National Identity and the Minority Question of Rohingyas in Myanmar

A Dissertation Submitted

To

Sikkim University

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the

Degree of Master of Philosophy

By

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February, 2020

Gangtok-737102, INDIA

Date: 05/02/2020

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled **"National Identity and the Minority Question of Rohingyas in Myanmar"** submitted to **Sikkim University** in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is my original work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **"National Identity and the Minority Question of Rohingyas in Myanmar"** submitted to **Sikkim University** for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** in **International Relations**, embodies the result of *bona fide* research work carried out by **Mr. Buddham Tamang** under my guidance and supervision. No part of the dissertation is submitted for any other degrees, diploma, associate-ship and fellowship. All the assistance and help received during the course of investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

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"National Identity and the Minority Question of Rohingyas in Myanmar"

Submitted by **Buddham Tamang** under the supervision of **Mr. Ph. Newton Singh** of the Department of International Relations, School of Social Sciences, Sikkim University, Gangtok- 737102, INDIA

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- **Buddham Tamang**

Place: Gangtok

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The primary focus of the proposed study is to understand the construction of a homogenous National Identity in Myanmar and how it implicates on the Rohingya minorities in the country. The study will analyze the nexus between State and religion in the construction of National Identityof Myanmar. The proposed study also examines how such constructed national identity plays out vis-a-vis minorities in the country. The study will specifically examine the case of the Rohingya minorities while also taking into account various other ethnic minority communities of Myanmar.

Like much of Southeast Asia, the territory of the state formerly known as Burma, now officially renamed Myanmar in the year 1989 is an area of considerable ethnic and linguistic diversity. Within the range of such variety, a broad and important distinction can be made between the largely monolingual, ethnically Burman central area and the multilingual, ethnically diverse border areas (Watkins, 2007). As such the dichotomy of majority and minority groups in Burma has led to the emergence of the ethnicity conundrum thereby giving rise to the contentious issue of Burmese National Identity in the present day context. Thus the statement made by Nicholas Tarling while writing the modern history of the region that "Southeast Asia is marked by ethnic diversity" fits well into the Burmese context.

So, the proposed study attempts to examine how the complex socio cultural and linguistic structure of the Burmese state gave rise to ethnic tensions and sectarian violence since independence thereby popularizing the rhetoric of National Identity. In

this regard two things seem to be relevant as such. The first of these is the nationalist drive of many decades to establish, maintain, and develop an independent state free of colonial and other foreign influences, coalescing an essentially Burman national identity at the centre and heart of the country. The second major tension concerns the relation of the dominant, majority Burman/ Bamar ethnic group to the kaleidoscope of minority groups which make up as much as one third of the total population of the country, living mostly outside of the central lowlands, and how these groups are integrated in the growth of a single Myanmar nation (Watkins, 2007). Therefore it is important to understand the concept of National Identity. Though there is no specific definition of National Identity as such, in general terms 'National identity can be perceived as one's identity or sense of belonging to one state or to one nation. It is the sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, language and politics. As such National identity may refer to the subjective feeling one share with a group of people about a nation, regardless of one's legal citizenship status. National identity is also viewed in psychological terms as "an awareness of difference", a "feeling and recognition of 'we' and 'them.' Defining one's national identity is essentially a process of nurturing a sense of 'we–ness'among members of the same nation. Commonality among members of the same nation is shaped by many factors; chief among these are language, tradition, myth, symbols, rituals, history, commemorations and collective memory.Apart from promoting commonality, national identity is reinforced through defining what one is not a process of distinguishing 'us' from 'other. Thus the concept of 'significant other', a term used by Anna Triandafyllidou while studying the Greek National Identity is significant in this regard. 'Significant other' is a group or a nation that is perceived to be a threat to the nation which one belongs to. There are internal as well as external 'significant others'.

Internal significant others can be an ethnic minority or immigrant community residing inside one's nation. External significant other usually refers to a rival nation. In any case, when the significant other is perceived as a threat, the dominant group or the nation will initiate a process to reaffirm or redefine its identity so as to highlight its own uniqueness (Chan, 2000). It is true that the Burmese state redefined its identity as distinct reflecting Buddhist culture and values to construct a homogenous National Identity encompassing all. However, the complexity in the construction of a Buddhist centric Burmese National Identity lies in the cultural and religious diversity among the minority groups themselves who profess many other religions and speak many more dialects and sub dialects apart from the majority language of the Burmans. Thus the co existence of majority and minority groups under a single national identity, specifically the Rohingyas case has made matters worse in Burma.

Experts (scholars, historians, and journalists) closely following Burmese politics have generally agreed that the history of Burma has been defined by sectarian ferocity, ethnic divergence, religio-racial nationalism, and protracted armed insurgency following the departure of the British and the formation of the union of modern Burma in 1948. Burma has historically been plagued by sectarian violence, political repression, and brutal insurgency because of the conflicting policy of national unity adopted and adapted by those who projected and determined the fate and future of the country. Burma is the largest of the mainland south eastern Asian states, one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world with 135 subgroups and home to 53 million people. It shares a border with Bangladesh and India in the west, Tibet and China in the north, and Laos and Thailand in the east. The coastline of the Indian Ocean forms a natural boundary to the south. (Mang, 2016). As such it can be understood from the

above fact that ethnicity and sectarian violence is no new phenomena for the Burmese state.

Ethnic minorities make up about one third of the population and occupy almost one half of the land. The seven states and seven divisions reflect these ethnic groups. The Union of Burma comprised the Kachin State, Shan State, Karenni State, Chin Special Division and Burma proper at the time of independence on 4 January, 1948. The country is currently divided into the seven primarily Burman ethnic divisions: Irrawaddy, Pegu, Magwe, Mandalay, Rangoon, Sagaing and Tennasarim and seven ethnic states: Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Arakan and Shan (Rodd, 2009). There are eight major ethnic groups in the country: Burman (69.0 percent), Shan (8.5 percent), Kachin (1.4 percent), Karen (6.2 percent), Chin (2.2 percent), Mon (2.4 percent), Rakhine (4.5 percent), and Karenni (0.4 percent). However, these figures seem to be skeptical as it was conducted by successive military regimes in 1983 for vested political interest as no proper census of the ethnic distribution of these minority groups has been carried out since 1931.

The ethno linguistic diversity also seems to be of significance in understanding the Burmese National Identity dimension as the studies specifically focusing on the Rohingya minorities consider themselves falling prey to the 'Burmanisation/Myanmarization'[1] policy of the majority Bamar speaking and predominantly Buddhist ruling elites. Tibeto-Burman languages are widely spoken in Burma (Watkins, 2007). The Burman, a Tibeto-Burman group, live in the heartland of Burma and are largely Buddhist. The Shan, a Tai hill people, are found in Shan State and part of northern Burma, and are predominantly Buddhist. Living in the northern

[1] An act of the ruling state elites in culturally homogenising the ethnically divided Burmese populace by constructing a single National Identity

frontier of the country, the Kachin, a Tibeto-Burman hill people, are mainly Christian. The Karen, a Tibeto-Burman group, are found in the Irrawaddy Delta and Karen State and many converted to Christianity in the nineteenth century. The Chin, a Tibeto-Burman hill people, mostly live in the western corner of the country and also converted to Christianity in the early twentieth century. The Mon, a branch of the Mon-Khmer group, live in the south of the country and embrace Buddhism as their national religion. The Rakhine, a Tibeto-Burman people, are mainly Buddhist and are found in the western frontier of Burma. Living in Kayah State and part of Shan State, the Karenni, a Tibeto-Burman hill people, are mostly Christian. There are many other important ethnic minorities such as Pa-o, Dawei, Palaung, Lahu, Wa, Akha, Kokang, Danu, Naga, and Kayan. (Mang, 2016).

So it can be said without doubt that the recent Rohingya crisis which have gained much international attention till date is clearly a manifestation of the reciprocal relation that existed between the State and religion in the pre colonial Burma where the Burman kingdom witnessed a transition from Mahayana Buddhism and a mix of animistic beliefs to Theravada Buddhism promoting it as the state religion. Since then the succeeding kings followed the same pattern of ruling till Burma became independent in 1948 from western colonialism. However, nothing changed in Burma even after independence as the modern state of Myanmar is still plagued by sectarian and cultural ethnic conflicts as is evident from the Rohingya crisis as such. Therefore, Nancy Hudson Rodd rightly states that “Institutionalised oppression, ethnic fragmentation and political distrust have all featured in Burma since independence from the British in 1948”.

However the specific case of the Rohingya minorities of the modern day Myanmar seem to reflect what GustaffHoutman in his "Mental Culture in Burmese crisis politics" (1999) has pointed out as an act of 'Myanmafication'[2]. The cultural turn has also challenged the notion of 'history from above' placing an emphasis on previously hidden or subaltern voices in the post colonial context. The state ideology has in the past drawn selectively upon the complex histories and identities of its people, championing some, while sidelining others, ostensibly in the interests of the national unity. This form of 'internal colonialism' has been seen at its worst in Burma, where the ruling military junta have stressed the 'Non disintegration of the union' as the paramount national resolution regarding nation building around the identity of the majority Bamar or Burmans (Tin, 2005).The task of trying to stimulate a sense of cohesion among newly'national' populations and encourage feelings of belonging and loyalty towards a co-inhabited territory has subsequently required much attention to the development of national identity in emerging states and the encouragement of a consciousness among citizens of collectively forming a single population with various common 'national' properties and a single shared future to invest in. The theme of national identity, it's possible definition, creation, growth, and protection has, accordingly, assumed a major importance in dialogue and strategic planning carried out at governmental level in many states within Asia during the course of the twentieth century and continues to hold an important place in political and intellectual discussion both in potentially fragile multi-ethnic states and in countries with a single dominant ethnic group, where traditional ideas of national identity may now be changing under the threat of new forces of globalization. (Simpson, 2007)

[2] The term coined by a Dutch Burma scholar Gustaff Houtman referring to the change of name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989 by the ruling military elite.

1.2. Review of Literature

The following literature have been reviewed for the proposed study. The sources which has been used for the review of literature is basically secondary sources which include books and articles in journals discussing themes such as language nationalism, ethno religious conflict, ethnic minorities and the Burmese history, the concept of National identity and the policy of cultural homogenization in the context of Burma thereby highlighting the issue of the Rohingya minorities.

"Buddhism and Politics in South-East Asia: Part Two", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Nov., 1976), pp. 30-45 (Social Scientist) by Francois Houtart is commonly an expansion of his first article with the broad theme mentioned above, however, differing in the content, by focusing on the interplay of Buddhism and Politics in the Theravada Buddhist societies in the post colonial period until now. "Buddhism in the Post-Colonial Political Order in Burma and Ceylon",*Daedalus*, Vol. 102, No. 1, Post-Traditional Societies (winter, 1973), pp. 29-54 (MIT Press on behalf of American Academy of Arts & Sciences) by Edmund Leach examines how the traditional Buddhist conception of Political order influenced the nationalist movement thereby illustrating formation of Post colonial political order in Burma and Ceylon .

"Buddhism under a Military Regime: The Iron Heel in Burma", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Apr., 1993), pp. 408-423 (University of California Press) by Bruce Matthews particularly examines the organisational structure of the Sangha and its interaction with the ruling military regime that is State Law and Order Resotration Council and vice versa. The article also seeks to analyse the consistent role of Buddhism as an integrative factor in correlating the national identity of the majority ethnic group.

"Reinterpreting Burmese History ", *Comparitive Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Jan., 1987), pp. 162-194 (Cambridge University Press) by Victor B. Lieberman critically examines the periodization vis-à-vis the Burmese historiography as such. He also attempts to make a comparative study of the different Burmese kingdoms established under various circumstances in different periods of pre colonial Burma thereby highlighting the periodozation of State formation as well as the transtition of Burma from the pre colonial to the colonial period and later to the modern state which according to Lieberman still manifests much of the precolonial precendents.

"The Clash of Civilization?", *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer, 1993), pp. 22-49 (Council on Foreign Relations) written by Samuel P. Huntington presents a new understanding of the conflict in the post cold war era whereby the nature of the conflict has undergone transformation primarily from economic or ideological conflict to more of a civilizational conflict, the fault line of which will be religion and culture thereby dominating the global politics. These conflicts he terms as the *"Clash of Civilization".* As such the recent conflict among Non westerncivilizations i.e. between Buddhist and Muslims in Burma is evident of the fact where a majority Burmese and predominantly Buddhist population in order to promote their religious values waged a kind of a civil war against the Muslim Rohingyas as such. Thus the case of Rohingyas seems to be related to the civilisation clash that Huntington talked about as religion and culture served as a fault line for perpetuating such conflicts.

"The politics of state-society relations relations in Burma", *South East Asia Research*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (JULY 2007), pp. 213-254 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd.) by Kyaw Yin Hlaing basically analyses the state society relationship in Burma in the post colonial period. The article examines the interaction of the state with the business groups,

student community, the Sangha as well as with the peasents and labour organisations in the post colonial period in Burma. The article therefore argues that the state-society interaction in post colonial Burma was more reflective of the patron-client ties that existed in the pre colonial state as such.

Arjun Appadurai in his article titled "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", *Theory, Culture & Society,*Vol. 7, No. 2–3, pp. 295–310 (June 1990) has provided an understanding of the dichotomy of cultural homogenization and heterogenization in the context of today's global interaction thereby paving the way for the conflicts arising across the globe. As such the article focusing on its broader theme seeks to understand such disjuncture in the global cultural economy by looking at the relationship between five dimensions (scapes) which the author has classified.

Carlos Sardina Galache in "Rohingya and national identities in Burma", (newmandala.org) has provided a general overview of the recent Rohingya crisis by highlighting the historical origin of the Rohingya muslims and their claim of indigenity to the Arakan (Rakhine) state of Myanmar. The author also discusses the contested historical narrative vis-à-vis the majority Bamar identity thereby bringing in the role of the colonial rulers in constructing ethnicity as a marker of identity.

David I. Steinberg in his article entitled "The Problem of Democracy in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar: Neither Nation-State Nor State-Nation?, *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (2012), pp. 220-237 (ISEAS – YusofIshak Institute) examines the internal problems that the Union of Burma is facing since its independence from the British in 1948. He further argues that Burma cannot be considered either Nation State or even it does not qualify itself for a State Nation status due to the unequal distribution of power among its ethnic minorities and its inefficiency to resolve the protracted armed struggles

that it faces from various quarters. The article also stresses the pivotal role of the military and the concentration of essential powers in it despite of having an elected government in 2011 in maintaining the integrity of the so called Union of Burma though in actuality there never existed a unified Burma.

In " The Narratives of Ethnocentric Buddhist Identity",*Journal of the British Association for the Study of religion (JBASR)* 20, (September, 2018), pp. 19-44, Paul Fuller have critically explained the different types of narratives in the context of Southeast Asian Buddhism focusing mostly in the dominant Buddhist narrative that shaped the formation of a Buddhist identity prevalent in modern day Myanmar. He has used the term 'ethnocentric Buddhism'[3] to describe such narratives which seems to be very much contradictory with the universal Buddhist teachings as such. As such this article explains how a chauvinistic Buddhist narrative has created the divide between buddhist and non-buddhist population often manifesting a protectionist outlook thereby reflecting violence and hatred towards other religious groups, particularly Islam in the context of Myanmar and shaping the broader religious and national identity.

In "Burma's National Unity Problem and the 1974 Constitution", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (December 1979), pp. 232-248 ISEAS – YusofIshak Institute by Robert H. Taylor discusses the problem of the national unity in Burma since independence thereby analysing the 1947 constitution and comparing it with that of the 1974 constitution in regard to the minority question as well as highlighting the provision of both the constitution in terms of flexibility, decision making and inclusiveness in the governance of the Burmese state as a single political unit.

[3] Paul Fuller has used the term 'ethnocentric Buddhism' to describe the chauvinistic, protectionist and radical Buddhism which contradicts with the universal understanding of Buddhism particularly in the context of the modern day Myanmar thereby reflecting the narrative of a dominant Buddhist Identity

In "Imagining 'Burma': a historical overview",*Asian Ethnicity* Vol. 10, No. 2, June 2009, 145–154 (Routledge) Marja-LeenaHeikkila Horn explains the British imagination of a geo body known as Burma and how the colonial rulers invented various ethnic categories that later on seem to be inherited by the modern state of Myanmar. It also explains how these racial categorization in the post independence period is politicized and manipulated by the ruling state elites for their vested political interest.

In "Political Relations between Medieval Bengal and Arakan" , *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 61, Part Two: Millennium (2000-2001), pp. 1081-1092 (Indian History Congress) Md. Akhtaruzzaman focuses primarily on the political relations between medieval Bengal and the sovereign kingdom of Arakan i.e. modern day Rakhine state of Myanmar. The article also highlights the outcomes of the political relations between the two kingdoms like the migration of the population from both sides and influence of Islam which in a way contributed to the increasing population of Muslims in Arakan kingdom thereby forming much of the discourse on the issue of Rohingya Muslims in the contemporary times.

In "The Re-ethnicisation of Politics in Myanmar and the Making of the Rohingya Ethnicity Paradox", *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, 74(4) 361–382 (2018) Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), (SAGE Publications) the author Patrick Hein has explained the root of the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar by using Paul Brass's framework of the Hindu- Muslim conflict in India. It also discusses how the racial classification of the population by the colonial power into indigenous and non indigenous groups led to the re ethnicisation of the politics by the ruling elite. As such the author in this article has discussed some important factors on the basis of which

the ethnicity narrative was legitimised such as the 1973 census[4], the 1982 citizenship law[5] and the 1989 changes to National Identity cards[6].

Jordan Carlyle Winfield in his article titled "Buddhism and Insurrection in Burma, 1886–1890, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 20, No. 3 (July 2010), pp. 345-367 (Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland) examines the British annexation of Burma in 1886 thereby resulting in insurgency against the colonial rulers. The article also delves into the issue of the inextricable nexus between the State and religion thereby explaining the role of the Burmese kings as the patron and protector of the Buddhist faith. It also explains the role of the Sangha[7] in organizing armed insurrection against the colonial government with an objective to defend Buddhism and restore the Buddhist ruler that seem to be prevalent in Burma prior to the invasion of the Britishers. As such the article's main focus is on the British encroachment in Burma thereby jeopardizing the religious faith of the Burmese kingdom as well as its inhabitants as the majority perceived their National Identity in terms of the Buddhist faith.

Kunal Mukherjee in his article entitled "The Ethnic Minority Question and the Rohingya Crisis in Contemporary Myanmar",*Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs,* (2019),Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 26–43, has attempted to explain the complicated subject matter of National races in the context of Myanmar with special emphasis on the

[4] The 1973 population census was conducted in the post independence period in Burma however the issue remains highly skeptical as many academicians and historians on Burma claims that since 1931 no official records of population survey seem to exist.
[5] The 1982 citizenship law ensures that those who resided in Burma after the colonial occupation and prior to independence will be granted full citizenship
[6] The 1989 changes to National Identity cards manifest the ambiguity over the citizenship issue of the Rohingya Muslims.
[7] Collective term for the Buddhist monkhood.

