Challenges and Implications to Ethnic Identity of Minority Malays in Sri Lanka

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Abstract
Ethnicity of minority group shifts in a plural society with a strong influence of core ethnic groups and thus minorities give up their ethnic identity and become identified with the larger society. Although Malays in Sri Lanka constitute 0.3 % of total population and are dispersed widely throughout the country, the prospect of their integration with core ethnic groups is largely significant compared to other ethnic groups. Although much has been written about Malays and their genesis in the island, studies on integration of Malays and its implications on their ethnicity has suffered scholarly neglect for many years. Thus, this study examines the degree of integration of Malays with other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka and the factors contributing to endanger their ethnicity. This is a qualitative study consisting of observation, interviews and focus group discussion as data collection techniques. This study argues that high integration by Malays with other ethnic groups has significantly endangered their ethnicity. This is attributed to mixed educational and working environment, interspersed settlement, shared religion, and absence of prejudice and stereotype against Malays by others. It is assumed that the identity of Malays would be eroded in future if the present trend of integration persists in the community level.
Keywords: Integration; Endangerment; Prejudice; Stereotype.

1. Introduction
Although, the concept of ethnic identity had been explored both in sociology and anthropology in the last century, it became a more prominent discourse only towards the end of the 1970s, particularly with growing cultural and religious revivalism that posed challenges to nation-states, freed from the clutches of colonialism during the latter part of the twentieth century. This provided space for discussions on identity in the context of modernity (Eriksen, 2004). Countries like Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Rwanda and Sudan are classic examples of how ethnic conflicts, with ethnicity as the basis, have affected whole peoples, resulting in innumerable loss of lives, homelessness and displacements within or outside of their own countries.

In plural societies, ethnic identities are not static; they shift due to the influence of other cultures based on contexts. Therefore, ethnic groups and their members may adopt different identities at different times. Individuals and groups who give up their (old) ethnic identities and become identified with the larger society are integrated (Phinney, 2001). This integration takes place either in the absence of identity markers or when there is little desire to maintain one's ethnic identity or culture (Phinney, 2001).

Ethnic identity may also be fostered through a socialization process from childhood by various social agencies such as family, school, neighbors, and peers. A change in their ethnic identity may occur with many influencing factors including age and generation of ethnic groups. As a result of these varying influences of dominant groups, sub-ethnic groups and their individual members are likely to be integrated into the former.

Sri Lanka is home to communities that are culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse. Sinhalese, Tamils. Moors and Malays comprise the major ethnic communities in Sri Lanka, their ethnicities being defined based on their language, territory, history, religion and culture. However, Sri Lanka has only recently come out of the civil war that had ravaged the country for over three decades, resulting in the death of over 100,000 people, mostly from the minorities, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands more internally and externally (Imthiyas and Iqbal, 2011). Hence, Sri Lanka has been in the popular discourse and debate among scholars. Chauvinistic political ideologies and discriminatory policies formulated in favor of the majority community by respective governments are attributed to the misunderstanding and hostility between the majority and minority ethnic groups, and the ensuing protracted war in the country. As such, Uyangoda (2007) notes "group discrimination, limited access to public resources, and cultural or ethnic marginalization were indeed the key components of minority experience that eventually produced the ethnic conflict and the demand for autonomy" (p.2).

Sri Lankan Malays, on the other hand, are largely the descendants of the inhabitants of the Indonesian Archipelago who were brought to Sri Lanka during the Dutch and British colonial rule from the mid-17th to mid-20th century (Hussainmiya, 1990). Sri Lankan Malays constitute just 0.3 percent of the total population in Sri Lanka (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012), numbering about 40,189 at present. Sri Lankan Malays are nevertheless a much larger group than either the Memons or Borahs of Sri Lanka both of whom constitute less than 20,000 persons. Malays are highly concentrated in Colombo, Gampaha, Hambantota, Kandy, Badulla, Kurunegala,Trinomalee, and Nuwaraeliya districts in Sri Lanka (Hussainmiya, 1990; Rasool, 2013).

Sri Lankan Malays are identified as Ja Minissu by the Sinhalese, as Java Manusar by the Tamils and Malai karar by the Moors (Hussainmiya, 1990). Moreover, Sri Lankan Malays were categorized as "Malays" by the British

colonial rulers during 19th century (Hussainmiya, 1990). They constituted a heterogeneous group of Easterners in terms of ethnic and linguistic background, along with the Bandanese, Bugis, Ambaenose, Balinese, Tiodrese, Madurese and Sundanese (Hussainmiya, 1990).

