

Abu Salah Md. Yousuf

SECURITIZATION AND ETHNIC VIOLENCE: MILITARY, MONKS AND ROHINGYA MINORITIES IN MYANMAR

Abstract

While most of the studies used a top-down approach of the Copenhagen School to understand securitization process against the Rohingya community, this paper argues that there is a horizontal and bottom-up securitization active against ethnic and religious minorities in Myanmar. A nexus between the military and the radical monks helped to develop different securitization narratives identifying Rohingyas as a security threat to the national integrity, social harmony and economic stability of the country. In this respect, the paper explains the structure and motives of the alliance between the military and the radical monks as well as focuses on the consequences of the securitization measures against the Rohingya community. The paper finds that the longstanding securitization of ethnic minorities helped military regimes in Myanmar to legitimize their stronghold in the state power and concurrently it led the country towards adopting unscrupulous policy, which instigated an unending conflict with the ethnic minorities. Moreover, the development of a horizontal and bottom-up securitization process deepened the division in the society and complicated any reconciliation process among the conflicting groups in Myanmar.

Keywords: Horizontal and Bottom-up Securitization, Ethnic Violence, Myanmar, Military, Monks and Rohingya Minorities.

1. Introduction

The Copenhagen School's securitization process is an inter-subjective bargaining between 'security actors' and 'audiences' where security actors justify the necessity of securitization by their "speech act" and the audiences' acceptance and consent allow the authority to adopt 'emergency measures' for the security of a particular 'referent object'. In this process, securitization is a top-down approach where security actors play pivotal role in the process of securitization. The School's "widening and deepening" agenda denotes that the state is not the only 'referent object' in the security study, rather societal, political, military and environmental issues can be also 'referent objects' in the securitization process. Nevertheless, the contemporary securitization scholarship suggests that securitization is not always a top-down approach, rather it can also be horizontal or bottom-up, where security

Abu Salah Md. Yousuf is Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS). His email address is: yousuf@biiss.org

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actors and audiences can act together and the securitization process can follow a bottom-up approach with multiple referent objects. On the other hand, in almost all ethnic violence, there is a securitization narrative. The security actors promulgate existential threat to their respective audience to justify the rationale of actions against some of the ethnic groups by “speech act”. The measures of securitization by the security actors sometimes become violent and, in many cases, military actions are adopted. As a result, retaliation from the victim groups leads a state towards an unscrupulous and longstanding ethnic violence. Therefore, a connection between securitization and ethnic violence is a recognized phenomenon in the existing literature.

Since independence in 1948, the issue of ethnic identity was a concern in the political space of Myanmar. Under the iconic leadership of General Aung San, Myanmar desired to be a multi-ethnic and multi-racial country where the founding leaders of the country expressed their commitment to ensure equal rights for all ethnic minorities.² The assassination of General Aung San in 1947 changed the trajectory of the country. His successor U Nu declared the supremacy of Buddhism and the idea of Myanmar as a multi-ethnic country was diminished. General Ne Win’s coup of 1962 led the country towards a longstanding military rule. His draconian measures to suppress ethnic identity of minority groups started a new political history and intensified ethnic conflicts in different regions of the country. General Ne Win adopted a securitization agenda on the issue of ethnic identity. He promulgated a linguistic nationalism in the country and enforced all the ethnic communities to learn Burmese language as part of socialistic agenda. His securitization narrative was that without establishing supremacy of Bamar identity, the unity and integrity of the country would be threatened. After Ne Win, successive military regimes also developed narratives to identify ethnic minorities as a threat to Myanmar’s nationalism, ethnic identity and Buddhism. The Rohingyas remained at the centre of this marginalization process. General Ne Win started suppressive measures against the Rohingyas by denying their citizenship of the country. Moreover, he nationalized personal properties of many non-Bamar people identifying them as threat to national integrity.

