto 1948, English was taught to Sri Lankans in two ways. There was the immersion method (grammar, literature texts, supportive material) for the élite and there was the hit-or-miss method (of some translations, simple primers
and talking lessons) for those being taught in Sinhala or Tamil. After 1956, Sinhala and Tamil became media of instruction in schools. And the immersion method was phased out. English was taught through graduated texts, with situational approach and controlled word-list; formal grammar was, mainly, dispensed with. This methodology was not totally new. Basic English had been introduced in the 1930s.

Any reasonable word-list would have been better than none, for both teachers and students, but Basic has several merits as a first landing-stage in the learning of English. For the student who is not going further, it allows a confident movement within what he has got, because he can rely on analogy without bumping into 'irregular' grammatical forms. . . .

Basic English in Sri Lanka did not get off the ground, however.

The impact of English on Tamil folk speech was in two ways. For the affluent, who were at home in English because of the 'immersion method', spoken Tamil was a matter of patterned structures, so that their 'speech' was variants of these pre-formed 'templates'. This was not such a deprivation as it might appear, because Tamil was only incidental to their social or professional lives.

For the rest of the Muslims of Sri Lanka, English furnished a vast treasury of needed words. (Even today, it is so much simpler to say 'washing machine' or 'radio set' or 'cooker' than to fish for their indigenous equivalents.) In order to concur with the requirements of folk Tamil, these nouns acquire helping 'vowel prefixes' before sound clusters (so that school becomes ischool) and the final r is sounded (so that, for instance, cooker becomes cookeR).

Owing to accelerated teaching in indigenous languages, the former strong and pervasive tendency to use English words with indigenous (Tamil) auxiliary verbs is fast weakening. Yet, it might be expected that more and more English words would enter the Muslim Tamil dialects in the future.

Sinhala language

The role of Sinhala in the Muslim Tamil dialects has been growing through the last two decades. This is because English has ceased to be the medium of instruction. Muslims have a choice of having their children taught either in Tamil or Sinhala. This has brought a new dimension to the Muslim Tamil dialects. Formerly, teaching in Tamil merely strengthened the grammatical base of Muslim Tamil dialects and steered them towards literary orthodoxy.

Teaching in Sinhala, which is of a different language group, introduces a new impact and invites new responses, from Muslim Tamil dialects.
Till 1956, few Muslims chose Sinhala as a medium of education; English for the élite and Tamil for the generality of Muslims of Sri Lanka, were the media of education. However, Muslim villages, except perhaps in the north and east (Sri Lanka) abutted onto or were enclosed by Sinhala villages. Hence the influence of the Sinhala language on Muslims spoken dialects of Tamil was osmotic (through face-to-face contacts) and not percolative (through direct teaching).

One osmotic influence seems to be the verb in the spoken Tamil Muslim dialects. A modern grammarian of Sinhala writes:

The verb in colloquial Sinhalese considerably differs from that in the literary language. Generally we can say that it is simplified. . . . In the present tense, for both the numbers and all the three persons, the form in -anava, -inava, -enava is used.47

The other osmotic influence is the large number of Sinhala nouns (themselves 'fossilized' Portuguese and Dutch derivatives) in the Muslim-Tamil dialects. Portugal ruled the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka (then, Ceylon) between 1505 and 1656 and the Dutch from thence to 1796. For this reason, Sinhala uses, for instance, the Portuguese word _almirah_ for shelf and Dutch _boodel_ for landed property. (The most curious is _sapattu_ derived from Portuguese _zapato_ for shoe. Hence, this word is incomprehensible to Tamil-speaking Muslims of South India, who prefer to use the words _shoe_ or _boots_.)48

Sinhala syntax has, to some extent, made inroads into Muslim-Tamil dialects. For instance, Sinhala prefers to make 'request-statements' in the interrogative mode. This use is making its way into Muslim-Tamil dialects. The impact of the Sinhala language is extensive in the capital, Colombo, and environs and in the south of Sri Lanka.

Malay and Other Languages

The influence of these languages on Muslim Tamil dialects is peripheral or incidental or derivative.

The Malay language as well as its Javanese equivalents came to Sri Lanka through early Malay-Javanese settlements and later, through levies (of soldiers) raised by the Dutch and the British.49 That the Malays-Javanese were _Shafi’ite_ Sunnis like the Muslims of Sri Lanka was helpful. They contributed the names of fruits such as _magosteen_ and _rambutan_ as well as specialized words such as _dakin_ for beef and _sabje_ for a hemp-based drink.