Since Malays are small in numbers and dispersed widely among other ethnic groups such as Sinhalese, Tamils, and Moors in the Western, Central, Southern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka, the prospect of their integration with core dominant ethnic groups is explicitly significant, compared to other communities in Sri Lanka. However, it is not the same in the case of other minority groups living in Sri Lanka. In the Eastern province, for example, though Sri Lankan Moors are living side by side with other communities, particularly the Hindus, this does not endanger the ethnic identity of Moors as they constitute a large concentration there. Whether or not a minority community manages to resist assimilation and preserves its unique identity is dependent upon how it manages to preserve and perpetuate its identity in a multi-cultural context. Conversely, an extensive form of integration may lead to the erasure of distinct social and cultural inventory of an ethnic group in a particular context. There is a growing body of literature regarding the Sri Lankan Malay language (SLM) and its sociolinguistic aspects. The works have been undertaken by Ansaldo and Lim (2006), Ansaldo (2008), Rasool (2013) and Slomanson (2008); Slomanson (2011) point to the SLM and its sociolinguistic aspects. Many linguists like Bichsel-Stettler (1989), Ansaldo and Lim (2006), Saldin (2007), Vijaycharya (2004) have discussed the linguistic range of the SL Malay community. These scholars discussed the loss of SLM as a home language is largely the result of widespread education in Sinhala among the educated elites in urban areas. This shows that Sri Lankan Malay Language (SLM), one of the dimensions of identity marker, faces challenges due to integration with other ethnic groups in the country. Moreover, scholars like Hussainmiya (1990), Samat (2016), Rifai (2015) and Vajracharya (2009) have concluded that Malays have become naturalized with other Sri Lankans due to the influence of different factors. However, their studies are non-empirical, except the empirical study of Hussainmiya. Therefore, this study examines the degree of integration of Malays with other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka and the factors contributing to endanger their ethnicity in the island. This is an area which has suffered scholarly neglect for many years. This study aims at filling such scholarly neglect that will contribute to academic discourses and rigor in future.

2. Conceptual Framework on Integration and Socio-Economic Aspects of Malays in Sri Lanka

This section delves into the conceptual framework of integration, followed by a discussion on the demographic, socio-economic dimension of minority Malays

2.1. Conceptual Framework on Integration

It is most likely that a new ethnic group will adopt to the new condition and culture since they arrive at a new environment. Thus, an ethnic group may continuously create or interpret its cultural tradition in the process of integration with other ethnic groups. The dynamics of the integration, generally, is such that the minority group will be subjected to the process of acculturation. In integration, the nature of contact is that of an asymmetrical process by which an out-group comes to accept the values of the dominant group, or at least incorporates those values into its own value system, through "process of interpenetration and fusion" (Park and Burgess, 1924). This proposition of Park and Burgess may be simple and outdated, but it provides a useful foundation that frames much of the current studies into integration.

The major problem with integration is that it is assumed that the minority groups will integrate into the majority groups to adapt to the majority culture and that the minorities will be accommodated by the host community. This preposition of the incorporation of minority ethnic groups into the majority groups may lead to the erasure of ethnic differences and cultural inventory of minority ethnic groups. Bergman (2000), argues that integration does not encourage multiculturalism whereby ethnic groups are able to understand and respect each other's cultures(p.10). Hence, integration is an on-going and complex process that is likely to change with time. For a multi-ethnic society, the concept of integration needs to be closely examined in the social context.

It is in this context that a study on the degree of integration of Sri Lankan Minority Malays becomes extremely pertinent and significant, given the critical debates surrounding over the ethnic identity of Malay immigrants and their integration that captures the attention of scholars at the present context.

Integration (structural assimilation) is the crux of the matter for Gordon (1964). The integration occurs when the ethnic minority or immigrant and his/her descendants in later generations enter and become integrated into the formal social, political, economic, and cultural institutions of the host country (secondary relationships) and develops numerous long lasting personal friendships with the members of the dominant majority group (primary relationships) (Gordon, 1964). While the former refers to a wide range of key integrative processes, including socioeconomic and spatial (residential) integration, the latter—extensive interaction within personal networks, and intermarriage—is likely to take place under conditions of status equality. Thus, it can vary from impersonal contacts within economic and political institutions to the personal contacts within neighborhoods, friendship circles and marriages (Williams, 1977).

2.2. Demographic, Socio-Economic Dimension of Minority Malays in Sri Lanka

As a minority ethnic group descending from Malay Archipelago during the colonial period, particularly Dutch occupation of Sri Lanka, minority Malay immigrants had domiciled in the country as permanent citizens, just like

others, enjoying all the rights and privileges that accorded to the other communities in the country (Hussainmiya, 1990).

Malays have diverse social, cultural and economic aspects. Malays living in various parts of the Western province form a complex picture of differing social and economic classes. Malays in Colombo generally possess high economic capital. Nevertheless, those Malays in Slave Island, which is in the heart of Colombo, are mostly from low socio-economic backgrounds. Wattala-Mabole Malays in the Western province are mostly of middle class backgrounds. Some villages in the Southern Province, such as Kirinda and Malay Colony, are considered Malay enclaves. Kirinda has 95% Malay population, approximately 75% of whom are fishermen while the rest are farmers. Malays in the Malay Colony and Sippikulam are mostly from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Rameez, 2017). Malays living in other parts of Sri Lanka such as Kandy, Matale, Nawalapitya, Ampara and Trincomalee represent middle to lower-class socio-economic backgrounds. One of the salient features of minority Malays in Sri Lanka is that they are multilingual and thus some of them are highly educated and well-employed in Colombo.

3. Materials and Methods

This study was carried out mainly through a qualitative research method. Data was collected from literature review too. Field work consisted of non-participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The field work was undertaken in places where the concentration of Malays was largely dominant. In particular, Kirintha and Malay Colony in the Southern Province and Slave Island and Akbar Town in Western Province were selected for field work. During my first field visit I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews on a simple random sampling method in the above mentioned areas. Of the 25 participants, 23 were from the Malay community and remaining two were from non-Malay communities. 15 Males and 10 females representing different age groups were selected for the interview. However, only 3 of them represented youth category. Government servants, academics, social activists, youth, representatives from Malay organizations and others were selected as participants for interviews. Selection of participants for interviews was done merely on the basis of their expertise or knowledge on Malay identity and challenges of integration to their ethnicity. The interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted at the residences of the participants, their places of work, and mosques. With the prior consent of the participants, the interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. At the end of each day, the recordings were transferred to the hard drive of my personal computer. All the interviews were conducted both in English and Tamil medium, since most of the Malays were multilingual. Interviews conducted in Tamil language were later transcribed to English before the analysis was done.

