

Securitization of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar: An Analysis

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DEDICATION

TO MY BELOVED PARENTS

May 2021

CERTIFICATION

The thesis on ‘*Securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar: An Analysis*’ has been written by Mst. Tahmina Akter. She has conducted the research under my supervision. I find the quality of the thesis satisfactory for submission to the Department of Political Science under the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Dhaka for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy. I declare that before final submission of the thesis, it was checked through professional plagiarism detection software.

Professor Dr. Sabbir Ahmed

DECLARATION

I submit the thesis on ‘*Securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar: An Analysis*’ to the Department of Political Science under the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Dhaka for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy. I hereby declare that it has not been submitted for any other degree anywhere.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AA	Arakan Army
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
ANUO	Arakan National United Organization
ARIF	Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BBC	British Broadcasting Service
BBS	Burma Broadcasting Service
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BIA	Burma Independence Army
CD	Compact Disc
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IS	Islamic State
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
MFA	Mayu Frontier Administration
MLC	Member of Legislative Council
MP	Member of Parliament
NLD	National League for Democracy
NRC	National Registration Certificate
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
RFA	Radio Free Asia
RSO	Rohingya Solidary Organization

SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
UN	United Nations
UNC	United National Congress
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

GLOSSARY

Rohingya	An indigenous Muslim ethnic group in northern Rakhine State, the world's largest group of displaced people who are constantly being securitized within their homeland Myanmar.
Burma	The former name of Myanmar. In 1989, the name of the country has been officially changed from 'Burma' to 'Myanmar' (a name that is associated with the Burman ethnic majority group) by the junta government and since then this has become an issue of controversies.
Burman/Bamar	A majority ethnic group who are predominantly Buddhist in religion. The terms Burman and Bamar have been used interchangeably to refer this majority ethnic group.
Burmese	Burmese refers to all the nationals and citizens of Burma (now Myanmar) irrespective of their race, religion and ethnicity. It indicates the civic identity in Burma including people, language, and all things having origin in the country.
Arakan/Rakhine	Historically Arakan was an autonomous territory with its distinct power and glory, geographically separated from the mainland of Burma where originally the Muslims lived as the majority. In 1990s, the governing elite (former junta) tactfully changed the historic name Arakan to Rakhine in line with the name of a Buddhist ethnic group (Rakhine) who are also concentrated in this area.
Frontier Area	Territories of ethnic minorities, such as Shans, Chins, Kachins etc. Before the British colonization, the territories of ethnic minorities (Frontier Areas) were not part of the Burma proper.
Ethnocratic Regime	A type of regime which is neither democratic nor autocratic. This type of hegemonic regime tries to ethnicize contested territory and ethnic identity centering migration, settlement, citizenship, religion, militarization, border crisis, and flow of culture etc.
Tatmadaw	The official name of the military of Myanmar.

MaBaTha	An extremist Buddhist group in Myanmar which is made up of monks, nuns and lay people which is formally known as the Organization or Association to Protect Race and Religion. Buddhist monks of this group are vocal in their extremist rhetoric against Muslims.
969 Movement	A group of ultra-nationalist Buddhist monks who keep themselves involved in campaigns against those who do not belong to 'pure' Burmese ideology or Buddhist spirit, to be more exact, against the Muslims.
Sangha Council	A body of high-ranking Buddhist monks appointed by Myanmar's government that supervises and regulates Buddhist clergy in the country.
Burmanization	'Burmanization' is a suppressive tactics or strategy of assimilation pursued by the Burman Buddhist in Myanmar to forcefully integrate the ethnic minorities into the mainstream Burman/Buddhist community.
Hate Speech	Speeches that instigates hate against any particular individual, group or religion.
Islamphobia	Fear and hate regarding the doctrine of Islam and the Muslims. In this regard, Islam is seen as an ideology of invasion, violence and fear while Muslims are regarded as evils.
Otherization	The process of making any thing or identity other; strategy of alienation from the mainstream.
Kala	In colonial Burma, Kala was used to refer the people with Indian origin (South Asia) whatever their religion is, later this geographical connotation transformed to a more religious and racial phrase and mostly confined to vilify ethnic Muslims, such as 'Rohingyas'.
Mayu Frontier	A former administrative zone of Burma which was existed from 1961 to 1964. It was consisted of the Maungdaw district of the present Rakhine State.
Maruk-U Dynasty	Rulers of Arakan from 1300-1800 AD.
Pagan Kingdom	Historical Tibetan-Burmese dynasty

Theravada Buddhism	One of the major forms of Buddhism prevalent in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia which is often intermingled with extremism, inter-ethnic conflict and violence.
Anti-Rohingya Discourse	Narratives that portrays ‘Rohingyas’ as illegal immigrants, interlopers, enemy others and as a fierce threat to the majority’s existence in Myanmar.
Political Liberalization	Sense of liberalizing rights linked to civil liberties and relaxation of restrictions, such as freedom of speech, expression, opening up media and press, freedom of organization and assembly etc.
Securitizing Actor/Agent	An entity that makes a securitizing move in the pretext of majority’s protection.
Referent Object	An entity that is claimed of being threatened and required extraordinary measures to be protected.
High Politics	Efforts undertaken by dominant elites under diverse regimes stressing contested territory, border, identity, migration, settlement, citizenship, religion, and flow of culture for the reinforcement of the mechanism that helps to consolidate and entrench their power eventually leading to conflict and dilemma between the state and the minority groups.

LIST OF KEY INDIVIDUALS

Aung San	Leader of the independence movement of Myanmar and founder of the Myanmar Armed Forces who played vital role in country's independence from the British rule; Father of Aung San Suu Kyi
U Nu	First Prime Minister of independent Myanmar who took office in 1948 and was in state power till 1962's military coup
Sultan Mahmud	Rohingya politician from Arakan (now Rakhine State) who served as the Cabinet Minister at the Ministry of Health from 1960 to 1962
U Ba Swe	Former Minister for Defense and the second Premier of Myanmar
Aung Gyi	Former Army Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Burma and the co-founder of NLD
Ne Win	Burmese General and the military dictator of Myanmar who hold on power with a military coup from 1962 to 1988
Aung San Suu Kyi	Burmese politician and leader of the NLD
Thein Sein	Former General who served as the President of Myanmar from 2011 to 2016, backed by Tatmadaw and the USDP
Ashin U Wirathu	Burmese Buddhist extremist monk, prominent figure and forerunner of the 969 Movement in Myanmar who is much louder in his extremist speech and rhetoric against Muslims, particularly Rohingyas
Min Aung Hlaing	Burmese army general and de facto leader who serves as Chairman of the State Administrative Council; He seized power with a military coup in 2021 overthrowing the elected government of NLD

ABSTRACT

The present study examines the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar and attempts to examine the issue on the basis of theoretical lens offering an in-depth analysis of the securitizing process. The central aim of this study is to examine the process of exclusion of an ethnic identity—‘Rohingyas’ in a nation state- Myanmar. Following qualitative method and on the basis of both primary and secondary data, this research investigates how the actions of Burmese governing (government, military actors) and non-governing (Burmese Buddhist groups, Buddhist monks, political parties, Intelligentsia) actors in Myanmar have led to the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’. This study is based on interviews with individuals from diverse disciplines and for this, a total of 20 respondents has been interviewed. In this regard, a random sample survey method has been followed in the selection of respondents. Scholars on Myanmar studies, migration and security, human rights activists, Rohingya and non-Rohingya Muslims, and Burmese Buddhists have been interviewed. The central argument of this study is that historically a less politicized ‘Rohingya’ issue has been addressed as a security question in Myanmar for the majority Buddhist identity and nationalism, gradually brought into the public debate by the Burmese elites making this ethnic minority other. This study tries to develop a framework that encompasses Speech Acts, actors, means and consequences of securitizing ‘Rohingyas’ within Myanmar and the beyond.

Chapter-1

Introduction

1. Introduction

‘Rohingya’ is an ethno-religious group in Northern area of Rakhine state (formerly known as Arakan), an isolated region in the western part of the present-day Myanmar¹ across Naaf River sharing boundary with Bangladesh. Since Myanmar emerged as an independent state in 1948, this country has had to grapple with multiple ethnic conflicts. Though Myanmar launched its journey based on an inclusive nation building process, the successive regimes replaced this process by their “nationalist project”² to legitimize ‘singularity’ neglecting other ethnic identities. The nomenclature—‘Rohingya’ turned into a ‘public discourse’ in the late 1950s that has been followed by a series of exclusionary attempts and ‘state-led harassment’ in the successive decades of civilian and military regimes of Myanmar. This protracted crisis that led this Muslim minority group to a threat of genocide is not an unintended disaster but it has been deliberately constructed.³ Throughout Myanmar’s political history, systematic attempts have been undertaken by the dominant political, religious and military elite to marginalize ‘Rohingyas’ from the mainstream people tagging them as illegal ‘Bengali’ immigrants and constructing their identity as ‘other’. This notion of ‘othering’ has been

¹ The official name of Myanmar is ‘the Republic of the Union of Myanmar’, previously known as the ‘Union of Burma’. In 1989, the name of the country has been officially changed from ‘Burma’ to ‘Myanmar’ by the then State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) junta government and since then this has become an issue of controversies. Though the United Nations Organization (UNO) recognized the changed name, some western countries, the opposition groups, expatriates and anthropologists prefer to use ‘Burma’. In this study, the country is generally mentioned as ‘Myanmar’ except for direct citations and the pre-1989 period narrative. This is also followed in referring the names of states, cities and towns of the country that were also renamed such as ‘Rangoon’ and ‘Arakan’ was changed to ‘Yangon’ and ‘Rakhine’ respectively.

² Ahmed, S. (2019), *Politics of Identity and Rohingya Crisis: Actors, Intensions and Consequences*, Dhaka: Borno prokash, p. 11.

³ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, p.10.

manufactured through a process of securitization⁴. A complex set of interacting factors and the gradual and incremental actions of the Burmese governing (government, military junta) and non-governing (Buddhist monks, political parties, civil society) actors led to the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar by which a less politicized ‘Rohingya’ issue has been addressed as a serious security question to the majority Buddhist nationalists and gradually brought into a public debate by the Burmese elites. Thereafter, a nationalist discourse of exclusion is propagated against ‘Rohingyas’ by the demagogic politicians, religious extremist groups and Buddhist monks that has been exacerbated by mass media and executed by the successive civilian-military governments of Myanmar that eventually led to exclusion, in turn culminating genocide. In this superficial discourse, ‘Rohingyas’ are sketched as ‘enemy other’ and tagged as insurgent Muslim ‘Kala’ came from the neighboring Bangladesh who have no innate right to live in modern-day Myanmar. Under the successive (quasi) civil-military regimes, state-sponsored repressive policies have been undertaken that were followed by mass destructions and violence against ‘Rohingyas’ leading them to ‘statelessness’. While the international community declared this as a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing”⁵, the Burmese government sought to validate their brutal actions exaggerating the Burmese citizen’s long-held misperception about ‘Rohingyas’ that, they are “illegal aliens”⁶, ‘infiltrators’ and ‘Muslim evil’ in the primordial Buddhist land who posed existential threats to the national integrity and to the majority religion—Buddhism.

Over and above, the ruling elite of Myanmar pursued a distinct policy of not referring the ‘Rohingya’ denomination in both official and un-official purposes lest this would possibly justify the indigenous root of ‘Rohingyas’ as an ethnic identity. The state officials, military forces and political leaders of Myanmar denied accepting ‘Rohingya’ as an ethnic identity, accusing that, they have been leading insurgent movements since the country’s independence with a greater goal of establishing an autonomous Muslim state. Over the decades, they

⁴ Securitization is an intended action of some purposeful actors who construct a challenge or an issue (ongoing or formerly ignored) as a security question, present this as an existential threat for the survival of mainstream people, group, identity, nation, and the state, turning this into a public debate.

⁵ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (UNOHCHR). “Mission Report of OHCHR Rapid Response Mission to Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, Sep 13-24. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/CXBMissionSummaryFindingsOctober2017.pdf>>. Accessed 25 July 2020.

⁶ The Daily Star. 2020. Abrar, C. R., Oxford’s Neo-Orientalism: Concoction of Biased History. Available: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/perspective/oxfords-neo-orientalism-1554160>. Accessed. 8 February 2020.

launched a campaign to incorporate the revisionist history in the national curriculum of Myanmar that established the predominance of “Buddhist-Bhama nationalism” in this region neglecting the existence of other ethnic minorities.

2. Background of the Study

The ‘Rohingyas’ are one of the most persecuted ethnic minorities in the world who used to live in Myanmar for centuries. But, there is a popular discourse in Myanmar that, ‘the ‘Rohingyas’ are not the real sons of Burma as they do not have their origin in this region and for this, they have no right to live in the state’. In Myanmar, ‘Rohingyas’ are perceived as untrustworthy ‘other’ who posed threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state and Burmese nationalism throughout its history. The dominant Burmese actors claims that, ‘Rohingyas’ are ‘foreigners’ who do not have any legitimate ethnic root in Burma (now Myanmar); in Myanmar, they are tagged as illegal ‘Bengalis’ who arrived at the region recently under the British protection during the colonial regime⁷. They believed that, the terminology ‘Rohingya’ is a deliberate “construct of post-1948 ethnic politics”.⁸ In reality, all these falsified narratives⁹ have been constructed by the Burmese governing and non-governing actors to alienate ‘Rohingyas’ from the mainstream people, to snatch their citizenship leading them to ‘statelessness’ and to drive them out from the land where they have been residing for centuries. However, understanding the historical background of Burma, particularly Arakan, is essential to unveil the truth about the ethnic originality of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar who lived in this region long before the British conquest of Arakan in 1826. A historical overview of the region, that has been elaborately done in the second chapter of this study, traces a well-established presence of ‘Rohingyas’ in northern Arakan of the modern Burma since the early eighth century. The ‘Rohingyas’ dwelled in the early Maruk-U kingdom of independent Arakan, later became intermingled with the Muslim traders who arrived at the region from the early ninth century to fourteenth century. On the other hand, following the trade relation with Sri Lanka and migration from Tibet in stages, Buddhism appeared in the central Burma around the same time and became dominant by eighth or ninth centuries. Around the 1000 AD, the ethnic Rakhines moved to Arakan and settled in the region intermingling with the inhabitants who were already residing there.

⁷ Human Rights Watch. 2000. ‘Malaysia/Burma: Living in Limbo’, Available: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/malaysia/maybr008-01.htm>. Accessed on 16 July 2020.

⁸ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, p.30.

⁹ Ibid, p.33.

After the Burman King Bodawpaya's conquest of Arakan in 1784, thousands of Arakanese Muslims were driven out that had resulted in a massive refugee influx into Bengal what was then ruled by the British. During this time, several attempts were undertaken by the Burman rulers with a view to 'Buddhicizing' the area by establishing Buddhism across the region.¹⁰ The British initially possessed Arakan in 1826 and later colonized Burma in the successive Anglo-Burman Wars (1824-26, 1852, 1885) that was followed by migration of workers from the neighboring South Asia. The British policy of separating the religious and political realms, refusing to recruit the Burman Buddhists in the leading positions, had created grievance among the ethnic Burman groups. Moreover, the colonial rulers preferred the Indians in the colonial civil administration that had further fuelled to the existing Burman injury and intensified an anti-colonial sense of nationhood, even though, many ethnic minorities, such as, Muslim 'Rohingyas' were loyal to the British. Thus, a serious hatred against 'Rohingyas' and an anti-Muslim feeling was triggered among the majority Buddhist Burmans which runs far deeper in the successive years, particularly resulted from the British strategy of 'divide and rule'.

With the onset of WWII, Japan took control of Burma and at this point in time, the British asked the "Rohingya" soldiers seeking their support against the Japanese forces and promised them to establish a Muslim national area in the northern Arakan (now Rakhine) state.¹¹ Following the British negligence to its promise, some 'Rohingyas' were politically mobilized and approached Jinnah (Governor General of the newly emerged Pakistan) to integrate northern Arakan into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). However, immediately after the independence of Burma in 1948, a notable group of Arakanese Muslims went on to petition the Constituent Assembly in Rangoon for the integration of Buthidaung and Maungdaw into the then East Pakistan.¹² These unsuccessful attempts had created a ground of mistrust and animosity between the Arakanese Muslims and the rest of Burma, particularly, the Buddhist

¹⁰ Tun, Than (1985), Paya Lanma (Lord's Highway) over the Yoma (Yakhine Range), *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 25, pp. 233-241.

¹¹ Yeger, M. (1972), *The Muslims of Burma: The Study of a Minority Group*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, pp. 96-112.

¹² Tinker, Hugh (1957), *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Year of Independence*, London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, p. 357.

Rakhines.¹³ Capitalizing these grounds, ‘Rohingyas’ were kept away from all negotiations with the British during the independence of Burma in 1948. The Myanmar establishment particularly, the military, Burmese extremists, Buddhist fundamentalists and the political parties, e.g., NLD endeavors to frame ‘a sense of pure nationhood’ excluding ‘Rohingya’ minority who are deemed as ‘outsiders’ having their political loyalty to a different nation Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) and belonging to a different religion (Islam) with a ‘peculiar language’¹⁴ (mostly similar to the Chittagonian language) and dark skin color.

3. Statement of the Research Problem

In 1948, Burma emerged with a mixed nature of ethnic entities who had diverse religious belongingness particularly following the inclusion of regions largely inhabited by non-Burman ethnic groups. Since the country’s independence, the then governing elites of Burma were divided into different distinct ideologies along the future of the new nation. Some of the dominant elites like General Aung San (the founding leader of independence) sought for an inclusive nation building process on the basis of the motto ‘unity in diversity’ and pluralism who were firmly committed to build an inclusive nation state (where all the people who had been residing within its border were supposed to consider as Burmese citizens) while some other elites desired to build a Burman-led pure ‘Buddhist polity’ excluding other ethnic groups and religious entities. It is noteworthy that, during the first civilian regime (1949-1962), the sense of ‘being Buddhist’ was more emphasized by the ruling elites than the sense of ‘being Burmese’; both of these senses had later been fiercely intermingled and institutionalized under the military’s direct intervention in politics in 1962 under the leadership of General Ne Win. However, during the first democratic phase of Myanmar, even though ethnic minorities were deliberately excluded from the mainstream Burman Buddhists through a process of forced Burmanization, there were not seen any major dilemma regarding the citizenship and ethnic status of ‘Rohingyas’; they were viewed as all other nationals who resided in both sides of Myanmar’s frontiers and shared international borders.

Since 1962, the successive military dictatorship crushed the state mechanisms with an exclusive ‘nationalist project’ to establish a singular Burman Buddhist identity alienating

¹³ Cook, A. D.B. (2016), *The Global and Regional Dynamics of Humanitarian Aid in Rakhine State*, in Crouch, Melissa (ed.), *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 262.

¹⁴ Leider, J. (2016), *Rohingya: The History of a Muslim Identity in Myanmar*, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, USA: Oxford University Press, p. 5.

other ethnic minorities, including ‘Rohingyas’. The Ne Win government designed a draconian citizenship act targeting ‘Rohingyas’ that was promulgated in 1982 leading this Muslim minority statelessness foreigners. The dominant ethnic majority Burmans who are predominantly Buddhist in religion propagate this military-led exclusionary nationalist project fusing ethnicity, religion, and migration together that has manufactured a new sense of ethno-religious nationhood in Myanmar. Prioritizing the Buddhist nationalism, the successive Burmese ruling and non-ruling elites attempt to frame the Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘other’, depicting them as perceived threat (religious, political and demographic threat) to the national integration of Myanmar. The Buddhist fundamentalists, driven by the Buddhist monks sought to establish a nationalist discourse that, the Burman-led ‘Buddhist hegemony’ along with its values, culture and identity has been threatened by the foreigners—‘Rohingya’ ‘other’. They have aggressively propagated against ‘Rohingyas’ through sermons, hate speeches, and publications, etc., with a view to spreading an anti-Muslim sentiment among the majority Burman people. Accusing that, the Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ sought to displace ‘Buddhism’ by Islam and Islam is ideologically inimical to Buddhist values; Buddhist extremists spread rumors and misinformation about Islam. Under the military dictatorship, these actions became atrocious with the reinforcement of Buddhism in academic curricula restricting space for other religions through a series of laws and declarations. Apart from this, the government, political parties and civil society actors of Myanmar abuses the media, particularly, social media to advocate the slogan—‘Burma is Buddhist land’ and to materialize their anti-Muslim agenda bracketing the ‘Rohingya’ identity. In addition, the subsequent ‘speech acts’ delivered by the Burmese elites led to the ‘otherization’ of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar. Besides, the successive Buddhist Burman-led governments in Myanmar pursue a policy of ‘Burmanization’—a suppressive tactics or strategy, to merge the ethnic minorities into the mainstream ideology for establishing a homogenous Burma with a ‘singular’ identity. Besides, the refusal of the government and Rakhine community to accept the use of ethnic designation ‘Rohingya’ and the equally strong rejection of the term “Bengali” by the Rohingya, has created a fierce dilemma. The dominant Burmese state and non-state elites sought to the complete destruction of ‘Rohingya’ identity that left millions of ‘Rohingyas’ stateless and massive refugee flow to Bangladesh which resulted in security dilemma worsening Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations.

4. Research Questions

The central research question of this study is- How has the ‘Rohingyas’ been securitized in Myanmar? With this, a couple of supplementary questions are worth-asking, such as, what are the means to securitize the ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar? What are the reasons behind this securitization of Rohingyas by the governing and non-governing elites of Myanmar? What are the consequences of the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’? This research attempted to answer these questions.

5. Objectives of the Research

The central aim of this study is to examine the process of securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar. In addition, the following specific objectives are mentioned below.

- ◆ To explore the process through which the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ has taken place in Myanmar.
- ◆ To find out the reasons behind the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ by the governing and non-governing elites of Myanmar.
- ◆ To examine the consequences that have been resulted from the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar.

6. Variables under Study

The Burmese actors routinely vilified ‘Rohingyas’ in the speeches, policies, media (electronic/press) and written propaganda associated with aggressive forms of Buddhist nationalism that have played a crucial role in the process of ‘othering’ of this ethnic minority. However, the central argument of this research is that, the actions of the Burmese governing (government, military forces) and non-governing (Burmese Buddhist groups, e.g., Buddhist monks, political parties, civil society) actors during the democratic and civil-military regimes led to the ‘otherization’ of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar. In this study, the actions of the Burmese actors under the successive regimes have been assumed as independent variable while the ‘otherization’ of ‘Rohingyas’ is dependent variable.

7. Hypotheses

The key hypotheses that have been drawn in this study are as follows—

- i. Actions of Burmese governing (government, military forces) and non-governing (Burmese Buddhist groups, e.g., Buddhist monks, political parties, civil society) actors driven by the dominant (Bamar) ethno-religious bias in Myanmar have led to the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’.
- ii. The ‘Speech act’ has played a pivotal role in the ‘otherization’ of Rohingya’ in Myanmar.
- iii. The securitization of ‘Rohingyas has been triggered by the absence of democratic political process for long in Myanmar.
- iv. The securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ led to geopolitical consequences jeopardizing regional security.

8. Methodology

To find out the answers of the aforementioned research questions, I have followed primarily qualitative method. Both primary and secondary data have been collected to analyze the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in the perspective of Myanmar.

Primary Data

Primary data have been collected through random sample survey using open-ended questionnaire from 20 interviewees. I have taken interviews of the leading policy analysts, activists and scholars (including Burmese scholars) who have expertise on Burmese studies, migration, security and ‘Rohingya’ issue, belonging to diverse disciplines, such as, political science, international relations, security studies, history, anthropology and law etc. In addition, I have taken interviews with some human rights activists, Buddhist monks, Burman Buddhist intellectuals, Rohingya and non-Rohingya Muslim politicians who are concentrated in Myanmar and beyond. I have managed to discuss with some young Rohingya activists who have fled from Arakan (Rakhine) to neighboring countries, such as, Bangladesh, India, Turkey, Malaysia, and Germany via online communication platforms. Here, [Table-1](#) shows the type of respondents I have selected for the interview.

Table 1. Sample size

Type of Respondents	Number of Respondent
Rohingya activist	6
Politician	2
Buddhist monk	4
Historian on Burma Studies	3
Burmese and non-Burmese scholar	3
Others	2
Total	20

Besides, I have participated in a series of webinar on the topic that covered the topic ‘Rohingya’ crisis, otherization of ‘Rohingyas’ and the present and future of Rakhine state and Myanmar.

Secondary Data

Secondary data have been collected through content analysis of relevant books, research works, journal articles, government reports, press releases, published and unpublished interviews, speeches, biographies, daily newspapers, and internet sources. The collected data have been validated through crosschecking with each other and with the secondary sources.

9. Justifications of the Study

In doing this study, I draw together insights from the existing literatures to map out the discourse of identity politics in Myanmar addressing the process of making an ethnic identity ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘other’. It is noteworthy that empirical study on ethno-political conflict in Myanmar, particularly on the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’, is insufficient due to the obstructions and challenges come from the successive military dictators for both national and foreign researchers. In addition, there are arising different questions regarding the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ that the existing literature is inadequate to answer. As there is a dearth of in-depth studies on this particular area, this study will be helpful to get insights into the complex nature of the ethnic conflict in Myanmar and demonstrate the diverse factors behind this exclusionary paradox. It provides scholarly insights of the politics of identity in Myanmar and the process of securitizing ‘Rohingyas’ as subordinate ‘other’. In doing so, this study traces the existing gaps that need to be fulfilled and the controversies that need to be addressed. It is a timely required and significant contribution to the understanding of the

exclusion process of an ethnic identity in a nation state, such as Myanmar. It will provide a solid base for future research related to this field.

10. Significance of the Study

The need to conduct the study stems from the idea that the roots of many pertinent crises faced by the 'Rohingyas' can partly be traced to the securitization of the Rohingyas in Myanmar. This study is significant because it contributes to knowledge on areas of research related to international relations and foreign policy of Bangladesh as it is going to investigate the securitization of the 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar. As there is a lack of in-depth study on this topic, this study will also be helpful to get insights into the complex nature of this problem and its effects on other factors in contemporary politics. It also adds further value to the field of security/conflict/policy studies and diplomacy of Bangladesh. It endeavors to assist the readers, researchers and academics who have interests to know or understand the 'Rohingya' mystery within Myanmar as to how the Burmese actors have played significant roles in the securitization of this ethnic minority during the first democratic government; under the subsequent military dictatorships; and during the recent civil-military regime. It addresses the diverse actions and measures of the dominant actors of Myanmar in the country's transition from one form of government to another. In addition, the people across the world has a right to know the actual truth about the 'Rohingya' conundrum and the process through which this minority Muslims have been deliberately constructed as 'other' in their homeland they have been living for decades. This study further helps the international community to raise voice against the ongoing 'Rohingya' persecution in Myanmar; to establish the rights of the ethnic minorities across the globe, and to pursue policies for securing human rights, peace and order in this world. This study, on the whole, makes a critique of Myanmar perspective on the 'Rohingya' crisis. This perspective is not found well-articulated in Bangladeshi literature. Moreover, Bangladeshi policy makers can take lessons from this study which may help framing practical foreign policy with Myanmar.

11. Scope of the Study

The persecution of 'Rohingyas' has been initiated several decades ago since the pre-colonial era and still going on. From 1948 afterwards, the 'Rohingya' dilemma is being entangled with diverse aspects in Myanmar and beyond, bringing forth a broad area of investigation. But, it is quite difficult to explore all these aspects of this crisis in this study. For this reason,

this study only attempts to look into the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar since it emerged as an independent state in 1948. It particularly dissects the actions and measures that have been pursued by the state and non-state actors of Myanmar to make the Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ ‘other’ accusing them as ‘foreigners’, ‘illegal Bengalis’ and ‘outsiders’ in their homeland and to securitize them as a threat for the existence of majority Buddhists’ nationhood. Regarding this, the role of ‘speech act’, during the democratic and civil-military regimes, has been prioritized that have led to the ‘otherization’ of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar. This study specifically focuses on the process through which securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ has taken place in Myanmar and intensely examines how the Burmese actors have played significant roles in the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ during the first democratic government (1948-1962); under the subsequent military dictatorship (1962-2010); and during the recent civil-military regime (2010-present). Here, the internal (both governing and non-governing) actors of Myanmar such as, government, military forces, Burmese Buddhist groups, e.g., Buddhist monks, political parties and civil society, who propagated for legitimizing ‘Rohingya’ minority as untrustworthy ‘other’, has been emphasized. Apart from these, there are different external dynamics which play a significant role to securitize the ‘Rohingyas’ in regional context that have also been discussed. However, this study also analyses the consequences of this securitization, particularly, in geopolitical and inter-state relations perspective.

12. Literature Review

In reality, ‘Rohingya’ securitization is at the margins of Myanmar studies. However, some of the literatures that border on the discussion of security arguments have been examined here. Among the scholars Win (2018), Wade (2017), Ibrahim (2017), Kipgen (2016), Schonthal (2016) and Ahmed (2010), few of them have made an in-depth contextual analysis of the decades-long ethno-political ‘Rohingya’ crisis in Myanmar. This track of literature is very relevant to my query which narrates the way Muslims, ‘Rohingyas’ in particular, have been constructed as ‘other’ in Myanmar.

I have intensively reviewed the research directly pertaining to the topic and also categorized these literatures into two groups—firstly, research tracts that have been done by Burmese scholars; secondly, literatures of western and Bangladeshi scholars. This categorization is made to understand how they look at the ‘Rohingya’ issue from their perspective. It is noteworthy that, the Burmese scholars examine the issue from Burmese perspective while the

foreign scholars analyses the ‘Rohingya’ conundrum through a crystal lens from a more humanitarian or human rights perspective. Moreover, they view the decades-long ethno-religious ‘Rohingya’ dilemma from a dichotomous ‘victim-versus-perpetrator’ perspective where Burmese dominant actors play the role of game changers and the ‘Rohingya’ minority remains as victims—the ultimate loser of the game. Apart from this, some of the literatures that are reviewed below have discussed the otherization of ‘Rohingya’ in a focused way whereas some of these research partly discussed the issue keeping security arguments secondary.

In ‘Securitization of the Rohingya in Myanmar’, Win (2018) examines the way how people’s sentiment to current events in Rakhine state builds off decades-long institutionalized disparity and systematic coercion of Rohingyas on the excuse of threats to ‘national sovereignty’, society, economy and ‘territorial security’ etc. He analyses the way Muslims in Myanmar, particularly the ‘Rohingyas’ have been securitized on the basis of a narrative that, ‘Rohingya’ are foreign ‘enemy other’ and eventually, they are ‘existential threat’ to state and society. He endeavors to bring out how the horizontal and bottom-up securitization processes have regenerated and strengthened these narratives over successive decades in Myanmar. Along with the top-down (elite driven) process, ‘Rohingyas’ are also securitized by bottom-up and horizontal pattern of securitization that has been culminated in the ongoing dilemma. Win analysed the process how the elites’ perceptions about ‘Rohingyas’ became widespread among the Burmese public through securitization that led to a zero-sum mentalities making this ethnic minority as ‘fearsome threat’. Referring historical evidences, he claims that, the seeds of ongoing ethnic rivalry between the majority Burman-Buddhists and the minority Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ lies in ‘the historical British colonial legacy (1824-1948) and the post-colonial fixation of borders and geographical lines.¹⁵ The British colonialists played a significant role in the positioning of ‘Rohingyas’ in Rakhine state as ‘other’. Referring some of the significant historical speeches, he briefly discusses the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ under the successive governments and analyses how state-driven subsequent securitization policies were justified by the ‘speech-act’. The dominant military actors controlled the state apparatus to securitize the ‘Rohingyas’ as a part of their militarized security agenda that was followed by a series of destructive policies, such as, a birth control order, restriction on the

¹⁵ Win, Kyaw Z. (2018), *Securitization of the Rohingya in Myanmar*, in Chambers, J., McCarthy, G., Farrelly, N., and Win, C. (ed.), *Myanmar Transformed? People, Places and Politics*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing. p. 253.

movement of ‘Rohingyas’ etc. In Myanmar, ‘Rohingyas’ are regarded as ‘foreigners’, or ‘aliens’, dark-skinned ‘kalas’ who posed threat to the national security of the state. Win focuses on the social context of Myanmar through which the socialization of ‘securitization’ processes has been done leading ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘enemy other’. He examines the way the Myanmar establishments, the state-controlled media and newspapers spontaneously portrayed ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘illegal Bengalis’ and a threat to the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the state.

In ‘Reworking the Colonial Era Indian Peril: Myanmar’s State-Directed Persecution of Rohingya and Other Muslims’, Zarni and Brinham (2017) narrated that, the violence against ‘Rohingya’ Muslims is a part of the racist strategic plan of the military-controlled state, particularly, of the powerful military leaders and the democratic government backed by Aung San Suu Kyi and her party-NLD who used the race and religion card for their own benefit. They tried to sketch how the colonial era anti-Indian migration sentiment and economic and cultural grievances among the local Buddhists transform into the present-day anti-Muslim/anti-Rohingya perceptions.

During the successive military regimes (1962-1988; 1988-2010), Islamophobia has evolved in the contemporary Myanmar following the global fear of Muslim’s rise in power that had eventually led to the “state-manufactured perspective of Rohingyas as illegal and/or unwelcome “Bengali” immigrants” who are deemed not to have their organic belongingness to the Buddhist land of Myanmar—Rakhine state. Since the country’s independence, the successive civilian-military governments used the anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya racism (portraying ‘Rohingya’ Muslims as ‘Enemy of Buddhism’) to exploit the (majority) Buddhist sentiments in Burmese society for gaining political or electoral favor from the majority Buddhist population. Zarni and Brinham argued that, many Burmese intellectuals, western educated persons, professionals and technocrats propagate misperceptions about ‘Rohingyas’ as “ignorant descendants of illegal Bengalis” across the online and offline platforms, such as social media sites, Burmese-language services of the BBC, Democratic Voice of Burma, Radio Free Asia, and Voice of America etc. With the process of democratization, the military, political and religious actors, in excuses of the freedom of speech and press, spread hate speech and exclusionary narratives against the Muslims and Rohingyas of Myanmar. They discussed how the Burmese Buddhists in the press, Buddhist clergy, intelligentsia, journalists and civil society circles sought to establish the official view of Muslim

‘Rohingyas’ as “illegal” Bengalis who consistently pose threat to the Buddhist nation and identity. ‘Rohingyas’ are branded as ‘a national security threat’ who are also sketched as potential “jihadist” (financially and ideologically) backed by Muslim states, such as, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and also by Islamic Organizations like OIC. Focusing on the securitization of Muslim ‘Rohingya’ lives in Myanmar, they analyse the way Myanmar military executed “religiously motivated demographic engineering” to make Rohingyas ‘other’ in their homeland. Not only the military leaders but also the Burmese political and religious commanders have presented Rohingyas as “Muslim interlopers’ or “illegal Muslim migrants” from the neighboring state Bangladesh that had led to the instant illegalization of this ethnic minority. Recently, the dominant political party-NLD and its affiliated leader-Aung San Suu Kyi-led hybrid government backed by the Myanmar’s most powerful force- military (Tatmadaw), systematically using ‘race-and-faith card’ to gain political interests putting Rohingya Muslims in greater trouble. They discussed the way Burmese government masterminded the national strategy to develop the Northern Rakhine state of Myanmar as an exclusive economic zone.¹⁶

In ‘Myanmar’s Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim Other’, Wade (2017) sharply dissected the political history of contemporary Myanmar delineating the powerful actor’s strategic role in manufacturing ‘Rohingyas’ as Myanmar’s enemy. These actors include governing military elite and the religious leaders—Buddhist monks who wielded the steering wheel of the ship of governance as well as public discourse of Myanmar. Wade stressed the need for understanding the colonial context of identity formation in Myanmar during the British reign in this region. The British strategy of ‘divide and rule’ and ‘administrative ordering of peoples’ based on racial identity initiated cleavages among groups along ethnic and religious fault lines that has been continued under the military dictatorship, later being formalized as a state building project in the post-independence era of Myanmar. This history of colonial roots has left a legacy of cleavages between the majority Buddhist and the stateless Muslim kalar ‘Rohingyas’. He analyses how a Buddhist monk led movement—Ma Ba Tha instigated conflict between “the civilized Bamar”—the Buddhist and “the unruly” Muslims, particularly ‘Rohingyas’. With a comprehensive and thorough criticism of the Myanmar’s military—Tatmadaw’s extreme measures to exclude ‘Rohingyas’,

¹⁶ Zarni, M., Brinham, N. (2017), Reworking the Colonial Era Indian Peril: Myanmar’s State-Directed Persecution of Rohingyas and Other Muslims, *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. xxiv, Issue. 1, pp. 53-71.

Wade does not hesitate to reveal the wileful strategy in the leadership importantly of Aung San Suu Kyi's enigma in using the name 'Rohingya' in public as a strategy of bracketing them as 'other'.¹⁷ Out of this maneuvering, 'Rohingyas' have been fallen squarely outside from the mainstream people both by the imaginary hatred line and formal legislations such as the Citizenship Act, 1982 that deprived this minority people from their citizenship rights. Thus, stressing Myanmar's nationalist, Buddhist, anti-Islam perspectives, Wade depicts the context of how the identity of an ethnic minority has been shaped as an enemy within a national geographic boundary—Myanmar.

Ibrahim (2017) in his book 'The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide' argues that 'Rohingyas' are being persecuted and excluded from the land they have been living for generations, presented as 'foreigners' and 'illegal Bengali immigrants' in Myanmar. Moreover, the ongoing crisis reflects over forty years of state led propaganda centering 'Rohingyas' in the focus of debate addressing them as the major threat for the Buddhist nationalism and culture. He forcefully emphasizes the situation in Rakhine that 'Rohingyas' continue to confront denominating this as almost a "text-book case of pre-genocide", discusses the historical roots of this ethnic blame game in this region and its escalation during the military regime when the rights (citizenship rights, right to vote, freedom of movement etc.) of this Muslim minority have been curtailed incessantly making them stateless within their own land.¹⁸ Their livelihoods became worsened through economic restrictions; participation in political processes and electoral politics has been dismantled; their religious identity turned as a curse for which they are accused of having relation with different religion based extremist groups. It is noteworthy that like the military dictators, the dominant political party of Myanmar—the National League for Democracy (NLD) and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi are reluctant to the non-Buddhist ethnic minorities. They patronize the majority Burman community who are mainly Buddhist in religion as their political support mostly comes from this group. In addition, Buddhism has been propagated as an ideology by the subsequent military regimes, political personalities and religious actors-Buddhist monks to fabricate an exclusionary nationalist discourse. Moreover, he sharply pointed some extremist Buddhist groups who are taking increasing control over the country's teaching curriculum; launching

¹⁷ Wade, Francis (2017), *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim Other*, London: Zed Books, p.129.

¹⁸ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, p.10.

supplementary schooling with textbooks that are designed by the Ma Ba Tha, one of the prominent race and religion based organization seeking discrimination against other religions except Buddhism. Ibrahim stresses the chronological analyses of events through which ‘Rohingyas’ have been deliberately brought into this discourse by the leading forces of Myanmar and focuses on the shifting political landscape of Burma since independence. He demonstrates that the crisis of Myanmar has been consciously manufactured by different groups of political actors — military, ‘national’ political parties (‘multi-ethnic’, ‘multi-confessional’ forces such as USDP and NLD who only speak for the Burman Buddhist interest), ‘regional’ ‘single-ethnic’ political parties (e.g., Buddhist Rakhine’s led ALD that spread anti-Rohingya propaganda) and the Buddhist monks etc.