Rohingya muslims. As such the article also stress the need to address the issue of National races as a part of historical continuity.

*Language and National Identity in Asia*edited by Andrew Simpson, 2007 (Oxford University Press) has focused on the theme of language in the context of nation building in regard to various nations within Asia as three main regions has been categorised accordingly i.e. the South Asian region, The East Asian region and the Southeast Asian region. As such the focus of this book has been much on the theme of language and its relevance in the growth of nationalism in various nations of the Asian region thereby discussing the subject matter of all encompassing National identity as such. A separate chapter on the Southeast Asian category regarding Burma/Myanmar by Justin Watkins discusses the various themes of ethno linguistic development in the context of Burma/Myanmar and explains how a ethnically heterogeneous Burmese society was attempted to unify by the successive military governments thereby trying to create a unified homogenous single National identity encompassing the various ethnic minorities of the Burmese state discussing the theme of language, social cohesion and national identity from pre colonial period to the present day context.

MangHre in his article titled "Religion: A Tool of Dictators to Cleanse Ethnic Minority in Myanmar?, *IAFOR Journal of Ethics, Religion & Philosophy*, 1(1) (October, 2013)have mainly focused on how the ruling state elites in Myanmar used religion as a tool to dictate the state sponsored policies and programmes and imposed it upon its ethnic minority population. The author also reflects the dominance of Buddhism as the religion of the majority population (not official religion) which is inextricably linked with the state structure since pre colonial years in Burma often

establishing religious hegemony and threatening the existence of other religions till date.

Matthew J. Walton in his article entitled " Burmese Buddhist Politics", *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2015), provides an insight as to how Buddhism as a religion played a very siginificant role in understanding politics in Burma. The author also highlights the use of Buddhist symbolism in defining Burmese National Identity thereby examining the role of the Sangha or the monastic order vis-à-vis the state. It also relflects the active involvement of the religious insititution like the monkhood in politics, contrary to the ethics of universal Buddhism which later on manifested a religious divide between the Buddhists and the Muslims. The article also examines as to how Buddhism has been employed in understanding the very concept of democracy.

MdZiaur Rahman et al., (2018) "Rohingya crisis: Identity of Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar",*International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 7(12**),** 12-16, the article focuses on the identity of the Rohingyamuslims of Myanmar and provides a brief understanding on the origin and history of the Rohingyas as well as the recent ongoing crisis. Michael Aung Thwin in his article entitled " Hierarchy and Order in Pre-Colonial Burma", Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Sep., 1984), pp. 224-232 (Cambridge University Press on behalf of Department of History, NationalUniversity of Singapore) provides a general overview of the social, political and insititutional structure that existed in pre colonial Burma thereby examining its hierarchical order. This article further explains as to how various social groups were classified into different categories manifesting the patron-client relationship. It also examines the role of these social groups vis-à-vis the precolonial state.

Michael Aung-Thwin in his article entitled "Of Monarchs, Monks, and Men: Religion and the State in Myanmar" (December, 2009), ARI Working Paper No. 127 (Asia Research Institute on behalf of the National University of Singapore) particularly explores the reciprocal relationship that exists between State and Religion in Myanmar since the precolonial period till date. The author has highlighted the dyadic interaction of the state apparatus and the Sangha (Buddhist monkhood) in Myanmar in a chronological order thereby reflecting the changing role of the sangha under different ruling regime. As such this intricate relationship between these two institutions is also reflected in Myanmar's attitude vis-à-vis its minority communities, particularly the Rohingyas.

Peter A. Coclanis in his article entitled "Terror in Burma: Buddhists vs. Muslims",*World Affairs,* Vol. 176, No. 4 (November / December 2013), pp. 25-33 (Sage Publications, Inc) primarily focuses on the Burmese state's inclination towards Buddhism thereby manifesting its chauvinistic character in the context of Burma.Raphael Boon (2015) in "Nationalism and the Politicization of Identity: The Implications of Burmese Nationalism for the Rohingya*",* Leiden University, attempts to explain the Burmese nation as well as state building process thereby highlighting its long term implications for the Rohingya muslims of the Arakan (Rakhine) state of Burma. The Rohingya issue has been analyzed theoretically and historically thereby explaining it in the context of both precolonial and independent Burma as well.

Robert H. Taylor in his article entitled "Do states make nations? The politics of identity in Myanmar revisited"*, South East Asia Research,* Vol. 13, No. 3 (November 2005), pp. 261-286 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd.) examines the modern political history of Myanmar thereby considering ethnicity as the major factor in the formation of

political identity. The article's core focus lies in the issue of political identity as it also analyses the ethnic orientation of the Burmese population in the pre colonial Burma as well as in the post colonial period. As the article has also stress that reviewing Myanmar's past is inadequate in understanding ethnicity and the formation of newer identities in the contemporary politics of Myanmar.

Southeast Asian Culture and Heritage in a globalising world: Diverging identities in a dynamic region edited by Rahil Ismail, Brian Shaw and OoiGiok Ling (2009), Ashgate Publishing Limited, presents the issue of regional and local identities in the Southeast Asian region in the context of a globalising world. It highlights the issue of the politics of heritage, culture and identity in the port cities as well as other coastal cities in Southeast Asia as the region has been marked with a high cultural and ethnic diversity due to globalisation and international migration of labour as such. Some chapters in this book like "Diverging identities in a dynamic region" by Brian J Shaw gives a meaningful insight to the identities emerging in the Southeast Asian region rapidly with the passage of time. Another chapter by Nancy Hudson Rodd "When was Burma? Military rules since 1962"provides an account of the complexities of the Burmese state since the military rule from 1962 and how the dictating military regime distorted the cultural history of the ethnic minority and initiated a kind of 'internal colonialism'[8] in the state of Burma thereby using the issue of ethnicity for vested political interest.

The article "Communities of Interpretation in the Study of Religion in Burma",*Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* Vol. 39, No. 2, Communities of Interpretation and the Construction of Modern Myanmar (Jun., 2008), pp. 255-267 (Cambridge University Press on behalf of Department of History, National University

[8] Internal colonialism in the context of Burma simply means the oppression or subordination of one majority ethnic group over another minority ethnic group

of Singapore) by JulianeSchober describes how Buddhism as a religion is interpreted and studied in the context of Burma thereby tracing its origin in the writings of the missionaries, colonial administrators, scholars of religious studies as well as historians and anthropologists including the narrative of tradition and modernity in the Burmese Buddhist culture.

The article "Evolution of the Arakan Problem in Burma",*Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 76 (2015), pp. 631-636 (Indian History Congress) by MihirShekharBhonsale explores the historical linkage of the Arakan kingdom with the then Bengal tracing the period dating back to the eighth century highlighting the political, religious and socio cultural contact between Arakan and Bengal. It also explains how the sovereign Arakan kingdom was annexed by Burma and later on by the Britishers and examines the influence of the Islam religion.

The article "Examining India's stance on the Rohingya Crisis" ,*ORF ISSUE BRIEF*, Issue No. 247 (July 2018) by KhriezoYhome basically explains New Delhi's approach towards the long term solution of the Rohingya crisis thereby highlighting the various concerns of India and its larger role in resolving the crisis in cooperation with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar itself and also with ASEAN, BIMSTEC and other international organizations.

The article "Historiography and National Identity of Colonial Burma: An Analysis of a Vernacular School History Textbook*" The Journal of Asian Studies*, 15 (2): 1-26.(2012)by MyoOo, Research Professor, Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Busan University of Foreign Studies explains the formation of the Burmese National Identity through school vernacular history text books of the colonial period by making reference

to U Ba Than's Myanmar Yazawin[9] which primarily consists of the historiographical accounts of the Burmese Chronicles as such. The author through this textual analysis has also focused on race, space and time element in order to explain how the Burmese national identity took shape during different Burmese kingdoms thereby highlighting the Buddhist lineage of the ethnic Burmese.

The article "Militant Buddhist Nationalism: The Case of Burma", *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter 1972), pp. 19-41 (Oxford University Press) by GuenterLewy explains how Buddhism emerged as an integrative factor that led to the emergence of Burmese sense of National Identity and later Burmese Nationalism as such. The article also reflects the reciprocal relation between the ancient Burmese Kingdoms and Buddhism. It also explains the changing character of the Burmese nationalism in the context of the British occupation of Burma thereby reflecting a militant character of the Burmese nationalism in its initial phase guided by a Buddhist ideology to a more secular sense of nationalism where the agenda of a secular state remained the highest priority while keeping religion and politics separate. However, the author stress that religion continues to play a significant role in the post independence period in Burma.

The article "Minorities in Burmese History", *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (August 1987), pp. 255-271 (ISEAS – YusofIshak Institute) by Ronald D. Renard attempts to conceptualize the narrative of minorities in the context of the Burmese history. It also provides an understanding that in the pre colonial Burma the notion of ethnic minorities as we understand it in the modern sense, mostly on religious and ethnic basis was not prevalent however, their minority

[9] Myanmar Yazawin is a historical text reflecting the nexus of Burmese culture with that of Buddhism around which the Burmese National Identity was constructed.

status were mostly understood in terms of their access to political power. The article also gives an insight as to how the notion of racial and ethnic minorities was invented by the colonial rulers/ Britishers for their vested interest as such.

The article "Religion and Politics in Modern Burma", *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Feb., 1953), pp. 149-162 (Association for Asian Studies) by John F. Cady has been structured along the broad theme of religion and its significance in Burma. As such the author has provided a chronology of events mostly associated with the status of religion under different Burmese kingdoms from the precolonial period till date. The article therefore examines the colonial intrusion of Burma and the abolition of the monarchical rule. It also explains as to how the religious institution like the Sangha totally lost its significance in the colonial period thereby further explaining the siginificance of Buddhism as a constructive factor in Burmese nationalism per se. Lastly, the article also highlights the emergence and the role of various western educated Burmese elites who were at odds with the notion of political clericalism.

The article "Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism in Burma" written by PumZaMang, (August, 2016), *Journal of Church and State* discusses the history of Burmese kingdom since the pre colonial times and have highlighted how the Burmese kingdom was plagued by sectarian and ethnic conflict historically. It also shows that how religion came to be intact in the state policy since the pre colonial times thereby illustrating the role of the Buddhist clergy (Sangha) in the political context.

The article entitled " Buddhism and Politics in South-East Asia: Part One ", *Social Scientist,*Vol. 5, No. 3 (Oct., 1976), pp. 3-23 (Social Scientist) by Francois Houtart particularly examines as to how religious and political insititutions were

interconnected with each other in the Theravada Buddhist societies. The focus of the study were basically Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Srilanka. The article also explores the societal hierarchy in these particular states provided by Brahmanism and its declining role thereby paving the way for the emergence of Buddhism and other religions like Jainism, however, Theravada form of Buddhism gaining prominence later which played a very significant role in the nationalist movement of these particular states mentioned above.

The article entitled "Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma: The Myths of Panglong", *Asian Survey* ,Vol. 48, No. 6 (November/December 2008), pp. 889-910 (University of California Press) by Matthew J. Walton critically examines the Panglong Agreement[10] thereby highlighting the effects of the agreement on the ethnic minorities of Burma. Thus, the author in this article has tried to deconstruct the myths surrounding the Panglong agreement and has suggested a reassessment of the myths of the agreement in order to better understand the national unity problem that existed prior to the independence of Burma.

The article entitled "Nation-Building in Independent Myanmar: A Comparative Study of a History Textbook and a Civic Textbook",*Suvannabhumi* Vol. 9 No. 1 (June 2017) 149-171 by MyoOo presents a comparative study of the history school textbook and civic textbooks prescribed in the state education curriculum during the independence period (1948-58). The author in this article has taken *Pyidaungzu Myanmar NainggganThamine*[11] by Ba shin, a lecturer of the Department of Myanmar and Far Eastern History and an ex major of the Myanmar Army and *PyithuNiti*[12]by U Ba Pe, a

[10] Panglong Agreement was signed on February 12, 1947 by Aung San and the ethnic minorities like Shan,Kachin and Chin in the Shan town of Panglong.
[11] History of the Union of Myanmar
[12] Direction of Citizen

former administrator and educator as a reference for understanding how school textbooks shaped the national identity of its citizens.

The article entitled “Sangha, State, Society, "Nation": Persistence of Traditions in "Post-Traditional" Buddhist Societies”, *Daedalus,*Vol. 102, No. 1, Post-Traditional Societies (Winter, 1973), pp. 85-95(The MIT Press on behalf of American Academy of Arts & Sciences) by Heinz Bechert gives an overview of the Theravda form of Buddhism in the context of a few mainland Southeast Asian states like Burma and Ceylon, just to mention a few. The article also examines the relationship between the Sangha, State and Society in these particular states thereby highlighting the role of the Buddhist monkhood as the conscience of the traditional Buddhist societies. It also explores as to how State religion nexus has undergone transformation with the introduction of colonial modernity, how it has led to the construction of ideology of national identity including the constant use of traditional precedents by most of the Therevada Buddhist societies mentioned above.

The article entitled “School, State, Sangha in Burma”,*Comparative Education*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Feb., 2003), pp. 45-63 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd) by Nick Cheesman provides a clear understanding of the nexus between school education, the state and the role of Sangha in the context of Burma. The author highlights the prominent position enjoyed by the Sangha and the monastic order in the pre colonial Burma vis-à-vis the state, its limited and declining role in the colonial period and its complete subordination to the state in the post independence period. The author also argues that the role of the Sangha and the monastic education in the post independence period remained minimal as education was centralized in order to propagate a new form of National Identity through school education curriculum, however Buddhism still

permeates the school education in Burma which discards most of other religions like Christianity and Islam from the school textbooks.

The article entitled "The essential tension: Democratization and the unitary state in Myanmar (Burma)", *South East Asia Research*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (JULY 2004), pp. 187-212 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd) by Tin Maung Maung Thang gives us an understanding of the persistence of problems associated with the process of democratization in Myanmar (Burma). The article also focuses on the multi-ethnic pluralism of the modern state of Myanmar (Burma) thereby analysing the majority-minority ethnic relations. As such it also examines the consistent participation of the military in the political system despite of Myanmar's (Burma) transition to a democracy thereby manifesting it as a unitary state.

The article entitled "The Relationship between Burmese National Identity and Buddhist traditions in contemporary Myanmar*"(Myanmar Cultural Research Society*)by MyoOo, Research Professor, Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Busan University of Foreign Studiesexplains the linkage of the Buddhist traditions in Burmese festivals and its role in shaping and sustaining Burmese National Identity by analysing the texts, chronicles and stories interlinked with the historiography of Burma .It also explains how the Buddhist traditions were invented by the Burmese kingdoms thereby highlighting the nexus of the Buddhist tradition and the Burmese culture as such.

The article titled " Buddhism and Politics in Burma", *The Antioch Review*, Vol.21, No.(Summer, 1961), pp. 166-175 (Antioch Review Inc.) by Fred Von Der Mehden provides us a general understanding of how Buddhism as a religion has determined the state society relationship in Burma since the precolonial times till the present day. As such it explains as to how religion has remained intact within the state since then.

It also explores the use of religion in politics by many nationalist leaders particularly, U Nu, the first prime minister of the Union of Burma, in the post colonial period. Thus, the article as a whole discusses some of the important aspects of state religion nexus which is more reflective of Myanmar as Buddhist state, even in the contemporary period, however, contributing to the lagely debated discourse on National Identity and the minority question, particularly of Rohingya.

The article titled "Constructing Religion by Law in Myanmar", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 13 No: 4, (December, 2015) pp. 1-11 (Routledge) by Melissa Crouch generally examines the relation of law and religion in Myanmar thereby highlighting some of the legal key reforms undertaken in terms of religion and religious practices which mostly determined the state's relationship with the religious communities including both Buddhists and non buddhists as such. Jacques Leider in " Rohingya, The Name, The movement, The quest for identity", (Jan, 2014) explicitly deals with the origin of the Rohingya muslims by tracing their historical claims as well as the highlighting the Rohingya movement initiated in search for a minority identity. The article further explains how this contested identity since then has been in popularity in order to get recognition from the state as legal citizens of contemporary Myanmar. However, the article has also highlighted the many problems and controverisies surrounding Rohingyas and Myanmar's sense of national identity.

The article titled "The "Sangha" and "Sasana" in Socialist Burma*", Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (FEBRUARY 1988),pp. 26-61 (ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute) by Tin Maung Maung Thanexamines the State Sangha nexus during the socialist phase of Burma's history under General Ne Win's regime. The article has confined itself in examining the institutionalization of the

Sangha within the secularist orientation of the then socialist state thereby highlighting the introduction of the 1974 constitution and the convening of the congregations for the purification of the Sangha. It also provides an insight as to how Sangha as a significant institution has sustained itself amidst fluctuating relationship vis-a-vis the state.

The article titled "The Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Origin and Emergence",*Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.-2, Iss- 11A (Nov, 2017):1007-1018, by Md. Salman Sohel, Department of Public Administration, Jagannath University, Dhaka have provided a basic understanding of the origin and emergence of the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar thereby highlighting the history of Rohingya minority group and perceiving it solely as a humanitarian crisis.

The article titled "The Theravāda Buddhist Engagement with Modernity in Southeast Asia: Whither the SocialParadigm of the Galactic Polity?", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Sep., 1995), pp. 307-325 (Cambridge University Press on behalf of Department of History, National University of Singapore) by Juliane Schober critically examines the interaction of the Theravada Buddhist polities with the colonial modernity brought about by colonialism in the context of Southeast Asia. It also discusses how the transformation of the traditional galactic polities of Southeast Asia into modern nation states has redefined the relationship between State and religion thereby manifesting the introduction of modern ideologies as an alternative to the traditional cosmological order of the Theravada Buddhist societies. The article also highlights the challeneges posed to the traditional cosmological order by the colonial modernity as such.

The article“Who's Counting? Ethnicity, Belonging, and the National Census in Burma/Myanmar*”, Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde,* Vol. 171, No. 1 (2015), pp. 1-28 (Brill) by Jane M. Ferguson primarily focuses on the controversy regarding the 2014 national census conducted in Myanmar. To quote the author this article also has a direct bearing upon the issue of ethnicity, citizenship and belonging in the census enumeration process. It also discusses about the census conducted during the colonial era on the basis of categorization created by the colonial rulers themselves. As such the article is also relevant in the context of the proposed study as it examines the exclusionary nature or an ambiguous stand on Rohingya Muslims as such thereby highlighting how the modern state of Myanmar labelled the Muslims in the Rakhine state as ‘Bengalis’ or immigrants rather than Rohingyas thereby denying the ethnic claims made by them.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Religion has always been a major factor in understandingMyanmar’s homogenous national identity and the Rohingya crisis. However, most of the studies on the theme of religion and politics in Myanmar has overlooked and deviatedfrom the homogenous national identity aspect. Therefore, the proposed theme attempts to highlight the state and religion nexus in Myanmar since the pre colonial times as well as the gradual development of religion over the period. Thus, religion served as a basis for constructing such majoritarian national identity in Myanmarwhich has led to the present day national identity conundrum and its long term implications for the Rohingyas.

