# State Onslaught and Ethnic Faultlines:
## Oscillating Identities of the Rohingya between Myanmar and Bangladesh

**Hasan A. Shafie**
**(University of Dhaka)**

## Introduction

Onslaught of the Rohingya people in Myanmar constitutes the textbook example of ethnic cleansing in contemporary time. The Rohingya, an ethnoreligious and ethnolinguistic group living in the Rakhine state of Myanmar, are considered among the most persecuted, vulnerable, and oppressed minorities in the world. They are victims of human rights violations and oppressions in various forms including, extrajudicial executions, forced eviction from settlements, land grabbing, bonded and forced labors and so on (Mohajan 2018). Several episodes of crackdown on the Rohingya people have forced them to flee and take refuge in Bangladesh, the Middle East, and Southeast Asian countries, forming a transnational body of Rohingya communities. Scholars are divided in their opinions regarding the origin and historical roots of the Rohingya. Their distinctive identity claims have evolved within a context largely defined by Buddhist-Muslim tensions and their ethnic recognition has reached a premature end due to the authoritarian regimes (1962–2011) in Myanmar (formerly Burma). The present paper would shed light on the making of contested Rohingya identity in various political and cultural contexts and explore the implications of their forced migration to Bangladesh.

The term Rohingya denotes an ethnoreligious identity of Muslims in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. The name came into existence in the 1950s and term became part of public discourse since then. A few Muslim intellectuals of the North Rakhine State of Myanmar used the term 'Rohingya' to refer themselves (Tha 1960, Chan 2005, Rozali 2006). However, the meaning of Rohingya identity today is rooted in the precolonial past of the Buddhist kingdom of Arakan (present day Rakhine State) and significantly shaped by Buddhist-Muslim tensions. This religious tensions have been intensified under the auspices of political and geopolitical factors. As a result, the history of the Rohingya has been subjected to political manipulations by the historians based on their respective sides of ethnic faultlines. Rohingya historians claim a native status for them based on many treatises indicating their ancestors'

presence in present-day Rakhine State for over a thousand years (Bhattacharya 2012), which the Burmese historians find as to be 'fictitious stories, myths and legends' (Chan 2005). The Burmese identifies the Rohingyas as the direct descendants of 'immigrants' from the Chittagong District of Bangladesh (formerly East Bengal) during colonial period. Following from this line of reasoning, the Burmese administration do not recognize Rohingya as an ethnic category, rather they define the Rohingya as Bangladeshi (a nationality) and Bangali (an ethnolinguistic category), which provide the justification for state sponsored oppression and onslaught on the Rohingya. However, these contested and opposed historical explanations essentially call for a reexamination of Rohingya origin, ethnohistory and the earliest presence of their ancestors in Rakhine State.

**Historical Landscape and Shifting State Boundaries**
**Ancient and Medieval History of Arakan and Chittagong**

Arakan is composed of a complex ethnoreligious setting and situated between Muslim Bengal and Buddhist Burma. Arakan is a strip of coastal plains, mangrove marshlands, and river valleys that runs in a north-south direction along the eastern Bay of Bengal. The history of Arakan province suggests that this region remained contested between the rulers of India and Burma (present-day Myanmar) (Tha 1960).

A part of the Muslims in Arakan state of Burma also trace their origin to the Arabian traders from the Middle-East who came through the Maritime Spice Routes. The Spice Routes, also known as Maritime Silk Roads, is the name given to the network of sea routes connecting the East to the West particularly, in this case, linking the Arabian Peninsula to the Far East (See Map – 01). The Maritime Spice Routes were, and still are, trade routes. Since our very earliest known history trade has been playing an important role in human life exchanging not only goods and services but also exchanging ideas, faith and religion among other things. A long chain of buyers and sellers were interwoven in relationships along the coastlines of the Maritime Routes. Besides exchanging goods, the sea ports along the Maritime Silk Roads (Spice Routes) acted as melting pots for cultures, ideas and information. Among all other forms of exchanges, the most important was the exchange of knowledge. The ships carried, along with valuable cargos on board, knowledge of new peoples and their religions, languages, expertise, artistic and scientific skills. The Arabian trade ships carried Islam along the coastlines of the South and Southeast Asia. Many Muslim Arabian traders had settled down in port towns of India,

Bangladesh, Burma and other countries during the middle ages. They developed affinal relations with local people in the processes of settlement.

The Muslim settlements started along the coastline of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean started long before the Muslims came into power of this region which can be traced to 7th to 8th centuries(Pearson 2003). Many historical accounts and evidence show that the Arabs had business terms with Bengal that started during the Pala empire (750-1174 C.E) (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 1985). Along with the business and trading, a Muslim settlement began in the coastal areas, especially in Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and adjacent areas long before official Muslim rule began in Bengal. It is also assumed Arab Muslims formed an independent state in the areas of Chittagong to Arakan in the tenth century (Pearson 2003). This empire was mentioned in 'Radjatuya' -the royal chronicle of Arakan where an account describes that the Arakan king Surtan invaded an area in 953 AD and marked it with 'Chettagoung'. Also suggested that the term Surtan came from 'Sultan' (king) and the invaded place is now known as Chittagong. However, it can be noted that there are significant number of Arabic and Persian words in the vocabulary of Cox's bazaar dialect and the natives of this area claims their Arabic ancestry. A king of Gaur (North-west Bengal) sultan Jalauddin supported the Arakanese King Normikhla (later known as Solainman after being converted to Islam) in his fight against the Burmese king. Chittagong remained part of Arakan till it was conquered by the Mughals.