In ‘Islam and the State in Myanmar’, Crouch, Farrelly, Kyaw, Schissler, Schonthal and Cook (2016) provide scholarly insights into the contextual analysis of the state of Muslim conundrum in Myanmar while stressing the ‘politics of belonging’ along with the process of making ‘Rohingyas’ Muslim ‘other’. Following both empirical and comparative discussion, they try to explore the contemporary political issues and controversies that the Muslims in Myanmar face for long in course of its historical trajectories. They investigate how the state mechanism of Myanmar including laws, regulations and policies has been enforced in making a legal discourse about ‘Rohingya’ Muslims. Doing a comparative analysis in regional perspectives, they seek to explore how the state authorities have tried to legitimize that ‘othering’ process in the name of the protection of ‘Buddhism’ and ‘national integrity’. ‘Rohingyas’ are mentioned by the majority non-Muslims of Myanmar as ‘Bengalis’, a minority group in Rakhine state who has a highly ambiguous and contested history of settlement in this region. It is argued, ‘the history of ‘Rohingya’ Muslims in Arakan that later renamed as Rakhine dates back to the 9th century and the historical records of their existence in this territory are traced from at least the 13th century onwards’.¹⁹

While the election campaigns and mottos of some political parties of the contemporary Myanmar admitted the role of all races in their struggle for independence, the governing authorities consistently refuse to incorporate ‘Rohingyas’ in their infamous list of 135 national races. For instance, in 2010, the National Democratic Party for Development

¹⁹ Crouch, M. (2016), Myanmar’s Muslim Mosaic and the Politics of Belonging, in Crouch, Melissa (ed.), *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 17.

(NDPD) launched its campaign with enthusiastic mottos justifying the context that ‘people of the Union regardless of race and religion live together in the successive periods who equally participated in the country’s independence struggle’. In July 2012, during the violent conflict in Rakhine state, the NDPD filled a paper to the parliament—Pyidaungsu Hluttaw that recorded information about the native inhabitants and the indigenous groups (who are Muslims in religion) of Rakhine state and their roles in the national struggle. This paper enlisted the elected representatives of the parliament which shows that Muslims had a significant representation in ‘Hluttaw’ from 1936 to 1962. During this time, NDPD along with another rising party DHRP (Democracy and Human Rights Party) claimed to include the term ‘Rohingya’ in the national census referring “a persuasive historical and political justification for Rohingya belonging.”²⁰ But this demand was brushed aside and the DHRP was pressurized by the Union Election Commission to suspend some of its executive members from the party for being registered with ‘Rohingya’ ethnicity. Since the pre-independence period, even though Muslims had a significant position and contribution in the contemporary politics of Myanmar, the scope of their political involvement has been drastically collapsed by the suppressive measures of the ruling actors and the successive government’s preference to ‘majoritarianism’. The concerned authority successfully disenfranchised the Muslims that make them void in the political activities raising questions regarding their acceptability in the politics. Supporting the majority Burman Buddhist fierce antagonism, in 1989, the military dictators of Myanmar launched a project of ‘Buddhist migration’ followed by the Burmese settlement in Muslim areas of Rakhine state as a part of ‘Burmanization’ policy that displaced and marginalized the local inhabitants and ethnic identities posing a great threat to their existence. In the discourse of nationalist propaganda, Muslims are perceived as ‘opponents’ to Buddhism, a major threat to the majority Burman Buddhist religion, belief and culture. They are constantly being denounced in the ‘public speeches, popular media and written propaganda’ with an excuse of Buddhist nationalism that has arisen in Myanmar for the last several decades. The age-long surge of Buddhist nationalism is predominantly led by the Buddhist religious leaders—‘Buddhist monks’ along with other political and military actors. In this study it is argued that the principal agencies for the propagation of Buddhist nationalist ideology include the ‘Ma Ba Tha’ and the ‘969 movement’ which are the dominant pro-Buddhist organization and movement in Myanmar

²⁰ Farrelly, N. (2016), *Muslim Political Activity in Transitional Myanmar*, in Crouch, Melissa (ed.), *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 112.

driven by the Buddhist monks and laity. The key agenda of these organizations is to protect and promote the tenets of Buddhism across the region and fight against the potential threats to Burman superiority. These pro-Buddhist agents routinely vilify the minority Muslims alleging that they exert major threat to Buddhist Burman integrity in diverse means, such as—increasing demographic invasion by Muslims (higher rate of birth and conversion to Islam), financial control over market, business and industry, establish domination over the scarce land. Referring the case of Indonesia (it is believed that Indonesia was once a ‘Buddhist nation’ later being invaded and controlled by the Muslims), these monastic leaders popularized and speculated a common discourse that Muslim aggressors of Myanmar are executing a master strategy of “Islamicization process” to turn this ‘holy land’ into an Islamic state.²¹ However, the governments, political parties and the Buddhist nationalist groups have drawn a self-fulfilling narrative about ‘Rohingya’ Muslims that they are a singular and separate Muslim minority group preferring ‘separatism’. Addressing them as ‘Kalas’, the majority Burman Buddhist people contested the identity and the status of ‘Rohingyas’ pursuing hostile perceptions about them and articulated an anti-Muslim sentiment with a growing ‘Islamphobia’. There is a serious speculation that the ‘Rohingyas’ have a strong network with different religious extremist groups across the globe, such as, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, one of the dominant Islamist groups in Bangladesh. It is pertinent to note that, a severe ‘Kala-phobia’ also arises among the Burmans which is still being validated through their ‘regular attitudes, speeches, language idioms, declarations etc.’²² Thus, the imaginary ‘self-depiction’ and ‘propagation’ of actors led to the construction of Muslims particularly ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘other’, reproaching them as unified “barbarians” who are proliferating their strength to make the decades long unwavering status of ‘Buddhism’ in this region.²³

Kipgen (2016), in ‘Myanmar: A Political History’, discusses the politico-historical antecedents of Myanmar tracing the political transition from the colonial legacy to the civilian government; the successive military dictatorship and its inclination towards the strategy of ‘Burmanization’. The shift of the military backed authoritarianism to a new democratic one with a plethora of ethno-political crisis that has been dragged on for years is

²¹ Schonthal, B. (2016), Making the Muslim Other in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, in Crouch, Melissa (ed.), *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 251-253.

²² Farrelly, N. (2016), Muslim Political Activity in Transitional Myanmar, pp. 100-112.

²³ Schonthal, B. (2016), Making the Muslim Other in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, pp. 255-256.

also being rightly pointed. The question of ‘autonomy-subordination’ has remained fundamental to the ongoing tensions in Myanmar. Here, ‘autonomy’ has been a long cherished demand of its ethnic minorities since independence. Taking Myanmar as a case, Kipgen argued that a “complex set of interacting factors and the abilities of the actors” played key role in steering a nation towards its cherished goal.²⁴ Focusing back to the leading incidents that initiated distrust between the “majority ethnic Burman-led successive central governments and the minority ethnic groups”, he has examined the factors that led this volatility to conflict. The decades old ethno-political conflict is the essence of this mistrust that has partly resulted from the ruling elite’s negligence to implement the Panglong Agreement (1947). It is a treaty that worked as the basis for the emergence of the Union of Burma in 1948 through which then the Burman leaders assured that there would be no interference in the local autonomy, customs and religions of the people of the “Frontier Areas”, the territories of ethnic minorities. Even though, full autonomy was granted in principle to the ethnic minorities in Panglong conference, the successive civilian and military governments alienated and underprivileged them through several discriminatory measures. Among these declaring Buddhism as state religion, promulgating Burmese as official language by making its use as obligatory and promoting ethnic Burman cultures in national spheres are mentionable. The Non-Burman ethnic religion, culture and identities were confined by these state led nationalized policies of Myanmar that led to increased mistrust and misunderstanding between the Burman-led government and the ethnic nationalities. The nationalization of press, media, industries, educational institutions and business establishments has worsened the grievance. Kipgen asserts that Myanmar has emerged as an independent state in 1948 and since then triggered by communal tensions. He looks different aspects of the political history of Myanmar and its gradual transition and attempts to analyze the underlying factors behind the ethnic and political conflict in this region. It is also argued that, ‘the origin of the contemporary ‘Rohingya’ dilemma lies in its “nomenclature”. The governing elites, political leaders, the Buddhist Barmans (ethnic Burmans) and Rakhines refuse to approve ‘Rohingyas’ as one of the ethnic groups of the country, prefer to address them as ‘infiltrator’ comes from the neighboring Bangladesh. They accused this Muslim minority for ‘forcibly propagating Islamic belief’ that poses threat to Buddhism and attempting to establish their predominance over the scarce land.

²⁴ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-40.

In the book “The Plight of the Stateless Rohingyas: Responses of the State, Society & the International Community”, Ahmed (2010) argued that the crisis and tension surrounding ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar was deliberately constructed in the course of history under the action of given forces. This study rightly captures the process of making the ‘Rohingya’ minority ‘stateless’ and strives to find out the underlying factors that forcefully drag them to the status of ‘refugeehood’ by analyzing the ‘historical trajectories’ of Burma. The government of Myanmar views ‘Rohingyas’ as illegal ‘Bengali’ immigrants from the neighboring East Bengal which is now Bangladesh and settled in Myanmar during the British period. As they use ‘Chittagonian dialect’ in their daily conversation, the junta government and the majority Burman Buddhist people firmly accuse them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. That is why the governments of Myanmar have adopted repressive policies against this minority group and treated them as ‘strangers’ in their own land. Ahmed tries to contextualize the genesis of stateless ‘Rohingyas’ focusing back to the history of Myanmar. The pre-colonial period of the history of ‘Rohingyas’ predominantly dealt with the ‘infiltration’ of Muslims in the former Arakan kingdom that had later being merged with the then Burma and renamed as ‘Rakhine’ in 1990s reflecting the dominance of ethnic Rakhine majority people. In colonial era, the relation between ‘Rohingyas’ and ethnic ‘Rakhines’ had been collapsed due to the ‘instigation’ of the British colonialists backed by the Buddhist Burmans. During this period, ‘Rohingyas’ were pushed aside keeping them aloof from all kinds of negotiations with the higher authority for the independence of Burma in 1948. They were not involved in the historical ‘Union treaty’ and strategically deprived of the constitutional guarantee of entitlement. It proved that the ‘Rohingyas’ were deliberately alienated by the Burmese extremist nationalists on the basis of religion. However, the post-colonial phase of the ‘Rohingya’ history is marked by the denial of Muslims as a separate identity by the government of Burma transforming them into ‘stateless’. Immediately after the independence of Myanmar, this crisis of identity has eventually led to the ‘Rohingya’ minority’s movement for autonomy. Against this backdrop, even though the government led by U Nu (1948-58) agreed to recognize “Rohingyas claim of separate ethnic identity”, the context has been deflected in the post-military days of early 1960s.²⁵ With the 1962 military takeover, by all means, they were methodically denied of their civil, political, economic and social rights that had later been formalized through the controversial Citizenship acts.

²⁵ Ahmed, Imtiaz (2010), *The Plight of the Stateless Rohingyas: Responses of the State, Society & the International Community*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited. P.5.

'Rohingyas' are 'ethno-linguistic' and 'religious' minority Muslims strangely belonging to 'no state' since the Ne Win government denied their identity by promulgating the 'discriminatory' Citizenship Law of 1982 that effectively excluded them from the naturalized citizenship. Even the word 'Rohingya' has not been officially recognized in Myanmar yet now where the governing regime prefers to address them as "residents of Rakhine state" who have no right to move beyond this state boundary. They are deemed as 'illegal immigrants' having no quality for being the 'residents of Myanmar' as per the requirements of the Citizenship Act, 1982. Addressing the process of 'Burmanization' as a part of 'National Reconsolidation policy' this study confesses the governments' effort to assimilate the multi-dimensional ethnic identities into the majority Buddhist Burman culture. In addition, the junta government of Myanmar forcefully confiscated the land and property of 'Rohingyas' and distributed among the state- sponsored 'Buddhist settlers' in the new 'Model Villages'. There are around 26 'model villages' that have been developed in the confiscated lands with a view to displacing the minority Muslim 'Rohingyas' by the Buddhist Burman and Rakhine settlers of this region. Strongly affiliated with the "Theravada Buddhism", the ruling elites of Myanmar threatened the 'Rohingyas' not to practice religious activities. Thus the most persecuted minority 'Rohingyas' have been ended up with 'statelessness' in their homeland belonging to 'no state' as the government of both Myanmar and Bangladesh refuses to give them any 'official status'.²⁶

All these studies attempt to trace the politico-historical antecedents of Myanmar, multi-dimensional factors of the decade-long ethno-political conflict in this region that make a field for my research. Though the discussed above literatures extensively dealt with the 'Rohingya' Conundrum, none of these intensively focuses on the securitization process of the persecuted Muslim 'Rohingya' minority under successive ethnocentric regimes within the Buddhist Burman-dominated territory Myanmar. In fact, Rohingya securitization is at the margins of Myanmar studies. This gap of research justifies an intensive scrutiny in the respective field. I demonstrate the existing gaps that need to be fulfilled and this paper attempts to address these gaps and particularly focuses on the process of securitization of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar.

²⁶ Ibid, pp.1-26.

13. Limitations of the Study

The major limitations of this research are timing and funding. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis worldwide, it was quite tough to do the fieldwork and to take intensive interviews within Bangladesh and beyond. Amid this situation, I had to take several interviews through online and due to this, the respondents were not enthusiastic enough to give relevant information in details. Another crucial limitation of this study is funding limitation. As this is completely a self-financed research work, greater range of data collection was quite impossible. Apart from these, it would be fruitful if I could manage to visit Myanmar, but, due to security concerns and other inter-state/intra-state complexities, it was difficult to go there.

This study is organized around six chapters. The first chapter gives a descriptive analysis of the state of ‘Rohingya’ conundrum in Myanmar and the existing crisis that have been dragged on for decades surrounding perpetrators-versus-victim perspective. It presents a detailed background of the study. The statement of the research problem, research objectives, hypotheses, research methods, scope of the study, its significance and limitations, are presented in the current chapter. Relevant literatures are also reviewed and analyzed in that chapter. Tracing back to the ground of the study, this chapter introduces the notion that, ‘Rohingyas’ have been deliberately sketched as untrustworthy ‘other’ and cautiously excluded from the mainstream people in Myanmar. The process of exclusion that the ‘Rohingyas’ have been experiencing for long backed by Burmese groups of actors—both governing and non-governing elites, results in ‘statelessness’ of this ethnic minority in their homeland. Raising few pertinent questions, this chapter also attempts to narrate the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ that has been influenced by the absence of democratic political process for long in Myanmar.

The second chapter briefly highlights the historical context of ‘Rohingya’ settlement in early Arakan (present-day Rakhine) that had later been a part of the present-day Myanmar. The framing of partial narrative about ‘Rohingyas’ by the Burmese dominant establishment (military junta, Buddhist monks, political parties and civil society) that, ‘Rohingyas’ are not the true son of the soil of Myanmar, requires an in-depth query of the historical existence of this ethnic minority in this territory. To inquire into the historical origin of the ethnicity of ‘Rohingyas’ and to trace the existence of this distinctive identity in Myanmar, it is unavoidable to reach back to the earliest settlement of their Muslim ancestors in this region.

This chapter examines the historical incidents to justify the presence of the ‘Rohingyas’ throughout the Myanmar’s ethno-political history. This chapter chronicles the historical precedence of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar, inevitably addressing their genealogy in pre-colonial and colonial Phases. It portrays the contextual analysis of the decades-long discontent and mistrust between the Buddhist Burman-led government and the ethnic minority ‘Rohingya’ Muslims. This chapter chronologically examines historical events and factors that had instigated grievance and antagonism between the majority Buddhist-Bamars and the ethnic minority ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar. It also tries to contextualize the ethno-political conflict in Myanmar centering ‘Rohingya’ conundrum.

On the basis of theoretical lens, the third chapter examines an empirical analysis of the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in the perspective of Myanmar. In this chapter, securitization theory has been applied to examine how the otherization of ‘Rohingyas’ took place in Myanmar. It points to the process, by which, historically a less politicized ethnic identity—‘Rohingya’ has been framed as a security threat for the Burmese nationalism in making a ‘pure’ nation and systematically brought into a public debate by the dominant agencies of Myanmar, both governing and non-governing. This chapter focuses on the process through which securitization has been taken place in Myanmar. It analyses the securitizing actors who have securitized the ‘Rohingya’ issue, significantly emphasizing the means (the role of ‘speech act’) of securitizing ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar. It argues that, the ‘speech act’ leads to the ‘otherization’ of ‘Rohingyas’ by legitimizing their existence as untrustworthy ‘other’ who have no right to stay in this territory. This deliberate framing of ‘Rohingyas’ as other discourse also generates some geopolitical consequences aggravating acute tensions regarding the inter-state relations. All these factors have been analysed in this section.

The fourth chapter analyses the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ during the first democratic regime (1948-1962) of Myanmar. Under the leadership of the first Prime Minister U Nu, the independent Burma faced a series of insurrections led by the ethnic insurgent groups who demand for self-autonomy and federalism. Following the Burman nationalists’ attempt to establish a unitary state, the governing actors forcibly tried to assimilate the ethnic minorities into the mainstream Burman community ignoring the spirit of the historic Panglong Agreement (1947) that has deepened the grievance among the ‘Rohingyas’. This chapter investigates the strategies and policies through which the government, ethnic fundamentalists, e.g., Buddhist monks and other political forces make ‘Rohingyas’ subservient to the majority

Buddhist Burman group, particularly, during the first democratic regime of Burma. This section analyses the way the U Nu government devastated the existence of minority by declaring Buddhism as the state religion and making the Burmese culture and language mandatory in educational institution. Thus, a policy of 'Burmanization' has been executed by the governing and non-governing elites of Myanmar to securitize the 'Rohingya' minority.

The fifth chapter highlights the actions and measures that have been pursued by the dominant securitizing actors under the military dictatorship of Myanmar with a view to excluding the 'Rohingyas' from the mainstream people that have successively led to the 'otherization' of this ethnic identity. In 1962, General Ne Win, a Burman nationalist seized power through a military coup dissolving the parliament and banning all the political parties that was followed by the end of parliamentary democracy in independent Burma. In the absence of the democratic political process, the Burman-led military government executed a series of suppressive tactics to drive the 'Rohingyas' away from Burma. This chapter focuses on the way the powerful actors keep securitizing the 'Rohingyas' in their home land tagging them as illegal 'Bengalis' during the military regime.

The sixth chapter critically examines the securitization of 'Rohingyas' under the civil-military regime (2010-present) of Myanmar. The ongoing hostility towards 'Rohingyas' rejecting their civil and political rights (particularly, the citizenship and voting rights) is the outcome of the last several decades' state-led propaganda to portrait this ethnic identity as 'illegal Bengali immigrants', 'interlopers', 'Kalas', 'foreigners' and 'religious extremist group' etc. The Buddhist nationalist groups, the ruling and non-ruling elites of Myanmar fabricate 'Rohingyas' as a single 'monolithic communal block', Muslim 'other' and strong 'opponent' to Buddhism who posed threat to the post-war nation building process of independent Burma. For the last several decades, this notion of 'othering' has been strengthened by the interpretation of 'Rohingya' issue through religious lens transforming this narrative into a discourse of nationalist project through written propaganda, popular media, hate speeches, declarations and nationalized policies etc. Even, the Burmese dominant elites including government officials, national leaders, e.g., Aung Sun Suu Kyi, refuse to use the word 'Rohingya' in their speeches to nullify the legitimacy of this ethnic identity in Myanmar. As a case in point, on December 2019, the State Counsellor of Myanmar Aung Sun Suu Kyi delivered her speech at International court of Justice where she tried her best to defend the military against Gambia's accusation. While defending against genocide charges,

she tactfully ignore the term ‘Rohingya’ in describing the status of this persecuted minority claiming that this is a “polarizing term”²⁷.

Finally, the seventh chapter briefly highlights the general and specific arguments of this research focusing on how the gradual process of securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ took place in Myanmar by the successive regimes doing high politics centering identity, migration, settlement, border dispute and historical narratives for the consolidation of their power leading to several geopolitical and interstate crises across South Asia and the beyond.

14. Conclusion

The demagogic politicians of Myanmar promoted ‘a nationalist discourse of exclusion’ against ‘Rohingyas’ that has been propagated by the religious extremist groups and Buddhist monks, exaggerated by mass media and executed by the successive military-civilian governments. A propaganda of ignorance and hate was constructed in Myanmar through mass media, speeches, schools and Buddhist platforms against ‘Rohingyas’, that eventually led to exclusion, culminating in genocide. The framing of biased narrative by Burmese actors about ‘Rohingyas’ that ‘they do not belong to Burma’, ‘they have their ethnic affiliation to a Muslim-dominated country Bangladesh’, ‘they pose existential threat to Burmese sovereignty’ and ‘sought to displace Buddhism by Islamic ideology’, results in genocidal actions against them. Thus, the governing and non-governing actors of Myanmar made frequent references to alienate ‘Rohingyas’ as Muslim ‘other’ that led to the ‘otherization’ of this minority ethnic identity. The state authorities of Myanmar popularized the term ‘other’ through political and media rhetoric and transformed this into a discourse of exclusion labeling ‘Rohingyas’ as a ‘subject of fear’ and ‘potential threat’ to their national integrity. The civil-military government, political parties, dominant Buddhist extremist groups, e.g., Ma Ba Tha and the 969 movement and Buddhist monks act as ‘authoritative voices’ in framing the ‘Rohingyas’ as an existential threat for Burma. In this context, the ‘Rohingya’ issue has been politicized at first and later being purposefully securitized²⁸ by the dominant

²⁷ Anealla Safdar and Usaid Siddiqui, “ ICJ Speech: Suu Kyi Fails to use ‘Rohingya’ to Describe Minority”, Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/aung-san-suu-kyi-fails-word-rohingya-icj-speech-191212102606322.html>, Accessed on 4 February 2010.

²⁸ A non-politicized issue neither included in the public debate nor it is dealt with the state; but an issue is politicized when it is made a part of public policy, formal decision with the interference of the government. Flowing from the politicization, the issue is being securitized by the framing of this issue as existential threats to the referent objects (identity, society, group and state) and pursuing of extra-political actions going beyond the normal bound of politics.

Burmese actors, in the name of fight against insurgency and Muslim evils. Thus, relatively a less focused 'Rohingya' issue has been fabricated as a security concern through an act of securitization named 'speech act' and politicized as an existential threat for the majority Buddhist to turn this into a popular debate.

Chapter-2

A Brief History of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar: Facts, Perception and Reality

The way Myanmar establishments (the military, political parties, Buddhist monks and ethnic extremists) present 'Rohingyas' is postulated by a discourse that the 'Rohingyas' do not have their 'deep root' in Myanmar, they do not have any legitimate right to stay in the state as they are not the 'real sons of the soil of Myanmar'. There exist some contemporary efforts to validate these narratives (in other word "prejudices") through scholarship. There are few scholars who tried to nullify the existence of 'Rohingyas' in early Myanmar and they are making a major drive to re-write or reformulate the history of Myanmar to gain a degree of legitimacy in offending the presence of 'Rohingyas' in the state. Against this backdrop, this study examines that, even though Muslims were migrated from India and the coastal regions of Bengal, in different phases, into the early Arakan and Burma, they were residing this territory for thousand years. Like most of the regions of the subcontinent, Burma has experienced war, conquest, propagation, British colonialism and a trend of ethnic shifts. However, historical sources that have been referred in this chapter justify the early existence of 'Rohingyas' in the soil of Myanmar.

In tracing the historical antecedence of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar, it is important to focus back on the existence of 'Muslims' in the region prior to the independence of the nation. The making of partial narrative about 'Rohingyas' by the military, political parties and Buddhist fundamentalists of Myanmar that 'they were never been a part of Burma' took its root to the pre-independence incidents particularly during the pre-colonial and colonial period. It is noteworthy that before the Burmese invasion and conquest of Arakan in 1784, both Arakan (today's Rakhine) and Burma (now Myanmar) was affiliated with a discrete history. This study dissects the historical precedence since the controversy about 'who was residing' in early Arakan during the British conquest of the region (which was a part of Burma for about 42 years) in 1826 necessarily matters to understand the contemporary politics of identity and citizenship dilemma in Myanmar. To understand this facts really matters as the debate (who resided in early Arakan prior to the British conquest of the region) is essential to conceptualize the contemporary securitization of 'Rohingyas'. The securitization of 'Rohingyas' might remain beyond understanding if the historical discussion is left behind as the process is heavily entangled with the early history of migration and settlement. That is

why, this research chronicles the history of Myanmar, inevitably addressing the genealogy of ‘Rohingyas’, into three major phases such as, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Phase.

Pre-colonial History

To investigate the historical root of the ethnicity of ‘Rohingyas’ and to inquire into the existence of this distinctive identity in Myanmar, it is fundamental to reach back to the earliest settlement of their Muslim ancestors in the Kingdom of Arakan during the pre-colonial era and the change of their demographic growth in the successive periods. Arakan had its separate glorious history as an independent kingdom before the Burmese conquest of the region in 1784.

Burma

The geographical and cultural linkages of central Burma (the core of the Burmese civilization), along the Irrawaddy Valley, with the East Asia, southwest China and Tibetan region was a potent force for diversity across the region. The south is close to the Malaysian Peninsula (where the present-day Mon state and the Tanintharyi region are situated) having sea links to the south, particularly with Sri Lanka and Indonesia. The geostrategic and economic link of central Burma to the Buddhist land Sri Lanka, by sea route, was an embryonic reason for the spread of Buddhism in early Burma. The groups residing the south of Burma—the Mon who have their trade linkage with Sri Lanka and it is widely believed that, they had brought ‘Theravada Buddhism’ into Myanmar in the early eighth or ninth century. Around the eleventh century, the Mon kingdom was appropriated by the Kingdom of Pagan and following this, the Mon were intermingled with the newly emerged ‘Burmese-Buddhist’ culture. However, from the early ninth century, the Burmese people were spreading along the Irrawaddy valley; later consolidated their power across the central Irrawaddy region following the reign of the Kingdom of Pagan. Under the Pagan dynasty, Theravada Buddhism was declared as the state religion. During this time, the Burmese kingdoms came in contact with the Arakan as a degree of communication had developed among the regions. By 1000 AD, the ethnic Rakhine people (who are Buddhist by religion) reached to the region of Arakan and shifted there permanently. Afterwards, the dominant Burmese Pagan Kingdom steadily grew its control over the region of Arakan and since then, Arakan maintained its political-economic linkage with the regions of Burma along with Bengal and India.

Arakan

Arakan is locked up by the Irrawaddy Valley along the hilly terrains to its east, connecting the lower landscape of Myanmar to the Bay of Bengal in its west. Having its border with Buddhist-dominated Burma and Muslim-led Bengal, Arakanese kingdoms had an independent history of glorification that had been lasted till 1784 centering Maruk U as its capital.

British Historian H. H. Wilson referred that, up to the tenth century, the influence of Indian culture was prevalent in Arakan that had been deflected and changed in the successive years after a growing interaction with the Burmese culture.²⁹ Pamela Gutman suggests to evaluate the Arakanese history till this time admitting Arakan as “a region of India”, not as a territory of Burmese Kingdom.³⁰ Arakan was naturally departed from the central Burma along a difficult and high coastal mountain range that had prevented the region to maintain any sort of political, cultural and economic connectivity with the Burma. For this, since the early century, Arakan had a close ties (economic, political and cultural exchange) with the coastal regions of the Bay of Bengal and India which had played a vital role in ethnic composition of the region.

²⁹ Buchanan, F. (1799), A Comparative Vocabulary of Some of the Languages Spoken in the Burma Empire, *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 5, pp.219-240.

³⁰ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, p.20.

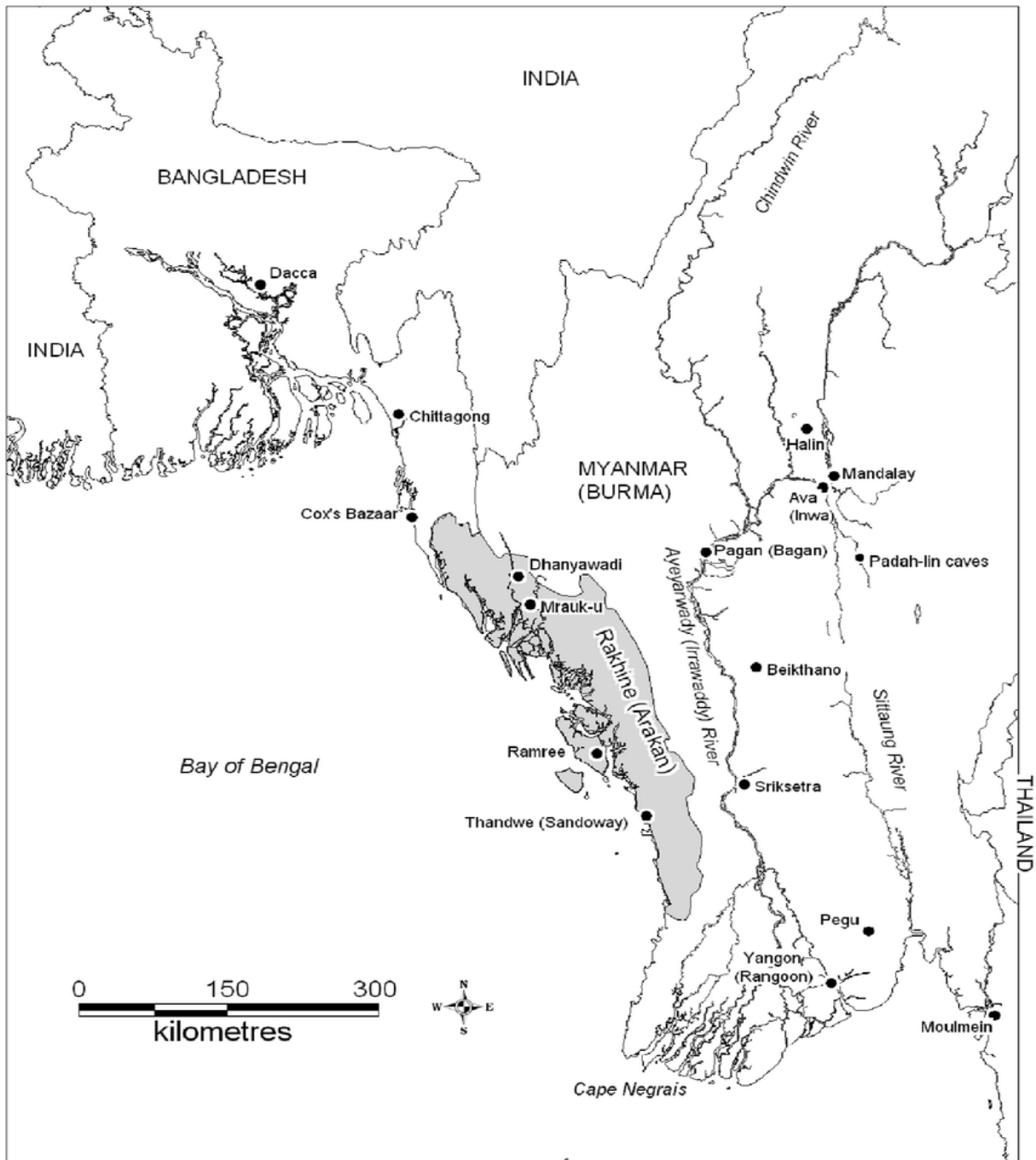


Figure 1: Former Map of Arakan (now Rakhine) State of Myanmar in Regional Context³¹

³¹ Gutman, P., Hudson, B., Htin, K.M., Aung, K. T. (2007), Rock art and artisans in the Lemro valley, Arakan, Myanmar, ANTIQUITY 81, p. 656.

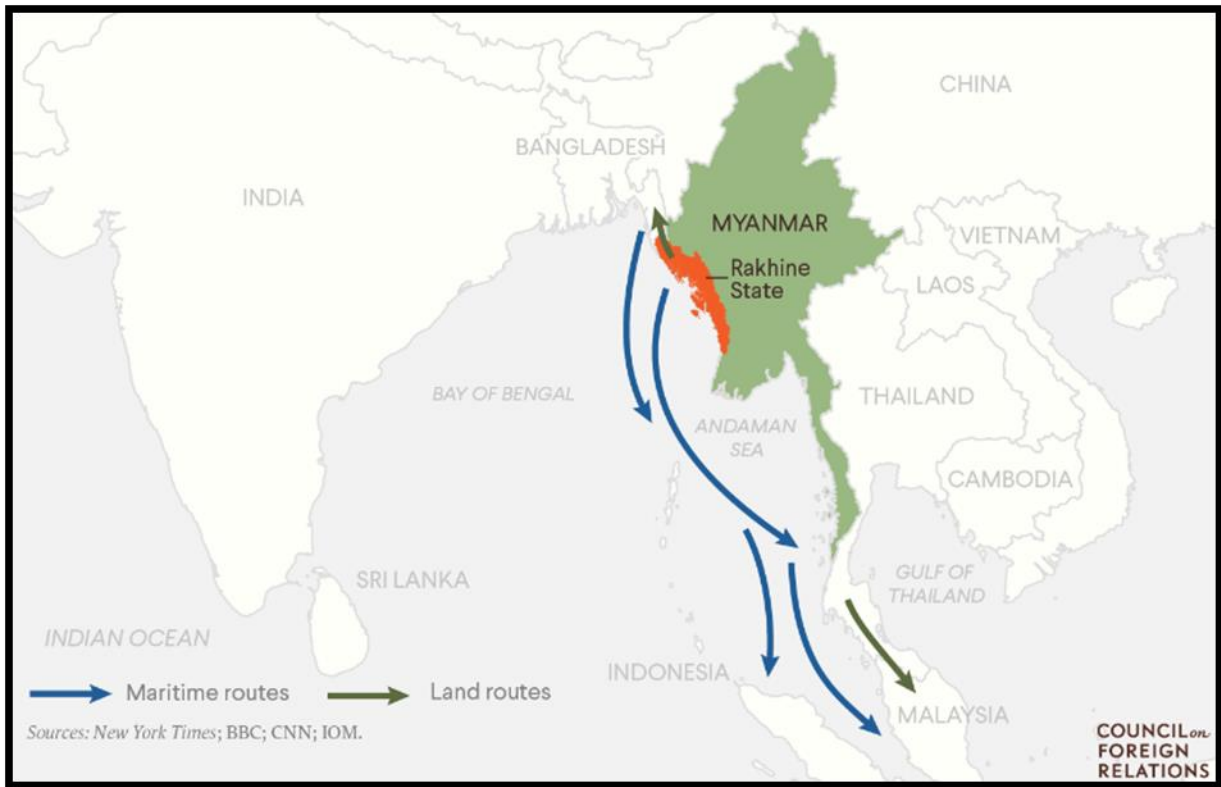


Figure 2: Map of Myanmar in Regional Context

This geographical detachment began to change around 1000 AD when the ethnic group—Rakhine shifted to Arakan from the Burma proper.³² Since then, Arakan had experienced the domination of the Central Burma’s rulers, enjoyed periods of independence and had a short history of ruling Bengal (present-day Bangladesh) up to 1666. However, in 1784, Arakan was seized by the Burma kingdom and formally annexed to it. This annexation caused a conflict between the British and the Burmese kingdom as the British desired to expand their administrative colony from Bengal to Arakan. By then, this dispute turned into a war, widely known as the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26); Arakan was possessed by the British at the end of this war. Thus, Burmese rule over Arakan was ended up. By the mid-1880s, the rest of the Burma was conquered by the British and after this; Arakan was incorporated to the ‘colonial Burma’. Consequently, Arakan remained as a part of Burma even after its independence in 1948. Later, Arakan was named as Rakhine following the name of Buddhist-dominated ethnic group in Burma.

³² Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, p.18.

Early 8th Century

In the pre-colonial era, Arakan was detached from the main land of ‘Burma proper’ by a chain of mountainous regions and river valleys, having its borders with the Bay of Bengal and India to the west, Thailand and Laos to the east, China to the north, Indonesia and Malaysia to the south and Sri Lanka to the south west. In the early eighth century, the ‘Rohingyas’, a distinct ethnic group of south Asian origin³³, lived in the Maruk-U kingdom in Arakan, that was independent of the Burmese Kingdoms along the Irrawaddy valley, central Burma, Bengal and the Moguls³⁴. In the early ninth century, Islam was commenced in Arakan when Arab traders came to this region and launched their trade and business activities across the territories, particularly, in the local market of Arakan. At this point in time, “the ‘Rohingyas’ came in contact with Islam through the Arab traders”³⁵.

During this time, ‘several ships carrying hundreds of Muslim merchants and crews were stuck on the Ramree island’ who confessed them as “Mohammedans” later being settled in the peripheral areas and the main land of Arakan Kingdom.³⁶ These Arab traders expanded their trade link across the Middle East and the Far East accelerating the process of ‘Islamisation’ in Arakan, even though, they were negligible in percentage. However, Many Muslim sailors arrived at the region around the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards.

Syed Alaol, a leading poet of medieval Bengal who served as the poet of Arakan court, referred Maruk-U as a land of diversity where the co-existence of multi religious beliefs was found. He recorded that, people from different regions of the world had migrated to Arakan particularly from Arabia, Egypt, Bengal, Hindustan (North India), Khurasan (greater Persia), Deccan, Sindh, Lahore, Malaya etc.³⁷ Traders from Persia, India and coastal regions of the

³³ The Wall Street Journal. 2016. Syed Zain Al-Mahmood, Timeline: A Short History of Myanmar’s Rohingya Minority, Available: <https://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2016/12/23/timeline-a-short-history-of-myanmars-rohingya-minority/>. Accessed 11 July 2020.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch. 2000. ‘Malaysia/Burma: Living in Limbo’, Available: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/malaysia/maybr008-01.htm>. Accessed 16 July 2020.

³⁵ The Wall Street Journal. 2016. Syed Zain Al-Mahmood, Timeline: A Short History of Myanmar’s Rohingya Minority, Available: <https://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2016/12/23/timeline-a-short-history-of-myanmars-rohingya-minority/>. Accessed 11 July 2020.

³⁶ Smart, R.B (1957), *Burma Gazetteer: Akyab District*, Rangoon: Government Press, Volume (A), pp. 19-99.

³⁷ Shahabuddin, M. (2019), Post-colonial Boundaries, International Law, and the Making of the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar, *Asian Journal of International Law*, 9, pp. 347-356.

Bay of Bengal trapped in the southern and western coastlines of Myanmar, later being settled there, were forerunner in initiating Islam across the region.³⁸ During this time, the coexistence of diverse ethnicity without any major religious and cultural fault lines was marked across the region, even though, Buddhism became increasingly dominant in the Burmese regions.³⁹

Around 15th Century

The Kingdom of Arakan with its geo-strategic location between the Muslim and Buddhist territory maintained sound economic and mercantile relations with the Bengal Sultanate. This relationship became strengthened when the King of Arakan was dethroned by the Burmese and was exiled in Bengal during the reign of Ghasiuddin Azam Shah in the Sultanate of Bengal. After twenty years of deportation, the Arakanese King regained his Kingdom in 1426 with the collaboration of Bengal Sultan's troop. During this time, thousands of "Muslim courtesans" and personnel were taken with the King from Bengal Sultanate to the Kingdom of Arakan.⁴⁰ Then, the Arakanese King was highly impressed by the diversity of Bengali cultures and traditions; even, he took an Arabic title and distinction—"Sawmun Shah"/"Sulaiman Shah". Regarding this, Jaques Lader remarked that, 'in the 15th century, Arakanese Kings' adoption of Muslim appellation and historical existence of engraved coins in this region proves the contemporary cultural influence of Bengal Sultanate on the rulers of Mrauk U'.⁴¹ In this context, the King was obliged to the Sultan and 'reached an agreement to stay as a feudatory to the Bengal Sultanate' that was extended and practiced for near about 200 years as a servitude to the Sultan of Bengal.⁴² However, the hegemonic practice of Bengal Sultanate ended up when the expansionist successor of the Arakanese King Sawmun Shah refused to stay loyal to the Sultan of Bengal. Following this, the king's successor Meng Khari (Ali Khan) later seized some territories of the Cox's Bazar region (Ramu) that was a part of Bengal. Later, in 1459, Arakanese took their possession of the port city of Chittagong and annexed it to the Kingdom of Arakan, even though, their domination ended up with the

³⁸ Wade, Francis (2017), *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim Other*, p.17.

³⁹ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, p.18.

⁴⁰ Hoque, M. (2018), *The Rohingya Genocide: Compilation and Analysis of Survivors' Testimonies*, Dhaka: Center for the Study of Genocide and Justice, p.62.

⁴¹ Leider, J. (2016), Rohingya: The History of a Muslim Identity in Myanmar, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, Oxford University Press, USA, pp. 1-5.

