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## **Can we take you as a bride? - the stories of eight Hindu women**

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# “Can we take you as a bride?” – The stories of eight Hindu women

While the horrifying experiences of Rohingya women and girls in Myanmar are well documented, less known is the experiences of Hindu women and girls in the region. **Aye Thiri Kyaw (Researcher, Myanmar)** details the experiences of eight women, as told in the documentary *Trunocide*, who were forcibly displaced and held captive after attacks on a number of Hindu-majority villages in the northern part of Myanmar’s Rakhine State by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).

[Myanmar’s military has long been using rape as a weapon against women and girls](#) in areas such as Kachin and Shan state as a result of the decades long civil war. In 2018, the United Nations Secretary-General put the Myanmar military onto his annual [list](#) of parties who have committed or who are responsible for sexual violence against Rohingya women and girls during the clearance operations in [2016](#) and [2017](#). But there are other armed actors also committing gender-based crimes in the region that have received less attention. Rakhine State has seen intense inter-communal violence between ethnic Rakhine and Rohingya populations and violence from different armed groups, including the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).

The [emergence](#) of ARSA had earlier been described as a ‘gamechanger’ in the northern Rakhine context. ARSA first emerged in 2016 when [they claimed the attacks on three police outposts](#) in the two townships in Northern Rakhine State. ARSA [claim](#) that they are fighting on behalf of the Rohingya population whose basic rights including citizenship have been denied. The motives behind the attacks towards the Hindu communities are not clear, but the women’s quotes from the documentary *Trunocide* gave some insight into the attacks, with one survivor describing how they were accused of favouritism from Myanmar’s military stating:

You Hindus, are on the same side of the authority, we won’t let anyone of you live

## Gender-based violence

These complexities of inter-ethnic tensions in the region have been the focus of several written [reports](#). These include [reports](#) of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar and of the [independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar](#). There are also reports which have delved into human rights abuses by ARSA, notably, a 2018 investigative [report](#) by Amnesty International that details that the attacks on Hindu villages in northern Rakhine in August 2017 were purposefully carried out by ARSA .

Building on these findings, *Trunocide* shows the ways in which women have been impacted adversely by recent waves of violence. The [eight](#) women featured in the documentary, some as young as 15 at the time of the attacks, were forced from their villages and held captive together with their children by ARSA members and forcibly displacement to Bangladesh. The women note that they were subjected to various forms of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), including forced marriages, and endured other human rights violations including forced (religious) conversions and physical harm at the hands of their captors. Tantamount to crimes against humanity, the extrajudicial execution of husbands and other family members, the destruction of their villages and the looting of their valuables, has also meant that these women and children have been left economically vulnerable.

[Scholarship](#) on sexual violence in conflict areas has continued to show that the risk of violence and lack of economic resources become acute among refugees and internally displaced women in conflict affected areas. Women remain economically vulnerable as a result of being stripped of their belongings and lack of income sources for their survival even after the conflict. Moreover, they often do not have houses or land to return to due to destruction or forced relocation. The precarious situation of the surviving women and children are seen and heard in *Trunocide*. While narrating her experience, one survivor mentions, “our lives are insecure, and we do not know where to live”.

Despite individual differences between the women, protection against further attacks following the rescue and [return](#) of the women and their children to Myanmar in September 2017, and a demand for justice to hold their oppressors accountable for the deaths and violations suffered, remain common desires between the eight women.

So many lives were lost, so many interviews have been taken, but no action has been taken. We don't want anything but justice. Two whole villages of Hindus were killed and we were interviewed about it. But no one seems to care. I want to see something being done about it.

### **Bringing justice through the women, peace and security agenda**

The stories narrated by the eight women tell us how different UN Security Resolutions can be enforced and bring the justice that the eight women deserve. Resolution [1888](#) (2009), for example, reiterates the obligations of State and non-State actors to comply fully in the prevention of sexual violence, and [Resolution 2106](#) (2013) specifically demands the immediate release of women and children forcibly abducted by armed groups. From the women's testimonies in the documentary, clearly, these resolutions were contravened.

The latest resolution, Resolution [2467](#) (2019), makes a strong call for the prosecution of sexual violence as a criminal act to bring an end to impunity and serve as a deterrent and encourages member states to strengthen legislation on sexual violence. Similar sentiments have also been conveyed by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. In drawing conclusions regarding drivers of long-term peace in Myanmar in her 2018 [Report](#), the Special Rapporteur underscores the point that holding "individuals who gave the orders and carried out violations against individuals and entire ethnic and religious groups" to account should be a major priority going forward.

### **Holding the perpetrators accountable**

In December 2018, the Government of the Union of the Republic of Myanmar and the United Nations through the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, issued a [Joint Communiqué](#) on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence. The accountability mechanism for non-state actors like ARSA is non-existent in the current context.

Addressing gender-based violence in conflict should be paramount in efforts to bring peace to northern Rakhine and other parts of Myanmar. It should ultimately ensure that perpetrators are held accountable, survivors can rebuild their lives with adequate support, and the various institutions at the national and local levels have the capacity to prevent the recurrence of violence in future. The plight of Rohingya women and girls and their horrific experiences are documented by the UN Fact Finding Mission report highlighting the impunity permitted to the perpetrators by the Myanmar's military. Likewise, the brutality that Hindu women and girls experience should not be forgotten, ARSA must be held accountable for their [actions](#), just as Myanmar's security forces should be for its actions.

### ***Trunocide***

*Trunocide features personal interviews with survivors and eyewitnesses of the attacks on Hindu villages, adding to a growing body of information providing first-hand accounts of the acts of targeted violence committed by armed actors who operate in the area. The film shows the intense human suffering being endured by Hindu women survivors who witnessed the brutal killing of their husbands and family members. The link for the film is [here](#). The password for the film can be requested at [trunocide@gmail.com](mailto:trunocide@gmail.com)*

*This blog was first published on LSE's [Women, Peace and Security Blog](#).*

*This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the South Asia @ LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Featured image: [DYKT Mohigan \(CC BY 4.0\)](#).*