RESEARCH PROPOSAL

ON

FORCED CREMATION OF MUSLIM COVID-19 VICTIMS IN SRI LANKA: EXAMINING ITS NATURE, IMPLICATIONS, AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPACT

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1. Introduction

The **forced cremation of Muslim victims of COVID-19** in Sri Lanka is a significant issue that warrants further study. This policy was implemented against the will of the victims' families, the broader Muslim community, and Islamic traditions, **despite guidelines from the World Health Organization** (WHO) and strong opposition from both national and international **experts in virology and healthcare**. The incident is widely regarded violation of religious freedom and human rights.

In 2020, the Sri Lankan government **mandated cremation for all COVID-19 victims**, contradicting WHO policies, which allowed both burial and cremation. As a member of the WHO since 1948, Sri Lanka has previously followed its recommendations on public health matters (WHO, 2025). However, the government's deviation from these guidelines raised concerns about religious discrimination, particularly among the Muslim community, which strictly prohibits cremation. While this policy did not significantly affect families of other faiths, it deeply impacted Muslims, who had never before encountered such forced practices.

The Muslim community perceived the mandatory cremation policy as an extension of ongoing discrimination, fuelled by political motives. During this period, politicians from a particular party allegedly promoted policies favoring the majority community to secure electoral support. This period also witnessed several violent incidents targeting Muslims, including attacks in Digana, Aluthgama, and Kurunegala (Author, 2018; 2019), further reinforcing concerns about systemic bias. The arbitrary nature of government decisions made it difficult for the Muslim community to seek justice through legal avenues.

Given these circumstances, a critical question arises why should the Muslim community continue to be concerned about this past event. Addressing this question and examining the broader implications of forced cremation on religious freedom and human rights form the primary objectives of this study.

2. Literature Review

Numerous journalistic and academic articles have examined the issue of forced cremation in Sri Lanka, focusing on aspects such as religious freedom, cultural rights, and human rights violations. However**, none of these sources provide a complete list of the victims' names and personal details, leaving a significant gap in documentation**.

In 2020, several families of Muslim victims, supported by Muslim civil and human rights organizations, filed a fundamental rights petition in the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka challenging the forced cremation policy. However, the petition was dismissed without a verdict and did not include a comprehensive list of the victims. This lack of complete documentation hinders efforts to preserve historical records, raise awareness among national and international human rights organizations, and support justice initiatives.

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Furthermore, existing **documentaries** on the forced cremation of Muslim COVID-19 victims are incomplete and often biased. A well-documented report containing detailed information on the individuals and families affected by this policy is crucial. Compiling such a report will require an extensive investigation. **Additionally, a comprehensive record could serve as valuable evidence for future legal challenges in the Supreme Court.**

If the primary objective is to seek legal redress and pursue a revised ruling under new circumstances, **resubmitting the original petition may be sufficient**. However, for the broader advocacy and long-term justice efforts, a well-researched report is essential.

3. Research Objectives

This research aims to produce a comprehensive document with detailed findings to achieve the following objectives:

1. **Highlight the violation of religious freedom** guaranteed by Sri Lanka's constitution by presenting the issue to Parliament and the judiciary. This will help prevent similar breaches during future crises.
2. **Assess the feasibility of providing financial compensation** to the families of the victims through legal and legislative channels, including Parliament and the judiciary.
3. **Raise awareness among national and international human rights organizations** and advocacy groups about the forced cremation policy and its impact on religious communities.
4. **Preserve documented records in schools, universities, and public libraries** to educate students about this serious human rights violation and the Islamic perspective on burial practices.
5. **Archive the documentation in key institutions and organizations,** such as the Library of Congress in the United States, to ensure its availability for future research and reference.

4. Hypothesis and testable hypothesis

4.1 Hypothesis

The mandatory cremation policy for COVID-19 victims in Sri Lanka violated the religious freedom and fundamental rights of Muslim victims. This act has caused lasting psychological trauma to the victim's families and the broader Muslim community, leaving an indelible mark on their collective memory.

