About seven percent of the population of Sri Lanka are Muslims. Sri Lanka is a multi-religious (Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Christian), multi-ethnic (Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers) and multi-linguistic (Sinhala, Tamil, English) state. Sri Lanka has been frequently compared to a mosaic or even a bouquet of different flowers, where each element adds strength to the totality.

Given these parameters, the Muslims, throughout the ages, have been aware of the linguistic potential of the country. Many of them are excellent linguists, with effortless fluency in English, Tamil and Sinhala. The compiler of the standard bibliography of published works by Muslims states that the Muslims of Sri Lanka have published books in many languages including, English, Sinhala, Tamil, Arabic, Malay, Arabic-Tamil and Malayalam. This a feat unrivalled by any other ethnic group in Sri Lanka. At the same time, the various sub-groups among the Muslims of Sri Lanka have a wide language spectrum between themselves. For instance, the Malays speak Malay (really, a Batavian–Javanese dialect). The Memon, the Bohras and the Khojas speak Urdu, apart from their regional dialects of origin. The national and provincial élites among the Muslims are fluent in English. The fast disappearing traditional élites are familiar with Arabic-Tamil. The maulavis, of course, are conversant with Arabic, at differing levels of attainment, varying according to intensity of teaching, innate ability and opportunity.

A recent phenomenon is the increasing number of Middle East (job) returnees, both Muslims and non-Muslims and both males and females. All of them have some familiarity with spoken Arabic, whether urban or rural dialects. A number of the returnees have got over the intricacies of Arabic pronunciation. The pronunciation of some Arabic consonants proved difficult for many Muslims. They could be properly enunciated only by those who had the
opportunity of observing the native speakers or had a wide knowledge of languages.

THE SINHALA LANGUAGE: SHAPE AND PURPOSE

The Sinhala language is the mother tongue of the Sinhalese, the predominant ethnic group in Sri Lanka. Referring to the nature of the language, a modern grammarian and philologist wrote:

As to the linguistic character of Sinhalese it is now generally admitted by scientists that it is one of the Indo-Aryan Vernaculars like Marathi, Bengali, Hindi etc. . . . Nevertheless, it was probably influenced in its development by the neighbouring Dravidian languages. I do not refer to the vocabulary, which indeed contains a good number of Tamil loan-words, for loan-words do not touch the character of a language. English, for example, in spite of the enormous mass of foreign elements in its vocabulary, ranks with the German languages and has been treated, for that reason, in Paul's *Grundriss der Germanischen Philologie* . . . by F. Kluge. We must rather try to trace the Dravidian influence in grammar and style. . . .

Indeed, that view has had currency in Sri Lanka for a very long time. Writing more than one hundred and forty years ago, James d'Alwis, member of the Ceylon Legislative Council, lawyer and man-of-letters had put forward that idea, in his introduction to his English translation of a medieval Sinhala grammar, the *Sidat Sangarava*. He wrote:

The Singhalese is unquestionably an Indian dialect; and looking merely to the geographical position of Ceylon, it is but natural to conclude that . . . their language belongs to the Southern family of languages. To trace, therefore, the Singhalese to one of the Northern family of languages, and to call it a dialect of Sanscrit, is apparently far more difficult than to assign it an origin common with the Telingu, Tamil and Malayalam, the Southern family. But in view of all the arguments pro and con, the Singhalese appears to us either to be a kindred language of the Sanscrit, or one of those tongues (as indeed the Singhalese Alphabet, as old as the language itself, testifies.) which falls under the head of the Southern class. Yet upon the whole, we incline to the opinion, that it is the former. . . .

James d'Alwis went on to discuss the similarity between the Sinhala and the Tamil alphabet.

For who can look at the Tamil and Sinhalese alphabets without being struck with the sameness of their arrangement, and the resemblance in
James d'Alwis pointed out that there were similarities between Sinhala and Tamil as regards the letters, $e/ u/ ee/ uu/ k/ p/ y/ r/ n$; and also $pa/ pi/ pu/ puu/ po/ poo/ pe$ etc. James d'Alwis also discussed the eclectic nature of the Sinhala vocabulary. Referring to the speech habits of the Sinhala, he wrote:

They, or at least the greater portion of the rising generation, are incapable of carrying on a conversation for any length of time, without introducing Portuguese, Dutch, English or even Tamil terms — a practice, we regret to perceive is gaining ground in the towns of this Island. We freely admit, that with European civilization, the introduction of European institutions, manufactures etc., European words and names, before unknown to the Singhalese, must necessarily obtain among us; as for instance orlosuwa, Portuguese watch; boodela, boedel (estate) in Dutch; joori, English jury etc. But how can anyone therefore justify the wanton admixture of purely European and not infrequently Tamil words with the Singhalese?