The early modern Buddhist kingdom of Arakan had its own independent history centered on Mrauk U. King Min Saw Mon, the founder of Mrauk-U Dynasty (1430-1784) was exiles in Bengal for twenty-four years and received military assistance of the Sultan of Bengal to regain his kingdom (Subrahmanyam 1997, Van Galen 2008). He allowed many Bangali to settle down in Mrauk-U and built the Santikan mosque. They were some of the early Muslim settlers in Arakan. The Moghal historian Talish, a Moghol historian, noted that the Portuguese pirates used to sell their captives to the Arakanese who employed these prisoners in agriculture and other kinds of services (Talish 1907, Chan 2005). Moreover, the Mrauk-U kings were Buddhist yet they adopted some Islamic traditions of using silver coins with Persian Muslim titles and occasionally used Muslim costumes in the style of the Sultan of Bengal (Charney 1998, Leider 1998, Van Galen 2008, d'Hubert 2014). There were some Muslim élites at the court of the Arakanese King who served the King perform these Islamic conventions (Charney 1998, Charney 1999) and transcribed the Bengali, Persian and Arabic literature. The linguistic traces of Arab and Persian in Arakan Muslims' eastern Bengali dialects point to these multifaceted contacts. During the 15th century, the use of Muslim titles by Arakanese kings and

inscribed coins suggests that the Bengal sultanate had a cultural impact on the court elite of Mrauk U (Leider 1998). In the 15th and 16the centuries several Muslim ministers, court members and poets were employed in the Roshanga royal court (Alam 1999). Daulat Kazi, Alaol, Kureshi Magon are such famous names. Alaol, the greatest Bengali poet in the medieval period, known as was the official poet in the Roshanga Royal court (Alam 1999, d'Hubert 2014, d'Hubert 2018). Different sources also validated the presence of Muslim in early modern period including the presence of Sufi saints, respected as the protectors of sailors and resident communities of Muslim traders in Arakan. Again, Chittagong, the affluent port of Bengal ruled by Muslim lords, was conquered by the Arakanese during sixteenth century and Chittagong's Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist populations significantly contributed to the economic prosperity of Arakan.

Several ethnic groups with their diverse culture and language, used to live in the region. These inhabitants included different groups e.g. Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto Burman speakers as well as Arabs, Bengalis and others. The Marma and Rakhine are the Tibeto-Burman speaking groups and they were colloquially called the 'Maghs'. During the medieval period, the Magh pirates in collaboration with the Portuguese pirates became a major threat for the coastal areas of Bengal and Arakan (Sengupta 2001). The popular Bangla phrase 'Magher Mulluk' refers to the state of anarchy and lawlessness developed by the Maghs. When the Mughal commander, Islam Khan Chishti, conquered Bengal in 1610, Chittagong remained beyond his control. Far later, Subahdar (governor) Shaista Khan conquered Chittagong and won over the Maghs and the Portuguese. Arakan still remained independent. The Mughal boundary extended upto Ramu of modern-day Cox's Bazaar region. When Shah Suja (brother of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb) fled to Arakan as a result of fraternal dispute, he was cordially received by the Arakanese King Sudhamma (Tha 1959). However, he was killed later on in 1661. Following his assassination, a number of Muslim populations from all over India started to come to Arakan. In fact, Shah Suja's death was followed by a total anarchy in Arakan.

Map – 01: Long Distance Trade Routes (Maritime and Silk) Connecting the West to the Far East.

**The Colonial History**

Although present boundaries between Chittagong District of Bangladesh and Rakhine State of Myanmar are clearly demarcated by international borders as separate geographic entities belonging to two different independent states, but this does do not go back very far in history when both these two places belonged to the same political unit, British India, until late 1940s. Arakan had been an independent kingdom until 1784, when it was conquered by the Burmese. Arakan had been an independent kingdom until 1784, when it was conquered by the Burmese. The Province remained under Burmese rule between 1784 to 1826. After that, the then Arakan Province was surrendered to British India as outcomes of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826) under the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 (Chan 2005). The war concluded in the winning of Arakan Province as to be the southern extension of Chittagong District for the British Empire. The movement of people between Chittagong and Arakan became more intensified during this period. Sir, Arthur Phayre, the first Deputy Commissioner of Arakan, mentioned about the local population of Arakan as:

