

Background Note: The Rewriting of History The Anachronistic Use of “Rohingya” as an Ethnic Identity

Rewriting history through the retroactive description as “Rohingya” of historical Muslim communities in Arakan which were once voluntarily known by other designations (Yakhain-kala, Burmese Muslim, Chittagonian, Zerbaidi, Myedu, Bengali) reveals a cynical lack of intellectual and scholarly integrity. It is a deliberate and mischievous anachronism.

This exercise in historical revisionism by the Rohingya lobby also panders unwisely to the State by seeking to acquire *taing yin tha* (“national race”) status on false pretences instead of opposing as a matter of principle what is internationally recognised as an essentially discriminatory concept.

Only the Kaman in Arakan have successfully resisted the “Rohingya” juggernaut and retained their genuine historical identity.

Outside Arakan tens of thousands of Muslims of identical ancestry avoid the label “Rohingya” like the plague. Historically, Chittagonian migrants during British rule who settled elsewhere in Burma beyond Arakan as port workers, boat crew, river pilots, artisans, traders and businessmen have generally learnt Burmese and seek to live in peace with their Buddhist neighbours, despite isolated communal flare-ups.

At the 1931 Census the British enumerated 201,912 British-era (1826-1948) Muslim settlers and descendants in Arakan, but only 56,963 descendants of pre-1823 Muslim settlers. The British began their annual censuses in Arakan in 1829 and continued them until the outbreak of the Second World War. From 1872 they conducted decennial censuses. These annual and decennial censuses alone contain authoritative statistical data. The Rohingya lobby are simply not credible in their attempts to discredit and ignore, solely because they are “colonial”, 122 years of British archives assiduously and expertly recorded.

Even so, some writers seek to argue that the British were mistaken in their identification in censuses, settlement reports, gazetteers, special studies etc. of “Chittagonian migrants” and allege that they were there all the time as descendants of indigenous “Rohingyas” and did not migrate from Bengal during British rule. But only propagandists and charlatans can pretend that British and local officials were so completely wrong over the 122 years of their administration of Arakan about the origins and composition of the several ethnic groups resident there, especially as the grass-roots enumerators were not British officials but all volunteers from their local communities.

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