4.2 Null Hypothesis

The mandatory cremation policy for COVID-19 victims in Sri Lanka did not violate the religious freedom or fundamental rights of Muslim victims. Furthermore, it did not cause lasting psychological trauma to the victims' families or the Muslim community.

4. Research Questions

This research aims to answer the following questions:

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1. Why and how was the mandatory cremation policy for COVID-19 victims established in Sri Lanka?
2. Is there strong documentary evidence to support claims against the policy?
3. Unlike the previous government, is the current administration willing to acknowledge and address the issue?
4. Has there been a change in judicial practices under the present government compared to the previous one?
5. Is it probable to obtain advocacy and supporting evidence from national and international human rights organizations, and justice advocacy groups, to strengthen the case before presenting it to Parliament and the judiciary?
6. According to the WHO, there were **16,886 confirmed COVID-19 deaths** (WHO, 2025). Were all the remains cremated without faith-based discrimination?
7. If the answer to Question 5 is **yes**, what is the position of eminent Islamic scholars regarding the forced cremation of Muslim bodies under such a policy in a country like Sri Lanka?
8. Was the forced cremation policy primarily intended to target and harm the Muslim community?

5. Methodology

This research will adopt a **mixed-methods approach**, incorporating **quantitative and qualitative data collection**.

Quantitative data will be prioritized to ensure the accurate documentation of the personal details of the victims and their immediate families. **Qualitative data** will be extensively analyzed, particularly concerning human rights violations, legal frameworks, and international policies, to provide a comprehensive contextual understanding.

This approach will enable a thorough and well-documented study, ensuring statistical accuracy and in-depth qualitative insights.

5.1 Data Collection

Data will be collected using the following methods:

1. Survey and Interviews:

   Personal details of the victims and their immediate families will be gathered through a structured survey. Research assistants will collect information using a questionnaire based on verified evidence and interviews. (See Annex A.)

2. **Interviews will be recorded** on digital devices for future reference, particularly for documentary purposes. **Photographs of the victims taken before cremation**, as well as **family group photographs**, will be collected from the families and attached to the document.

3. Affidavit

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In addition, the head of each affected household **will sign an affidavit** to verify the collected information. A sample affidavit will be available with research assistants for the purpose. (See Annex B.)

5.2 Data Analysis

The collected **quantitative data** will be processed using Microsoft Access or another suitable database program to generate tables and figures. A comprehensive report will be created, incorporating individual data sheets for each victim into the main document. Meanwhile, the **qualitative data** will undergo extensive analysis to provide a detailed narrative on the nature of the violation, demonstrate the severity of the human rights breach, and develop recommendations for a project proposal outlining the next steps in achieving the research objectives. This structured approach ensures statistical accuracy and a thorough contextual understanding of the issue.

5.3 Sample/Population

This study involves the **entire population** of interest, which consists of approximately **300 Muslim victims of COVID-19**. Since the objective is to document the details of every individual in this group, **sample selection is not applicable**—the research encompasses a **complete census** rather than a sampled subset.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical sensitivity is paramount when collecting data from the families of the victims, as recalling these experiences may evoke emotional distress. To ensure ethical integrity. **Informed consent** will be obtained before including any personal or relevant details in the research document. Families will be treated with **empathy and care** during interviews and data collection. If a family objects to disclosing a victim's identity, **anonymity** will be strictly maintained in the final documentation.

6. Timeline

Table 1: Timeline for the research (Author, 2025)

Description	**Timeline (2025)**	**Duration**
Primary data collection (identification of victims and their families, interviewing filling questionnaires, and collecting testimonies)	Marc 01 – May 31	3 Months
Qualitative data collection (library work)	Jun 01 – Jul 31	2 Months
Tabulation of data and analysis	Aug 01 – Aug 31	1 Month
Writing report	Sep 01 – Oct 31	2 Months
Total	**Mar 01 – Oct 31**	**8 Months**

Figure 1: Table showing the timeline for the research study (Author, 2025)

The commencement of this research depends on the **availability of funds**, and as a result, the timeline may be **rescheduled accordingly** to accommodate financial constraints.

