

Serm on Delivered (in Tamil) by Ash Sheikh A.C. Agar Mohammed (Secretary – All Ceylon Jamiiyathul Ulama)

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Oh Muslims of Sri Lanka your motherland and mine is currently facing many challenges and obstacles from Western nations. At a crucial time like this every Sri Lankan voice must express loyalty to the land of our forefathers. This needs to be showcased for the entire world to see. At this point in history, where do we stand as Muslims?

First things first, as far as Islam is concerned, it does not have any room for communalism. Islam is a religion that requires its adherents to dispel ignorance and gives utmost importance to an individual's fundamental rights. In fact, Islam as a religion, revolved around the "ummaah" (the community of believers) and the call of Islam is a universal one. However, Islam accommodates variety amongst its faithful on the lines of nationality, region, language, tribe or race as long as the tenets of the faith, such as the importance of brotherhood in Islam, are observed in accordance with the teachings of the faith. Thus, Islam is a religion that promotes unity through diversity.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other))."

Our master and leader, the messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (Salallaahu Alaihi wa Sallam), when compelled to leave Makkah cried out "Oh Makkah, of all the places on this earth, you are the one I prefer the most and if it wasn't for the people of this land who are forcing me to leave, I would never dare take a step outside you". Not just the messenger alone, but all of his companions who had migrated to Madina (as sacred as it is) used to talk about their native land of Makkah with deep emotions and would often cry in worry for their beloved land of birth.

This is evidence that Islam, as much as it has a world view, encourages loyalty and love for ones motherland. However, our love and passion for our motherland should not lead us into arrogance or destructive nationalistic fervour. Islam has no room for such extremism. When your passion turns into arrogance you will never be able to judge between truth and falsehood or right and wrong. Besides, the beloved nabi of Allah (peace be on him) has said that anyone with even an iota of arrogance will not be able to enter paradise.

We have seen our brothers and sisters in the Middle East fight for their rights and freedom from their corrupt governments that dance according to the tune of western superpowers. From Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, and Yemen and now in Syria and Bahrain, we have seen people rise in revolt. These are all Muslims that love their motherland and were desperate to break the shackles that bound them to their tyrant rulers. We, as Muslims of Sri Lanka, are blessed and fortunate to have continuously had governments that have granted us our fundamental and religious rights to practice our religion without any let or hindrance.

We had the Portuguese, who came here and ruled, followed by the Dutch and then the English. They all took turns in trying to establish their rule and succeeded to a large degree. However, when our Muslim ancestors arrived, they never had any intention to establish their rule or take over the countries governance. In fact, they did not even think of it. They lived and have been living respectfully as citizens of this country which has a history of achieving freedom in the face of many obstacles. Our Muslim ancestors never took advantage of such situations but always lent their best possible support to help the country get back up on its feet. We Muslims have been a leading example of co-existence and for 1000 years have been living in ethnic harmony.

Muslims have held positions of authority in government for many years in Sri Lanka. Professor Idreesi writes that back in 1954, when there were 16 ministers in parliament, 4 of them were Muslims. Even during the kingdom of Wijayabahu, Meeran Lebbe was among his chosen leaders. Muslims had diplomatic skills in communication and language, which is why they were deployed by governments as their representatives abroad. In 1183, during the kingdom of Yapahuwa, King Konakabahu sent Haji Usman to Egypt to establish commercial relationships between the two countries. Furthermore, whenever foreign delegations arrived in Sri Lanka, the leaders of the time would deploy Muslims as their representatives for the exact same reasons. So much so that if you take a look at the registered names of the Muslims in Kandy, you will come across some names that have been titled "Mudiyanse". Muslims were so close to the indigenous people that King Senarath protected them from the Portuguese invaders by giving them refuge in safer locations. However, our Muslim ancestors did not only serve in governmental authority, but they were also employed as chefs at the palaces of kings. In fact, early rulers would enjoy meals prepared by Muslims. All of this was solely because of the trust and honesty that was seen in our Muslims by the rulers of the time.

Among the kingdoms of Seethawaka, Kotte and Kandy, Muslims have also served as soldiers. In 1810, 400 Muslims were among the soldiers of the Kandy regiment. Muslims have actively participated in gaining independence for Sri Lanka.

The English laid a condition that independence will be provided only if two parties want it. The then leader of Muslims, T.B. Jayah and Dr. Kaleel immediately were among the first to demand independence and made it very clear to the English that they will take care of any problem within the country. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike praised the Muslim community for accepting independence without laying any demands or conditions.

We Muslims have been at the forefront in the fields of agriculture, medicine, commerce and many more walks of life thus contributing to the overall economic and social welfare of the country.

Honourable D.S. Senanayake once famously pointed out that the Muslims were the backbone of Sri Lanka.

Taking a look at recent history itself, the 30 year long war that we all suffered has affected everyone in some way or the other. A large number of Muslims have had their share of affect as a result of this. In order to protect the hard fought independence, the sovereignty and the freedom, Muslims living in the North and East had to leave their native lands in a matter of hours on account of the violence that had gripped the region. Many were the Muslims who had sacrificed their homes and hearths and even their lives. Those who died in Eravur and those that were killed while in prayer in Kattankudi were all victims of this deadly war. All this is recent history, not ancient history.

My dear brothers and sisters in Islam, these are the efforts and sacrifices made by our Muslim ancestors for the independence and freedom of this country. We should always keep in mind that come what may, we lived, we are living and Insha-Allah will continue to live in our motherland. This is the Akhlaq (manners) that Islam teaches us.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to make a dua sometimes. "Oh Allah, I bear witness that I am indeed your slave and I also bear witness that the entire humanity is one brotherhood". Islam is a religion that nurtures a human being to be most grateful and a religion that does not tolerate ingratitude. Islam requires us to thank the Lord extensively, to thank our parents, our teachers and all of those who have helped us move along. Another great quality that Islam nurtures in a human being

is humility. The prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said that “the one who has not thanked man has not thanked Allah.”

Keeping this in mind, we need to be grateful to our motherland. Not to please anyone but because it is our duty and our responsibility towards our country. We, with the blessings of Allah, have 800 Muslim schools, 2500 masajids, 500 ahadiyaas and more than 250 Arabic institutions in Sri Lanka. Apart from this, we also enjoy the services of SLBC and SLRC, print and electronic media who have given us fair coverage. Islamic studies have been established in the school syllabus system for many years now. One of the oldest educational departments of this country is the departments of Arabic and Islamic Civilisations which was established in 1941 at the University of Peradineya.

For over 200 years, even law and order of the country has been amended for Muslims to practise our religious obligations. In fact, so many of our religious obligations which require our time, are respected and given room for, not just by the government but also the general public of this country.

Allah says in the Qur'an: “Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity.”

Dear friends, this country has finally been able to put a stop to a 30 year long civil war and is now at peace. The need of the hour is co-existence. All of us the Muslims, the Singhalese, the Tamils need to put behind our difference and work together in order to take this country forward. As Muslims, it is our sole responsibility to gain knowledge of the brethren that we share this country with. The secret lies in getting to know one another and establishing a level of trust and mutual understanding which will then lead us to live in harmony with one another.

We call out to our Muslim ummah worldwide to support and give us the encouragement we need to take this country forward once again and show the world that Sri Lankans are a people that respect one another, Sri Lankans are a people that believe in one another, Sri Lankans are a people that love another, and above all Sri Lankans are a people who love their country.