After the military coup of 1962, some Buddhist supremacists supported Ne Win considering his policies as resurrection of the “kingship”, what existed in Myanmar before colonial rule. Later, Ne Win’s policies were conflicting with the interests of the religious groups and the distance between the military regime and the monks were deepening. The 1988 uprising against military rule opened a new era for the democratic forces and the formation of the National League for Democracy (NLD)

² General Aung San signed the Panglong Agreement with ethnic minorities on 12 February 1947, where he agreed to protect the racial and religious identity of all the ethnic communities in Myanmar.

raised new hope that the country might return to the principles of its independence movement adopted by General Aung San. But military's crackdown and denial to transfer power to Aung San Suu Kyi after the election of 1990 made the political scenario more complex. Almost all the ethnic minority groups were supporting Aung San Suu Kyi and expected that her accession to power might raise hope for them. The military installed a "divide and rule" policy and continued operations in many areas of Myanmar to suppress resurgent movements. The monks were mainly supporting the democratic forces. Though their support for democracy was not very open, the Saffron Revolution of 2007 unleashed the hidden grievances of religious monks against military rule. The monks had a respectable position in society and one kind of legitimacy³ from the monasteries was necessary for any government who wanted to survive in the political power of Myanmar. Therefore, after Saffron Revolution, the military leadership understood the urgency to develop relations with monks and started communicating with the radical group of monks like movement 969⁴ to accomplish military's legitimacy in power.⁵ At the same time, the radical monks also found it as an opportunity to strengthen their position in the society by marginalizing the traditional monks. The military and the radical monks developed a common narrative against the ethnic minorities, particularly against the Rohingya community, by identifying them as a threat to state integrity, social stability and economic progress of the Bamar people of Myanmar. The nexus between the military and the radical monks helped both to enhance their political and social power in the country. In addition, the unrestricted "hate speeches" of the radical monks escalated ethnic violence in the country and deepened existing divisions in the society.

In this backdrop, the present study is an endeavour to understand why the military and the monks developed alliance as security actors in the securitization process of the Rohingya community in Myanmar and how the adopted securitization measures escalated ethnic violence in the country. By using a theoretical framework of horizontal and bottom-up securitization, the study takes the Rohingya community as a case to study and process tracing is used for data collation to explain the processes of securitization of the ethnic minorities in Myanmar. The paper is divided into six sections including introduction and conclusion. Introduction highlights the objectives

³ Peter G. Stillman, "The Concept of Legitimacy", *Polity*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1974, pp. 32-56.

⁴ The number 969 has its ideological roots in a book written in the late 1990s by U Kyaw Lwin, a functionary in the ministry of religious affairs of Myanmar, and its precepts are rooted in a traditional belief in numerology. Muslims represent the phrase *bismillah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim*, or "In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful", with the number 786, and some businesses in Myanmar display the number to indicate that they are Muslim-owned. 969's proponents see this as evidence of a Muslim plot to conquer Myanmar in the 21st century, based on the implausible premise that 7 plus 8 plus 6 is equal to 21. The number 969 is intended to be 786's cosmological opposite, and represents the "three jewels" the nine attributes of the Buddha, the six attributes of his teachings, and the nine attributes of the Sangha, or monastic order.

⁵ Jonathan DeHart, "Ashin Wirathu: The Monk behind Burma's "Buddhist Terror", *The Diplomat*, 25 June 2013.

of the paper and briefly describes the methodological issues. Section two deals with the theoretical framework of the paper in which horizontal and bottom-up securitization process are discussed in relation to the securitization of the Rohingya community in Myanmar. Section three explains formation and transformation of political and social forces in Myanmar and focuses on the contemporary alliance between the military and the radical monks in developing securitization narratives. Section four highlights the securitization narratives and emergency measures adopted by the military and the radical monks against ethnic minorities and the Rohingya community of Myanmar. Section five identifies the consequences of the securitization of ethnic identity in Myanmar and explains how securitization process escalated ethnic violence in the country. In conclusion theoretical and analytical outcomes of the paper are summarized.

2. Theoretical Framework

The idea of security is an expansive and contentious one. Prior to the 1980s, the concept of security mainly focused on the priorities of sovereignty of a state from any existential threat. However, sometimes internal threats like domestic revolution and civil wars were also considered as security threat to the state. In the 1960s, some scholars tried to expand the notion of security by analyzing the complexity of the subject matter. As Arnold Wolfers defined security as “the absence of threat to acquired values”⁶. This definition imagined security as something inherently more complex than physical threats to the state apparatus. The idea of security was mainly analyzed from three theoretical approaches: realist, liberalist and constructivist. The realists consider that the perception of security is based on principles of anarchy, survival, self-help and domination.⁷ On the other hand, the liberals see the security as a potential realm of progress and change. In other words, liberals believe that the security can be based on trust and mutual interest with certain conditions.⁸ Realist and liberalist theories argue that social and political phenomena can be explained in a way that scientists use for explaining natural world, whereby they argue that facts and values are two separated things. Therefore, they think actors and concepts are exogenously given, and the actors act in a pre-given world according to the demands of instrumental reason.⁹

While realists and liberalists consider security as a factor defined by the state, the constructivists consider it as a social construct between security and threat.

