

Islam, Sufism and Everyday Politics of Belonging in South Asia

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3 Islamic and Buddhist impacts on the shrine at Daftar Jailani, Sri Lanka

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Introduction

In the aftermath of Sri Lanka's quarter-century of civil war that ended in 2009 between the militant Tamil separatists of the LTTE and the central government, a strongly Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist sentiment has imbued national politics. This has been expressed in the growth of several militant organizations headed by Buddhist monks who seek to reassert the primacy of Sinhala Buddhist culture and religion over what they consider alien religious communities, in particular Christians and Muslims (DeVotta and Stone 2008). The most powerful of these is the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS – Buddhist Strength Force), a group of militant monks who received tacit support from the government of former President Mahinda Rajapakse (2005–15). Among the Muslim targets chosen by the BBS is the Sufi hermitage shrine of Daftar Jailani, also known by the Sinhala name Kuragala, a mountainous location where Buddhist monastic cave-shelters have been dated to the second century BCE. Compounded by reformist Muslim criticisms of the Jailani festival as a deviation from true Islam, the BBS campaign to reclaim the site as an ancient Buddhist monastery has given the Jailani shrine an uncertain future.

Jailani shrine and festival

There are no Sufi *dargāhs* in Sri Lanka that have enjoyed imperial or aristocratic patronage over the centuries, such as Ajmer Sharif in Rajasthan or Nagoor in Tamilnadu. Apart from the many local saints' tombs (Sri Lankan Tamil, *ziyāram*) commonly found in mosque premises throughout the island, there are only four Sufi shrines that attract substantial numbers of Muslim pilgrims for annual festivals, including the Khidr Mosque located at Kataragama, the shrine for Faqir Muhiyadeen at Porvai (Godapitiya) in the deep south, and the Beach Mosque shrine for the Nagoor saint at Kalmunaikkudy on the eastern coast (McGilvray 1998, 2013). The fourth and most widely known shrine is Daftar Jailani, situated on the southern escarpment of the Kandyan Hills in a dramatically beautiful location 22 kilometers from the town of Balangoda in Sabaragamuwa Province. The population of the surrounding

region is overwhelmingly Sinhala-speaking Buddhist in composition, but the pilgrims who come annually to Jailani are mainly from Sri Lanka's Tamil-speaking Sunni Muslim community, known in English as Moors or in Tamil as Sonahar (*cōnakar*), who are widely dispersed across the island (McGilvray 1998, 2008).

The site is named after the illustrious Sufi saint, 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī (d. 1166 CE, buried in Baghdad), founder of the Qādiriyya, a Sufi order that is widespread in South Asia as well as in Southeast Asia, and is found throughout the Muslim world (Zarcone et al. 2000). Sri Lankan legend claims that the saint meditated for 12 years in a rock cave at Daftar Jailani before he took up public life as a teacher and jurist in Baghdad. This folk narrative places him in the company of later Muslim travelers such as Ibn Battuta who in the fourteenth century ascended Adam's Peak, located only 50 kilometers away, where Adam is believed to have fallen from Paradise. The shrine itself preserves no physical trace of the saint; it is instead a hermitage site where his annual kandoori death anniversary festival (Tamil, *kantūri*, equivalent of 'urs) is celebrated, and where the sixteenth-century CE south Indian saint Shahul Hamid of Nagoor and the 'green' Prophet al-Khidr are believed also to have paid visits. There is no hereditary line of living descendants at Jailani, but the office of chief trustee has been passed down within a prominent Muslim family from Balangoda that helped to establish the shrine in the late nineteenth century.

Physically, the site consists of three granite monoliths guarding a deep ravine situated at the top of steep rocky cliffs overlooking Sinhalese Buddhist villages and rice fields on the Kaltota plain spread out below. Saint 'Abd al-Qādir is believed to have meditated at the ledge of a deep natural opening in 'cave mountain' (Tamil, *curankam malai*) facing a dramatic view over the southern jungles of his day. In the opposite direction is an exposed granite slope known as 'djinn mountain' (Tamil, *jin malai*), where custodians of the shrine reported finding a stone with the Arabic inscription *yā Allāh hijrī 300* (907 CE), a date more than two centuries prior to the saint's lifetime (Aboosally 2002: 60–61). The main center of festival activities at Daftar Jailani is situated directly beneath the third and largest monolith, known to local Sinhalese villagers as Hituwangala (standing rock), but to Tamil-speaking Muslims as 'ship mountain' (*kappal malai*) for its resemblance to the prow of a boat, or 'hand-print mountain' (*kaiyati malai*) for palm impressions believed to have been made by saintly visitors such as Shahul Hamid of Nagoor. Under the massive overhanging rock face there is a roofed, open-air mosque built in 1922 and the *ziyāram* of a *faqīr* named Darvesh Muhiyadeen whose tombstone was reportedly discovered during the original construction of the building. According to shrine officials, the inscription on the tombstone bears the date 715 AH (1315 CE), but this has not been independently examined or officially verified. Until the summer of 2013, there were also a number of pilgrim shelters, administrative offices, tea shops, and several twentieth-century *ziyāram* tombs located along the main path, which conducts visitors a short distance on foot from the parking lot and bus halt.