The problem also lies in the fact that despite Myanmar being composed of various minority communities like Kachin,Chin,Shan and Rohingyas, and considered as multi

ethnic state,it is not so in its true sense as is evident from the present day Rohingya crisis. The construction of a homogenous national identity in Myanmar has created a kind of "clash of civilisation", a term popularly used by Samuel P. Huntington between Islam and Buddhism, the fault line being religion. So, a Buddhist centric single national identity also seem to threaten the co-existence of other minority communities who adhere to other religions like Christianity and Hinduism thereby creating a majority-minority dichotomy. Although the religion of the majority population is Buddhism, it is yet not the official state religion of Myanmar as no mention of Buddhsim is found in any official document like the Constitution. As a result, the construction of a homogenous national identity solely on the religious basis has also led to the minority question particularly of Rohingyas in Myanmar.

1.4. Rationale and Scope of the Study

The primary focus of the study would be to understand how religion shapes the present day national identity discourse of the majority Burmese population in relation to the Rohingyas. For this purpose, the study would examine Burma's past since pre colonial era till date. In the pre colonial Burma there was no such notion of the state as we understand it today with fixed demarcated boundaries and population.The king was the state and the subjects were to obey his command. The Sangha and the monastic order enjoyed a prominent position in the pre colonial era under the aegis of the Burmese kings until their role was limited during the colonial era and in the post independence period. However, there still seem to exist a closer link between religion and the state in contemporary Myanmar which forms the larger part of the National Identity discourse vis-à-vis the minorities specifically the Rohingyas.

As such the proposed study will examine religion as a focal point in understanding the National Identity of the majority Burmese population who adhere to Theravada Buddhism and its principles. There are numerous literature available on the theme of State and Religion in Burma manifesting the dominance of Theravada Buddhism in the Burmese culture since the ancient times.However, so far no study has been undertaken particularly to examine how religion constructed the national identity of the majority group vis-à-vis the minorities in Burma. As such the scope of the proposed study would be confined in understanding the link between religion, national identity and the minorities focusing on the case of the Rohingyas.

Therefore, the study would also add to the existing literature an insight as to how religion has evolved over certain period that shaped the perception of the Burmese state in recognizing a homogenous National Identity for such a diverse and a multi ethnic population where various other religions like Islam and Christianity co-exist.

1.5. Objectives of the Study

- To study the nexus between State and religion in the construction of Myanmar's homogenous National Identity.
- To examine how such national identity constructed on majoritarian religious identity implicates on the minorities of Myanmar, especially the Rohingyas.

1.6. Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What is the role of the State and Religion in the construction of Myanmar's National Identity?
- How does the Myanmar state deal with the question of minorities?

- What are the implications of Myanmar's homogenous National Identity on the Rohingya community?

1.7. Methodology

The proposed study is qualitative in it's orientation and makes a critical analysis of the nexus between State and Religion in the construction of National Identity and how it shapes Myanmar's attitude vis-à-vis the Rohingya minorities.The proposed study will basically utilize secondary sources like books, articles in journals, online sources, newspapers, e-content, magazines, reports etc.

1.8. Chapters/ Chapterization

The dissertation consists of the following chapters:

Chapter I

Introduction

This chapter will give an overview of the organization of the study thereby conceptualizing National Identity and highlighting the history of Myanmar, its ethnic composition vis-à-vis the National Identity conundrum.

Chapter II

The Evolution of the Burmese Nation-State and the Question of Minorities

This chapter will discuss the evolution of the Burmese Nation-State. It will also discuss how the pre-colonial State structure gradually developed over the period thereby forming the geo-body of the contemporary Myanmar. It will also discuss about how the questions of minorities have been dealt with in Myanmar .

Chapter III

State-Religion nexus and the construction of a homogenous National Identity

This chapter provides an account of the inextricable nexus between State and Religion in Myanmar since the pre colonial period thereby highlighting the role of the Sangha (Buddhist monkhood) in professing Theravada Buddhism as the majority religion. It will also discuss the changing role of the Sangha from the pre-colonial period to the present. It will also discuss how the dominant narrative of a chauvinistic or "ethnocentric Buddhism" led to the construction of homogenous National Identity vis-a-vis the minorities.

Chapter IV

Myanmar's National Identity and the Rohingya Dilemma

This chapter discusses some of the policies of the Myanmar government vis-à-vis the Rohingyas and also attempts to understand if such policies are reflective of an attitude of a homogenous national identity towards the minorities in the country. The chapter will also discuss how such policies have resulted in the mass exodus of Rohingya population to the neighbouring countries.

Conclusion

This section presents a concluding note and summarizes the key findings of the proposed study.

CHAPTER II

The Evolution of the Burmese Nation-State and the Question of Minorities

2.1. Introduction

Nations and States may seem identical, but they are not. States governpeople in a territory with boundaries. They have laws, taxes, officials, currencies, postal services, police, and (usually) armies. They wagewar, negotiate treaties, put people in prison, and regulate life inthousands of ways. They claim sovereignty within their territory. Bycontrast, nations are groups of people claiming common bonds likelanguage, culture, and historical identity. Some groups claiming to benations have a state of their own, like the French, Dutch, Egyptians and Japanese. Others want a state but do not have one: Tibetans, Chechnyans and Palestinians for example. Others do not want statehoodbut claim and enjoy some autonomy. The Karen claim to bea nation trapped within the state of Burma/Myanmar. The Sioux[1] area nation within the boundaries of the United States. Each of thesenations has its own special territory, rights, laws, and culture but notstatehood. Some imagined nations are larger than states or cross stateboundaries. The Arab nation embraces more than a dozen states,while the nation of the Kurds takes in large areas of four states.Some people assume that states are fixed and permanently establishedacross most of the globe. But in fact states are in flux. Stateboundaries are often changed – by war, negotiation, arbitration, oreven by the sale of territory for money (Russia sold Alaska to theUnited States, for example). A few states have endured, but othersmay be here today and gone tomorrow. In recent years, a number of states have disappeared – Czechoslovakia, East Germany,

[1]Sioux are the native American tribes of North America

Northand South Yemen, and of course the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Griffiths,Callaghan & Roach, 2014).

As such this chapter particularly explains the genesis of the Burmese Nation-State vis-a-vis the various minority communities inhabiting the territory of contemporary Myanmar. However, the term Nation-State itself is quite problematic in the context of Burma/Myanmar due to the protracted armed ethnic insurgency as well as constitutional irregularities and of late due to the Buddhist Muslim violence in the Rakhine State which is a clear manifestation of a civilizational conflict. Robert H. Taylor and David I. Steinberg in their articles entitled "Burma's National Unity Problem and the 1974 Constitution","Do states make nations? The politics of identity in Myanmar revisited" and "The Problem of Democracy in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar: Neither Nation-State Nor State-Nation?" has clearly provided an understanding of the intricate nature of the Burmese Nation- State as such.

The nation-state is less successful in those situations where the population is fragmented between several large groups who do not wish to surrender portions of their different identities in order to produce a national identity. Malaysia, Indonesia, and Yugoslavia arejust a few particularly good contemporary examples. In these cases,the national ideology for various reasons fails to assimilate large sections of the population causing an ongoing crisis of belief within the society that is generally responded to with the use of (sometimes violent) coercion by the apparatus of the state and by the dominant group (Griffiths et al., 2014) . As such the construction of a unified homogenous National Identity is a clear manifestation of the failure of the Burmese Nation-State to address its minority problems since the precolonial times

which in the present day context forms the significant discourse on the Rohingya crisis.

2.2. Conceptualizing 'Nation-State'

Contemporary politics, both domestic and international, remainsfundamentally shaped by the idea that the nation-state is the mostimportant form of community within which people live. Usedloosely, the term is synonymous with the word 'country', and so weare used to seeing people refer to, for example, Indonesia, France andArgentina as nation-states.The term warrants unpacking, however,because this rather simple usage hides a good deal of complexity. Inorder to appreciate this complexity we need to do two things: firstwe need to clarify our understanding of the two elements incorporatedin this concept and, second, we need to note the varied ways inwhich this concept has been employed in different historical contexts (Harrison, Little & Lock, 2015). Therefore, it is important to distinguish the terms 'Nation' and 'State' as it has numerous meanings and understanding in the contemporary period.

The first of them'nation' refers to a group of people, where membership of that group tends to bedefined through reference to certain common traits. Disagreementdoes exist regarding what these traits are or can be; some hold thatsuch traits are ethnic or cultural in form, while others argue thatadherence to a set of political values can lead to the formation of anation. In either case, the idea suggests that people have a natural orpowerful connection to a particular group, and that such a groupought to have political independence from other such groups.The term 'state' is often used in two ways. On the one hand, it isused loosely to refer to the government. Used in this way, the term refers to theinstitutions and individuals who represent the government (rangingfrom parliaments and presidents, to civil servants and agents of the statesuch

as police).This usage also mirrors the conceptual divide drawn between the public and the private, one that suggests that there aresome (public) areas of life that are appropriately governed by the state,and others (the private realm) which ought to be free of governmentinterference. On the other hand, this term is used to describe a type ofpolitical community that is formally defined in terms of the principle ofsovereignty.This legal principle states that each territorially defined sovereign state ought to be ruled by a source of authority that issubject to no internal competitors and no external superiors. One'smembership of a sovereign state tends to be more formally defined than does one's membership of a nation. The termnation-state' conflates these two different forms ofcommunity into a single concept.It isworth noting that these two elements emerged historically at different points in time.This is importantbecause it is entirely possible to have a nation that is not formally recognised as a sovereign state (such as the Kurdish nation) or a statewhose citizenry is not comprised of members of a single nation (suchas the UK, in which people of multiple nationalitiesScottish, Welsh–and English, for example, coexist) (Harrison et.al.,2015). Thus the attempt to construct a homogenous national identity by the ruling state apparatus in the backdrop of the Rohingya crisis better manifests the existence of the multiple nationalities as well as the intricate nature of the Burmese Nation-State. However, the question of coexistence in Myanmar seems to be problematic.

Indeed, there are relatively fewexamples throughout the world of sovereign states whose bordersneatly encompass the members of a single nation. Unpacking the concept of the nation-state helps us to understandthe term's meaning but it also highlights that what we know today asa nation-state is a form of political community that has developedover a lengthy historical period.The origin of nation-states begins

with the origin of the sovereign state, arising as it did more than a century before thedevelopment of nationalism occurred.Nation-states have not always looked as they do today but, equallyimportantly; even today not all nation-states look alike. There arenumerous terms used to categorise nation-states, and many of these terms help us to appreciate the multitude of functions andresponsibilities that we expect political communities to meet.Thedistinction between 'developed' and 'developing' states makes reference to the level of economic activity and organisation within states, and it implies that we expect modern nation-states to beeffective managers of their domestic economies. The usage of theterm 'failed states' highlights that we expect our governments tomeet minimum standards in terms of the provision of various education,social care and law and order services. The notion of 'roguestates' highlights a further expectation: namely that legitimatenation-states will meet the norms and rules of the internationalcommunity. The key point here is that the'nation-state' hasbecome a complex form of political community that is expected toserve a broad range of functions.Finally, it is worth noting that forms of political communitycontinue to change (Harrison et.al., 2015).

On the one hand, globalisation continues to challenge the capacity of nation-states to exercise authority overand provide services for their citizens (Held and McGrew 2007b, as cited in Harrison et.al., 2015). On the other hand, while the sovereign autonomy and powers ofnation-states may be declining, other forms of political institutions and community are emerging. Thus, supra-national organisations such as the European Union have emerged, exercising authority overmultiple nation-states but also forging new understandings of politicalcommunity whose boundaries extend beyond those associated witheither nationality or citizenship. At the same time, transnational and sub-state organisations and communities have emerged that

sometimeswork in conjunction with, and sometimes compete with existingnation-states. It is important to note that the consequence of theseand other processes has not been the complete demise of nation-states,which remain as the most important single type of political community (Sørensen 2004, as cited in Harrison et.al., 2015). Instead, these processes have continuedto change what nation-states are, both in terms of the functions thatthey serve and the communities that they represent (Harrison et.al., 2015).

"Nation," it is clear, is not the same as "state." The latter refers to an independent and autonomous political structure over a specific territory, with a comprehensive legal system and a sufficientconcentration of power to maintain law and order. "State," in otherwords, is primarily a political-legal concept, whereas "nation" isprimarily psycho-cultural. Nation and state may exist independentlyof one another: a nation may exist without a state, a state mayexist without a nation. When the two coincide, when the boundaries of the state are approximately coterminous with those of the nation,the result is a nation-state. A nation-state, in other words, is a nation that possesses political sovereignty. It is socially cohesive aswell as politically organized and independent (Rejai& Enloe, 1969). However, the factual understanding of the Nation-State seems to appear contradictory in the case of Myanmar due to a kind of policy of racial segregation directed against its minority communities, particularly the Rohingyas as such. Therefore, many international organisations like Amnesty international perceive the Rohingya crisis as a State sponsored apartheid[2] to promote the majority culture of the ethnic Bamar community.

[2] Apartheid generally understood as a form of institutionalized racial segregation was prevalent in South Africa, characterized by an authoritarian culture based on the notion of white supremacy and was directed against the majority South African blacks.

2.3. The 'Geo-body' of Precolonial Burma

The process of state formation in precolonial Burma can be understood from the existence of different kingdoms ruling the territory at different periods in history. Scholars like Victor B. Lieberman whose work "Reinterpreting Burmese History" talks much about the problems associated with periodization in the Burmese historiography thereby tracing the evolution of the precolonial state. Lieberman also explains as to how the colonial intrusion of Burma later changed the state society relationship thereby making the precolonial indigenous institutions as well as the political order based mostly on Buddhism less relevant. As a result, the colonial state brought with it, its own conception of administrative and political order with an emphasis on western values and norms thereby manifesting a social engineering of foreign territory under their control. However, Lieberman still argues that despite of the transition that Burma has witnessed in the past the modern state of Myanmar, as it is called since the post 1988 period still manifests much of the precolonial precedent.

Two significant forces caused the nature of the precolonial state to change. One was the force of internally and externally sanctioned economic and technological change. This recast the environment in which the state functioned, especially in the early modern period at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The other force was the evolution of the scale of the state as a consequence of its territorial expansion, some modest population growth, and the accumulated experience of the ruling strata (Koenig, 1978 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 15). Clearly the fulcrum of the state throughout the precolonial period was the monarch. Strong, charismatic kings, usually the founders or the early monarchs of new dynasties, put their personal stamps on their reigns. To the popular mind the monarchy and often the monarch himself was

seen as the state. Notions of kingship and statecraft derived from classical Indian Buddhist thought persisted throughout the period. Territorial consequences was seen as the consequence of the kings possession of a full treasury and a strong army, and it was the exercise of that territorial control that made possible the taxation of labour and agriculture which filled the treasury and fed the army (Tambiah, 1976 as cited in Taylor, 2009:16).

Below the king (or in case the case of two Mon reigns – the queen) was a system of vassal chieftains and often hereditary district and village headmen, all more or less answerable to the court. "Corve" (tax-in-kind) labor was organized at the village level, and the large infrastructure projects undertaken by the Mon-khmer, Tai and Burman kings employed what would today be called "forced labour". Other centres of power reflecting the stratified political order included the Buddhist Sangha and the shamanistic Nat[3] and Kalok cults indigenous to Mon and Burman communities (South 2005: ch. 1 as cited in South, 2008). Each Nat represented a particular territory reflecting the administrative divisions of the kingdom, and helping to cement people'sidentification with a particular locality (Perriere, 1995 as cited in South, 2008)

In this regard it would be very important to understand the notion of the state that existed in precolonial South East Asian states and particularly Burma. Thus the definition of the state as suggested by Charles Tilly would be significant in this regard. Tilly suggests that "an organisation which controls the population occupying a defined territory is a state in so far as (1) it is differentiated from other organisations operating in the same territory; (2) it is autonomous; (3) it is centralized; and (4) its

[3]Animistic being thought to people part of the conceptual world of many villagers.

divisions are formally coordinated with one another" (Tilly, 1975 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 9-10). As such the above definition as suggested reflects a modern notion of the state widely prevalent in Europe at that time. However,precolonial mainland South East Asian states did not have a 'population occupying a defined territory' in the sense of a territory demarcated by externally as well as internally recognised and reasonably precise borders. In such circumstances, the concept of 'foreign affairs' would not have had the same sense as in Europe. European borders were often imprecise and much contested until relatively recent times, while South East Asian rulers knew what territory they were able to control and tax, and their subjects knew to whom they owned taxes and service., if not always allegiance. Indeed, crude equivalents to demarcated borders did exist before the arrival of European concept of State (ibid).Thus it can be understood from the above fact that in the precolonial period there existed a very blur concept of state and its structure in the form of monarchical rule, not necessarily the modern European State system.

Throughout the era of the precolonial state, and in the present day, parallel to the state stood the institutional form of the Buddhist faith, the Sangha or the monkhood, usually in a subordinate relationship, but when the state was weak, a challenging one.Being closer to the people and in a less obviously exploitative coercive posture, the monkhood survived dynastic changes to provide society in central Myanmar with a cultural unity that was little questioned and more rarely tested until the rise of the colonial state and mass nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The outward manifestations of the institutions of the Buddhist faith, which were remarkably uniform from the fifteenth century onwards, provided the only important, albeit narrow, avenue of social mobility for those who were young and ambitious until the colonial period, and gave the populace a shared experience and

social expectations that both explained and justified the vicissitudes of life and the state (Taylor 2009: 16).

So, in the precolonial state there existed a societal institution of religion, mainly Buddhism in a hierarchical order where king reigned as the supreme authority thereby placing the Sangha or the monkhood under its subordinate control. As such from the precolonial period Buddhism has played a very prominent role in shaping and transforming the state society relationship in Myanmar, however, sometimes challenging the might of the state under different circumstances. Thus the present day discourse on Rohingya Muslims also surrounds mostly on the institution of religion thereby manifesting the State-religion nexus and its role in initiating a process of cultural homogenization. However, a separate chapter on the topic would be dealt subsequently.

The precolonial state rested upon a society which had a fundamental stability grounded in agriculture and religion which it was little able, or willing, to alter. The problem for the controllers of the state was how to direct and use these societal institutions for their own purposes, while rivals in the Sangha, and especially the local gentry, championed the ultimate power of religion and the rights of the village and the town in the name of ideals and interests which were sometimes at odds with those of the king and the central state (Taylor, 2009: 17).