⁶ Arnold Wolfers, “National Security” as an Ambiguous Security”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 4, 1952, pp. 481-502.

⁷ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979.

⁸ Martin Griffiths, *Fifty Key Thinkers in International Relations*, London: Routledge, 1999.

⁹ Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 3.

They consider that “the discussion of security is a discussion of threats”¹⁰ and the issue at hand having been securitized, merits emergency attention and extraordinary measures.¹¹ By following constructivist approach, the Copenhagen School’s securitization theory opened a new understanding in the field of security studies. The proponents of securitization theory adopted a “widening and deepening” framework for security understanding where they analyzed that security is no more related with military only and referent object is not always ‘the state’. Barry Buzan’s “widening” agenda took security concept beyond the traditional military and political dimension, to include economic, societal and environmental dimensions, and “deepening” agenda expanded referent object beyond the nation state to new referents both the individual and human kind (human security), the communal and societal, as well as the international, regional and the global or planetary levels.¹² Buzan *et. al.* argued that “security is a particular type of politics applicable to a wide range of issues”¹³.

The process of securitization as presented by Buzan and Ole Wæver can be analyzed in four steps.¹⁴ The first step is “speech act”, where a credible authority presents an issue as an existential threat to a referent object. The “speech act” rests at the core of securitization theory. It is a performative act which “makes a security problem”¹⁵. The second step is the acceptance of this threat by a credible audience. The audience also serves as the “operative conduit through which the negotiations between who securitizes and who accepts such securitization perform”¹⁶. Buzan *et al.* emphasize, “successful securitization is not decided by the securitizer but by the audience of the security speech act”¹⁷. The third step is deployment of extraordinary measures to address and combat this threat. Such extraordinary measures should accept the “breaking of rules”, “beyond existing binding rules”¹⁸ and that “some kind of emergency remedial action is legitimate in the face of an existential threat”¹⁹.

¹⁰ Ole Wæver, “Politics, Security, Theory”, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 42, Issue 4-5, 2011, pp. 465-480.

¹¹ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.

¹² Hans Günter Brauch, “Conceptual Quartet: Security and its Linkages with Peace, Development and Environment”, in Hans Günter Brauch *et al.* (eds.), *Globalization and Environmental Challenges: Reconceptualizing Security in the 21st Century*, Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace, Vol. 3, Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2008, pp. 65-98.

¹³ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

¹⁴ Sabine Hirschauer, *The Securitization of Rape: Women, War and Sexual Violence*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 27.

¹⁵ Rita Taureck, “Securitization Theory and Securitization Studies”, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2006, p. 57.

¹⁶ Sabine Hirschauer, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁷ Barry Buzan *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁹ Jurgen Haacke and Paul D. Williams, “Regional Arrangements, Securitization, and Transnational Security Challenges: The African Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Compared”, *Security Studies*, Vol. 17, Issue. 4, 2008, p. 779.

And, fourth step is de-securitization. It is placing an issue out of emergency mode back “into the ordinary public sphere”²⁰ of political interaction: contestation, bargaining, negotiations, compromise and agreement.²¹ Vuori identified four strands of securitization: a. to raise an issue on the agenda, b. to act as deterrence, c. to legitimize past acts or reproduce existing securitization and d. to acquire more control.²²

There are a number of studies where the connections between securitization process and ethnic violence were explained. Vayrynen argued that any type of securitization in ethnic issues leads towards ethnic conflict.²³ He explained that securitization weakens social cosmos and escalates conflict in the society. Pia and Diez explained that the violation of human rights by securitization leads towards ethnic conflicts.²⁴ Fearon and Laitin argue that the social construction of ethnic identity in two ways can lead towards violence.²⁵ Firstly, the elites construct an antagonistic identity to maintain and increase their power and categorize people based on ethnic identity. Secondly, supra-individualistic discourse motivates some ethnic groups to use violence against other people. The Serbian ethnic violence was one of the brutal ethnic problems in the post-Cold War world. Roren used a framework of sociological securitization and identified different phases of securitization under Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia to marginalize Bosniaks and argued that continuous securitization process led to the ethnic violence.²⁶ Roychoudhury studied the securitization of Punjab crisis in India and concluded that the securitization of Punjab crisis was a consequence of missed political opportunities to settle genuine political, social, economic and cultural grievances of Sikhs. He argued that in the name of securitization “The assault on cultural and religious symbol of the Sikh community, excesses of political actions, and human rights abuses triggered a tangible communal

²⁰ Lene Hansen, “Reconstructing Desecuritisation: The Normative Political in Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2012, p. 531.