Figure 3.1 Sri Lankan Muslim pilgrims approaching the entrance into the Jailani/
Kuragala site during the annual kandoori festival in 2014
(Photo courtesy Dennis B. McGilvray)

The opening day of the annual festival, which begins at sunset on the first day of the month of Rabi' al-Ākhir, features an exciting flag-raising (Tamil, *kotiyērram*) ceremony, followed by devotional *rātibs* and ecstatic self-mortifying *zikr* by Bawa *faqīrs* of the Rifā'ī order that I have described elsewhere (McGilvray 2004; see also Spittel 1933: 312–321). The key event is the blessing of a newly donated embroidered green flag by a group of male religious leaders and mosque officials, who dip their hands into sandalwood paste and place palm prints on the flag in commemoration of 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī, Shahul Hamid of Nagoor, and various other saintly figures who are believed to have visited the site centuries ago. The Nagoor saint is said to have conducted his own personal retreat (*chilla*) in the very same location where the flag is consecrated, a shallow cave in a crevice above the mosque that has also been identified by the Sri Lankan Archaeology Department as an ancient shelter for Buddhist monks. There are two such monastic cells in close proximity to the mosque, each with a chiseled stone drip-edge to prevent rainwater from trickling inside the cave area, and both of them accompanied by Brahmi stone inscriptions from the second century BCE. Both of these rock shelters were enclosed by masonry walls presumably constructed (or perhaps reconstructed) during the twentieth century as part of the development of Daftar Jailani as a Muslim religious center, the second shelter becoming a devotional site for honoring the Prophet al-Khidr, who is associated in Sri Lanka with wild and pristine natural environments such as one finds at Jailani.

Historical summary

The only available history of the Daftar Jailani shrine is a self-published book written by the late chief trustee, the Hon. M.L.M. Aboosally, who had served as a long-standing United National Party member of parliament and Cabinet minister representing the Balangoda constituency from 1977–94, and whose father and grandfather led the first efforts to establish Jailani as a saintly shrine (Aboosally 2002). According to Aboosally's account, it was a south Indian Muslim *sayyid* (descendant of the Prophet) from the Lakshadweep archipelago bearing the title of *maulānā*, or *tankal*, who visited Balangoda in 1857 and first discovered the precise location of Jailani, known previously only by legend. In 1875 his nephew arrived from India, enlisted the aid of local Muslims to clear the jungle site, and eventually married and settled in Balangoda. By the late nineteenth century, the existence of a Muslim shrine at Daftar Jailani had been noted by colonial government agents in Ratnapura, and in 1922 the current mosque was erected by C.L.M. Marikar Hajiyyar of Balangoda, the father of Mr Aboosally MP. Further construction on the site after that date seems to have been incremental and undocumented, apart from a substantial pilgrim shelter erected by a wealthy patron in 1965, who also arranged to be buried in a private *ziyāram* next door.

The Bawa *faqīrs* who perform their annual Rifā'ī *zikr* at Jailani built a small lodge or clubhouse (*pakkīr makkām*) facing their performance space,

adjacent to the tomb of an Indian holy man named Mastan Sahib Abdul Gafoor who had unilaterally taken up residence in the ‘chilla room’ cave until his death in 1965. There have been a number of such uninvited guests who prolonged their stay at Jailani, including ‘one delightful gentleman from Lahore’ whom the British archaeologist C.H. Collins says prayed in the depths of ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī’s meditation cave for three months at a time (Collins 1932: 168). Another was a stubborn *faqīr* squatter named ‘Trinco Bawa’, who was eventually taken to court by the government Archaeology Department and acquitted (Aboosally 2002: 84–85). A number of commercial tea stalls, restaurants and souvenir shops were in place when I first visited Jailani in the early 1990s. By late in the same decade, several modern bungalow-style accommodations had been erected by private Muslim donors on leasehold land closer to the parking lot, and an ornamental Islamic gateway with chiseled stone steps had been constructed at the entrance to the shrine property by a Muslim patron from Chilaw.