As such in the terminology of comparative Weberian sociology, the precolonial state is best described as 'patrimonial'[4] (Weber, 1968 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 17). Princes, ministers, provincial officials and village and township headmen, as well as rival

[4]A patrimonial state is best described as one in which the supreme authority lies directly with the ruler and it manifests a form of political domination which is more autocratic or oligarchic in nature. Patrimonialism has been mostly associated with the works of Max Weber.

power centers on the periphery of the state's domain, were continually seeking opportunities to organize sufficient power to keep wealth and authority in their own hands. The central state had to struggle constantly to regroup and control the resources provided by agriculture and trade, and the kings influence over the institution of the Buddhist religion made the aggrandisement of the state easier by clothing it with the mantle of legitimacy (ibid). As such it is to be noted that the precolonial state structure mainly rested on the monarchical rule, however, time and again rival power institutions have emerged to challenge the authority of the precolonial state from various quarters. Michael Adas has referred to this form of state structure as a 'contest state', noting that,central to this form of political organisation is the rule by a king or emperor who claims a monopoly of power and authority in a given society but whose effective control is in reality severely restricted by rival power centres among the elite, by weaknesses in administrative organisation and institutional commitment on the part of state officials, by poor communication, and by a low population-to-land ratio, that places a premium on manpower retention and regulation (Adas, 1981 as cited in Taylor, 2009:17-18).

However, the structure of the precolonial state as it is understood was quite different. In reality, the monarch was caught in a web of internal rivalries and external threats to the security of his throne, to the wealth of his treasury, and to the power of his state. In theory, 'the kingdom was minutely regulated. The whole kingdom was governed by the pen' (Furnivall, 1948 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 21-22).

In territorial terms, the structure of the precolonial state evolved from the form established by the founders of the Bagan state to that developed by the Restored Toungoo and Konbaung dynasties. Bagan consisted of four different territorial

categories: 1. the nucleus, 2. secondary settlements, 3. strategic stockades, 4. conquered 'foreign' areas. The nucleus was the core of the state's territory from which, by controlling its irrigation system, it derived the bulk of its manpower and revenue and had the greatest control over its subjects occupations. The secondary settlements on the state's western frontier were probably of little economic value, although some trade may have been conducted there. The relatively undefended nature of the secondary settlements zone suggests that the rulers perceived the area as posing little threat. Threats were perceived to come from the north and east, where the state created a string of forty- six stockades under control of the king's army. As an indication of the restricted area of the Bagan state in comparison its seventeenth-and eighteenth-century successor, the so-called conquered territories (naingngan) lay mainly to the south of the nucleus zone in what became the heart of the state's domain in the last period of the precolonial state (ibid).

It has been witnessed that in the later period greater centralization was done to make the precolonial state more powerful and simple by re arranging the state's administrative structure. It is also to be noted that in the precolonial state though the monarch was considered as the main fulcrum, however, the state functioned through various officials appointed centrally.

Rather than possessing four different types of administrative zones, the Restored Toungoo and Konbaung state had only three (Lieberman, 1984 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 23). The nuclear zone, the most important, was in some respect similar to, though much larger than, the nucleus of the Bagan state. In the second zone, which Lieberman refers to as the zone of dependent provinces , authority was placed in the

hands of centrally appointed officials known as myo-wun[5], whose staff, also centrally appointed, represented the king in provincial capitals. Further from the king's supervision lay the third zone, that of the tributaries. Here, hereditary rulers from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds exercised immediate authority. These rulers, Shan sawbwa, Kachin duwa, Kayin and Chin chiefs, etc., paid allegiance to the central court through tribute missions, marriage alliances, military forces and similar non-permanent, non bureaucratic displays of obligations. When these tributaries posed no serious threat to the central state, kings allowed them to conduct their affairs undisturbed (ibid).

Now talking of the authority relations in the precolonial state, it was more or less similar to its territorial structure, organized in a hierarchical order. However, it is to be noted that the precolonial state functioned under various inevitable circumstances which sometimes led to its downfall. According to Aung Thwin, throughout the history of the classical state the 'essence of social and administrative organisation' was its structuring along patron-client lines through a form of 'cellular' organisation (Thwin as cited in Taylor: 2009: 26).As such this patron-client structuring in the pre colonial period resulted in the classification of social groups under various categories vis-à-vis the state. However, the duties and responsibilities of these social groups varied according to their position and status in the hierarchy.

The king stood at the apex of the society in which the bulk of the population was attached to specific organic communities, tied to him through a network of interlocking relationships which provided the warp and woof of state and society. In practice, the king's ability to control the behaviour of his subjects was limited, as his

[5]Myo-wun was the name given to those officials who were appointed centrally and represented the king in provincial levels.

authority was mediated through a chain of subordinate authorities of varying kinds (ibid). Despite the king's theoretically all powerful position, the officials who surrounded him, as well as his cultural and political milieu, placed other limitations on the effectiveness of his authority. Growing bureaucratic tendencies in the administration 'restrained him from having a free hand' (Kyi and Tin, 1973 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 28).

While talking of the economy of the precolonial state in Burma it mostly reflects an agrarian base supporting various societal institutions running parallel along the state. Mention is to be made of the religious institutions like the Sangha, various institutions under the control of the state structure like army, court appointed officials below the monarch and most importantly the population. As such Taylor (2009) argues that the precolonial economy can be characterized as essentially a subsistence economy[6].

However, despite the fact that the precolonial state witnessed stability and order during the period of the Restored *Toungoo* and *Konbaung* dynasty no transition of economy from subsistence to a modern form of economy took place. As it has been already stated that there existed a hierarchical structure where the state in the form of monarchical rule maintained a subordinate relationship with other societal institutions, reforms were not undertaken due to political interests of the state officials at that time.

The subsistence aspects of the economy were, moreover advantageous to the state's controllers in as much as they tended to limit the economic aspirations of the bulk of the population; demands by the society on the state for economic improvements were rare. Avoidance of the state, not reliance upon it, was the norm. Thus, a variety of

[6] An economy reflecting the use of natural resources for one's own basic necessity and in which trade as understood in the modern sense is minimal.

means to evade state demands were developed, and the inability of the central state's administrative system to penetrate the village beyond the *thu-gyi*[7] made all this easier (Taylor, 2009: 39). The primary basis of the state's finances was taxation of produce. With regard to land tax, by tradition the king could lay claim to one-tenth of all production which 'was viewed as a return for tenancy' (Trager and Koenig, 1979 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 40). However, scholars have mostly differed in their approach with regard to the ownership of land as such.

In the classical Burmese state, land and labour were categorized as either crown orprivate. State or crown land (mye-taw) was composed largely of the best irrigated tractsin the dry zone, usually worked by crown labour called *kyun taw* or ahmudan[8]-depending upon the period of study -subject to service tenure, whose produce went to kyi-tawor royal granaries. These crown lands and labour were administered by temporary andpermanent clients of the king in return for certain rights and privileges. Exempt communal or ancestral land (bobabaingmye) was owned collectively, usually by villages of non-indentured people (athi)[9] who, in lieu of corvee, submitted per capita taxes to the crown, determined by a complicated system based on their occupation. Sahghika or religious lands (wathukanmye) were either owned outright by the church or held inperpetuity as endowments (Thwin, 1984: 224).

Again with regard to the ownership of land in the precolonial state, theory and practice differed greatly. Land was in theory owned by the king, and therefore his officials had the right, in his name, to determine use and settlement patterns if their authority was appealed to in cases of disputed usufruct. However, in practice, the

[7] A thu-gyi is a village headmen

[8] An individual owing personal obligation to the state.

[9] A person owing tax obligation to the state.

overwhelming bulk of land was regulated by customary understandings among the villagers under the supervisory authority of the thu-gyi. The state was forced to tolerate such a disjuncture between theory and practice in land ownership and usage because it did not have the political power, administrative means, or economic necessity to change it; moreover there was no incentive for the development of state sanctioned legal concepts of property rights as developed in European feudalism (North and Thomas, 1973 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 42). Unable to administer the land in practice, the precolonial state attempted to regulate the people who cultivated the field and allowed them to determine usage. However, the authority of the state always lay behind the customary arrangements, and when these were disputed by a segment of the community, the king's fictive ownership gave his officials the right to determine the outcome (ibid. 42-43). As such it can be understood that the precolonial state continued to regulate the ownership of land, even though at some point its intervention became limited. Thus, a centralized state structure was the result.

In addition to taxes on land and population, taxes on commerceand trade were increasingly important sources of revenue. The equivalents of customs post were established to control internal and external trade on the reasonably well developed network of cart and high roads and the rivers which connected the major towns (Koenig, 1978 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 43). These posts were manned by crown service men from the ahmu-dan population and were supervised by a minister known as the kin-wun[10] (Trager and Koenig, 1979 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 43). Here it needs to be pointed out that the precolonial state despite of having limited resource base at its disposal, it initiated increased taxation through customary arrangements,

[10] A state official or a minister who supervised the ahmu-dan or crown service men.

village intermediaries like the headmen, customs etc. Taylor (2009) states that given the patron-client nature of most authority relationships in the precolonial state, heavy taxation almost inevitably led to a declining tax base. The hierarchical territorial organisation and the authority relations that provided the order of the precolonial state were designed to enable the rulers to carry out their primary duties of control, security and resource accumulation (Taylor, 2009: 46).

As such the patron-client ties defined the very nature of the overall precolonial state structure and its subordinate institutions thereby manifesting the political interest of the ruling elites in perpetuating the state and its resource base.

The leaders used military, economic, religious and legal instruments to perpetuate themselves and the state (ibid). In the precolonial state law, like the army, the administrative system and the economic order and the religious institutions, was used for the maintenance of royal authority upon which the monarchs depended for the perpetuation of their state (Taylor, 2009: 54). The king, as the centre of the state, was the focus of the state's legitimizing ideology (ibid). As a result, the cosmological beliefs provided a basis for the monarch to justify his rule in the precolonial period thereby manifesting political and social stability and a complete subordination of the society to the state.

The ideology of classical kingship had many elements. All were interrelated and sanctioned by the teachings of Theravada Buddhism or by folk beliefs about local and regional gods known as *nats* (Taylor, 2009: 56). As Thwin (1983) states that the classical Myanmar concept of kingship contained within it several notions of the nature of the monarch himself. Thus he assumed the role of *dhammaraja* or the lord of the law and *cakkavatti*, universal monarch or world conqueror in providing

ideological justification vis-à-vis the state. However, Lieberman (1987) (as cited in Taylor, 2009) argues that the ideological complex that provided the legitimacy of the Buddhist state in the classical period was much more intricate than these Buddhist derived theories would imply. Therefore, now, it would be important to understand the nature of politics in the precolonial period. The usual image of politics in the precolonial period of Myanmar's history is that of dynastic (Taylor, 2009: 60). As such a detailed examination of the relationship between the state, society and politics provides a better insight to understand politics in the precolonial period. Thus the hierarchical order on the basis of which the precolonial state derived its existence contained different segments of people.

Apart from the vertical patron client structure of the precolonial state, the Burmese social organisation was also arranged horizontally into a pyramidal scheme of three major class divisions. At the top was the royalty, their clearly definable kin and the higher (court) officialdom; below them were the lower (provincial) officialdom; and at the bottom lay the commoners, the bulk of Burmese society (Thwin, 1984: 224). As such the state was perceived differently by these classes. For royalty, the state was the means to perpetuate their privileged place in society. For officialdom and the gentry, it was a set of mechanisms that allowed them to support their different hereditary or appointed positions in the state's intermediary administrative structure. For the peasantry, the state was probably more a burden than a blessing most of the time, but there were few long term choices available given the tyranny of chaos that would emerge without the order that the state provided (Taylor, 2009: 61). The 'lord of life' monarch in fact, had only tenuous control over his subjects through a set of institutions that often operated more for the benefits of the state's intermediary functionaries than of the king (Pollack, 1979 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 61). As such

the later monarchs who continued the trend of perpetuating the state for their own vested interest with increased centralization and taxation from its meagre resource base drastically changed the nature of the precolonial state. In addition, the internal challenges in the form of peasant rebellion and later the external challenge posed by the British Indian Empire exposed the precolonial state and its institutions further to a more advanced form of administrative and bureaucratic state structure with greater logic of rationalization and modern state system as such. Thus the nature of the state society relationship also changed with the change in the nature of the state from a traditional classical state to a modern state or more aptly a colonial state.

2.4 Question of Minorities in Myanmar

One of the most complicated problems that Burma has faced is that of the status of minorities and their position in the hierarchical order of the Burmese society. Various minorities recorded in the history of Burma have inhabited the territory of Burma since the precolonial times. However, the recent Rohingya crisis in modern day Myanmar has led to a political vacuum which manifests mostly a majority minority divide along ethnic lines. As such time and again identity has been constructed and deconstructed by the various regimes and ruling elites in Burma.

In precolonial Burma, ethnic, political, social and religious identities were not fixed and unipolar as they became during the colonial period. Ethnic identity based on language and cultural inheritance, was only one of a number of themes in social and economic life. In general markers of identity were not self consciously held and with some important exceptions social and political issues were problematised along ethnic lines. Rather than being oriented towards a single axis of ethnic identity, and uniform set of allegiances that determined secondary relationships, communities and

individuals in precolonial Southeast Asia participated in multiple networks of obligation and privilege, often paying tribute to more than one centre of political economic power-i.e. being subject to multiple sovereignties (South, 2008:5). The nature and significance of ethnicity, and other categories of identity, have changed over the centuries – often according to political and economic circumstances. During the precolonial period, for example, the primary marker of individual and communal identity was position in the tributary (feudal) hierarchy (ibid).

In traditional Burmese society "identity was determined by (a) whether one was a Buddhist, and (b) whether one was a member of an alliance with the ruling dynasty, that is, which place one held in the tributary hierarchy." The key to the fulfillment of patron-client obligations was power, and the various strata of society were loosely in a series of fluctuating patrimonial relations (Gravers, 1999:19 as cited in South, 2008: 5). However, as Gravers notes "historical memory is crucial to defining identity, legitimizing classifications or rendering subjective concepts of, for example an ethnic movement as authentic". The historical record in Burma (and elsewhere) indicates that ethnicity has been understood differently and granted varying degree of importance during different periods (ibid).

Ethnic and other markers of identity in precolonial Burma were formed from a mixture of elements, ancient and contemporary. To a degree, group and individual identities were constructs- and could therefore be re made under the influence of changing social, political and economic circumstances. Relatively fluid concepts of identity were amenable to the influence (manipulation even) of domestic elites, and later, foreign conquerors. The re construction of identity was not necessarily undertaken in a systematic or self- conscious manner. Regardless of ideological

considerations, the reification of ethnicity in late precolonial Burma and especially under the British rule, and since has profoundly influenced the relationship between the state and society and the country's historical development (South, 2008: 6).

CHAPTER III

State-Religion Nexus and the Construction of a Homogenous National Identity

3.1 Introduction

Scholars argue that the nexus between religion and politics is rooted in the biography of the Buddha and his close relationships with royal supporters like King Bimbisara, who donated the Deer Park near Benares to the early Buddhist community. The later Theravada tradition continued to cultivate a close and reciprocal relationship with political leaders. Several lineages of the Buddhist tradition spread to Southeast Asia by land and sea routes. Burmese history credits King Anawrahta (1044–1077) with establishing, by the middle of the eleventh century, Theravada as the religion of the Pagan dynasty and its empire. A dhammaraja—a king whose office comprised simultaneously religious and political responsibilities—ruled a Theravada Buddhist polity such as the Pagan empire and later Burmese kingdoms. As a righteous Buddhist ruler, the dhammaraja was expected to govern in accordance with the Buddhist Law (dhamma) or Universal Truth (Schober, 2006: 75-76). As such scholars like Gunter Lewy (1972) therefore argue that it was under the rule of King Anawrahta, the founder of the first Burmese empire in 1044 that the Theravada Buddhism became the dominant religion of Myanmar.

While Theravada Buddhism is not a totalizing influence on Burmese politics, the religion has provided both a set of ideational raw materials and a general conceptual framework within which most Buddhists in Myanmar think about and practice politics. Burmese political thinkers have used Buddhist principles to both defend and contest political authority and to construct a national identity in which state and religion are, for many, both interdependent and inseparable. Monks have played a

leading role in Myanmar's politics, justified via their responsibility to defend and propagate the religion as well as their obligation to reduce suffering. The appropriate relationship between Buddhism and politics remains an essentially contested question within Buddhist communities (Walton, 2015: 1-2).

Therefore, this chapter will examine the nexus between State and Religion in Myanmar since the precolonial period thereby exploring as to how this dyadic interconnectedness has changed its nature according to time and circumstances. It will also discuss the significant role of the Sangha or the monastic order and its interaction with the State in promoting Theravada form of Buddhism from the precolonial period till date. Thus, it is to be understood that religion became a very important factor in Myanmar since then. As such some scholars like Paul Fuller who has done a critical study on Buddhism in the Southeast Asian context refers to such use of religion and Buddhist identity in maintaining social and political order as ethnocentric and chauvinistic. This chapter will also explore as to how the narrative of an ethnocentric Buddhist identity in Myanmar has been employed in constructing a homogenous national identity vis-à-vis the minorities as such.

3.2 State-Religion relationship in Myanmar with reference to the role of the Sangha

The Burmans considered Buddhist faith the very raison d'être of their state (Harvey, 1946 as cited in Cady, 1953: 150). Superficially, at least, Buddhism appears to affect every facet of Burma's social and political life (Mehden, 1961:166-167). This is evident from the abstract use of Buddhism and Buddhist symbolism by the monarch in the precolonial times, its decreased significance in the colonial period and however, its revival in the aftermath of Burma's independence till date manifests the intricate

nexus between Church and the state as well as an attempt to legitimise the use of Buddhism in shaping the national ideology of the state.

3.2.1 State and Sangha in Precolonial Burma

Burma's nationalists, laymen and monks, tend to look back upon monarchical Burma as a political system in which religion and the Sangha (monkhood) played a vigorous role. They point to the existence of an intact Buddhist hierarchy, the formal obeisance of the monarch to the Sangha, advice given by noted sayadaws (abbots) to the king, and the place of Buddhism as the state religion. In reality, the sangha was not the continuously powerful force in pre-British Burma that it has been portrayed. At times of crisis, certain pongyis[1] were active as mediators, envoys, or challengers to arbitrary royal authority, but as a rule the sangha was apolitical. (Cady, 1959 as cited in Mehden, 1961:167-168).

The king served as the primary patron of religious causes that ranged from donations to the Sangha to sponsoring the construction and consecration of pagodas, monasteries, and sacred icons, including Buddha images and stupas, which are reliquaries that contain the Buddha's remains or similar sacred items. From a Burmese cultural perspective, the religious and ritual obligations of the king were basic to his political leadership (Schober, 2006: 76). The king, in addition to promoting Buddhism by feeding the monks and building shrines and temples, also acted to safeguard the purity of the faith by appointing the head of the Sangha hierarchy, suppressing heresy, and enforcing discipline within the order. The chief agency of royal control was the thathanabaing ("possessor of discipline and instruction"),a kind of archbishop who was appointed by the king (Cady, 1959 as

[1]A Pongyi is a Buddhist monk.

cited in Lewy, 1972: 21). As such it can be understood that from the precolonial times itself Buddhism remained intact with the state apparatus in the form of monarchical rule who acted as the main patron and protector of religion and the monastic order.

