

THE REALITY OF BURMA'S SO-CALLED 'PEACEFUL' BUDDHIST MONKS AND THEIR TRANSGRESSION AGAINST THE MUSLIMS OF BURMA¹

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Indeed, all praise is due to Allaah, we praise Him, we seek His aid, and we ask for His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allaah from the evil of our actions and from the evil consequences of our actions. Whomever Allaah guides, there is none to misguide and whoever Allaah misguides there is none to guide. I bear witness that there is no god worthy of worship except Allaah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allaah.

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“O you who have believed, fear Allaah as He should be feared and do not die except as Muslims (in submission to Him).”

{Aali-Imraan (3): 102}

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“O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allaah through whom you ask things from each other, and (respect) the wombs. Indeed Allaah is ever, over you, an Observer.”

{an-Nisaa (4): 1}

¹ In fact, the brother Daawood Adeeb in the late 1990s mentioned the reality of this oppression by the Buddhists in Burma.

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“O you who have believed, fear Allaah and speak words of appropriate justice. He will amend for you your deeds and forgive your sins. And whoever obeys Allaah and His Messenger has certainly attained a great attainment.”

{al-Abzaab (33): 70-71}

To proceed:

There has been much talk of late with regards to the activities of the so-called 'peaceful' Buddhist Monks of Burma and their involvement in the protests in Burma which are motivated by the Burmese governments increase in the prices of petrol, diesel and gas. The poverty-ridden population found this to be the last straw and activists took to the streets to protest. Buddhist Monks in Pakokku took government officials as hostages and requested the government apologise for hurting some Monks. When the government issued no such apology the Buddhist Monks increased their protests and withdrew their religious services from the military and government. A group called the Alliance of All-Burmese Buddhist Monks was set up to co-ordinate the protests, and the West has been bombarded with images of these Monks and their agenda has been described as being "heroic" and the likes.

But who are these Buddhist Monks and what about the Muslims of Burma? This is what we hope to shed some light upon. Dr Gabriele Marranci is an anthropologist and one of the younger professors at the *University of Aberdeen* who specialises in Islam and recently provided some important facts regarding the situation of the Muslims of Burma who are oppressed by extremist Buddhist Monks of Burma.² Dr Marracni states in a post entitled *The other, invisible suffering of Burma*:

From an anthropological viewpoint, the revolt in Burma is particularly interesting for an anthropologist specialised in Muslim societies and communities. There are two elements that attract my attention. **First of all, how this revolt is represented by the western mass media and secondly, the near total lack of reference to the drama that the**

² In the late 1990s the Salafi preacher Daawood Adeeb mentioned the reality of the oppression of the Muslims in Burma in several lectures.

Muslim minority, the so called Rohingya Muslims, have experienced in the last three decades. There are some hard stereotypes which affect how the mass media represent religions, and consequently, how ordinary people understand religions. To make a long story short (and of course this means to over-generalise), religions are still understood through a Manichean vision: peaceful versus violent, good versus evil, true versus false. Of course, in the majority of cases, political correctness has transformed the vehement apologetic diatribe of Middle Age origin. Today, the Manichean discourse is passed to the mass media audience through latent or manifest stereotypes, which essentialize religion into a 'real thing'; a powerful cultural artifact from which actions derives. **So, Buddhism is the most peaceful religion; Islam the aggressive and violent; Christianity the confused one. The mass media needs to simplify, to present news in a sequence of exponential pathos, to attract your ocular bulbs and conquer your mind long enough to feed you all the appropriate advertisements (the real end of all the process).** Yet religion is a complex phenomenon, and I can tell you that it is as variegate as the human beings which live on this beautiful, yet terminally ill, planet. "Burma is a Buddhist state facing a Buddhist power struggle." This would be the headlines of newspapers if instead of a Buddhist state with Buddhist monks, Burma was Iran, where the confrontation between Shi'i Muslims and Sunni Muslims seems to be able to explain everything, including the failure of the Iraqi American dream. Of course, the Burmese drama is more complex than just a struggle within a religion or the struggle between saints and kings. **However, the mass media, which discusses and reports the oppression of the Buddhist population by the generals, neglects to inform you about another story, another tragedy. The omission, when compared, is not very dissimilar from the western attitude towards other Muslim minority and refugee tragedies. Just to mention one, allow me to remind you of the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, [and its genocide](#) that nobody (not even Muslims) commemorate. Muslims often play only one part in the drama of headline news, the evil character, like the Indians in the [Hollywood Western films](#) , before Sergio Leone corrected the historical mistake.**

Here is a reality of Burma that probably you have never heard about (if by any chance you had heard about Burma before!). Muslims in Burma are a persecuted minority.³ It is a long story and history that I will try to summarize for you, and let you read more from the little available on the topic. Burma has about 4% of Muslim population (Muslim leaders say 10%). The life of Burmese Muslims has never been easy, and as other Muslims (i.e. Palestinians) they received amazing