A later grammarian, Abraham Mendis Gunasekera, too, noted and classified the list of Tamil loan words in Sinhala, both discrete nouns and nouns suffixed by Sinhala auxiliary verbs. Another Sinhala grammarian, W. Fonseka Gunawardene, who flourished in the 1920s took the view that Sinhala grammar was influenced greatly by Tamil language and that the underpinings of the medieval Sinhala grammar, the Sidat Sangarava, was Dravidian. However, his views failed to win acceptance either among the indigenous literati or Western orientalists.

Grammarians have emphasized the difference between literary Sinhala which is highly inflected and governed by strict ordonnance and spoken Sinhala which is virtually free from these 'constraints'. Geiger noted that, as regards the colloquial/verb,

in the Present tense for both the numbers and all the three persons. the form in $-anavā, -inavā, -enavā$ is used.

These characteristics of Sinhala vis-à-vis the Tamil language have a vital significance in the language modality of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. It is generally accepted that Tamil is the home language of the Sri Lankan Muslims. At first sight, it would be surprising why a community claiming descent from Arab settlers should have the most intricate, the most developed and the most self-sufficient of the Dravidian languages as their intimate language.
Various explanations have been put forward to explain this state of affairs. One reason was the dominance of Colombo, principle port and metropolis of Sri Lanka today, over the Muslims of Sri Lanka. Throughout history, Colombo has had one of the strongest concentrations of Muslims in the Island. Besides, the exigencies of the external trade of Sri Lanka, in which the port of Colombo was the main participant, necessitated the presence of the Muslim intelligentsia in Colombo. The income which the port generated gave the financial underpinnings to the influence and example of Colombo Muslims. Tamil which was the predominant tongue of South India easily became the lingua franca, uniting the many foreign populations which visited or took part in the activities of the port of Colombo and its trade. Referring to medieval Colombo, a modern historian writes.

Apart from the Sinhala fisher-families who lived in the environs, there were Arabs who had come from the great mart at Ormuz, Marwaris, Bengalis and Burmans, and others from the coasts of near and farther Coromandel and Malabar.\textsuperscript{19} In those circumstances, the merchanting role of South India and its language, Tamil, was great.

Further, after the European occupation of Sri Lanka, which continued from 1505 to 1948, the role of South India (including what used to be known as the Madras Presidency and Kerala of today) remained important in the affairs of the Muslims of Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{20} When the Portuguese exerted commercial and political pressure on the Muslims, some of the energetic and affluent among them found it expedient to sail across to Kerala, particularly to Calicut (presently Kozhikodu) then ruled by the Zamorins, whose fleet was officered mainly by Muslims. The expulsion of the Muslims of Colombo and their entry into the Kandyan kingdom, an indigenously ruled principality in the central hills of Sri Lanka, might have, also, helped in the transfer and fostering of Tamil among the Muslims of that region.\textsuperscript{21}

The South Indian connection with the Muslims of Sri Lanka would have continued during the Dutch regime. The Dutch took systematic, though not always effective, steps. For instance, one Dutch Governor of Ceylon directed his subordinate in charge of the southern sea-board to register all Muslims living there and to prevent 'Muslim priests' from entering that area.\textsuperscript{22} During the period when Britain was in control of Sri Lanka, there was close trade and other affiliations with South India, itself under British authority. In addition, the Tamil-speaking Muslims of South India, were frequently the background of reference to the Muslims in Sri Lanka. They furnished the services of Islamic theologians, established branches of \textit{tariq}, caused the provision of books on Islamic and other topics and participated in the use of Arabic-Tamil (i.e. Tamil written in Arabic script).\textsuperscript{23}
All these could be adduced as reasons for the home language being Tamil for the Muslims. It was, of course, true that Tamil handled by the Muslims of Sri Lanka has some determining characteristics of its own, most perceived in the spoken mode. Some of these characteristics are, the preference for a single verb form for all three persons; the avoidance of the passive; and in phonology, the softening of all / sounds into a single sound; the avoidance of s sound in favour of sh sound. However, there is no difference in the literary use of Tamil by the Muslims, except in the use of some words, usually Arabo-Turko-Urdu derivatives. Hence, the use of Tamil by the Muslims of Sri Lanka encompasses two aspects, a spoken dialect of exclusive use and a literary Tamil common to both Muslims and ethnic Tamils.