The cosmological link between Buddhism and political power was affirmed through cultural expectations about kingship, and it was sustained through merit-making rituals among communities. Merit determines the material and ethical quality of one's rebirth, and laypeople acquire merit by giving material support (dana) to religious causes that sustain the Buddha's Dispensation. As Burmese believe that religious merit will manifest itself in status, power, and prestige, making merit is an integral part of achieving political goals. (Schober, 2006: 79).The galactic polities of Buddhist Southeast Asia embodied a pre-modern totalizing construct in which social, religious, and cosmological order were integrally linked (Schober, 1995:309).Therefore, the monarch in the precolonial period indulged himself in merit making rituals and governed the state in accordance with the philosophical teachings of Buddhism in order to achieve political goals.

The complementary roles of world conqueror and world renouncer have defined the conceptual structure of Buddhist kingdoms and of traditional South and Southeast Asian galactic polities. The righteous king (dhammaraja)- or even a more encompassing universal monarch (cakkavatti) – represents secular authority, while the religious authority of the Buddhist monkhood (Sangha) is predicated on renunciation of worldly gains in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment and disciplined action to uphold the Buddha's teachings (dhamma) (Lehman, 1987 as cited in Schober,1995:310-311). Kings were expected to rule in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha, ensure social harmony and material prosperity for their subjects, and act as primary patrons

of the Sangha. The monastic observance of the Buddha's teachings, in turn, bestowed merit upon the king, his subjects, and polity which legitimated his reign (ibid).

Among the dhammaraja's responsibilities as patron of the Sangha was the periodic initiation of monastic reforms that typically entailed unification of the Sangha, purification of ordination lineages, standardization of monastic education and revisions of the Buddhist scriptures (dhamma), particularly the monastic code of conduct (vinaya). Equally significant in this regard was the reform of tax exempt, monastic endowments such as land holdings or revenues (Mendelson, 1975 as cited in Schober, 1995: 311). Sangha on the other hand is a very important religious institution that shares a dyadic interaction with the state since the precolonial times.

The Sangha's role was to preserve and practice the Buddha's dhammakaya, and monks were expected to embody his spiritual message (dhamma) through practice, knowledge, and insight. Hence, the Sangha occupied a place of authority and veneration within Burmese society. Because of the Sangha's role as an educational institution, home for the intellectual elite, and social location for the production of cultural knowledge, monks in general and select individuals in monastic groups (in Burmese, gain) within the Sangha have had profound influence on Burmese culture and history. The Burmese Sangha's internal structure is hierarchical, and monks acquire seniority with each full year they remain in the Sangha (Schober, 2006: 80). Thus, Sangha stands as a very significant pillar of religious institution in Myanmar since the precolonial times which has been functioning parallel alongside the state and had sometimes even challenged the might of the state.

In most of the pre-colonial period (say from the 11th to the 19th centuries), the Sangha seemed better integrated into state and society. Its head was usually the primate of the king, who had been the king's spiritual advisor, when still a prince (Thwin, 2009: 7). The primate was assisted by a commission of eight monks (pongyis); under him were district bishops called gainggyoks. This organization enforced monastic discipline, settled controversies within the order, organized the holding of annual examinations, and generally supervised monastic training (Cady, 1959 as cited in Lewy, 1972: 21). While the king invested the primate, who served at his pleasure, the thathanabaing's authority in matters of ecclesiastical organization and discipline was great and interference by the king in the sacerdotal affairs rare (Smith, 1965 as cited in Lewy, 1972: 21). The thathanabain was the Supreme Patriarch of the Burmese Sangha. He was appointed by the king, who generally looked toward monastic teachers and lineages with close relations to the court. The thathanabain counseled the king on matters of governance (Schober, 2006: 80). The monarch needed the Sangha for it strengthened the royal authority in numerous ways. The Sangha performed an important function of social control by teaching the virtues of meekness and humility (Smith, 1965 as cited in Lewy, 1972: 21). The wearers of the yellow robe were proverbially the conscience of the people, the custodians of literature and learning, the educators of youth, the champions of the moral order (Cady, 1953: 150). The monks at court participated in affairs of state, celebrations, ceremonials, and cremations. They were frequently sent on diplomatic missions, apparently to add an aura of sincerity to royal proposals. They nevertheless on occasion urged the deposition of unworthy monarchs, led revolts, aided royal personages to escape, and one even acted as regent. But the court chronicles contain clear evidence that the king brooked no clerical challenge to his authority over the state. He punished summarily any

indication of defiance or rebellion (Harvey, 1925 as cited in Cady, 1953: 51). The monastic community was thus largely self-governing, but was dependent none the less on the strong arm of the king to maintain essential discipline and orderly procedures (ibid).

The organization itself was clearly smaller and less complex with fewer orders, so that it was likely less factionalized and more manageable, with little reason for opposition to the state since it was its main patron. As a result, their relationship was cozier and more often expressed in public rituals of legitimation centred on the religious donations. Initially, these donations which were in the form of cash as well as permanent land and labor endowments stimulated the developments of the agrarian economy by increasing the acreage of the padi land and attracting scarce labour into the kingdom. The kingdom of pagan (perhaps along with Angkor) paid some of the highest salaries for skilled labor in Southeast Asia during the 12^{th} and the 13^{th} centuries. Eventually, the Sangha and the state became two major land owners in the largely agrarian state, which meant the Sangha was the only institution in society that was economically independent of the state, thereby, also the only one that could counter-balance the power of the state. Ironically, then, the Sangha's independence from the state was derived largely from the largesse of the state (Thwin, 2009: 7-8). As such Taylor (2009) notes that the problem of religious power in the history of Myanmar during the precolonial period is a much documented feature of the political order and shows most clearly how the state used certain nominally extra-state agencies for its perpetuation, for the rival power of the institutions of the Buddhist religion was dependent upon the state and cyclical in nature; it waxed and waned, and could always be brought to heel under the dominance of the state.

The control of the Sangha was to the advantage of the state and the purity the state could impose upon the sangha was to the advantage of the religion. The king always had the final say as to whether monastic practices were legitimate, and he maintained this power through his ability to grant 'tax-exempt status or royal endorsement and approval' through patronage of those institutions and practices which were legitimate 'as interpreted by the king' (Thwin, 1979 as cited in Taylor, 2009:52). The relations between the state and religion in pre-colonial Myanmar were similar in broad respects to those between the monarchs and the clerical orders in early modern Europe. Like the kings of Myanmar, European kings involved in the formation of the early modern state 'had little autonomous creative power' at their disposal, and hence 'clerics were useful partners' in both an administrative and a legitimising sense (Tilly, 1975 as cited in Taylor, 2009: 52). However, the role of the king as defender of the faith was the most important facet of the relationship between religion and kingship in Burma (Winfield, 2010: 348). Therefore, it can be understood from the above fact that there existed a subordinate rather than a reciprocal relationship between the State and religion throughout the precolonial period. It is also true that both the institutions i.e. the State and the Sangha were totally interdependent and inseparable as the entire society was structured in a hierarchical order and manifested patron-client ties. As such most of the societal institutions in the precolonial state were used for the maintenance of royal authority and to the advantage of the monarch in order to legitimise the state.

Throughout the precolonial period, doubtless the strongest basis for the perpetuation of the state was its clearly and largely unchallenged claims to be acting in accordance with the cosmological order. That order was buttressed by both religious doctrine and

customary beliefs, and was rarely brought into question until the arrival of rival religions and ideologies from Europe in the early modern period (Taylor, 2009: 54).

3.2.2 State and Sangha in Colonial Burma

While Buddhism continued to be an important source of legitimation for secular authority in most traditional polities and many modern Southeast Asian societies, profound challenges developed in the course of the nineteenth century. The expanding influence of colonial powers posed multiple challenges to the traditional cosmology of galactic polities (Schober, 1995:312) As such this section will provide an overview of the State Sangha relationship in Colonial Burma and how the abolition of monarch by the colonial powers led to a general disenchantment among the Burmese laity and the Buddhist clergy vis-à-vis the British annexation.

The Burmese experience of modernity was largely synonymous with the beginning of colonialism that rapidly eclipsed traditional cultural values, institutions, and lifeways (Myint-U, 2001 as cited in Schober, 2006: 81). The collapse of traditional institutions, initially in Lower Burma and after 1886 in Upper Burma, accelerated a restructuring of Burmese society that reflected Western secular values. Colonial rule became in large measure a vehicle for introducing modernity to the region (Schober, 2006: 81-82). With the British colonial rule, this reciprocal and cozy relationship between state and Sangha for most the part ended. He further states that one of the reason behind that change lay the near obsession of the colonial state with regard to the principle of separating church and state, a bloody and prolonged experience in their own history (Thwin, 2009:10).Annexation and the exile of the last Burmese king, Thibaw, triggered fierce resistance, in which Buddhist monks for the first time in Burma's history actually took up arms against the state, partly because it was a foreign one

which showed little or no interest in their religion, but also because by eliminating the monarch, the British had eliminated the chief patron of the Sangha and the defender of the faith, with dire consequences in the year to come (ibid).

It is in this regard that Juliane Schober, a prominent scholar associated with Burma as an area of research has provided some of the factors responsible for the collapse of the traditional cosmological order in the Southeast Asian polities including Burma. Several factors were significant in the eventual erosion of the galactic polity and its traditional, cosmological premises. The expansion of colonial trade networks initiated a gradual modernization of the economy which caused changes in the production of livelihoods and life styles; it also entailed the emergence of alternate avenues for social advancement which, in turn, accelerated the erosion of traditional values and status symbols. The expansion of foreign spheres of influence required traditional Southeast Asian polities to consider radically different world views, cosmologies, and modern political ideologies (Schober, 1995: 312). As much as the Sangha derived its independence largely from the precolonial state, their role under the colonial state deteriorated to a large extent due to the non recognition of the traditional cosmological order as well as the imposition of modern western ideologies and religion. Thus, it can be considered for most part in the history of Burma that Buddhism served as a unifying factor in understanding the national identity of the majority Burmese. The British invasion was decried as threatening both Buddhism and the state (Winfield, 2010: 351). In addition to establishing an administration in which pragmatic issues of military, economic, and political power were transacted separately from the Buddhist foundations of the earlier political administration, the British also implemented a deliberate policy of non-involvement in the religious affairs of the colony (Schober, 2006: 82). Thus the colonial state's non recognition of

the role of the supreme patriarch appointed by the monarch himself created a kind of vacuum in the monastic leadership as such ultimately leading to the decline of the Sangha as a religious institution. According to Lewy (1972) the abolition of the monarchy, a national and religious symbol, had created a serious institutional and psychological void. Without ecclesiastical authority over even the members of his own Sangha, the Thathanabaing could no longer impose disciplinary sanctions on unruly monks, chastise those who violated Vinaya (monastic code of conduct), settle disputes over Sangha property, or intercede in doctrinal disputes. There was no longer anyone with supreme religious or moral authority to whom truly devout and genuinely orthodox order could turn in order to maintain the integrity of the Sangha and the religion (Thwin: 2009: 11).

Colonial rule introduced alternate configurations of power that had not been a part of Burmese cultural knowledge. It created administrative structures that rationalized and centralized state powers and furthered the economic and political goals of the empire (Furnivall 1956 as cited in Schober, 2006: 82). In their totality, they had a profound impact on Burmese cultural institutions, religious authority, and the everyday lives of Buddhists (ibid). British authorities accordingly made a clean sweep of the older system, abolishing not only the court but also the ecclesiastical commissions, governmental support of the thathanabaing's authority, and even such traditional local institutions as the hereditary township and circle headmen (Furnivall, 1948 as cited in Cady, 1953:153). As such the colonial authority broke down the organisational structure of Sangha and the societal institutions thereby introducing various forms of modernity.

In the absence of a centralized or unified Sangha, internal fragmentation characterized the monastic engagement with colonization and modernity (Schober, 2006:82-83). The fact that the British failed to appoint a leader of the "sangha", a responsibility incumbent upon righteous rulers, confirmed for many Burmese the perception that the welfare of the state and of religion were in decline (Adas, 1979; Herbert, 1983; Sarkisyanz, 1965 as cited in Schober, 1995:314). Traditional symbols of social status based on merit and patronage of the sangha no longer were accurate indicators of access to and control over political power (ibid). One of the most far-reaching developments the colonial project promoted concerned the acquisition of knowledge, and through that, shaped conceptions of national identity in Burma. Traditionally, knowledge was based on Buddhist principles, and the Sangha facilitated its acquisition. Both basic literacy and higher education were firmly established within the domain of the Sangha, which acted as the source of and authority over knowledge. Concerned about compromising its authority, the Sangha ultimately rejected collaboration with the colonial government in matters of education. The collaboration had envisioned employing monks as teachers and adding lay teachers to the teaching staff at monasteries. The thathanabain argued that compliance would amount to a breach of the Vinaya, which prohibits monks from employment for compensation to safeguard monastic authority and practice. Internal fragmentation, organizational disarray, and diminishing economic support for the Sangha contributed to marginalizing monastic influence among Burmese colonial elites, especially in Lower Burma (Schober, 2006: 83-84). Thus, the colonial intrusion of Burma led to the deterioration of the Sangha's control over monastic education, the dissolution of the hierarchical order as well as the breakdown of the cohesive structure of the monkhood thereby ultimately resulting in the separation of religion and the state. As a result of

colonialism, there was an integration of modern political ideologies into the traditional knowledge system based on cosmological order.

As the colonial state spread and the socio-economic mobility of the people became more and more connected to secular accomplishments within that rationalized state (Taylor, 2009 as cited in Thwin, 2009: 11) (such as an English language education), the traditional role of the Burmese monks as models for, and educators of society's children (in terms of literacy, religious instructions, ethics, and discipline) became irrelevant, so that they themselves became increasingly marginalized- socially, psychologically, and economically.

Concepts rooted in Buddhist cultural truths, such as the rule of a dhammaraja and the righteousness of the Universal Law (dhamma)—as well as Burmese notions of power denoting physical might (ana), influence (oza), one's store of merit (phon), and personal power (tagou) that granted protection over a Buddhist center of power since times immemorial—were among those transformed and challenged by the colonial rule of the British Empire. The collapse of traditional institutions hastened the restructuring of Burmese society through colonial forms of knowledge and classification. Although diminished in its authority, the Sangha in Upper Burma came to articulate an anticolonial discourse objecting to the presence of a foreign power that refused the responsibility of the traditional state to protect the sasana[2] and hence was seen as anti-Buddhist (Schober, 2006: 85). Buddhism became a symbol of self-assertion against the colonial regime (Lewy, 1972: 25). Although the monks' image of their role in monarchical Burma did not completely coincide with reality, the loss of power under British provided a strong stimulus to sangha participation in nationalist

[2]Sasana here denotes religion

movement (Mehden, 1961: 168). Reacting against colonial modernity, a series of millenarian Buddhist revolts against the British presence developed in Upper Burma in 1906, 1910, and 1916, fostering expectations of the imminent appearance of a Universal Monarch (setkya min) (Sarkisyanz 1965 as cited in Schober, 2006: 85). These traditionalist reactions to colonial rule culminated with the Saya San Rebellion of the late 1920s (Herbert, 1983 as cited in Schober, 2006: 85).However, with the suppression of the Saya San rebellion, the role of the monks became less significant in the nationalist history of Burma as there witnessed a secular aspects of nationalism with the emergence of Dobama Asiayone[3] which was formed in 1935. Thus, the dream of a Buddhist state by the traditional monk led nationalism totally eclipsed during the era of Aung Sang, considered as the national hero of Burma's independence as he proposed a secular character for the newly independent state, thereby separating religion and politics. However, the nature of the secular state was short lived as there was recourse to the revival of dyadic relationship between the state and religion under Thakin Nu better known as U Nu, the first prime minister of Burma.

3.2.3 State and Sangha in Post-colonial Burma

Looking into the history of Burma, it has been witnessed that Buddhism has always been a crucial and unifying factor in state society nexus as such. Religion in Burma has always occupied a very important status and has been very much associated with the overall national identity of the majority Burmese society. The Sangha or the monkhood has also been a very significant societal institution without which the state couldn't function properly as both manifested interdependent relations since the

[3]We Burmans Society

precolonial period, however, their role being curbed in the colonial period by the colonisers as there was a separation of state and religion under imperial rule. But again the newly independent state inclined itself towards Buddhism in order to establish political legitimacy among the masses. As such the post colonial period in Burma has witnessed the revival of the interaction of religion and state for their own vested interest as there has been many instances where Buddhist symbolism and policies reflective of a modern Buddhist state has been manifested by the ruling regimes in different periods of Burma's history. Therefore, this section will deal with the State Sangha relationship in post colonial Burma thereby analysing as to how Buddhism has unified the geobody of Burma since precolonial times until now. In addition, the integration of Buddhism in various aspects of society in Burma has led to many significant questions pertaining to the status of religious and ethnic minorities in general and Rohingya Muslims in particular thereby forming the discourse on national identity and cultural homogenisation of the minority groups in Myanmar.

The post-colonial period in Burma mostly highlights the revival of the State Sangha nexus manifesting the synthesis of traditional cosmological order with that of modern political ideologies. At independence, Burma's political and and religious leaders inherited this contentious and fissiparous sangha which was extremely difficult to deal with. On the one hand the pongyi was the symbol of moral authority and renunciation whose acceptance of one's gifts provided merit that enhanced the donor's rebirth on the ladder to nirvana. On the other, many were a disgrace to the saffron robe with their lawless and immoral behaviour (Thwin, 2009:13). Thus, the Sangha became more of a political problem for the state due to its politicised nature. The burden to once again purify the Sangha fell on U Nu, a devout Buddhist himself and the first prime minister of the Union of Burma, which was, in name, and formal apparatus, a

parliamentary democracy (ibid). As such U Nu initiated a series of reforms in order to organise the Sangha and acts as righteous ruler to fill in the vacuum for monastic authority.

In fact, Theravada reforms have long provided a cultural template for the consolidation of political power. The reforms strengthen political values and authority by defining normative Buddhist beliefs and practices, at least for political elites. Reforms thus also present opportunities to establish new kinds of religious authorities in texts, monastic conduct, normative practice, and management of wealth acquired by the Sangha. Successful reforms, promoted as purification and propagation of the sasana, in turn lent legitimacy to traditional kings and modern heads of state, who are credited with their implementation (Schober, 2006: 87-88). In 1949, a hierarchy of ecclesiastical courts was established. In I950, a Ministry of Religion was formed, and Parliament passed an act setting up achievement examinations for the religious orders and a second act establishing a Pali university. In 1956, the Sixth World Buddhist Synod was held in Burma with government support and encouragement. Under U Nu, Burma has also tended to work for the propagation of Buddhism through the rebuilding of temples and monasteries, encouragement of inter-national Buddhist exchanges, the use of Buddhism to regenerate criminals, and efforts to proselytize among Burma's hill peoples-all of these activities having at least the tacit approval of the government (Mehden, 1961:171). It is to be noted here that the above mentioned reforms initiated during U Nu's regime consists of the Dhamma Chariya Act, which established two government sponsored ecclesiastical courts, one in Rangoon and the other one in Mandalay. Its main objective was to purify the Sasana and to classify the pure from the impure, the Vinissaya Act, which led to the establishment of a Pali University thereby recruiting students from monasteries acquainted with Pali for

teaching and examination, supported by the state funds and the establishment of a Buddha Sasana organisation with an objective of translating the Pali Tripitakas into Burmese language for preaching and propagation of Buddhism as such. It also acted as a central Buddhist organisation representing every Buddhist in Burma.