The inhabitants are, In the Plains – 1. Ro-khoing-tha (Arakanese)- 2. Ko-la (Indian) – 3. Dôm (Low Caste Hindu). In the Hills – 1. Khyoung-tha – 2. Kumé or Kwémwé – 3. Khyang – 4. Doing–nuk, Mroong, and other tribes… While the Arakanese held these possessions in Bengal, they appear to have sent numbers of the inhabitants into Arakan as slaves, whence arose the present Ko-la population of the country (Phayre 1841: 680 – 681 cf. Chan 2005).
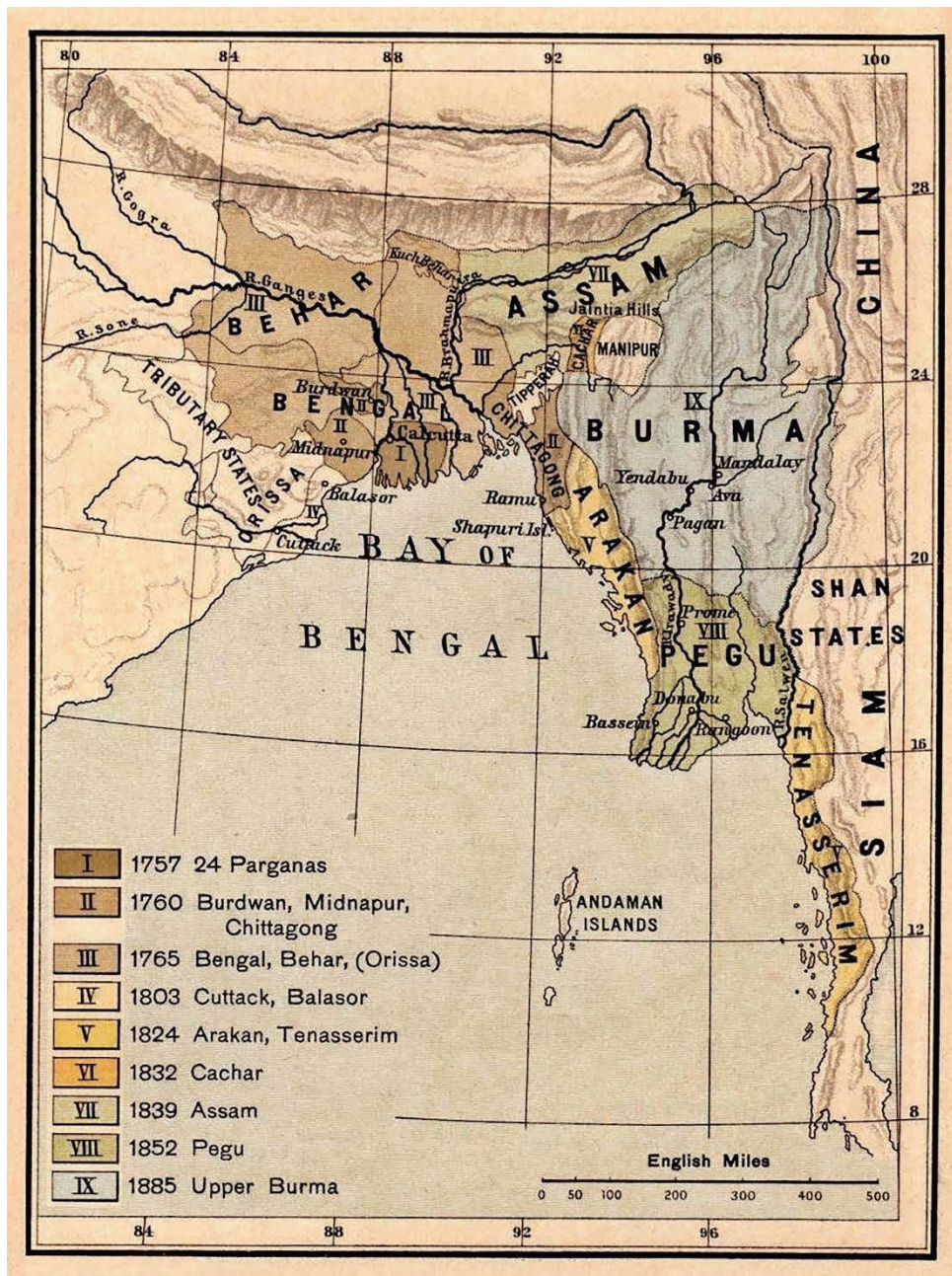


Map – 02: The Growth of British India and Burma during Colonial Period.

*Source: (Joppen 1907)*

Following the invasion of the Burmese king Bhodapaya in 1784, the Arakanese fled to the bordering hills that was governed by the British East India Company. Since then a number of Arakanese including both Buddhists and Muslims started to migrate to nearby Ramu and Teknaf area which are now parts of Cox's bazaar district. Around 1798-99 the British East Company appointed Captain Hiram Cox to rehabilitate the refugees. Each refugee family was granted 1 hectare (2.472 acre) of land and 26 mounds of food grains as food support for six months. The area was named after him as Cox's Bazaar. Some historians argue that these migrant Arakanese Muslims were known as Roains (Rohingyas).

Some of the Arakanese refugees formed a rebellion against the Burmese king and sought support from the British. The British, in return, handed over three rebel leaders to the Burmese. Later on, when the Arakanese rebellion began insurgency and fight against the Burmese king, the British East India Company supported the Burmese king. The Burmese took control of Arakan and proceeded towards Chittagong and Manipur claiming these areas as integral part of Burma. At one point, the Burmese force occupied Shahpari Island killing the employees of East India company. That was the beginning of Anglo-Burmese dispute that resulted in three major warfares in 1825,1852 and 1885 and the colonization of Burma by the British. As the British rule began, a number of fortune-seekers that included the Rohingyas once again moved to Arakan and other parts of Burma, while the refugees of Arakan were also appointed as laborers by the British to clear jungle and other construction works.

**Rohingya Identity: Ethnoreligious and Ethnolinguistic Faultline**

There are hardly any anthropological investigations carried out on Rohingya identity as a culturally distinctive category. There is limited access to essential information and documentation. The term Rohingya had been used in in the late 1950s in North Arakan to denote a religious identity for the region's Muslim community, as distinct from and in opposition to its majority Buddhist population. This identity also refers to an ethnopolitical category particularly emerged in the context of the sociopolitical challenges developed after the independence of Burma in 1948 (Chan 2005). According to Chan, the Rohingya identity claims can be understood in a narrative context that includes the simultaneous rise of Rakhine Buddhist nationalism in the 1950s, and later, the political oppression and impoverishment that constrained the lives of both Buddhists and Muslims between 1962 and 2011 (ibid). Similar to ethnic or social identities in other context, the Rohingya identity is an unstable signifier pointing to various features of organization. Moreover, the global media representations have signified

the Rohingyas as being stateless victims of systematic oppression, whose refugee status and disenfranchisement are defining elements of their public identity (ibid).

The Rohingya are a multilayered Muslim community. According to Chan, "the Muslims in the Arakan State can be divided into four different groups, namely the Chittagonian Bengalis in the Mayu Frontier; the descendants of the Muslim Community of Arakan in the Mrauk-U period (1430-1784), presently living in the Mrauk-U and Kyauktaw townships; the descendants of Muslim mercenaries in Ramree Island known to the Arakanese as Kaman; and the Muslims from the Myedu area of Central Burma, left behind by the Burmese invaders in Sandoway District after the conquest of Arakan in 1784 (Chan 2005). The Rohingya identity formation is an ongoing process and differently being represented in international media as stateless and as a state-oppressed Muslim minority after riots in Rakhine State in the 1990s and onward. It is, however, an ethnic category that includes Muslim communities in the North Arakan region having similar cultural features but with a diverse historical background.