Previously, back in the 1930s, the colonial exploration of Sri Lanka’s archaeological heritage had finally reached the lesser-known parts of the island, including the Ratnapura District where Jailani – officially known as Kuragala – is situated. The major archaeological report on Kuragala, and adjacent sites situated below the Balangoda plateau, was published by C.H. Collins in 1932. He documented two cave shelters and two accompanying second-century BCE Brahmi inscriptions located near the present-day Jailani mosque that are included in Paranavitana’s comprehensive inventory of such inscriptions throughout the island (Paranavitana 1970). However, the more significant archaeological site, according to Collins, was Budugala, located at the foot of the Kuragala escarpment but within eyesight of Jailani/Kuragala, where handsomely carved stone lintels, stairways and platforms indicated the former existence of a Buddhist temple (Collins 1932: 161–165). Since Collins’s day, the most exciting archaeological discoveries in the region have been the excavation of mesolithic stone tools and skeletal remains of ‘Balangoda Man’ (*Homo sapiens balangodensis*, ca. 38,000 years BP) from other sites in the region (Deraniyagala 1996), and the discovery of sophisticated wind-powered technology for smelting steel dating to the ninth century CE located near the new Samanalawewa hydroelectric project (Juleff 1998).

Collins noted in passing that ‘Kuragala is a great place of Muslim pilgrimage, though other religionists also claim it’ (Collins 1932: 168). These claims were heatedly asserted in a confrontation staged in the early 1970s by a group of Buddhist monks supported by the incumbent Sinhalese MP for Balangoda, Mrs Mallika Ratwatte, who was a staunch political rival of the chief trustee, Mr Aboosally. In his own account of the incident, violence was averted by skilled diplomacy, but the ensuing political compromise acknowledged the government’s authority over Kuragala, which was designated a second-century BCE Buddhist monastic site under the administration of the Archaeology Department in 1972. A moratorium on further construction and a ban on additional *ziyarām* tombs were also agreed to. However, as a gesture

of reassurance, the archaeological commissioner wrote in a trilingual memorandum that '[t]he Muslims who have been using Kuragala as a place of worship will not be affected by this conservation work' (Aboosally 2002: 109).

The Brahmi inscriptions at Kuragala, like many of similar antiquity around the island, are fragmentary and seemingly incomplete. For example, one simply says '[t]he cave of lord Punaśaguta, son of the chief Sona' (Paranavitana 1970: inscription no. 776), without any explicit designation of the cave as a gift to the Buddhist monkhood. Mr Aboosally's reading of the epigraphical evidence led him to argue that these inscriptions were ambiguous, and that – in contrast to caves elsewhere that had been explicitly donated to the monkhood – the caves at Kuragala were not necessarily intended for Buddhist religious use (Aboosally 2002: 61–63). However, research by Sri Lankan archaeologists and epigraphers establishes that such inscribed cave-shelters were intended by their donors as religious gifts to support the monkhood in Sri Lanka, providing shelter during the annual rainy season (*vassa*) retreat as prescribed in Theravada Buddhist tradition (Paranavitana 1970; Dias 2001: 14–18). Thus, the two Brahmi-inscribed caves at Kuragala – like more than 1,200 others scattered across the island – were evidently Buddhist merit-earning gifts from locally powerful chiefs, constructed in the hope that some pious monks might occupy them for three monsoon months every year. However, to call these two isolated cave-shelters a 'monastery' might strike some visitors as an exaggeration. They are in no way unique or historically significant as Buddhist antiquities, except that they pre-date Muslim occupation of Jailani.

Buddhist pressure on Jailani

Although the recent history of Sri Lanka has been dominated by the quarter-century of civil war between Tamil Tiger (LTTE) separatists and the Sinhala-led central government that ended in 2009, there has also been a history of twentieth-century friction between the Sinhala Buddhist majority and the Tamil-speaking Muslim minority. The most devastating outbreak was in 1915, when thousands of Muslim shops and homes throughout the Sinhala districts were attacked, and British troops were called to their rescue (Ameer Ali 1981; Peebles 2006). Although Muslim political leaders since then have shunned alliances with Tamil nationalists and have preferred pragmatic coalition politics with Sinhala-majority parties, there has been intermittent and scattered local-level Sinhala-Muslim violence, usually sparked by neighborhood grievances or personal animosities, and quite possibly economic inequalities (Scott 1989). The same could be said for Tamil-Muslim tensions in the northern and eastern regions of the island, a situation aggravated by the harsh LTTE campaign of ethnic cleansing of Muslims from the north in 1990 (Hasbullah 2004; Thiranagama 2011).