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7. Expected Outcomes

The expected outcome of this study is the **production of a comprehensive report** on the **forced cremation of Muslim victims of COVID-19**. This report aims to support **legal advocacy** by enabling committees and interested groups to seek **justice** through legal means. Additionally, it will serve as an **educational resource** for the **public and concerned organizations** to raise awareness of the issue. Furthermore, the research findings will contribute to the production of a **documentary** that highlights the injustice faced by the affected families and brings global attention to the matter.

8. Significance of the Study

The study holds significant **social and legal implications**, particularly for **minority communities**. If the legal follow-up actions are successful, they may help strengthen **public trust in the judiciary**, demonstrating that justice is accessible to marginalized groups. Moreover, families who have suffered loss may experience a sense of **mental satisfaction** by knowing that their grievances have been acknowledged and that they might be eligible for **compensation**.

9. Limitations

Despite its significance, the research faces several **limitations**, particularly in **primary data collection**. One of the main challenges is the **lack of government transparency**, as authorities do not disclose details of the cremated victims. Additionally, while **human rights organizations and United Nations officials** have addressed the issue globally, they have not actively collected data on individual victims. The **only viable method** to obtain this information is by approaching **local Mosque administrations**, who may have records or knowledge of affected families. To facilitate this process, the committee should seek support from the **All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU)**—a council of Islamic scholars—to encourage cooperation in identifying relevant locations and communities for investigation. However, past attempts at similar research relying on **volunteer efforts** have been largely **unsuccessful**, which raises concerns about the effectiveness of this approach.

Another limitation is the **lack of quantitative data** on the personal details of **COVID-19 victims** in existing literature. Due to this gap, a **detailed literature review** has been omitted from this study. Nevertheless, relevant materials will be **consulted during library searches** to enhance the research's foundation. Despite these challenges, the study remains a crucial effort in documenting and seeking justice for the victims of forced cremation.

13. Budget

Table 2: Research budget allocation (Author, 2025)

Qty	Description	Unit cost-Monthly (LKR)	Total (LKR)
1	Main Researcher	200,000 X8	1,600,000
2	Research Assistants	100,000X2X5	1,000,000
1	Vehicle (Rented car)	120,000 X5	600,000
	Vehicle maintenance (Fue & other)	15,000X16X5	1,200,000

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1	Driver	70,000 X5	350,000
	Food	600X3X4X20X5	. 720,000
	Accommodation (Stay)	6,000X2X6X4X5	1,440,000
	Materials (printing, and binding	200,000 (approximately)	200,000
	Total		**7,110,000**
	Contingencies (10 percent)	375,000	**711,000**
	Gross total		**7,821,000**

. Figure 2: Estimated research budget for the study of forced cremation Muslim victims of COVID-19 (Author, 2025).

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Reference List

Author, 2018; 2019. *Aluhgama Violence against Muslim: Violence against Muslims in the aftermath of Easter Sunday Attack,* s.l.: unpublished.

Author, 2025. *Estimated research budget allocation.* s.l.:s.n. unpublished.

Author, 2025. *Timeline for research.* s.l.:s.n. unpublished.

WHO, 2025. *Countries.* [Online]
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[Accessed 2 February 2025].

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Appendix A

Questionnaire for data collection

(1. Fill up in uppercase, 2. Do not leave answer boxes empty)

1	First name	
2	Surname	
3	Sex	
4	Residential address	
5	DS Division	
6	District	
7	Date of birth, age of victim & BC # (attach a copy of birth certificate))	
8	NIC #v(attach a copy of NIC	
9	Passport # (attach a copy)	
10	Death certificate # (attach death certificate)	
11	Place of death (address of)/house/hospital/quarantine center/other	
12	Coroner's name	
13	GS' name	
14	Name of Dr performed postmortem (if not done indicate with X)	
15	Name of Dr confirmed death	
16	Address of quarantine center	
17	If the victim has been deported from a country (country's name)	
18	Was the victim diagnosed while that was abroad?	
19	Was the victim suffered any other diseases? (write the name of the disease)	
20	Was the family allowed to see the victim on death?	
21	Was the family allowed for funeral prayer?	
22	Address of place of cremation	
23	Was PCR performed? (attach PRC report/indicate if not provided)	
24	What was the reaction of authorities when you claimed the body?	