U Nu was himself a deeply religious person committed to ascetic practice in his daily life. His government sponsored monastic reforms and large-scale Buddhist rituals and eventually instituted Buddhism as a state religion. In doing so, U Nu gave in to escalating monastic demands and hoped to strengthen his political power (Schober, 2006: 88). Although many Burmese had millennial expectations of U Nu as a righteous ruler (dhammaraja) or even Universal Monarch (setya min), he was eventually unable to contain escalating pressures from the Sangha, political factions within his government, and separatist rebellions fought by ethnic minorities. A decidedly modern revitalization of Buddhism and Burmese national identity formed the historical legacy of this era, despite the collapse of U Nu's government through a military coup. The establishment of a Ministry for Religious Affairs undoubtedly had enduring consequences for Burma, as it provided the state with a mechanism for regulating religious practice among the laity, monks, and minority religions (ibid). Thus, the civilian government of U Nu was followed by the military regime of General Ne Win, sometimes also known as the Revolutionary Council/ Government.

Initially, Ne Win's reforms focused on the state, and society was organized into socialist workers' collectives (Schober, 2006: 89-90). The Revolutionary council had relatively better success controlling Sangha's political activity (Taylor, 1987 as cited in Thwin, 2009: 17). All organized political activities of monks and laymen alike virtually ceased after the Revolutionary Council assumed power on 2 March, 1962.

The government's stand on religion vis-à-vis the state returned full circle to the secular orientation envisaged by *Bogyoke* Aung San. It was also decided in early May 1962that the Revolutionary Council's policy was one of "minimum participation by the government in religious affairs". The Revolutionary Council quickly repealed some of the measures stipulated by the State Religions Promotion Act (October 1961) that presumably hindered administrative and economic efficiency - such as public holidays on Buddhist Sabbath days, the ban on liquor sales on Sabbath days, the prohibition on the sale of beef, the moratorium on the application of pesticides and insecticides, and the elimination of stray dogs in the capital (Smith, 1965 as cited in Than, 1988: 28). It was in this context that the socialist state published its policy declaration known as the "Burmese Way to Socialism" thereby emphasizing on the subject of religion as an individual concern. Thus the symbiotic relationship that existed between the state and the sangha in the regimes prior to the taking over of the revolutionary government became obsolete as the church and the state got separated during this period.

One of the first acts of the new government was the freezing of the annual grant to the Buddha Sasana Council followed by its dissolution on 17 May 1962. 10 The state subsidies for religious organizations representing other faiths were also scaled down to nominal sums and a determined campaign against *nat* ("spirit") worship was launched in the second half of 1962 (Smith, 1965 as cited in Than, 1988: 30). In addition, the revolutionary government repealed all those religious legislations as approved by the previous regime of U Nu such as the Dhamma Chariya Act, Vinissaya Act and the Pali University act which manifested a clear stand of the socialist state vis-a-vis religion, particularly Sangha. As such with the task of secularizing the polity and in realising the visions of the Burmese way to socialism,

the revolutionary government discontinued all state support for Buddhism in order to establish a truly socialist state.

The nationalization policy initiated by the socialist state in 1963 also proved to be a bane for the Sangha in many ways. The economic pressure was, in all probability, more pronounced in the urban private sector, and anecdotal evidence seems to support the notion that in the decade that followed, the maintenance of the physical infrastructure for the sangha (in the form of monasteries, consecration halls, temples, and pagodas) suffered as a result of severe constraints on the economic resources of individual devotees (Than, 1988: 31). Despite of discontinuing state support for the religion and the religious institutions, Sangha continued to be an important factor for state religion nexus. The loose patron-client relationship between the lay devotees and the sangha continued at the individual and local levels while in urban centres a somewhat subdued trend towards collective and organized support for the sasana began to evolve – probably due to resource scarcity and administrative requirements which were beyond the capabilities of the normally individualistic devotee in his or her private capacity (ibid). The lay organizations which supported the sasana in various ways constituted a wide spectrum ranging from local groupings in the neighbourhood dedicated to providing regular alms to the monks in the locality (soon-laung ah-thins) to more formal organizations such as the Malun Hsan-Hlu Ah-thin, which has operated since 1896 on a nation-wide scale soliciting annual rice appropriations for the monks residing in the Sagaing Range (near Mandalay). Most of these groups operated on a voluntary basis with funds and material from the general public (through door-to-door solicitations and donations collected at public places) or from the savings of its individual members (Than, 1988: 34).

The new Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma was adopted with an overwhelming majority by a national referendum on 3 January 1974. The Revolutionary Council formally handed over the power and responsibilities of the state to the Pyithu Hluttaw ("People's Assembly") on 2 March 1974 (ibid). The new constitution of 1974 represented the transformation from a provisional Revolutionary Government to a single party headed by the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). The latter was developed during the twelve years between the coup of 1962 and 1974 constitution. General Ne win stepped down as the chairman of the Revolutionary Government and became civilian U Ne win as the president of the BSPP (Thwin, 2009: 18). Therefore, the introduction of the new constitution manifested the depoliticization of religion and religious institutions as enshrined in the spirit of the socialist republic of the union of Burma. But again, despite of delinking state and religion, the socialist state never allowed the open exploitation of the Sangha and the religious institution as such. Thus, efforts were made to purify the Sangha and the Sasana.

As Aung Thwin (2009) notes that the BSSP Government conducted a successful sasana reform on May 24th , 1980 and was called the First Congregation of All Sangha Orders as its aim were to achieve unity and to purify and promote the sasana. One thousand two hundred and eighteen delegates from the nine different orders from all parts of the country attended to draft a constitution. The document (as subsequently amended in the Second congregation of 1985) adopted certain fundamental rules for the organization of the Sangha, procedures for solving Vinaya conflicts, and registration of members of the Sangha. Three organs of the Sangha were formed at the state and division (provincial) levels: the Ovadacariya committee, its legal arm; the Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, its executive; and the Sangha

central Working Committee, its secretariat. This structure more or less imitated government structure. The stated goal of the organization was the supervision and centralisation of the Sangha (ibid). The Second Congregation of the Sangha of All Orders of Republic of the Union of Burma for Purification, Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana (hereafter cited as the "Second congregation") commenced on 29 May 1987 as scheduled and concluded on 31 May 1985 (Than, 1988: 45). However, it must be noted that the purpose of convening a series of congregations were mainly to curb political involvement of the Sangha and to purify the Sasana to a large extent. Thus, the purification of the Sangha and the Sasana manifested the realisation of the prior parliamentary government's desire to initiate a thorough reform of the entire religious institution in general and the Sangha hierarchy in particular. Although the Sangha was still not a monolithic institution after the purifications, under the BSPP Government, it was by far better unified, organized, and controlled than it had been since British annexation (Thwin, 2009: 19). As such the entire socialist regime under General Ne win represents a secular orientation of the state vis-a-vis the Sangha and the society.

However, the succeeding regime of the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) continued to establish its firm control over the Sangha until there was pro-democracy movement in 1988. Although the government initially suppressed the involvement of monks in anti-government and pro-democracy movements, it then gradually launched a large-scale campaign to win the support of influential political monks by reconstructing and renovating religious buildings and temples. It made generous donations to influential monks, and created new titles for them. As the titles came with regular allowances and large donations, many monks were eager to accept them from the government. Senior monks were also provided with excellent medical

care. Similarly, the junta gave imposing funeral ceremonies for influential political monks (Hlaing, 2007: 235). Thus, the SLORC regime, later SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) also made the continued use of Buddhism and manifested itself as the patron of religion.

Perhaps the most insightful instance of celebrating the cosmology of modern state Buddhism occurred in the early 1990s, when SLORC promoted the restoration of Burmese national culture and traditional Buddhism along several dimensions. Critical features of this cultural reconstruction included familiar Buddhist strategies to enact the Buddha's sacred biography: a hearkening back to an idealized and glorified past under powerful Burmese kings, the reaffirmation of sacred places and stupas that locate the Buddha's presence in the Burmese nation and its history, and, lastly, the celebration of a national community that simultaneously constituted a political and social hegemony (Schober, 2006: 92). SLORC's appeal to this classic Buddhist strategy accomplished a variety of objectives. It insulated the regime and its politics from accountability to citizens and the international community. It further allowed the regime to present itself as heir to the glorious past of powerful kings and thus boost its legitimacy. Finally, the state's emphasis on ritual merit making at a national level and the concurrent silencing of the Sangha shifted public attention away from other crises facing the state. Burmese television and print media frequently report on Buddhist rituals performed in conjunction with the restoration of ancient sites and royal palace sat which military generals and government officials officiate on behalf of Burmese citizens (ibid). However, it must be noted that despite the military regime in the aftermath of the prodemocracy movement established overtures with the Sangha, the Sangha is still not a monolithic institution. In addition, Aung Sang Suu Kyi and her party National League for Democracy (NLD) won the 1990s elections with an

overwhelming majority, however, the then military regime did not let her assume power till transition of Myanmar from a military rule to a democracy in 2011. But again the persistence of religion and religious institution like the Sangha in the post military period reflects the emergence of Myanmar as a modern Buddhist state still retaining the traditional cosmological order and philosophical underpinnings of Theravada form of Buddhism thereby manifesting the exclusionary nature of Buddhism. Thus, the subsequent section will deal with the type of Buddhist identity emerging in Southeast Asia, particularly Myanmar. It will also examine how such identity based on religion has served as an integrative factor in achieving a sense of national identity among the majority ethnic Bamar thereby opening up a discourse on cultural homogenization of the religious minorities, particularly Rohingya Muslims as such.

3.3 "Ethnocentric Buddhism", National Identity and Cultural Homogenization in Myanmar

"Ethnocentric Buddhism" is a particular term used by a scholar named Paul Fuller in his study on the dominant narrative of Buddhism in the context of modern day Myanmar. The emergence of various organisations in Myanmar like the Organisation to Protect Race and Religion, also popularly known with the Burmese acronym of MaBaTha along with the 969 movements with core Buddhist ideology of defending the Sangha and the Sasana particularly from Islam remains significant in this regard.

The term 'ethnocentric Buddhism' points to the ideological and political narrative in which Buddhist identity is intrinsically linked to national and ethnic identity (Rorty, 1989 as cited in Fuller, 2018: 24). In this use, there are shared cultural and ethnic characteristics which distinguish Buddhists from non-Buddhists (ibid). The term is

also synonymous with chauvinistic Buddhism thereby manifesting a protectionist nature. The term ethnocentric Buddhism signals the combination of features of Buddhist and national identities producing distinct ethno-Buddhist identities. For example, in Thailand there is the idea of 'nation, religion, monarch' (*chatsāsana-phramahakasat*) (Liow, 2016 as cited in Fuller, 2018:24) and in Myanmar 'nation, language and religion'(*amyo-barthar-tharthanar*) (Sein and Farrelly, 2016 as cited in Fuller, 2018: 24). As such Buddhism has played a very important role in the formation of the majority national identity in most of the traditional galactic polities of Southeast Asia and particularly Myanmar.

Thus, Fuller has outlined eight different types of narratives that help's in understanding the formation of an ethnocentric or chauvinistic Buddhist identity. The narratives are as follows:

1. The narrative of the 'True Dhamma/Dharma' (*saddharma/saddhamma*).
2. The narrative of the disappearance of the Dharma/Dhamma.
3. The narrative that the teachings can be corrupted and are subject to decline.
4. The narrative a of a collective Buddhist identity.
5. The narrative that Buddhism is under threat and needs to be protected.
6. The narrative of the threat of conversion.
7. The narrative of 'blasphemy'.
8. The narrative that Buddhism is linked to ethnicity (Fuller, 2018: 25).

The idea of the 'True Dhamma/Dharma' (*saddharma/saddhamma*) has been a theme throughout Buddhist history. In its developed form the idea is that there is a complete and perfect version of the teachings of the Buddha preserved in one particular place. For example, in Sri Lanka after the migration of Buddhism to the island that particular

transmission of the Pali Canon would be considered to preserve the essential word of the Buddha (Fuller, 2018: 26). The Abhidhamma could be said to serve a similar purpose in South and Southeast Asian Buddhism. In Myanmar, the MaBaTha group have taken to settling disputes using Vinaya rules and assumptions (Ashin and Crosby, 2017 as cited in Fuller, 2018: 26). Thus, reference to the vinaya as texts, the use of Buddhist symbolism in constructing a majority ethnic identity has signified the notion of true dhamma. The second narrative in the formation of an ethnocentric Buddhist identity revolves around the notion of the disappearance of the teachings of Buddha. The third narrative in the broader theme of ethnocentric Buddhist identity is based on the corrupt practices in the Buddhist teachings itself which may lead to its decline. The fourth narrative of ethnocentric Buddhism is the idea of a collective Buddhist identity. The most prominent examples are in Thailand where 'nation, religion, monarch' (*chat-sāsanaphramahakasat*) and in Myanmar 'nation, language and religion' (*amyobarthar-tharthanar*) express key cultural and religious allegiances. Notions of Buddhist identity are then linked to other cultural and national identities (Fuller, 2018: 33).

The fifth narrative as described by Fuller is of much importance in the broader theme of a construction of a homogenous national identity in Myanmar. The narrative provides an insight as to how certain Theravada polities in Southeast Asia has perceived Buddhism to be under threat most likely from Islam and the need to defend Buddhism. As such the rise of the various Buddhist organisations like MaBaTha in Myanmar has manifested a militant character time and again thereby creating a sort of a civilizational clash between Islam and Buddhism. The threat in the modern context is often understood to be non-Buddhist religious groups. This feeds into an often volatile Buddhist nationalism (Fuller, 2018: 34).The protection of Buddhism, of the

sāsana, is key in the recent Burmese discourse about the relationship of Buddhism and national identity. The protection of Buddhism is both a rallying call of Burmese Buddhist nationalists, and a key element in what it means to be Burmese (Fuller, 2018: 36). The defence of Buddhism leads to the idea that Buddhism is under threat through Buddhists being coerced to convert to other religions. This is the sixth narrative of ethnocentric Buddhism. The threat of conversion is often part of the rhetoric used by militant Buddhist movements in modern Myanmar (ibid). Among the various laws passed by Myanmar in 2015, the Conversion Law No. 48/2015 finds special significance in understanding the discourse on ethnocentric Buddhism. As Fuller (2018) notes that the importance of this narrative is that they express a fear within ethnocentric Buddhist movements of other religious groups. There is a hesitation within these modern Buddhist societies to fully accept the existence of other religions, without distancing and distrusting them. They need to be controlled, tamed, and moderated. The idea of a multicultural religiously plural society is treated with suspicion by many of these Buddhist groups. This narrative is part of the protectionist tendency apparent in ethnocentric Buddhism.

The seventh narrative as described by Fuller vis-a-vis ethnocentric Buddhist identity is that of blasphemy which revolves around the idea of protecting Buddhism and other sacred Buddhist objects from being disrespected. These terms focus upon how Buddhists might be offended by images and texts being used in away which detracts from and offends their sacredness (Fuller, 2018: 37).

The last narrative of Buddhism being linked to ethnicity as explained by Fuller also seems to be relevant in the study of broader theme of minority question and the construction of a homogenous national identity in Myanmar. In ethnocentric

Buddhism, Buddhist identity is associated with ethnicity. A particular ethnic group is under threat and needs to preserve the teachings of the Buddha. Other ethnic groups, unless they come under the control of the dominant Buddhist group, are a danger. In certain contexts, to be 'Buddhist' is to be part of a distinct ethnic group. This in turn gives rise to a natural sense of Buddhist nationalism. What is essential to the tradition is emphasized and Buddhist fundamentalism comes to the fore in which the 'other' is polarized as a threat to the future of Buddhism (Fuller, 2018:38). As such, considering a minority group as 'other' by a majority ethnic community therefore manifests a kind of an ethnocentric notion of Buddhism being employed in Myanmar against the Rohingya Muslims thereby initiating a process of cultural homogenisation of the non-Buddhist communities. However, it must be noted that some of these narratives which Fuller has provided does not apply necessarily to Myanmar.

Chapter IV

Myanmar's National Identity and the Rohingya Dilemma

4.1 Introduction

The discourse on national identity and the emergence of the Rohingya crisis manifesting communal divide between the Buddhists and the Muslims in contemporary Myanmar, known as Burma prior to 1989 (but still known as Burma to the West) can be traced back to the inclination of the precolonial state towards making Theravada Buddhism as the dominant religion. Thus, the transition of Myanmar from a precolonial to a colonial state and eventually to a modern nation-state manifests the dyadic relationship between the state apparatus and the religious institutions with the special role of the Sangha (monkhood) during different periods in the history of Myanmar. As such it is religion which has played a very significant role in the state formation of Myanmar since the precolonial times till date. The philosophical underpinnings of Buddhism according to which the precolonial state was governed lost its relevance in the colonial period due to introduction of Christianity along with the overthrowing of the righteous ruler i.e. the dharmaraja by the Britishers. Later the ruling elites of the modern nation-state of Myanmar again revived the tradition of integrating Buddhism in the state apparatus reflecting majority ethnic culture and acted like a righteous ruler in accordance with the Theravada form of Buddhism thereby getting involved in merit making rituals and acting as the patron of religion. However, it can be said that Buddhism served and is still serving as a segregating factor in understanding the relationship of the majority ethnic community against the religious minorities, particularly the Rohingyas. As such an attempt to construct a national identity based solely on religion i.e. Buddhism has raised many pertinent

questions towards the cultural diversity of Myanmar thereby keeping the Rohingya muslims in a state of dilemma.

Therefore, this chapter will explore the historical claims made by the Rohingya muslims as an indigenous ethnic community inhabiting the territory of contemporary Myanmar prior to the annexation of Arakan (contemporary Rakhine state) kingdom by the Burmese kings. It will also examine the relationship between the majority ethnic groups with that of the minorities, particularly Rohingya Muslims as such. The chapter also seeks to explain the origin of the Rohingya crisis as well as some major policies formulated by the ruling regime of contemporary Myanmar vis-à-vis the minorities, particularly the Rohingya muslims. Further, it will discuss whether the inclination of Myanmar towards making Buddhism as the dominant religion has served in constructing a homogenous national identity thereby resulting in the communal clashes between the Buddhists and Muslims in the Rakhine state of Myanmar, the use of military force by the state apparatus particularly against the Rohingyas as well as resulting in the mass exodus of the Rohingya population to the nearby neighbouring countries like India, Bangladesh including many other Islamic countries. As such an analysis of the abstract idea of indigeneity as well as the historical evolution of the Rohingya identity in the context of the rhetoric of majoritarian national identity in contemporary Myanmar stands significant in this regard. However, the political relations between Bengal and the sovereign kingdom of Arakan (today's Rakhine State) would better explain the existence of Rohingya muslims and their religious orientation in the territory of contemporary Myanmar.