More recently, however, an upsurge of anti-Muslim sentiment in the Sinhala Buddhist community has been fomented by a cluster of new organizations

that seek to reclaim and reassert Sinhala Buddhist political and cultural hegemony over what they consider foreign, non-indigenous religious communities, including Christians, but especially Muslims (McGilvray 2016). The most prominent of such anti-Muslim groups is the BBS, led by a pugnacious Buddhist monk named Galagoda Atte Gnanasara, who broke away from membership in the *bhikkhu*-centered Jathika Hela Uramaya (JHU – National Heritage Party) because they were too moderate. Two other militant *bhikkhu*-led organizations, Sinhala Ravaya (Sinhala Outcry) and Ravana Balaya (Ravana Power), pursue similar anti-Muslim agendas. Since 2011, when the BBS first appeared on the scene, they have conducted a series of high-profile public relations campaigns and have led public demonstrations against a variety of Muslim targets, including the commercial certification of halal foods and products, the slaughter of livestock to celebrate ‘īd al-Adha (the sacrifice of Abraham), the wearing of hijab and the full face covering (*niqāb*) by Muslim women, the allegedly corrupt practices of certain leading Muslim clothing chains, and the purported encroachment of Muslim mosques and shrines into historic ‘sacred zones’ surrounding Buddhist *dāgobas* (stupas) and *vihāras* (temples). The BBS also alleges that the Sri Lankan Muslim community harbors clandestine jihadi terrorist cells and warns that their high birth-rate will allow the Muslims (9.7% of the population in 2012) to control the island within a few decades. The most surprising BBS claim is that Muslim restaurant cooks are required by Islamic law to spit three times into food before it is served to non-Muslims.

It is the militant Buddhist opposition to Muslim mosques and sacred sites of all kinds that places the Sufi shrine at Daftar Jailani in renewed jeopardy. The BBS-inspired demolition of a local saint’s tomb in Anuradhapura in 2011 first caught the headlines, an event recorded on video showing a robed monk directing lay workers wielding sledgehammers while a platoon of uniformed policemen watched passively from the sidelines. Then, in 2012, a mob of 2,000 led by a prominent monk ransacked a mosque near the ancient Rangiri Vihara in Dambulla that was alleged to have been erected without permission 60 years ago (Heslop 2014; Amarasuriya et al. 2015b). Since then, there have been numerous acts of vandalism against mosques and madrasas across the island (Center for Policy Alternatives 2013), as well as an alarming outbreak of large-scale anti-Muslim rioting in Aluthgama in June 2014 (Haniffa et al. 2015). The 100th anniversary of the 1915 riots passed without incident in 2015, much to the relief of the Muslim community.

According to administrators of the shrine, things were relatively peaceful at Daftar Jailani after the resolution of the archaeology crisis of the early 1970s. An official sign was erected, notifying visitors they were entering a Buddhist archaeological reserve containing the ‘remains of a Buddhist monastery circa 2nd century BC’, but construction of a bogus brick *dāgoba* at the top of ‘cave mountain’ was terminated through the intervention of Mr Aboosally. Apart from bureaucratic red tape, Archaeology Department staff interfered very little with Muslim religious activities at the site for four decades, until the

BBS and their allies started to stir communal tensions again in 2012–13 (Amarasuriya et al. 2015a). On several occasions, groups of Buddhist monks from the JHU, the BBS and the Sinhala Ravaya organizations have attempted to occupy the Jailani/Kuragala site. An assault in January 2013 was thwarted by a tropical downpour that local Muslims viewed as divine intervention. By that time, however, the Sinhala nationalist monks had acquired the support of the minister of defense, Gotabhaya Rajapakse, the brother of the Sri Lankan president. After summoning the current chief trustee of the Jailani shrine, Mrs Roshan Aboosally, to the Defense Ministry for several rounds of questioning, the minister and his entourage made a helicopter trip to Jailani/Kuragala in April 2013. The outcome was an order from the Defense Ministry that all structures had to be removed from the four-acre archaeological reserve, except for the mosque (left untouched) and the exposed Muslim tombs (minus their roofs and walls). This included dismantling Muslim flagpoles atop the three granite monoliths surrounding the Jailani shrine, as well as demolishing all administrative offices, storerooms, pilgrim shelters, tea shops and commercial structures located inside the boundary of the archaeological zone.