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25	Was the victim married? & marriage cert. # (attach a copy of marriage certificate)	
26	Name of spouse	
27	The current address of the spouse	
28	# of children	
29	Name of the head of family (current)	
30	Name of the person who provided above information	
31	Relationship of the above to the victim	
32	NIC # of above	
33	The signature of the above person provided the above information	
34	Date the information provided	
35	Name of person interviewed	
36	Is the death certificate attached?	
37	Is the copy of the deceased's NIC attached?	
38	Is the birth certificate of the deceased attached?	
39	Is the marriage certificate of the deceased attached?	
40	Is the photograph of the victim attached?	
41	Is the victim's family photograph attached?	
42	Signature of the person interviewed	
43	Date of interview	

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Appendix B

Sample Affidavit

(Confirmation of Cremation During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka)

I, [Your Full Name], holder of National Identity Card (NIC) No. [Your NIC Number], residing at [Your Address], do hereby solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare as follows:

1. That I am the [relationship, e.g., son/daughter/spouse] of the deceased **[Full Name of Deceased]**, who was born on **[Date of Birth]** and passed away on **[Date of Death]** at **[Name of Hospital/Place of Death]**, Sri Lanka.
2. That the deceased was diagnosed with **COVID-19** or suspected as a COVID-19 patient and was under medical care at **[Hospital Name]** or was confirmed to have passed due to COVID-19 as per the health authorities' records.
3. That due to government-mandated health and safety regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the remains of the deceased were cremated on **[Date of Cremation]** at **[Name of Crematorium]**, by the directives of the Sri Lankan health authorities.
4. That the cremation was conducted under the supervision of the relevant health and municipal authorities, and no burial was permitted as per the COVID-19 regulations enforced by the Government of Sri Lanka at the time.
5. That I confirm the cremation of my [relationship] was carried out in compliance with the government regulations, and this affidavit is made to officially confirm the said fact for any legal or administrative purposes.
6. That I make this affidavit in good faith, believing the same to be true and correct to the best of my knowledge and understanding.

Signature:
[Your Full Name]
[Your Contact Number]
[Date]

Sworn to and signed before me at [Location], Sri Lanka, on this [Day] of [Month], [Year], in the presence of the undersigned authority.

Signature & Seal of Commissioner for Oaths / Notary Public
[Name & Designation]

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Appendix C

AFFIDAVIT to be printed

(Confirmation of Cremation During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka)

I, ……., holder of National Identity Card (NIC) No. ……., residing at …… …..……, do hereby solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare as follows:

1. That I am the of the deceased ……..., who was born on …… and passed away on ……. at …….:……., Sri Lanka.
2. That the deceased was diagnosed with **COVID-19** or suspected as a **COVID-19** patient and was under medical care at …… was confirmed to have passed due to COVID-19 as per the health authorities' records.
3. That due to government-mandated health and safety regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the remains of the deceased were cremated on ……at ……, by the directives of the Sri Lankan health authorities.
4. That the cremation was conducted under the supervision of the relevant health authorities, and no burial was permitted as per the COVID-19 regulations enforced by the Government of Sri Lanka at the time.
5. That I confirm the cremation of my …… was carried out in compliance with the government regulations, and this affidavit is made to officially confirm the said fact for any legal or administrative purposes.
6. That I make this affidavit in good faith, believing the same to be true and correct to the best of my knowledge and understanding.

Signature:

……..
……..
…….

Sworn to and signed before me at …… Sri Lanka, on this …… of ……., ……., in the presence of the undersigned authority.

Signature & Seal of Commissioner for Oaths / Notary Public
…….

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