The Myanmar government officially rejects Rohingya as an ethnic denomination and consider them as a threat for developing political movements aiming at the creation of an autonomous Muslim area in North Arakan (Chan 2005). The Myanmar's military and authoritarian state governments have described Rohingyas as a political and demographic threat since 1980s. The ethnic tensions between the Arakanese and the Rohingya have aggravated by the discriminatory state policies of exclusion and deprivation of rights, and gradually led to the lasting and violent conflicts in Arakan Shate.

The ethnoreligious hostility between the Muslim Rohingya and Buddhist Arakanese, the demographic majority of the Rakhine State, has also been accelerated by the radical Buddhist nationalism of *ma bat tha* movement also known as 969 movement. This is a nationalist movement opposed to what they see as Islam's expansion in predominantly-Buddhist Burma and spreads islamophobia by communicating apprehensions about Islam's expansion in the Buddhist Burma. This anti-Muslim movement was launched and led by Ashin Wirathu, a Burmese Buddhist monk and communal leader, in 2001. The Movement continued in the Mandalay riots of 2013. Wirathu had deep hatred against the Muslims refused to call the Ronhingya community by the name, and instead claims they are from Bangladesh and prefers to call them Bangladeshi. Although there are about 5% Muslims in Myanmar which has a population of 5.4 million, according to 2014 Census, yet Wirathu pushes the idea that Islam and the Muslims tends to put Buddhism and essence of Myanmar in threat. On 20 June 2013, the cover story of Time magazine mentioned Wirathu as "The Face of Buddhist Terror". Referring to Muslims, Wirathu says, "you can be full of kindness and love, but you cannot sleep next

to a mad dog…. If we are weak, our land will become Muslim." In similar instance, he says, ""I am defending my loved one like you would defend your loved one. I am only warning people about Muslims. Consider it like if you had a dog, that would bark at strangers coming to your house – it is to warn you. I am like that dog. I bark."



The Rohingyas have always been subject to oppressions in the independent Burma. General Ne Win's Dragon Operation to suppress ethnic uprising resulted in the mass exodus of the Rohingyas to Bangladesh began in 1978. After an agreement between two countries, most of the Rohingyas repatriated although many of them were left behind. In the General Election of 1991, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi 's party won all the seats in Arakan. As the government did not hand over the power to Suu kyi's party, they again began a repressive move which resulted in mass exodus of 250,000 Rohingyas to Bangladesh. Following a series of bilateral negotiation, only 7000 Rohingyas were

repatriated and many thousands refused to go back apprehending the repression and eviction. Since then flow of the Rohingya Muslims became common, which became intense in 2011 and 2014 following the inter-ethnic riots and attack on the Rohingyas in Myanmar.

The above accounts depict two major lines of history. The Muslims of Burma has diverse ancestral connection, Bengali connection is one of them but not the only one. In fact, like the Bengalis, they also claim Arab ancestry, and in many cases, Magh, Dutch and Portuguese ancestries are also found. Second, Arakan has been a region that was subject to repressions of both sides-on the one side, there were the Burmese who treated Arakan as their remote unreachable outpost but always eager to occupy it; and on the other, there were the Bengal – whose boundaries with Arakan often propagated. Although the local dialect of Chittagong sounds pretty similar with the Rohingya (roains) language, as it is with the Chakma dialect, the languages are not same. The Rohingya language can be easily identified as distinct by the people who are familiar with different dialects of Chittagong region.

**Profiling Bangladesh: Challenges and Concerns**
**Historical and Politico-economic Settings**

Bangladesh is a fairly recent Muslim nation that came into existence in 1971. Following from the about two hundred years of British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent, Bangladesh appeared as East Pakistan as India partitioned in 1947, and of late, achieved independence from Pakistan (erstwhile West Pakistan) after a nine-month long war of liberation in 1971. During the partition, from the political point of view, emphasis on religious affiliation (Hinduism or Islam), and the Hindu- Muslim difference ultimately led to the creation of two independent states in 1947: Hindu concentrated India the Islamic state of Pakistan. Although religious identities influenced the post-colonial independence, but language difference (Urdu and Bangla) justified the second struggle for independence and the emphasis on a common Bangali identity led to the liberation war and finally to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Today, almost 90% of Bangladesh's population adheres to the religion of Islam making the Muslims as the overwhelming majority followed by almost 8% Hindu population and the remaining 2% constituting the Christians, Buddhists and indigenous people. The political instability of Bangladesh, along with its ravaging poverty, famine, natural disasters and over population stigmatized the country with a hopeless image, particularly expressed in the words of Henry Kissinger, the American Secretary of State, as the 'bottom less basket' case during early seventies. Renowned Noble Laureate Amartya

Sen analyzed the situation of Bangladesh as a land not only whose 'granary is full of rice' and 'ponds are full of fish', but also a land that experiences famine and poverty (Sen 1981). However, the remarkable achievements of Bangladesh in the economic sphere, of recent times, along with its resilience against recurrent natural disasters and 2008 global economic crisis, suggest that Bangladesh's economic growth can outpace its population growth. Bangladesh's economy recently proved to have bypassed the global financial crisis of 2008 and the country has proven ability to withstand disasters brought about by recurrent floods and cyclones as well as the microfinance movement have been widely acclaimed globally as role model for poverty alleviation.