⁴² Phayre, P., A. (1883), *History of Burma*, London: Trubner & Co, p.78.

restoration of the territory by the Mughals.⁴³ Up to 1666, the people of diverse religions such as, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus of Chittagong were under Arakanese dominion who acted as a potent force in serving the economic interest of the Kingdom of Arakan.⁴⁴

From 16th to 17th Century

The contemporaneous history and demography shows that, from 1575 to 1666, Chittagong was ruled with full dictatorship by the Arakanese. By the seventeenth century, many Bengalis were brought to Arakan for work who later resided permanently. From sixteenth to seventeenth century, a massive flow of Muslims took place in Arakan following the Arakanese and Portuguese piracy in Bengal that had resulted in forced displacement of thousands of masses from Bengal to Arakan who were kept as ‘captives’ or ‘slaves’.⁴⁵ By this time, Arakan was reputed as a pirates’ haven. Thus, the regular deportation of Bengali rank and file to the court of Arakan heightened a trend of slave trade. Regarding the demographic composition of Muslims in Arakan, western sources refers that, Muslim population in Arakan comprised personnel serving at the Arakanese court, labor forces, Muslim traders and a group of merchants migrated from the regions contiguous to the Indian Ocean.⁴⁶ The presence of Persian and Arabic accent in Arakanese Muslim’s Bengali dialect indicates their diversified connection with these coastal regions. However, having a distinct history of glory with ups and downs, possessing unprecedented strength and “thriving for more than 350 years as a prosperous trading hub”, the independent Kingdom of Arakan was seized by Burman king Bodawpaya and annexed to ‘Burma proper’ in 1784.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid, p.78.

⁴⁴ Leider, J. (2002), On Arakanese Territorial Expansion: Origins, Context, Means, and Practice, in *The Maritime Frontier of Burma—Exploring Political, Cultural, and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200-1800*, ed. Jos Gommans and Jacques Leider, *Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen/KITLV Press*, Amsterdam and Leiden, Netherland, pp. 127-150.

⁴⁵ Charney, W. M. (1999), *Where Jambudipa and Islamdom Converged: Religious Change and the Emergence of Buddhist Communalism in Early Modern Arakan (Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)*, PhD diss., University of Michigan, p. 147.

⁴⁶ Van Galen, Stephen Egbert Arie (2008), *Arakan and Bengal: The Rise and Decline of the Mrauk United Kingdom (Burma) from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century AD*, PhD diss., Leiden University.

⁴⁷ Shahabuddin, M. (2019), Post-colonial Boundaries, International Law, and the Making of the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar, pp. 347-356.

18th to 19th Century

1784 to 1824

The Burmese triumph over Arakan was a part of their ‘expansionist strategy’, officially regarded as a “religious war” and was said to have been a revolutionary step to “re-Buddhicize” Arakan.⁴⁸ Then the Buddhist Kingdom of Ava (today’s Mandalay in Myanmar) acted as the core center from where Buddhism was spread and re-established across the region including the territories of Arakan. After the Burmese conquest of Arakan, several Buddhist missions were launched by the subsequent rulers as a part of ‘re-Buddhicizing’ the area. In addition, the annexation of Arakan with Burma proper followed by a ‘Royal Order’ which was enforced on October 14, 1787, strictly prohibiting the use of Arakanese coins and seals (previously launched by the King of independent Arakan) in the Kingdom of Burma.⁴⁹ During the four decades of Burmese rule (1784-1824), thousands of Arakanese fled to the neighboring Chittagong of British Bengal due to the atrocities of the Burmese conquerors whereas some others took shelter in the mountainous regions along its borders. As per the record of the British East India Company, in 1799, about 35,000 Arakanese were expatriated from Arakan and took shelter in Chittagong to take shelter.⁵⁰ Before the annexation of Arakan with the ‘Burma proper’ in 1784, independent Arakanese kingdom had enjoyed full autonomy for thousands of years. But, the question of their autonomy was being desperately overlooked by the Burmese rulers during the forty years of Burmese dominance in Arakan that was ended with the British triumph against the Burmese in the First Anglo-Burman war in 1826.

Colonial Period (1824–1948)

Transforming Historical ‘Indophobia’ to ‘Islam/Rohingya-phobia’

Up to 1784, Burma and Arakan had experienced a distinct history of rise and fall, both in ruling and being ruled, across the region. But after the Burmese conquest of Arakan in 1784, both of these regions get intermingled and following this, the geopolitical contexts had also

⁴⁸ Tun, Than (1985), Paya Lanma (Lord’s Highway) over the Yoma (Yakhine Range), *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 25, pp. 233-241.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 182.

⁵⁰ Chan, Aye (2005), The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar), *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*, Vol.3, No.2, Autumn 2005, pp. 398-399.

been changed to a large extent. After the British appropriation of Arakan in 1826, the Burmese rulers fell into a survival threat or fear of invasion for the British-led East India Company's growing expansion in Indian sub-continent. However, in the Anglo-Burman Wars (1824-26, 1852, 1885), Burma was defeated to British and was annexed to British India as a province. Flowing from this, the then domestic migration became flexible as there was no international border between formerly separated Arakan and Burma (as both of these territories came under the British colonial rule). Before the British colonialization, the territories of ethnic minorities (Frontier Areas) were not under the control of the Burma proper. The minority ethnic groups such as, Shans, Chins, Kachins and others were governed by their own chief/head. But, the annexation of Burmese Kingdom by the British was followed by the incorporation of 'Frontier Areas' too. During the colonial period, the British administered central Burma and the Frontier Areas separately in the pretext that, these areas inhabited by ethnic minorities are under-privileged both politically and economically which required preferential treatment.⁵¹

From 1870s to 1880s, particularly, following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the British imported a huge number of Hindu and Muslim Indians, both cheap laborers and moneylenders, in the British Burma to meet up the rising demand of manpower and financial needs of the rice industries. However, after the British invasion of Burmese monarchy, colonizers feared empowering the majority of the population that were ethnic Bamar, choosing instead to put ethnic minorities in important colonial positions.⁵² In addition, disregarding "Buddhist religious hierarchy" and Burman nationalists' agenda, the British' inclination to assign the Indians in the colonial administration had fueled grievances among the majority Buddhist-Burman groups.⁵³ Under the colonial administration, English language was made official replacing Burmese language and British laws and norms were introduced as mandatory that retarded and severely affected the then Burman Buddhist led contemporary Burmanization and their superiority too. Furthermore, they reinforced the division between areas and peoples. As a part of the divide and rule policy, British colonialists separated Burma proper from the Frontier Areas while they practiced direct control in the former and indirect control in the latter. They also executed the seeds of division in the Frontier Areas by

⁵¹ Kipgen, N. (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, pp. 1-40.

⁵² The Diplomat. Weiss, Stanley A. (2017), 'Did Aung San Lead at Panglong-or Follow?' Available: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/did-aung-san-lead-at-panglong-or-follow/>. Accessed 27 January 2021.

⁵³ Bischoff, R. (1995), *Buddhism in Myanmar: A Short History*.

institutionalizing the system of making Chieftain for individual Frontier area.⁵⁴ Apart from these, the minorities in the Frontier Areas, both indigenous and foreigners (including Indians) were provided with reserve seats (Quota system) in the legislature and they were also granted to form special electorates in pretext of their ethnic grounds and backward position.⁵⁵ Later, the British colonialists cared only the Indian Islamic laws⁵⁶ and deliberately neglected the Burmese Buddhists religious laws and norms that raised a conflict of interest between the Burmese Buddhists and the Indian Muslims. All these measures had created grievance among the Burman Buddhists against the British colonial system that preferred minorities destroying the majority Burman superior position, their culture and religion. Thus, throughout the colonial period, the British colonizers reinforced a strategy of ‘divide and rule’ to create mistrust between the minorities (both indigenous and settlers) and the majority Buddhist Burmans to serve their interests in this region.

Following the worldwide Great Depression in 1930s, the socio-economic condition of many Burmese people got deteriorated; they used to rely on Indian moneylenders and became indebted to this thriving class.⁵⁷ In addition, the rising share and ownership of farms, businesses and land by the Indian migrants fueled the existing anti-Indian hurt-burning resentment. The Burmese nationalists began to accuse that, the thriving class of migrated Indians possessed the Burmese economy, society and religion leading them to marginalized status. Thus, volatility and tension was aroused between the Burmese and the migrated ethnic people that led to anti-Indian and anti-Muslim communal riots in 1926 and 1938.⁵⁸ Throughout the colonial period, the Burmese particularly the Bamar Buddhists found themselves at the bottom of the power structure whereas they felt that, ‘they were subjugated by the British who were holding power at the top and increasingly supplanted their socio-

⁵⁴ Harvey, G. E. (1946), *British Rule in Burma, 1842-1942*, London: Faber and Faber. pp. 84-86; Furnivall, J. S. (1958), *The Governance of Modern Burma*, New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, p.22.

⁵⁵ Silverstein, Josef (1959), The Federal Dilemma in Burma. *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 28. No. 7. pp. 97-105.

⁵⁶ Interview with Yan Naing (Mr. Bellal), a Muslim lawyer in Myanmar (having Tamil Indian root) and also a politician of the Muslim political party- UNC, 21 January 2021.

⁵⁷ Chakravarti, N. R. (1971), *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community*, London: Institute of Race Relations.

⁵⁸ Win, K. Z. (2018), Securitization of the Rohingya in Myanmar, in Chambers, J., McCarthy, G., Farrelly, N., and Win, C. (ed.), *Myanmar Transformed? People, Places and Politics*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing. pp. 253-256.

economic position by the Indian migrants at the middle and lower levels of the power.’⁵⁹ Though, the migration of Indians to Burma during the colonial era was regarded as a ‘domestic movement’ (as Burma was governed as a province of British India till 1937), the Burmese Buddhists used to consider the Indian settlers as “different people” and “outside forces”⁶⁰ that conspired to degrade their socio-economic and religious status. At this point in time, an anti-Indian sentiment was fiercely aroused among the Burmese Buddhist nationalists and the dominant political elites.

Besides, interfaith marriage between the Muslim settlers and the Burmese Buddhist women had been regarded as a potential threat to both Buddhism and Buddhist identity⁶¹ that had created a fear of ‘Muslim penetration’ among the majority Buddhist population. All these facts had been propagated by the Burmese Buddhists that fueled Islamophobia. Muslim migrants from India got married with the Burmese Buddhist women and convert them into Islam. This was one of the powerful allegations based on which the historical Indophobia in colonial Burma had later been transformed into Islam/Rohingya-phobia. However, this anti-Muslim allegations and hate sentiment have been cultivated throughout the colonial and post-colonial Burma.

In 1937, Burma was administratively separated from the British India and was made a full colony in its own right. At this point in time, an anti-colonial resentment was emerged among the Buddhist-Burman communities against the British rule whereas the ethnic minorities e.g., Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ and Christian Karen were loyal to the British.⁶² Thus, the seeds of ethnic

⁵⁹ Chakravarti, N. R. (1971), *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community*, London: Institute of Race Relations; Taylor, R. H. (1974), *The Relationship between Burmese Social Classes and British-Indian Policy on the Behaviour of the Burmese Political Elite, 1937-1942*. PhD diss., Cornell University; Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2015), *Alienation, Discrimination, and Securitization: Legal Personhood and Cultural Personhood of Muslims in Myanmar*, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 13:2.

⁶⁰ Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2015), *Alienation, Discrimination, and Securitization: Legal Personhood and Cultural Personhood of Muslims in Myanmar*, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 13:2, p. 56.

⁶¹ Interview with Yan Naing (Mr. Bellal), a Muslim lawyer in Myanmar (having Tamil Indian root) and also a politician of the Muslim political party- UNC, 21 January 2021; Interview with Ro Nay San Lwin, a Rohingya activist based in Germany and also the Co-founder of Free Rohingya Coalition, 21 January 2021; Interview with Aman Ullah, a ‘Rohingya’ migrant residing in Chattogram, Bangladesh since 1985 and also a former member of Arakan Rohingya National Organization, 21 January 2021.

⁶² Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, p.27.

divisions along religious lines were planted in the early colonial era. In this context, it is also perceived by the Burmans that, at the eve of the British invasion of Burma, Muslims with their proficiency in multi-languages acted as “informers” to the British administrators since 1823 onwards.⁶³ This perception has created mistrust and misunderstanding between the ethnic Bamar and the minority Muslim ‘Rohingyas’.

During the World War II, the Japanese took possession of Burma in 1942 driving away British from this region that was followed by the Rohingya’s departure of Arakan once again in the fear of Burmese barbarity. Thus, since the Burmese occupation of independent Arakanese Kingdom in 1784, the fate of ‘Rohingyas’ changed with the ups and downs of the British colonial power in this region. However, many ethnic minorities including ‘Rohingyas’ suffered much for their ‘pro-British stance’ while Burmese nationalists took their position in favor of the Japanese, intensifying ethnic fault lines between the minority Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ in north and the majority Buddhist Rakhines in south.

In this backdrop, the British employed the expelled ‘Rohingyas’ as soldiers, against the Japanese, to take possession of Burma. The British had committed to give a “Muslim National Area” with relative autonomy to the Muslims of northern Arakan for their contribution in this battle.⁶⁴ In 1945, the British liberated Burma from the Japanese possession with the collaboration of the ‘Rohingya’ soldiers⁶⁵ and the Burma Independence Army (BIA) that was consisted of thirty Burmese comrades led by General Aung San.⁶⁶ It is noteworthy that, these Burmese comrades fought for the Japanese against the British force, mainly from 1942 to 1945⁶⁷. Meanwhile, facing Japanese coercion and having a clear indication that Japanese are going to lose the war, the Burmese independent leaders began to

⁶³ Leider, J. (2016), Rohingya: The History of a Muslim Identity in Myanmar, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, Oxford University Press, USA, p. 1-5.

⁶⁴ Yeger, M. (1972), *The Muslims of Burma: The Study of a Minority Group*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, pp. 96-112.

⁶⁵ The Wall Street Journal. 2016. Timeline: A Short History of Myanmar’s Rohingya Minority, Available: <https://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2016/12/23/timeline-a-short-history-of-myanmars-rohingya-minority/>. Accessed on 11 July 2020.

⁶⁶ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, p.28.

⁶⁷ The Irrawaddy, 2007. ‘Heroes and Villains’. Available: https://www2.irrawaddy.com/article.php?art_id=6883. Accessed on 14 July 2020.

lobby with the British and consequently changed their stance.⁶⁸ Later, the Burmese Armed forces took part in an anti-Japanese uprising in March, 1945.

However, the British had taken their promise (to ‘Rohingyas’) back once the war was ended up. The ‘Rohingyas’ felt deceived as the British failed to fulfill the promise of autonomy and relative independence for the Arakanese Muslims. These facts created resentment among the ethnic Muslim communities, who had been dreamed for an autonomous Muslim state for long. It had been accused that, during this time, the ‘Rohingyas’ pursued a policy of separatism in order to join East Pakistan supporting the slogan “Pakistan Jindabad”.⁶⁹ In 1947, some of the Rohingya leaders approached for the inclusion of the northern districts of Arakan into the then East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh),⁷⁰ even though, they failed to get the support from the newly emerged East Pakistan government.⁷¹

On June 15, 1947, in a general meeting at Rangoon, the historical predominance of Arakan as an ‘autonomous state’ had been acknowledged focusing that Arakan had a distinct history of independence for more than four thousand years with its geographical isolation from the main land of Burma—‘Burma proper’ by mountainous regions.⁷² Historically, the kingdom of Arakan had its glory of self-determination that had been mentioned in the contemporary reports, documents, writings etc. For instance, in the revealed British official records of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), the narratives on Arakanese defense system and its erstwhile fortress had been significantly referred with admiration.⁷³ However, considering decade-old prolonged and enriched history of Arakan, the Rangoon meeting reached in a conclusion that Arakan should be granted as a state with ‘autonomous status’ to determine its political destination as before. But, all these efforts of Rangoon meeting were fallen in vein

⁶⁸ Slim, W. J. (1956), *Defeat into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India 1942-1945*, New York: Cooper Square.

⁶⁹ Chan, Aye (2005), The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar), *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*, Vol.3, No.2, Autumn 2005, pp. 415.

⁷⁰ Cook, A. D.B. (2016), The Global and Regional Dynamics of Humanitarian Aid in Rakhine State, in Crouch, Melissa (eds.), *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 262.

⁷¹ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, p.27.

⁷² India Office Records and Private Papers, “Letter from U Hla Tun Pru, Chairn, All Arakan Representative Working Committee to the Secretary of State for Burma, dated June 21, 1947”, IOR/M/4/2503, pp.18-19.

⁷³ Wilson, H. Horace (1852), *Narrative of the Burmese War (1824-1826)*, London: W. H. Allen and Co., pp. 155-156.

as a mass violence took place in Arakan following the arrest of a well-known Buddhist monk U Seinda.⁷⁴ The government of Burma constantly preferred to tag these separatist movements of Arakan as ‘communist anarchy’ that caused tension and awareness among the British colonialists. Labeling the contemporary unrest and violence in Arakan as a ‘communist uprising’, the Burmese propagated against the Arakanese and provoked the British to give their support to the Burmese leadership in government. In this context, the anti-communist British colonialists considered that the leading Burmese political opponents manipulated these secessionist movements for serving their vested political motives and to establish communist order in this region. This was the way the contemporary international politics and ideological conflict affected the geopolitical calculation of the region and the independence of Burma. All these historical facts had been brought to light by a Burma Office Minute Paper (dated July 8, 1947) that also recorded the historical recognition of the Arakanese demand for autonomous status.⁷⁵

By incorporating Arakan into its territory, Burma emerged as an independent state in 1948 and thus, the political fate of ‘Rohingyas’ became absolutely subservient to the Burmese political elite. On the basis of ‘territorial integrity’, the post-colonial boundaries of Myanmar were entirely demarcated by the British colonialist that had made the existence of ‘Rohingya’ Muslims vulnerable in a new-born nation state. Amidst the mass political resistance of Arakanese people, the geographic inclusion of Arakan with the ‘Burma proper’ was followed by a political grievance among the Arakanese specifically, the ‘Rohingya’ Muslims who called for a revolt against the established order demanding for ‘self-determination’ and ‘equal status’ as an ‘autonomous state’ that was previously promised by the Burman leadership in the historical Panglong agreement⁷⁶ (see Chapter 4).

In the 1948 afterwards, a group of Arakanese Muslims approached to incorporate Buthidaung and Maungdaw into the then East Pakistan, but this attempt was failed too as the Constituent Assembly in Rangoon rejected the appeal.⁷⁷ These incidents had drastically affected the existence of ‘Rohingyas’ in independent Burma. This had eventually created a ‘political

⁷⁴ Shahabuddin, M. (2019), Post-colonial Boundaries, International Law, and the Making of the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar, *Asian Journal of International Law*, 9, pp. 347-356.

⁷⁵ India Office Records and Private Papers, “Burma Office Minute Paper (B/C 1235/47)”, IOR/M/4/2503, pp.10-11.

⁷⁶ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, pp. 14-28.

⁷⁷ Tinker, Hugh (1957), *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Year of Independence*, London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, p. 357.

climate of mistrust and fear' among the minority ethnic races and the government of Burma. It was alleged that, the Arakanese Muslims, particularly, 'Rohingyas' were antagonist to the Burma's independence having their political loyalty towards a Muslim state—East Pakistan. Prioritizing these facts, the majority ethnic Burmans tried to establish a narrative that, the Muslim 'Rohingyas' are the untrustworthy 'outsiders' who have no legitimate right to be a part of independent Burma as they have "threatened the territorial integrity"⁷⁸ of Burma prior to its independence. It is believed that the Buddhists are the real sons of the new nation who struggled for decades to liberate Burma from the British colonialism. This had intensified a violent 'ethnic strife' between the 'Rohingyas' and the Rakhine⁷⁹ communities causing a serious disruption of the communal coexistence of the prevailing ethnic groups in Burma.

The Arakanese demand for 'autonomy' or 'self-governance' was negated throughout the colonial period, even, in the 'decolonization process' of Burma, the 'political fate' of Arakanese particularly 'Rohingya' Muslims had not been given serious attention that was followed by a series of secessionist movements in the successive years. The 'Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (2017)' reveals that, the 'Rohingya' Muslims-led armed insurgency began with the country's independence, particularly, against the Burmese government, who claimed for 'a Muslim federation in the northern area of the state.'⁸⁰

Contextualizing these facts, the Burman nationalists routinely alleged that, on the eve of Burma's independence, the 'Rohingya' rebellion were involved in armed insurrections and persuaded Muhammad Ali Jinnah (the founding leader of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan) in order to lobby against the Burma's independence "asking him to incorporate Northern Arakan into East Pakistan [now Bangladesh]."⁸¹ The Burmese governing and non-governing elites repeatedly referred these historical events questioning the loyalty and legitimacy of 'Rohingyas' in the independent Myanmar and accused that, 'Rohingyas' are the 'villains' of

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch. 2000. 'Malaysia/Burma: Living in Limbo', Available: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/malaysia/maybr008-01.htm>. Accessed 13 July 2020.

⁷⁹ J. Lee, 'A History of Broken Promises', Alders Ledge.

Available: <http://aldersledge.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/a-history-of-broken-promises.html>.

⁸⁰ The Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine, Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, also known as the Anan Commission, August, 2017, p.8.

⁸¹ Smith, Martin J. (1991), *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, London: Zed Books, p.41.

Burma who did not even show their ‘political loyalty’ to Myanmar, particularly, during the period of independence.

Regarding the aforementioned allegations, Aman Ullah, a ‘Rohingya’ migrant and also a former member of Arakan Rohingya National Organization said that, this is actually a partial truth. He noted that,

“Some Arakanese Muslim leaders met with Mohammad Ali Jinnah and raised two-fold demands. In an 18 minutes discussions, they urged Jinnah either to include Arakan with the then East Pakistan or to insist the leaders of Burma, particularly Aung San, to give full pledged autonomy and rights to the Arakanese people. But, Jinnah rejected this proposal. The main reason behind this refusal was that, as most of the people of both East Pakistan and Arakan were ‘Sunni’ Muslims, they collectively would constitute majority who possibly would dominate the ‘Shia’ Muslims of West Pakistan and form a separate state. On the basis of this strategic calculus, Jinnah repudiated the proposal of Arakanese leaders. Meanwhile, M. A. Raschid, a trusted friend of General Aung san, on behalf of Burma, met with Jinnah and assured him that, Aung San will consider the issue of Arakanese Muslims and they will be provided with constitutional rights. But later this words were not fulfilled by the successive governments of Myanmar”.⁸²

Referring the case of independence struggle of Bangladesh, Ullah added,

“Like the people of Bangladesh, the Arakanese Muslims pursued this step to serve their group interests, to achieve autonomy and equal rights. It was not a wrong decision. Even, the Buddhist Rakhines also prefer separatism and struggle to establish a separate Arakan state which is also going on till today led by the Arakan Army (AA), a dominant Rakhine armed group. But, ‘Rohingyas’ never fought for separatism in the post-1950s periods. We only claim for fundamental rights of freedom, movement, justice and education etc.”⁸³

In 1947, amid the political atmosphere of Bengal partition on the basis of ‘Two Nations Theory’ centering religion as a dominant force, the Arakanese Muslim leaders’ dream or demand for a separate autonomous ‘Muslim Area’ and following this, their approach to the Muslim leader of Indian subcontinent was not inappropriate. During this time, Burma (including Arakan), Pakistan and India all these regions were controlled by British administration. Some of the Arakanese Muslims, till today, believe that, if they would be able

⁸² Interview with Aman Ullah, a ‘Rohingya’ migrant residing in Chattogram, Bangladesh since 1985 and also a former member of Arakan Rohingya National Organization, 21 January 2021.

⁸³ Interview with Aman Ullah, 21 January 2021.

to be incorporated with the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), they might not face such systematic exclusion and long-held discrimination under successive regimes.⁸⁴

Overview of Demographic Changes: A Majority-Minority Dilemma

The colonial power pursued a policy to patronize “a free flow of Indians into Myanmar (Burma) from Bengal and beyond”, that had been followed in other regions, such as, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and elsewhere “planting the seeds of communal tensions.”⁸⁵ Since the British expanded the administration of Bengal to Arakan, both of these territories were under the British dominion. As there was no international boundary between Bengal and Arakan; there was no restriction regarding the emigration of people across the region that had promoted the movement of migrant workers. The Burmese extremists claimed that, the demographic size of Muslims particularly ‘Rohingyas’ had been increased because of the British initiatives regarding rice cultivation in Arakan that required huge labor force. For this, a great number of labors (both Muslims and Hindus) were brought into the fertile land of Arakan from Bengal for seasonal work, many of whom were later settled down in this region permanently. Meanwhile, many Muslims including ‘Rohingyas’ who fled to Bengal and took ‘refugeehood’ in the face of Burmese conquest of Arakanese Kingdom in 1784, came back to Arakan after the British annexation of Burma.

Thus, in the late nineteenth century, a demographic change took place in this region that fueled a serious religious resentment. The contemporary census reports of 1881, 1891, 1911, 1921, and 1931 partially recorded the growth of the migrated Muslims in this region comprising twenty-seven percent of the total demography.⁸⁶ By 1931, about 212,000 Indians (Muslims and Hindus) were residing in Yangon whereas the demographic size of Bamar was 128,000.⁸⁷ Following this, grievances had aroused among the Bamar claiming that, they were getting a minority status in Burma.

⁸⁴ Interview with Ali Johar, India based Rohingya activist and also a Rohingya migrant residing in India, 17 January 2021.

⁸⁵ Wade, Francis (2017), *Myanmar’s Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim Other*, p.19.

⁸⁶ Baxter, James (1941), *Report on Indian Immigration*, Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationary.

⁸⁷ Wade, Francis (2017), *Myanmar’s Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim Other*, p.19.

In ‘Historical and Statistical Sketch of Arakan’, Charles Paton (1828) noted that, Muslims comprised of thirty percent among the total population of Arakan when the British possessed the region in 1825.⁸⁸ Paton’s references firmly justify the historical fact that, Muslims had a strong existence in Arakan, particularly, in some of the territories such as, North Arakan, Mrauk U and Akyab etc. This also rules out the Burmese extremists’ claim that the ‘Rohingyas’ first arrived in this territory under the British protection during the colonial era.

Historical Records

Regarding the existence of the Muslims in early Arakan, Jaques Leider noted that, “sources testify to a patchwork of Muslims presence since the early modern period” and the pre-colonial history of Arakan ruled out the presence of ethno-political tensions and economic animosities.⁸⁹ In 1799, Francis Buchanan referred the distinctive dialect of the Arakanese Muslims who confessed their historical root as “Rooinga” (both as an intrinsic language and land of their origin), denominating Arakan in their “own tongue”.⁹⁰ With the passage of time, the word “Rooinga” had been transformed to the present-day ‘Rohingya’, even though, British administrators did not refer this term as an ‘ethnic category’. Buchanan’s reference of the word ‘Rooinga’ in his contemporaneous study on spoken languages in Burma Empire has later been referred as a historical source to justify the existence of an indigenous Muslim ethnic group—“Rohingya’ in Arakan.⁹¹ In addition, following the British annexation of Arakan, Arthur Phayre—the first deputy commissioner of Arakan documented the indigenous population of Akyab and regarding this, he referred the existence of “Ro-khoing-tha (Arakanese)” inhabitant in this region.⁹²

The existence of ‘Rohingya’ identity in earlier Arakan can also be traced in the Bengali literatures and historical treatises of the medieval period. For instance, Syed Alaol, a remarkable Muslim intellectual at the Arakanese court, referred Arakan as “Roshang” in his epic ‘Padmabati’ (1651). Later, Abdul Karim Khandakar mentioned “Roshang” in the preface

⁸⁸ Paton, Charles (1828), *Historical and Statistical Sketch of Arakan*, *Asiatick Researches*, Vol. 16, pp. 353-381.

⁸⁹ Leider, Jacques (2016), *Rohingya: The History of a Muslim Identity in Myanmar*, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, pp. 1-5.

⁹⁰ Buchanan, Francis (1799), *A Comparative Vocabulary of Some of the Languages Spoken in the Burma Empire*, *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 5, pp.219-240.

⁹¹ Leider, J. (2016), *Rohingya: The History of a Muslim Identity in Myanmar*, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, Oxford University Press, USA, pp. 1-5.

⁹² Phayre, A. (1841), *Account of Arakan*, *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 10, pp. 680-681.

of his translated work of the Persian narrative ‘Dulla Majlish in 1698.’⁹³ Abdul Karim, an eminent historian of medieval Bengal asserted that the word “Roshang” deflected to “Rohang” with the passage of time and the people living in the land later being denominated as “Rohingi” or “Rohingya”.⁹⁴

It is unfortunate to give the aforementioned references to prove the presence of ‘Rohingyas’ in early Burma as this is the world’s largest group of displaced minority whose history of settlement is heavily contested. The controversy about ‘who was residing’ in early Arakan at the eve of the British conquest of the region in 1824-26 matters for the extremists in making narratives to exclude ‘Rohingyas’ from citizenship rights in Myanmar that had led them to ‘statelessness’. Prominent French historian Jacques Leider claimed that his position about the ethnicity of this group (Rohingyas) is as same as the post-colonial anthropology which tries to reveal that ‘identity is fluid, and it is socially constructed’. Leider prefers to apply the common nature of identity- fluidity and social construction on the case of ‘Rohingyas’, and tries to explore when, how and under what conditions their identity (as they see it today) emerged, how has this historically constructed or framed. Leider tried to historicize and contextualize the way or process Rohingya’s identity has been constructed focusing on 1950s that is largely rejected by the Rohingyas, some other historians and scholars who have been conducted research on this area. Leider argued that his research does not absolutely match with the Rohingyas that they claim today. He added, “they (Rohingyas) denied the massive migration in colonial period, all which happened in colonial Burma in the 1950s”.⁹⁵ Historian Derek Tonkin and Jaques Leider argued that, ‘the notion of ‘Rohingya’ is deliberately constructed in the post-independence period of Burma centering its ethnic politics and the term was never historically used as an ethnic designation’. The colonialists’ choice or preference of not recording this Muslim minority group with their ethnic denomination ‘Rohingya’ in the colonial era’s censuses have been used by the successive Burmese establishment as stronger ground for the denial of ‘Rohingyas’ as an ethnic group that led to a couple of genocidal consequences. It is pertinent to mention that, during the colonial era, the British carried major surveys and censuses in colonial Burma on the basis of religious

⁹³ Shahabuddin, M. (2019), Post-colonial Boundaries, International Law, and the Making of the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar, *Asian Journal of International Law*, 9, pp. 347-356.

⁹⁴ Karim, A. (2016), *The Rohingyas: A Short Account of Their History and Culture*, Dhaka: Jatiya Sahitya Prakash.

⁹⁵ Interview with Jaques Leider, a French historian on Burma/Rakhine who is reputed for his research that Rohingya identity is deliberately constructed in the post-independence period of Burma.

identity and language⁹⁶ instead of ethnic or racial grounds.⁹⁷ However, the absence of ‘Rohingya’ designation in the colonial era’s censuses or records does never simply mean and prove that this group of people (Rohingyas) was not existed in this region. Regarding the existence of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar, Zarni and Brinham referred that, ‘while confronted with undeniable historical proofs dating back to the early 1799 and official records or documents from ministries, particularly, from the Ministry of defense validates the historical and official belongingness of ‘Rohingyas’ to both pre-colonial and colonial Myanmar what they have been claiming for generations. Furthermore, Burmese intellectuals, civil society members, journalists, technocrats, Buddhist monks, government officials, human rights activists and former military leaders deny to admit the truth’.⁹⁸ In most of the cases, they refused the actual facts and prefer to spread the self-fulfilling myth about ‘Rohingya’ Muslims that have been constructed by themselves through speeches, writings, and official statements or declarations etc. These elite-manufactured narratives about ‘Rohingyas’ as illegal Bengali immigrants who were deemed to be purposefully entered into Myanmar since the colonial era, even in the contemporary decades, through the western gate of Myanmar to Islamize the Buddhist land Myanmar took strong base among the Burmese Buddhist populations; even though, few dominant military officials assured of the fact that, there is no inflow of migrants, legal or illegal, from the neighboring state-Bangladesh which has been firmly stated by the former military leader Khin Yi who served as the Minister at the Ministry of Immigration during the Thein Sein regime (2011-2015).⁹⁹

However, the above discussions are loud enough to conclude that the ‘Rohingyas’ were residing in Arakan even prior to the Buddhist Rakhines’ arrival in this region. It is important to unveil the history of Burma, particularly Arakan in order to refute the self-constructed narratives of Burmese governing and non-governing actors— military government, ethnic extremists, Buddhist fundamentalists, e.g., Buddhist monks, political parties, civil society etc. Indeed, the seeds of ongoing ethnic tensions between the majority Buddhists and the minority

⁹⁶ Kyaw, Nyi, Nyi (2015), Alienation, Discrimination, and Securitization: Legal Personhood and Cultural Personhood of Muslims in Myanmar, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 13 (2), pp. 51-52.

⁹⁷ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, pp.30-31.

⁹⁸ Zarni, M., Brinham, N. (2017), Reworking the Colonial Era Indian Peril: Myanmar’s State-Directed Persecution of Rohingyas and Other Muslims, *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. xxiv, Issue. 1, p.64.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.64.

‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar, that is unfolding till today, lies in ‘the British colonialism (1824-1948), complex decolonization process, and the post-colonial fixation with borders and the nation state.’”

Chapter-3

Securitization of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar: A Theoretical Framework

There are several cases of ethnic dictatorships to prove the fact how a culturally diverse, tolerant and syncretic society under successive ethnocratic regimes is being plagued by 'ethno-religious bigotry, intolerance and violence'¹⁰⁰ with the process of securitization. Several examples of the close connection among ethnicity, religion and politics are prevalent around the world, such as: Israel or Palestine (Jewish versus Muslim), Northern Ireland (Protestant versus Catholic), Sri Lanka (Buddhist versus Hindu), Malaysia (Muslim versus Confucius)¹⁰¹, Myanmar (Buddhist versus Muslim), India (Hindu versus Muslim), Thailand (Buddhist versus Muslim) and China (Buddhist versus Muslim) etc. These examples point out that dominant governing and non-governing actors under a particular ethnocratic regime choose to construct a discourse of exclusion capitalizing religion (of a particular minority ethnic group) or historical migration with a view to establishing a singular dominant ideology (mostly based on religion) and serving their broader political interests: gain legitimacy, secure the vote bank and preserve geopolitical interest etc. In Israel, minority Muslims (who have been migrated from Palestine) are being suppressed by (majority) Zionist model of successive regimes; in Myanmar, minority Muslim 'Rohingyas' (with Bangladeshi/Indian origin) have been securitized under Buddhist (majority) Burmese model pursued by the securitizing actors; in Sri Lanka, minority Hindu Tamils with Indian origin are being undermined by employing Buddhist (majority) Sinhalese model of the state; in China, minority Uyghur Muslims with Turkic origin are being suppressed through (majority Han) Chinese model; in India, minority Bengali Muslims are systematically otherized by dominant Hindutva model owned by the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP). Most of these global experiences suggest that, successive regimes highlight intimate connections between cross-border migration and religion based identity formation while minority ethnic group is being dramatically addressed as a security threat to the survival of the majority's identity/existence and securitized them as enemy 'other' on the pretext of threats to national sovereignty. Significantly, authoritative actors used to tag (religious) minorities as external evil forces or

¹⁰⁰ Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2020), The Role of Myth in Anti-Muslim Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar, Iselin Frydenlund (eds.), *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, Singapore: Springer Nature.

¹⁰¹ Yiftachel, O., and A. Ghanem (2004), Understanding 'Ethnocratic' Regimes: The Politics of Seizing Contested Territories, *Political Geography* 23, no 6, p. 653.

illegal migrants infiltrated from the neighboring border geographies who predominantly took control of the (resource) economy, religion, society and political spheres of the host country, eventually posed severe existential threat by making the existence of the mainstream identity vulnerable. Regarding this, religion acts as one of the key forces in constructing exclusively ‘layered’ and ‘selective’ discourses of exclusion and historical interpretations on the basis of religious myths prioritizing (majority) ‘our’ control of the land versus (minority) ‘their’ invasion of the sovereignty.¹⁰² Consequently, these discourses are widely accepted and upheld by the dominant religious majority; later being propagated and justified in public opinion, in routine speeches or writings, in media, politics as well as institutional settings, such as military trainings and academic courses.

Religious and ethnic minority residing in the borderlands, particularly who share bi-cultural ties to both the adjacent border territories like western region of Myanmar-Rakhine state and Bangladesh or North-east region of India-Assam and Bangladesh, experienced severe identity dilemma within their homeland. They are viewed by both of the dominant state and non-state actors through a national security lens and presented as fearsome ‘other’ and potential threat for another ideology, identity, religion and so on. Similar thing happened in the case of ethnic minority ‘Rohingya’ Muslims in Rakhine state of Myanmar where they are deemed as ‘enemy other’, illegal infiltrators or foreigners in Myanmar. Like Myanmar, some other South Asian countries like China (a Buddhist majority state) and India (a Hindu majority state) pursue almost the similar strategies in othering Muslim minorities while the former otherized the minority Uighur Muslims and the later securitized the Bengali Muslims in Assam. The Chinese government employs military in ‘re-education’ camp where thousands of Uighur Muslims (minority) have been detained since long who are facing severe military abuses. In the pretext of re-educating the detainees, the trainers designed the whole re-education process with a view to stripping the minorities (including Uighur Muslims) of their religion, language, and culture and forcefully merge them into the mainstream Chinese (majority Buddhist) culture.¹⁰³ In India, minority Muslims in Assam have also been tagged as infiltrators from the neighboring Bangladesh where the dominant governing and non-governing Indian elites securitized them through speech acts. As a case in point, immediately

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 654.

¹⁰³ Hill, M. Campanale, D. & Gunter, J. (2021), ‘Their goal is to destroy everyone’: Uighur camp detainees allege systematic rape. *BBC News*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55794071>. Accessed 6 February 2021.

before elections in 2019, Amit Shah, India's running Home Minister and also the President of BJP declared that, "we will remove every single infiltrator from the country, except Buddha, Hindus and Shikhs."¹⁰⁴ Flowing from this, controversial National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act-2019 have been undertaken targeting the minority Muslims.

The making of ethnic minority 'Rohingya' Muslims as an existential threat and enemy 'other' within Myanmar has been remarkably under-theorized in academic area. However, based on the theoretical lens of securitization this study critically analyze how ethnic minority 'Rohingyas' have been 'otherized' within Myanmar under the successive civilian-military regimes. More specifically, the main goal of this research is to shed some light on the mechanics of the 'otherization' of the minority Muslim 'Rohingyas', even on the refusal of their existence in Myanmar under the securitization model. And, as such, this study focuses on the marginalization process or dimensions of constructing 'Rohingyas' as 'other' in Myanmar and explores a range of new ways to understand existing dynamics involved in the (Buddhist-Muslim) ethnic conflict in Myanmar across time and space based on religious fine lines.

1. Understanding Securitization

Securitization, an analytical framework developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde (Copenhagen School of security studies), is an 'inter-subjective process',¹⁰⁵ an intended action of some purposeful actors who construct a challenge (ongoing or formerly ignored) as an existential threat for the survival of mainstream people, group, nation, identity and the state. It is the conversion of some issues from general status to "emergency politics" claiming that these issues pose severe threats to the existence, for which emergency measures/actions must be taken. Here, securitization acts as a context dependent process in which a specific discourse is constructed and shifted from normal politics to a subject of high

¹⁰⁴ The Indian Express (2019). Will remove every single infiltrator from the country, except Buddha, Hindus and Shikhs: Amit Shah. Available: <https://indianexpress.com/elections/will-remove-every-single-infiltrator-except-buddhists-hindus-and-sikhs-amit-shah/>. Accessed 6 February 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever & Jaap de Wilde(1998), 'Security: A New Framework for Analysis', Lynne Rienner Publishers, United States, p.30.

politics; give it a new shape under the umbrella of “emergency security issues”.¹⁰⁶ Authoritative voice(s) or elites within a given society present this prioritized issue in front of the audience (primarily public) as a threat to their existence and initiate different precautionary steps justifying actions outside the normal bound of political procedure. They extremely politicize these actions and transform the whole issue into public focus in order to gain legitimacy and support of the majority making them understand that they (majority) are the prime concern. Thus, ‘a previously less focused or non-politicized issue (either the state does not deal with this issue or it has not transformed into a topic of public debate and decision yet) is pointed as a security question, later being politicized (making the specific issue as a part of public policy, government actions and decisions or through some other engines of communal governance) and securitized (the issue is designed and portrayed as an existential threat requiring emergency measures or special actions) as a threat to the majority turning this into a public debate’.¹⁰⁷ Buzan, Wæver and Wilde illustrated the concept of securitization and its threshold as:

“Security” is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization. It is a discourse that takes the form of presenting something as an existential threat to a referent object does not by itself create securitization—this is a *securitizing move*, but the issue is securitized only if and when the audience accepts it as such through coercion or consent. The distinguishing feature of securitization is a specific rhetorical structure (survival, priority of action “because if the problem is not handled now it will be too late, and we will not exist to remedy our failure”). In security discourse, an issue is dramatized and presented as an issue of supreme priority; thus, by labeling it as a security, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means. The process of securitization is what in language theory is called a *speech act*. It is not interesting as a sign referring to something more real; it is the *utterance* itself that is the act. By saying the words, something is done.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Laura, H. (2017), *Security as Speech Act: Discourse Constructions on the Syrian Refugee Crisis*, p. 283. Available: <http://www.afahc.ro/ro/rcic/2017/rcic%2717/LSDA/283-287%20Herta.pdf>. Accessed 16 October 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever & Jaap de Wilde(1998), ‘Security: A New Framework for Analysis’, pp. 23-24.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 23-26.