The only archaeologically significant change was the removal of the twentieth-century masonry walls and doorways that had been erected to enclose the two ancient Buddhist cave-shelters, labeled by Muslims as the



Figure 3.2 Islamic wall decorations for sale at the Jailani kandoori festival in 2001, displayed beside a trilingual Sri Lankan Archaeology Department signboard identifying Kuragala as a second-century Buddhist monastery (Photo courtesy Dennis B. McGilvray)

Nagoor saint's 'chilla room' and the 'Khidr room'. Even this conservation work by the Archaeology Department may be questionable, since it was common practice in the second century BCE to enclose such cave-shelters with walls, doors and windows (Dias 2001: 2–12). The demolition work was carried out in the summer of 2013 by members of the Civil Defense Corps under the direction of the Defense Ministry. When I visited Jailani in January 2014, the remaining area had been nicely tidied up, leaving a series of earthen terraces with stonework retaining walls resembling a parade ground. The defense minister is reported to have left strict instructions to make the site clean and appealing for the many foreign tourists whom he predicted would be coming to see the two isolated cave-shelters constituting this second-century BCE Buddhist site.

Media skirmish

A decade ago I published a chapter entitled 'Jailani: A Sufi Shrine in Sri Lanka' (McGilvray 2004), in which I offered an anthropological account of the history and popular meaning of Daftar Jailani for Sri Lankan Muslims, focusing on a description of the annual kandoori festival. I also discussed the long-term pressure by the Buddhist clergy to reclaim control over Jailani/Kuragala and to eliminate Muslim occupation of the site. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the central Muslim figure in this ongoing tussle had been Mr Aboosally, the chief trustee of the Jailani shrine and an adroit politician at the national level, who defused threats from militant *bhikkus* as well as rival politicians on several occasions. I pointed out the geographical vulnerability of Jailani, a tiny Muslim outpost surrounded by Sinhala populations on all sides, a predicament that could easily lead to complete Buddhist hegemony over the site. I did not, however, directly assess the archaeology and epigraphy of Kuragala, choosing instead to cite Mr Aboosally's own interpretation of the cave inscriptions in a brief two-sentence comment (*ibid.*: 287, footnote 20) that reads as follows:

There are Brahmi inscriptions at Jailani dating to the second century B.C.E., but they appear to assert territorial claims by local political chieftains. According to Aboosally (2002: 62–63) there is no evidence that the site was ever dedicated to the Buddhist Sangha.

The readership I had in mind at the time was an academic audience of anthropologists and scholars of comparative religion. My chapter was primarily about ethnography and popular religion, not archaeology, and I deliberately avoided rendering judgment on matters of Sri Lankan epigraphy about which I knew practically nothing at the time. However, my chapter emerged in 2013 as the focus of a debate in the Sri Lankan press and digital media over the efforts to expel Muslims from Buddhist 'sacred zones' around the island, and from Jailani/Kuragala in particular. By then, Mr Aboosally

had passed away, and the office of chief trustee at Daftar Jailani was in the hands of his eldest daughter, Mrs Roshan Aboosally, a Colombo lawyer by profession.

In April 2013 a journalist for the online newspaper *The Colombo Telegraph* wrote a detailed account of the high-level intervention by the minister of defense, supported by various militant Buddhist groups, in ordering the removal of the Muslim structures at Jailani (Bastians 2013). A month later, in the same publication, a Colombo Muslim political commentator lamented the prospect of celebrating Buddhist Vesak at Jailani (Farook 2013). These two digital articles quickly provoked a volley of cyber-rebuttals defending the importance and authenticity of the Buddhist caves at Kuragala, and their criticism focused on my 2004 chapter, or to be more precise on my fateful footnote 20, which was taken as proof that I had been a naive – perhaps even mercenary – mouthpiece for the Jailani shrine management. The fact that my article had been posted on a website maintained by the Daftar Jailani shrine management (www.jailani.org) was taken as a further sign of my partisan scholarship. Ignoring my ethnographic reportage, the media critics emphasized, first, my uncritical acceptance of Muslim shrine pseudo-history, and second, my incompetence as a scholar for neglecting the only important question that needed to be settled: who occupied Kuragala first. Many of these online rants were sophomoric and tendentious, but they quickly served to point me toward the archaeological and epigraphic literature on Buddhist cave inscriptions, with which I have now become quite conversant. The lesson from this skirmish is one familiar to scholars of other South Asian ethnic and religious conflicts: the past inevitably becomes a battleground for the present.