Extreme climatic events and recurrent disasters have swept the development achievements of Bangladesh from time to time over the centuries and imposed much havoc on the well-being and socio-economic situation of the people. Impacts and shocks caused by natural disasters have contributed significantly to the pauperization processes in Bangladesh. Researchers often argue that, frequent devastation by natural disasters have been one of the major causes for the country being so poverty stricken (Mirza 2003). It is believed that managing disasters is a vital prerequisite for the country's step towards any long–term development goals. The Government of Bangladesh has attached high importance to disaster management in pursuit to achieve and sustain its development efforts (Mirza, et al. 2003). It is evident that vulnerability of the country to climate change is the result of a complex interrelationship among biophysical, social, economic and technological factors of the country. Many anticipated adverse impacts of climate change would in fact aggravate many of the existing stresses that already pose a serious impediment to economic development of Bangladesh (Ali 1999).

**Socioecological and Environmental Settings**

Bangladesh is a disaster-prone country. Both in Copenhagen and in Cancun, the world community unanimously agreed that Bangladesh is the country most vulnerable to climate change impacts. Due to climate change, hydro-meteorological disasters (cyclone, flood, drought, etc.) will be more frequent with increased magnitude. Almost every year, the country experiences disasters causing heavy loss of life and property and jeopardizing the development activities. The country is already beset with many problems like increasing population density, food security, human health, illiteracy, and so forth. The global warming due to the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations in the earth's atmosphere and the consequent sea level rise (SLR) are going to exacerbate the situation (Dasgupta, Huq et al.

2010)(Ahmed and Chowdhury 2006). Almost every sector of socio-economic life in Bangladesh is likely to be affected by climate change (Karim and Mimura 2008, Dasgupta, Huq et al. 2010, Khan, Ireson et al. 2011, Dasgupta, Huq et al. 2014) Pouliotte, et al. 2009; Rahman 2008). Over the next 25 years, however, with the increase in the absolute size of the population, the per capita water availability in Bangladesh will progressively be reduced (Ahmad, et al. 2001). Under general climate variability, the annual per capita water availability in 2025 will become 7,670 cubic meters as against 12,162 cubic meters in 1991. Keeping in view the poor water availability in the dry season, the per capita available supply will be much less, while demand for irrigation and other purposes (i.e., industrial process water, domestic & municipal water supply etc.) will continue to rise (Ahmed 2006). In agricultural sector, the present production activities are impeded by too much water during the wet season and too little during the dry season.

The social impacts, though generally not well–understood, are likely to be profound and climate change will affect humans through a variety of direct (changes in climate variables) and indirect pathways (pests and diseases; degradation of natural resources; food price and employment risks; displacement; conflicts, negative spirals) (Heltberg, Siegel et al. 2009). Risks and uncertainties, associated with the impact of climate shocks and stresses, are typically embedded in agricultural practices in rural areas. The agriculture sector is reportedly more vulnerable to climate variations. Therefore, it is important to understand climatic impacts on agroecosystems and the farmer perceptions of climate change and its implications. Climate change is likely to have severe impacts on the food and livelihood securities, human capital and wellbeing of the poor people because of their reliance on subsistence agriculture in rural areas of Bangladesh. On the other hand, in urban areas, informal settlements are mostly built illegally and without formal planning. Limited availability of water, high child and infant mortality rates compounded with a very high morbidity rate (malaria, tuberculosis, diarrhea etc) are common characteristics of such informal settlements (Dodman and Satterthwaite 2008). Climate change also has implications for the urban poor and for rural–urban change. With climate change negatively affecting rural livelihoods, migration from rural to urban areas is increasingly likely to become the favored adaptation strategy of the mobile, rural poor. This will further exacerbate the problem of people living in urban fringe hazardous environments with potential risks of social unrest.

**Governments' Position on Rohingya Issue**

Bangladesh government's position regarding the question of the Rohingyas is quite controversial in many terms. First flow of the Rohingyas as refugees started in 1978 following the riot in Rakhine state of Myanmar. However, unofficial and irregular flows from both ends have been a regular practice for many years. Regular flow of large Bengali population including both Hindus and Muslims who started to migrate and settle down in different parts of Burma began since the late nineteenth century. As part of the British empire, Myanmar was considered to be a place of prosperity. Almost every family in Chittagong used to have a connection in Burma since British Period. Such ties could be marital, social or business or professional. Therefore, Bengali inhabitation in Myanmar should not be a smaller one. It is interesting to note that the educated or semi-educated Bengali population in Myanmar is not suffering the controversy of identity. On the other hand, the uneducated and poor Rohingyas are victims of all sorts of repression. In Chittagong, Cox's Bazaar and adjacent areas, both Rohingya men and women are appointed as laborers in agriculture, petty business, household works and so on. For long, people of Chittagong came across many communities and therefore, they are accustomed with the juxtaposition. At local level, Rohingyas are treated as different or 'other', but not as outsiders or unexpected. Many of these Rohingyas already had had connections in Bangladesh. They strengthened their ties by marriage and joining professions.

Officially, the government of Bangladesh was not that antagonistic against the Rohingyas in the beginning. In fact, the refugee Rohingyas of 1978 and 1991 were treated with much empathy although bilateral negotiation continued. The Country office of UNHCR along with a number of refugee camps was established in Cox's bazaar. The government's attitude began to change keeping the pace with the change in national politics. First of all, both in 1979 and in 1991, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was in power. The BNP has a strong ally with the Islamist parties, especially with the anti-liberation force Jamaat E Islami (hereafter JI), who was the part of their coalition in 1991. Many of the Rohingyas were used as their vote banks and political cadres. The Rohingya Muslims are the main arms cadres of JI which had a strong base in Cox's Bazaar and Chittagong district. Later on, while the country faced series of attacks and threats from the Islamist extremist groups, many forms of Rohingya involvements with these connections were revealed. Remote areas of Cox's bazaar, adjacent remote places of Bandarban district are found to be the dens of Islamic militants where a number of Rohingya

people were trained. Over the years, many Rohingyas involved in crimes, drug-dealing, smuggling and anti-social activities which is common among refugee population anywhere in the world.