The linguistic representation of a particular issue as an existential threat can better be understood by George Orwell (1974) who has illustrated the politics of language arguing that, “political language might exert a substantive, unconscious influence on political thought”¹⁰⁹; by this, language, speech and writings have a profound impact on the belief, psychology and ideology of the people of a community. However, the correlation between politicization and securitization does not necessarily denote that state is the only actor through which an issue can be securitized; securitization can also be done or enacted via other *platforms*, such as religious organizations (Buddhists-led *MaBaTha* and *969 movement* in Myanmar), military institutions (*Tatmadaw* in Myanmar) and other societal apparatus as well. Once the securitizing actors succeed in establishing an issue as an existential threat through speech act, undertaken precautions can be legitimized as a fight against vulnerability, particularly for the protection of majority. Actors are those who bring an issue in public focus and identify a particular issue as a matter of grave concern, an existential threat for the identity, society and state; undertake emergency initiatives to fight against these threats for survival. Securitizing actors include government, military, political parties, religious leaders, public figures, civil society, lobby and pressure groups etc. Even, the state acts as a dominant actor of securitization. Remarkably, these actors play an active role in identifying an existential threat and bringing this specific issue in mainstream discussion that requires extra-political action. It is noteworthy that ‘things or entities that are viewed as existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival are considered as referent objects’.¹¹⁰ For example, ethnic or mainstream groups, individuals, religion, identity and environment etc. may be considered as referent objects. Declaring these objects or entities existentially threatened, actors deliberately securitize an issue by presenting this in front of the public via dramatic language, statement, media, propaganda, policy and other legal mechanisms. This is a fluid process of framing a normal issue as an existential threat and transform this into a discourse of exclusion through speech act; this message is targeted at a specific discursive audience or referent objects.¹¹¹

Based on this theoretical foundation, this research tries to investigate the process of securitizing ‘Rohingya’ minority as involving several key stages. Firstly, under the

¹⁰⁹ Geis, Michael (1987), *The Language of Politics*. New York: Springer-Verlag. P.1.

¹¹⁰ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever & Jaap de Wilde(1998), p.37.

¹¹¹ Howe, Adam E. (2018), *Discourses of Exclusion: The Societal Securitization of Burma’s Rohingya (2012-2018)*, *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 3. pp.6-7.

successive (quasi) civil-military regimes of Myanmar, authoritative forces such as, political elite, public figures, military dictators, religious leaders and intellectual elites predominantly addressed religious minority 'Rohingys' as an existential threat or enemy 'other' presenting them as 'illegal migrants' or 'Bengali infiltrators' (penetrated from the neighboring Bangladesh) in front of the majority Burmese Buddhist people. Secondly, authoritative voice(s) or elite groups securitized 'Rohingya' issue through 'Speech Act' using anti-Rohingya dramatic language, derogatory statements or declarations (accusing them as foreign invaders, aliens, terrorists, evil-*kala*, national villains etc.) that have been effectively accepted by Buddhist Burmese (audience). Thirdly, these anti-'Rohingya' hateful rhetoric/language/speech got normalized across the time and space that have been effectively followed by undertaking of several extra-political measures and emergency actions by dominant elite groups. These measures include: redesign exclusive curriculum and national history marginalizing 'Rohingyas', use of policy and legislative instruments, denial of citizenship and voting rights, restriction on movement, geographic, electoral and administrative rearrangements etc. Fourthly, this securitizing move led to coercion, atrocities and violence against the religious minority 'Rohingyas' making them stateless and driving them out from their homeland. In essence, a series of actions have been followed by the dominant Burmese actors to securitize 'Rohingya' issue with a view to serving their broader (electoral) political, economic and religious interests. Regarding this, Khin Zaw Win, a Burman (Bamar) Buddhist think tank member of Myanmar argued that, 'the dominant securitizing actors always try to establish that, they are pursuing all these extraordinary actions to ensure the majority's security and protection'.¹¹² He added, we saw apartheid or race-hatred in South Africa and nowadays, in Palestine, it is really a replay of this race discrimination in Myanmar case. The whole process of securitizing the 'Rohingya' Muslims was gradual, systematic and institutionalized and as there was no other counter forces (political party, leader) that could stop this long standing scheme, this making of other accelerated.¹¹³

¹¹² Interview with Khin Zaw Win, a Burman (Bamar) Buddhist in Yangon who is serving as Director of Tampadipa Institute which is a think tank in Myanmar, 13 January 2021.

¹¹³ Interview with Khin Zaw Win, 13 January 2021.

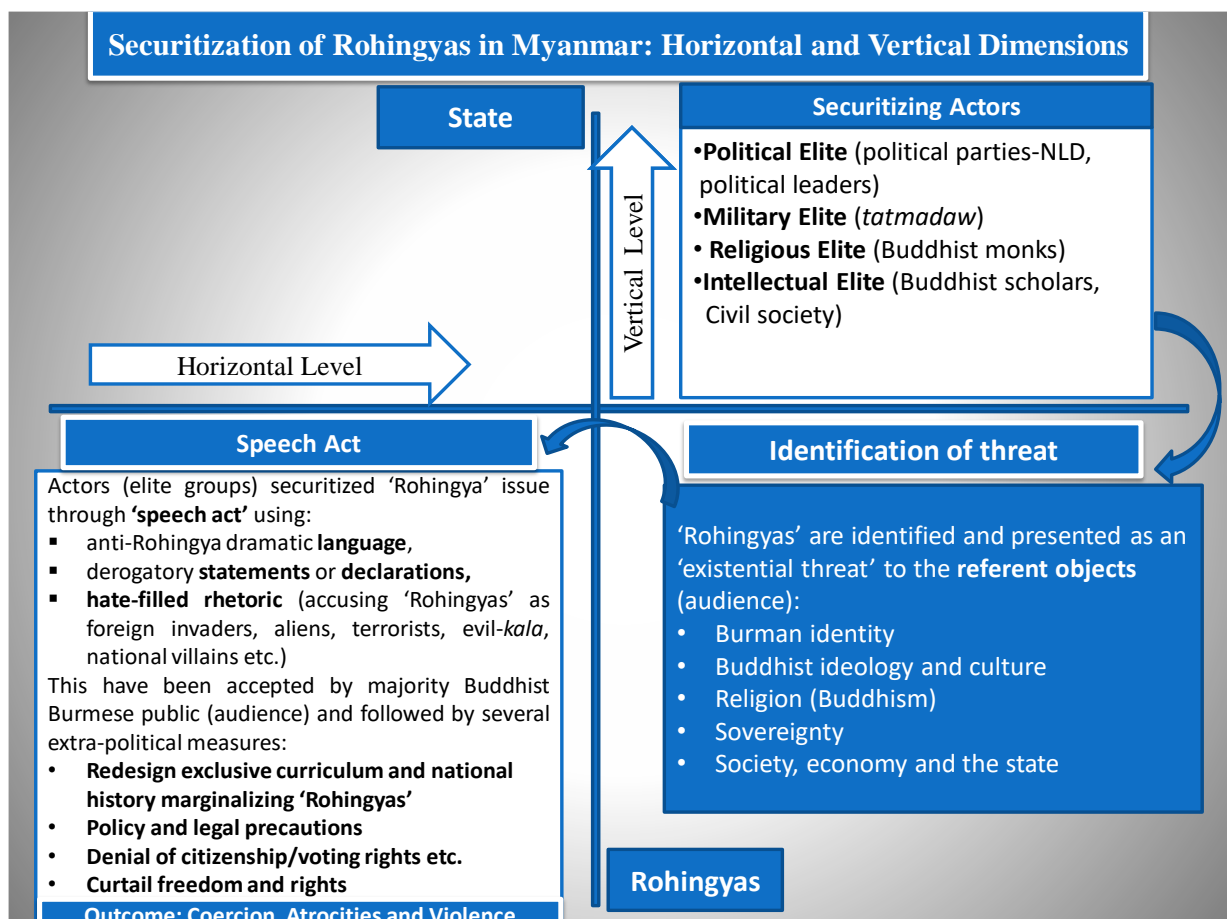


Figure 3: A theoretical framework for understanding securitization of ‘Rohingyas’

The securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar goes against the post-independence (initial phase) spirit of the Burmese society—the notion of pluralism and multi-culturalism, that has fiercely propagated the ongoing idea of ‘one nation, one religion, one language’ reinforced by the Buddhist-nationalist regimes of Myanmar since the country’s independence. Regarding the making of ‘Rohingyas’ other in Myanmar, a UK based scholar on Burma Studies Michael Charney (2021) narrated that,

“The dominant Burmese elites present Islam through the ‘Rohingyas’ as an ‘existential threat’ to the Burmese Buddhists, make them ‘exceptional threat’, jeremiads (accuses) and sell these narratives to the audience (the Burmese public) and pursue extraordinary means to deal with the problem. It became easier to convince the audience that ‘Rohingyas’ are ‘dangers’ because there were already anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya ideas in Burmese discourse such as, ‘Rohingyas mistreat women’, ‘they are mostly illegal migrants’, ‘they are fake’ who lack sufficient legal documents of citizenship’, ‘they were introduced by colonialism and also the product of British colonials’. As a case in point, one of these ideas has been redirected by the Foreign Minister of Philippines who made a talk in an interview

recently where he said that, ‘it is not the Burmese problem, it is the British who traded a ‘subhuman clash’ from outside and dropped them into Burma and left them there’. All these existing ideas are circulating in the Burmese discourse while some extreme ethno-nationals like Wirathu in Burma try to convince Burmese people that, Rohingyas are potential threat and portray them as ‘fear’. It is the Buddhist monks and the political leaders of Myanmar who depicted the ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘invaders’ who are also tagged as a threat at different levels. As a part of securitization, the elite groups attempt to portray Muslims as terrorists, which became much more convincing to the public to support what have been happening in Rakhine and other regions of Myanmar. This is exactly same thing that had happened in the 1920s and 1930s when Burmese ethno-nationals also depicted Muslims in Burma in the same way that they would outbreed the Burmese and would extinguish Buddhism in the country”.¹¹⁴

Many Ma Ba Tha and 969 leaders use such kind of narratives, stories or history to convince the audience (general public, followers) and fosters hate and fear among the mass people that create a psycho-cultural settings among them to accept the fabricated discourses. Influenced by this hate and fear factors,¹¹⁵ the majority Burmese Buddhists, not all, used to deny the existence of that particular community-the ‘Rohingyas’ that eventually led to majority-minority dilemma and otherization. The colonial era anti-Muslim/Rohingya sentiment that has been latent during the first democratic regime¹¹⁶ has later been re-emerged and sparked with the militarization of politics in Myanmar and also under the quasi-civilian military backed NLD regime.

Here few pertinent questions arise at this point of discussion that are really tough to explain, these are: why the ‘Rohingya’ Muslims have been singled out and targeted to be securitized by the Burmese elites in Myanmar? Why other ethnic minority groups of Burma like Rakhine, Shan, Karen, Kachin, and Chin who are mostly Buddhist and Christian in religion, have not been addressed as a national security threat? What is the status of other minority Muslim ethnic groups in Myanmar? What are the prevailing securitizing speech acts that shape the majority Burmese Buddhists’ perceptions and ‘psyche’ about ‘Rohingyas’ as a threat?

¹¹⁴ Interview with Michael Charney, a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies and a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies, Arakan or Rakhine communalism and history; Chair of the Southeast Asian and Military History, SOAS, University of London, 19 February 2021.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Bhikkhu Mandalay Zan, a Buddhist monk in Myanmar, 22 January 2021.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Khin Zaw Win, 13 January 2021.

There have been found several arguments that are stronger enough to answer the aforementioned questions. Firstly, the sense of distrust and fear that have been set in the colonial era following the rise of the so called migrant Muslims' dominance in this region and particularly, centering the 1947's 'Rohingya' appeal for an autonomous Muslim national area that run far deeper in the post-independence period. The historical context of the creation of this mistrust and volatility between the state and the ethnic 'Rohingyas' has been elaborately discussed in the previous chapter of this study. Secondly, 'Rohingyas' are not armed enough and they do not have a long history of armed insurgency like other ethnic groups such as the Shan, Karen and Rakhine (predominantly, these groups belong to Buddhism in religion). For example, Rakhine Buddhists are armed enough and they have been fighting the Burmese Buddhists and the central government demanding sovereignty that they had lost formerly to the Burmese Buddhist of the region.¹¹⁷ However, in the post-independence Burma, 'Rohingyas' seldom fight with any ethnic group or with the state; even, they do not ask for regional autonomy and independence after having the 1947-1948's bitter experience. So, the successive regimes find it easy and thornless to target the 'Rohingyas' to securitize on the pretext of historical events.

Following the decolonization of Burma in 1948, Mujahidin rebellion was instigated around 1954 demanding autonomy for Arakan State, but these insurrections had been strongly handled by the then Burma government. However, in the successive years, this Mujahidin rebellion was tagged by the successive elites (both governing and non-governing elites) as secessionist efforts led by the Arakanese Muslims particularly, Rohingyas to separate Arakan from the mainland of Burma. This is considered as one of the key reasons on the pretext of which 'Rohingyas' have been targeted to exclude.¹¹⁸ But, Aman Ullah, a former member of Arakan Rohingya National Organization who currently resides in Chattogram, Bangladesh firmly argues, 'even though the post-independence Mujahidin rebellion has routinely been branded as secessionist movement, the historical incidents speaks that many other ethnic groups in Arakan have the records of insurrections which have not been tagged as

¹¹⁷ Anadolu Agency, 2020. Exclusive: Rohingya issue, not Muslims v/s Buddhist paradigm. Available: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/exclusive-rohingya-issue-not-muslims-v-s-buddhist-paradigm/1891919>. Accessed 7 August 2020.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Rahman Nasir Uddin, a cultural anthropologist at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh who writes on Rohingya/Myanmar issue, 21 March 2021.

secessionist attempts. In fact, no group in Arakan would pass the test of non-insurgent in nature'.¹¹⁹

Thirdly, the religious, racial and geopolitical essence of anti-'Rohingya' discourses in Myanmar established by the Burmese elites call for the refusal of 'Rohingya' identity arguing that, since geo-strategically Rakhine state (formerly Arakan state) is mostly intermingled with the borderland of Bangladesh with its shared geography, culture (language and religion) and history, there is a potent possibility of being seized of this territory by Bangladesh with its explosive Muslim population. Burmese politicians, military forces and religious leaders particularly Buddhist nationalist monks feel fear of the Muslim's invasion of Myanmar and alleged that, the neighboring Bangladeshi Muslims would take over the Buddhist land 'using 'Rohingya' Muslims in Rakhine as a proxy'.¹²⁰ This prejudice is also reinforced by the general Buddhist public (majority) who sought to project 'Rohingya' Muslims as 'foreign invaders', 'external element' and 'illegal Bengali immigrants' claiming that, if 'they' remained unchecked and uncontrolled, 'our' land (Myanmar), religion/identity (Buddhist), economy and national sovereignty would be grasped by them very soon. They press for undertaking emergency extra-ordinary means arguing that, if this threat is not handled urgent, it will be too late and we (Burmese Buddhists) will not exist to remedy our failure.

Fourthly, after the military intervention in politics, Ne Win initiated a 'unilinear framework of state formation'¹²¹ with a view to establishing Burma a Burman dominant nation excluding other non-Burman minority ethnic groups¹²² (including Rohingyas, Kachin, Karen etc.). 'Rohingyas' had easily been singularized or exclusively branded for their minority ethnic status in terms of religion, language and ethnicity. Moreover, all other Muslim ethnic groups except 'Rohingyas' were able to assimilate themselves with the mainstream Burmese culture while only the 'Rohingyas' refused to compromise with their identity, distinct history, religion and language before and since the inception of the country's independence.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Aman Ullah, a 'Rohingya' migrant residing in Chattogram, Bangladesh since 1985 and also a former member of Arakan Rohingya National Organization, 21 January 2021.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Anadolu Agency, 2020.

¹²¹ Interview with Rahman Nasir Uddin, a cultural anthropologist at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh who writes on Rohingya/Myanmar issue, 21 March 2021.

¹²² Interview with Abdu Shukkur, a Turkey based Rohingya activist who is conducting research on the Rohingya dilemma and the democratic transition of Myanmar, 2 April 2021.

‘Rohingyas’ did not want to integrate with the majority Burman culture but they desired to stay as a distinct entity under the umbrella of Burmese pluralist society.¹²³

Moreover, the subsequent military dictators pursued the strategy of ‘Rohingya’ otherization with a view to distracting public attention and gaining legitimacy amid the economic recession.¹²⁴ Fifthly, ‘Rohingya’ leaders played pivotal role not only during the Burma’s independence but also there were several ‘Rohingya’ politicians who represented in the country’s legislature until 1990s. So, among all other ethnic minority groups, only the ‘Rohingyas’ were politically more organized and active for which they were targeted to be securitized. Finally, during the election campaign, political parties launch anti-‘Rohingya’ propaganda and “hate-filled rhetoric”¹²⁵ across the country to get popularity among the majority Buddhist voters and to secure electoral triumph by making the vote bank heavier than others.

However, in an in-depth interview with Ven Seintita, he mentioned several factors that reinforce the securitization of Rohingyas in Myanmar within a cycle:

“There are several books, publications and written documents available in Myanmar which present Rohingyas as threat and fear. These written pieces try to establish that, there were very few Muslims in pre-colonial Burma, but following huge population growth in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), many illegal immigrants came to Myanmar in the colonial and post-colonial period that create tension among the Burmese general public and the government. Flowing from this, there have been arisen some popular rumors which become widespread since the pre-2010 period. These are- ‘Muslims will transform Myanmar into an Islamic state’, ‘they will destroy Buddhists’, ‘Rohingyas who prefer separatism will establish a separate state’. These allegations became widely accepted and believed by Burmese Buddhists monks, lay people, Tatmadaw and the government who stay anxious about the ‘Rohingya’ issue”.¹²⁶

¹²³ Interview with Rahman Nasir Uddin, a cultural anthropologist at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh who writes on Rohingya/Myanmar issue, 21 March 2021; Interview with Mohammad Noor (Maung Nu), a Rohingya political activist based in the United States of America, 27 April 2021.

¹²⁴ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, p.50.

¹²⁵ Howe, Adam E. (2018), Discourses of Exclusion: The Societal Securitization of Burma’s Rohingya (2012-2018), *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 3. P. 1.

¹²⁶ Interview with Ven Seintita, a Buddhist monk and also an owner of several Dhamma Schools in Myanmar, 22 January 2021.

It is pertinent to mention that, based on the aforementioned context, the dominant securitizing actors of Myanmar launched online and offline hate speeches against the Muslims, including the Muslims of all other races in Myanmar, particularly against the ‘Rohingyas’ in Rakhine state (who constitute majority of the total demography of Rakhine state). Regarding the hostility between (Rakhine) Buddhist and Muslims in Myanmar, Alexandra de Mersan (2016) argued that, in the early 1990s, there was a tendency to disown and even, wipe out the Indian existence in Rakhine culture throwing “all Muslims together into one basket”.¹²⁷ In trying to securitize Rohingyas, they created broader anti-Islamic discourses that eventually targeted other Muslims too leading to the violence against all the minority Muslim ethnic groups in Myanmar. So, the securitizing elites started with the ‘Rohingyas’ but later been applied to all the Muslims, particularly those who reside in Rakhine.¹²⁸ Most significantly, this is how securitization produces enemies that would not intended to begin with.¹²⁹

2. Actors of Securitization

3.1. Political elite

In Myanmar, majority political parties such as NLD and USDP routinely use anti-Rohingya rhetoric and narratives to get immense support from the majority Bamar Buddhists during elections who are inevitably considered as ‘vote bank’. Surprisingly, the so called pro-democracy icon of Myanmar Aung San Suu Kyi’s anti-Rohingya stance and speeches validates the othering of Rohingyas one way forward to extreme politicization.

As NLD was increasingly tagged as ‘pro-Muslim’ for its language and views regarding human rights and contemporary illiberal laws which were opposed by the majority Buddhists and by the monks in particular, this party has taken a strict decision in not fielding any Muslim candidate in the successive elections like all other dominant political parties in Myanmar. Regarding this, Fisher (2015) asserted, “The NLD, is now running scared of the monks and doing everything they can to counter the suggestion that they are a “pro-Muslim”

¹²⁷ De Mersan, A. (2016), *Ritual and Other in Rakhine Spirit Cults, Myanmar’s Mountain and Maritime Borderscapes: Local Practices, Boundary Making and Figured Worlds*, ed. Su-Ann Oh, Singapore: ISEAS, p.127.

¹²⁸ Interview with Khin Zaw Win, a Burman (Bamar) Buddhist in Yangon who is serving as Director of Tampadipa Institute which is a think tank in Myanmar, 13 January 2021.

¹²⁹ Interview with Michael Charney, a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies and a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies, Arakan or Rakhine communalism and history; Chair of the Southeast Asian and Military History, SOAS, University of London, 19 February 2021.

party”. Even, this party refused to give nomination ticket to any Muslim or Rohingya candidate for contesting in the elections of 2015.¹³⁰ So, the quasi-democratic political system of Myanmar could not ensure the Muslim (including Rohingya) candidates’ right to contest in the elections that had been previously prevailed, even under the military rule. Moreover, the ‘right to vote’ of Rohingyas have been deliberately curtailed with all efforts by the state. This is how the political parties, having immense pressure from the state and the religious platforms, pursued a structural and planned strategy to exclude minority Muslims, particularly, ‘Rohingyas’ from formal political spheres. In an interview, Win Htein, one of the patron of NLD asserted that, “If we choose Muslim candidates, Ma Ba Tha points their fingers at us so we have to avoid it.”¹³¹ Similarly, the military-backed political party USDP also has no Muslim candidates. In the 2015 elections, out of more than six thousand candidates at both national and regional levels, around ten candidates were thought to be Muslims¹³² that shows the systematic exclusionary process in Myanmar Politics. Even, the Muslim candidates who got nomination had been gone through scrutiny under the Union Election commission which declared many of these candidates disqualified on the fictitious ground of citizenship. Regarding this nomination manipulation on the basis of citizenship ground, Yan Naing, a Muslim politician of UNC party in Ayeyarwady Rgion argued,

“I was a former member of the local committee of NLD, but the members of the NLD oppose me because I was not a Buddhist. They disliked, mistreated and overlooked me for my religious identity. I did my best for NLD, but they did not evaluate me on the basis of my efforts only for being Muslim and showed indifference to appoint me in the chairman post of the party. Against this backdrop, I resigned from NLD and after that, I arrived at Yangon and joined a Muslim political Party- United National Congress UNC¹³³. Immediately before the 2015’s elections, the Union Election Commission rejected me on the ground that, my father was suspected as a citizen of Burma. Among the twelve percent Muslim candidates, they only nominated four percent for the elections. However, having

¹³⁰ Phyo, Myat Pyae (2020), Myanmar’s Ruling NLD Rejects calls to Ditch Muslim Candidate. The Irrawaddy. Available: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/elections/myanmars-ruling-nld-rejects-calls-ditch-muslim-candidate.html>. Accessed 18 January 2020.

¹³¹ Fisher, J. (2015), Myanmar’s Ma Ba Tha monks flex their political muscle. BBC News. Available: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34463455>. Accessed 16 January 2021.

¹³² Fisher, J. (2015), Myanmar’s Ma Ba Tha monks flex their political muscle.

¹³³ The former name of UNC was Burma Muslim Congress which was established in 1945 by U Razak who was a cabinet minister in Aung San’s pre-independence interim government and later assassinated with Aung San and six other ministers in 1947.

been confronted with the proofs that my grandfather (who was a Tamil Indian) arrived in Myanmar in 1900, the Election Commission granted me a nomination ticket to be contested. But, I found very little time for election campaign and did not win that election”.¹³⁴

In 2015, U Tin Oo, a senior member and also a patron of the Aung San Suu Kyi’s political party-NLD (who was also a former commander-in-chief of the Burmese army), is seen in a video kneeling at the feet of Buddhist monk Wirathu and having his advisory speeches on how the NLD could win in the elections utilizing the then going issues. It clearly shows a close ties of both military and religious establishments with political elites of the country. In reality, political elites of the country defended the military with all efforts. The majority parties, particularly NLD and all the political leadership did not take any steps against the Rohingya persecution and allowed this to go on because they preferred to keep their public support intact. Furthermore, Aung San Suu Kyi deliberately avoided to give any reactions that would jeopardize the majority support¹³⁵ she has gained in Myanmar; surprisingly, she denied the securitization of this ethnic minority, sided with the military- Tatmadaw and tried to please the majority Burmese Buddhists to keep her position secured. Suu Kyi might have equated that, stressing on nationalism and ignorance of ‘Rohingyas’ would protect her from being outmaneuvered by the both the Tatmadaw and the Burmese ultra-nationalists, accommodating her to secure a greater electoral success. So, the reality is that, even though, NLD did not directly fabricated anti-Rohingya discourses but they did not stand against this promotion of securitization.¹³⁶ Thus, the non-cooperation of both Suu Kyi and NLD has helped to establish anti-Rohingya propaganda that fueled the existing spark of anti-Rohingya sentiment leading to violent consequences.¹³⁷ During the recent election in 2020, one of the candidates in Yangon advertise his profile in a big billboard containing the slogan, ‘No Rohingya’ and saying, if he wins the election, no ‘Rohingya’ will be allowed in the

¹³⁴ Interview with Yan Naing (Mr. Bellal), a Muslim lawyer in Myanmar (having Tamil Indian root) and also a politician of the Muslim political party- UNC, 20 January 2021.

¹³⁵ Interview with Ro Nay San Lwin, a Rohingya activist based in Germany and also the Co-founder of Free Rohingya Coalition, 21 January 2021.

¹³⁶ Interview with Michael Charney, a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies and a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies, Arakan or Rakhine communalism and history; Chair of the Southeast Asian and Military History, SOAS, University of London, 19 February 2021.

¹³⁷ Interview with Khin Zaw Win, a Burman (Bamar) Buddhist in Yangon who is serving as Director of Tampadipa Institute which is a think tank in Myanmar, 13 January 2021.

country'.¹³⁸ Thus, 'Rohingya' identity is used by the political actors during the elections as a tool for political game and also to manipulate the country's electoral engineering.

3.2. Military Elite

Since the military coup in 1962, the Burmese military has approached 'Rohingya' issue as a potential security threat and has viewed 'Rohingyas' as stronger agents of Mujahidin rebellion. The military force of Myanmar, popularly known as '*Tatmadaw*',¹³⁹ in the name of controlling insurgency and fight against terrorism, treated 'Rohingyas' with extraordinary measures and called for undertaking emergency precautions to get rid of them. As a case in point, in 2017, the military carried out a strategy called 'scroached-earth tactics' in Rakhine state by which almost 80 inhabited areas were burned down that fueled the ongoing crisis in greater scale. Moreover, they launched several military operations that ended in thousands of 'Rohingyas' fleeing to neighboring state Bangladesh. This 'slow burning genocide'¹⁴⁰ attempt was masterminded by the military forces to wipe out the sign of this Muslim minority from the Myanmar land where they have been residing for generations.

In Myanmar, military controlled journals, publications, and media agencies keep portraying the Muslims, particularly 'Rohingyas' as 'illegal immigrants' from Bangladesh and fabricate the neighboring border state Bangladesh as a possible threat. Some of these military-controlled media include Myawaddy Daily, Kyaymon (The Mirror) Daily, Myawaddy Television, Thazin FM (Radio) and Ngwe Tar Yee (Literary Magazine) which are dominant across political and military domain in Myanmar and reinforce anti-Rohingya sentiment shaping the mass people's perceptions and psyche towards ethnic minority- 'Rohingya'.

Besides, the Tatmadaw not only funded the Buddhist monks and supported their anti-Rohingya propaganda but also make the Burmese public understand that, only the military can protect the Burmese people. There are seen available posters and billboards containing Tatmadaw's slogans across the streets in Myanmar that propagate against the minority 'Rohingya' community and support the military rule in Myanmar. Even, some of these slogans are publicly displayed in the name of "People's Desire" which indirectly portrayed

¹³⁸ Interview with Kyaw Zeyar Win, a Burmese scholar based in United States of America, 19 January 2021.

¹³⁹ Ahmed, K, and Mohiuddin H (2020), *The Rohingya Crisis: Analyses, Responses and Peacebuilding Avenues*, Lexington Books, UK, p. 37

¹⁴⁰ *Prothom Alo*, December 7, 2017.

the minority 'Rohingyas' as 'external evil forces' and 'common enemy'; these slogans are: "Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy", "Tatmadaw and the people, cooperate and crush all those harming the nation". These military's propaganda posters also try to establish the necessity of military rule in Myanmar within the Burmese public sentiment stating that, "Only when the Tatmadaw is strong will the nation be strong", "the Tatmadaw shall never betray national causes". Thus, military elites play the role of crucial actors in securitizing the 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar.

On 30 November 1993, in a Burmese language speech delivered at the National Defense University, Khin Nyunt, the former chief of the Directorate of Burmese Defense Intelligence Services, exposed the major demographic motives of Myanmar's military force: firstly, change the demographic proportion of the country through religiously motivated demographic engineering considering the geo-strategic position of the country having border land with Bangladesh, China and India; secondly, shift (forcefully) the Muslim-dominated nature of the Northern Rakhine state into a Buddhist land by making Muslims, particularly 'Rohingyas' displaced.¹⁴¹ As per the plan masterminded by the military elite, the Burmese security force has pursued hardline campaigns against 'Rohingyas' in the name of 'immigration checks' and make them 'stateless' through a rapid process of 'illegalization' resulting in making thousands of Muslim 'Rohingyas' statelessness.¹⁴² Furthermore, Buddhist populations have been resettled in the western Rakhine state as a part of the blueprint of the ruling military leaders of the state. It is pertinent to note that, throughout the period from 1962 to 2010, the military leaders of Burma reinforced 'divide and rule' strategy between the Buddhist Rakhines and the Muslim Rohingyas in Rakhine state to serve their political interests.¹⁴³

3.3. Religious Elite

Even though, religion is not the only reason for which 'Rohingyas' are being singled out in Myanmar, but, it acts as a vibrant force in fueling the securitization process. Several

¹⁴¹ Myat Khaing (2013), Interview with ex-General Khin nyunt, Yangon: Quality publishing house, p. 158; Khin Nyunt (2016), Our Country's Western Gate problem, introduction; Zarni, M., Brinham, N. (2017), Reworking the Colonial Era Indian Peril: Myanmar's State-Directed Persecution of Rohingyas and Other Muslims, *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. xxiv, Issue. 1, p.65.

¹⁴² Zarni, M., Brinham, N. (2017), Reworking the Colonial Era Indian Peril, p.65.

¹⁴³ Interview with Aman Ullah, a 'Rohingya' migrant residing in Chattogram, Bangladesh since 1985 and also a former member of Arakan Rohingya National Organization, 21 January 2021.

influential (Buddhist monks) religious leaders and (Buddhist) religious networks predominantly propagates against 'Rohingyas' using anti-Rohingya derogatory narratives and by this, they become successful in shaping the majority Buddhists' attitudes and perspectives towards the minority 'Rohingyas'. Regarding this, McKay (2019) argued that, 'alongside political, military, economic, and other social drivers, religious dimensions are clearly affecting the intensity and trajectory of conflicts in Rakhine.¹⁴⁴ Dominant Buddhist monks of Myanmar often used religious maps to make the Buddhists believe how Buddhism is an ideology increasingly faces extinction and Buddhists are shrinking demographic or geopolitical minority across the world¹⁴⁵ claiming that, 'very few regions of Asia are Buddhist today; but, formerly there were many other Buddhist countries, such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, even Turkey and Iraq which were part of Theravada Buddhist world, those have later been transformed to Muslim states'. Thus, these Buddhist monks having prestigious position in Burmese society created a fear of Islam and Muslim 'Rohingyas' that, "the real goal of all Muslims is to displace Buddhism".¹⁴⁶ Whether or not this assertion is plausible, this is widely believed by the majority Buddhist population, wielding fears against the Rohingyas who are increasingly perceived as 'interlopers'. This menace has been spread more acutely against all Muslims in Myanmar including those who belong to the Kaman (the only recognized Muslim ethnic group).¹⁴⁷

Along the Buddha Dhamma Foundation, there are several 'Dhamma Schools' that have been established to spread Buddha's teaching, but some of the Buddhist monks of these schools use these platforms to spread hate and propagate falsified narratives and self-constructed anti-Muslim facts and stories through their routine speeches, lectures, teaching materials etc. that help to reinforce anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic sentiment among the Burmese students from the

¹⁴⁴ McKay, M. (2019), *The Religious Landscape in Myanmar's Rakhine State*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace. Peaceworks no 149. Available: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/20190829-pw_149-pw.pdf. Accessed 14 January 2021.

¹⁴⁵ Kyaw, N. N. (2020), *The Role of Myth in Anti-Muslim Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar*. In I. Frydenlund, & M. Jerryson (Eds.), *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World* (pp. 197-226). Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁴⁶ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, p.66.

¹⁴⁷ International Crisis Group Report, 2017. *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar*. Report no. 290, Brussels. Available: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/290-buddhism-and-state-power-in-myanmar.pdf>. Accessed 14 January 2021.

very beginning of their school life.¹⁴⁸ One of the founders of Buddha Dhamma Schools, Ven Seintita also admitted the aforementioned facts.¹⁴⁹

The 969 Movement

The 969 movement, a group of ultra-nationalist Buddhist monks who strongly perceive that, the existence of other religious ideologies within Myanmar state is a serious threat to the existence of Buddhism.¹⁵⁰ This movement evolved out of the 1988 uprising¹⁵¹ and since then, it has been strongly affiliated with anti-Muslim propaganda in excuse of the protection of Buddhism in Myanmar. For this, they keep themselves involved in campaign against those who do not belong to ‘pure’ Burmese ideology or Buddhist spirit, to be more exact, against the Muslims. The extremist Buddhists frequently uses inflammatory rhetoric against the Myanmar Muslims in general and routinely instigate anti-Rohingya propaganda in particular regardless of their ethnic legacy in Myanmar with a view to establishing a pure Buddhist state well-backed by Buddhist monks. The 969 leaders, their followers and other believers of 969 ideology propagate the “myth of deracination” against the ‘Rohingya’ Muslims, in their religious speeches fiercely opposing the legitimate existence of this ethnic minority within the Myanmar state and of presenting them as ‘fearsome other’. The core message of the 969 movement which is profoundly supported by its Buddhist monks begets Islamphobia across the country leading to anti-Rohingya propaganda and mass violence in Rakhine state, is well evident. Buddhist monks affiliated with the 969 network spread anti-Rohingya hatred speeches on YouTube and other social media platforms¹⁵² where they are followed by thousands of Buddhist people. These 969 leaders make these Buddhist audience understand or believe that, Buddhism and Buddhists in Myanmar is under severe threat of extinction both within Myanmar and the beyond. It is noteworthy that, these extreme speeches or sermons delivered by the 969 Buddhist monks are found available on the streets of Myanmar as videos and tape recordings which are publicly played at the local teashops, religious gatherings and

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Bhikkhu Mandalar Zan, a Buddhist monk in Myanmar, 22 January 2021.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Ven Seintita, a Buddhist monk and also an owner of several Dhamma Schools in Myanmar, 22 January 2021.

¹⁵⁰ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, p.67.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.67.

¹⁵² Interview with Ven Seintita, a Buddhist monk and also an owner of several Dhamma Schools in Myanmar, 22 January 2021.

also at the Buddhists' residents.¹⁵³ All these speeches, sermons and messages of the leaders of the 969 movement are circulated via YouTube channels, Facebook and other social media platforms; watched by thousands of followers, that play crucial role in constructing anti-Rohingya narratives and stories portraying 'Rohingyas' as fearsome 'other' and as an existential threat to Myanmar. In the sermons of the 969 leaders—Buddhist propagandist monks, 'Rohingyas' are being accused of having linkage with the external Muslim networks, both ideologically and financially, who are doing conspiracy to Islamize Buddhist land Myanmar. Such kind of allegations became widespread in the post-2000s periods, particularly since the political re-opening of the political system of Myanmar in 2010.

As a case in point, Ashin Wirathu, one of the dominant 969 leaders who is branded as Burma's 'Buddhist Bin Laden'¹⁵⁴ for his extreme speeches and sermons, call on his Buddhist followers not to transact with Muslim-run businesses and to strictly boycott the Muslim shops for protecting Buddhist interests, their race and religion.¹⁵⁵ He also claims that, such acts of prohibition is justified as Muslims have already boycotted Buddhists' shops and businesses. As a part of the 969 campaign, Wirathu made a speech on February, 2013 which is found available in CDs format sold in the Myanmar markets, exaggerates the ongoing anti-Muslim sentiment to an extreme level. In his speech, Wirathu fiercely uttered at the Buddhists audience,

If you buy from Muslim shops, your money does not just stop there, it will eventually go towards destroying your race and religion. These Muslims could outbreed Buddhists, steal away Buddhist women, overwhelm political offices. Once these evil

¹⁵³ Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2016), Islamophobia in Buddhist Myanmar, in Crouch, Melissa (ed.), *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 185.

¹⁵⁴ Preston, A. (2015), Saffron Terror: an audience with Burma's 'Buddhist Bin Laden' ashin Wirathu', London: GQ. Available: <http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/comment/articles/2015-02/12/ashin-wirathu-audience-with-the-buddhist-bin-laden-burma>. Accessed 17 December 2020.

¹⁵⁵ Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2016), Islamophobia in Buddhist Myanmar, in Crouch, Melissa (ed.), *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 184-85; Ibrahim, Azeem (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, p. 67.

Muslims have control, ‘they’ will not let ‘us’ practice our religion. ‘We’ must be careful. ‘They’ really hate ‘us’.¹⁵⁶

In front of his thousands of Buddhist followers, Wirathu routinely delivers his online and offline hate-filled racist speeches about the ‘wickedness of the Bengali “kalars” (a very offensive denomination for Muslim ‘Rohingyas’) and the urgency for Rakhine Buddhists to fight against the Muslims with their best and to defend themselves at all costs’.¹⁵⁷ Even, in a public sermon at Shwe Hlay village, Wirathu once narrated mosques as “enemy bases”.¹⁵⁸ Acknowledging himself as a ‘outspoken firebrand’, Wirathu grants several interviews and abuses social media platforms to spread self-fulfilling false narratives about Muslims, routinely denigrating them in his speeches as “mad dogs”, “troublemakers”, and “rapists”.¹⁵⁹

Prominent monks like Ashin Wirathu, Ashin Wimala and Ashin Parmoukkha have been much louder in their extremist speeches and rhetoric, making allegations of Muslim’s conspiracy to take control of the Buddhist nation with the scheme of marrying and converting Buddhist women. These anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya hate-filled speeches were widely circulated across the country through 969 stickers, CDs and DVDs.¹⁶⁰ These hate speeches have directly fueled to massive violence and otherization of almost all the Muslim ethnic groups in Myanmar, including both Kaman¹⁶¹ and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state, and the Burmese Muslims in central Myanmar.

¹⁵⁶ The World. Patrick Winn, Myanmar’s ‘969’ crusade breeds anti-Muslim malice, 27 March 2013. Available: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-03-27/myanmar-s-969-crusade-breeds-anti-muslim-malice>. Accessed 18 December 2020.