Two (2) focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with Malays living in places like Colombo-Slave Island (Western Province), and Kirinda (Southern Province). Almost 10-12 people representing different segment of the Malays such as civil servants, social activists, youth, representatives of Malay organizations and others were selected to the FGDs and the data gathered accordingly. FGD in Kirinda was conducted in Tamil medium while the FGD in Slave Island was conducted in English and Tamil languages. Two different set of questions were used as a guide for both as interview as well as focus group discussion. As interviews were conducted earlier, the responses obtained from the interviews helped enhanced the questions of focus group discussion. A descriptive analysis was largely employed to analyze the data collected from the field work and it was presented in tables, and diagram where necessary.

4. Integration of Malays in Sri Lanka

This section deals with the integration of Malays with the core dominant communities such as Sinhalese and Moors in Sri Lanka and its challenges on the ethnicity of minority Malays. Then, it will be followed by a discussion on the factors contributing to the integration of Malays with the core dominant ethnic groups endangering their ethnicity.

The minority status and their interspersed settlement amidst the core ethnic groups across the country propelled the Malay immigrants to integrate with the core dominant ethnic groups in the socio-cultural, political and economic spheres, which yielded to an extensive interaction within personal networks, and intermarriages. It is also noted by scholars that the Malays are well integrated into the Sri Lankan society (Nuhman, 2007). Moreover, the Malays consider it inevitable to integrate with core groups in the country as they are a minority within the dominant majority ethnic groups. This is well-noted in the responses of one of the participants:

> Survival of fittest fits with the existence of our community. Older generation did not have economic or marketing interaction with majority communities in the country. Apart from cultural aspects, when it comes to socio-economic issue, it is imperative to interact with the other communities. With the world is changing, the generation must change to survive. Older generation does not have to make the present generation uncomfortable, because we also adopt ourselves. Otherwise, there is no future for them. Existence of our community depends on our excellence and competition. The more you interact or market yourself, the more successful you would become. (Interview 01)

The above is a representation of one of the participants endorsed by many in the interviews and focus group discussions. It suggests that it has become inevitable for minority Malays to engage in socio-economic integration with the core groups in this fast-changing world to empower themselves socially and economically. In the same vein, a young Malay who now pursues his higher studies observes:

> Integration with other community is the most important thing. We can't keep your culture or identity as it is and say we cannot get together with you all, because of our ethnic identity. As you are living in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic country, you are most likely to be integrated with other communities. (Interview 02)

The above perspective of Malay youth suggests the need of integration of Malays with the core groups as a minority ethnic group in the country. Therefore, it is safe to assume that it is essential for Malays as a tiny minority to integrate with core ethnic groups socially, politically and economically for their future survival and prosperity in the country.

Meanwhile, scholars have noted that Sri Lankan Malays have currently become naturalized/integrated with other ethnic groups (Hussainmiya, 2010). The fate of Kinniya Malays as a minority in terms of full integration is a case in point here where they are fully integrated with Moors and are no more identified as Malays.

4.1. Malays in Kinniya During Malay Regiment and Their Integration With Moors

Kinniya is located in Trincomalee district where Malays were brought in to be stationed in the Malay regiment during the Colonial period and domiciled amidst the Moors since then. Malays in Kinniya were reported to have escaped from Malay regiment stationed in Trincomalee and settled there with Moors (Hussainmiya, 1987). They are no more identified as Malays as they are fully integrated with Moors due to their interspersed settlement with Moors, intermarriages and shared religion of Islam. Elaborating on their history, a retired government servant observes:

> A few Malays from Trincomalee regiment escaped and came to Kinniya during the Dutch occupation of Sri Lanka and they were intermarried to Moors as they were Muslims. Some of the Malays married Tamils after converting them into Islam (Interview 04)

The above perspective is an instance to witness the degree of integration by Malays with Moors in Kinniya as a result of intermarriages over a period of time. On the other hand, my field work in Kinniya and Muthur has provided no substantial evidence to trace Malay heritage among the present day generation as they are fully integrated with Moors. Their successive generations adopted Tamil as a language, which is the mother tongue of Tamils and Moors; they married Moors as their partners; they now prefer to be called themselves as Sonakar(Moor); they hardly know their Malay heritage, and adopt the culture of Moors. As such, they are now identified as Moors in Kinniya as they are fully integrated with Moors.

When holding a discussion on the ethnicity and ancestry with young boys and girls in Kinniya whose ancestors or forefathers were believed to have reached there during the Colonial period, it became clear that they hardly knew of their Malay ancestors and felt comfortable in defining themselves as Sri Lankan Muslims (Sri Lankan Moors) and communicating in Tamil language. This is also a clear illustration of full integration of Malays with Moors in Kinniya-Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. This finding is further corroborated by Hussein (2007) who cites that Malays living in Kinniya in the Trincomalee District have fully integrated with Moors through intermarriages over the years and are no more speaking Malay language, but Tamil, the mother tongue of the Moors (Hussein, 2007). Thus, it can be seen clearly that the integration has significantly endangered the ethnicity of Malays in Kinniya. Interestingly, it should be noted that some Malays in other parts of the country are fearful that the same fate may befall upon the future generation of Malays living throughout the country if the present trend of integration of Malays with core ethnic groups persists for some more years.