²¹ Sabine Hirschauer, op cit., p. 40.

²² Juha A. Vuori, “Illocutionary Logic and Strands of Securitization: Applying the Theory of Securitization to the Study of Non-democratic Political Orders”, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, 2008, pp. 65-99.

²³ Tarja Vayrynen, “Securitized Ethnic Identities and Communal Conflicts”, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1997, available at <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=pcs>, accessed on 22 March 2020.

²⁴ Emily Pia and Thomas Diez, “Conflict and Human Rights: A Theoretical Framework”, *SHUR Working Paper No. 1/07*, University of Birmingham, January 2007.

²⁵ James D. Fearon and David D Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity”, *International Organization*, Vol. 54, No. 4, 2000, pp. 845-877; James D. Fearon and David D Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil”, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, pp. 75-90.

²⁶ Pål Roren, “The Securitization of Ethnicity in Serbia (1987-1991)”, *E-International Relations*, 12 October 2013, available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/10/12/the-securitisation-of-ethnicity-in-serbia-1987-1991/>, accessed on 12 April 2020.

backlash”²⁷. Tredaniel and Lee explained how Chinese security actors focused on the security threats and legitimized emergency measures in Xinjiang while dealing with the terrorist activities in the region.²⁸ Howe studied societal securitization in Myanmar and identified that the Movement 969 and the Ma Ba Tha contributed in the marginalization process of the Rohingya community in Myanmar.²⁹ Kyaw explained how a process of legal personhood and cultural personhood alienated and discriminated Muslim identity in Myanmar by constitutional amendments and legal provisions.³⁰ Foxes described the narratives by the security actors in Myanmar for defending Buddhism and Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar.³¹

The aforementioned studies on ethnic violence are based on the top-down approach of securitization process. Adamides used a horizontal and bottom-up securitization process to understand securitization and de-securitization for explaining the ethnic violence in Cyprus.³² He defines horizontal and bottom-up securitization,

“... the (horizontal) process essentially ‘peer-to-peer securitization’. Bottom-up securitization refers to cases where the audiences either become securitizing actors themselves or they apply so much pressure to the ‘mainstream’ actors that the latter are ‘forced’ to develop or perpetuate securitizing acts even in cases where they do not necessarily feel strongly about it. The impact of the bottom-up pressure depends on how powerful the horizontal processes are, therefore making the two forms of securitization intertwined.”³³

In the process of horizontal securitization, all the peers may not enjoy equal power in a system. Some of them may be in lower power structure, but bear some social capital and capable of influencing state authority to accommodate their views. In the bottom-up securitization, security actors may be the part of the audience, but they enjoy one kind of autonomy to influence the power structure of the system.

²⁷ Sreya Maitra Roychoudhury, “State Securitization and Internal Ethnic Conflict in India: Re-examining the Punjab Crisis”, *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2014, p. 168.

²⁸ Marie Tredaniel and Pak K. Lee, “Explaining the Chinese Framing of the “Terrorist” Violence in Xinjiang: Insights from Securitization Theory”, *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, Vol. 46, Issue 1, 2018, pp. 177-195.

²⁹ Adam E. Howe, “Discourses of Exclusion: The Societal Securitization of Burma’s Rohingya (2012-2018)”, *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2018, pp. 1-22.

³⁰ Nyi Nyi Kyaw, “Alienation, Discrimination, and Securitization: Legal Personhood and Cultural Personhood of Muslims in Myanmar”, *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2015, pp. 50-59.

³¹ Niklas Foxeus, “The Buddha was a Devoted Nationalist: Buddhist Nationalism, Ressentiment, and Defending Buddhism in Myanmar”, *Religion*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2019, pp. 661-690.

³² Constantinos Adamides, *Securitization and Desecuritization in Protracted Conflicts: The Case of Cyprus*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. x.

Nevertheless, the horizontal and bottom-up securitization may happen concurrently and the political authority feel compulsion to communicate with the peers or audience cum actors in the process of adopting emergency measures.