It is in this background that a proper assessment of the status and role of the Sinhala language among the Muslims of Sri Lanka, can take place.

STATUS AND ROLE OF SINHALA AMONG SRI LANKAN MUSLIMS: PRE-1956

The role of Sinhala during the medieval times, that is up to the arrival of the Portuguese, was simple enough. All members of the Sinhala community knew and spoke Sinhala; the only difference was that the educated among them knew Sinhala at a higher level together with classical languages such as Sanskrit and Pali. The case of the Muslims, as well as other communities, was equally simple. They had a spoken knowledge of Sinhala, which differed much or little, depending on the distance from the capital, where the standard spoken Sinhala prevailed.

The entry of the Portuguese was to change this situation. Though the Portuguese, both as administrators and soldiers, acquired a modicum of Sinhala, the decision-makers among the Sinhala community found it convenient to learn Portuguese. In course of time, Portuguese percolated to the masses of the Sinhala; this accounts for the large number of Portuguese loan words in Sinhala. Though most of these were nouns, some basic terms in Sinhala were, and are, Portuguese. The Dutch language did not have such a deep impact, though a considerable number of Dutch words are found in Sinhala. The British, when they occupied Sri Lanka, set up a position of economic liberalisation and freedom of expression. They also helped to create a middle-class, assuming that a social class is a group of persons conscious of certain traits and of certain common ways of behaviour which distinguish them from members of other social classes with other traits and other ways of behaviour . . . to be a full member of a social class, an individual must both feel himself to be so and must be felt by others to be so.
The British in Ceylon from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards succeeded in establishing a system of public schools, a contrivance, which using the English language as medium of instruction, instilled institutionally the values of the English middle classes.

Indeed, the importance of a public school education in the English class structure has been held to be so great that the natural division of the whole country would fall between the class above and the class below the old school tie. This would neatly separate England into the ruling class and the rest. 27

Hence, English captured the attention of the decision-makers in Sri Lankan society. And Sinhala was relegated to the status of traditional studies.

In these circumstances, a knowledge of spoken Sinhala was enough for most Muslims. This is not to discount the fact that some Muslims, specially gifted and inclined, did produce substantial works in Sinhala on serious topics. For instance, H.M. Nizamddin Sahib wrote and published in 1902, a work on Yunānī (traditional Muslim) medicine in Sinhala. 28

A knowledge of spoken Sinhala was acquired by the Muslims of Sri Lanka in many ways. Those engaged in trade sold and bought goods from the Sinhalese, in the course of which they acquired some knowledge, largely trade-based. Since the transfer of information was the only requirement, none or, at least few, bothered about acquiring the correct accent or elegant language. That was not the case with the Muslims who studied and practised Ayurveda or co-mingled Yunānī with Ayurveda (the traditional medicine of the Sinhalese). They had to learn, sometimes to memorise, Ayurvedic treatises in Sinhala, mainly in verse. Most of these treatises were written in Sinhala verse of high quality. For instance,

_Yoga Ratnakara_, a book no less celebrated for its doctrines on medicine, than esteemed for the elegance of its versification. 29

Those Muslims who lived in villages close to the villages of the Sinhalese, generally, acquired a correct accentuation and enunciation of Sinhala words. (Correct Sinhala pronunciation can only be acquired by constant observation of indigenous speakers. This is particularly important because Sinhala has vowel and consonant systems different from those of Tamil.) Their stock of Sinhala words, too, were comprehensive.