³ To some extent the same can be said of the Muslims in Sri Lanka who are oppressed by extremist fanatical Buddhist Monks, *al-Jazeera* once featured an interesting report into this.

promises from us, the British, only to find themselves abandoned to a destiny of suffering after the end of the British colonialism. So, here is the story of the Rohingya Muslims, and their grim destiny. The Rohingya Muslims live mainly in the North of the [Rakhine State](#) and represent, officially, 4% of the entire Burmese population, but represent 50% of the population of Rakhine state (previously known as Arkana) itself. Islam reached the region during the 9th century through contact with Arab merchants. Arkana was an independent state until 1784 and developed its own culture and also dialect. In 1784, a Burmese king, Bodawpaya, annexed Arkana to his domain. This provoked a long guerrilla war with the Muslims, which saw, according to historians, more than 200,000 Arkanese killed. Many of the local Muslim population, at that time, were reduced to slavery and forced to build Buddhist monasteries. The struggle continued, but so unsuccessfully that in 1796 more than two-thirds of the Muslim population of Arkana had to leave the country and find refuge in what today is Bangladesh. Arkana was annexed to the rest of the British Empire by 1885, and many Rohingya Muslims decided to go back to their homeland. The journey between their homeland and Bangladesh would become a cruel ritual for this population. Until the Second World War, Muslims and Buddhists were able to live more or less peacefully side by side. Yet the Japanese were reaching the region in 1942, and so again the Muslims, and this time also the British, were forced to leave Arkana. The Buddhists found an opportunity to clear the Muslim population from Arkana, and thus another 20,000 Muslims had to reach the British Indian territories (again today Bangladesh). Indeed, while the Rakhine Buddhists supported the Japanese, the Muslims, as in other countries, supported the British forces.

The British, to thank the Muslims for their support and loyalty, promised the Rohingyas an autonomous region in the north of the country. Many refugees decided to come back to their homes, full of hope for the possibility of having their own state. As usual in British foreign relationships and history, the promise was never honoured. Also the fact that the Muslim population had supported the British and tried to achieve autonomy in the northern region, made them appear suspicious to the Burmese regime and the main Buddhist population. These feelings toward the Muslim minority not only still exist today but also have been reinforced, after the Taliban destroyed the [Buddhas of Bagan](#). Muslims in Burma are not considered to be citizens. They have no rights and often suffer discrimination and indiscriminate killings. Many of them, in particular after 1962, had to flee the country and still today live [in refugee camps in Bangladesh](#), which actually do not welcome them.

Although Muslims have taken active part in the 1988 revolt, and paid the consequences more than the Buddhist population, the majority of monks and Buddhists in Burma have anti-Muslim sentiments, in particular based on the fear of possible intermarriages. Pamphlets glorifying race purity and Buddhism and actually reinforcing anti-Muslim sentiments have been distributed since 2001 (i.e. *Myo Pyauk Hmar Soe Kyauk Hla Tai* or *The Fear of Losing One's Race*). These inflammatory publications, preaching against the Muslim minority, as well as rumors spread about Muslims raping children in the streets, provoked a [series of monk-led riots](#) against Muslim families and the destruction of mosques. Muslims were killed and mosques destroyed, and again the Rohingya Muslims had to flee to Bangladesh.⁴

Today we are witnessing a new Burmese revolt, organised mainly by the few politicised monks. Everybody hopes that the Buddhist monks can succeed in mobilising the population in a sort of Intifada. Some Muslims, I know, are repeating their Inshallahs in the not so distant Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. They hope that the end of the military junta means the end of their oppression. Nonetheless, a question remains, after such strong monk-led anti-Muslim campaigns which were also reinforced by the welcomed 'Bushit' rhetoric of 'war on terror': would the new, certainly Buddhist, regime accept the history and the existence, as Burmese citizens, of Rohingya Muslims? Or, would the new regime, like their predecessor generals the Muslims as an easy scapegoat?⁵

So all this shows that Muslims do not have a monopoly on oppression, transgression, violence, extremism and intolerance and that indeed, those who have been blindly promoted in the West⁶ as being "peace-loving" pseudo-Gandhi-esqe like Monks in Burma have a lot to answer for in this regard.

⁴ It is odd that we never hear of this intolerance by some fanatical Buddhist extremists in Burma and Sri Lanka in any recent research by non-Muslim 'think-tanks' or agencies. Indeed, we will begin to see terms being coined such as "Buddho-fascism" in light of what is taking place in Burma against the Muslims? We think not.

⁵ <http://marranci.wordpress.com/2007/09/30/the-other-invisible-suffering-of-burma/>

⁶ Even though many in the West jump onto the bandwagon of Buddhism is self-righteous attempts to seek 'spirituality', with Western University students getting into such crazes there are a number of realities which we feel have to be mentioned with regards to the "Buddha path". Many people are unaware of the fact that in the 1920s the Tibetan Buddhists even outlawed the bicycle!?! Totally against any sort of progress!