This paper argues that the contemporary securitization of ethnic minorities in Myanmar can be analyzed by using horizontal and bottom-up securitization process because the emergence of radical Buddhist groups and their alliance with the military have made them an influential actor in the securitization of ethnic minorities. Since the monks have historic influence in the political space of Myanmar, the contemporary military regimes are very keen to obtain legitimacy from the Buddhist monks. On the one hand, military suppressed traditional monks and on the other hand, military developed a strong nexus with the radical monks. This horizontal and bottom-up securitization has unscrupulous consequences in the political and social arena, which are discussed in the next sections.

3. Alliance between the Military and Monks

Throughout the history, Buddhism played a pivotal role in the formation of cultural and social institutions of Burma.³⁴ A western historian termed Buddhism as *The Soul of a People*³⁵ of Burma. Though there is no archaeological evidence, the oral traditions of Burma speak that Buddha visited the country for four times³⁶ and prophesized that Burma would be built as a Buddhist city within 2,400 years³⁷, after the foundation of Buddhist religion. This belief inspired the psyche of the monks and they still consider it as a religious responsibility to pursue and protect Buddhism in Myanmar. Therefore, in the political history of Myanmar, there was a symbiotic relation between the state power and religious monks of the country. In the pre-colonial era, kings confirmed their legitimacy by promoting and defending Buddhism in their kingdom.³⁸ Mikael Gravers defined the relations between Buddhism and political power of Burma as cosmological one.³⁹ The monastic order (Sangha) could not survive without the protection and gift of the political power. On the other hand, political authority could not retain power without the consent of religious monks.

³⁴ The English name of Myanmar was changed from “Burma” to “Myanmar” in 1989. It was claimed by the government that the name “Myanmar” represented a time when the country was ruled by itself, rather than being under foreign colonial rule.

³⁵ H. Fielding Hall, *The Soul of a People*, London: MacMillan, 1889.

³⁶ “Collected Wheel Publications”, Vol. XXVI, Numbers 394 to 411, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2014, p. 119.

³⁷ Donald M. Seekins, *Historical Dictionary of Burma (Myanmar)*, Toronto: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2006, p. 280.

³⁸ Mikael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma*, London: Curzon Press, 1999, p. 15 and Donald E. Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

The monarchs of the country could use ‘violence’ for the protection of the country, where the consent of the monks was necessary. But, when the royals violated the principle of “Ahimsa”, the monks delegitimized the political authority.

The British occupation was a shock for Burma’s society and politics. The colonial state withdrew the donations for monasteries and disrupted the local economy which was an important source of income for Pagodas. Following the British conquest of upper Burma and the removal of King Thibaw from his palace in Mandalay in 1885, Buddhist monks dressed in their yellow and crimson robes led bands of armed rebels against the colonial power. As Donald Eugene Smith wrote in his study *Religion and Politics in Burma*: “In the anti-colonial struggle, the pongyis (monks) were the first nationalists”⁴⁰. In fact, the monks led all kinds of resistance against British rule throughout the colonial period of Burma from 1852 to 1948. The first organized movement against British rule in Burma was started by the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA) in 1898. The organization’s core values were to protect Burma from the expansion of Christianity and safeguarding the purity of the society of Burma. For more than hundred years of British rule, the monasteries were the most organized force to protest and the monks never compromised with colonialism. Therefore, the monks enjoy a sacred place in the memoirs of Burmese people.

During the independent movement of Myanmar, General Aung San emerged as a unanimous leader of the country. All kinds of political forces rallied behind him to achieve the independence of the country. The religious forces, societal organizations, ethnic minorities, military and secularist forces altogether accepted the leadership of Aung San as the president of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL) in 1946 with the stated purpose of achieving complete Burmese independence. However, General Aung San envisioned a united Burma, where all ethnic groups would enjoy equal rights. He wanted to accommodate all religious and ethnic minorities under the umbrella of secular nationalism. Therefore, he signed the Panglong Agreement in 1947 with major ethnic groups and drafted a secular constitution.⁴¹ But his secular nationalism raised concern among the Buddhist nationalists. The monks were dreaming of a country where Buddhism will be promoted and protected. Though Aung San did not promulgate any extreme secularist principles, the monks feared that secularist agenda might undermine the supremacy of Buddhism. The assassination of General Aung San changed the trajectory of the country. The spirit of the Panglong Agreement was diminished and the government of U Nu declared a special position for Buddhism in the country. In the beginning, the monks were very much enthusiastic about the policies of U Nu,

⁴⁰ Donald Eugene Smith, op. cit., p. 85.