The acquisition of the Sinhala language by the Muslims of Sri Lanka varied according to the regions. Where Sinhalese predominated (the greatest concentration being in the Western Province), the Muslims' acquaintance with Sinhala was greater, because of greater contact. For the same reason, those
Muslims who constantly went into the interior to buy local produce such as grains and spices, spoke idiomatic Sinhala.

There was yet another factor at work. Urban Muslim élites (national élites) were frequently insulated from contact with the mass of the people (Sinhalese included), by servants, poor relations and dependants; this made even picking up colloquial Sinhala unnecessary. English was the forte and the badge of rank for urban Muslim élites. Any Muslim who had an interest in classical Sinhala literature had to deal with theses unknown and unfelt in his upbringing and experience such pieces in the classical works as (the thirteenth-century) Saddharma Ratnavaalis, (the twelfth-century) Amavatura and Muvadev-davata. (This perception is perhaps also true of some classical Tamil literature.)

With these facts in mind, it is possible to schematize the language abilities of the social groups among the Muslims of Sri Lanka. (The modal years for this exercise would be the mid-1940s.)

**National élites (affluent urban Muslims)**

Tamil (low/medium); Sinhala (low); English (medium/high)

**Provincial élites (rural affluent Muslims)**

Tamil (medium/high); Sinhala (low/medium); English (low/medium)

**Middle-middle class (professionals etc.)**

Tamil (medium/high); Sinhala (low/medium); English (medium/high)

**Lower middle class (junior clerical servants/mercantile workers etc.)**

Tamil (medium/high); Sinhala (medium); English (low).

**Workers and the rest of the population (artisans, manual workers etc.)**

Tamil (low/medium); Sinhala (low); English (insignificant/low).

This socio-linguistic stratification was reflected in the school structure which serviced the Muslims of Sri Lanka. Nearly all of the schools established by the Government or by private Muslims non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of those times were Tamil or English medium schools. There was resurgence of Muslim education in the 1930s, when a measure of civil responsibility was received by Ceylonese, a considerable number of primary Government schools were established, principally in the rural sector of Sri Lanka. These were called Government Muslim schools. These were in the
Tamil medium. Apart from this socio-linguistic stratification, there was the adventitious stratum of *maulavis*. The *maulavis* were, and are, graduates (sanad holders) of madrasahs recognized by the Department of Education (of the Government of Sri Lanka). Their language abilities differed from the rest of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. Schematizing thus;

*Maulavis*

Arabic (medium/high); Tamil (medium/high); Sinhala (low/medium); English (low).

In that period, employment-wise, too, Sinhala, along with Tamil, were not attractive prospects. Neither the Government departments nor the mercantile sector were keen on offering jobs to those well-qualified in Sinhala or Tamil. Teaching in Government or private schools was the only option. Here, too, there were drawbacks. For instance, teachers trained at the Government Training College in the English-medium were given salaries higher than those who had been trained by indigenous-language institutions. While the reason for the mercantile firms preferring English qualifications was that the import-export economy of Sri Lanka was needed to be serviced by English-language personnel, there was no such reason for government departments. Equally, Sinhala and Tamil did not qualify for high academic or professional purposes. Even Latin, a language studied by a few and spoken by none, was considered better in this regard. A pass in the senior school (secondary school) examination was necessary, *inter alia*, for Ceylon Medical College and the Ceylon Law College admissions. Under these circumstances, Sinhala was not high in the educational priorities of the Sri Lankan Muslim.

**STATUS AND ROLE OF SINHALA AMONG SRI LANKAN MUSLIMS:**

**POST-1956**

This situation changed to a great extent when Ceylon gained independence from the British in 1948. In 1956, the government passed laws making Sinhala the official language of Ceylon (Official Language Act, Act. no. 33 of 1956). (Tamil was given reasonable role.) English was to be phased out.

The phasing out of English meant the gradual transfer of administration from the use of English to Sinhala (and Tamil *mutatis mutandis*). While this, involved the senior personnel learning Sinhala, it also necessitated a grasp of English on the part of the new-indigenous-language-qualified administrator, because he had to understand the old government files. This process could be expected to continue for quite a long time.

It was the transformation of Sinhala from the language spoken by the predominant section of population in the country into the language of national
discourse. (This view applies to Tamil \textit{mutatis mutandis} but keeping to the subject matter of this article, Tamil will not be discussed here.)