The pro-liberation party Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) came into power in 1996. Later they formed government in 2009 when they had had a land-slide victory. One of their major agenda was to evict militancy. The BAL always maintains a good relationship and correspondence with India which is their strongest base of international support. In recent years, India developed a major concern regarding the insurgency in 'Seven Sisters' of the north east. Ethnic peoples of CHT has many ethnic and cultural connections which poses a threat to India. A common propaganda says that these Seven sisters, CHT and Arakan might form a new state with the support of China as both China and India are trying to take control of the region. To eliminate such a possibility, the foreign minister of Bangladesh declared that there were no Indigenous (adivasis) in Bangladesh, and now they are constitutionally known as 'Minority Ethnic groups' (Khhudro Nri Goshthee). In this geo-political game, the Rohingyas are the most vulnerable community in despair. In mass media, after the attack on Buddhist Temples in Ramu in 2012, the anti-militancy campaign mobilized the national sentiment against Rohingyas.

**Locating Rohingya Refugee Camps**

The Rohingya camps in Bangladesh are located in Kutupalong- Balukhali expansion site, Hakimpara, Jamtoli, Baggohona, Chakmarkul, Unchiprang, Shamlapur under Ukhia upazila and other camps are located in the Leda, Alikhali, Jadimura, Nayapara under Teknaf upazila in Cox's bazar district. In kutupalong area, there are 23 camps. Under the supervision of each camp, there is a camp in-charge committee which is managed by the Bangladesh government officials and Bangladesh army. Camp in-charge committee work under RRRC (Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner) and the members of CIC are in obligation to supervise, monitor and co-ordinate different NGOs activities inside the camps like what kind of works have to do. Moreover, Usually, CIC organize meetings with the NGOs for their activities in every week. Bangladesh Army mainly operates as a part of the CIC. Bangladesh Army handles the distribution of reliefs, maintenance of discipline and security of the camps. Among Rohingyas selected camp representatives' work under this camp in-charge committee.

| Location | Female | Male | Total Individuals | Total Families |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Camps 01 - 10 | 228726 | 210203 | 438929 | 102973 |
| Camps 11 - 20 | 143764 | 132878 | 276642 | 63614 |
| Camps 21 - 27 | 76046 | 67717 | 143763 | 32711 |
| Kutupalong RC* | 9353 | 8647 | 18000 | 3548 |
| Nayapara RC* | 14435 | 12487 | 26922 | 5702 |
| No camp** | 2869 | 2649 | 5518 | 1299 |
| Total | 475193 | 434581 | 909774 | 209847 |
| *Kutupalong RC includes 14,277 registered refugees (2,617 families) while Nayarapara RC includes 19,895 registered refugees (3,704 families) | | | | |
| **This represents refugees residing outside formal camp / site boundaries | | | | |

Table – 01: Distribution of Rohingya Migrants in Bangladesh (as of March 2019).

*Source: (UNOCHA 2019)*
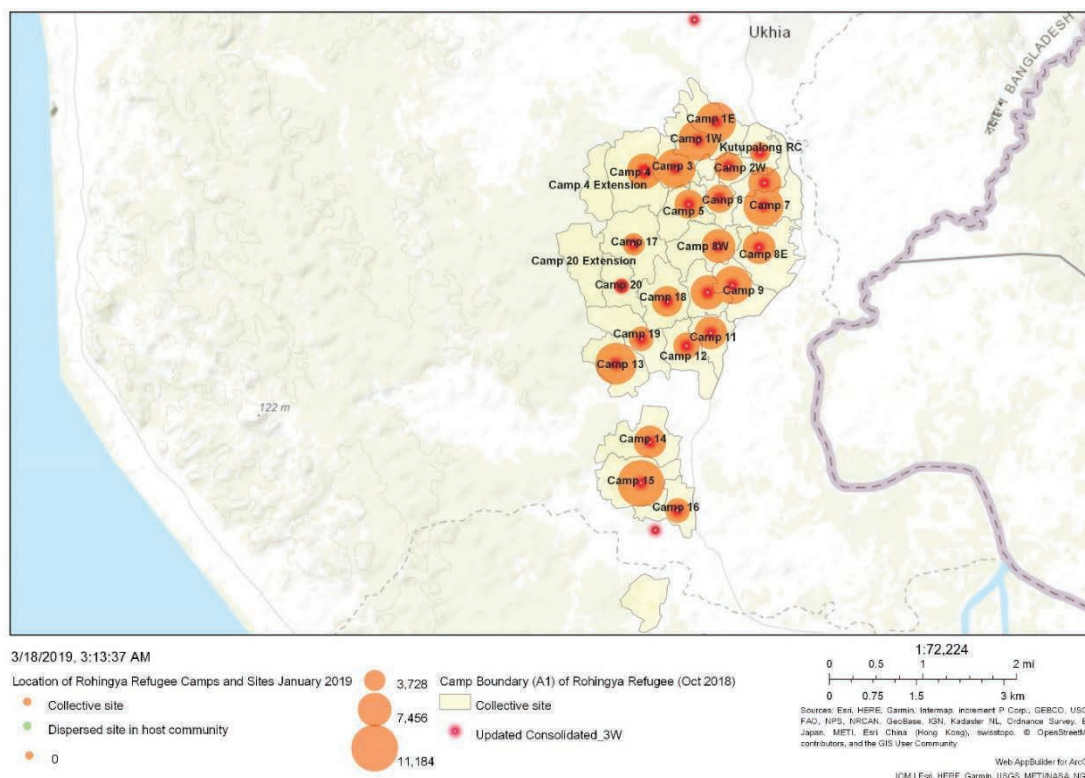


Map – 02: Locating Rohingya Camps in Southeast Bangladesh.