Jailani flag-raising 2014

In the course of discussions in 2013 between the chief trustee and the defense minister, the written pledge made in 1972 that Muslims would be permitted to continue using Kuragala as a place of worship was reaffirmed by the director of archaeology, and government authorities have so far permitted the annual festival to proceed in customary fashion. The kandoori celebration in 2014 – on the 125th anniversary of the Jailani shrine itself – was the first to be conducted after the razing of Muslim structures within the archaeological reserve. To observe the practical impacts of the Buddhist demolition campaign, I attended the flag-raising celebrations on the opening day of the festival, January 31, 2014.

Because of the official publicity about Kuragala as an archaeological site, the road to Jailani/Kuragala – now marked by a new Buddha statue at the main junction – has been greatly improved for automobile and bus access. Inside the four-acre archaeological zone, the demolition and removal of existing structures has been thorough, leaving only the 1922 mosque and several exposed *ziyāram* tombs still standing. Near the top of the hillock where pilgrims enter the site, the modern Islamic-style gateway arch and carved stone steps remain untouched. It is on this peripheral property,

allocated to the Jailani shrine on a long-term lease, that all of the commercial business and food preparation activities took place in 2014. As a money-saving strategy, and as a gesture of respect for monastic Buddhist values, the shrine prepared only vegetarian meals for pilgrims this year.

Apart from these changes, however, the Jailani pilgrims in 2014 occupied and utilized space in the archaeological reserve exactly as they had done in the past: camping in family groups near the mosque, roaming around the granite monoliths on foot, and conducting the flag-raising ritual itself inside one of the ancient Buddhist cave-shelters recently stripped of its twentieth-century masonry walls (the so-called ‘chilla room’ where the Nagoor saint is believed to have meditated). The second of the second-century BCE Buddhist cave-shelters (formerly the site of devotion to the Prophet Khidr) was fully occupied during the 2014 flag-raising by a Sufi shaykh and a group of Muslim laymen and women in his entourage. Regular prayer and individual (largely female) vow making was conducted at the mosque, and night-time performances of ecstatic *zikr* by Bawa *faqīrs* of the Rifāī order took place in their customary space near a temporarily erected flagpole. A Sri Lankan Police post was manned by Sinhalese constables who seemed relaxed and rather bored, and a new Archaeology Department office was staffed by a cordial Sinhalese woman who offered us tea when the chief trustee and I paid a courtesy visit.

The size of the crowd on the opening day appeared roughly comparable to what I had observed in previous years, with a strong contingent from the eastern Ampara and Batticaloa Districts where Sufi shaykhs have recently been gaining new followers (McGilvray 2011, 2014). A large banner was seen at the entrance to the archaeological preserve expressing support from the Eastern Ahlus Sunna Foundation, a new organization headed by several young maulavis in the Kalmunai area. In the current Sri Lankan context, ‘Ahlus Sunna’ identified this group as defenders of customary forms of Sufism and saint veneration, aligning them with an older Colombo Muslim association, Hubbul Avuliya (Love of the Saints), who also support Jailani. The blessing and raising of the saint’s flag at sunset, a ceremony highly charged with Muslim spiritual energy (*barakat*), was conducted with the same excitement and sacred tension I had seen before, only this time there were many smartphones, and at least one iPad, deployed to record personal videos for posterity. I had feared there might be disruption of the festival by militant BBS monks or by government security forces, but nothing of that sort happened. Not a single Buddhist monk was to be seen, although there were Sinhala shopkeepers vending snacks and souvenirs to the Muslim pilgrims, and nearby Sinhala property owners were busily collecting parking fees from private Muslim vehicles.