⁴¹ The ethnic leaders who signed the treaty were from Kachin, Chin and Shan.

but later when he could not take effective action to protect Buddhist supremacy, his popularity declined. In this stage of history, General Ne Win occupied the power of the country in 1962 and the long rule of military started in Myanmar.

General Ne Win's military coup was celebrated by many extremist Buddhists considering that his strong leadership would help to unite the country. He declared his political ideology, "The Burmese Way to Socialism"⁴² in 1962, followed by "The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment"⁴³ in 1963. Both documents were based at least in part on a Buddhist interpretation.⁴⁴ Ne Win's policies to make Burma a unitary state was supported by many monks. Some of the scholars argue that Ne Win's military coup was considered by many monks as "resurrection", instead of a "revolution".⁴⁵ Because the monks identified Ne Win's government as a beginning of a strong leadership as it were during the 'kinghood' in the pre-colonial Burma. General Ne Win received a kingly image from many monks and monks were expecting that Ne Win's government would patronize Buddhism to flourish. Ne Win's declaration for Bamar supremacy and policies to uphold a linguistic nationality were praised by the Buddhist nationalists.⁴⁶ Many monks considered it as a model of the kingdom of pre-colonial Burma. But, when Ne Win failed to fulfil the expectations of the monks and tilted towards socialism, they started criticising Ne Win's rule. The government appeared eager to distance itself from Buddhism by declaring that the state was no longer the patron of the faith, eliminating religious holidays, lifting restrictions on animal slaughtering and halting the proselytizing of non-Buddhist minorities. Such policies of Ne Win weakened the relations between the military and the monks.⁴⁷

Anthropologist Gustaaf Houtman worked on Burmese Buddhist politics under military rule and developed a framework to understand the relations between the military and the monks in the country.⁴⁸ He argued that a clash between the two distinctive manifestations of power is associated with two groups, *Ana* and *Azwa*. *Ana* is the idea of order, command, or authority, most commonly associated with

⁴² Fred R. von der Mehden, "The Burmese Way to Socialism", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1963, pp. 129–135.

⁴³ "The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment", The Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), The Union of Burma, 17 January 1963, <https://www.burmalibrary.org/sites/burmalibrary.org/files/obl/docs/System-of-correlation.htm>, accessed on 27 March 2020.

⁴⁴ Bruce Matthews, "Buddhism under A Military Regime: The Iron Heel in Burma", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 1993, pp. 408–423.

⁴⁵ Michael Aung-Thwin, "The British 'Pacification' of Burma: Order without Meaning", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1985, p. 256.

⁴⁶ Robert H. Taylor, *The State of Burma*, Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1987, p. 366.

⁴⁷ Bruce Matthews, op. cit., p. 414.

⁴⁸ Gustaaf Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy*, Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999.

the top-down disciplining power of the military. *Azwa* is more associated with self-purification through moral practice. The two are not complete opposites, as they are ideally combined in a model of righteous and ethical rule, but, as Houtman notes, the story of political authority throughout Burmese history is primarily *ana*-based, centralizing power and *azwa*-based moral opposition. The idea of *ana* is that it is limited by boundaries and frameworks—a domain and some kind of lifespan such as a period of government; *azwa*, however, is so fluid that it transcends the trickles through all boundaries of time and place. By using this framework, the evolutions of relations between and among the political forces of Myanmar under the military regimes can be explained in a better way.

Since the 1962 military coup, at least five political and social forces have been dominating the political space of Myanmar. The conflicts and alliances among these forces were determinants of the government’s political decisions towards ethnic minorities. The first and most powerful political force in Myanmar is military, known as Tatmadaw. General Ne Win established military as almost unchallenged political force in the country. In the last six decades, military shaped the political order of the country in a way that no other political and social forces can compete with military. In fact, military and the state of Myanmar emerged almost synonymous to each other.⁴⁹ General Ne Win’s coup of 1962 started a unitary system of government and denied any autonomous power to the ethnic communities. Ne Win’s linguistic nationalism and “four cut” policy suppressed the existence of other forces.⁵⁰ He singlehandedly ruled the country till 1988 and emerged as a unique personality in the political space of Myanmar.⁵¹ Though he left the power, but his legacies continued to strengthen military’s stronghold in the politics of Myanmar.⁵² After Ne Win, General Saw Maung took the control of power and established the State, Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). General Saw Maung promised for change and declared for reconciliation with ethnic groups.⁵³ But, the categorization of ethnic minorities instigated conflict among the ethnic communities of the country. In 1992, General Than Shew came to power and due to domestic resistance and international pressure, he took different initiatives to reform the power structure of the country and introduced a new constitution in 2008.⁵⁴ His policies were appreciated as a transition

⁴⁹ Yoshihiro Nakanishi, *Strong Soldiers, Failed Revolution: The State and Military in Burma, 1962–88*, Singapore and Kyoto: NUS Press in association with Kyoto University Press, 2013.