4.2 Historical Evolution of the Rohingya Identity

The history of the Arakan province of Burma (Myanmar), known today as the Rakhine state is linked to Bengal by political, religious and socio-cultural contact that can be traced back to the 8th century. Islam is said to have been introduced in Arakan through Bengal. Beginning from the immigration of sea-fearers in Arakan to her annexation by the British, connected with the history of cultural contact is the consolidation of minority identity in Arakan. The region, especially the Northern Arakan since Japanese occupation of Arakan in 1942 has been conflict ridden often seeing communal clashes between Rakhine Buddhists and Muslims. The much contested origins of the identity of 'Rohingyas' or 'Rohingya Muslims' has its basis in this period, especially between I5th and 18th centuries under Narmeikhla's rule. Also, in pre-colonial Burma, the period starting from the invasion of Bodhapaya in 1785 and the annexation of Arakan by the British in 1824, is critical in the claims of an Rohingya identity in particular and minority identity in general (Bhonsale, 2015: 631).

Arakan is a coastal geographic region in southern Myanmar (Burma). It comprises a long narrow strip of land along the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal and stretches from the Naaf estrary on the border of the Chittagong Hills area (in Bengal) in the North to the Gwariver in the South. It is about 400 miles (640 k.m.) from North to South and is about 90 miles (145 k.m.) wide at its broadest (Hall, 1950 & Habib, 1982 as cited in Akhtaruzzaman, 2000: 1081).The name Arakan is a corruption of various native names:*Rakhaing Pyi Akhrang, Rakhang, Arkhang , Rakhan* etc. and itsinhabitants (i.e. Arakanese) are commonly known as *Rakhain/Rohinga* and more frequently *Magh* (Mason, 1860 et.al as cited in Akhtaruzzaman, 2000:1081).As such

it must be noted that historically Arakan was an independent geopolitical unit. The Arakanese were animists before Brahaminism, Buddhism and Islam shaped their beliefs (Ahmed, 2010 as cited in Bhonsale, 2015: 631).Islam was introduced in Burma in the middle of 8th century by Muslim seamen who rapidly established colonies on the coast. Burma was important for sea communication and the Burmese ports were a stop-over for many trading ships coining from the Persian Gulf to China. Gradually, a community of Muslims began to settle in these coastal areas. Many even married local women like other foreigners coming to Burma. Arab, Persians and Indian Muslim traders formed the original nucleus of Burma's Muslim community. This community was known as the 'Pathee' or 'Kala' during the rule of the Burmese kingdom (Yegar,1972 as cited in Bhonsale, 2015: 631).

During the first half of the fifteenth century political intercourse between Bengal and Arakan became much more cemented. The chronicles of Burma and Arakan write that in 1404 when Arakan King Meng Soamwun alias Naramiekhla (1404-1434 A.D.) was driven out of his kingdom by the Burmese king Pyinsing Mengswa alias Meng Khamaung, then he took political asylum in his friendly court of Gaur (i.e. Bengal) (Phayre, 1883 et.al. as cited in Akhtaruzamman, 2000: 1083). As a result the king of Arakan, Naramiekhla was welcomed by the sultan of Gaur, Ahmed Shah and later helped him in restoring his throne by sending an army under the command of two able generals known as Wali khan and Sindhi/Sidhi Khan. Thus, Narmiekhla founded a new city by the name Mrohaung (Mrauk-U), which served as the capital till the annexation of the Arakan kingdom in 1785 by Burma.

Bhonsale (2015) states that Narmeikhla's Muslim soldiers who came with him from Bengal settled near Mro haung. Hereafter, till the Burmese annexation of Arakan, the

Muslims played an important role in the history of Arakan. Arakan 's contact with Bengal Sultanate was closest during this period shown by the ceding of territory to the Sultan of Bengal and recognised his sovereignty. He and his heirs despite being Buddhists in addition to Arakanese titles, took Persian titles. They assumed the title of badshah and adopted in addition to their own Arakanese names, Muslim titles. Such kings were: Naramiekhla or Sulaiman Shah (1404-1434), Mengkhari or ali shah (1434-1459), Basawpyu or Kalimah Shah (1459-1482), Gadzabadi Gazapati or Ilyas Shah (1523-1531). Meng beng (Minbin) or Zabauk/Mubarak or Barbak Shah (1531-1553), Min Palawng or Sikandar Shah (1571-1593), Mengradza or Salim Shah (1593-1612), Meng Khamaung or Husain Shah (1612-1622), Shri Thudhamma or Salim Shah II (1622-1638) etc. The kings also issued medallions bearing the kalmia, the Islamic confession of faith, in Persian script (Phayre,1883 & Harvey,1967 as cited in Akhtaruzzaman, 2000: 1083).Arakan was subject to Bengal till 1531. Narmeikhla's successors had several forays and raids in Bengal that continued till the 18th century with the help of the Portuguese after the consolidation of British navy in the Bay of Bengal. The capture and enslavement of prisoners was one of the most lucrative types of plunder. These formed another nucleus of Muslims living in Arakan (Bhonsale, 2015: 632). Bhonsale (2015) also mentions the fleeing of the mughal prince shah to Arakan with his soldiers and fighting against Aurangzeb who dethroned Shah Jahan and obtained the Mughal throne. It is further learnt that Sandathudama, the then king of Arakan allowed Shah to take refuge with his soldiers in Mrohaung on the condition that he would surrender his weapons. However, the king of Arakan asking Shah for his daughter in marriage reveals the fact that shah attempted a rebellion against the king with his soldiers and local muslims but was unsuccessful in doing so. Later, his soldiers joining the king’s special archery unit were known to be Kamans or Kamaci

(bow and bowman) muslims which is evident from the above fact.In the ensuing period anarchy and riots became the order of the day and Muslim Kaman units played a decisive role in throning and dethroning kings. The Kaman units were continually reinforced by fresh mercenaries from North India. Between 1666 and 1710, the political rule of Arakan was in their hands. King Sandawizaya managed to get an upper hand over them and most of the Kamans were exiled to Ramree and a few villages near Akhyab. Their language is Arakanese and their customs are similar to that of Arakan customs, except their religion i.e. Islam (Yegar, 1972 as cited in Bhonsale, 2015: 633).

However, after the murder of Sandavizaya in 1731 Arakan once again relapsed into chaos and official relations between these two countries remained almost suspended. But when Burmese king Bodawpaya annexed Arakan to his empire by deposing its last king Maha Thamada (i.e. people elected king: 1782-1785) in 1785 Bengal was again compelled to come to its military contact. It is observed that after Burmese occupation in 1785, revolt after revolt broke out in Arakan and thousands of its inhabitants, reportedly half the population, fled over the border into the Chittagong jungles, then belonged to the East India Company's (established first in Hughli in 1651) Presidency of Bengal. The migration of the Arakan refugees challenged the security of Bengal. Their attempts to reconquer their country from bases in the unadministered tracts behind the British frontier provoked a series of disputes, which in the long run, were the main cause of the first Anglo.-Burmese War in 1824 (Hall, 1950 as cited in Akhtaruzzaman, 2000: 1089).

Yegar is of the view that it is not possible to differentiate among the various Muslim groups or between them and the Buddhist-Arakanese, among whom they live and the

Arakanese Muslims who call themselves as Rohingya or Rowengyahs. This name is used more by the Muslims of North Arakan (Mayu region) where they are largely concentrated, than by those near Akhyab (Sittwe) (Yegar, 1972 as cited in Bhonsale, 2015: 633). However, Rohingya school of historians trace the history of the Muslims of Arakan as a continuum with Rohingya history. This school suggests that Rohingyas are descendents of Moorish, Arab and Persian traders including Mughul, Turk, Pathan and Bengali soldiers (Ahmed, 2010 as cited in Bhonsale, 2015: 633). The Arakanese Muslims call themselves 'Rohingya' or 'Roewengyah' which means the 'dear ones', 'the compassionate ones' or those who believe in mutilation of words rwa-haung-ga-kar, "tiger from the ancient village" which means brave and was a name given to Muslim soldiers who settled in Buthidaung (Yegar, 1972 as cited in Bhonsale, 2015: 633). Bhonsale (2015) further notes that the writers and poets appeared in this period lasting three centuries (15th -18th) writing in Persian, Arabic or Rohingya that was a mix of Urdu, Bengali and Arakanese language. They also composed songs in Rohingya language. In 1785, the Burmese conquered Arakan. There was a Muslim unit known as "Myedu" that the Burmese posted at Sandoway. Their descendents, few in number came to live there. With the conquest of king Baudapaya who removed all vestiges of autonomy of the Arakanese society and religion. Burman attempts to extract resources from Arakan, drove tens of thousands of Arakanese to cross the Naf river, into Bengal. Citing British records, Michael Charney has called it the "Burmanisation of Arakan" (Bahar,2010 as cited in Bhonsale, 2015: 634). Thus, it can be said that it was as early as 1785 that the cultural homogenization of the minority identity took place in contemporary Myanmar.

The British annexed Arakan in 1824 and the Burman Army started pushing the Arakanese Muslims further West, well inside British colonial territories. Following,

British annexation the Arakanese Muslims whose ancestors had left Arakan at the end of the 18th century started to return from Bengal or India. In a way the British encouraged their migration to Arakan. The British encouraged Bengali inhabitants to migrate to the fertile valleys in Arakan as agriculturists. The British also extended the administration of Bengal to Arakan. Emigration to Arakan was encouraged by this British policy. Higher wages in Arakan due to the breakdown in labour during the Burman rule were also responsible for Bengali migration en masse to Arakan (Bhonsale, 2015: 634).

4.3 Contested Narratives on 'Rohingya' Identity

There exist several schools of historians and scholars as well as contested historical narratives regarding the origin of the Rohingya Muslims and their minority identity. The above mentioned political relations between the Bengal Sultanate and the sovereign kingdom of Arakan has highlighted the introduction of Islam religion and the existence of the Muslim population in Arakan, however the term 'Rohingya' still remains controversial in contemporary Myanmar.

The origins of the term "Rohingya" are extremely difficult to trace. The first known record of a very similar word used to refer to the Muslim inhabitants of Arakan is to be found in an article about the languages spoken in the "Burma empire" published by the Scottish physician Francis Buchanan in 1799.The first is that spoken by the Mohammedans, who have long settled in Arakan, and who call themselves Rooinga, or natives of Arakan[1]. It has been argued that Rooinga (or Rohingya) derives from Rohang, the word used in Bengal to refer to Arakan, and thus was just another way to

[1]See Galache, C. The *Rohingya and National Identities in Burma*, [Online: Web] Accessed 12 May 2019, URL: http://www.newmandala.org/the-rohingya-and-national-identities-in-burma/.

say Arakanese. Michael Charney suggests tentatively that "Rohingya may be a term [2]that had been used by both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis living in Rakhaing [Arakan] since the sixteenth century, either as resident traders in the capital or as war captives resettled in the Kaladan River Valley".[3]

Again Chan (2005) provides us with an understanding of the development of a Muslim enclave in Arakan while studying the discourse on national identity and Rohingya crisis. Citing British records, Aye Chan makes a claim that the Rohingyas are second or third generations of Bengali immigrants who came during British period as agricultural labour and settled in Burma. At the advent of British, the region between the Lemro rivers and Kaladan rivers was thinly populated and only wild weeds grew in the land. Only, after the exodus of Bengali immigrants did the population of Arakan swell, especially of the Mayu Frontier Area. He thus concludes that the region in Arakan populated by Muslims is an "enclave"[4] (Chan, 2005 as cited in Bhonsale, 2015: 634). Chan cites occupational interest as the only as the only interest behind migrating to Arakan first as seasonal migrants and over time (ibid).

The other position of the Mayu Frontier District in Arakan populated by Muslims by the Rohingya School is that of a "Frontier Culture". This region geographically located at the intersection of South Asia and South East Asia oscillated between the influences of Burma and Bengal. Hence this "marginal land" clearly has a "frontier culture" developed with people of two racial groups, the Rakhines and the Rohingyas. Language and culture of the Rakines and the Rohingyas though has witnessed a separate evolution, but until recently, they have recognised one single history of

[3]Ibid

[4]An enclave is a portion of a territory that is culturally and ethnically distinct in its character.

Arakan (Bahar, 2010 as cited in Bhonsale, 2015: 635). 'Rohingya' is a controversial term that refers to a Muslim minority population estimated to number from 725,000 to 1.3 million people living in a concentrated area in north Arakan state (also known as Rakhine state) in Buddhist-dominant Myanmar. They practice Sunni Islam and a majority of them are the descendants of Bengali immigrants from the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent. Rohingyas, as they commonly call themselves, constitute about 90% of the population in Maungdaw and Buthitaung townships and about 40% in Sittwe township – three of the most densely populated areas of Rakhine state (Thawnghmung, 2016: 527-528).

Further, Leider (2018) provides us an understanding that the name Rohingya denotes an ethno religious identity of Muslims in North Rakhine State, Myanmar (formerly Burma).The term became part of public discourse in the late1950s and spread widely following reports on human rights violations against Muslims in North Rakhine State during the 1990s, and again after 2012 (ibid). Most writers use the word "Rohingya" as a term of convention for a persecuted Muslim population even though the word lacks the basic characteristic of a conventional name, i.e. general recognition and agreed meaning (Lieder, 2014: 4).

Jacques Leider in his work " Rohingya : The name, the Movement and the Quest for Identity" therefore provides a broad range of definitions and opinions about the term 'Rohingyas' and their identity in order to understand the broader theme of minority identity vis-à-vis the state of contemporary Myanmar. Qualified authors such as Lewa and Selth have left no ambiguity as to the ethnic roots of the Rohingyas. In a report presented at the *Canadian Friends of Burma Public Conference* in 2002, Chris Lewa stated that "the Rohingya Muslims are ethnically and religiously related to the

Chittagonians of southern Bangladesh (Leider, 2014: 6). In his authoritative paper on Myanmar's Muslims published in 2003,Andrew Selth uses the term "Rohingya" as a conventional term to refer to the "largest Muslim community in Burma today" (Selth, 2003 as cited in Leider, 2014: 6-7). As such Selth provides a straight historical definition by considering the Rohingyas as Bengali Muslims and associating their arrival during the colonial annexation of Arakan kingdom. Leider (2014) notes that other academic authors who similarly use the term "Rohingya," use it now conventionally for the Muslims in Rakhine in general and do not share in the controversy that surrounds its use. While they escape thus an unresolved complexity and conveniently match a new political correctness, they do not establish per se the term's acceptability as an ethnic term.

Christina Fink, an anthropologist, acknowledges in a balanced way in her work both the denial of citizenship for "most Rohingya" and the "Buddhist Rakhine population's fears of a Muslim takeover". But she does not use the term "Rohingya" as an ethnic identifier when she writes about "small armed groups of Muslims generally known as Rohingya (Fink, 2001 as cited in Leider, 2014: 7). Benedict Rogers has relentlessly criticised the Myanmar military regime which he accuses of targeting the Rohingya for "extra persecution". But he fairly acknowledges the existence of a "serious debate as to whether the Rohingya represent one of Burma's historic ethnic nationalities" and correctly defines the Rohingya as "Muslims of Bengali ethnic origin" (Rogers, 2010 as cited in Leider, 2014: 7). David Steinberg presents the "people that call themselves Rohingya" as an "unrecognized cultural minority" that has emerged in a space with "traditionally undefined frontiers" and "heavily Muslim and culturally related populations" (Steinberg, 2010 as cited in Leider, 2014: 7).

More recently, Egreteau and Jagan have used the term throughout their book to refer to the majority Muslims from Rakhine after duly explaining that the term "Rohingya" is the name under which "the local Muslim populations had been known since the 1950s" (Egreteau & Jagan, 2013 as cited in Leider, 2014: 7). In the latest reports of the International Crisis Group like in many other articles in the printed press or written for the social media, the expression "Rohingya Muslims" alternates with "Muslim Rohingyas" where it is generally understood that the expressions refer to Muslims who suffer persecution in Rakhine. But a clear definition of the term is generally omitted (ibid). Michael Charney, one the very few historians to mention the Rohingyas, identifies them as "Muslim Arakanese". Occasionally used by Rohingya writers, this expression introduces an alternate, but significantly different semantic dimension (Charney, 2009 as cited in Leider, 2014: 8). Leider (2014) further points out that at present, as an ethnic-cum-religious denomination, "Rohingya" remains a "soft" name. The term is highly polarizing in Myanmar and its use is part of the problem ,i.e. the controversial Rohingya identity; moreover there is no international consensus on its use, no legal recognition and no anthropological or sociological scholarship giving credit to the term.

From a lingustic point of view, the name "Rohingya" is derived from the Indianized form of Rakhine, i.e. Rakhanga. Following Dr Thibaut d'Hubert, "the rules of historical linguistics of the Indo-aryan languages allow to easily explain the phonological derivation 'Rakhanga' > 'Rohingya' (D'Hubert, 2011 as cited in Leider, 2014: 8). The name Rakkhanga (or Rakhanga) itself is a sanskritized form of Rakhine. In Rakhine, we find the name of the country as Arrakhadesa in the Anandacandra pillar inscription of the 11th century. Rakhine [Rakhuiṅ] in the Burmese script is found for the first time in an inscription of the 14th century AD

(Mahathi Crocodile Rock inscription A. 156) in associated terms such as “Rakhine min”, Rakhine ruler, and “Rakhine naing-ngan”, referring to the area under the king’s sway (Frasch, 2002 as cited in Leider, 2014: 9). However, as Leider (2014) observes that the contemporary Rohingya writers claim that a local Rakhine Muslim identity to be called “Rohingya” has existed for centuries, because they argue for the recognition of distinct ethnic credentials. But at the same time, they point to the great diversity of ethnic origins and social backgrounds of Muslims during the pre-modern period which makes the hypothesis of a single identity rather unlikely.

Against this background of claims of a Muslim community in Northern Rakhine to gain recognition as an ethnic group within the nomenclature of Myanmar ethnicities, the questions that historians face relate to the constraints that conditioned the articulation of this new identity. The observable fact is that members of the educated Muslim class in Maungdaw and Buthidaung started to claim a separate “Rohingya” identity as they engaged in their fight for political autonomy after the Second World War. This recognizable political struggle was shouldered by an ideological process that may have been in the making since the late thirties and came to full fruition in the late fifties. What maybe conceptualized as Rohingya ideology is a literary construction based on a partial and eclectic reading of Arakanese history. The building of a communal identity referred to as “Rohingya” is a different issue, being a social process that has hitherto not been studied by anthropologists (Leider, 2014:15). Paradoxically, the Rohingya historians have particularly denied the mixed cultural roots of origin and have stressed the distinction between the muslims retaining a ‘Rohingya’ identity and other groups of muslims mostly from the Chittagong district, thereby marking a cultural difference in terms of their origin, ancestors, language, rituals, historical texts except religion.