¹⁵⁷ Preston, A. (2015), Saffron Terror: an audience with Burma’s ‘Buddhist Bin Laden’ Ashin Wirathu’, London: GQ. Available: <http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/comment/articles/2015-02/12/ashin-wirathu-audience-with-the-buddhist-bin-laden-burma>. Accessed 17 December 2020.

¹⁵⁸ Dawn, 4 October 2013, The 969 Movement. Available: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1047407>. Accessed 18 December 2020.

¹⁵⁹ Fisher, J. (2015), Myanmar’s Ma Ba Tha monks flex their political muscle. BBC News. Available: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34463455>. Accessed 16 January 2021.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Ven Seintita, a Buddhist monk and also an owner of Buddha Schools in Myanmar, 22 January 2021; International Crisis Group Report, 2017. Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar Report no. 290, Brussels. Available: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/290-buddhism-and-state-power-in-myanmar.pdf>. Accessed 14 January 2021.

¹⁶¹ The Kaman are one of the Muslim ethnic groups of Myanmar who reside in Rakhine state. This is the only Muslim ethnic identity which is officially enlisted as an ‘ethnic group’ in the government’s recognized 135 national races.

These Buddhist monsters pressed for the passing of several illiberal laws in the parliament targeting minority Muslims. They supported the recent ban of the interfaith marriage and helped in drafting of the proposed laws arguing that, these laws are justified as a measure to protect the Buddhists before they are going to be overwhelmed by Muslim ‘other’. Thus, the Buddhists’ 969 crusade breeds anti-Muslim/anti-Rohingya malice in Myanmar. Even though, this violence is undeniably fueled by these 969 Buddhist radicals’ hate-filled anti-Muslim speeches and campaigns, dominant state actors support these monks along with the 969 movement. For example, President Thein Sein of Myanmar addressed Wirathu as a “son of Lord Buddha” while praising the 969 movement as a “symbol of peace”.¹⁶² Moreover, in June, the Minister of Religious Affairs Sann Sint in an interview with Reuters denied the inflammatory activities of the Buddhist monks claiming that, (monks) they only work to protect and promote the peaceful co-existence of religions.

The Ma Ba Tha

The Organization or Association to Protect Race and Religion, in Burmese language acronym “*Ma Ba Tha*,” popularly known as an extremist Buddhist group which is made up of monks, nuns and laypeople, has been actively inciting hatred and violence against the Muslims (Rohingyas in particular) in Myanmar. This group has pushed the government and military administration to enact a series of repressive laws ostensibly aiming at the marginalization of ‘Rohingya’ minority. More alarmingly, Ma Ba Tha is not simply an extremist Buddhist group of widely-revered and charismatic monks; it has not only created an expanded space in religious spheres in Myanmar but also has taken increasing control over the country’s educational system. The Ma Ba Tha monks have gained greater popularity among the general Buddhists through the introduction of complementary state schooling—Buddhist Sunday schools (Dhamma Schools). As Ibrahim (2017) has noted, the Ma Ba Tha as a Buddhist group prefers to discriminate against other religions and primarily focuses on the protection of Buddhism from all the possible threats what it considers whether it is real or perceptions. However, all the things that these Buddhist inspired informal Sunday schools teach are not tolerance, diversity and inclusiveness but they make inform and instigate of the students about anti-Islamic messages, misinformed rumors and negative images of Muslims that seeks to establish that, Buddhist identity is under severe threat of Islam and must be secured against

¹⁶² Dawn, 4 October 2013, The 969 Movement. Available: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1047407>. Accessed 18 December 2020.

an outside enemy.¹⁶³ It is pertinent to note that, many Ma Ba Tha monks and members, particularly Ma Ba Tha women are serving as teachers of these Dhamma schools who deliver inflammatory lectures filled with anti-Muslim rhetoric.¹⁶⁴ Both the students and teachers are likely to explain their lessons with reference to the existing pervasive discourses of Buddhism in danger of being swallowed by Muslims in Myanmar.

In late-2013, Myanmar government' appointed formal body of monks—Sangha Council effectively banned the 969 movement for its widespread propagation of anti-Muslim hate speeches and rumors. Immediately after this, Ma Ba Tha picked up the place of the 969 movement where they had seemingly left off. As Walton has noted, 'the Ma Ba Tha, along with its ally platform 969 movement, deliberately leads 'buy Buddhist' campaigns to make it affirms that Muslim businesses are boycotted'.¹⁶⁵ Worryingly, these Buddhist monks have also intimate relationship with the dominant political parties of the country, such as USDP and NLD; to buy Ma Ba Tha and its followers' support, politicians of these parties donate to the Ma Ba Tha affiliated monasteries that clearly indicates the historical political and financial nexus between the state apparatus and the religious establishment—Buddhist clergy.¹⁶⁶ This 'buy Buddhist' agenda was strongly backed by the state's patronage as the USDP and NLD are not willing to lose the support of their potential electorate. Even the anti-Muslim hatred movement that become influential since 2010 is funded and supported by the contemporary regimes of Myanmar.¹⁶⁷ Even, facing immense pressure from Ma Ba Tha, Aung San Suu Kyi's political party- NLD has put forward not a single Muslim candidate in the elections. This is how the Myanmar's Ma Ba Tha monks amplifies their political muscle.

3.4. Intellectual Elite

Burmese scholarly and intellectual elite were actively involved in the preservation and maintenance of Burmese Buddhist dominance refusing the legitimate claim of Rohingyas'

¹⁶³ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, p.68. Walton, M. (2014), 'What are Myanmar's Buddhist Sunday schools teaching?' East Asia Forum. Available: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/12/16/what-are-myanmars-buddhist-sunday-schools-teaching/>. Accessed 15 January 2021.

¹⁶⁴ Walton, M. (2014), 'What are Myanmar's Buddhist Sunday schools teaching?' East Asia Forum.

¹⁶⁵ Walton, M. (2013), *A Primer on the Roots of Buddhist/Muslim Conflict in Myanmar and a Way Forward*.

¹⁶⁶ International Crisis Group Report, 2017. *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar*. Report no. 290, Brussels. Available: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/290-buddhism-and-state-power-in-myanmar.pdf>. Accessed 14 January 2021.

¹⁶⁷ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, p.70.

existence in Myanmar prior to the colonial era. From the very beginning, the Burmese educated class consciously portrayed the Indian migrants, both Muslims and Hindus as a potential security threat to their existence and identity. As a case in point, in the early 1937, a prominent Burmese writer named Saithan wrote in *New Light of Burma* that, ‘since the early history, Indians (contextually referring here to *Kala*) on behalf of the white colonialists have been playing dominant role as the pioneers of attacks against the Burmans. It would be best if they were not supposed to stay here.’¹⁶⁸ Moreover, there are some historians (among whom Jaques Leider is prominent for his refusal of ‘Rohingya’ identity), Rakhine scholars and diplomats (such as, Derek Tonkin) who relentlessly reject the ‘Rohingya’ identity as an indigenous ethnic group claiming that, the nomenclature ‘Rohingya’ is a post 1950s deliberate creation.¹⁶⁹ Thus, over the time, as the dominant securitizing actors intellectuals sought to make ‘Rohingyas’ ‘fearsome other’ and refuse the legitimacy of this ethnic minority as citizens of Myanmar.

Historian Jacques Leider tried to establish that ‘Rohingya’ is an identity which is historically constructed or framed. He tried to historicize and contextualize this construction process focusing on 1950s arguing that this ethnic designation had not been used by the colonizers in the colonial censuses (he referred the Bengal Census). According to him, ‘Rohingyas’ are the product of British colonialists. He said that among the elites (particularly the military) in Myanmar, ‘Rohingyas’ have seen as a demographic threat because they could not control the border at the moment of crises as such during the independence war of Bangladesh, people crossed the border going back and forth throughout the decades (1980s), including the Rohingyas and the Rakhine Buddhists who were a very smaller number (some of whom resides in Bangladesh). Denying the otherization of ‘Rohingya’ since 1960s, he claimed that ‘Rohingyas’ could be a threat at the cultural level and this has been articulated locally by the Buddhist Rakhines in the recent years’. He argued that, until the 1990s, the Roingya organization always had a territorial claim that is historically unjustified. Leider accused that, ‘Rohingyas denied the massive migration in colonial period, all which happened in colonial

¹⁶⁸ Riot Inquiry committee, Interim Report of the Riot Inquiry Committee, Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationary, 1939.

¹⁶⁹ Win, Kyaw Z. (2018), Securitization of the Rohingya in Myanmar, in Chambers, J., McCarthy, G., Farrelly, N., and Win, C. (ed.), *Myanmar Transformed? People, Places and Politics*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing. p. 255.

Burma in the 1950s'.¹⁷⁰ However, all these arguments are largely rejected by the Rohingyas as these claims do not absolutely match with the evidences that they have and strongly refuted by some historical proofs or evidences (see Chapter 2).

An attempt to securitize 'Rohingyas' by the Burmese elites is their obsession with history and their efforts for fashioning and refashioning of the Burmese history with a new veil excluding the role of ethnic minorities, Muslims and the 'Rohingyas' in the country's political development and misrepresenting them as national betrayers, villains or enemies. They sought to construct a single official narrative of history, reinforce this narrative with legal and constitutional safeguards and propagate through diverse formal and informal platforms. There are several countries across the world that have pursued the refashioning of their history with a greater goal of achieving legitimacy and consolidate power for long, to establish the dominance of the majority group and erase the existence of (religious) minority ethnic group. In this regard, historians, intellectuals and journalists of the country are instructed to follow the discourses of the top-ranked elite groups leading to zero-sum mentalities.

Amidst the anti-'Rohingya' hate-filled rhetoric and campaigns, a number of books, tracts or research pieces¹⁷¹ have been generated by the dominant Buddhist intellectuals of Burma portraying Muslims, particularly the 'Rohingyas' as national enemy or foreign invaders that get widely circulated on the social media platforms, websites and also in the offline sites.¹⁷² Thus, the dominant intellectual forces play a serious role in curving the legitimate claim of Rohingyas regarding their existence in Myanmar and to ethnicize the presence of this minority group in question, stoking and worsening the communal tension within the country. As a case in point, 'in the introductory part of his tract *Our Country's Western Gate Problem*' former military intelligence leader Khin Nyunt falsely asserted that, in the pre-colonial period, there had not been found any Muslim's presence in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Referring the case of Middle East, he makes a rapport among Islam/Muslims, terrorism and violence, and expressed a grave concern for the presence of so called

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Jaques Leider, a French historian on Burma/Rakhine who is reputed for his research that argues, Rohingya identity is deliberately constructed in the post-independence period of Burma.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Kyaw Zeyar Win, a Burmese scholar based in United States of America, 19 January 2021.

¹⁷² Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2020), The Role of Myth in Anti-Muslim Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar, Iselin Frydenlund (eds.), *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, Singapore: Springer Nature, P. 203

“Bengali”—Muslim Rohingyas in Myanmar who pose a potential existential threat for the country.¹⁷³ Moreover, there are a lot of foreign academics (including western scholars) who supported the Burman’s negative attitude towards ‘Rohingyas’ as they are also influenced by majority Burman’s stance. They also helped to turn these things worst contributing to reinforce the existing discourses and gave academic legitimation to the ideas that the Rohingyas are existential threat to Burma.¹⁷⁴

3. Means of Securitization and the Role of ‘Speech Act’

Kyaw Zayer Win (2021) elaborately discussed the securitizing ‘speech act’ in Myanmar arguing that, there are a couple of prevailing securitizing speech acts that frame the majority Burmese Buddhists attitude, perception, and their psyche towards the (religious) minority ‘Rohingya’ community. First, Burmese nationalists prefer to draw a link or nexus between the contemporary history of the past Mujahidin rebellion during the pre-independence period of Burma and the current ‘Rohingya’ situation in Rakhine; consistently allege that, these ‘Rohingya’ Muslims concentrated in northern Rakhine state have always been played role as secessionists who tried to separate Rakhine territory from Burma and annex with Bangladesh. Thus, ‘Rohingyas’ pose threat to the sovereignty or the territorial integrity of Myanmar. Second, the nationalist elites, even government officials and state-controlled newspapers consistently claim and describe the ‘Rohingyas’ as an existential threat to the national security who would eventually threaten the global security as well by their terrorist activities. They fabricate the terrorist attacks in abroad as the acts of Muslims arguing that, ‘not all the Muslims are terrorists, but all the terrorists are Muslims’. Third, nationalist elites, including intellectuals and prominent public figures, accused that ‘Rohingyas’ pose potent threat to the societal security of Rakhine state in diverse ways, such as, Rakhine population are jeopardized by a large number of illegal immigrants as well as their uncontrolled population with high birth rate; ‘Rohingya’ community is a menace to cultural identity as they are not adherent to local culture and tradition (they prefer to speak in local language with Chittagonian accent); they try to outnumber the Buddhist population in Rakhine through intermarriage with non-Muslim women, convert them into Muslims turning Myanmar into an

¹⁷³ Khin Nyunt (2016), *Our Country’s Western Gate Problem*, Yangon: One Hundred Flowers Literary House.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Michael Charney, a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies and a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies, Arakan or Rakhine communalism and history; Chair of the Southeast Asian and Military History, SOAS, University of London, 19 February 2021.

Islamic country and possessing severe threat to Buddhism, Buddhist religious identity of Rakhine and Burmese society as a whole. Finally, 'Rohingyas' are also securitized as a threat to economy. They are accused of supporting the Muslims in business dealings and receiving funds from Islamic countries for missionary activities and for the expansion of their Islamic domain. This is one of the most profound and powerful speech acts against the 'Rohingya' minority. All these narratives reinforce 'fear' and 'besiege mentality' amongst the Burmese general public (audience) who accept and internalize these narratives and discourses within themselves and also propagate across the country through diverse means. Flowing from this, these majority people negatively response to call a halt of the Muslim 'Rohingyas' at different levels and urge the ruling elites for undertaking 'immediate measures' to put an end to this dilemma and to deal this threat. As a result, the ruling elites try to behave, frame and pursue measures in line with the majority's demands and expectations whether it is justifiable or not. They fabricated their routine speeches taking the psychological perspectives of the audiences and to please them with all efforts. This is how the anti-Rohingya discourses are reinforced and reproduced along the horizontal and bottom-up securitization processes and the othering of 'Rohingyas' is taken place in Myanmar.¹⁷⁵

Discourses of Exclusion: Use of Anti-*Kala* Rhetoric/Language

During the colonial period, Burmese extremists began to use the phrase '*kala*' to express their anti-Indian sentiment. With a long-held desire of the Burmese people to free from the so called British-led Indian domination, 'Burmese nationalist discourses and languages were heavily filled with anti-*kala* rhetoric and expressions'.¹⁷⁶ However, hostile Burmese' perceptions of the 'Kalas' (South Asians) begot from colonial-rooted resentment and then historical 'Indophobia' comprehended by the Burmese during the colonial era have later been evolved as a catastrophic 'Islamphobia' across the Myanmar. Contextualizing these facts, the Muslims were targeted in Burma in its post-independence period and a new discourse of exclusion was emerged to make the Muslims, particularly, the 'Rohingyas' as enemy 'other'. With the passage of time, the phrase *kala* has been publicly used to address the Muslim 'Rohingyas' of the Northern Rakhine state of Burma. They have been referred as *kala-so*

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Kyaw Zeyar Win, a Burmese scholar based in United States of America, 19 January 2021.

¹⁷⁶ Chakravarti, N. R. (1971), *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community*, London: Institute of Race Relations; Mazumder, Rajashree (2013), *Constructing the Indian Immigrant to Colonial Burma, 1885-1948*, PhD diss. Los Angeles: University of California.

(evil *kala*) in several government-led publications.¹⁷⁷ Apart from this, the terminology *kala* is repeatedly used as a negatory denomination by the dominant public figures, government authorities/high ranking government officials, Buddhist monks and political leaders in public speeches, religious sermons and also in the popular social media platforms, such as, Facebook, Twitter etc. For example, in June 2012, following the murder of ten Muslims by a Buddhist mob in the Taungup town in Rakhine province, several state-owned national dailies, such as the Mirror, the Myawady Daily and the Myanmar Ahlin Daily,¹⁷⁸ reported the news describing the Muslims as ‘Muslim *kala*’. Thus, the state officials’ use of the pejorative phrase ‘*kala*’ in public media reflects their anti-Muslim psyche. It is noteworthy that, in the colonial Burma, even though, *kala*¹⁷⁹ was used to refer the people with Indian origin [South Asia] whatever their religion (either Hindu or Muslim),¹⁸⁰ later this geographical connotation transformed to a more religious and racial phrase¹⁸¹ and mostly confined to vilify ethnic Muslims, such as ‘Rohingyas’.

‘Rohingya-phobia’: Making ‘Muslim’ versus ‘Buddhist’ Narrative

Though there is an ongoing armed struggle between the Rakhine Buddhists and the Burmese Buddhists in Myanmar, the ‘Rohingya’ conundrum is being highlighted through Burmese and western media that overstressed ‘Muslim versus Buddhist’ paradigm.¹⁸² The securitization of Muslims in global context has a partial impact on othering ‘Rohingyas’. In the post-2000 period, the way international media securitized Muslims/Islam as a ‘global threat’ and sketched conflicts around the world as a part of the so called ‘clash of civilizations’—the

¹⁷⁷ Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2015), Alienation, Discrimination, and Securitization: Legal Personhood and Cultural Personhood of Muslims in Myanmar, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 13:2, p. 56.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Kyaw Zeyar Win, a Burmese scholar based in United States of America, 19 January 2021.

¹⁷⁹ Initially, *Kala* was used to refer ‘foreigner’ and ‘kala-Phyu’ was used to indicate ‘people from the west’. With a socio-historical constructivist process, this terminology evolved with the making of ‘selfness’ and ‘otherness’ across time and space.

¹⁸⁰ De Mersan, A. (2016), Ritual and Other in Rakhine Spirit Cults, Myanmar’s Mountain and Maritime Borderscapes: Local Practices, Boundary Making and Figured Worlds, ed. Su-Ann Oh, Singapore: ISEAS, p.122.

¹⁸¹ *Kala* means the people with a dark skin color who are ugly and came from outside the Burma; Interview with Yan Naing (Mr. Bellal), a Muslim lawyer in Myanmar (having Tamil Indian root) and also a politician of the Muslim political party- UNC.

¹⁸² Anadolu Agency, 2020. Exclusive: Rohingya issue, not Muslims v/s Buddhist paradigm. Available: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/exclusive-rohingya-issue-not-muslims-v-s-buddhist-paradigm/1891919>. Accessed 7 August 2020.

‘Islam versus other ideologies’, the ‘otherization’ of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar is also a part of this global context. The fear of ‘Rohingya’ Muslims has been reinforced within Myanmar with an increasing global articulation of Muslims as a ‘blood of terror’. By referring the global ‘psyche’ about Muslims/Islam and analogizing imagery ‘Rohingya’ separatists to global Muslim terrorist groups, both the top-down and bottom-up securitizing actors of Myanmar sought to solidify and validate their anti-Muslim rhetoric and agenda to portrait Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘fearsome other’ and make their existence vulnerable.¹⁸³ Thus, the narrative of ‘religious war’ is propagated to create ‘Islamphobia’ reinforcing a misperception that, terrorists belong to Islamic community. Referring the case of Afghanistan or Indonesia, the governing and non-governing actors of Myanmar argued that, once a Buddhist land Indonesia had later been supplanted by the Muslims and turned into a Muslim country. They preferred to tag ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘secessionist’¹⁸⁴ Muslims who seek to replace Buddhism and turn Myanmar into an Islamic country. The Buddhists feel fear of ‘Muslim takeover’ and alleged that, Muslims are ‘potentially dangerous’ as they deem to overtake other religions in the name of ‘Jihad’ through diverse strategies such as, rapid demographic growth of Muslims, practice of polygamy, intermarriage and forced conversion of Buddhist women.

Policy of ‘Burmanization’

Burmanization’ is a suppressive tactics or strategy of assimilation pursued by the Burman Buddhist in Myanmar to forcefully integrate the ethnic minorities into the mainstream Burman/Buddhist community. The policy has been culminated under the military dictatorship; the rulers prohibited the use of non-Burman ethnic languages or dialects in educational institutions and imposed restrictions on practicing the traditional cultures of ethnic minorities. It is noteworthy that, formerly the ethnic groups were allowed to enjoy some sort of autonomy in education system. They were permitted to “teach in their local languages or dialects up to the fourth grade in schools” so that the new generations got acquainted with their own culture and traditions.¹⁸⁵ As a result, they had to simultaneously learn both of the Burman majority culture along with their local one. It indicates that the

¹⁸³ Schonthal, B. (2016), Making the Muslim Other in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, in Crouch, Melissa (ed.), *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 241; Yeger, M. (1972), *The Muslims of Burma: The Study of a Minority Group*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, pp. 110-112.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with T. Kyaw. Htay (pseudonym), a Ma Ba Tha monk in Myanmar, 15 January 2021.

¹⁸⁵ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p.40.

former Union of Burma was a nation with ‘unity in diversity’ like other South Asian nations, even though; this spirit of unity has been perished by the successive governments’ initiatives in Myanmar. A series of nationalized policies were introduced by the governing actors doing unfair treatment to the ethnic minorities that eventually posed a serious threat to the ethnic culture and identities. For example, the use of the Burmese language has been promulgated as compulsory in all academic institutions, government offices and also in the national parliament of the country. They also banned all actions and celebrations that might promote the identities of non-Buddhist ethnic minority groups such as, imposed strict restrictions on observing ethnic national days. Even, it is stated that, ‘the design of their national dress was informally done following the costume of the majority ethnic Buddhist Burman people’. Executing these ‘Burmanization’ policies, the civilian and military actors brought immense changes in which absolute preferences have been given to promote the majority Burman culture, traditions, language and religion.

4. Consequences of ‘Rohingya’ Securitization

4.1. Geopolitical Calculus

The discussion in this section proceeds with a question that has formerly been pointed in brief and this is, why the Myanmar government and the Burmese military along with other dominant actors target the ‘Rohingyas’ to be securitized. In reality, geopolitical dynamics, particularly ‘resource politics’ centering Rakhine state has been acting as one of the driving forces behind the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar. For its geo-strategic and geo-economic importance, Rakhine state (former Arakan) is being considered as the ‘heartland’ of Myanmar. In Myanmar, coercive mechanisms of state agencies have been employed by the successive governments to force out the marginalized smallholders ‘Rohingyas’ from their homeland Rakhine in order to preserve their economic gains as well as to serve the interest of the multi-national corporate stakeholders.

For the geostrategic position of Rakhine state and also for its huge natural resources, neighboring states, particularly both China and India became interested in building mega projects in Rakhine. Both China and India proposed to establish a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Rakhine while the former one picked up the city of kyaukphyu and the later one chose Sittwe. India is giving its best efforts to complete the US\$ 484 million Kaladan Multimodal Project which connects with Sittwe seaport at Rakhine state. Like in other regions, both of these countries have been fighting to gain strategic predominance in Myanmar. So, this strategic war of gaining geopolitical and geo-economic interests among

the strategic rivals in this subcontinent and the beyond also significantly led to the making of ‘Rohingyas’ other in Myanmar.



Figure 4: Geo-strategic position of Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project in Rakhine state.¹⁸⁶

For the geographical location of Bangladesh, the mainland of India is merely connected with its land-locked northeastern regions-Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur, Arunachal, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Sikkim which shares borders with China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Apart from this, these northeastern regions faced insurgencies by several insurgent groups that claimed for autonomy and independence since long. Considering this geopolitical realities and facts, India regards Rakhine as the “geopolitical headquarters”¹⁸⁷ with a view to implementing its multi-billion-dollar mercantile projects and strengthening connectivity with both South Asian and Southeast Asian countries to materialize its aspirations to become a sole superpower in South Asia region and the beyond. Moreover,

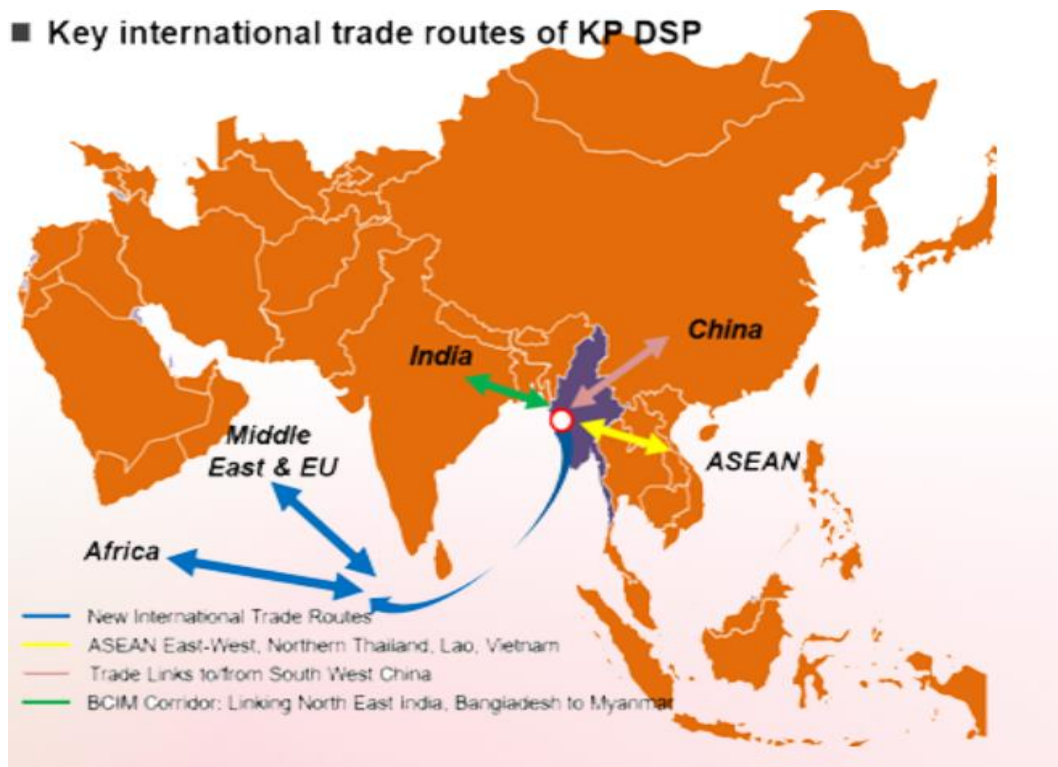
¹⁸⁶ Democratic Accent (2020), ‘Mizoram seeks early completion of project connecting India and Myanmar’. Available: <https://www.democraticaccent.com/mizoram-seeks-early-completion-of-project-connecting-india-and-myanmar/>. Accessed 18 January 2020.

¹⁸⁷ Khan, Ashrafuzzaman (2018), The Strategic Importance of Rakhine State, The Daily Star. Available: <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/opinion/perspective/the-strategic-importance-rakhine-state-1628290>. Accessed 18 January 2017.

‘India’s strategy to develop surveillance systems for the provinces of its northeastern regions’ is another reason of this country’s pro-Myanmar stance¹⁸⁸.



Figure 5: China’s trans-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline from Kyaukpyu to Kunming.¹⁸⁹



¹⁸⁸ Khan, Ashrafuzzaman (2018), The Strategic Importance of Rakhine State.

¹⁸⁹ Chen, Xiangming (2018), Globalization Redux: Can China’s Inside-Out Strategy Catalyse Economic Development Across Its Asian Borderlands and Beyond. Cambridge Journal of Regions Economy and Society, 11 (1), 35-58. DOI: [10.1093/cjres/rsy003](https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsy003).

Figure 6: Trade routes, connectivity and geostrategic importance of Myanmar in regional context.

For its geo-strategic location, Myanmar is considered as a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia. Besides, the coastal belts of Rakhine state are regarded as gateways to the Bay of Bengal and also to the Indian Ocean that offers huge potentials for China to strengthen its trade and military connection with countries like Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Even, China pursues its geo-strategic policy towards Myanmar to make its defense ties stronger with Myanmar using the Bay of Bengal and taking the Rakhine coastal belts as proxy.¹⁹⁰ Along with its conventional cross-border trade, China has installed a gas and oil pipeline from Myanmar's port city Kyaukpyu at its west coast to Kunming city of China (see figure 5). The new oil pipeline that has operationalized in 2017 facilitates China to transport huge crude oil from the Middle East to China using the land of Myanmar which is less expensive and faster than the formerly used transportation through more risky and narrow Straits of Malacca. Besides the 771-km gas pipeline, China-Myanmar new trade route accelerates China's trade and economy with Southeast Asia region to a greater extent.

However, driving away 'Rohingyas' from Rakhine state is a planned and well-structured state-sponsored agenda backed by coercive mechanisms of state agencies. To execute this agenda, the military-backed civilian government, along with its other stakeholders such as high-ranked officials, political parties, leaders, Buddhist monks and other securitizing actors has deliberately established anti-Rohingya narratives, spread widespread hate-speeches and launched state-sponsored violent military operations against this minority to make their existence vulnerable. Based on this resource politics, the civilian administration of Myanmar allied with India and China and these countries provide huge military support to the Myanmar state and still take stance in favor of Myanmar.

Moreover, there are many other major powers, including the western countries and some of the big powers of Asia such as Singapore, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan¹⁹¹ which are

¹⁹⁰ Khan, Ashrafuzzaman (2018), The Strategic Importance of Rakhine State, The Daily Star. Available: <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/opinion/perspective/the-strategic-importance-rakhine-state-1628290>. Accessed 18 January 2017.

¹⁹¹ Anadolu Agency, 2020. Exclusive: Rohingya issue, not Muslims v/s Buddhist paradigm. Available:

competing for securing their economic interests and establishing control over the resources in Rakhine state as well. To take greater control over the resources of this region, the Myanmar government firstly launched destructive persecutions against the Rohingya minority; but, nowadays, they are also struggling with the Buddhist Rakhines to drive this Buddhist minority out from Rakhine state that clearly speaks the truth about the geopolitical calculation of the Myanmar state. It is noteworthy that, the central Rakhine state is wrecked by a rising dispute between the Arakan Army (led by Rakhine Buddhists which has a strong support among the Rakhine Buddhist population) and the Myanmar military Tatmadaw.

4.1. Inter-state Relations

The way successive regimes of Myanmar, both military and (quasi) civilian, has done ‘big’ politics of identity centering migration and has constructed discourses of exclusion based on religion (Buddhist-Muslim), language (Burmese-Rohingya), culture and history causes not only wider human rights violations but also hinders the development of a balanced diplomatic relation and stable bilateralism, even though, both Myanmar and Bangladesh has a shared geography, history and ethno-cultural belongings. In the realm of the (geo) politics of identity and forced migration, Rakhine is one of the serious cases where majority-minority dilemma and the politics of identity has a broader impacts on inter-state relations. The cross-border implication of the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar is that, Myanmar-Bangladesh bilateral relations became vehemently dispersed following the influx of ‘Rohingya’ refugees along the border areas. Worryingly, at the cost of close bilateral ties with two major powers China and India, Myanmar merely cares for the deterioration of its relation with one of its border state-Bangladesh. The long-held volatility and deep mistrust between these border states that have resulted from the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ within Myanmar cause barriers in establishing cooperation and symmetric bilateralism and also affect the politics of this sub-continent. However, Myanmar’s hostile attitude and climacteric relation with a border state like Bangladesh will affect the long-term interest and security of this country and surely, Myanmar has to pay for its negligence in maintaining viable relationship with Bangladesh in near future.

Both of the allies of Myanmar, both China and India’s successive regimes pursue not only anti-Muslim or anti-minority measures to push them out of their territory portraying them

enemy others but also stay indifferent to the Myanmar's anti-Rohingya securitizing actions which has a deep rooted effects in reinforcing the securitization of 'Rohingyas'. Unsurprisingly, there are some geo-strategic dynamics which act as the main forces in directing regional calculus of the neighboring border states and also in the making of the minority Rohingyas the northern Rakhine state persecuted. Alongside religious, political, military and other social drivers, these geopolitical equation creates high hurdles in resolving the long-held majority-minority dilemma in Myanmar. China has always bypassed and ignored to make any single statement criticizing its neighboring 'bosom friend' and always provides military, economic and diplomatic supports to the military in exchange of receiving access to Myanmar's territory and resources. Consequently, Myanmar became excessively dependent on China. Even, almost all the ASEAN countries calculates their geopolitical and geo-economic interest in strategically significant Myanmar and try to establish their accommodation with the political regime whether it is military or quasi-civilian.

From the aforementioned analyses, it can be concluded that, the dominant ruling and non-ruling elites of Myanmar deliberately constructed anti-'Rohingya' propaganda portraying them as a potential threat to the majority's identity, religion and sovereignty that has eventually led to the securitization of this ethnic minority. Alarmingly, there exists a close ties among military establishments, political engines and religious leaders who routinely propagates against Muslims, particularly 'Rohingyas' through their speeches, lectures, sermons, and discussions etc. These widespread hate speeches against Muslims centering migration and religion broadly shapes the general public sentiment of Myanmar who are kept ignorant of the real facts that also begets fear and hate creating a majority-minority dilemma and ethnic conflict in Myanmar. It seems from the above discussions that, securitization of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar has broader implications from both of geopolitical perspectives and of the deterioration of Myanmar-Bangladesh inter-state relations that has a greater costs in regional politics, security and peace.

Chapter-4

From Democracy to Military Dictatorship (1948-1962): Politics of Ethnicity, Burmanization and the State of ‘Rohingyas’

To analyse the ‘othering’ of ethnic minorities in Myanmar in its first democratic era, it is essential to understand the formation of the Union of Burma and the contemporary historical events that had led to the country’s independence and also impacted the post-independence politics centering ethnicity and religion. In 1948, British rule came to an end and Burma emerged as an independent multi-ethnic state with diversity and pluralism. Immediately before the independence of Burma, General Aung San (the founding leader of the nation) along with his delegation met with British Prime Minister Clement Attlee¹⁹² in order to lobby for Burma’s independence. It is noteworthy that, all the delegate members were from ethnic Burman group whereas the leaders of the Frontier Areas were deliberately excluded. During this time, ‘the British Prime Minister stressed that, the leaders of the Burma proper should not force the Frontier Areas to join the Union of Burma against their consent’.¹⁹³ Both the British and the leaders of the Frontier Areas were in doubt that, the majority Burman leaders would not heed their demands and treat all the ethnic minorities equally after the emergence of the Union of Burma in near future.¹⁹⁴ Against this backdrop, to end up this anxiety, doubt and fear hold by both the British and the Frontier leaders and to prove Burman leaders’ awareness regarding the position of the ethnic minorities in future Union of Burma, a meeting was convened at Panglong in the Shan States on February 1947 under the leadership of Aung San.

The Panglong Agreement and Formation of the Union of Burma: How Far Was It Inclusive?

There was arisen a dilemma among the Frontier leaders regarding their participation in the historic Panglong meeting and about the fact that, whether they should join the Union of Burma or not. Most of the Frontier leaders perceived that, their culture, religion, customs and distinct identity would be subsided by the domination of the majority ethnic Burmans.

¹⁹² Smith, Martin J. (1991), *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, London: Zed Books.

¹⁹³ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 15; Silverstein, Josef (1959), The Federal Dilemma in Burma. *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 28. No. 7. pp. 97-105.

¹⁹⁴ Bray, John (1992), Ethnic Minorities and the Future of Burma, *The World Today*, 48 (8-9), pp.144-147.

However, amid huge perplexity and suspicion, some of the Frontier leaders, particularly from the Chins, Kachins and Shans joined the meeting. In the Panglong conference, the delegates from the Burma proper (ethnic Burmans or leaders of the Bamar ethnic group), the Frontier Areas, and the colonial British were attended where they were supposed to discuss about the formation of a new nation. Regarding this, an eminent scholar on Burma studies, Kipgen (2016) pointed in his book, entitled *Myanmar: A Political History*, that:

‘In an attempt to persuade the Frontier leaders to join the Union of Burma, ethnic Burman leaders proposed the idea of granting autonomy, which means that the Burmans would not interfere, among others, in the customs and religious practices of the Frontier Areas. Despite this proposition, leaders of the Chin, Kachin, and Shan refused to take part in forming the Union of Burma, and instead discussed the idea of establishing a ‘Frontier Areas Federation’.¹⁹⁵

At this point in time, in support of the long-desired demand of the frontier people, the then British director of the Frontier Areas Stevenson proposed for the formation of the ‘United Frontier Union’ that was strongly rejected by the Burman leaders.¹⁹⁶

In accordance with the Attlee-Aung San Agreement, Aung san along with other nationalist leaders of Burma proper consulted with the leaders of Shans, Chins and Kachins at Panglong conference where it was unanimously consented that, “full autonomy in the internal administration for the frontier areas is accepted in principle.”¹⁹⁷ At the Panglong meeting, Aung San recognized the interests of the ethnic minorities assuring the Frontier leaders attended at the meeting that, ‘If Burma gets one kyat (Burmese currency), you will also get one kyat’.¹⁹⁸ He reassured that, all the ethnic minority group would get equal rights and freedom; none of these ethnic entities would be discriminated by others within the Union of Burma. After receiving such a strong commitment from the national hero Aung San, the representatives of the Burma proper and the Frontier Areas reached in an agreement on 12 February 1947 that is known as historic Panglong Agreement. Among the delegates, twenty two (3 representatives from Chin, 6 representatives from Kachin and 13 representatives from

¹⁹⁵ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, p. 34; Kipgen, Nehginpao (2015), *Democratisation of Myanmar*, India: Routledge.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Panglong Agreement, 1947. *Frontier Areas Committee of Inquiry*, 1947 (Part I Report), Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing and Stationary, pp.16-17.

¹⁹⁸ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2015), *Democratisation of Myanmar*, India: Routledge.

Shan States) were from the Frontier Areas while rest of them were from the Burma proper. This was a ‘power sharing agreement’ that persuaded the leaders of the ethnic minority groups-the Chin, the Kachin and the Shan to cooperate the interim Burmese government. In effect, it was a blueprint of the Burman leadership to form a unified Burma. Worryingly, this agreement did not represent all the ethnic minorities as there were no representative from other ethnic groups, such as Arakan, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Pao and Wa etc. It is noteworthy that, there were four Karens present at the conference as observers. The Karens still believe that they would get a separate independent state from the British.

However, the Frontier leaders agreed to integrate with the Union of Burma to get “full autonomy” in the internal administration of the Frontier Areas and to have equal access to the country’s wealth. At that time, some of the ethnic groups were provided with special states that ‘they have the right to secession after ten years if they felt discriminated or mistreated’¹⁹⁹ while ethnic groups such as the Karens, Arakan and the Mons were not given such a state of their own right to divergence that had fueled ethnic tensions keeping the society divided for long.

Politics of Identity in Post-Independence Era

After the independence of Myanmar, the U Nu government experienced a series of insurrections both by the Burma Communist Party (BCP-White Flag Communists) and the minority ethnic organizations, such as the Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO), the Mon National Defence Organization (MNDO), and the Mujahids (Muslims of Pakistani and Burmese Origin) etc. All these minority groups claimed for ‘autonomy’ or ‘federalism’ while the Burmese Communists, possibly with Chinese support, launched a military crackdown against the new government to seize state power.²⁰⁰ It is noteworthy that, during this time, some of the British diplomats provoked the ethnic minority- Christian Karens to fight against the then running government. Flowing from this, there had been emerged several fights between the state and the ethnic minority groups in Burma’s borders. From then, an attitude of mistrust and fear was arisen among the governing elites towards the ethnic minority groups in this region. Though these fights between the state and the rival ethnic

¹⁹⁹ The Diplomat. Weiss, Stanley A. (2017), ‘Did Aung San Lead at Panglong-or Follow?’ Available: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/did-aung-san-lead-at-panglong-or-follow/>. Accessed 27 January 2021.

²⁰⁰ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, p. 19; Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, pp.7-35.

groups became less prominent afterwards, the effects of this mistrust and negative attitude prevailed in the successive years.