A language of national discourse is the official language of a country but apart from its administration dimension, it will also have literary, artistic, social and societal aspects. Some aspects which need emphasis are,

(a) \textbf{The Translation effect}

While primary, and to some extent secondary, education in Sri Lanka, were in the indigenous languages (Sinhala and Tamil), higher education was entirely in English. It was so in university studies, professional studies (ranging from law and accountancy to surveying and elementary book-keeping). Hence, these books had to be translated into Sinhala.\textsuperscript{32} Supportive literature, as in legal studies, needed translation, too, for they were essential for those who wished to practise law.\textsuperscript{33} The Government instituted official steps, such as the Official Languages Department; yet the task was formidable.

Translation of serious literature, has, at least, three dislocating factors. These might be schematized thus.

(i) \textbf{The Transliteration Anomaly}

The easiest way to translate serious works (technical and scientific, for instance) is to incorporate English terms into Sinhala material. This process is irresistible in subjects such as chemistry. But a large-scale incorporation of transliterated English terms would make the translation rather a creole variety of English. One alternative was to coin native words (of Sinhala) as equivalents. Another and a favourite device was to derive Sinhala equivalents from Sanskrit derivatives; this was a logical practice because Sinhala has a large stock of 'naturalised' Sanskrit words. Still, there were cases where some translations of words were not satisfactory.\textsuperscript{34} Both these modes needed extensive glossaries, which, frequently have to be made up-date.

(ii) \textbf{The Transformation Anomaly}

Some of the books to be translated into Sinhala from English have implied premises. For instance, most of the history books are Euro-centred. But the student trained in English becomes acclimatised to this premise and is able to discount it in his study of the text. But indifferent translators, by not taking steps to correctly assess the context, might make the translated text funny or even hilarious.
(iii) The Text Reduction Anomaly

Generally, texts in English are concise because terms of art are not explained. Anyone needing explanations may consult dictionaries of technical terms. But these facilities, are in the main, unavailable in Sinhala. Hence, there is a tendency for translators to simplify matters which reduces the sophistication or technical rigour as compared to the original.

Despite these handicaps, however, there is a solid body of translated material in Sinhala, some of which is of international standard. But there is still, an overriding factor. Sri Lanka, being an import-export economy, has to depend on English as international language. This commercial strategic importance of English has had ramifications in every aspect of Sri Lankan life, including the arts. In crude terms, English is still the passport to élite status.

THE MAKINGS OF A DILEMMA

In those circumstances, it was not possible for the Muslims of Sri Lanka to discard English and concentrate on Sinhala. Generally, there has been a bifurcation in the educational aspirations and attainments of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. Most of them attended indigenous language schools (invariably Tamil-medium ones) and mainly, the urban Muslims (and the offspring of provincial élites) attended English-medium schools, of course in the towns.

The indigenous-language-qualified Muslims took up trade and other occupations. Some of them with ability, wits, or experience went on to found large fortunes. The English-educated Muslims took to professions or service in Government departments or mercantile establishments. This is not to say that their environment was in any way divergent from Islamic culture. Indeed, some of the most dynamic aspects of Islamic culture and Islamic thinking have been mediated through English books and literary material. For instance, the appreciation of Iqbal, the great Muslim poet of South Asia, by Sri Lankan Muslims has been largely through the readings of his books and associated literature in English.35

When the English-medium schools lapsed (i.e. when English-medium classes died out in time), every Sri Lankan had to opt, for his children, classes in Sinhala or Tamil. As a rule, the Sinhalese children were taught in Sinhala and Tamil children in Tamil. At first, Muslim children (together with Burghers) were allowed the concession of being taught in English.36 Soon, this concession was withdrawn and Muslims had to choose the option of having their children taught in Sinhala or Tamil. Meanwhile, by 1960, the monolithic University of Ceylon which taught in English decided to teach in Sinhala and Tamil too; two new universities, teaching in indigenous languages were set up.37
The choice of taking up either Sinhala or Tamil as school-language was not as simple matter as it seems. For, generally, it is the school-language which becomes the thinking tool of the students and shapes his perceptions and conceptions. Muslims exercised this choice in various ways. Some opted for Tamil and others for Sinhala.