The future of Jailani

According to Mrs Aboosally, there were harrowing last-minute delays before she received formal permission from the Archaeology Department to conduct

the 2014 festival. However, she also admitted that having all of the commercial activity relocated outside the shrine itself might prove to be a long-term blessing in disguise because it could serve to elevate the spiritual tone of the festival. Her dream is to build a new year-round Sufi meditation center and library on the leased property outside the archaeological reserve, a project for which she has already commissioned some preliminary survey work and architectural sketches. The clientele for such a Sufi meditation center would presumably be affluent, well-educated, middle-class Muslims (and some non-Muslims, too) eager to enjoy Jailani's solitude and natural beauty, but the funding and business model for such a center remains to be developed. Meanwhile, Jailani's current devotees are drawn to the festival for more emotional and practical reasons: to obtain the personal protection and intercession of 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī and his spiritual companions. It is this core following of devotees and vow makers that sustains the shrine and attends its annual festival, including a number of affluent urban Moors and Memons who help to underwrite the celebration each year.

It is impossible to tell whether the steps taken by the government to remove most, but not all, of the Muslim structures will permanently placate the monks of the BBS and its allies. At the flag-raising ceremony in January 2014, the Muslim pilgrims and celebrants fully occupied the two ancient Buddhist cave-shelters, utilizing them for Sufi ceremonies and domestic purposes exactly as they had done in previous festival seasons, while a TV camera crew from Colombo shot video footage, and national newspapers carried articles describing the event. In early 2015, however, militant Buddhist groups staged several more protests at Jailani/Kuragala (Amarasuriya et al. 2015a: 44–46). Meanwhile, the Buddhist site of Budugala, described by Collins in his 1932 archaeological survey, clearly visible below the cliff-top parapets of Jailani, has been growing in popularity as a Sinhala Buddhist pilgrimage center. Situated amidst granite boulders adjacent to the Budugala archaeological site, the Budugala Raja Maha Vihara (established in 1925) has completed construction of a gleaming white *dāgoba* (2001), a facsimile shrine of the Buddha's footprint atop Adam's Peak (2010), and a reduced replica of the fifth-century CE Avukana Buddha statue (2011), all funded by popular subscription. The official temple booklet claims that Budugala played an historic role in safeguarding the Buddha's tooth relic, now enshrined in Kandy, as well as situating an early medieval temple for Kataragama, the most popular of the four guardian deities of the island (Somaratana n.d.). Although no Buddhist religious activity seems to occur at Jailani/Kuragala, the nearby Budugala temple is clearly attracting Sinhala Buddhist pilgrims from outside the local area. It remains to be seen whether this expanding Buddhist center will generate further pressure to reclaim Jailani as part of a larger Budugala Buddhist complex.

For the time being, it is the Archaeology Department that must demonstrate its genuine commitment to impartial conservation, scientific excavation and epigraphic research. For 40 years following the designation of Kuragala

as an archaeological reserve in 1972, they seem to have given the site little attention. Most notably, the Arabic inscriptions to which Jailani officials have pointed have not been examined or verified by Archaeology Department epigraphers. I was told that an early (300 AH) Arabic inscription on ‘Djinn Mountain’ had been completely effaced in the course of demolition work conducted by the Civil Defense Corps in 2013. As the late Mr Aboosally ruefully noted, ‘[t]he Archaeological Department appears to be only interested in Sinhala and Buddhist archaeology’ (Aboosally 2002: 85).

A more long-term question concerns the leadership of the Daftar Jailani shrine, which has been held by Mrs Aboosally since the death of her father in 2005. The Aboosally family supported and led the development of Jailani throughout the twentieth century, and her succession as the chief trustee appears to have encountered no local opposition. However, when the defense minister made his flying visit to Kuragala with an entourage of Buddhist monks and Archaeology Department officials in 2013, he brought along a Muslim cleric from Colombo who was unknown in the Balangoda area. According to first-hand accounts, he admonished the Jailani authorities for allowing a woman to administer the shrine, only to be vociferously corrected by one of Mrs Aboosally’s sisters, who later received accolades from the Muslim women who witnessed the encounter. The Aboosally family has a reputation for its forthright and progressive women, and Roshan has weathered the BBS assault on Jailani with grace and aplomb, seeking to preserve her father’s vision of the shrine as a space of religious tolerance and individual spiritual fulfillment. It can be assumed, however, that having a woman in charge of the Jailani shrine and mosque will continue to provoke objections from conservative anti-Sufi Muslim elements such as the Tablighi and Towheed Jamaats.