The newly emerged Burma state inherited a mixed nature of ethnic entities with diverse religious belongingness particularly following the inclusion of regions largely inhabited by non-Burman ethnic groups who had to deal with intense coercion at its first democratic period after independence that tells us a bitter truth about the persistence of majority-minority dilemma in Myanmar since the very beginning of its independence. Regarding this, Ibrahim (2017) asserted that, the then governing elites of Myanmar were divided into different distinct ideologies along the future of the new state since its independence. Worryingly, few of these ruling elites desired to build a Burman-led pure 'Buddhist polity' excluding other ethnic groups and religious entities while some other dominant elites like General Aung San were committed to establish an inclusive nation state where all the people who had been residing within its border were supposed to consider as Burmese citizens. Moreover, Aung San preferred to keep the military away from the political sphere. On the other hand, some of the (military) elites saw the military as the armed forces of the state under civilian control while some (military) others such as General Ne Win believed that, it was only the military which truly represented the Burmese people and for this, he desired to see the army in the state power.²⁰¹ This reveals that, there had been a sort of latent aspiration by the Burma's ruling elites (not all) to establish a Burman-dominated 'pure' Buddhist state since its creation where Buddhism was supposed to be the sole spirit of the state's ideology and ethnic Burman group was dreamt to be 'all in all' in the state apparatus. Thus, the lack of consensus among the political elites of the newly emerged Burma state caused multi-fold problems in the nation building process in its post-independence era.

Following the assassination of General Aung San, the pro-Burman elites (including the military) with an embodiment of Burman Buddhist beliefs persuaded several discriminatory incremental strategies to make ethnic minorities marginalized within Burma state that had created a deep mistrust and fear of alienation and finally deepened with the military dictatorship's formal securitization since 1962. It is noteworthy that, during the first civilian regime (1949-1962), the sense of 'being Buddhist' was more emphasized by the ruling elites than the sense of 'being Burmese'; both of these senses had later been fiercely intermingled

²⁰¹ The Irrawaddy (2007), Heroes and Villains, Vol. 15, no.3. Available: https://www2.irrawaddy.com/article.php?art_id=6883. Accessed 27 January 2021.

and institutionalized under the military's direct intervention in politics who used to see Buddhism as an essential prerequisites for being "true Burmese" in its nation building process.²⁰² However, after the assassination of Aung San and most of his cabinet members, the pro-Buddhist Burman elites moved away from the commitment that was given to the ethnic minorities at the Panglong agreement. Since then, the mistrust between the majority Burman-led central government and the ethnic minority groups erupted in Myanmar that are widely seen as the outcomes of the Burmese elites' failure to implement the promises set at the Panglong agreement.

Process of Forced Burmanization

The unequal treatment of ethnic minorities regarding the issue of separate statehood and the introduction of a series of discriminatory nationalized policies had created mistrust, fear and dilemma among the non-Burman minority groups who perceived that these state-sponsored strategies of mischievous Burmanization would destroy their autonomy, religion, culture, language and history etc. Firstly, the Karens, who constituted the largest minority in Burma Proper and also the larger ethnic group in Frontier Areas were granted statehood (separate states) that created grievance among all other ethnic minorities, such as the Mons and the Arakanese who claimed for the status of separate state in 1948.²⁰³ The ethno-political boundaries or the territorial limits of the newly created separate states were demarcated along the religious and ethnic lines where the non-Burmans, such as the Karens, were deprived of their proportionate access to the territories of the Burma proper as the majority Burmans were unwilling to hand over the territories that they jointly possessed with the Karens. This demographic engineering and the unequal treatment of the indigenous minorities entangled the then 'unity in diversity' and instigated increased communal hostility in Burma.²⁰⁴ The ethnic minorities of the Frontier Areas got disappointed with a presidential proclamation through which the army captured all the powers of the state government, particularly took control over the Shan States during the period of 1952 to 1954, drawing an end to the promised 'full autonomy'.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*. pp. 35-77.

²⁰³ Regional Autonomy Inquiry Report (1952). Rangoon: Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery.

²⁰⁴ Silverstein, J. (1959), The Federal Dilemma in Burma. *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 28. No. 7. pp. 97-105.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Moreover, in the post-1948 period, policies were promulgated with a view to nationalizing land and restricting private lending to peasants that drastically hampered the existing Indian landlord class.²⁰⁶ Moreover, Burmese nationalist movement against the ethnic and religious minority groups instigated the ‘otherization’ of Muslims in Burma resulting severe ethno-nationalist conflict that is burning till today.

Secondly, Burmese language was made compulsory in educational institutions, public offices and also in the legislature of the Union of Burma that possessed greater threat to the identity of the minorities of the Frontier Areas and the beyond. It is noteworthy that, initially students were allowed to learn their local languages or dialects in school level (up to the fourth grade), but, later, they were made bound to learn Burmese language both at school and university level.²⁰⁷ Silverstein (1959) narrates the means of Burmanization in Burmese politics as follows:

Probably the most serious problem is the mandatory and widespread use of Burmese in certain levels of education and government. Sanctioned as the official language in the Constitution, it is the medium of instruction (along with English) in the middle schools, high schools and universities. It is the only language allowed in the Union Parliament and, regardless of a legislator’s proficiency in his local dialect or language or his facility in the use of English, he must speak in Burmese if he wishes to air his opinions and enter formal debate.²⁰⁸

As a case in point, an Arakanese-speaking educated legislator of the Union of Burma, despite having higher degree from the Cambridge University, had to go through difficulties as he was supposed to memorize his speech each time immediately before making any address in front of the legislature. At the research institutes and universities, the language, art, history and culture of the majority Burmans were studied with all efforts as fountains of the national culture while the language, art, traditional norms and values of the ethnic minorities were deliberately ignored. For example, ‘the costume of the ethnic Burmans were set as the pattern for the national dress of Burma’²⁰⁹ whereas the morals and practices of the residents of

²⁰⁶ Win, Kyaw Z. (2018), *Securitization of the Rohingya in Myanmar*, in Chambers, J., McCarthy, G., Farrelly, N., and Win, C. (ed.), *Myanmar Transformed? People, Places and Politics*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, p. 257.

²⁰⁷ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 40.

²⁰⁸ Silverstein, J. (1959), *The Federal Dilemma in Burma*. P. 102-103.

²⁰⁹ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, p. 40.

Rangoon and Mandalay was formally accepted as national pattern. Even, the residents wearing traditional costume of their birthplace were viewed as obsolete.²¹⁰

Thirdly, Buddhism, the religious faith of the majority ethnic Burmans, was manipulated as a dominant ‘nationalizing vehicle’ and peddling of this religion forces by the then U Nu administration was targeted to get widespread support from the Buddhist clergy and the majority Buddhist general public fostering frustrations among the ethnic minorities. Immediately before the elections in 1960, U Nu not only took partial position in favor of Buddhism but also “served as a Buddhist monk for six weeks, offered alms to the monks, sought the advice of important Buddhist leaders, and organized the Buddhist Synod”²¹¹ as an agenda of his populist strategy. In discussing the ways U Nu accumulated popularity among the Burmese Buddhists, Bigelow (1960) argued:

Nu was a devout Buddhist who had promised just before the elections that, if he and his party (Clean) AFPFL won the 1960 national election, he would make Buddhism the state religion. Furthermore, he played an active role of a demagogue who spoke to the general public in language and idioms they prefers. With a vision of establishing a Buddhist state before them, the monks started becoming politically active and disseminated this message of the election to general public that, Buddhism would surely be benefitted if it is placed as state religion. This Buddhist clergy’s propagation strengthened the already strong vote bank of the U Nu’s party.²¹²

To serve the same purpose, U Nu reached in a public commitment to support the statehood for both of the Arakanese and the Mons.²¹³ [Table 2](#) shows the way Frontier States, particularly the Arakanese became the potent force of the Clean AFPFL government led by U Nu and also to that of the opposition. In Arakan, ANUO was a dominant party and its main goal was to have a separate Arakanese State which supported the Clean AFPFL government probably for materializing the dream of granting separate statehood.

²¹⁰ Silverstein, J. (1959), *The Federal Dilemma in Burma*. pp. 102-103.

²¹¹ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 44.

²¹² Bigelow, L. S. (1960), *The 1960 Election in Burma*, *Far Eastern Survey*, 25(5), pp. 70-74.

²¹³ Ministry of Information, *Burma Weekly Bulletin*, New Series, Vol. VII, No. 12, July 3, 1958, p.88; Bigelow, Lee S (1960), *The 1960 Election in Burma*, *Far Eastern Survey*, 25(5), pp. 73; Silverstein, Josef (1959), *The Federal Dilemma in Burma*. *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 28. No. 7. P. 102.

Table 2. Ethnic Groups of Legislators in 1960²¹⁴

Ethnic Groups	Government	Opposition	Uncertain
Karens	1	6	0
Kachins	4	3	0
Chins	3	3	0
Kayahs	1	0	1
Shans	6	0	14
Arakanese	3	1	8
Total	18	13	23

In addition, the representation of minority ethnic groups in electoral politics of Burma both from the government and the opposition also points out that, representatives from different ethnicities with diverse religious background had a ‘space’ in state politics. Meanwhile, U Nu allotted several cabinet posts to Arakanese legislators with a view to getting parliamentary support against his political opponents.²¹⁵ But, there were undertaken slow and less effective initiatives by the then U Nu government to materialize his pledge to the Arakanese for creating a separate Arakanese State. These analyses unfold two different but stronger facts: first, all these strategies that U Nu had pursued only to serve his political interests and to make his power or regime permanent; second, there was a significant number of Arakanese representatives in Burma’s electoral politics while the dilemma of citizenship (both formal and informal) was quite insignificant. Even though, this question and equation of citizenship and ethnic status became one of the most serious issues during the military regime of Ne Win.

In 1960s, there was arisen unrest and armed struggles in the ethnic nationality regions, particularly in Shan and Kachin State. The Shan, Ta’ang and Wa ethnic nationalities became active in insurgencies while Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) was formed across the borderland of China following the U Nu’s plan to make Buddhism as state religion.

However, during the first democratic phase of Myanmar, even though, Prime Minister U Nu and his fellow Minister of Defense U Ba Swe admitted ethnic status of the minorities such as, Rohingya, Kachin, Karen, Mon and Rakhine²¹⁶ through several declarations and statements, the constitutional recognition of the ‘special position’ of Buddhism and later, the declaration of Buddhism as state religion on 7 February in 1960 has fueled the then prevailing majority-

²¹⁴ Bigelow, Lee S (1960), The 1960 Election in Burma, *Far Eastern Survey*, 25(5), pp. 70-74.

²¹⁵ Silverstein, J. (1959), *The Federal Dilemma in Burma*. P. 102.

²¹⁶ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*.

minority antagonism formalizing the ‘othering’ of ethnic minority groups. Section 21(1) of the 1948’s constitution of Burma provides that, “The state recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the majority of the citizens of the Union”.²¹⁷ Flowing from this, most of the minority ethnic groups found themselves alienated and also in a marginalized status. Regarding this religion politics, Kipgen argues that the spirit of ‘national integrity’ and ‘unity in diversity’ was severely affected when Buddhism was placed as official state religion by the then country’s Premier U Nu.²¹⁸

Following the pledge of the U Nu government regarding the creation of new ethnic states, an enquiry commission named “Aakan Enquiry Commission” was established that recommended separate statehood for both of the Arakanese and the Mons by September, 1962. Meanwhile, the country’s military- Tatmadaw under the leadership of Ne Win set a blueprint for the political future of Burma and consequently, the formation of Arakan State was postponed. Shortly afterwards, a chaotic situation was aroused when the U Nu government declared the formation of Mayu Frontier Administration in 1961, comprising Maungdaw, Buthidaung and western Rathedaung townships.²¹⁹ Rakhine nationalists found this announcement completely wrong-footed who argued that, this MFA had been designed by the Bamar leaderships as a ‘divide and rule’ strategy to reinforce division and conflict among the ethnic entities in Arakan and to weaken the strength of the unified autonomous Arakan state. Later, a draft law mandating the new state was prepared in 1962 that excluded the “Mayu District” from its territory.

Thus, the Arakanese found themselves deceived firstly by the British in the pre-independence period, later by the Burman representatives who break the commitment set at Panglong meeting, finally by the country leader-the first Prime Minister U Nu. In this way, reality spoke differently against the fate of the Arakanese Muslims, particularly the ‘Rohingyas’ whose long-cherished dream and claim for autonomy and statehood had been pulverized several times and remained unfulfilled as the earlier. Unsurprisingly, the ethnic minority groups realized that, any sort of agreement, commitment or negotiation between the Burma

²¹⁷ Lee, R. (2016), The Dark Side of Liberalization: How Myanmar’s Political and Media Freedoms Are Being Used to Limit Muslim Rights. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 27(2), 195-211.

²¹⁸ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, pp. 1-40.

²¹⁹ Smith, M. (2019), *Arakan (Rakhine State) A Land in Conflict on Myanmar’s Western Frontier*, Amsterdam: Transnational Institute (TNI), p. 34.

government and the ethnic minorities regarding the issue of autonomy or federalism became pointless. Later, even though, the country's Prime Minister U Nu proposed of a serious dialogue with the leaders of ethnic groups to end the growing mistrust among the minority ethnic groups, this agenda of reconciliation was fiercely opposed by the Burmese military, particularly by the Burman nationalist General Ne Win whose ultimate goal was to establish an exclusive Burman nation state excluding all other ethnicities and religious entities of independent Burma.²²⁰ In March 1962, Ne Win seized power with a military coup and publicly stated, "Federalism is impossible; it will destroy the Union."²²¹

The State of 'Rohingyas'

In the post-independence parliamentary era, 'Rohingya' identity appeared to be recognized like all other ethnic minorities in Burma. 'Rohingyas' were allowed to represent in the Legislative Hluttaw, led by Aung San, where the first constitution of Burma was drawn. This means, the father of independence Aung San accepted 'Rohingyas' as Burmese nationals despite their ethnic differences. In the brief era of parliamentary democracy, government leaders addressed them by their name-'Rohingyas' which is well backed by the historical proofs. According to the article 3 of the Nu-Attlee Treaty (1947) and Section 11 (i), (ii), (iii) of the Constitution of the Union of Burma (1947), the 'Rohingyas' were acknowledged as "bonafide citizens" of Burma. Even, M. A. Gaffar and Sultan Ahmed, both of these 'Rohingya' representatives actively participated in the drafting of the country's first constitution. Moreover, some of them were appointed in senior government posts, elected to the parliament, and also appointed in different important ministries. In the 1951's general elections, there were five elected members of Parliament who belong to 'Rohingya' community that increased to six in 1956. Sultan Mahmud served as the cabinet Minister at the Ministry of Health under Prime Minister U Nu. [Table 3](#) shows the representation of Rohingya and non-Rohingya Muslims of Arakan in the Parliament of Burma during the time frame between the years 1947 to 1960. Since 1947, both the 'Rohingya' and non-'Rohingya' Muslims enjoyed the rights to elect and to be elected that had later been curtailed with an

²²⁰ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2010), 50 Years of Conflicts in Burma: Problems and Solutions, *Asian Profile*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 163-173.

²²¹ Leider, J. (2018), Conflict and Mass Violence in Arakan (Rakhine State): The 1942 Events and Political Identity Formation, in Marie Lall & Ashley South (eds.), *Citizenship in Myanmar: Ways of Being in and from Burma*, Singapore: Chiang Mai University Press & ISEAS Yusuf Ishak Institute, pp. 193-221.

incremental process of exclusion under the successive military and quasi-civilian regimes of Myanmar.

Table 3. Representation of the Rohingya and non-Rohingya Muslims of Arakan in Parliament (1947-1960).²²²

Year	Position	Name of Candidate	Area Represented
1947	M.L.C	U Pho Khaing (a) Nasir Uddin	Akyab West
	M.L.C	Mr. Sultan Ahmed	Maungdaw
	M.L.C	Mr. Abdul Gaffar	Buthidaung
1951	MP	Mr. Abdul Gaffar	Buthidaung North
	MP	Mr. Abul Bashar	Buthidaung South
	MP	Mr. Sultan Ahmed	Maungdaw North
	MP	Daw Aye Nyunt (a) Zurah	Maungdaw South
1956	MP	Mr. Ezar Meah	Buthidaung North
	MP	Mr. Sultan Mahmood	Buthidaung North (By election)
	MP	Mr. Abul Bashar	Buthidaung South
	MP	Mr. Sultan Ahmed	Maungdaw North
	MP	Mr. Abul Khair	Maungdaw North
	MP	Mr. Abdul Gaffar	Maungdaw and Buthidaung
	MP	Mr. Abul Bashar	Buthidaung South
1960	MP	Mr. Sultan Mahmood	Buthidaung North
	MP	Mr. Abul Khair	Maungdaw South
	MP	Mr. Rashid	Maungdaw North
	MP	M. A. Subhan	Maungdaw and Buthidaung

There were a significant representation of Arakanese Muslims in both government and opposition, but, with the passage of time this proportion decreased in a nominal level. Apart from these, there were found different historical proofs of recognizing ‘Rohingya’ minority as an ethnic national. Table 4 shows some historical speeches, declarations and documents that indicates the formal and informal acceptance of ‘Rohingya’ identity like all others ethnic groups. There were no such statements, legislations and official documents that directly employed to reject the ethnic recognition of ‘Rohingyas’. It is noteworthy that, before the

²²² Min, U.K. (2012), ‘An Assesment of the Question of Rohingya’s Nationality: Legal Nexus between Rohingya and the State’. Rangoon.

1962's military takeover, the legislation and other efforts pursued by Burma government were not directly employed to deny 'Rohingyas' as an ethnic identity.

Table 4. Historical Records of Recognizing 'Rohingyas' as an Ethnic National.²²³

Timeline	Historical Incidents
1950	In a public meeting held at Maungdaw and Buthidaung, PM U Nu addressed the people residents of these areas as genuine Burmese citizens and also assured that, there would be no discrimination against the residents.
September 25, 1954	On a radio speech publicly relayed by the BBS, Prime Minister U Nu admitted the residents of Maungdaw and Buthidaung as 'national brethren' who are also referred as 'Rohingyas'.
November 3-4, 1959	PM U Nu and U Ba Swe (Minister of Defense) delivered public speeches in Maungdaw and Buthidaung where they stated that Rohingyas have equal status like other nationalities, such as Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Mon, Rakhine, Shan etc.
1959-1961	There was Rohingya Student Association in Rangoon University in the sessions 1959-1960 and 1960-1961 respectively bearing formal registration ID.
1960-1961	'Rohingya' representatives were invited as the 'State Guests' in the Union Day celebrations, sponsored by the Burma government.
July-August 1961	In a speech delivered by the then Brigadier General Aung Gyi at Mujahids' surrender ceremonies, he asserted that the people of this district (Mayu Frontier) are 'Rohingyas' and they were addressed as one of the ethnic nationals of the Union of Burma. In Defense Ministry's bulletin, <i>Khityae Sasaung</i> , 'Rohingyas' were described as majority group in northern Rakhine.
November 20, 1961	In a public notice of Frontier administration, Mayu Frontier Area was described as a Rohingya majority area.
1964	In <i>Myanmar Encyclopedia</i> , published by <i>Sarpay Beikman</i> (a government authorized publishing agency), a detailed paragraph on 'Rohingyas' and their Burmese nationality was inserted.
May 15, 1961- October 30, 1965	Rohingya language was relayed and broadcasted twice in a week from BBS's Indigenous Races' Broadcasting Program.

²²³ Min, U.K. (2012), 'An Assesment of the Question of Rohingya's Nationality: Legal Nexus between Rohingya and the State'. Rangoon; Lwin, N. S. (2012), Making Rohingya Stateless. Rangoon: New Mandala. Available: <https://www.newmandala.org/making-rohingya-statelessness/>. Accessed 24 August 2020.

On 25 September 1954, in a public speech Prime Minister U Nu described ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘national brethren’, an ethnic group, stating that, “The people living in Buthidaung and Maungdaw Townships are Rohingya, ethnic of Burma”.²²⁴ In another speech delivered at a public meeting in November, 1959, Prime Minister U Nu and his fellow U Ba Swe (Minister for Defense) narrated in brief that, “The Rohingya has the equal status of nationality with Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Mon, Rakhine and Shan”.²²⁵ On 8 July 1961, in a speech Brigadier General Aung Gyi, the Army Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Burma, mentioned the ‘Rohingya’ ethnonym as the following:

“The people living in Mayu Frontier are Rohingya. Pakistan (now Bangladesh) is located in west of Mayu Frontier and Muslims are living there. The people living in west are called Pakistani and the people living here are called Rohingya. This is not the only border that has same people on both sides, border with China, India and Thailand also have the same phenomenon. In India-Burma border Chin, Li-Shaw and Naga are living. These people are living in Burma as ethnics and living in India as well”.²²⁶

Moreover, the people who lived in Mayu Frontier²²⁷ was repeatedly regarded as “ethnic Rohingya” in several official announcements and documents and publications. In 1961, the inhabitants of Mayu frontier has been included as ‘ethnic Rohingya’ through the announcement of Frontier Administration Office of Burma. The 1964’s *Myanmar Encyclopedia* referred that, the ‘Rohingyas’ comprises seventy-five percent²²⁸ of the total population residing in Mayu Frontier (Myanma Encyclopedia, 1964, Vol. 9, pp. 89-90). Similar description is found in *Tatmataw Khit Yay Journal* (Vol. 12, No. 9) that was published in 1961.²²⁹ Thus, the declarations, documents and legal framework in the first democratic phase of Burma were not destructively employed to portray ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘external forces’. However, this scenario of relative ethnic tolerance began to deflect when General Ne Win captured power and constructed self-fulfilling discourses of exclusion

²²⁴ Lwin, N. S. (2012), *Making Rohingya Stateless*. Rangoon: New Mandala. Available: <https://www.newmandala.org/making-rohingya-statelessness/>. Accessed 24 August 2020.

²²⁵ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, p.8.

²²⁶ Lwin, N. S. (2012), *Making Rohingya Stateless*. Rangoon: New Mandala.

²²⁷ Mayu Frontier comprises of Buthidaung, Maungdaw and Rathedaung Townships.

²²⁸ Bank of Knowledge 1964. *Scripture of Myanmar Encyclopedia*, Rangoon, p. 89. Lwin, N. S. (2012), *Making Rohingya Stateless*, Rangoon: New Mandala; Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, p.50.

²²⁹ Lwin, N. S. (2012), *Making Rohingya Stateless*. Rangoon: New Mandala.

against ethnic ‘Rohingyas’ that had later been formalized and legitimized through several incremental measures, such as legislations, policies etc.

From the aforementioned discussions, it can be concluded that, in the first democratic period of Myanmar, minorities were deliberately excluded from the mainstream Burman Buddhists and they were also being deprived of their long cherished dream of autonomy and self-rule. There was arisen division among the Burmese elites where some of them preferred to establish Burma as a Buddhist polity. Like all other ethnic nationals, Arakanese Muslims had a dream of autonomous status or federalism that had been broken up several times. But, there were not seen any major dilemma regarding their citizenship and ethnic status and they were seen as all other nationals who resided in both sides of Myanmar’s frontiers. The government also regarded the state of ‘Rohingyas’ as the ethnic people of Shan, Naga, Karen and also of the people with Chinese root in Kookang area who also shared international borders. It is also pertinent to note that, there were a lot of publications in the beginning of 1950s that highlighted local culture (language, dress up) of ‘Rohingya’ and other ethnic groups. So, it can be said that, the regime of U Nu was relatively a pluralist regime of tolerance for Rohingyas. About this, Khin Zaw Win, a Burman (Bamar) Buddhist think tank member in Myanmar opined, ‘In the first democratic period, Myanmar was much more cosmopolitan, tolerant and non-discriminatory in comparison to other regimes (both military and quasi-civilian), people of all ethnic groups (including Burman Buddhists) were used to take part in each other’s religious and racial festivals’.²³⁰ But, as time flies, the perplexity of identity became deeper particularly with the military takeover in 1962. And, since then, they were increasingly deprived of not only civil and political rights but also denied of their citizenship turning them as the largest stateless people in this world.

²³⁰ Interview with Khin Zaw Win, a Burman (Bamar) Buddhist in Yangon who is serving as Director of Tampadipa Institute which is a think tank in Myanmar, 13 January 2021.

Chapter-5

Securitization of 'Rohingyas' under Military Regime (1962-2010)

In Myanmar, General Ne Win came to power following the 1962 military coup and since then, the strategies of 'othering' 'Rohingya' Muslims were further institutionalized with different incremental 'xenophobic' attempts undertaken by the Junta government. Since then, the situation started to get worsen and 'Rohingyas' have been addressed as an existential security threat for the majority Buddhist identity and religion; they have been brought to the forefront through a gradual process of securitization. Under the leadership of Dictator Ne Win, then the military government undertook a series of nationalist policies to exclude them from the mainstream national identity. For example, Muslims were expelled from diverse ranks of the army and the 'Rohingyas' were systematically demoted from "holders of indigenous ethnic minority status" to "Bengali foreigners" or "illegal immigrants" from neighboring Bangladesh.²³¹ Since the 1960s, Burmese military successively launched an anti-Muslim propaganda spreading 'Islamphobia' among the Burmese Buddhist communities propagating that, 'Muslims are "evil", Islam is an "invasive" ideology²³² and Muslims will demolish Buddhism and will take control of Burma'. Thus, the Burmese people are made frightened of the existence of Muslims that triggered 'xenophobic' fury among the Burmese Buddhist nationalists against the minority Muslim 'Rohingyas'.

Immediately after seizing power, Ne Win led Burmese military forcefully took control of the administrative zone of Mayu Frontier District in 1962 and integrated this zone with Arakan State in 1974. It is pertinent to note that, during the first democratic phase of Burma, Prime Minister U Nu had established this zone named the Mayu Frontier District in 1960 as a separate administrative zone for Rohingya majority regions of Arakan. From 1961 to 1964, this separate zone was administered from Rangoon by the national government. Thus, the military regime got involved in administrative engineering to take control of the 'Rohingya' dominated Mayu Frontier and Arakan for their broader political-economic gains. On October, 1964, the Ne Win government suspended the 'Rohingya' language based radio program titled

²³¹ Win, Kyaw Z. (2018), Securitization of the Rohingya in Myanmar, in Chambers, J., McCarthy, G., Farrelly, N., and Win, C. (ed.), *Myanmar Transformed? People, Places and Politics*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, p. 257.

²³² Anadolu Agency, 2020. Exclusive: Rohingya issue, not Muslims v/s Buddhist paradigm.

“Indigenous Groups”²³³ that had been broadcasted three times a week since 1961 from state-owned indigenous language program of Burma Broadcasting Service.

During the military regime of Ne Win government (1962-1988), the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma was promulgated in 1974 that was followed by the delimitation of the country’s ethno-political boundaries. The political map of the country was redrawn forming seven divisions and seven states respectively. The divisions included the territories that are pre-eminently inhabited by the majority Buddhist Burmans whereas the states were created with the areas of other ethnic minorities. This biased strategy of the Burman-led government drastically changed the territorial boundary of the country making the non-Burman ethnic minorities subordinate to the dominant majority Buddhist Burmans. It was believed by the ethnic minorities that this tactics of alienation was an extension of the then ongoing ‘Myanmafication’ policy of the military government that has drastically influenced or manipulated the political, electoral and resource geography of the country. Amidst the decade’s long suppressive politics, this initiative has widened the existing volatility and gap between the Burmans and the minority groups reflecting the policy of domination of the majority Burman over the minorities.²³⁴ ‘The remaking of the ethnic political geography and taking of control over the political space’²³⁵ was thus a part of the nationalist project under the dictatorship of Ne Win government.

In 1978, in the pretext of fight against Muslim insurgent groups, the military government launched a violent operation called ‘Dragon Operation’ that have driven at least 300,000 ‘Rohingyas’ off their homeland and ended with widespread destructions in Rakhine State.²³⁶ In 1977, the military government launched an operation named ‘*Nagamin*’ (Dragons Kings) to verify national identification cards and to take actions against the illegal foreigners or

²³³ EFSAS (European Foundation for South Asian Studies), *The Rohingya Issue – Its Wider Ramifications for South Asia*, Amsterdam: 2018. P. 4.

Available:<https://www.efsas.org/The%20Rohingya%20Issue%20%E2%80%93%20Its%20wider%20ramifications%20for%20South%20Asia.pdf>. Accessed 29 August 2020.

²³⁴ Smith, Martin J. (2007), *State of Strife: The dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*, Washington, D.C: East-West Center, pp. 5-33.

²³⁵ Yiftachel, O., and A. Ghanem (2004), Understanding ‘Ethnocratic’ Regimes: The Politics of Seizing Contested Territories, *Political Geography* 23, no 6, p. 652

²³⁶ Ahmed, Imtiaz (2010), *The Plight of the Stateless Rohingyas: Responses of the State, Society & the International Community*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited, p.16.

infiltrators.²³⁷ In the pretext of this operation, coercive attacks were done against minority Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ in northern Rakhine state by the military forces and the local Rakhines dispossessing approximately 200,000 ‘Rohingyas’ into Bangladesh.²³⁸ But, at this point in time, the official Burma News Agency (NAB) reported that,

“Bengalis” had fled and sought to escape the government-led scrutinisation drive—‘Nagamin’ as they do not have any citizenship proofs including legal documents or entry registration papers.²³⁹

The state-patronized media and agencies deliberately manufactured these falsified narratives about the ‘Rohingya’ Muslims and propagate across the country. Thus, the junta government securitized ‘Rohingyas’ over the decades and tried to validate these narratives along the state-led subsequent atrocities against this minority ethnic group.

‘Rohingya’ Conundrum and Citizenship Controversy

The new socialist constitution of 1974 refused to recognize the status of ‘Rohingyas’ as an indigenous ethnic group that had been partially granted immediately after independence, particularly, during the democratic regime (1948-1962). Launching a systematic nationalist project across the country, the initially recognized ethnic status of ‘Rohingyas’ were gradually snatched by the Ne Win government. Formerly, ‘Rohingyas’ had their National registration cards like others in Burma,²⁴⁰ but, the newly enacted constitution of Ne Win government redefined citizenship that had been inserted in article 145 of the new constitution as follows: ‘persons born of parents both of whom are nationals of the Socialist Republic Union of Burma are citizens of the Union’.²⁴¹ As the Constitution of the Union of Burma (1947) did not define the concept “indigenous races” mentioned in the section-11 and as the ‘Rohingyas’ were not formally approved as citizens of Burma in 1947, this time, they were said not to be qualified for being citizens under the new constitution (1974). Therefore, under

²³⁷ Smith, Martin J. (1991), *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, London: Zed Books, pp.37-241.

²³⁸ Rachagan, S. Sothi (1987), Refugees and Illegal Immigrants: The Malaysian Experience with Filipino and Vietnamese Refugees, in Rogge, J. (ed.), *Refugees: A Third World Dilemma*, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, p.254.

²³⁹ Anannd, J. P. (1978), Refugees from Burma. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 (27), pp. 1100-1101.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, p.50.

the 1974 Emergency Immigration Act, ethnicity-based National Registration Certificates (NRC) were provided whereas ‘Rohingyas’ were declared not to be eligible for the NRC. At the point of this time, they were mandated to take Foreign Registration Cards that marked them as ‘foreigners’.²⁴² This was the process through which almost overnight ‘Rohingyas’ were tactfully degraded from ethnic nationals to ‘foreigners’; from national identity card holders (National Registration Certificate) to non-national foreign card holders (Foreign Registration Certificate).

A further step to make ‘Rohingyas’ ‘other’ in Burma had been accomplished by a draconian citizenship act that was promulgated in 1982 named the *Burma Citizenship Law*. The 1982’s citizenship law categorized citizenship status as follows: citizen, associate citizen, naturalized citizen. Under this law, citizenship was assigned to ethnic races on the basis of their residence in Burma prior to 1823. It is noteworthy that, the Union Citizenship Act, 1948 defined ‘indigenous races’ as “those who have resided in Burma anterior to 1823 or before British colonization”.²⁴³ Later, this had been deflected under Section 3 of the 1982’s citizenship law and citizenship was redefined. According to Section 3 of the law,

“Nationals” are those who belong to Burmese races such as Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Burman, Mon, Rakhine or Shan and to such racial groups who have settled in any of the territories included within the State as their permanent home from a period anterior to 1823 A.D.²⁴⁴

It is pertinent to mention that, all the aforementioned nationals are Burmese by race whereas they belong to Buddhism and Christianity by religion²⁴⁵; even though, there have been many other prevailing Muslim ethnic groups in Burma,²⁴⁶ they were intentionally ignored by

²⁴² Howe, Adam E. (2018), Discourses of Exclusion: The Societal Securitization of Burma’s Rohingya (2012-2018), *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 3. P. 2.

²⁴³ Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2015), Alienation, Discrimination, and Securitization: Legal Personhood and Cultural Personhood of Muslims in Myanmar, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 13:2, p. 54.

²⁴⁴ Refworld. 1982. ‘Burma Citizenship Law’. UNHCR.

Available: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4f71b.html>. Accessed 25 August 2020.

²⁴⁵ Nationals such as Burman, Mon, Rakhine or Shan are Buddhist by religion whereas Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin belong to Christianity.

²⁴⁶ Historically, the demographic size of ethnic ‘Rohingya’ Muslims in Burma was much larger than the Kayah, Karen, Burma, Mon, Rakhine or Shan nationals. See Kipgen, Nehginpao (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 12-13.

military dictatorships. Besides, the Section 4 of the new law provided absolute power to the Council of State to fix whether a group is national or not²⁴⁷ which is regarded as a destructive aspect of this act. About the role of Council of the State, a Rohingya activist based in Germany argued that, ‘in many cases, we had available primary source evidence that we belonged to the Arakan state before 1823, yet, the National Council enjoys the sole power to determine and decide whether a group is indigenous or not’.²⁴⁸

However, a huge number of ‘Rohingyas’ were not eligible to have their citizenship under the newly enacted heinous law as they do not fall under any of these three categories that have been inserted in the Citizenship Law, 1982 for being considered as ‘foreigners’. Moreover, their citizenship was denied under the restricted Section 3 of the law as ‘they were deemed not to have lived in this region (Arakan) before 1823’.²⁴⁹ On the eve of the 1989’s general elections, the military authority launched scrutiny in Rakhine state, their legal documents had been forcefully confiscated and then the Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ had to go through severe harassment as the immigration authorities refused to receive citizenship applications from them and forcefully categorized the ethnic Muslim residents as “Bengali Burmese” that had further culminated ‘Rohingya’ exclusion in Burma.²⁵⁰ During this time, the military dictators, public figure, political and religious agencies of Burma had advertently composed a self-constructed story about Rohingya ‘separatism’ describing them as ‘foreigners’ in this country.²⁵¹ Then the nationwide Burmese media reports and military political agendas routinely painted ‘Rohingyas’ as a Muslim insurgent group that historically prefers ‘separatism’.

Redesigning Exclusive National Curriculum and History

In the 1970s geography textbook at high school level (printed in 1978, p. 86), the regions of national races were narrated where Northern Arakan was prominently marked as ‘Rohingya

²⁴⁷ Refworld. 1982. ‘Burma Citizenship Law’. UNHCR.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Ro Nay San Lwin, a Rohingya activist based in Germany and also the Co-founder of Free Rohingya Coalition, 21 January 2021.

²⁴⁹ Burma Citizenship Law, 1982. Rangoon.

²⁵⁰ Ahmed, Imtiaz (2010), *The Plight of the Stateless Rohingyas: Responses of the State, Society & the International Community*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited, p.17.

²⁵¹ Schonthal, B. (2016), Making the Muslim Other in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, in Crouch, Melissa (ed.), *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 241.

region’.²⁵² But, after the arrival of Ne Win government, he took several initiatives to erase ‘Rohingyas’ from both textbooks²⁵³ and history of Burma. As a part of Burmanization, General Ne Win redesigned the national curriculum amidst an extreme ethnic grievance that prioritized Burman culture, language, ethnic groups and Theravada Buddhism, and tends to produce partial narratives of national history replacing the ‘real history’ of Burma where ethnic Muslims, notably ‘Rohingyas’ were deliberately portrayed as “external destructive elements”,²⁵⁴ ‘national enemies’, ‘traitors’ and ‘villains’. The history curricula are tied to political goals and extremely “one-sided”²⁵⁵ that have been acting as key determinants in constructing hostile sentiments, prejudice and misperceptions towards Muslim ‘Rohingyas’. This unique strategy of ‘otherization’ continues till today with a view to making a singular ethno-religious identity in Myanmar negating the role of other ethnic groups during the independence of the country. For example, the recent textbooks of Grade 9 and 11 described Indian migrants as ‘strangers’ in narrating the history of Burma, particularly the period from colonial phase to the present as follows:

‘Together with capitalist economic system, those strangers (British, Indians and Chinese) arrive with their beliefs and their literature, which destroy Myanmar society and customs. Foreign cultures submerge [Myanmar culture]’.²⁵⁶

The military rule facilitates a state monopoly on historical discourse and endeavored to construct an exclusive Buddhist national identity using state curriculum. Thus, the national curriculum of Burma remains as a catalyst in making the discourse of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ acting as “a relatively unexplored source of insight into state ideology”.²⁵⁷

²⁵² See geography textbook, printed in 1978, p. 86. Lwin, N. S. (2012), Making Rohingya Stateless. Rangoon: New Mandala. Available: <https://www.newmandala.org/making-rohingya-statelessness/>. Accessed 24 August 2020.

²⁵³ Textbooks on Geography and history were dealt with ethnic Muslims, particularly ‘Rohingyas’.

²⁵⁴ Gervais, N. S., Metro, R. (2012), A textbook Case of Nation-Building: The Evolution of History Curricula in Myanmar, *Journal of Burma Studies*. Vol. 16, no. 1. Illinois. P. 55.

²⁵⁵ Metro, Rosalie (2006), Developing History Curricula to support Multi-ethnic Civil Society among Burmese Refugee and Migrants, Research Paper no. 139, Policy Development and Evaluation Service, United nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva.

²⁵⁶ Gervais, N. S., Metro, R. (2012), A textbook Case of Nation-Building: The Evolution of History Curricula in Myanmar, pp. 54-56.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

‘Guest-Versus-Host’ Discourse

Throughout the period of military dictatorship, there were initiated diverse efforts by the government to alienate the ‘Rohingyas’ that was culminated with the denial of their citizenship rights in 1982. The Ne Win government promulgated a new citizenship act, the ‘Burmese Citizenship Law, 1982’ that was designed to exclude Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ in their own ancestral land Myanmar making over one million ‘Rohingyas’ ‘stateless’. On October 8, 1982, a meeting held in the Central Meeting Hall at President House where General Ne Win delivered a speech arguing that, untrustworthy “foreigners” within Myanmar posed threat to the security of the state and they were not eligible for full-fledged citizenship status. General Ne Win’s speech is summarized below:

“During the period between 1824 to 1948, foreigners, or aliens, entered our country un-hindered under various pretexts”. After the independence of the country in 1948, some of these ‘kalas’, to be frank, left Burma leaving their relatives here and fled to Singapore, Hongkong, America, Australia instead of going back to their native land. Then, these relatives used to maintain linkage with the ‘kalas’ residing abroad and “smuggle goods” out of Burma. So, these people could not be trusted and they will not be allowed to get into important positions of the state because they would “endanger ourselves” and could “betray us” as well. Against this backdrop, these ‘kala’ people will not be given “full citizenship and full rights”.²⁵⁸

The aforementioned declaration demonstrates the securitization narratives that the governing and non-governing actors manufactured during the military regime in Myanmar to alienate the ‘Rohingya’ minority. Thus, Addressing the Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ as “kalas” and the Buddhist Burmese as “true citizens”, the military dictator Ne Win propagated a popular discourse of minority exclusion. Therefore, Ne Win government introduced a narrative of ‘we’ versus ‘they’, in which Burmese were portrayed as ‘generous host’ whereas ‘Rohingyas’ were termed as ‘ungrateful guests’ of the country. These falsified narratives helped to build up long-held Burmese misperception about the dark-skinned ethnic minority ‘Rohingyas’ that have later been popularized by the political elite, military actors, Buddhist monks, and the civil society organizations of Myanmar. Even, after the anti-Muslim communal violence in

²⁵⁸ The Working People’s Daily. October 9, 1982. Available: https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/Ne_Win%27s_speech_Oct-1982_Citizenship_Law.pdf. Accessed 28 July 2020.