The Rohingyas living in a particular block elect the Majhi5 of that block. The standard of the Majhi election is mainly decided on the basis of a person's previous record, such as their educational status,

behavior and more priority is given if that person was a local member of the Myanmar. During the election, the inhabitants of the particular block get together where they give the vote to the person of their choice. In this case, the participators of the election need to raise their hand when the name of their favorite nominated candidate is called and in this way Majhi of the block gets elected. The Majhi of the blocks are always accountable to the head Majhis. It is the responsibility of the head Majhis to monitor the duties of the elected Majhis and if needed the heads will provide assistance in order to solve any problems and issues. These head Majhis are elected directly from the votes of the block Majhis. Priority on educational status and fluency in Bengali language are given preference when electing a head Majhi because it is the head Majhis who maintain the communication with the army, camp in charge committee and NGOs.

Almost every camp has shops and markets. For instance, at the entrance of the camps, small shops like pharmacy, tea stalls, saloon, cloth markets etc. can be seen. Majority of the market share, 70%, are run by the Rohingyas and the other 30% of the market are run by the locals. Basically, the word 'Majhi' refers to 'Boatman'. Every camp is divided into some blocks and every block has a block leader who is called the 'Majhi'. Besides, the Majhis of every block is under the supervision of one head Majhi.

They are funding in opening up the shops. These funding are mainly coming from their belongings, such as cash money and gold, which they managed to bring with them when fleeing from Myanmar. Besides, financial assistance from the relatives, who live abroad, is also contributing to these funding. The Rohingyas are utilizing this money in starting their businesses. Moreover, the Rohingyas are using the identity of the locals to issue business licenses in opening up Pharmacies inside the camp and in exchange the Rohingyas are paying a sum of money to those locals. In addition, according to the information given by a Rohingya, in order to start business and open up shops inside the camp, taking permission from the army is not necessary. The armies only help them to find a suitable area inside the camp where the shops can be built. If the shop is built on a private land, then the owner of the land has to be paid particular amount of money every month or if the land is a government owned land, then the payment should be done to the local chairman. Besides, if any NGOs want to build houses inside the camp, then they need to contact the 'Majhi' beforehand. The Majhi then employs an experienced person to assist the NGOs. In this case, the person who is appointed as the day laborer must pay a certain amount of money to the Majhi from his daily remuneration. For example, if the daily pay is 300 Tk. then he must pay an amount of 50 Tk. to the Majhi. Apart from that, in case of constructing roads and other establishments, the army usually employs workers from the Rohingyas.

**Looming of Environmental Crisis**

To collect wood fuel, households traveled an average distance of 8.75 km and did this 3 days per week, collecting 28.65 kg per trip. During wood collection trips, households experienced a variety of threats. In particular, three women were attacked by elephants and 25% of women reported being threatened by mainly the host community. The average household consumption rate for cooking fuel was 4.285 kg/HH/day. For the displaced population this amounted to 54,452 tons biomass per year. Key findings from the fuel wood supply assessment: Observations from field plots revealed highly degraded forests, specifically low plant diversity and low regeneration rates, likely due to persistent wood fuel collection by both host and displaced communities. - Satellite imagery analysis showed that since 1994 wood biomass decreased by 40%. (Source IOM-FAO Assessment Study Nov,2017.)
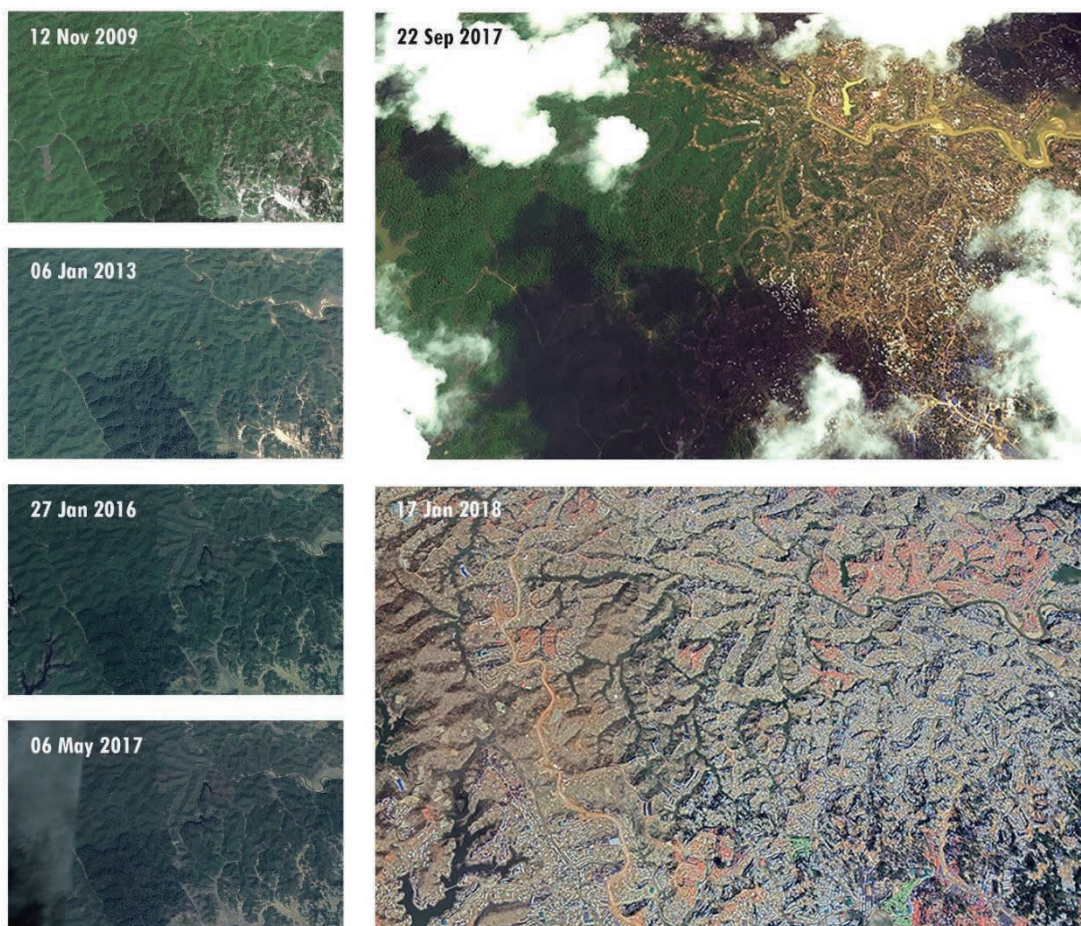


Map – 03: Satellite Image of the same Geographic Coordinates in different Times Showing Rapid Change and Destruction of Local Environment.