More importantly, the minority status of Malays in the country has prompted them to integrate with non-Malays in the social, economic and political sphere. Most specifically, the younger generation of Malays compared to their older generation is so susceptible to a high degree of integration as a result of intermarriages, which substantially endangers their ethnic identity in the long run. The trend of Malays marrying Moor partner is steadily increasing across the country, as both ethnic groups espouse same religion and Islamic jurisprudence-Shafi school of thought (Nordhoff, 2009). At the same time, resistance of intermarriages in the Malay community level, particularly Malays marrying Moors is very less compared to Malays marrying others like Sinhalese, Tamils or Burgers or Christians. Here, the religion is the source of major discontentment for those Malays marrying non-Malays. By and large, it all endangers the ethnic identity markers of Malays as a result of intermarriages in the long run.

4.2. Malays and Moors

Relations between Malays and Moors can be traced back to Colonial period in which Malays were brought here from Malay Archipelago (Hussainmiya, 2010). The presence of Muslim community of Moors in the country when the Malays arrived here helped preserve the cultural and religious identity of Malays and thereby their cultural and religious integration became stronger. The mosques built in Malay contantments during the colonial periods served as a place of religious integration between Malays and Moors (Hussainmiya, 1990). This has facilitated for the personal relations of integration between Malays and Moors via the intermarriages. Although some of the Malays, mainly the soldiers, arrived to the island during the colonial period with their wives and families, others tended to choose partners from the core groups, particularly from Moors (p.43). In the post-independence of Sri Lanka, the trend of intermarriages among Malays with core ethnic groups, mainly with Moors, dramatically increased mainly due to their shared religion.

The following responses of Malays suggest that a relatively large number of inter-marriages occurs with Moors in the present context of the country:

> 25% of Malays here are married to Moors. Even, my daughter is married a Moor here. If a Malay girl or boy marries non-Muslims, they are usually converted to Islam. There are some instances where 1 or 2 Malays married to non-Muslims without converting them to Islam. Under such

circumstances, those Malays will be alienated from their families, and sometimes, such Malays might be persuaded to come again to the fold of Islam and scions of Malay community by their relatives and Ulema. There are certain people and madrasas engaging in such tasks. (Interview 06)

My wife is also from the Moor community. Many Malays tend to marry Moors, if they have no suitable partners in the community. There are almost 10 Malay families of inter-racial marriages in Slave Island. However, Alhamdulillah, all of them are converted to Islam and their offspring is really more religious these days. (Interview 07)

The above perspectives characterize the degree of inter-marriages occurring between Malays and Moors and further suggest that some Malays tend to marry non-Muslims such as Sinhalese and Tamils ensuring that their partners are converted to Islam. Furthermore, it appears that many organizations and individuals embark on the task of bringing back those Malays married to Sinhalese or others to the fold of Islam. Nordhoff (2009), roughly estimates that approximately 10% of marriages of Malays have taken place with Sri Lankan Moors, while 5 % marriages of Malays have taken place with Sinhalese(p. 44). Like Nordhoff, we found as many as 10% of our samples have entered into interethnic marriages due to, inter alia, mixed education and working context, shared religion, and interspersed settlement with Moors.

Generally, interethnic marriages of Malays with non-Malays, particularly Moors in urban pockets, significantly endanger the primordial markers of Malay ethnicity; it replaces the Malay language with Tamil/Sinhala language; endangers Malay culture with dominant cultures leading to acculturation (Rameez, 2017); it ceased the Malay lineage too. This is precisely because the Malays are largely shaped from impersonal relations to personal relations of integration through intermarriages with Moors. It could be argued that the linguistic shape of Sri Lankan Malay (SLM) is the by-product of the intermarriages between the Malay immigrants and Moors and its tangible effect reflected in SLM which is a mixture of local vernacular languages (Ansaldo and Lim, 2006; Ansaldo, 2008; Hussainmiya, 1987).

While intermarriages between Malays and Moors accepted by the Malay community, a strong sense of resistance prevails in the community level for the intermarriages of Malays with non-Muslims such as Sinhalese, Tamils, Burgers or Christians. Thus, the intermarriages of Malays with non-Muslims are considered an execrable practice or taboo and consequently remedial action are promptly taken to bring those Malays back to the fold of Islam. Moreover, the finding also shows that the issue of Malays marrying Sinhalese or others may even lead to ostracization of such Malays from the community, if the partner is not converted to Islam.

4.3. The Factors Contributing To Integration of Malays

High integration of Malays with core dominant ethnic groups occurs mainly due to many factors, as can be discussed below:

4.3.1. Mixed Educational System and Working Environments

As Malays are small in number and thinly distributed in areas mainly dominated by non-Malays, they are most likely to intermingle with non-Malays in schools, tuition centres and workplaces. This is the key factor that has contributed to high integration of Malays with non-Malays. In articulating such reasons, a participant notes:

Not all the Malays came here with their wives during the colonial period; so, they chose local partners from the Moors and Sinhalese, and converted them to Islam. The factors that contribute to the strong integration or interaction with non-Malays are: 1) mixed schools/tuition classes, 2) mixed environment/neighborhood, and 3) mixed working environment. (Interview 08)

The above perspective of a participant represents a factor that prompts the Malays to integrate and choose partners from the core communities. This is the key factor of integration highlighted by most number of participants in the interviews and focus group discussions. The focus group discussions conducted both in Kirinda and Slave Island shown in a diagram available in Appendix 2 underlines that this is the most significant factor of integration between Malays and non-Malays. Moreover, intermarriages between Malays and non-Malays began from the colonial period since many of the Malays did not come with their wives and families here (Hussainmiya, 1990). Scholars note that it is in educational environments that Malays imitate the Sinhalese more than anywhere (Hussainmiya, 2010; Saldin, 2003). This shows that Malays and Sinhalese are closely integrated in the educational and working environments. Thus, it can be safely concluded that mixed educational and working environment is a major contributory factor of integration between Malays and non-Malays.