The larger picture

The monks of the BBS and their allies have no apparent understanding of – or interest in – Sufism. This was reflected in a fatuous comment by the Ven. Gnanasara, head of the BBS, alleging that Muslims at Kuragala venerated a local ‘Sufi prophet’ who smoked ganja and provided wild meat for a Sinhalese landed estate nearby (*Colombo Telegraph*, March 14, 2014). The BBS campaign has been directed against Islam in general, and the Sri Lankan Muslim community in particular, with no concern for the diversity of the religion or its adherents. The affinities and connections between the BBS and the anti-Muslim 969 Movement in Myanmar, led by the Burmese monk Ashin Wirathu, have also become clear, as seen in a conclave of BBS monks in Colombo on September 28, 2014, at which Wirathu was the invited speaker. It has also been noted that the BBS shares many characteristics with militant Hindutva organizations in India – such as the Shiv Sena, the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and the VHP (Vishva Hindu Parishad) – exuding deep hostility to Islam as a religion alien to South Asia’s dharmic traditions.

While Sri Lankan Muslims of all persuasions are alarmed by the breadth and vigor of the BBS campaign – ranging from condemnation of halal certification to accusations of harboring jihadi terrorist squads – there has been conspicuously little outrage on the part of Muslim fundamentalist and reformist groups such as the Sri Lanka Towheed Jamaat (www.sltj.lk) in response to the Buddhist assault upon Sufi shrines and saintly *ziyārams*, a goal toward which they are theologically sympathetic. In this singular respect – but for utterly different reasons – the BBS and the Muslim fundamentalist/reformist groups tacitly share a common viewpoint. One fears that the Khidr Mosque near the famed multicultural Kataragama temple in southern Sri Lanka, with its numerous entombed saints and *faqīrs*, could be next.

Ironically enough, the type of Muslim piety seen at Daftar Jailani is the most easily comprehensible form of Islam from a Sri Lankan pan-cultural point of view. The commemoration of a Sufi saint and the quest to obtain his spiritual protection bear obvious similarities to the supplication of Hindu deities, the offering of prayers to Catholic saints and the dedication of vows to Sinhala Buddhist guardian gods such as Sumana Saman at Adam's Peak. The nightly performance of ecstatic Rifā'ī *zikr*, featuring the 'cutting and stabbing work' (Tamil, *vettukkuttu vēlai*) of the Bawa *faqīrs*, is definitely on a par with the kavadi hook dancing (Tamil, *mulu kāvati*) one sees among Sinhalese and Tamil vow makers at Kataragama. Also, judging from their attire and their patterns of public sociability, the Muslim pilgrims who attend the annual festival at Daftar Jailani appear to be relatively less reformist or fundamentalist in outlook. Families mingle in mixed-gender crowds, and women in dazzlingly colorful saris far outnumber those in all-black Saudi-style hijab. At the flag-raising in 2014 I saw only one woman wearing a *niqāb*. If the practice of serving only vegetarian meals to Jailani pilgrims is permanently adopted by the shrine management, the BBS criticism of Muslim animal slaughter will have been forestalled. All in all, compared with Wahhabi-inspired expressions of public religiosity and Islamic dress, the festival at Daftar Jailani appears to be strongly indigenous and Sri Lankan.

Conclusion

Despite the Archaeology Department's official declaration that Kuragala is a second-century BCE Buddhist monastery, no BBS monk has yet expressed a desire to spend his annual three-month monsoon season *vassa* retreat in the Kuragala caves. The struggle for control of Jailani/Kuragala is not about competitive worship on shared sacred ground (Hayden 2002), nor does it involve the kind of universally magnetic sacrality that has been described for certain Sri Lankan temples and churches (Bastin 2012). It is a contest between the living participants of one religious tradition – the Sufi Muslim devotees of 'Abd al-Qādir Jilānī – who wish to continue to celebrate their saint's annual festival, versus an ethno-nationalistically motivated religious party – the Buddhist monks of the BBS and their allies – who simply wish to

banish Muslims from ‘their’ archaeological turf. The fact that the Jailani festival celebrates the legends of a saintly hermitage, a site of Sufi self-isolation and retreat from the world, would seem to honor Buddhist monastic traditions of asceticism and meditation. However, the BBS fixation on securing and sealing the ‘sacred zones’ surrounding all Buddhist religious sites, whether modern or ancient, instead seeks to make Kuragala into a symbol of exclusive Sinhala Buddhist nationalist identity. One can only hope that the new government of President Maithripala Sirisena, democratically elected in 2015, will pursue a policy of renewed tolerance and reconciliation toward all of Sri Lanka’s ethnic and religious minorities, including the Muslim pilgrims to the sanctified caves at Daftar Jailani.

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