⁵⁰ The “four cut” policy was to cut off insurgents from food, fund, intelligence and recruits.

⁵¹ Robert H. Taylor, op. cit., p. 367.

⁵² Roger Lee Huang, “Re-thinking Myanmar’s Political Regime: Military Rule in Myanmar and Implications for Current Reforms”, *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 19, Issue 3, 2013 and Uta Gartner, “Legacies of Military Rule in Myanmar”, *International Quarterly for Asian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 3-4, 2017.

⁵³ Josef Silverstein, “Burma in an International Perspective”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 10, 1992, pp. 951-963.

⁵⁴ Priscilla Clapp, “Burma’s Long Road to Democracy”, *Special Report No. 193*, Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, November 2007.

towards democracy, though military reserved 25 per cent of parliamentary seats for them. In the present system, no constitutional change is possible without the consent of military. To make any amendment in the constitution, the consent of 75 per cent of parliamentarians is necessary, which is not possible without the votes of military representatives in the parliament. Military dominates most of the political affairs of Myanmar. Military is still exerting strong influence on the incumbent elected government of Myanmar, particularly on the issues of national integrity and ethnic policies.⁵⁵

The second influential political force in Myanmar is the National League for Democracy (NLD), the largest political party in the country under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, the incumbent State Counsellor of Myanmar. The party was established after the mass uprising against military in 1988. The uprising was mainly started by the students, but later the monks and all other social forces joined the protest. During the movement, Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as an iconic leader and the NLD was formed under her leadership. The party was mainly led by retired military officers who were demanding for democracy in the country.⁵⁶ Due to political pressure, the government declared a nationwide election in 1990, where the NLD won 392 out of 485 seats in the parliament. Military dismissed the results of the election and arrested most of the leaders of the NLD. It gave the NLD a unique acceptance among the people of the country and the party mobilized whole country to protest for democracy against military rule. The movements of the NLD forced the military regime to declare a roadmap for democracy in 2003 and accordingly military approved a constitution in 2008. Though the NLD was critical about the 2008 constitution of the country, it participated in the 2015 election under the constitution and won majority seats in the parliament. Since Aung San Suu Kyi married a foreign citizen, she could not be the president of the country according to the 2008 constitution adopted by the military.⁵⁷ Therefore, a new position naming State Counsellor was created and Suu Kyi became the executive head of the country in 2015. But, military enjoys enormous power to intervene in the government policies. On the other hand, Suu Kyi's failure to resolve the ethnic issues and her silence about the military's suppression on the Rohingya community raised a lot of questions about her iconic image in the country and abroad.

The third major force who has been dominating social and political space of Myanmar is the traditional religious monks of the country. As mentioned earlier, the monks were influential in Myanmar since pre-colonial era. General Aung San and U

⁵⁵ "Myanmar", *BTI 2018 Country Report*, Gutersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018.

⁵⁶ Mary P. Callahan, "Union of Myanmar", in Neil Schlager and Jayne Weisblatt (eds.), *World Encyclopaedia of Political System and Political Parties*, New York: Fact on Files Inc., Fourth Edition, 2006, p. 931.

⁵⁷ Article-59, Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008.

Nu, both of them maintained a good relation with monks, though their policies were not always appreciated by the monks. Later, when Ne Win made military coup, the monks were expecting that he would patronise Buddhism. Nonetheless, Ne Win's socialist policies have created distance between the military and the monks.⁵⁸ On one hand, Ne Win was not fulfilling the demands of the monks to promote Buddhism. On the other hand, his suppressive policies were against the principles of Buddhist teachings. Therefore, the monks actively participated in the resistance of 1988 against military rule and later became closer to the NLD. The 2007 Saffron revolution was one of the major protests against military rule in Myanmar led by the monks.⁵⁹ After the Saffron revolution, military's crackdown against monks weakened the traditional Buddhist values in society. In fact, military took control over religion and politics of the country.⁶⁰ In contemporary times, the voice of traditional monks is almost silenced, particularly on the political issues.