4.3.2. Interspersed Settlement with the Core Ethnic Groups

Not all Malays enjoy the privilege of living in Malay Kampong or Malay enclaves; Malays are thinly distributed in areas dominated by Sinhalese and Moors in the country. Thus, Malays are most likely to be integrated with Moors and Sinhalese (Hussainmiya, 2010). This contention is endorsed by a Malay participant as follows:

The third generation of Malays settled down in predominantly Sinhala areas and established a great deal of network with Sinhalese, while the family relationship with their older generation, still living in the centers, began to wane. So, this network and interaction with other communities, particularly with Sinhalese, corrupted our culture, language and subsequently our ethnicity. (Interview 13)

It is common that the growth in the size of Malay families, and lack of availability of affordable housing in the urban centers that led them to settle in far-fetched areas like sub-urban and rural areas. This persuaded younger Malays to move away from their parents and grandparents in areas dominated by non-Malays. Hence, this has

weakened the familial bond between the older generation in the center and the new generation in the peripheries. More importantly, this has led to a situation where younger Malays become so closer to non-Malays leading to the extent of integration through interethnic marriages between Malays and non-Malays. However, this has become a central element to endanger primordial identity markers of Malays.

4.3.3. Shared Religion-Islam

As highlighted above, the most important factor that draws Malays and Moors closer to each other is their shared religion of Islam with its Shafi School of jurisprudential thought (Hussainmiya, 1990; Rifai, 2015). Wherever Malays and Moors are living side by side throughout the country, this has bound them together so closely, naturally resulting in intermarriages between them. This is so clearly reflected in the excerpts of a Malay participant as given below:

> Malays marry Moors in this areas because they are brought so closer to each other by religion. So, the Malays believe that they would be religious if they marry Moors. (Interview 11)

It is the religion that brings both ethnic groups together. Therefore, there is no resentment on the part of the both communities to interethnic marriages. The above view of the participant shared by majority of participants in the interviews. Moreover, the focus group discussion conducted both in Kirinda and Slave Island demonstrates that shared religion is the third major factor of integration through interethnic marriages resulting in the endangerment of primordial identity markers of Malays. Thus, it is safe to conclude that this is also one of major factors that has enormously contributed to the high degree of integration of Malays with core dominant ethnic groups endangering the identity of Malays in Sri Lanka.

4.3.4. Lack of Prejudice or Stereotype Against Malays by Others

Malays have immensely contributed to the socio-political development of Sri Lanka and served in the security establishments like police, army, navy and intelligence services in responsible positions during the colonial and post-independence periods of Sri Lanka (Hussainmiya, 1990; Saldin, 2006). Reimers (1924), colonial writer, states: "The Ceylon Malay community of today are noted for their loyalty and modesty, qualities which they have inherited from their virile ancestors, who during their long association with the Dutch and later, the British, have always been true to their salt"(Pp.157-158). Consequently, this has created a positive impression about Malays among non-Malays in the country: they are seen as loyal, honest, genuine and patriotic people. By and large, Malays are considered by non-Malays as an integral part of the nation and thus do not suffer any prejudice and stereotype by others (Hussainmiya, 2010; Hussein, 2007). This has inevitably led to high integration of Malays with non-Malays challenging their ethnic identity in the island. This is noted by a Malay civil society representative:

> During the Kandyan War, 150 Malays were shot dead by the British for giving protection to King Rajasingham. The Malays could have simply surrendered to the British forces. As you know, there were some Malays serving with the British too, just like there were Malays serving as part of the Sinhalese forces guarding the King Rajasinghe. But, Malays never betrayed the King. They chose to lay down their lives in defense of their king, Rajasinghe. The loyalty and bravery of our forefathers is so great (Interview 5).

The above view of a Malay with regard to their loyalty, patriotism and bravery endorsed by many participants took part in the interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Participants in the FGD conducted in Kirinda and Slave Island have contended that they are seen with a sense of pride and treasure in the country, while compared to other minorities like Moors and Tamils. In essence, qualitative data obtained from interview and FGD underlines that Malays are deemed by others as an integral part of the nation-Sri Lanka. This can further be illustrated with views of non-Malays on the Malays. For an example, a participant from the Majority community, Sinhalese, observes:

> Malays are honest, loyal and hardworking people. They are multilingual, too. Their contribution to the country, especially its sovereignty, is invaluable. They have integrated well with other communities in Sri Lanka, especially with Sinhalese (Interview 17)

Thus, construction of positive impression about Malays by non-Malays yields a high integration with non-Malays in the country endangering ethnic identity of Malays. This can be contrasted with the negative stereotyping of Malays in Singapore where they are regarded as lazy, dull, and drug addicts (Rahim, 1998). This 'cultural deficit thesis' of Malays in the Malay world has significantly been subscribed to by a lot of Malays and non-Malays in the Malay world. Mahthir (1982), account has attributed the economic backwardness of Malays in Malaysia to their indolent nature [p.24]. Nevertheless, such stereotype of Malays by non-Malays in Sri Lanka is absent due to their socio-economic contribution to the country, but, instead, they are considered with positive impression. This makes no room for them to be stigmatized or marginalized by majority community or others in Sri Lankan context. As such, absence of prejudice and stereotyping against Malays is one of the key factors of integration, which leads to intermarriages challenging the ethnic identity of Malays.