The rationale of those who opted for Tamil as school-language for Muslims could be summarized as follows.

(a) Since nearly all Muslims of Sri Lanka have, at least, a speaking knowledge of Tamil, the acceptance of Tamil as school-language is only the acknowledgement of an existing fact.

(b) Classical Tamil has been acclimatized (quasi-Islamized) by Muslims for at least five hundred years and specific variants of Tamil meant for Muslims exist. One such tailor-made one was Arabic-Tamil (i.e. Tamil written in Arabic script).

(c) There would be sufficient reading material and literature for Tamil-users in Sri Lanka, because of the presence of Tamil-users in South India (Tamil Nadu). In terms of number of speakers, Tamil is the sixteenth and Sinhala, forty-ninth, among the languages of the world. Hence, the prices of books would be cheap; subsidies for publications would not be required.

(d) There exists a large number of Islamic books, old and new, in Tamil in Tamil Nadu. This would be helpful to the Muslims of Sri Lanka. A population of one and a half million (which the Sri Lankan Muslims are) could not be expected to publish much in the nature of Islamic books and supportive material.

(e) Most of the ārīq in Sri Lanka are Tamil Nadu based. Missionaries of Islam frequently come from Tamil Nadu and various Islamic colloquia and seminars take place there. Drifting away from Tamil meant a drifting away from these useful Islamic contacts.

(f) The maulavīs had knowledge of Tamil and Arabic only; and since most of the madrasahs in Sri Lanka, till recently, had principals from India, there was a strong link with the ‘ulamā’ of South India.

(g) English as a link-language would continue to be the language of national discourse.

Those Muslims who advocated the adoption of Sinhala as school-language, argued from contrary-wise premises. Their stand-point, in brief, was that:
(i) In course of time, Sinhala would become the language of national discourse. English would be a peripheral language studied only for business purposes just as French or German, or now Arabic or Japanese, is studied by Englishmen. To opt out of Sinhala is to opt out of the mainstream of life and learning in Sri Lanka.

(ii) Where Muslims live among large concentrations of Sinhalese, it is logical to opt for Sinhala, because adoption of Tamil will mean the duplication of facilities, including educational equipment, not always possible for a Third World country.

(iii) Educational progress for Muslims meant the acquisition of applied and pure science and management and numerate technologies. In this respect Sinhala will be more useful.

(iv) The use of Tamil in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu is not congruent. Glossaries of technical terms differ widely. So do methodologies of teaching structures, inter-disciplinary studies, for instance. In any case, each country has to work out its own syllabi. Further, creative activities in literature are self-motivated.

(v) Islamic book-writing and -publication need not be tied down to South Indian (Tamil language) sources. Indeed, there is no agreed transliteration of Arabic words into Tamil, even today. This situation was incisively commented upon by a leading Muslim educationist and man-of-letters as early as thirty years ago.40

(vi) Islamic activity in Sri Lanka is a wide-ranging one, encompassing the sub-continent, the Asian region and the Middle-East. It need not be chanelled through South India.

(vii) Sri Lankan maulavis are, today, in sufficient number to cater for the advisory and functional needs such as mosque duties. The younger maulavis are energetic and eager to learn Sinhala.

(viii) Sinhala is a fast growing language. Sri Lankan has perhaps, the highest rate of literacy in South Asia. Its literary production is second to no country in Asia. With an avid readership, a great number of newspapers and periodical literature are regularly produced. One of Sri Lanka's Sinhala Sunday magazines had the largest circulation in South Asia. In that sense, there would be no intellectual lethargy if Sinhala were adopted as the school-language of the Muslims.

These two viewpoints being mutually exclusive, it was no wonder that there was no consensus. Hence, while a large number of Muslims opted for
Sinhala as school-language, considerable number adopted Tamil as school-
language.

THE ACCLIMATIZATION OF SINHALA: THE TASKS AHEAD

The years subsequent to the 1980s brought out the realities inherent in adopting
Sinhala and Tamil as school-languages. Some of these could not be dismissed
as birth-pangs. Critics contended that the dethronement of English necessarily
impoverished higher education. Since, there was an information boom and
proliferation of computer technology in the 1980s, a need for an international
language was keenly felt. It was also appreciated that translation was not a total
remedy. Hence, steps were taken to splice English to Sinhala (and Tamil) at the
higher levels of education. This would be the acquisition of language
management techniques and not the acquirement of the makings of an English
gentleman versed in English literature.