2012, the ‘guest versus host’²⁵⁹ discourse took the forefront of the Burmese media where ‘Rohingyas’ have been tagged as ‘ungrateful guest’ and the ‘traitor’ in the Burmese holy land. However, along the hate-filled anti-Rohingya rhetoric, the subsequent state-led policies and legal measures, such as, the Burmese Citizenship act (1982), are regarded as the forerunner of institutionalizing ‘otherization’ of ‘Rohingyas’. Accusing the migrant businesspeople as ‘selfish and disloyal to the nation’, Ne Win openly claimed that, these aliens were growing dominant in businesses and also in public services and eventually framed a discursive discourse of exclusion. The authoritarian regime of Ne Win imposed couple of effective restrictions on their businesses and also created barriers on the Muslims’ engagement in the higher government offices and thus, the strategy of ‘othering’ that had been pursued by Ne Win was more legal and economic²⁶⁰ than the former religious or racial one.

Military State and Idiosyncratic Strategy of Otherization

In the 1990s, there was noticed an ill motive of the Myanmar state to “erase any Indian presence” and to fall “all Muslims into one basket”; the state-controlled newspapers and media used to present ‘Rohingyas’ as “illegal Bengalis” possessing threat to the economy, religion and sovereignty of Myanmar.²⁶¹ At that time, there was launched a collective effort to wipe out the presence of Muslims in Myanmar and to override the ethnic ‘Rohingyas’ through different idiosyncratic strategies. State gradually began to disown the culture of ‘unity in diversity’ and historical co-existence of multiethnic groups within its territory that eventually resulted in the deterioration of long-held warm rapport between the ethnic Buddhist Rakhines and other ethnic Muslim groups, particularly, ‘Rohingyas’. They were viewed as ‘Bengali foreigners’ and ‘external forces’ coming from outside the country intending to destroy the holy land of Buddhist Burma. Keeping this view in consideration, a slogan titled “No nation faces extinction from being swallowed up by the earth, but a nation

²⁵⁹ Interview with Ro Nay San Lwin, a Rohingya activist based in Germany and also the Co-founder of Free Rohingya Coalition, 21 January 2021.

²⁶⁰ Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2020), The Role of Myth in Anti-Muslim Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar, Iselin Frydenlund (eds.), *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, Singapore: Springer Nature, P. 210

²⁶¹ Win, Kyaw Z. (2018), Securitization of the Rohingya in Myanmar, in Chambers, J., McCarthy, G., Farrelly, N., and Win, C. (ed.), *Myanmar Transformed? People, Places and Politics*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing. p. 259.

faces extinction if it is swallowed up by another people”²⁶² was then positioned in immigration offices across the Myanmar.²⁶³ However, the stance of the then SLORC and SPDC government towards ‘Rohingyas’ became clear with the official version quoted below:

“The so-called ‘Rohingyas’ never belonged to the national races or national racial groups of Myanmar. The Rohingya do not exist in Myanmar historically, politically or legally nor do they in any way represent any segment of the population in Myanmar including those professing the Islamic faith. The so-called Rohingya is an invention of insurgent terrorist organizations like Rohingya Solidary Organization (RSO) and Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF). Both organizations are alien to Myanmar in form and content and are largely supported from abroad.”²⁶⁴

Based on geo-strategic calculation and as a part of ‘Myanmafication’, in 1989, the name of the country has been officially changed from ‘Burma’ to ‘Myanmar’ by the military establishment that had aroused grievance and controversies across the country. Many western countries, the then opposition groups, dominant leader Aung San Suu Kyi, expatriates and anthropologists preferred to use ‘Burma’ and refused to accept ‘Myanmar’ raising question about the legitimacy of the unelected military authority in changing the country’s official name particularly without the people’s consent or referendum.²⁶⁵ Regarding the renaming of the country’s name, Aung San Suu Kyi, in an interview with Marie Claire Magazine (1996), remarked that, ‘they (the then governing authority) claim that, Myanmar refers to all the Burmese ethnic groups, whereas Burma only refers to the Burmese ethnic group; but it is not true. As Myanmar is a literary word for Burma, it also refers only to the Burmese ethnic group’.²⁶⁶ It is noteworthy that, in Universal Burmese-English Dictionary (1978) and in Myanmar-English Dictionary (1993), the phrases Bama and Myanma had been merely referred interchangeably.

²⁶² This slogan appears in Burmese language, ‘*Mye myo ywe` lu myo ma pyo`k lu myo hma lu myo pyo`k me`*’. Here, ‘lu myo’ means ‘nation’, ‘people’, ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’, but I preferred to translate it as ‘nation’.

²⁶³ Schissler, M., Walton, J. M., and Thi, P. P. (2017), Reconciling Contradictions: Buddhist-Muslim Violence, narrative making, and memory in Myanmar. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 47, No. 3, p.11.

²⁶⁴ Min, U.K. (2012), ‘An Assesment of the Question of Rohingya’s Nationality: Legal Nexus between Rohingya and the State’. Rangoon.

²⁶⁵ Houtman, G., Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics Aung San Suu Kyi and the national League for Democracy, Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999, pp. 43-54

²⁶⁶ Houtman, G., 1999, p.50.

As historically Arakan was an autonomous territory with its distinct power and geographically separated from the mainland of Burma, then the Burmese elites got frightened of the possible separatist move from Arakan that could lead to further disintegration—emergence of Arakan as an independent state and end of neo-colonial structure of Burma. Considering these geopolitical calculus and as a part of anti-Muslim nationalist project, the government further took a Machiavellian tactics to erase ‘Rohingyas’ from the history of Arakan; consequently, in 1990s, the governing elite (former junta) tactfully changed the historic name Arakan to Rakhine intending to transform it into a Buddhist land which projects the state’s partial belongingness to the majority Rakhine Buddhists too. But, the historical records prove that “Arakan was the land where originally the Muslims lived as the majority” with a little Buddhist influence.²⁶⁷ Even, both the Rohingyas and the Buddhist people of Arakan once talked in ‘Rohingya’ language that was the original lingua franca in Arakan.²⁶⁸ Similarly, in 1991, the junta government changed the name of certain regions and population groups of the country in the pretext of breaking down British colonial legacy.²⁶⁹

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the ‘Global War on terror’ became popularized across the world; at this point in time, referring terrorist incidents happening around the world, both at regional and global level, the Burmese Buddhists and the non-Buddhist securitizing actors including dominant military and religious leaders intended to portrait ‘Rohingya’ Muslims as an ‘existential threat’ to Myanmar and also alleged them as a broader security threat for the rest of the world. They use the pictures of terrorist attacks in other countries available in the internet (holding guns, wearing long dress), remake or fabricate these images and accused that, these atrocities dare done by the ‘Rohingya’ Muslims. According to the report of International Crisis Group, in 2001 afterwards, referring global events, Buddhist monks, prominently Ashin Wirathu had been widely propagating against Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ in particular, misrepresenting Islam as a ‘rising threat’ by

²⁶⁷ Nemoto K. (2005), The Rohingya Issue: A Thorny Obstacle between Burma (Myanmar) and Bangladesh, *Journal of Burma Studies*, vol. 5, no. 19, p. 8.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ De Mersan, A. (2016), Ritual and Other in Rakhine Spirit Cults, Myanmar’s Mountain and Maritime Borderscapes: Local Practices, Boundary Making and Figured Worlds, ed. Su-Ann Oh, Singapore: ISEAS, p.139.

disseminating inflammatory anti-Muslim pamphlets that had incited deadly violence in Myanmar.²⁷⁰

These misperceptions were also manufactured within the military domain where ‘Islamphobia’ was spread through institutionalized military actions and trainings. Muslims were banned to join the military, administration or other public services. Moreover, the military dictators designed several refresher courses for the government officials and these courses were made mandatory for the officials seeking promotion. These public servants had to go through these arranged refresher courses at PhaungGyi training camp where high ranked military officials delivered speeches on sovereignty (territorial security), borders and security threats of Myanmar, sketching the Muslims, particularly ‘Rohingyas’ as a potential threat for the majority Buddhist nation. This government-sponsored bureaucratic training for promotion institutionalizes the securitizing speech acts within the Burmese bureaucratic system.²⁷¹

In the pretext of state security, the military state delineated the Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ as a threat to national sovereignty and used the state apparatus to take actions against them, resulting in the enforcement of draconian measures such as, restriction on movement, language and cultural expression. In addition, ‘Rohingyas’ were subject to a gradual marginalization process through a series of state-sponsored exclusionary policies and restrictions, particularly, on education, health services, property right, employment opportunities²⁷² and even, on getting marriage permits and right to worship freely.²⁷³ As a part of the militarized securitization agenda, the controversial birth control policy was enforced in Maungdaw and Buthidaung provinces (where 95 percent people are Muslims)²⁷⁴ of Rakhine state since 2005 targeting the ‘Rohingya’ Muslims, that was driven by the

²⁷⁰ International Crisis Group Report, 2017. Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar. Report no. 290, Brussels. Available: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/290-buddhism-and-state-power-in-myanmar.pdf>. Accessed 14 January 2021.

²⁷¹ Interview with Kyaw Zeyar Win, a Burmese scholar based in United States of America, 19 January 2021.

²⁷² Human Rights Watch. 1996. Burma: The Rohingya; Ending a Cycle of Exodus? Available: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/b/burma/burma969.pdf>. Accessed 29 July 2020.

²⁷³ EFSAS (European Foundation for South Asian Studies), The Rohingya Issue – Its Wider Ramifications for South Asia, Amsterdam: 2018. P. 6.

²⁷⁴ The Guardian. 2013. Burmese Muslims given two-child limit. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/25/burma-muslims-two-child-limit>. Accessed 29 July 2020.

nationalist Buddhist monks who feel fear of the Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ and consider them as a potential threat to Buddhism. This birth control law imposed that, ‘Rohingyas’ were not permitted to have more than two children and if they infringe this restriction, their children were “blacklisted”²⁷⁵ by state authority, even to enroll in educational institutions. Surprisingly, this regulation has not been applied to the majority Buddhists area that is a further example of the institutionalized persecution of ‘Rohingyas’ in Myanmar.

Framing ‘Rohingyas’ as Electoral Threat

Following an economic disaster resulted from the ‘Burmese Road to Socialism’, in 1988, a nationwide pro-democratic popular revolt took place in Burma known as the ‘8888 uprising’ that pressurized the military generals to arrange an election to restore democracy. Prior to the 1990’s election, new laws were enacted that revived several discriminatory provisions of the legal framework existed in Burma since 1974. Even then, partially ‘Rohingyas’ had enjoyed the right to vote and to represent on behalf of political parties.²⁷⁶ In 1990, they were provided with identification cards named as ‘white cards’ that had given a temporary residential status, issued by the junta authority.²⁷⁷

The National League for Democracy (NLD) and its allies (mostly from the ethnic community of Rakhine) refused to allow ‘Rohingya’ parliamentarians to stand for elections alleging that, they might have used fake citizenship cards to prove their status. In 1990’s election afterwards, the military junta denied to accept the results of the elections and continued to govern the country till 2008. However, the 2008 constitution was a major footprint to reinstate minimal democracy with restricted citizenship previously practiced since 1974. In addition, a decentralized political structure was conducted by this constitution that gave some sort of authority (executive and legislative) to Rakhine State. This special status has created communal and political tension across the region as the people of Rakhine were not allowed to compete for power in previous decades of authoritarian regime. During this time, the Rakhine Buddhist considered the ‘Rohingyas’ as an ‘electoral threat’ for them to take control over the state’s political affairs.

²⁷⁵ EFSAS (European Foundation for South Asian Studies), *The Rohingya Issue – Its Wider Ramifications for South Asia*, Amsterdam: 2018. P. 6.

²⁷⁶ Ibrahim, A. (2017), *The Rohingyas Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, p.9.

²⁷⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, Eleanor Albert, *The Rohingya Migrant Crisis*, September 13, 2017. Available: <http://www.cfr.org/burmamyanmar/rohingya-migrant-crisis/p36651>

Taking these facts in consideration, the military backed government of Myanmar systematically arranged the legal and constitutional framework in such a way that approximately 500,000 ‘Rohingyas’ were not allowed to exercise their voting rights in the 2015 elections even though they took part in the polls of 2010 and 2012.²⁷⁸ Even, the 2014 census compelled this Muslim minority to register them as ‘Bengali’ or ‘Indian’ to describe their ethnic identity.²⁷⁹ As such, many Muslim candidates were rejected to compete for elections this time which created a feeling of alienation among the ‘Rohingyas’. In 2015, Shwe Maung, a Rohingya MP from then the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) was restricted to run for the election on the pretext that, he did not have full citizenship and effectively withdrawn from the party politics. But, surprisingly, he had contested the election held in 2010 and won a seat in parliament as a full citizen of Myanmar²⁸⁰.

The hostility towards ‘Rohingyas’ rejecting their citizenship and voting rights is the outcome of the last several decades’ state-led propaganda to frame this ethnic minority as ‘illegal Bengali immigrants’, ‘foreign invaders’, and ‘religious extremist group’.²⁸¹ The government refused to approve them as country’s legal citizen accusing that, they have no legal documentation and proof, successfully making ‘Rohingyas’ stateless ‘fearsome others’.

Branding ‘Rohingyas’ as “Ugly as Ogres”

On 11 February 2009, Burmese Consul General in Hong Kong, Ye Myint Aung narrated the ‘Rohingyas’ as “ugly as ogres” in a letter sent to foreign officials and media, claiming that, ‘Rohingya’ Muslims should not be considered as the true citizen of Myanmar. Ye Myint Aung’s delivered message is described here:

In true sense, the ‘Rohingyas’ do not belong to Myanmar and they could not be an ethnic group of Myanmar. Contrasting the “dark brown” color of ‘Rohingyas’

²⁷⁸ The Daily Observer. 2016. Challenges of Democratization in Myanmar. Available: <https://www.observerbd.com/2016/03/11/140826.php>. Accessed 5 February 2020.

²⁷⁹ The Guardian. 2015. No Vote, No Candidates: Myanmar’s Muslims barred from their own election Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/03/no-vote-no-candidates-myanmars-muslims-barred-from-their-own-election>. Accessed 5 February 2020.

²⁸⁰ The Nation. 2015. How the Rohingya have been Excluded from Myanmar’s Landmark Elections. Available: <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/how-the-rohingya-have-been-excluded-from-myanmars-landmark-elections/>. Accessed 15 August 2020.

²⁸¹ Interview with Ro Nay San Lwin, a Rohingya activist based in Germany and also the Co-founder of Free Rohingya Coalition, 21 January 2021.

with the “fair and soft” skin of other Burmese ethnic people (which he called “good looking” also), he asserted, ‘Rohingyas’ are “as ugly as ogres”. Addressing ‘Rohingyas’ as “illegal immigrants”, he stated, “(My complexion is a typical genuine one of a Myanmar gentleman and you will accept that how handsome your colleague Mr Ye is). It is quite different from what you have seen and read in the papers.”²⁸²

In reality, what he claimed was that, ‘Rohingyas’ could not be qualified as the citizen of Burma for their ‘odd-looking’ appearance and as they are ‘different’ from the Burmese Buddhist in skin, language, culture and religion which is resembling to the Bengali people in Bangladesh. Immediately after this racist statement regarding the ‘Rohingya’ Muslims, this diplomat got promoted and later being appointed as an ambassador as a reward of his securitizing efforts. Thus, the ethnic minority ‘Rohingyas’ have been negated throughout the history of independent Myanmar for their skin color and language that seems ‘peculiar’ to the Burmese racist governing and non-governing actors. Regarding the reason for which ‘Rohingyas’ have been targeted to be securitized by the dominant actors, Burmese scholar Kyaw Zeyar Win argued that, ‘among the Muslim ethnic groups, ‘Rohingyas’ are easy to be targeted to securitize and alienate because they look different from the majority Burmese Buddhists, they wear different clothes (similar to the Muslims in Muslim countries), they behave in their own style, and they speak in a completely different language’.²⁸³

The ‘othering’ of ‘Rohingyas’ has been formally and institutionally initiated during the military regime of Ne Win and since then, a series of exclusionary narratives have been installed in Myanmar against this ethnic minority: ‘guest-versus-host’, ‘foreigners-versus-nationals’, ‘fake citizens-versus-true citizens’ and ‘traitor-versus-patriot’ discourses which are more dominant among these constructed falsified narratives. Apart from these, the then military dictatorship effectively pursued idiosyncratic strategy of both ethnographic and demographic engineering with a view to making ‘Rohingyas’ existence vulnerable. Surprisingly, the military elites began to deliver their speeches in public accusing that, ‘Rohingyas’ are the ‘foreigners’, untrustworthy ‘guests’ and ‘illegal immigrants’ came from neighboring border state Bangladesh who had no ethnic belongings to Myanmar. These elite-

²⁸² Huffington Post. 2009. “Ugly As Ogres:” Burmese Envoy Insults Refugees. Available: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/ugly-as-ogres-burmese-env_n_166159. Accessed 12 August 2020.

²⁸³ Interview with Kyaw Zeyar Win, a Burmese scholar based in United States of America, 19 January 2021.

driven anti-Rohingya propaganda and hate-filled rhetoric became widespread across the country that has gradually internalized the perceptions of majority Buddhist general people about 'Rohingyas' as 'enemy others' and 'zero-sum sentiment'. All these hate speeches and hostile narratives constructed by the Burmese elites became normalized in Myanmar that followed by the designation of several exclusionary legal mechanisms, such as discriminatory citizenship law of 1982 and re-arrangement of national curriculum and history. Thus, elite-driven securitization process through 'speech act' has later been transformed to grassroots level by shaping the majority people's psycho-cultural attitude towards minority Muslim 'Rohingyas' as 'fearsome others'.

Chapter-6

Making the ‘Rohingyas’ Other under (Quasi) Civil-Military Regime (2010-Present)

After the political transition in 2010, ethnic conflict aroused in Myanmar that have been followed by an outbreak of violence in June 2012 between the Buddhists and the Muslims of northern Rakhine state. This hyper-communal tensions of Rakhine state (re)generates “the questions of “strangeness” in the sense of belonging to groups at the margins of the society, or of being an outsider”.²⁸⁴ Since then, many videos and graphic pictures, containing violent scenes of extreme cases of radical Islam across the world, have been circulated and rapidly went viral in different online platforms sparking the fire of hatred and anti-Muslim sentiment across the country. Many Burmese Buddhist extremists arrived at the social media, such as facebook, messenger, youtube as the saviors of Buddhism depicting Islam as an ideology of violence, extremism, terrorism and appropriation. They have effectively spread rumors about Muslims (who constitute majority group of the Rakhine state) as evil soul, particularly, against the Muslim ‘Rohingyas’ portraying ‘them’ as ‘existential threat’ for rest of the ethnic identities, to be more exact, Buddhist ideology.

The colonial era narratives that have been constructed amidst the then Bamar versus Indian conflict, have been fiercely evolved with a new mask of mistrust and fear between majority Burmese Buddhists and minority ‘Rohingya’ Muslims;²⁸⁵ even though, content of these discourses as well as securitizing actors get slightly changed, substance of these narratives have remained almost same under the successive civilian-military regimes of Myanmar. In 2010 onwards, under the military-backed democratic regime of Myanmar (led by Aung San Suu Kyi), the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and population has been frequently using these discourses as national slogan. At the onset of the democratization process and political liberalization in Myanmar, media restrictions have been minimized that has also culminated the ongoing securitization of ‘Rohingyas’.

²⁸⁴ De Mersan, A. (2016), *Ritual and Other in Rakhine Spirit Cults, Myanmar’s Mountain and Maritime Borderscapes: Local Practices, Boundary Making and Figured Worlds*, ed. Su-Ann Oh, Singapore: ISEAS, p.121.

²⁸⁵ Egreteau, R. (2011), *Burmese Indians in Contemporary Burma: Heritage, Influence, and Perceptions Since 1988*, *Asian Ethnicity* 12, no. 1, pp. 33-54. Nyi Nyi Kyaw, “Alienation”.

Making Minority ‘Rohingyas’ ‘Other’

The 1938’s Buddhist-Muslim riots in Burma had been erupted following the publishing of a dominant tract by U Shwe Phi titled *Moulvi-Yogi Awada Sadan* what was then considered as one of the major reasons of contemporary religious clash; even today, this text is accepted as one of the dominant documents in the Buddhist-Muslim history of Burma. Similarly, another extremist write up headed by *Amyo-pyaukhma So-kyauk-sa-ya* (In Fear of Deracination) was published in 1990s that has been widely accepted and propagated by the Burmese extremists in Myanmar. A recent sequel of the former tract has been arrived named *Amyo-ma-pyauk-aung Ka-kwaè-ya-miNi-lan-mya* (Ways to Prevent Deracination or In Fear of Deracination) following the violent riots in 2012. The central message of these written texts is that,

Muslims in Myanmar (who constitute 20 percent of the total population) have set off a demographic conspiracy as a part of their secret agenda financed by external sources (International terrorist groups or foreign Muslim states) for the Islamization of Buddhist land Myanmar. Muslims are increasingly taking control of the demographic geography of the country with a rapid conversion of Buddhist women through inter-faith marriage and also with a higher birth rate (breeding faster than Bamar Buddhists). If it remains unchecked, Buddhist Bamar as a race and Buddhism as religious faith will be withered away soon.²⁸⁶

All these written pieces containing highly contested anti-Muslim narratives, claims and assertions what Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2020) termed as a “myth of deracination” has latter been circulated and repeatedly referred by the Burmese Buddhist public and hardline nationalists across different social media platforms and websites to justify the propagation against ‘Rohingya’ Muslims, effectively turning this into a public discourse.²⁸⁷ These fictitious anti-Muslim mythologies spread faster among the Burmese Buddhists (both topmost and grassroots Burmese people) through language idioms/phrase, routine speeches, official statements and sermons etc. Thus, formerly developed anti-*kala* or anti-Indian [South Asians] colonial-era myth has (re)emerged and reinforced in modern day Myanmar with a strong religious fabric that has been carried forward through dominant institutions—religious

²⁸⁶ Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2020), The Role of Myth in Anti-Muslim Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar, Iselin Frydenlund (eds.), *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, Singapore: Springer Nature, pp. 217.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 215-16.

establishments, military, political parties, public figures etc. In 2011 afterwards, Ashin Wirathu and his fellow Buddhist monks of 969 platform revived the colonial era anti-Muslim myths with a new veil. It is pertinent to note that, the colonial period's inquiry report of the 1938 riots noted that, "one of the major sources of anxiety in the minds of a great number of Burmese was the question of the marriage of their womenfolk with foreigners in general and with Indians in particular."²⁸⁸

In 2012, an anti-Muslim violence has been erupted in the western coastal region of the country centering a wave of clashes between the 'Rohingya' Muslims and the Buddhist Rakine resulting in 'systematic torture' against 'Rohingya' minorities that have been reported by the Human Rights Watch (HRW) as a campaign of "ethnic cleansing" against 'Rohingyas'. During this time, a published state-backed investigation report charged the violence as 'contentious border tensions with neighboring Bangladesh' and accused 'Rohingya' Muslims alleging that, 'Bengalis' (a highly contested and pejorative denomination repeatedly uttered by the Burmese elites to describe the 'Rohingyas') were dreaming to take control of the state through the rapid growth of their population. Thus, addressing the 'Rohingya' minority as illegal 'Bengalis' and launching a systematic anti-Rohingya campaign, successive Burmese ethnocentric regimes sought to refuse 'Rohingya' denomination and tried to erase this ethnic identity from the soil of Myanmar. Amidst the violence, Burmese Buddhist extremists circulated pamphlets containing anti-Rohingya narratives; the message of these pamphlets was that, 'the global Islamic blueprint has made inroads into non-Muslim territories in diverse strategies, such as the practice of polygamy, constructing mosques, seeking legal acceptance (citizenship) for 'Rohingyas', taking control of the majority's culture and religion' that had fueled the local Buddhists' grievance.²⁸⁹ 'Many extremist Buddhists publicly demanded for the slaughter of all Muslims, particularly call for the killing of all illegal Bengalis'²⁹⁰ in Myanmar depicting them as a curse for the Buddhist nation.

²⁸⁸ Burma Riot Inquiry Committee, *Interim Report*, Rangoon: 1939.

²⁸⁹ Kipgen, Nehginpao (2014), Addressing the Rohingya problem, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 49(2), p. 242.

²⁹⁰ Zarni, M., Brinham, N. (2017), Reworking the Colonial Era Indian Peril: Myanmar's State-Directed Persecution of Rohingyas and Other Muslims, *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. XXIV, Issue. 1, p.54

However, shortly afterwards, the government reinstalled its ‘two-child policy’ aiming at the ‘Rohingyas’ that had further promoted a “xenophobic narrative”²⁹¹ about ‘Rohingya’ Muslims that, they pose serious threat to majority Burmese Buddhist people. Regarding this, the state officials of Rakhine argued that, ‘this policy will ease the ongoing tensions between the Buddhists and the Muslims’ as the Buddhists feel fear of the rapid growth of ‘Rohingya’ population in Rakhine state and view them as a ‘serious threat’²⁹² to Buddhist nationalism. On the contrary, in an interview with *The Irrawaddy* (a local magazine), Buddhist extremist monk Ashin Wirathu stated, “If the bill is enacted, it could stop the ‘Bengalis’ that call themselves ‘Rohingya’, who are trying to seize control”.²⁹³ Thus, on behalf of the ‘Protection of Nationality and Religion Movement’, extremist Buddhist monks with a racist anti-Muslim agenda, supported the Burma’s coerced population control law and propagated its motive across the country that had culminated then the existing bloodshed in Myanmar.

The Monks’ Muscle

In the post-transition period of Myanmar, both the 969 movement and the Ma Ba Tha supported the anti-Muslim/anti-Rohingya onslaught regardless of their ethnicity with a view to establishing a religiously and racially pure nation—Buddhist Bumar state; even though, not by their direct collaboration but through several anti-Rohingya instigating languages or voices. At this point of time, many Buddhist extremists (969 movement and Ma Ba Tha’s believers and followers) have taken to the internet (social media platforms) to spread their Islamophobic propaganda and to express grievance against the Muslims (particularly, ‘Rohingyas’) accusing them as ‘foreign invaders’ and drawing an analogy of them with Islam based extremist groups such as Taliban, Al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS).²⁹⁴ It is noteworthy that, amidst the anti-Rohingya violence in Rakhine state, Buddhist monks began to securitize ‘Rohingya’ issue claiming that, ‘hyper-fertile’ Bengali illegal Muslims submerge the northern Rakhine through their ‘fast breeding’ with too many children who would rapidly extinguish

²⁹¹ Minority Rights Group International. 2020. World directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, Myanmar/Burma: Muslims and Rohingya. London.

Available: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/muslims-and-rohingya/>. Accessed July 30 2020.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ The Guardian. 2015. Burma's birth control law exposes Buddhist fear of Muslim minority.

Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/25/burmas-birth-control-law-exposes-buddhist-fear-of-muslim-minority>. Accessed 29 July 2020.

²⁹⁴ The Irrawaddy. 2012. Arakan Conflict Spurs Hatred for Asia’s Outcasts. Available: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/features/arakan-conflict-spurs-hatred-for-asias-outcasts.html>. Accessed 12 August 2020.

Buddhist population²⁹⁵ and also pose severe threat to rest of the regions of Myanmar with its Islamization project. Regarding this, Ashin Wimala Biwuntha, one of the dominant Buddhist monks of 969 platform, delivered his sermon with a fiery speech claiming that, “We Buddhists are like people in a boat that is sinking. If this does not change, our race and religion will soon vanish”.²⁹⁶ During sermons, the 969 used to play a song with a fearful message that, ‘We Buddhists should not stay calm. If we do so, our race and religion will be replaced by “other” and will also be disappeared very soon’.²⁹⁷

Such anti-Rohingya threat-filled rhetoric and fictitious narratives have been widely accepted and circulated by the majority Burmese Buddhist public (audience) by using Facebook, tweeter, messenger and local media as an effective engine that has flamed the existing Buddhist-Muslim tensions in Myanmar and fiercely accelerated the process of making ‘Rohingyas’ enemy others. Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2020) elaborated the strategy that the Buddhist monks pursue in making Muslims as enemy ‘other’:

Buddhist sermons given by Ma Ba Tha monks, most prominently Ashin Wirathu of Mandalay and leaders of the 969 movement, which often used religious maps to show how Buddhism was a shrinking demographic and geopolitical minority in the world, and was under threat from Muslim Southeast Asia and South Asia added fuel to the fire. The most common examples of such countries used by those monks to support their claims were Indonesia, Malaysia, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh which, they claim, were once majority Buddhist or Hindu but are now Muslim. The southern Thailand conflict has often been used because, for many Myanmar Buddhists, the Malay Muslims there are just soldiers of Islam seeking to Islamize Buddhist Thailand.²⁹⁸

The firebrand Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu, the racist spiritual leader of the 969 Buddhist nationalist movement who has been titled as the “face of Buddhist terror” by *Time Magazine*, routinely delivers anti-Muslim rhetoric at religious gatherings. In the name of sermons, Wirathu’s speech crackles with hate that instigates majority Buddhists’ heart-burning against

²⁹⁵ Interview with Michael Charney, a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies and a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies, Arakan or Rakhine communalism and history; Chair of the Southeast Asian and Military History, SOAS, University of London, 19 February 2021.

²⁹⁶ Kyaw Zaw Moe, “A Radically Different Dhamma”, *The Irrawaddy*, June 22, 2013. Available: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/a-radically-different-dhamma.html>, Accessed 15 October 2020.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2020), *The Role of Myth in Anti-Muslim Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar*, Iselin Frydenlund (eds.), *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, Singapore: Springer Nature, pp. 218.

the minority Muslim ‘Rohingyas’. Buddhist extremist leaders used to organize rallies where posters containing “no human rights for terrorists” were exhibited by their believers and followers to show support for the government and military atrocities that have been launched against Muslim ‘Rohingyas’.²⁹⁹ The ultra-nationalists including former military officer “Bullet” Hla Swe (now tabloid editor) and de facto leader of the 969 Movement—Wirathu are placed as the key speakers at these rallies who delivered hate speeches against the ‘Rohingyas’ describing them ‘terrorists’/foreign invaders/evil *kala* that led to ‘xenophobic frenzy’ and profound resentment among the majority Buddhist public.

In 2014, Ma Ba Tha collected millions of signatures from Buddhists across the country and sent these to the central authority of the government and also to the legislature (Hluttaw) pressing for undertaking emergency actions and the passing of laws to protect Buddhism, (Buddhist Bamar) majority race and their Buddhist motherland from the potential threat of Islamization. This public pressure turned heat on the government following which U Thein Sein, the then President of Myanmar, forwarded Ma Ba Tha’s nationwide petition (with 1,335,600 signatures) to the Hluttaw and also introduced Race Protection Bills [four bills in a package] collectively known as *Myo-saung Upade* in 2014 urging for passing of laws in this regard. Shortly afterwards, the infamous *Race and Religion Protection Laws* (Law for Health Care Relating to Control of Population Growth, Monogamy Law, Religious Conversion Law and Interfaith marriage Law) was promulgated in 2015³⁰⁰ which is considered as one of the populist strategy of the then U Thein Sein administration in its terminal months in power to please the majority Buddhists immediately before the 2015’s elections. However, the statistical data of population growth rate of the past several decades in Rakhine and other regions speaks different. [Table 5](#) shows the religion-wise population distribution in different States of Myanmar and also presents the decadal population growth rate from 1973 to 2014 as per the Census Report of 1973, 1983 and 2014. The comparative analyses of the data presented below shows that, the percentage of total Buddhist population at Union level in 1973 and 1983 was 88.8 percent and 89.4 percent respectively that has risen to 89.8 percent in 2014. Unsurprisingly, the Census Reports show that, the proportion of country’s Muslim

²⁹⁹ Asia Times. 2019. Myanmar military chief seeks Muslim redemption. Available at: <https://asiatimes.com/2019/09/myanmar-military-chief-seeks-muslim-redemption/>. Accessed 10 July 2020.

³⁰⁰ Global Legal Monitor. Rahman, Shameema and Zeldin, Wendy, Burma: Four “Race and Religion Protection Laws” Adopted, September 14, 2015, Available: <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/burma-four-race-and-religion-protection-laws-adopted/> Accessed 15 October 2020.

population has fallen from 3.9 percent in 1973 and 1983 to 2.3 percent in 2014. On the other hand, the population growth rate in Buddhist majoritarian regions and Muslim majoritarian Rakhine State strongly nullify Buddhist nationalists' claim of 'the rise of Muslim population due to high birth rates threatens Buddhism' as justification of their anti-Muslim campaigns and hate speeches to protect Buddhist race and religion in Myanmar.

Table 5. Distribution of population in different States of Myanmar by religion and decadal population growth rate from 1973 to 2014 (in percentage).

State/Region	Year	Buddhists	Muslims	Population in States (in total)	
				1973-1983	1983-2014
Union	2014	89.8	2.3		
	1983	89.4	3.9	22.1	45.8
	1973	88.8	3.9		
Kachin	2014	64.0	1.6	22.6	86.7
	1983	57.8	1.5		
	1973	55.0	1.5		
Kayah	2014	49.9	1.1	33.1	70.2
	1983	46.2	1.2		
	1973	42.6	1.2		
Kayin	2014	84.5	4.6	22.9	49.2
	1983	83.7	5.2		
	1973	84.8	4.3		
Chin	2014	13.0	0.1	14.1	29.8
	1983	10.8	0.1		
	1973	8.9	0.1		
Sagaing	2014	92.2	1.1	23.8	37.9
	1983	93.8	1.0		
	1973	93.1	1.0		
Tanintharyi	2014	87.5	5.1	27.5	53.5
	1983	88.7	5.9		
	1973	88.7	5.9		
Bago	2014	93.5	1.2	19.5	28.1
	1983	94.3	1.2		
	1973	94.9	1.3		
Magway	2014	98.8	0.3	23.1	20.8
	1983	99.0	0.3		
	1973	99.0	0.3		
Mandalay	2014	95.7	3.0	24.8	60.0*
	1983	96.0	3.0		
	1973	96.0	3.0		
Mon	2014	92.6	5.8	27.8	22.3
	1983	92.2	6.0		
	1973	92.8	5.7		
Rakhine**	2014	96.2	1.4	19.4	>55.9
	1983	69.7	28.5		
	1973	68.7	29.2		
Yangon	2014	91.0	4.7	24.6	85.2
	1983	91.13	4.85		

	1973	88.6	7.0		
Shan	2014	81.7	1.0	16.9	56.7
	1983	83.9	1.2		
	1973	80.1	1.1		
Ayeyawady	2014	92.1	1.4	20.1	23.8
	1983	92.8	1.2		
	1973	93.1	1.3		
Nay Pyi Taw	2014	96.8	2.1	-	-
	1983	-	-	-	-
	1973	-	-		

Sources: Census Report of 1973, 1983 and 2014

* In 1983, Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory was included in Mandalay Region. Population growth from 1983 to 2014 in Mandalay includes the population of Nay Pyi Taw, counted as: $((\text{Population Mandalay 2014} + \text{Population Nay Pyi Taw 2014} - \text{Population Mandalay 1983}) / \text{Population Mandalay 1983}) \times 100$.

** In Rakhine State, the total size of non-enumerated population was 1,090,000 who were assumed to be Muslims or mainly affiliated with Islamic faith (Department of Population, 2016b). In Kachin and Kayin, the number of non-enumerated population were respectively 46,600 and 69,753 where no assumption was made and the religion of these estimated population are described as ‘Not Enumerated, Religion not Assumed’.

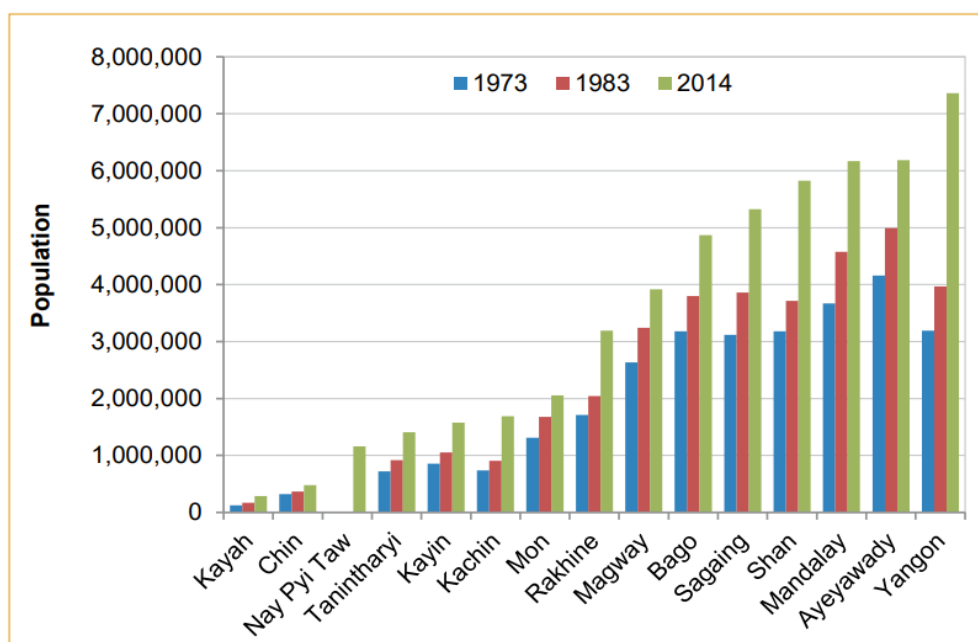


Figure 7: Total Population of Myanmar 1973, 1983 and 2014³⁰¹

³⁰¹ CENSUS ATLAS Myanmar, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census. Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Department of Population. Available:

Table 6. Crude birth rates and fertility rates in 2014

State/Region	Districts	Crude Birth Rate	Fertility rate (in total)
Union		19.8	2.5
Kachin		19.9	3.0
Kayah		26.3	3.5
Kayin		22.8	3.4
Chin		33.9	5.0
Sagaing		19.7	2.4
Tanintharyi		23.5	3.3
Bago		18.6	2.4
Magway		18.9	2.3
Mandalay		17.6	2.1
Mon		17.9	2.5
Rakhine		21.8	2.8
	Sittway	21.4	2.6
	Myauk U	23.0	2.8
	Maungtaw	26.1	3.4
	Kyaukpyu	21.8	3.0
	Thandwe	18.7	2.5
Yangon		15.9	1.8
Shan		23.2	3.1
Ayeyawady		21.7	2.8
Nay Pyi Taw		19.6	2.4

Source: Department of Population, 2016d

This is the way how the non-governing actors (religious elite) of Myanmar drives the governing actors to employ the state machineries or legal instruments to attain their desired goal of ‘othering’ (religiously) minority ethnic ‘Rohingyas’. It is noteworthy that, the military-backed, semi-civilian Thein Sein’s administration tactfully supported the launching of monk-based extremist organization named as “the Association for the Protection of Race and Faith” with a view to gaining overwhelming support from the Buddhists in the general elections of 2015. Notably, ‘many of the prominent Burmese Buddhist think tanks, monks, top-level government officials, technocrats and politicians actively propagated rumors about ‘Rohingyas’ as “ignorant descendants of illegal Bengalis” across the social media platforms and Burmese language services of the BBC, Voice of America, Democratic Voice of Burma,

as well as Radio Free Asia'.³⁰² Moreover, a large number of Burmese ultra-nationalists in Myanmar's press and electronic media, intelligentsia, and civil society groups relentlessly worked for constructing an institutionalized narratives about 'Rohingyas' as a 'national security threat' and by this, sparked the ongoing anti-Muslim/anti-Rohingya sentiment across the country. Here, 'Rohingyas' are sketched as potential "jihadists" having financial support from abroad, particularly, from the Muslim states, such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and also from the international organizations like Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).³⁰³ Regarding the official propaganda about so called 'Bengalis', Zarni and Brinham (2017) referred about an interview that had been conducted in Burmese-language in July 2017 between Aung Zaw (chief editor of Irrawaddy News Group) and Ye Htut (former minister at Ministry of Information) where both of them exaggerated the existing anti-Bengali narratives; portraying 'Rohingya' Muslims in Rakhine state as foreign 'jihadists', Islamic extremists and interlopers from the neighboring Bangladesh. It is alleged that, ARSA movement links with Al Qaeda and global jihadist groups who has been reinforcing religious militancy across the South Asia region and the beyond. But, Khin Zaw Win, a Burman (Bamar) Buddhist think tank member in Myanmar argued,

'Even though, the ARSA members are extremist, they are not militant enough and there has not found any convincing proofs of having their linkage with Al Qaeda or Islamic state. So, it is unfair to securitize all the 'Rohingyas' in the pretext of the ARSA's activities what we see in the last several decades, particularly in 2017'.³⁰⁴

Moreover, there has been pursued a massive religious discrimination within the Myanmar military in order to Buddhicize the whole system. If a military official does not belong to Buddhist community, he will never be promoted to the topmost rank of the Tatmadaw. Nowadays, almost all the military officials belong to the Buddhist identity whose ultimate goal is to establish Myanmar as a Buddhist polity.