The influence of the former colonial languages, Portuguese and Dutch, has been noticed above. The influence of Malayalam, the sister language of
Tamil, on the Muslim Tamil dialects warrants analysis. Some of the impact of Malayalam is sketched under.

Users of Spoken Tamil Dialects of the Muslims of Sri Lanka

The bedrock of the spoken Muslim Tamil dialects is the sector comprising semi-literate Muslims of both sexes, school dropouts and those trained in English and/or Sinhala. This sector is being eaten into, partly through the death of the aged and the phasing out of English, forcing the acquisition of Tamil, whether written or spoken. The dilution or the cessation of Muslim enclaves in Sri Lanka is, also, a contributory to the 'diminution effect'.

The school child, speaking Muslim-Tamil dialects, rapidly acquires standard literary Tamil, when he is taught in the Tamil medium. This is partly because, a continued use of folk words is an encumbrance on his writing work and partly because of a repugnance of being thought of as a country bumpkin. Hence, such Arabic words as niyāh and nishān are replaced by karūthu (standard Tamil word) and ābib-rayā (Tamil word derived from Sanskrit), both meaning idea or opinion. Folk circumlocutions, such as ettu kāl pūchī (eight-legged-insect) for spider has given way to silenthī (standard Tamil word).

Two factors block the wholesale word-transfer-technology. One is the lack of equivalents for most religio-social words of Arabo-Perso-Urdu origin. In that sense, the mosque and the madrasah stand as bulwarks against the Tamilization (and Sinhalization) of spoken Muslim-Tamil dialects.

The other factor is the vital role of spoken Muslim-Tamil dialects as a preservative, and as an identity-classifier. When Muslims meet it is usual to employ spoken Muslim-Tamil dialects. Thus, these dialects continued to be in active circulation. Formerly, a large part of its dynamism came from the Muslim women, who had little education and who spent most of their lives in seclusion at home. 'Untainted' by any other linguistic influence, the folk dialects deepened and proliferated. (Any new linguistic innovations of the males were scotched at home by the inflexible, monolithic folk dialects which and only which the Muslim women spoke. Likewise, the children learnt folk dialects from birth.) At present, as a large number of Muslim females are educated and not an insignificant number are in employment, the ground base of spoken Muslim-Tamil dialects is not so firmly established as it used to be.

Still, most Muslims use the spoken Muslim-Tamil dialects, in face-to-face relationships. Critics have hinted at this rate of use, spoken Muslim-Tamil dialects would be perilously close to becoming Gaunersprache. Attempts have been made to give a kind of permanance to spoken Muslim-Tamil dialects, by introducing these into literary work, in novels, short stories, plays and (rarely) poetry, written in Tamil. But there are some constraints. In order to ensure
communicability, fiction can only incorporate a certain amount of folk material; else, the generality of Tamil speakers will lose the trend of the fiction. Next, the Tamil script lacks signs for sounds, $f$, $b$, $z$ which occur in numerous words of Muslim-Tamil dialects. Many Muslim intellectuals called for the introduction of such adapted letters. Dr A.M.A. Azeez, educationist and man-of-letters, in particular, urged the adoption of such letters. But, the Muslim community has not addressed its mind to this process. The adoption of some letters from Malayalam appears to the present writer, a workable solution. In South India and also in Sri Lanka, Malayalam founts are not difficult to find. In South India there exists today, and in Sri Lanka there was till recently, a vigourous Malayalam Press.

At present, the high users of spoken Muslim-Tamil dialects are those in 'enclosed' or 'semi-enclosed' environments such as traditional Muslim men and women, madrasah teachers and students, mosque functionaries, retailers and farmers. Medium users would include working-women, skilled male workers, businessmen and teachers in Muslim schools. The typical low user of spoken Muslim-Tamil dialects are the urban elites whose preferred language is English and working tool, the Sinhala language. Others in this category are teachers of Tamil language, Tamil-trained academics, teachers in non-Muslim schools and 'Tamil-media-men'.

With these factors as background, it is possible to schematize a phono-cartograph of the Muslims of Sri Lanka, as regards the Tamil language.

THE PHONO-ZONES OF THE SPOKEN MUSLIM-TAMIL DIALECTS OF SRI LANKA

The map below gives the locational bearings of the matrix concerning Arabic and its affectant languages, discussed above.