**Conclusion and Ways Forward**

Our attitudes toward the subject of human rights law are likely to be shaped by our philosophical underpinnings and hence need some clarifications. Therefore, understanding the philosophic foundations would help us devise a translation framework that will allow us to explain human rights principles in the context of Bangladesh. Human rights are a set of moral principles, and include some recognition of the value of freedom or autonomy. However, Immanuel Kant's compelling discussion on ethic underlies most of the theories of rights. Rights then flow from the autonomy of the individual, as a free and rational agent, in choosing his or her ends. According to Kantian thesis, a person must always be treated as an end, and the highest purpose of the state is to promote conditions favoring the free and harmonious unfolding of individuality (Shestack, 2017; Suchinmayee, 2008: 98). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights also reflects the moral universalist influence revealed in the following statements:

> "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world [Declaration's opening statement].... All human beings are born free and equal in dignity [Article 01]. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status [Article 02]" (United Nations, 1948: Pp 1-4).

**Recommendations**

o    Bangladesh needs more than careful planning, meaningful regional collaboration, and a need-based, forward-looking foreign diplomacy in the coming days.

o    Bangladesh needs to assess its relations with other members of SAARC countries and alliances. Also follow-up the repatriation pact signed with the authorities in Myanmar.

o    Myanmar has to create a decent conditions in Rakhine state for the safe and voluntary return or dignified return of the refugees who have fled to Bangladesh. Need to create diplomatic pressure on Myanmar.

o    Bangladesh needs to have medium and long-term policies to address Rohingya crisis.

# References

Alam, M. A. (1999). "A Short Historical Background of Arakan."

Bhattacharya, S. (2012). "Islam in Arakan: An interpretation from the Indian perspective: History and the Present." Rohingya League for Democracy (Burma) RLDB 1.

Chan, A. (2005). "The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar)." SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research 3(2): 396-420.

Charney, M. W. (1998). "Rise of a Mainland Trading State: Rahkaing Under the Early Mrauk-U Kings, c. 1430-1603." Journal of Burma Studies 3(1): 1-33.

Charney, M. W. (1999). Where Jambudipa and Islamdom converged: Religious change and the emergence of Buddhist communalism in early modern Arakan (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries).

Chaudhuri, K. N. and K. Chaudhuri (1985). Trade and civilisation in the Indian Ocean: an economic history from the rise of Islam to 1750, Cambridge University Press.

d'Hubert, T. (2018). In the Shade of the Golden Palace: Alaol and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan, Oxford University Press.

d'Hubert, T. (2014). Pirates, Poets, and Merchants: Bengali Language and Literature in Seventeenth-Century Mrauk-U. Culture and Circulation, Brill: 47-74.

Dasgupta, S., et al. (2010). "Vulnerability of Bangladesh to cyclones in a changing climate: potential damages and adaptation cost."

Dasgupta, S., et al. (2014). "Cyclones in a changing climate: the case of Bangladesh." Climate and Development 6(2): 96-110.

Dodman, D. and D. Satterthwaite (2008). "Institutional capacity, climate change adaptation and the urban poor." IDS Bulletin 39(4): 67-74.

Heltberg, R., et al. (2009). "Addressing human vulnerability to climate change: toward a 'no-regrets' approach." Global environmental change 19(1): 89-99.

Joppen, C. (1907). Historical atlas of India: for the use of high schools, colleges, and private students, Longmans, Green.

Karim, M. F. and N. Mimura (2008). "Impacts of climate change and sea-level rise on cyclonic storm surge floods in Bangladesh." Global environmental change 18(3): 490-500.

Khan, A. E., et al. (2011). "Drinking water salinity and maternal health in coastal Bangladesh: implications of climate change." Environmental health perspectives 119(9): 1328.

Leider, J. (1998). "These Buddhist Kings with Muslim Names… A Discussion of Muslim Influence in the Mrauk-U Period." Etudes birmanes en homage a Denise Bernot. Paris: EFEO: 189-215.

Mohajan, H. (2018). "History of Rakhine State and the Origin of the Rohingya Muslims."

Pearson, M. (2003). The Indian Ocean, Routledge.

Phayre, A. P. (1841). Account of Arakan.

Rozali, I. I. (2006). "The Rohingyas of Arakan." Quarterly Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society 54(1).

Sen, A. (1981). Poverty and famines: an essay on entitlement and famines, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Sengupta, G. (2001). "The Portuguese in Bengal." India & Portugal: Cultural Interactions: 24-33.

Subrahmanyam, S. (1997). "Slaves and Tyrants: Dutch Tribulations in Seventeenth-Century Mrauk-U." Journal of Early Modern History 1(3): 201-253.

Talish, S. (1907). "The Frengi Pirates of Chatagaon." Jadunath Sakar (tr.). Journal Asiatic Society of Bengal 3: 419-425.

Tha, B. (1959). "Shah Shuja in Arakan." The Guardian Magazine 6(9): 26-28.

Tha, B. (1960). "Rowengyas in Arakan." The Guardian Magazine 7(5): 33-36.

UNOCHA (2019). "Humanitarian Response." Humanitarian Response.

Van Galen, S. E. A. (2008). "Arakan and Bengal: the rise and decline of the Mrauk U kingdom (Burma) from the fifteenth to the seventeeth century AD."