From the point of view of Sri Lankan Muslims, the adoption of Sinhala
as school-language had brought in some problems which need immediate
solutions. One was the production of Islamic supportive material. The
Department of Government Publications had provided Islamic textbooks (just as
it had provided for other religions). These Islamic textbooks are of a graded
series, beginning from Year Four and ending in Year Ten. These are well-
planned texts, articulated and targeted for the particular level of intellectual
development of the child. The final book for Year Ten is a massive tome of
some 500 pages, discussing the entire range of Islam and Islamic history.
Written by Muslim officers and teachers of the Department of Education, this
book is authoritative enough to be used as a work of reference for adults.

However, there is a persistent need for supplementary easy readers on
Islamic rituals and history. This is important for Muslim students studying in
Sinhala in non-Muslim schools. Muslim schools, as a rule in Sri Lanka, are
those with Tamil as school-language but some of them have a stream of children
with Sinhala as school-language. In these instances, enough information on
Islamic topics such as the rituals in prayer are passed on by the Tamil-medium
children to the Sinhala-medium children. It should be admitted, however, that
at present, Sinhala does not have the plethora of Islamic texts as does Tamil
(because of the imports of Islamic books in Tamil from Tamil Nadu). Some
pioneering work on the production of Islamic supportive literature has been and
is being done by the Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs and
some Muslim NGOs.

Another preliminary problem is the working out of an effective system
of transliteration of Islamic terms into Sinhala; this involves modification of
Sinhala letters (at present, *zahira* sounds *sahira* in Sinhala; *sa’a* becomes *sahu*
likewise). This would obviate the translations of Islamic terms (Perso-Arabic
In the wider field of Sinhala art and culture, Muslims have played a not unimportant role, while not deviating from the Shart’ah. Muslims, for instance, have pioneered in the field of Sinhala light songs. Muslim involvement in Sinhala literature is a recent development. This is particularly seen in articles, short stories and verse written in Sinhala by Muslim writers. Since, formerly, Sinhala was not in common use as a spoken language among Muslims, writing stories in Sinhala about Muslims would be an exercise in ‘translated emotions’ as Sri Lankan stories written in English. But, at present, there is a generation of Muslims whose effective language is Sinhala; hence the entry into imaginative writing in Sinhala by Muslims. Muslims, mainly the youth, have ventured into short-story writing, in various Sinhala periodicals and in Sinhala national dailies. Critical assessment of these writers are also being undertaken and various modes of approach are being used. Imaginative writing in Sinhala has also the advantage of bringing to the attention of non-Muslims, the lives, the travails and the realities of the Muslims.

The question of dissemination of Islamic works and culture at fairly high levels cannot be broached on ad hoc terms. An international language would appear necessary for the Sinhala-educated Muslims. Being Muslims, the only modus would be the acceptance of Arabic as a viable language by the Muslims. This is not an insurmountable task but the present system of rote-teaching of accented Arabic would seem to be the greatest hindrance to such consummation.

CONCLUSION

Sinhala is the language spoken by the predominant majority in Sri Lanka, viz. the Sinhalese. Tamil, being the home-language of the Muslims of Sri Lanka, Sinhala language till recent times, had been put on the back-burner. English was considered and used by the Muslim élites as the most important communication tool; this was so with the élites of other communities, too. However, when the indigenous languages became important in Sri Lanka, English ceased to be the school-language. Consequently, while some Muslims chose Sinhala as school-language, others chose Tamil. Sinhala, being relatively recent in literary use by the Muslims, efforts are being made to bring it closer to Muslims and Islam. These efforts are being continually assessed. One useful method would be to popularise Arabic among the Muslims of Sri Lanka.
Sri Lanka was called Ceylon till 1972 when it became a republic. (All dates are CE in this article.) Details about the Muslim population may be found in M.M.M. Mahroof and M. Azeez (compilers), An Ethnological Survey of the Muslims of Sri Lanka (Colombo: Sir Razik Fareed Foundation, 1986). pp. 262. Mps., bibl.