³⁰² Zarni, M., Brinham, N. (2017), *Reworking the Colonial Era Indian Peril: Myanmar's State-Directed Persecution of Rohingyas and Other Muslims*, p.61

³⁰³ Ibid, p. 62.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Khin Zaw Win, a Burman (Bamar) Buddhist in Yangon who is serving as Director of Tampadipa Institute which is a think tank in Myanmar, 13 January 2021.

‘Rohingya’ Identity and the Sense of Belongingness: A Strong Rejection

A new tactics or strategy has been followed by the military and political leaders of Myanmar as they carefully ignore the word ‘Rohingyas’ in delivering their speech. For example, on December 2019, the leader of Myanmar Aung Sun Suu Kyi delivered a speech at International court of Justice in which she tried to defend the military against Gambia’s accusation. While defending against genocide charges, she did not pronounce the term ‘Rohingya’ in describing the status of this persecuted minority claiming that this is a “polarizing term”³⁰⁵ and thereby implicitly upholding the majority Burmese Buddhists’ accusation that these persecuted people were “interlopers” from neighboring Bangladesh instead of an ethnic minority. Even the Burmese officials’ disinclination to utter ‘Rohingya’ proved a strong sign that they refused to recognize the existence of this ethnic group. For example, on October, 2017, General Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar armed forces, mentioned ‘Rohingyas’ as “Bengalis” in a meeting with the US ambassador. In briefing, he accused the British colonialists referring that, (British) they were liable for the ongoing political crisis of Myanmar. He asserted, “Bengalis are not the natives”, but ‘they were shifted to this land under the British guard, not by Myanmar’. In 2018, the Burmese ministry of information asked the US-patronized Radio Free Asia (RFA) and BBC not to use the ‘controversial’ and ‘strictly prohibited’ ‘Rohingya’ terminology in their broadcasted shows (both RFA and BBC used to air their content with local network ‘Democratic Voice of Burma’ that airs on state’s television channel)³⁰⁶. These issues lied at the heart of this Rohingya crisis. Thus, the denial of the ethnic identity ‘Rohingya’ is a further step to securitize this issue. The term ‘Rohingya’ is considered as politically and ideologically uploaded with contestation and for this, it is ignored by the elites to serve their interests (to gain electoral support from the majority Burman Buddhists, to gain legitimacy and to consolidate or entrench power). In fact, ‘Rohingyas’ are deemed as ‘subhuman’ in Myanmar and they are being discriminated in all spheres.

³⁰⁵ Anealla Safdar and Usaid Siddiqui, “ ICJ Speech: Suu Kyi Fails to use ‘Rohingya’ to Describe Minority”, Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/aung-san-suu-kyi-fails-word-rohingya-icj-speech-191212102606322.html>, Accessed on 4 February 2010.

³⁰⁶ The Washington Post. 2018. Myanmar is now erasing the ‘Rohingya’s very name. Available: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/myanmar-is-now-erasing-the-rohingyas-very-name/2018/06/16/e3f66986-6f40-11e8-bf86-a2351b5ece99_story.html. Accessed 15 August 2020.

Regarding the ongoing dilemma of identity of Muslims and Rohingyas in Myanmar, Yan Naing argued,

“According to the Immigration office of Myanmar, if an individual having faith in Islam wants to get national identity card, the concerned authority must use the name of foreign countries before the nationality as compulsory such as- India plus Bama, Bangali plus Bama, or Pakistan plus Bama. It is not a matter of consideration whether this person belongs to this country ever or not. Surprisingly, if a Burman Buddhist converts to Muslim, his nationality in the identity card will also be inserted with the name of the foreign countries, like India-Bama, Bangali-Bama or Pakistan-Bama. Naing added, even though, he had never been in India, he has to write India plus Bama (India+Bama) in his identity card only because he is a Muslim, otherwise, he would not be provided with ID card. It is widely believed in Myanmar that, Islam is an identity of foreign nationalities and entered into Myanmar with the immigrants”.³⁰⁷

As a part of securitization, ‘Rohingyas’ are consistently tagged as ‘illegal Bengali immigrants’ in Myanmar, even though, they had been residing Arakan long before the emergence of present-day Myanmar. Nowadays, this term ‘Rohingya’ has been appeared as a highly ambiguous and disputed appellation, for this, ‘Rohingya’ Muslims feel fear to disclose their indigenous identity in Myanmar; even, in the diasporas, they hesitate to unveil their ethnic root as ‘Rohingyas’ to get off unwanted harassment.

Democratic Dilemma: Did Political Liberalization Promote the ‘Othering’ of ‘Rohingyas’?

Following Myanmar’s long-desired political transition from military dictatorship to democratization, dominant Burmese elites including military leaders, Buddhist monks, political forces, public figures and intelligentsia persuaded an agenda of reinforcing anti-Rohingya propaganda aiming at ‘othering’ the minority Muslims (both Rohingyas and non-Rohingyas) misusing the then ongoing political and media freedoms.³⁰⁸ Since 2010, these elite groups have taken control over the democratic platforms, such as, uncensored electronic and print media, freedom of press and assembly, public gatherings and freedom of expression

³⁰⁷ Interview with Yan Naing (Mr. Bellal), a Muslim lawyer in Myanmar (having Tamil Indian root) and also a politician of the Muslim political party- UNC, 20 January 2021.

³⁰⁸ Lee, R. (2016), The Dark Side of Liberalization: How Myanmar’s Political and Media Freedoms Are Being Used to Limit Muslim Rights. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 27(2), 195-211.

or people's opinions) for propagating anti-Rohingya hate speeches and discourses of exclusion to execute state's goal of alienating 'Rohingyas'. In the present age of Myanmar's 'superficial democratization',³⁰⁹ social media revolution³¹⁰ have been taken place while the narratives that have been constructed by the top-level elites of Myanmar became widespread and common among the general Buddhist population through internet or different social media platforms, such as facebook, messenger, tweeter etc. and thus, a sense of hostility arose begetting (Buddhist-Muslim) majority-minority dilemma. Regarding this, Bhikkhu Mandalar Zan, a Buddhist monk in Myanmar argued that,

“Following the relaxation of media restrictions along the political liberalization in Myanmar since 2010, many Burmese Buddhist ultra-nationalists use Facebook, WhatsApp, and Viber as primary tools to propagate misconceptions and raw message against Rohingyas and other minority ethnic groups that got accepted and became widespread among the lay people of the society. Besides these, there are some media agencies that spread hate and fear against the Muslim 'Rohingyas'. In effect, not only the government controlled news agencies but also some of the private media agencies negatively present news or reports addressing Rohingyas as 'Bengalis'. Both the MaBaTha and the 969 also routinely publish and propagate some magazines portraying Rohingyas as fearsome 'others', an existential threat for all. Moreover, there are some military-controlled media in Myanmar such as, Myawaddy Daily, Kyaymon (The Mirror) Daily, Myawaddy Television which misrepresented the minority Muslim Rohingyas as 'intruders', 'strangers', 'Bengali' and also as 'illegal immigrants' came from Bangladesh who do not belong to our ethnic groups, the Buddhist land Myanmar”.³¹¹

It is noteworthy that, formerly, this trend of securitization was not so extensive, even, not during the regime of military dictatorship. Thus, in the pretext of political liberalization, both the Burmese elites and the lay people spreads fear and hate against the 'Rohingyas' and also other Muslim ethnic groups making their 'cultural personhood' downgraded.³¹² With the increasing modernization and political opening in Myanmar, there have been arisen more

³⁰⁹ Zakaria, F. (1997), The rise of illiberal democracy. *Foreign Affairs*, 76(6), 22-43.

³¹⁰ Interview with Michael Charney, a UK based Scholar on Burma Studies, Arakan or Rakhine communalism and history; Chair of the Southeast Asian and Military History, SOAS, University of London, 19 February 2021.

³¹¹ Interview with Bhikkhu Mandalar Zan, a Buddhist monk in Myanmar, 22 January 2021.

³¹² Kyaw, N. N. (2015), Alienation, Discrimination, and Securitization: Legal Personhood and Cultural Personhood of Muslims in Myanmar. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 13(2), 50-51.

tension among the Burmese Buddhists people regarding the extinction of culture, identity and traditions which was prevalent in the colonial Burma and also rapidly fueled the then nationalist movement; these sentiments are also dominant in the present-day Myanmar. In an in-depth interview, Khin Zaw Win asserted that, ‘In Myanmar case, a tightly controlled system opened up and more democratic freedom and practices were allowed that has successfully multiplied the acts of otherization and massive propaganda at all levels. At this point in time, the whole system rarely found ready to handle this radical propagation. The same case happened in countries of Europe (particularly in former Yugoslavia) and South Asia. This is one of the unfortunate side effects and byproducts of the process of (pseudo) democratization and political re-opening.’³¹³

It appears from the above analyses that in the 2010 afterwards, ethnicity and religion became intermingled in Myanmar and the dominant securitizing actors prefers to do ‘high politics’ centering identity and migration. Following the increasing liberalization of political system, formerly imposed media censorship during military regime has been withdrawn and all forms of restrictions have been ended up. Flowing from this political re-opening, dominant elite groups (securitizing actors at top level) and the grassroots Burmese Buddhist people (securitizing actors at horizontal level) publicly began to spread hate speeches and anti-Rohingya narratives claiming that, ‘they’ are existential threat for ‘us’; threat to the identity, religion and sovereignty of the Buddhist nation-Myanmar. It is noteworthy that, in 2010 afterwards, dominant religious agencies (Buddhist monks) became highly active in propagating hate speeches for securitizing ‘Rohingyas’ through ‘speech act’ using religious platforms, such as, the 969 Movement and the Ma Ba Tha. Since 2010, more actors have become active and engaged in securitization while diverse narratives and discourses have been produced to present the ‘Rohingya’ issue as a threat. Since then, the authorities in Myanmar began to explain and stand up certain of their attitudes, the presentation of ‘Rohingyas’ as a threat predominantly at two levels- at the demographic level and at the cultural level. In effect, after the installation of the quasi-civilian government under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD, the securitization of ‘Rohingyas’ followed the former flow under the military dictatorship that has been in many cases accelerated than the former.

³¹³ Interview with Khin Zaw Win, a Burman (Bamar) Buddhist in Yangon who is serving as Director of Tampadipa Institute which is a think tank in Myanmar, 13 January 2021.

Period	Regime Type	Securitization Strategies	Key Actors	Outcome	Level of Securitization
1948-1962	Democracy	<p>Giving Buddhism 'special position' in constitution</p> <p>Burmanization of education system</p> <p>Making majority Burman language and culture mandatory at school level</p> <p>The costume of ethnic Burman was informally adopted as national dress code</p> <p>Declaring Buddhism as the official state religion</p>	Government	<p>Threat to minority's religion, culture, language and tradition.</p> <p>A Sense of alienation</p>	Low
1962-2010	Military Dictatorship	<p>Ethnographic engineering- the remaking of the ethnic political geography</p> <p>Redesigning exclusionary national curriculum and history</p> <p>Framing discourses: 'guest-versus-host', 'foreigners-versus- nationals', 'fake citizens-versus-true citizens' and 'traitor-versus-patriot' etc.</p> <p>Redesigning discriminatory citizenship law, 1982</p>	Military Religious elites	<p>Mischievous policy of Burmanization</p> <p>Division of ethnicity as 'we' versus 'they'</p> <p>Framing 'Rohingyas' as 'Others'.</p> <p>Majority-minority dilemma</p>	High

2010- Present	Civilian- Military/ Quasi-Civilian	<p>Using anti-Rohingya discourses as national slogans ‘Othering’ by language idioms/phrase, routine speeches, official statements and sermons of elite groups.</p> <p>Dominant religious agencies (Buddhist monks) propagated hate speeches against ‘Rohingyas’ taking Buddhist platforms-the 969 Movement and the Ma Ba Tha.</p> <p>Misusing social media platforms to spread hate speeches</p> <p>High politics centering ‘Rohingya’ identity</p>	Government, Military, Monks, Political leaders, Intellectuals	A sense of deep mistrust and volatility Rohingya-phobia: Portray ‘Rohingyas’ as ‘existential threat’.	Very High
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Figure 8: Regime-wise analysis of ‘Rohingya’ Securitization

Chapter-7

Conclusion

The general argument of this research is that elite's perception and behavior determines the construction of an identity in a nation. Here, nations, nationalities and national identity are the outcomes of elite's collective imaginations and actions. Analyzing the case of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar, the specific argument of this study stands as- the perceptions and actions of the dominant Burmese elites led to the securitization of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar. Here, the central question of the study remains as- how has the 'Rohingyas' been securitized in Myanmar? In this regard, this study argues that the actions, strategies, and speeches of the successive military, political, religious and intellectual elites in Myanmar under different military and (quasi) civilian regimes led the securitization of this (religious) minority group- 'Rohingyas'. Based on the nature of the regimes, these actors pursue 'high politics' centering migration, religion and identity in Myanmar with the reinforcement of diverse strategies to consolidate and entrench their power that eventually led to the making of 'Rohingya' identity other. Flowing from this, a relevant query arises at this point of discussion and it is- what are the means to securitize the 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar? In reality, this ethnic minority has been otherized through the speech acts, whereas the elite-driven anti- Rohingya propaganda presenting them as 'illegal Bengali immigrants', 'illegal aliens', 'enemy foreigners' and 'Islamic terrorists' for long shaped the psycho-cultural perspectives of the majority Burmese Buddhist public that establishes a strong feeling of intimidation that these 'Rohingya' intruders pose consistent existential threats to their identity, religion, society, economy and also to the territorial integrity of the country.

The securitization of 'Rohingyas' is a gradual and incremental process that took place under successive regimes. In the first democratic regime of Myanmar under Premier U Nu, there have been undertaken several discriminatory measures which deliberately excluded minorities from the mainstream Burman Buddhists tarnishing their long cherished dream of autonomy and self-rule. But, there were not seen any major dilemma regarding the 'Rohingya' identity and their ethnic status. The historical facts and incidents shows that, the colonial era anti-Muslim/Rohingya sentiment that has been latent during the first democratic regime has later been re-emerged and sparked with the militarization of politics in Myanmar and also under the quasi-civilian military backed NLD regime. Over the time, the military dictatorship designed exclusionary Citizenship Act that denied the existence of 'Rohingyas'

as one of the Myanmar's indigenous groups. During this military regime, the real otherization of 'Rohingya' identity has taken place while the country's military-political and intellectual establishment tactfully incorporated revisionist history prioritizing the supremacy of the Buddhist Bama nationalism and history excluding 'Rohingya' existence who are consistently presented as 'invented political identity' (see Chapter 3). Besides, a series of exclusionary narratives have been installed in Myanmar against this ethnic minority: 'guest-versus-host', 'foreigners-versus-nationals', 'fake citizens-versus-true citizens' and 'traitor-versus-patriot' discourses which are more dominant among these constructed falsified narratives. However, since the 1990s, the religious forces, such as monks, monasteries, and religious extremism became more prominent in the Burmese way of life and flowing from this, 'Rohingya' identity has been used as a potential threat that played an instrumental role in serving the electoral and geopolitical interests of the ethnocratic regimes. These hate-filled rhetoric became widespread across the country that has gradually internalized the perceptions of majority Buddhist general people about 'Rohingyas' as 'external forces' cultivating zero-sum sentiments.

With the passage of time, ethnicity and religion became intermingled in Myanmar while the division of ethnicity as 'we' versus 'they' has created a sense of deep mistrust and volatility that also fueled the contemporary majority-minority dilemma in Myanmar, particularly in Rakhine state. Flowing from the political liberalization and pseudo democratization since 2011, dominant securitizing actors at the top level and the grassroots Burmese Buddhist people at the bottom level massively launched hate speeches and anti-Rohingya narratives making allegations that, these Muslim 'Rohingya' Bengalis are threat for 'us', to our identity, and religion. It is noteworthy that, in 2010 afterwards, dominant religious agencies including Buddhist monks became highly active in spreading hate speeches and derogatory narratives for marginalizing 'Rohingya' identity through 'speech act', particularly misusing several Buddhist platforms-the 969 Movement and the Ma Ba Tha. Thus, majority's perceptions regarding 'Rohingyas' as 'enemy others' shapes the ethno-political contestation and dilemma centering identity that remained unchanged till today (see Chapter 3).

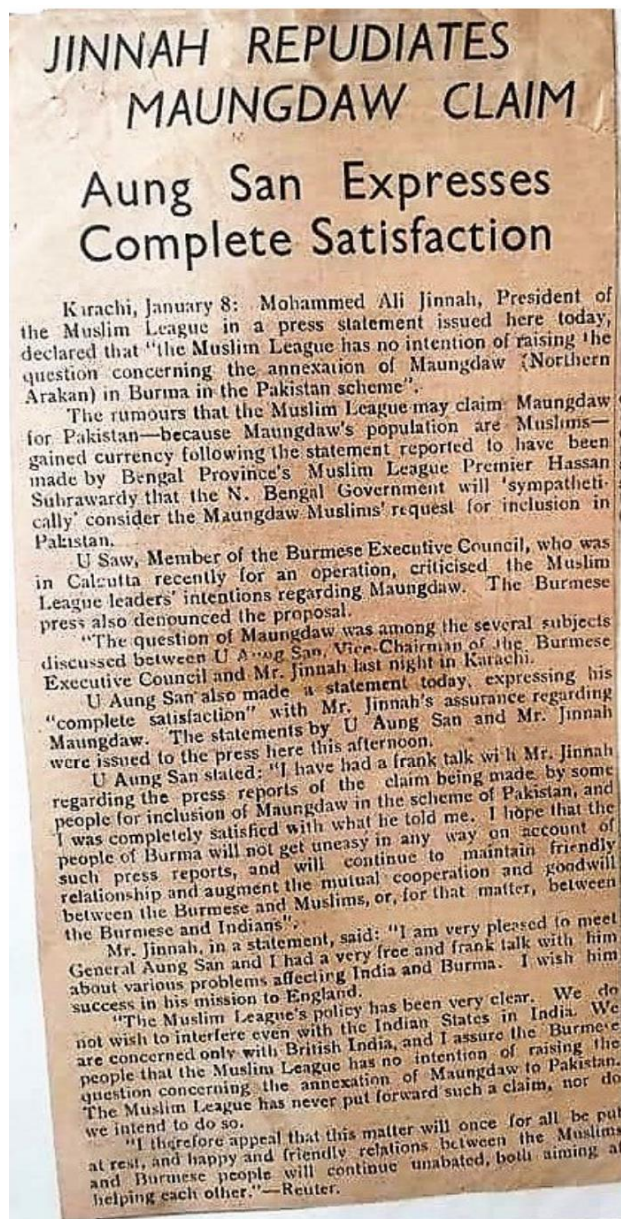
However, another significant dimension of this research is to find out what are the reasons behind this securitization of Rohingyas by the governing and non-governing elites of Myanmar? There have been found several possible reasons for which 'Rohingyas' have been targeted to be securitized. The sense of mistrust and fear that have been cultivated in the pre-

colonial era in this region and particularly, centering the 1947's 'Rohingya' appeal for an autonomous Muslim national territory had led to severe effects in the post-independence period. The historical context of the creation of this mistrust and volatility between the state and the ethnic 'Rohingyas' led to further dilemma (see Chapter 2). Moreover, the successive regimes found it easy and thornless to target the 'Rohingyas' to securitize on the pretext of the historical incidents as they are not armed enough and they do not have a long history of armed insurgency like other ethnic groups such as the Shan, Karen and the Rakhine.

Apart from these, the Burmese elites call for the denial of 'Rohingya' identity arguing that, since geo-strategically Rakhine state is mostly intermingled with the border of vastly populated Bangladesh with its shared geography, culture (language and religion) and history, there is a potent possibility of being seized of this territory by Bangladesh with its explosive Muslim population. The successive governments feel fear of the Muslim's invasion of Myanmar and alleged that, the neighboring Bangladeshi Muslims would take over the Buddhist land using 'Rohingya' Muslims in Rakhine as a proxy. This misperception became widespread among the general Buddhist public (majority) who sought to project 'Rohingyas' as 'foreign invaders', 'external element' and 'illegal Bengali immigrants'. They pressed for undertaking emergency extra-ordinary means arguing that, if these threats are not dealt in urgent, our identity and religion will extinct in near future. Even, during the election campaign, political parties launch anti-'Rohingya' propaganda and "hate-filled rhetoric" across the country to get popularity among the majority Buddhist voters and to secure electoral triumph by making the vote bank heavier than others (see Chapter 3). In effect, this long-planned, well-designed and systematic efforts of the successive democratic, military and quasi-civilian ethnocentric regimes reinforced the discourses of 'othering' 'Rohingyas' within a broader umbrella of securitization that eventually led to several geopolitical and inter-state challenges in South Asia and the beyond. Before closing, I would like to say that this research is from complete. Being a Bangladeshi, I have tried my best to capture the reality of Rohingya's otherization took place in Myanmar. More information needed from inside Myanmar which could enrich this research further.

ANNEXURE 1

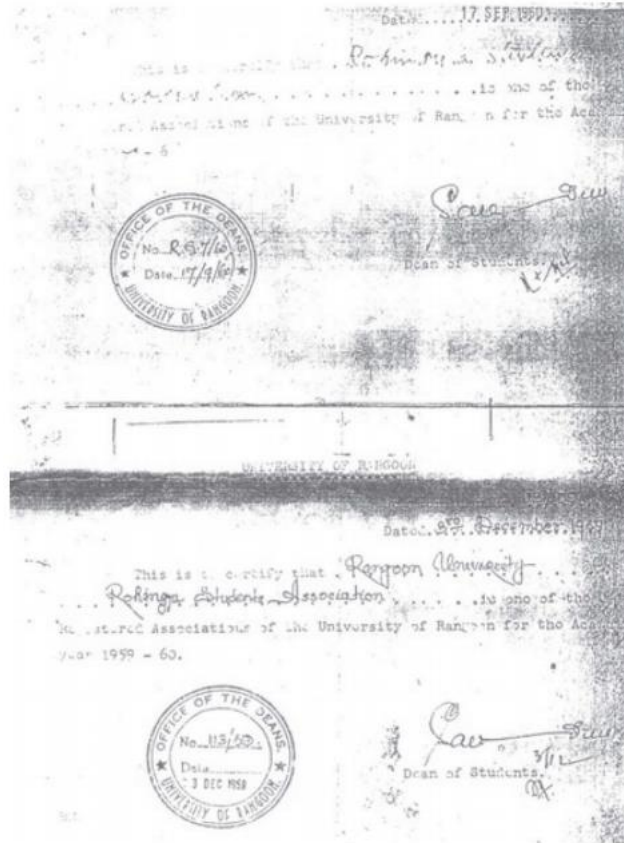
Excerpt from Newspaper on Formal Statement rejecting the Annexation of Northern Arakan with Pakistan Scheme³¹⁴



³¹⁴ This excerpt from newspaper has been collected from a 'Rohingya' migrant in Chattogram, Bangladesh.

ANNEXURE 2

Rohingya Student Association at Rangoon University³¹⁵



³¹⁵ Ibrahim, Azeem (2017), *The Rohingyas Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, Hurst & Company, Speaking Tiger, New Delhi.

ANNEXURE 3

Rejection of 'Rohingya' Identity by the Rakhine Buddhists in Sittwe (November 2014)³¹⁶



ANNEXURE 4

Burmese Buddhists' Protest denying 'Rohingya' Existence in Myanmar's History³¹⁷



³¹⁶ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'Burma's Path to Genocide'. Available: <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/burmas-path-to-genocide/chapter-3/weakened>. Accessed 20 February 2021.

³¹⁷ Geneva International Centre for Justice Reports, 2017. Available: <https://www.gicj.org/gicj-reports/1298-save-rohingya-from-genocide>. Accessed 20 February 2021.

ANNEXURE 5

Government Elite's Rejection of 'Rohingya' as a Race³¹⁸

The **New Light of Myanmar**

11th Waxing of Tabodwe 1374 ME Thursday, 21 February, 2013

No 'Rohingya' race in Myanmar, says Deputy Minister

NAY PYI TAW, 20 Feb— There is no so-called 'Rohingya' ethnic race in Myanmar, Deputy Immigration and Population Minister U Kyaw Kyaw Win said at Pyithu Hluttaw today.

He repeated the comment twice in his answers to questions raised by U Maung Nyo of Sittway Constituency and Daw Khin Saw Wai of Yathedaung Constituency – both from Rakhine State which in 2012 witnessed bloody strife between two communities involving indigenous Rakhine nationals.

The deputy minister also said there is no official information with the word 'Rohingya' which MP U Maung Nyo mentioned as a 'newly coined word'.

"I do not say there is no Bengali in Myanmar," Daw Khin Saw Wai told The New Light of Myanmar, saying the purpose of the question is to make clear that there is no "Rohingya" ethnic race in Myanmar.

U Maung Nyo said, "I am satisfied with the answer of the deputy minister."

U Aung Tun Tha of Mrauk U Constituency raised the question on lifting of the ban of tourist visit to Mrauk U. The answer by Deputy Minister for Hotels and Tourism Dr Tin Shwe is 'soon', making clear that the ministry's commitment is not financial or commercial motivation.

U Thein Swe of An Constituency and U Saw Ra Thein of Thabon



³¹⁸ The New Light of Myanmar. 21 February 2013.

ANNEXURE 6

Extremist Buddhist Monks’ Rally against the UN Special Rapporteur³¹⁹



Buddhist monks protest against visiting UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar Yanghee Lee in Rangoon. AFP

ANNEXURE 7

A Public Poster in Myanmar Street Describing the Term ‘Rohingya’ as ‘Fake’³²⁰

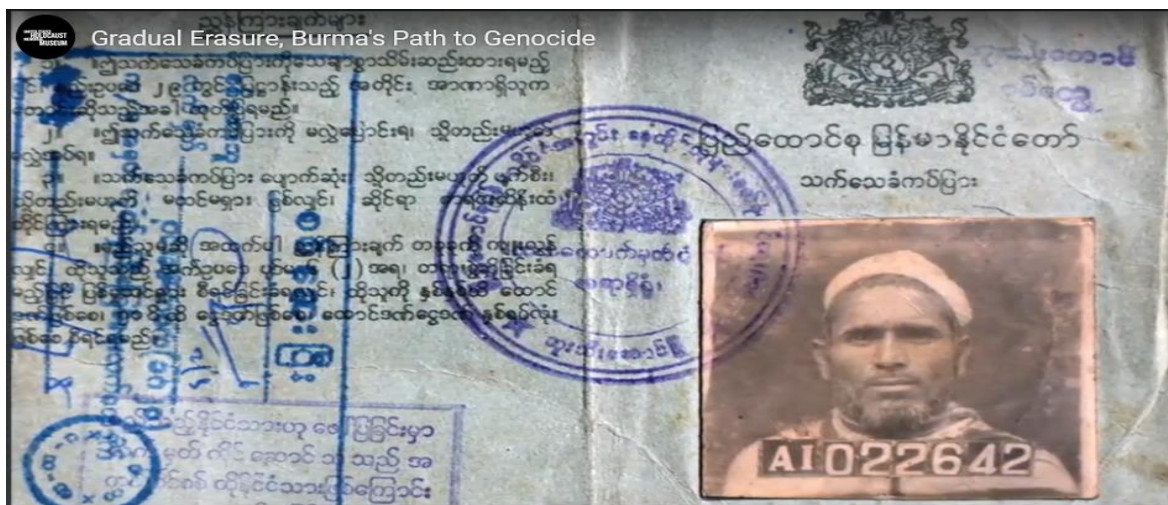


³¹⁹ PILGRIM, S. (2015), ‘Buddhist Monks called UN expert ‘whore’ over Muslim support’. Available: <https://www.france24.com/en/20150121-burma-buddhist-monk-un-expert-whore-anti-muslim-wirathu>. Accessed 19 February 2021.

³²⁰ This photo was posted by dominant Buddhist monk Wirathu in his facebook page on 28 April 2016.

ANNEXURE 8

'Rohingya' ID Cards in post-independence period³²¹



³²¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Gradual Erase, Burma's Path to Genocide. Available: <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/burmas-path-to-genocide/chapter-2/stripping-away-citizenship>.

ANNEXURE 9

Registration lists change the ethnic status of 'Rohingyas' from 'Rohingya' (in 1978), to 'Islam' (in 1984), then to 'Bengali' (in 1996).³²²

1978

Handwritten registration form for 1978. The form includes fields for name, address, and registration details. The 'Race' column is marked with 'Rohingya'.

အမှတ်စဉ်	အမည်	မွေးဖွားသည့်					အဘအမည်	အိမ်ထောင်စဉ်မှိုင်းနှင့် မည်သို့တော်စပ်သည်	အလုပ်အကိုင်	မှတ်ပုံတင်အမှတ်စဉ်			Race	နိုင်ငံသား	ဘာသာ	မှတ်ချက်
		ရက်	လ	ခုနှစ်	ကျား	မ				မြို့နယ် သင်္ကေတ	နိုင်ငံသား	နိုင်ငံမြို့သား				
၁	၂	၃	၄	၅	၆	၇	၈	၉	၁၀	၁၁	၁၂	၁၃	၁၄	၁၅	၁၆	၁၇
၁	ကော့ကော့			၁၂		✓	ကော့ကော့	ဦးစီး	ကျ စာပေ	BTA ၁၇၁၂၃			Rohingya	မူ	မွတ်စလင်	
၂	ကျွန်းစိမ်း			၁၀		✓	ကျွန်းစိမ်း	ဦးစီး	ဗိုလ်	AI ၁၃၃၈၉၇						
၃	မာမာမာ			၁၂		✓	မာမာမာ	မိန်းမ	မိန်းမ	BTA ၁၇၁၂၃						၂၆/၁/၇၁
၄	မာမာမာ			၁၆		✓	"	"	"							
၅	မာမာမာ			၁၉		✓	"	"	"							
၆	မာမာမာ			၁၉၀၄		✓	"	"	မိန်းမ							

1984

Handwritten registration form for 1984. The form includes fields for name, address, and registration details. The 'Race' column is marked with 'Islam'.

အမှတ်စဉ်	အမည်	မွေးဖွားသည့်					အဘအမည်	အိမ်ထောင်စဉ်မှိုင်းနှင့် မည်သို့တော်စပ်သည်	အလုပ်အကိုင်	မှတ်ပုံတင်အမှတ်စဉ်			Race	နိုင်ငံသား	ဘာသာ	မှတ်ချက်
		ရက်	လ	ခုနှစ်	ကျား	မ				မြို့နယ် သင်္ကေတ	နိုင်ငံသား	နိုင်ငံမြို့သား				
၁	၂	၃	၄	၅	၆	၇	၈	၉	၁၀	၁၁	၁၂	၁၃	၁၄	၁၅	၁၆	၁၇
၁	ကျွန်းစိမ်း			၁၀		✓	ကျွန်းစိမ်း	ဦးစီး	ဗိုလ်	AI ၁၃၃၈၉၇			Islam	မူ	မွတ်စလင်	
၂	ကျွန်းစိမ်း			၁၀		✓	ကျွန်းစိမ်း	ဦးစီး	ဗိုလ်	AI ၁၃၃၈၉၇						
၃	မာမာမာ			၁၂		✓	မာမာမာ	မိန်းမ	မိန်းမ	BTA ၁၇၁၂၃						၂၆/၁/၇၁
၄	မာမာမာ			၁၆		✓	"	"	"							
၅	မာမာမာ			၁၉		✓	"	"	"							

1996

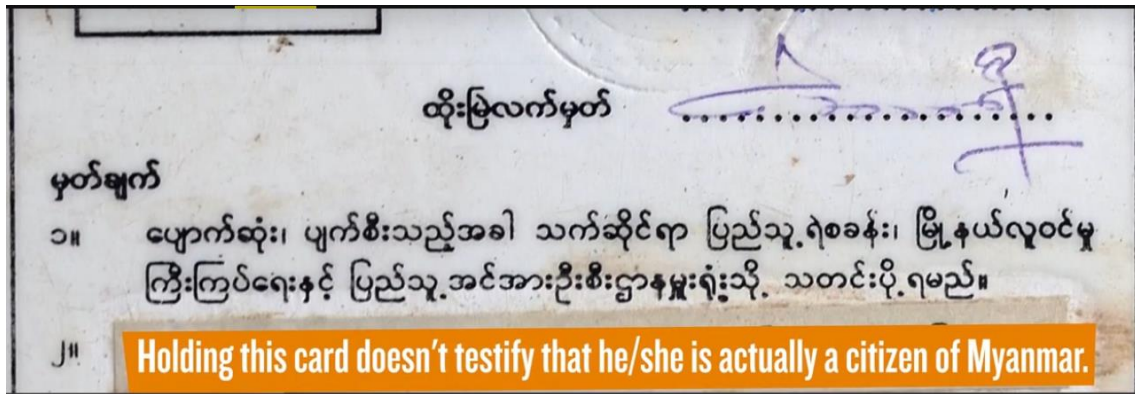
Handwritten registration form for 1996. The form includes fields for name, address, and registration details. The 'Race' column is marked with 'Bengali'.

အမှတ်စဉ်	အမည်	မွေးဖွားသည့်					အဘအမည်	အိမ်ထောင်စဉ်မှိုင်းနှင့် မည်သို့တော်စပ်သည်	အလုပ်အကိုင်	မှတ်ပုံတင်အမှတ်စဉ်			Race	နိုင်ငံသား	ဘာသာ	မှတ်ချက်
		ရက်	လ	ခုနှစ်	ကျား	မ				မြို့နယ် သင်္ကေတ	နိုင်ငံသား	နိုင်ငံမြို့သား				
၁	၂	၃	၄	၅	၆	၇	၈	၉	၁၀	၁၁	၁၂	၁၃	၁၄	၁၅	၁၆	၁၇
၁	ကျွန်းစိမ်း			၁၂		✓	ကျွန်းစိမ်း	ဦးစီး	ဗိုလ်	BTA ၁၇၁၂၃			Bengali	မူ	ဗုဒ္ဓ	
၂	ကျွန်းစိမ်း			၁၀		✓	ကျွန်းစိမ်း	ဦးစီး	ဗိုလ်	AI ၁၃၃၈၉၇						
၃	မာမာမာ			၁၂		✓	မာမာမာ	မိန်းမ	မိန်းမ	BTA ၁၇၁၂၃						၂၆/၁/၇၁
၄	မာမာမာ			၁၆		✓	"	"	"							
၅	မာမာမာ			၁၉		✓	"	"	"							

322 Ibid.

ANNEXURE 10

In 1995, ‘Rohingyas’ receive ID cards which were temporary and not proof of Burmese citizenship³²³



ANNEXURE 11

Public rally by the supporters (hardline Buddhist group) of Myanmar military at Thilawa Port, Yangon in response to the arrival of Malaysian relief carrying ship for ‘Rohingyas’³²⁴



³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ <https://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-facebook-bans-myanmar-army-chief-and-other-military-officials-over-human-rights-abuses-2655572>.

ANNEXURE 12

Military propaganda poster with the title 'People's Desire' in Mandalay, Myanmar³²⁵



ANNEXURE 13

Military government' propaganda in Mandalay of Myanmar on September 26, 2007.³²⁶



³²⁵ <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-man-cycling-in-front-of-tatmadaw-army-propaganda-poster-titled-peoples-79444615.html>

³²⁶ http://unhumanrights.org/02gen/0201myanmar/0201_01.htm.

ANNEXURE 14

Questionnaire

Securitization of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar: An Analysis

(All collected information to be used for academic purposes)

Information about respondent

Name of respondents:

Age:

Profession:

Contact no:

1. Do you think that 'Rohingyas' have been otherized in Myanmar? How?
2. Who are the dominant securitizing actors (who are propagating against Rohingyas) of Myanmar?
3. We know that, along with the 'Rohingya' minority there are many other Muslim minority ethnic groups in Myanmar like Kaman, Malays, Panthays etc. Do you think that, the successive governments, political leaders and Buddhist monks of Myanmar singularly targeted/securitized the Rohingya Muslims?
4. What are the reasons behind the 'otherization' of 'Rohingyas' by the governing and non-governing elites of Myanmar? Why do they perceive 'Rohingyas' as a security threat for their religion/identity/national sovereignty?
5. We know that, initially there arose an anti-Indian sentiment among the Burmese Buddhists people during the Colonial era. Why and how did this historical Indophobia later transform into Rohingya-phobia or Islamphobia in Myanmar?
6. Did Myanmar government take any initiative/policy to alienate 'Rohingyas' during its first democratic era (1948-1962)?
7. How did the military leaders lead to the otherization of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar?
8. What are the strategies the Buddhist monks/religious leaders follow to spread anti-Muslim/anti-Rohingya propaganda?
9. Do you think that, anti-Rohingya hate speeches lead to the securitization of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar?
10. Did the state-patronized media and agencies play role in manufacturing falsified narratives about 'Rohingyas'?

11. Do you think that the absence of democratic political process for long in Myanmar has triggered the otherization of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar?
12. How far the majority political parties use the anti-Rohingya narratives to get the support from the majority Burmese Buddhists during elections who are considered as 'vote bank'? Would you please say something about the anti-Rohingya position of Aung San Suu Khyi?
13. The western/international media used to portrait Islam/Muslims as a 'symbol of terrorism'. Is there any linkage between these assumptions and 'Rohingya' securitization? Does Burmese actors (government, politicians and monks) refer this to portray 'Rohingyas' as 'fearsome other'?
14. How far this 'Rohingya' securitization is interlinked to global events like 9/11 incident in 2001?
15. What are the major consequences (geopolitical consequences and inter-state relations) of the securitization of 'Rohingyas' in Myanmar? Does geopolitics (resource politics) influence this process of genocidal attempt against 'Rohingyas'?

ANNEXURE 15

Name of Respondents

1. Michael W. Charney, a UK based leading scholar on Burma Studies, Arakan or Rakhine communalism and history; Chair of the Southeast Asian and Military History, SOAS, University of London.
2. Jaques Leider, a French historian on Burma/Rakhine who is reputed for his research that Rohingya identity is deliberately constructed in the post-independence period of Burma.
3. Nehginpao Kipgen, India based scholar on Burma Studies, Professor and Executive Director at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University.
4. Rahman Nasir Uddin, a cultural anthropologist at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh who writes on Rohingya/Myanmar issue.
5. Khin Zaw Win, a Burman (Bamar) Buddhist in Yangon who is serving as Director of Tampadipa Institute which is a think tank in Myanmar.
6. Aman Ullah, a 'Rohingya' migrant residing in Chattogram, Bangladesh since 1985 and also a former member of Arakan Rohingya National Organization.
7. Kyaw Zeyar Win, a Burmese scholar based in the United States of America, 19 January 2021.
8. Yan Naing (Mr. Bellal), a Muslim lawyer in Myanmar (having Tamil Indian root) and also a politician of the Muslim political party- UNC.
9. Ro Nay San Lwin, a Rohingya activist based in Germany and also the Co-founder of Free Rohingya Coalition.
10. Ali Johar, India based Rohingya activist and also a Rohingya migrant residing in India.
11. Khing Maung (Mr. Rafique), a Rohingya activist concentrating in a refugee camp across the border in Bangladesh.
12. Md. Sadek, a Rohingya migrant residing in a refugee camp across the border in Bangladesh.
13. Abdu Shukkur, a Turkey based Rohingya activist who is conducting research on the Rohingya dilemma and the democratic transition of Myanmar.
14. Mohammad Noor (Maung Nu), a Rohingya political activist based in the United States of America.
15. Bhikkhu Mandalay Zan, a Buddhist monk in Mandalay, Myanmar.

16. Ven Seintita, a Buddhist monk and also an owner of several Dhamma Schools in Myanmar.
17. U Thein (pseudonym), a Buddhist monk in Myanmar who is a member of Ma Ba Tha.
18. T. Kyaw. Htay (pseudonym), a Ma Ba Tha monk in Mandalay, Myanmar.
19. U Zaw Aung (pseudonym), a Burman Buddhist in Yangon.
20. K. Thaung (pseudonym), a Rakhine Buddhist in Rakhine State, Myanmar.