4.3.5. Economic Reasons

Economic factor is also a contributory factor of integration in terms of secondary relations. Malays have been economically integrated with Sinhalese and Moors in places like Kirinda and other rural areas, particularly in fishing industry and some small businesses (Rameez, 2017; Rasool, 2013). On the contrary, economic factor has also driven Malays to interethnic marriages in some circumstances. Clearly speaking, some Malays are attracted by the strong financial capability of non-Malays, and hence they tend to marry non-Malays, that is, outside of their ethnicity. This point can be illustrated by the following views of Malay participants:

Only a handful of intermarriages are taking place here. That, of course, is mainly due to economic reasons. (Interview 09)

The same view is also shared by another Malay:

> Many Malays marry Moors here due to the financial strength of the Moors, thinking that their future would be prosperous if they marry them. (Interview 10)

The above is a view point shared by little number of participants in the interviews and focus group discussions. Majority of participants took part in the FGD held in Kirinda(rural area) and Slave Island(urban area) did not prioritize economic factor as a significant incentive of integration endangering the identity of Malays in the country. However, it has to be borne in mind that financial capability of non-Malays has also become a source of interethnic marriages of Malays with non-Malays in some areas cutting across rural and urban boundaries.

4.3.6. Multilingualism and Flexible Interpretation of Islam

Sri Lanka Malays have been classified as "the most multilingual community in Sri Lanka" (Ansaldo and Lim, 2006; Saldin, 2007). Unlike the Moors whose interpretation of Islam is conservative, Malays are seen as affable, liberal in their interpretation of Islam (Rasool, 2013). Malays were able to upgrade these skills while serving in the armed forces during the colonial period and then the post-colonial period; while Malays were in military service they interacted more closely with Burghers, and engaged in trade union activities where partying, drinking and so on were common practices. The early close relationships between the Malays and Burghers seem to have been facilitated due to both the communities being fluent in English (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). This is aptly noted by a Malay participant:

> Intermarriages among Malays were on the rise sometimes ago, but it has slowed down now to a great extent because of the concerted effort of various Malay organizations and religious groups. Basically, Malay girls/boys are well-liked by everyone, because they are 1) good looking, 2) very social, 3) trilingual, and 4) liberal in their interpretation of their religion. A lot of the Non-Malays marrying Malays are embracing Islam, too. We do a lot of Sunnath (circumcision). We are increasingly concerned about Malays getting married to Moors now because of the cultural differences. (Interview 05)

Although he cites many factors for such interethnic marriages of Malays with non-Malays, characteristics such as Malays' sociability, their trilingual capabilities, and liberal interpretation of Islam figure prominent in the assertion of Malay participant. However, this has discerned a mixed reaction from the responses of participants took part in the interview and FGDs. A fair number of Malays agreed that their multilingual characteristic and flexible interpretation of Islam enabled them to enter into interethnic marriages with non-Malays. However, a large number of participants took part in the FGDs held in Kirinda and Slave Island maintain that a flexible interpretation of Islam is not at all as a significant factor of integration driven primarily by interethnic marriages, though they accepted that their multilingual dimension is a positive factor and strength of their ethnicity in the country. On the other hand, it has to be noted interethnic marriages are currently on the decline and Malays are increasingly concerned about the high number of intermarriages with Moors too, because of cultural and linguistic differences between them. Thus, this factor is not a significant factor contributing to the integration of Malays with non-Malays in the country.

4.3.7. Improper Socialization

It is noted that Malay parents are criticized for bringing up their children in an environment that contributes to interethnic marriages and permits dating. A Malay participant notes:

> Lack of family bond / parental negligence is the reason for intermarriages with non-Malays. Dating is generally tolerated within the community. We don't mind intermarriages with Moor, but we are worried about such intermarriages with non-Muslims. We warn parents. As a last resort, we don't mind someone getting converted to Islam. Head-strong children, whose family bond is not strong, are likely to go out of religion. This has something to do with the lack of bond between parents and children. (Interview 01)

It is common that inter-ethnic marriages occurs in an environment where social and familial bonds are held weaker. In such a context, the above perspective of the Malay participant is an instance to witness the trend of intermarriages of Malays with non-Malays, given the parents are negligent, reckless and permit dating. However, we cannot make a generalization from the above perspective of one participant, because responses from other participants in the interviews and FGDs discerned mixed reactions. A few participants in the interviews and majority of participants in the FGDs maintain that intermarriages have nothing to do with upbringing of Malay boys and girls, but rather, they maintain that it has much to do with culture and context. More importantly, it is observed and majority of the participants hold the view that inter-ethnic marriages by Malays with non-Malays are on the decline, particularly the interethnic marriages with non-Muslims such as Sinhalese are considered as a taboo in their society unless or otherwise the partner is converted to Islam. However, Malays marrying Moors is excused due to religious affinity. Nevertheless, improper socialization is not a significant factor contributing to the integration of Malays with non-Malays in the country.