4.4 State Policies and the Rohingya Muslims

The period of the Arakan Kingdom ended in 1784, when Burmese King Bodawphaya invaded and plundered its people and cultural artifacts. This event marks the collective memory of generations of Rakhine Buddhists and feeds distrust of the Bamar majority, which has monopolized political power in Myanmar in the postcolonial period. King Bodaw deported Rakhine court Brahmins and ceremonial specialists of Bengali origin to serve in his own court in central Burma, while many Buddhists and Muslims fled to Southeast Bengal in the wake of the Burmese king's rampage (Leider, 2014 as cited in Thawnghmung, 2016: 531). Rakhine Buddhists' historical grievances were also fuelled by British imperial policies in the 19th century. After the British annexation of Arakan following the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826) and the subsequent incorporation of Burma into British India, the British encouraged immigrants from South Asia to farm the fertile valleys of Arakan or take up other forms of work. Thus the existing Muslim community was absorbed into a new influx of Muslim Bengalis from Chittagong. When the number of immigrants from Chittagong soared, relations with local Rakhine Buddhists, some of whom had lost land and property to immigrants, became more antagonistic (ibid). The Japanese invasion of Burma during World War II expelled the British, created a power vacuum, and resulted in mass killings by both sides in Arakan (Yegar, 2002 & Chan, 2005 as cited in Thawnghmung, 2016). After the war, some Muslims led a Mujahid armed rebellion against the central government in a campaign for an autonomous Muslim territory in Rakhine state, but were soon defeated. Many Rakhine Buddhists refer to this secessionist movement (as well as to other Rohingya armed resistance organizations formed in a later period) as a warning of their potential threat to the survival of Rakhine people (ibid).

The historical ambiguity over the existence of the so called ‘Rohingyas’ who by faith adhere to Islam as their religion as opposed to the Rakhine Buddhists have sparked controversy over the issue of minority identity, particularly of the Rohingya muslims in contemporary Myanmar. The disregard of the Rohingyas as the rightful citizens of Myanmar also raises question on the multi ethnic nature of the state. However, it must be kept in mind that the applicability of the term ‘ethnic’ to the Rohingyas is a clear manifestation of the entire discourse on Rohingya crisis and the issue of a homogenous national identity. The contested historical narrative of the existence of Muslims in the Arakan kingdom before the Burmese annexation in 1784 and later the British annexation of Arakan in 1824 provides a relatively sceptical understanding of the Rohingya identity as such. Thus, the events unfolding after the World War II and the role of the Muslims thereafter marks the emergence of the Rohingya identity gaining popularity in order to be considered as an ethnic community at par with other minorities thereby trying to obtain a state recognition as legal Myanmar national.

The entire discourse on Rohingyas and their minority identity against the Myanmar’s majority national identity also seems to be fuelled by the ethnic classifications as set up by the colonial authorities. As Myanmar gained independence in 1948, the ethnic conflicts increased to a large extent which is even witnessed today as is evident from the minorities fighting the state. Thus, the communal violence that took place in the Rakhine state of contemporary Myanmar from 2012 to 2014 shows the arbitrary use of state power against a religious minority in order to establish a sense of majority national identity thereby perceiving the Rohingyas and Islam as a threat to Buddhism and the majority ethnic Bamar. An account of the state policies vis-a-vis the minorities, particularly the Rohingyas would be helpful in understanding the broader theme of the study.

U Nu, who led Myanmar's first independent government as Prime Minister from 1948,pursued a more conciliatory policy toward the Muslims, who were beginning to refer to themselves as 'Rohingyas,' a development that raised alarm among Rakhine Buddhists. Muslim civilians in Buthitaung and Maungdaw townships were issued National Registration Cards (NRCs), which temporarily conferred citizenship status on their holders and allowed them to vote. Four Muslim representatives were elected to the state parliament (Thawnghmung, 2016: 531). However, the successor of U Nu, General Ne win took a harsh stand and imposed several restrictive policies against the foreigner and particularly Rohingyas. The Rohingya exclusion policy started after General Ne Win seized power in a military staged coup d'état in 1962 and became head of state as Chairman of the Union Revolutionary Council and also Prime Minister (Haque, 2017: 455).

First, the overall Burmese impression of Chinese and people of South Asian origin was not good. Most of the administrative posts and business sectors had been controlled either by people of Chinese or Indian origin since the colonial period. For that reason, the military regime after 1962 instigated the so-called ultra-nationalist policy in the name of "Way to Burmese Socialism". Many South Asian-owned properties were confiscated by the Ne Win government in the name of nationalization. In Arakan, most businesses were owned by the people of Chittagong and North India. However, after the so-called nationalization, many Chittagonians and other members of the Indian business community abandoned their properties and returned to their country of origin. These people, or their ancestors, had originally immigrated to Arakan during the British colonial period (ibid).

Second, Burmese officials and Rakhine leaders often felt that in the Muslim dominated western frontier population growth posed an alarming threat to their country's security(Rakhine Investigation Commission, 2013 as cited in Haque, 2017: 456).Even before the enactment of the 1982 Citizenship Law, Union Home Minister Brigadier Sein Lwin had stated in 1981, expressing his frustration, that "Burma as a country would disappear and its original identity would become museum piece if immigration officials continued to let illegal immigrants into the country and to register them as citizens in lieu of a small bribe." (Kin, 1983 as cited in Haque, 2017: 456) This line of thinking could explain the Burmese regime's position as to why they excluded the Rohingya Muslims in the 1982 Citizenship Law (ibid).

Third, after operation Naga Min in 1978, and the first Rohingya refugee exodus, the Burmese government realized that the 1948 Citizenship Law had failed to manage citizenship and immigration issues (Rakhine Investigation Commission, 2013 as cited in Haque, 2017:456) After three decades, the Government of Myanmar had recognized that all these elements were inter-related and thus it promulgated the1982 Citizenship Law. As explained by Amnesty International, the 1982 law provides three categories of citizenship, each with its own identity card and it was effective in 1989 (Citizens Scrutiny Cards) (Amnesty International, 2004 as cited in Haque, 2017: 456).It is discussed in detail in Burma immigration procedures—1983. The whole citizenship law has 76 sections in 8 chapters. The three categories of citizenship are described in chapters 2 to 4of the act (ibid).

(A) Full Citizenship—Pink Card Holders

The first criterion for full citizenship is recognized nationals of Burma. Under this law Chapter II, Section 3 "Nationals such as the Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Burman,

Mon, Rakhine or Shan and ethnic groups as have settled in any of the territories included within the State as their permanent home from a period anterior to 1185 B.E., 1823A.D." The Rohingya are not recognized by this act as nationals. The Council of State has unlimited powers and as mentioned in Section 4 "may decide whether any ethnic group is national or not" (Haque, 2017:457).At the same time, the Council can revoke any categories of citizenship except a citizen by birth. Section 5 states that "every national and every person born of parents, both of whom are nationals are citizens by birth". In addition, Sections 6 and 7 provide that "a person who is already a citizen on the date this Law cones into force is a citizen". Children born abroad to parents belonging to specified combinations of citizenship categories are also citizens. It was the first time, Rohingya identity was not mentioned in the citizenship law. Their ethnic identity was not recognized as indigenous under Section 3 (ibid).

(B) Associate Citizenship—Blue Card Holders

Chapter III, Sections 23 to 41 set out the criteria for associate citizenship. According to Sections 23 and 24, associate citizenship will be granted under certain conditions to those who had applied for citizenship under the 1948 law and their children, and whose application was ongoing at the time of promulgation. Again, it is elaborated on in Section 30; an associate citizen is "entitled to enjoy the rights of a citizen under the laws of the State, with the exception of the rights stipulated from time to time by the Council of State". This grants the government an unlimited discretion to deprive such persons of their rights as citizens. Regarding this category, "Central Body" can enjoy and practice unlimited power to revoke "associate citizenship" in the name of "disaffection or disloyalty to the state" or "moral turpitude". Ethnic Muslim minority

Rohingya from the Arakan State are not entitled to this associate citizenship. The "Associate Citizenship" is virtually limited to these who applied under the 1948 Citizenship Election Act as a new settler in Burma. Associate citizenship is the new version of 1948 Citizenship Election Act with few amendments (Haque, 2017: 457)

C) Naturalized Citizenship—Green Card Holders

The criteria for naturalized citizenship are included in Chapter IV from Section 42 to 61.Naturalized citizenship may be granted to non-nationals such as members of ethnic groups not recognized as indigenous races, which specifically includes the Rohingya. However, The Rohingya leaders argued that there was no reason for them to apply for naturalized citizenship; they enjoyed full citizenship rights in the Union before the1982 Citizenship Law. Under this category, all foreign registration card holders could The 1982 Citizenship Law in Burma apply for naturalized citizenship. HRW notes that stateless person may also apply for this category (Human Rights Watch as cited in Haque, 2017: 458). According to naturalized citizenship law, a citizen must "speak well one of the national languages", "be of good character" and "be of sound mind". Mostly Foreigners Registration Card holders apply to be naturalized citizens (ibid).

Similarly, Melissa Crouch has highlighted some of the areas where law has been used by the state apparatus to construct an idea of religion and acceptable religious practices. There are three areas where law has been used to regulate and limit religious life and practice in Myanmar since independence. The first area is personal law and inter-religious relations as regulated by statute and case law. The second realm is constitutional law and the role of religion in public life. The third area is the control of the Sangha through the legal regulation of disputes and education, and the

application of criminal law (Crouch, 2015: 1). Crouch (2015) in this regard mentions the legal system in Myanmar providing personal law for four religious communities' viz. Hindu, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians. The mention of Burma Laws Act, 1898 remains significant .The Burma Laws Act included customary law for three religious communities: Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus (ibid). The only law in relation to family law for Buddhists is the 1939, Registration of Kittama Adoptions Act which regulates the inheritance rights of an adopted son or daughter according to Burmese Buddhist law (Huxley, 2014 as cited in Crouch, 2015: 2). Crouch (2015) also observes that in Myanmar, inter-religious marriage came to be perceived as a "problem" in" the context of a marriage between a Buddhist woman and a Muslim man. As such mention is to be made of the Buddhist Women special marriage law. As a result, in 1939, the Buddhist Women's Special Marriage and Succession Act No 14/1939was approved by parliament with the purported aim of protecting Buddhist women who marry anon-Buddhist man in terms of their rights to inheritance and divorce (Chakravarti, 1971 as cited in Crouch, 2015: 3).

In 1953, the Muslim Dissolution of Act Marriage was introduced to modify and limit the system of personal laws by allowing Muslim women the right to divorce. Introduced by then Minister for Justice U Khin Maung Latt(a Burmese Muslim), the purpose was to allow Burmese women who had converted to Islam to marry to be able to divorce their husband (Yegar, 1972 as cited in Crouch, 2015: 3). Subsequently followed was the Buddhist women's special marriage and succession act, 1954 regulating an inter religious marriage particularly between a non Buddhist man and a Buddhist woman. As such the issue of inter religious marriage still remains a very pertinent issue in contemporary Myanmar. Interestingly, this directive was issued prior to the violence that broke out in Rakhine State in 2012 (Crouch, 2015: 4).

In addition to the law on inter-religious marriage, three other bills on topics of population control, polygamy, and conversion have been pushed by the Buddhist nationalist movement led by the group known as Ma-Ba-Tha (ibid). Due to the contested nature with the place of religion in Myanmar, State religion promotion law, 1961 was also passed thereby dictating to teach Buddhist scriptures to the students and prisoners. Crouch (2015) notes that the amendment reaffirmed the teaching of religion in schools, and the right of parents to ensure their child was taught about their religion. Yet this failed to ease the political tensions of the time, and the subsequent military coup of 1962 was the end of Buddhism's short-lived status as the state religion. Several laws has been passed thereafter till date which to a large extent manifest Myanmar's heavy emphasis on Buddhism, though it's not an official religion.

As a result of the various repressive and restrictive state policies it is evident that Myanmar has abstractly created a kind of communal divide between those following Buddhism and Islam as attempts to construct a homogenous national identity is solely based on the idea of Buddhism being in danger because of the emergence of Islam and other religions in contemporary Myanmar thereby leaving the Muslims of Rakhine state who calls themselves as 'Rohingyas' in an utmost dilemma. However, the primordial identity which the Rohingyas claim in order to get state recognition as legal citizens also needs to be analysed and examined thoroughly as most of the historical narratives on them remains sceptical. However, the Rohingya crisis needs to be analysed critically as some scholars like Bertil Lintner has studied the discourse on Rohingya Muslims from a different perspective by arguing about the communal nature of the crisis. Due to large scale ambiguity over the claims made by Rohingyas as an ethnic community in contemporary Myanmar inhabiting the territory before the

Burmese annexation of Arakan as well as the distorted historical facts manifested by most of the Rohingya scholars also makes the issue highly sceptical. As most of the scholars have argued over the mention of the term 'Rohingyas' and of their identity as constructed and invented very recently and have mentioned the immigration of Muslims as labourers during the colonial era but argues that those Muslims were identified as Chittagonians rather than Rohingyas. In addition it is also to be noted that in Arakan (today's Rakhine state) there existence of various group of Muslims with different identities have also made the issue of the Rohingyas controversial to a large extent as most of the muslims living in Arakan (today's Rakhine state) deny the 'Rohingya' identity and calls themselves as Arakani muslims or Burmese muslims as such. Thus it can be said without doubt that the nature of the Rohingya crisis is much beyond the Buddhist Muslims violence that took place in the past as well as recently.

In terms of the bilateral relations Myanmar has established a kind of a strained relationship over the Rohingya issue with Bangladesh since the 1970s and many other neighbouring countries which has become a popular destination for the Rohingya refugees. The state sponsored military brutality against the Rohingya Muslims has threatened them to the verge of leaving Myanmar in pursuit of a food, shelter and safety and most importantly a political identity. Thus, it cannot be denied that most of the state policies against the Rohingyas have been formulated with a sense of a perceived threat against Buddhism by other non Buddhist communities, particularly Islam and Rohingyas. As such following military persecutions in Myanmar, Rohingyas have fled to countries like Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and a few other Islamic Republics as refugees thereby disrupting their social, cultural and economic relations in the long term. However, even though the internationalisation of the Rohingya issue and the involvement of the international

community and various other organisations, the issue remains at a standstill as no wilful repatriation has been initiated on the part of both the host state and the parent state. The failure of the UN and UNHCR also manifests the minorities being victims in the refugee camps of the host state as well. In addition many scholar have also mentioned the national security dimension and the emergence of non traditional security threat vis-a-vis the Rohingya crisis due to massive influx of refugees having an economic burden on their scarce resources. Therefore, Myanmar's construction of a national identity in relation to the Rohingya Muslims as well as the contested historical narratives of the Muslims in Arakan have created a state of dilemma.

Conclusion

Since the evolution of the geobody of contemporary Myanmar and the transition of the precolonial state to a modern nation state, Myanmar always had the Buddhist character inherent in it. As such the king always acted as the fulcrum of the state from the precolonial times and followed Buddhist philosophical underpinnings in governing the state structure. The role of the king as the righteous ruler was the form of his divine character. As such the entire theme on Myanmar's national identity and the minority questions of the Rohingyas focuses on the Buddhist character of the contemporary Myanmar and a sense of national identity constructed around it. Thus, since the precolonial times itself Theravada form of Buddhism governed the galactic polities of Southeast Asia as scholar Juliane Schober has termed it. However, the interdependence and the inextricable nexus of the state institution and the Sangha or the monkhood has made it difficult to understand the politics of contemporary Myanmar without Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhism since then has played a very important role in Burmese nationalism as well as in achieving a sense of homogenous national identity in the contemporary Myanmar. But again it becomes problematic when scholar like Arjun Appadurai talks about the global interaction of the cultural homogeneity of one particular group of people trying to assimilate a minority group with distinct cultural heterogeneity in a particular society. Theravada form of Buddhism always being intact in the state apparatus of contemporary Myanmar since the precolonial times therefore explains as to how it governed the entire state society relationship since then. It was only during the colonial period that Buddhism lost its significance due to introduction of Christianity and European values and cultures. As soon as Myanmar got independence in 1948 there started debates and discussions as to whether it should be a secular state or should have a state religion. Thus, the entire

majority-minority dichotomy vis-a-vis the state in contemporary Myanmar has brought to the forefront the discourse on Rohingya crisis and Myanmar's national identity.

Similarly, juxtaposing Myanmar's nature as a multi-ethnic state seems contested in terms of its relationship with the minority groups. Armed struggles by the ethnic rebel groups have always been a siginificant factor in Myanmar's polity. Looking into the Rohingyas case, they claim their existence in the geobody of Myanmar since the precolonial period. However, most scholars don't accept this fact because of their contested cultural history and of their identity. As such the ruling elites in the post colonial period as well now takes a hard stand on the presence of some religious minorities in contemporary Myanmar, particularly Rohingyas. Following a series of sectarian violence in the past and recently in 2012 between the Buddhists and the Muslims, the issue has become internationalised thereby gaining sympathy but yet has not been resolved. Jacques Leider and many other scholars has provided a wide range of understanding regarding the origin of the Rohingyas but most of them has pointed to the large scale immigration that took place after the British annexation of Arakan in 1824, particularly of the Bengali Muslims from the Chittagong district. It is also a fact there existed a close cultural relations between the medieval Bengal and Arakan kingdom in the past due to which the issue of Rohingya identity emerged. However, Rohingyas are mostly alleged of inventing and constructing their identity by distorting the history against other religious minorities present in contemporary Myanmar as there is no particular stand on the issue. Paradoxically, the total denial of the Rohingyas as legal citizens by Myanmar as well as the right to religious freedom and conscience enshrined in the constitution underlines the broader theme of national identity and the minority question of the Rohingyas.

Thus the entire issue of Rohingya Muslims and the construction of a homogenous national identity has large scale implications for not only Rohingya but also for other non Buddhists minorities in contemporary Myanmar. The multi plural claims of contemporary Myanmar also raises many pertinent questions vis-a-vis its relationship with the minorities who are culturally distinct. Again the democratic and secular nature of the state and the freedom of religion as provided in the constitution also stands in stark contrast with the widespread use of Buddhism and Buddhism symbolism in the governance of the state even today. As such scholar like Paul Fuller whose work has been mostly on the chauvinistic forms of Buddhism existing in the Southeast Asian regions therefore supports clearly shows as to how the abstract use of Buddhism in understanding the state society relationship have often created an ethnocentric Buddhist identity in contemporary Myanmar.

The ruling elites of the current state apparatus again revived the practice of employing Buddhism thereby acting as the righteous rules involving themselves in merit making rituals, building Buddhist monasteries and pagodas and funding the monkhood or the Sangha in contemporary Myanmar.However, perceiving the existence of Islam and Rohingyas as well as other religious groups apart from Buddhism clearly manifests the chauvinistic form of Buddhism prevalent in contemporary Myanmar today. On the other hand the reciprocal relationship between the state apparatus and the religious institutions, particularly the Sangha's widespread participation in politics since the colonial times till date has been another significant feature in Myanmar that raises alarm over the state dealing with the question of minorities.

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