(1) Phono-Zone A

This is the administrative district of Colombo. It houses the apparatus of the state, including Parliament, the apex courts, administrative institutions. It is also, one of the earliest settlements of the Muslims of Sri Lanka and has received the notice of celebrated travellers such as Ibn Battūtah. Perhaps, it has the highest concentration of Muslims in Sri Lanka, including some of the most affluent, the most educated and the the most influential.

Consequently, the phono-zone shows the influence of many languages in its spoken Muslim-Tamil. Consequently, too, it has the greatest attachment to Arabic, and Arabic-associated words, as if to countervail the influence of other languages.
MAP

Phono-Zones of the Spoken Muslim Tamil Dialects of Sri Lanka
A curious aspect of this phono-zone is the use of an English word (substantives mainly) with a Tamil auxiliary verb. For instance by-force panninaan, where panninaan is auxiliary (Tamil) verb to cause. The sentence reads he made use of force. Other features are (i) vowel shifts, for example, ii becomes oo and e becomes o; (ii) consonant shifts; eg, so becomes se and pe becomes po. Special idiomatic forms are used; for instance 'car drivers' are called by the Tamil equivalent of 'car chasers'. At present, there is a tendency to substitute Sinhala words for some Tamil words; when these are homophones (such as pana which means 'cash' in Tamil and 'life' in Sinhala). In this event, the Tamil homophone is replaced by a different (Tamil) word.

**Phono-Zone B**

This phono-zone runs south of phono-zone A. It includes the Western and Southern littoral of Sri Lanka. It encloses early Arab settlements. The vocabulary used to be heavy with Arabic words, Perso-Urdu words being less pervasive, since this zone is far from the bazaar-structure of Colombo.

It was said, with some justification, that most Muslims here invariably replaced the standard Tamil sound sa with the Arabic sha. Verbs in standard Tamil with consonantal clusters ttha are always softened to ccha and the finite verb, ending the spoken sentence has the weak sound ya. Likewise, the standard Tamil particle of negation (which ends in the sound ai) here has the same weak ya.

Phono-zone B has two sub-zones, which have some interesting variations. Galle sub-zone (marked 'x' in map) used to prefer (it is obsolete now) the adjective kunji (Malayalam for 'little') while Tamil uses the term sinna. This could be explained by the fact that the littoral of Sri Lanka was controlled by the Dutch between 1656 and 1796, while, at the same time, they were principal buyers of pepper and cardamoms from the Malayalam-speaking regions of South India. There were other linguistic similarities with Malayalam in this sub-zone.

The sub-zone (marked 'y' in phono-zone B) shows the influence of Malay-Javanese dialects. Apparently, the original settlers of this area were from Java and parts of present-day Malaysia. In this sub-zone there are two versions; a spoken Muslim Tamil dialect, with a great deal of Javanese loan-words; and a 'skeletal' archaic Batavian (Javanese) dialect depending on Tamil nouns and verbs.

**Phono-Zone C**

Phono-zone C is a littoral-inland area, with emphasis on agri-business in coconut and rubber; yet, traditional Sinhala elites hold out as landowners.
Hence, Sinhala terms for land-holding and associated matters have been incorporated into the spoken Muslim-Tamil dialect. (The Sinhala term for 'squire', ralahamy is in popular use and used to refer to Muslim rich men.) English words are discounted; archaic Arabic words are preferred.

**Phono-Zone D**

Phono-zone D is the North-Western littoral. It has had Muslim settlements from early times. One of its ports, Mannar, was an important inter-Asian clearing house from tenth to the fourteenth century. Another port, Kalpitiya (Calpentyn), continued to be in use during Portuguese (1505–1656) and the Dutch (1656–1796) periods. A number of Muslims of this region were, and are, involved in fishing and fishing-related activities. South Indian ports are at a short distance. This fact has led to the incorporation of a large number of words in use in the Tamil-speaking parts of South India. The availability of broad tracts of land has created a Muslim land-owing class. This situation has encouraged the visits of learned men from South on sponsored Muslim missionary and cultural activities. Consequently, the Muslim-spoken Tamil dialect tends towards the literary.

**Phono-Zone E**

Phono-zone E is the northern-most region. The Muslims are found in certain specified precincts. They numbered 12,958 in 1981. The spoken Tamil of the non-Muslims here shows interesting variations. Generally, the spoken Tamil finite verbs in other zones either have vague or weak terminations (to differentiate first, second, third person, number and gender). However, in phono-zone E, the normal spoken Tamil adopts a different practice. The finite verb is really the verb-stem prefixed to the nominative case of the pronouns (both gender and person). The Muslim-spoken Tamil participates in this practice. The pronunciation is staccato and there is no slurring of consonants. Expectedly, the stock of words contains a large number of Arabo-Perso-Urdu terms.