*According to the latest Census (1981) of Sri Lanka, of the total population of 14,988,000, Buddhists are 69.31%; Hindus 14.46%; Christians 7.4%; Muslims 7.4% (Statistical Pocketbook of Sri Lanka for 1982 (Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics) (p. 12). The ethnic composition is Sinhalese (mainly Buddhist); Tamils (largely Hindu). Some Sinhalese and some Tamils are Christian. Sinhala is the language of the Sinhalese and Tamil that of the Tamils.

S.F de Silva’s, *Graded Series on Civics*, widely used in Sri Lanka between 1940 and 1970, introduced this concept of ‘mosaic’ throughout the schools.


Historically, the Sinhalese classify themselves into Kandyan Sinhalese and Low Country Sinhalese. The Kandyan Sinhalese, the descendants of the inhabitants of the indigenously ruled principality of Kandy, which merged with the British-held maritime provinces in 1815, have their own personal law called Kandyan Law.


James d’Alwis, "A Survey of Sinhala Literature" (being an Introduction to a Translation of the *Sidat Sangarava*) (Colombo; Department of National Museums, 1966 reprint of original 1852 edition), p. xlvi. Telingu and Malayalam are d’Alwis’ spelling of present day ‘Telugu’ and ‘Malayalam’, members of the Dravidian language group to which Tamil belongs.


Ibid. p. cclix. The words in Sinhala in the original text are Anglicised by the present writer in this article. ‘Island’ in the text means Sri Lanka.


M.M.M. Mahroof "Arabic-Tamil".


The Portuguese ruled the maritime provinces of Ceylon from 1505 to 1656 and the Dutch thence to 1796, when the British defeated them. The British annexed the independent principality of Kandy in 1815 and ruled over the whole country. Ceylon became independent in 1948.


M.M.M. Mahroof, "Arabic-Tamil".

Lists in A.M. Gunasekera, Comprehensive Grammar of the Sinhalese Lanaguage. Also, S.R. Dalgado, Dialecto Indo-Portugues de Ceylão (Lisbon, 1900).


Lewis and Maude, The English Middle Classes, p. 21.


d'Alwis, "Survey of Sinhala Literature", p. cxvi. Yoga Ranakara is a medical text dealing with forty-eight kind of cures, written in 1665. There is an edition of 1930 by K.A. Perera.

At present, these madrasahs, known in Sri Lanka as Arabic Colleges, are recognized and registered by the Ministry of State for Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs.


The nature of the task of translation can be gauged from a sample of disciplines and the number of books which required translation (given within brackets) in University degree courses. Law: Constitutional and Administrative Law (11); Roman Law (11); Legal Systems of Sri Lanka (8); Criminal Law (6); Law of Succession (5); Contract and Delict (12); Jurisprudence (2); Commercial Law (8); Law of Persons and Property (10); Evidence and Procedure (7).

Engineering: Civil Engineering (5); Mathematics (8); Electrical Engineering (13).

Medicine: Anatomy (5); Physiology (8); Biochemistry (7); Pharmacology (11); Pathology (5); Bacteriology (2); Forensic Medicine (5); Public Health (8); Parasitology (1); Medicine (9); Surgery (5); Obstetrics (3); Gynaecology (8).

Law reports in translation are necessary for legal practice. In Sri Lanka, the official law reports go under the name of New Law Reports (NLR). By 1980, these had gone beyond eighty volumes. Lawyers also consult English law reports such as the All England Reports as well as law reports of the South African, Indian and Pakistani apex courts. Such tasks could not even be contemplated.

For instance, the Sinhala word, based on Sanskrit sources, for reservoir is jala savya, roughly meaning "water holder". Hence, the difficulties in coining equivalents for reservoir for petrol, gas etc.


Burgher is the term generally used in Sri Lanka for the descendants of the Dutch settlers.


Manorama Year Book 1984 (Kottayam, Kerala, India, Manorama Publications), pp. 232-33.

Ibid. p. 27.

Istam (for Grades Nine and Ten) (Colombo: Government Publications Department, 1980).

Maulavis played an important part in the writing of this book. Of the nine members of the drafting committee, four were maulavis.

Some Sinhalese words are derived from Pali (Magadhi), the ecclesiastical language of the Buddhists.