4.3.8. Freedom to Choose Their Partners

Unlike Moors, it is noted from the responses of Malays that parents tend to give Malay boys and girls the freedom to choose their partners as they wish in terms of marriages, because it determines their future. Thus, Malays, unlike Moors, are more lenient. Sometimes, this leniency and unstinted freedom enable Malay youth marrying non-

Malays beyond their boundaries of ethnicity, challenging their ethnic identity in the island. This has plainly been observed by a Malay respondent:

> The Moor community would not hesitate to marry off their daughters to professionally qualified boys from Malay community, but not vice versa. We are short of professionally qualified men to marry off our daughters to, since our most eligible bachelors are taken away by other communities. Malays also permit dating. (Interview 12)

The above perspective is an instance to gauge the trend of intermarriages by Malays due to freedom and leniency. What is seen here is that Malay men can and do marry Moor women, but not vice versa. This distinguishes Malays from other communities where members have certain restrictions in terms of exogamy. However, this has discerned a different picture in the focus group discussion. Participants took part in both FGDs held in Kirinda and Slave Island gave very little significance to this factor of integration, as can be seen in the diagram 2(available in the appendix 2). Participants in the FGDs viewed that other factors can be prioritized than this one when it comes to integration and endangering the identity of Malay ethnicity. However, it is to be noted that with such freedom given by the parents to Malay youth, they may end up eroding their ethnicity in the future in the country.

It is clear that Malays have largely integrated with both the Moors and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka in the social, economic and political sphere. More importantly, the integration of Malays with core ethnic groups occurring primarily through intermarriages has profoundly endangered their primordial characteristics such as their language, culture and ancestry or lineage. It is noted that Malay younger generation is becoming more vulnerable in respect of integration. As such, Sinhala or Tamil languages have replaced Malay language which was once considered their domestic language; acculturation among Malays has become largely entrenched; Malay ancestry or lineage is seriously challenged with a fair number of intermarriages occurring primarily with Moors. This tendency can be explicitly observed with the trajectory of Kinniya Malays who have now fully integrated with the Moors having adopted Tamil as their domestic and working language, and Moorish culture as their culture. Thus, it is observed that the term called 'Malayness' is apparently distant to younger generation of people in Kinniya at present whose ancestors descended from Malay Archipelago during colonial period.

Interestingly, Malays in Southern Sri Lanka tend to intermarry primarily with Moors because of their shared religion of Islam, and in some exceptional cases, with Sinhalese, which is considered as a taboo in the society. Although measures have been taken in the social level to combat such intermarriages, it does occur at least in minute numbers. On the other hand, Malays marrying Sinhalese may even lead to ostracization from the community, if the partner is not converted to Islam. Therefore, the family members of the Malays tend to arrest the intermarriages with Sinhalese and organizational attempts are also taken to bring those Malays back to the fold of Islam.

As shown above, the integration of Malays with core ethnic groups is attributed to various factors: 1) mixed educational system and working environments 2) interspersed settlement with the core ethnic groups, 3) shared religion-Islam, 4) lack of prejudice and stereotype of Malays by others 5) economic reasons, 6) Multilingualism and flexible interpretation of Islam, 7) lack of proper socialization of the parents, 8) freedom to choose their partners. The first four factors have significantly contributed to integration of Malays with core ethnic groups, while rest of the factors have made little contribution to the same.

5. Discussions

It is clear that integration of Malays with non-Malays occurs in the social, economic and political sphere as well as through intermarriages. However, it has profoundly challenged their primordial characteristics such as their language, culture and ancestry or lineage. More specifically, Malay younger generation is seen as more vulnerable in respect of integration. While Malays in urban Sri Lanka tend to intermarry primarily with Moors because of their shared religion of Islam, Malays in rural Sri Lanka tend to marry Moors and Sinhalese in some exceptional cases. By and large, integration occurring in the form of inter-ethnic marriages between Malays and non-Malays causes significant challenges to the perpetuation of ethnic identity of Malays in the country.

More importantly, the integration of Malays with core ethnic groups is attributed to various factors. Of which, mixed educational system and working environments, interspersed settlement with the core ethnic groups, shared religion-Islam, and lack of prejudice and stereotype of Malays by others are considered more significant to the integration, while economic factors, multilingualism and flexible interpretation of Islam, lack of proper socialization of the parents and freedom to choose their partners are considered less significant factors of integration. Thus, four important factors are immensely contributing to the integration of Malays with non-Malays to the extent of challenging their ethnicity.

By and large, a vast majority of Malays have shown greater intensity to cling on to vast vestige of their Malayness in the island amidst so much challenge to their ethnicity. It is also commendable that Malay organizations visibly present in all the places in the country, except in far rural areas, have been functioning actively to perpetuate the ethnic identity markers of Malays, particularly in their socio-cultural, linguistic and religious sphere. However, it is to be noted that their organizational activity needs to be backed by a substantial support from the mainstream Malay community from the Malay World and thus deserves recognition and merit for worthy activities aimed at preserving their ethnic identity in the country. Besides, it is also imperative on the part of Malay organizations including their regional branches and the elites of the community to reach out to the Malays living in various parts of the country in minute numbers, particularly those living in rural areas. Programmes and competition on religious, cultural, and language aspects organized by Malay organizations annually in Colombo and other parts of Sri Lanka can be a good platform to mobilize rural Malays with urban Malays and foster durable relationship among them for long term benefits and existence of the community in the island. This will enable the Malays living in far-fetched

areas to engage and involve with the mainstream Malay community and prevent them feeling aloof in the island. Most importantly, the Malays would have to seek out the support of the High commission of Malaysia and Indonesia in Sri Lanka and the benevolent Malays including politicians in the Malay world whose assistance can be of immense support and benefit to their existence and perpetuation of their ethnicity in Sri Lanka.