**Phono-Zone F**

Phono-zone F is a large area but the population is relatively sparse. This is true of the Muslim population, too. The land is largely subsistent-farming area, depending on irrigation. Being far away from the administrative structure in Colombo, English never had any deep hold in this region. The influence of the Sinhala language is pervasive both in language stock and intonation, in the spoken Muslim Tamil of the phono-zone F.

There is a substantial amount of archaic Arabic words in the spoken Muslim Tamil. Since most Muslims are involved in farming activities or small
businesses, Sinhala farming terms are a staple of this dialect. And since, some of the Muslim traders, formerly, penetrated into the remote parts of this area for commodities such as honey and skins, some of the specialized 'patois' of these village folk were found in the Muslim spoken Tamil, too. One such 'patois' was Govi-basava (farmers' language). This is used during the various operations of paddy cultivation. Conventional words and phrases, different from those of the current language, are used for the operations of the cultivators and for the implements employed by them.

Another 'patois' was the Kale-basava (jungle language). It was originally invented by the Vaddas and by the Vanniyas, a small tribe of hunters living in the North-Central Province, but the custom was also imitated by Sinhalese. This language is used, when they are wandering or hunting in the forest.

Recently, the improvement of the economic conditions of the Muslims and also, advancement of education, have helped to steer the spoken Muslim-Tamil dialect of this zone towards that of phono-zone A.

Phono-Zone G

Phono-zone G is a highland region. It is the centre of the tea plantation agriculture, the principal cash-crop of Sri Lanka. Much wealth was, and is, produced. There is an established affluent class, which also includes a proportion of Muslims. The prevalence of the English was strong. The Muslim-spoken Tamil dialect thus is an amalgam of a strong contingent of English words, Arabo-Perso-Urdu vocabulary (akin to phono-zone A). However, the presence of Indian estate Tamil workers (originally indentured labourers) have added a lilt to the spoken language, which used to be most noticeable among the poorer Muslims.

Phono-Zone H

Phono-zone H is a highland region, too. In fact, phono-zone H is a variant of phono-zone G. It differs from phono-zone G in the following respects. (a) The pervasiveness of English is less strong. (b) The influence of 'estate Tamil workers' Tamil dialect' is stronger. (c) The area is sparsely (relatively) populated. (d) The eastern portion of this phono-zone has substantial number of traditional Sinhala farmers. All these have had an impact on the spoken Tamil of these Muslims.
Phono-Zone I

Phono-zone I is an intermediate zone. It is not far from the administrative structure in Colombo. Yet, this area has established economic resources in rubber production and the gem industry. It is an area where the Sinhala language is entrenched. However, since the economic resources are export-oriented, English is a necessary language adjunct here. In consequence, the spoken Muslim Tamil dialect has the usual Arabic vocabulary base, a greater number of Sinhala words. Incidentally, the spoken Muslim Tamil has a large number of words related to gems and gemming, including, Sinhala, English and even some Japanese words (Japan being an important buyer of the precious stones of Sri Lanka).

Phono-Zone J

Phono-zone J is the eastern littoral of Sri Lanka. This is the phono-zone the farthest from Colombo. Hence, the knowledge of English words or their use was rare except among the Muslim elite who were, as a rule, educated in Colombo. The spoken Muslim Tamil has obvious similarities with that of the Tamil-speaking Muslims of South India. Indeed, the intonation is not far from that of Malayalam.

In this zone, there are a stock of Tamil words, rare among other zones. Some of these are verbs, such as koluthal (burning) for pathuthal (lamp-lighting). Some are adjectives such as aruthalaka (relaxedly) for methuwaka (slowly). An interesting linguistic practice is the vocative thamby (younger brother) usually shortened to mby. The genitive of nouns is equally shortened nra instead of udaya.

CONCLUSION

The above schematic description of the phono-zones of the spoken Muslim Tamil dialects, should be understood, in the terms of reference discussed above. Also, increasing educational facilities have a centripetal effect. The educated persons, who generally receive their tertiary training in Colombo, tend to adopt the speech traits of phono-zone A. This practice follows them, when they go back to their respective home-towns or villages. However, the necessity of preserving a distinct style of speech, has controlled the evolving levelling process.

\[1\] Ceylon was the name Sri Lanka had till 1972 when it became a republic. It is an island of 25,000 sq. miles, lying south of India. It is multi-ethnic (Sinhala, Tamil, Muslims, Burghers); multi-
religious (Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam); multi-linguistic (Sinhala, Tamil, English). (All dates in this article are in CE.)

Wilhelm Geiger, A Grammar of the Sinhalese Language (Colombo: Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch, 1938), pp. 2 seq. According to the last Census (1981), the total population was 14,988,000, of which Buddhists were 69.31%; Hindus 14.46%; Muslims, 7.4%; the Christians, also 7.4%. The Sinhala are mainly Buddhists (though some are Christians); the Tamils are largely Hindus (though some are Christians).

Tamil categorise define themselves as Ceylon Tamils and the Indian Tamils, the latter are the descendants of tea-estate workers, originally from Ramnad, Trichy, Tinnevelly and Tanjore districts of (present day) Tamil Nadu.

All Christians of Sri Lanka are either Sinhala or Tamils.

The Burghers, a very small community, are the descendants of the Dutch settlers in Sri Lanka.


Azeez, Ethnological Survey, p. 4.

Ibid. p. 5.


Malayalam, a branch of the Dravidian family ... struck out on its own by the 10th century AD", Manorama Year Book 1984 (Kottayam, Kerala, India: Manorama Publishing House 1884), p. 394.


The word Marikar added as a surname by some Muslims in South India and Sri Lanka is a Tamil/Malayalam word meaning 'ship-trader' or 'ship-man'.

Mahroof and Azeez, Ethnological Survey, passim.

G.C. Mendis, Ceylon under the British (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries Ltd, 1944), passim.

M.M.M. Mahroof, "Arabic-Tamil . . . .", Islamic Studies (Summer, 93), 169 seq.

Ibid.

Ibid. Also, A.M.A. Azeez, Arabu Thamil Enkal Anbu Thamil (Arabic-Tamil, Our Cherished Tamil) (Colombo: Diamond Press, 1972).

As a rule, Muslim bridegrooms of Sri Lanka and South India tie the thali (matrimonial necklace) on the neck of their brides as form of ceremonial investiture of wifely status.

Kilakarai and Kayal Pattinam are landing stages (ports) in Ramnad and Tinnevelly districts respectively. Kottaru is a town in Tamil Nadu, close to the Kerala state.

Rif'iyyah is a tariqah, dating back to its founder, Sayyid Ahmad Kabîr Rif'i'i. In Sri Lanka, this tariqah is incorporated by Act of Parliament. The Jîfriyyah is a sub-fraternity of the Qadîriyyah tariqah.


At present, there are some popular gazeteers of Tamil Nadu which give some historical background, such as those of L. Thamivalavan.

The Sri Lankan Muslim scholar, M.M. Uwise, has pioneered the field of Islamic Tamil Literature.

M.M. Uwise, "The Language and Literature of the Muslim", in *Etnological Survey* (ch. VIII).


When the present writer was a senior official in the Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs, a draft for a model Qur'anic school on correct pedagogic practice was taken up for consideration; but it did not come to fruition, because of public apathy, mainly.

"Azeez, *Arabu Thamil, passim*.


The Received Standard English, is today, a fading discipline, known and used only by those over forty-five years of age.


Mahroof, "A Millennium of Qur'anic Schools...", *Muslim Education Quarterly* (Autumn, 88), 15 seq.


The early stages of English acclimatization are discussed in M.M.M. Mahroof, "Muslim Education in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) 1881–1901", *Islamic Culture*, vol. xlvii, no. 4 (October, 1973), 301 seq.


The electronic media (particularly radio) in Sri Lanka, frequently, gives courses in Sinhala in its Tamil broadcasts and vice versa.


M. Murad Jayah, "The Sri Lankan Malays: A Brief Historical Survey", in *Souvenir, Muslim Development Fund* (Colombo, n.d.).

In the southern littoral of Sri Lanka, where the *RisΔ'iyah tartiqah* was prominent, some knowledge of Arabic-Malayalam was available. The preceptors of this *tartiqah* from Lakshadeep islands off Kerala, had Malayalam as their home-language.

A.M. Azeez, *Arabu Thamil, passim*.

Malayalam has the letters 'missing' in Tamil. For instance, the Malayalam letter $b$ is the Tamil *sa* and *pa* ligatured. The Malayalam $f$ is a hook prefixed to Tamil $ma$.


58 Ibid.


60 The population figures have, to some extent, changed today. Because of uncertain conditions due to Tamil militancy, large numbers of Muslims have been displaced in some areas.


64 Ibid.