6. Conclusions

It can be understood that Malay integration with non-Malays through primary and secondary level of integration has caused significant challenge to the perpetuation of ethnic identity of Malays in the country. Of which, inter-ethnic marriage is a major cause of concern for Malays since it challenges identity marker of Malay ethnicity such as their ancestry, language and culture in the long run. Moreover, growing influence of Islamisation by Islamic movements, particularly Thowheeth movement has also become a serious cause of concern of Malays these days since it has seriously dwindled distinctive cultural patterns of Malays and created other issues. It is assumed that the identity of Malays would be eroded in future if the present trend of integration or assimilation and growing influence of Islamisation persists in the community level.

This study is highly significant, given the fact that the extensive discussion on integration of Malays and its challenges confronting their ethnicity of this nature has little been undertaken by any scholars before. The findings have policy implications on researchers, organizational activists, and policy makers in the government as well private level in future. More importantly, the dimensions of identity contestation among Malays, relations and conflicts between Moors and Malays and other socio-economic and political challenges confronting Malays at present context of Sri Lanka can be explored by future researchers and scholars.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement

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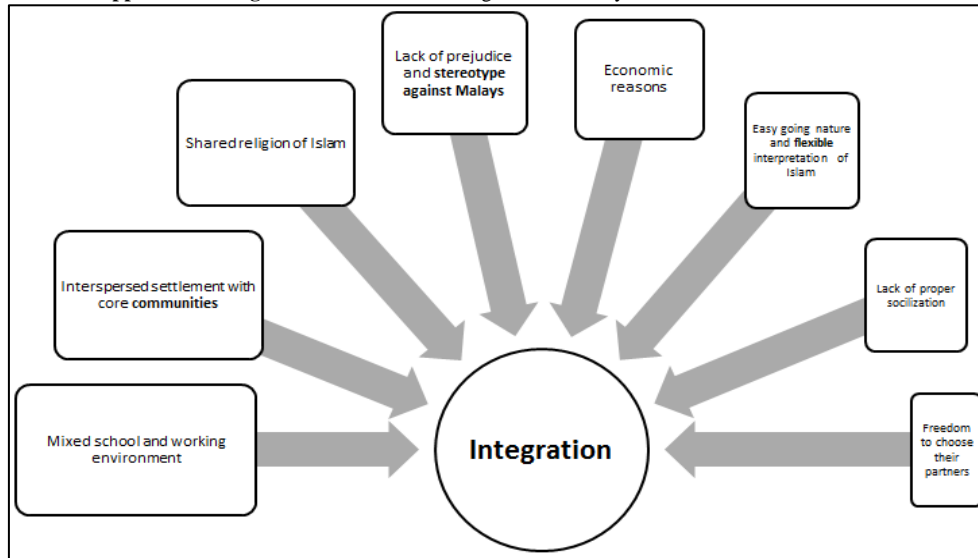
Appendixes

Appendix 1: Table-2.2. Demographic dynamics of Malays by district-wise in Sri Lanka

Districts	Number	Percentage of the total Malay Population (%)
Colombo	12,463	31.01
Gampaha	11,658	29.00
Kalutara	597	1.48
Kandy	2,062	5.13
Matale	335	0.83
Nuwara Eliya	492	1.22
Galle	79	0.19
Matara	54	0.13
Hambantota	8,210	20.42
Jaffna	5	0.01
Mannar	10	0.02
Vavuniya	5	0.01
Mullaithivu	12	0.02
Batticaloa	16	0.03
Ampara	176	0.43
Trincomalee	364	0.90
Kurunegala	1,083	2.69
Puttalam	592	1.47
Anuradhapura	158	0.39
Polonnaruwa	46	0.11
Badulla	1,288	3.20
Moneragala	46	0.11
Ratnapura	270	0.67
Kegalle	168	0.41
Total	**40,189**	**100.00**

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2011

Appendix 2. Diagram-1. The causes of integration of Malays in Sri Lanka reflected in FGDs

Appendix-3. Details of interviewees

Interview No – 01	Colombo District	Retired civil servant
Interview No – 02	Colombo District	Malay youth (student)
Interview No – 03	Colombo District	Research scholar (academic)
Interview No – 04	Trincomalee District	Civil servant
Interview No – 05	Gampaha District	Civil Society Representative
Interview No – 06	Gampaha District	Civil Servant
Interview No – 07	Colombo District	Civil Society Representative
Interview No – 08	Hambantota District	Civil Servant
Interview No – 09	Gampaha District	Civil Society Representative
Interview No – 10	Tricomalee District	Unskilled worker (labor)
Interview No – 11	Tricomalee District	Civil Servant
Interview No – 12	Colombo District	Civil Society Representative
Interview No – 13	Kandy District	Civil Society Representative
Interview No – 14	Trincomalee District	Retired Civil Servant
Interview No – 15	Hambantota District	Civil Servant
Interview No – 16	Colombo District	Civil Society Representative
Interview No- 17	Colombo District	Sinhalese Civil Servant

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