The fourth force which has emerged in recent years is the radical Buddhist groups. Since British occupation of Myanmar, the resistance from the monks was common. Though all the monks were against British occupation, some of them were also focusing on the migrated Indians in Burma. They were claiming that the British rulers were patronising Indians.⁶¹ The famous 1930 riots against Indians and 1938 riots against Muslims helped to organize anti-Muslim movements in Myanmar.⁶² In 1997, a riot was held under the leadership of a group of monks. The government arrested at least 100 monks for this riot.⁶³ In 2001, Ashin Wirathu and his follower monks started preaching against Muslims, identifying them as a threat to the Burmese state, society and religion.⁶⁴ After 2007 Saffron revolution led by the traditional monks, military found these radical groups as an instrument to use against traditional monks. Military developed a relation with these groups and remained silent on the activities of the Movement 969, who were preaching hate speeches against Muslims.⁶⁵ Though the Ma Ba Tha did not take any side in 2015 election, the military and the NLD both tried to receive sympathy from these groups. They are the most powerful organized Buddhist movement nowadays, where traditionalists are suppressed and marginalized by the military.

⁵⁸ Bruce Matthews, op. cit. p. 414.

⁵⁹ Benedict Rogers, "The Saffron Revolution: The Role of Religion in Burma's Movement for Peace and Democracy", *Totalitarian Movement and Political Religions*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 2008, pp. 115-118.

⁶⁰ Ashley South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 139.

⁶¹ Renaud Egreteau, "Burmese Indians in Contemporary Burma: Heritage, Influence and Perceptions since 1988", *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 12, Issue 1, 2011, pp. 33-54.

⁶² Ashley South, op. cit. p. 27.

⁶³ David Lea and Colette Milward (eds.), *A Political Chronology of South East Asia and Oceania*, London: Europa Publication, 2001, p. 122.

⁶⁴ Niklas Foxeus, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Andrew R. C. Marshall, "Special Report: Myanmar Gives Official Blessing to Anti-Muslim Monks", *Reuters*, 27 June 2013.

The fifth group is the ethnic armed groups (EAGs). Since 1962, they are fighting against military for their self-determination. Almost all of them have been supporting Aung San Suu Kyi, desiring that she would help them to ensure their self-determination after her arrival to power. They are now in negotiation with the government in a process known as 21st Century Panglong. But, the negotiation is facing obstacles due to longstanding mistrust between the military and the resurgent groups.

Ne Win government's relations became antagonistic with monks and ethnic minorities due to his policies towards religion and minorities. Though some of the policies of Ne Win were similar to the demands of monks, Ne Win government followed an *Ana* structure, which was contradictory with the *Azwa* structure of monks. After 1988, Aung San Suu Kyi adopted Buddhist values in her democratic movement and talked about "moral democracy" in addition to "right based democracy".⁶⁶ She received support from traditional monks. After Saffron revolution of 2007, military aligned with radical monks to gain legitimacy. Before 2015 elections, military passed at least four famous laws to appease radical monks.⁶⁷ Aung San Suu Ki remained silent about the radical monks fearing to lose support of religious people.⁶⁸ But after arrival to power, her traditional iconic position seems to be weakening due to her compromise with the military and the radical monks.⁶⁹ On the other hand, ethnic minorities are losing their confidence in her. The "Sangha Council" of the traditionalist monks seems to weaken and some of them are compromising with military for their survival.⁷⁰

Though the radical monks never declared their allegiance to the military or to the NLD, but there is an undeclared alliance between the military and the radical monks on the issues of minorities, particularly regarding military's operations against the Rohingya community. The radical monks are silently providing legitimacy to the military operations against the Rohingya community and the military is also not taking any action against the "hate mongering" speeches of the radical monks.⁷¹ Aung San Suu Kyi is silent about radical monks fearing that her voice for the rights of minorities may reduce support for her among the Buddhist people. It is evident that at least in last one decade, the military and the radical monks reached

⁶⁶ Michal Lubina, *The Moral Democracy: The Political Thought of Aung San Suu Kyi*, Warsaw: Scholar Publishing House, 2019.

⁶⁷ The Population Control Law (May 2015), The Women's Special Marriage Law (August 2015), The Religious Conversion Law (August 2015) and The Monogamy Law (August 2015).

⁶⁸ Sara Perria, "Why is Aung San Suu Kyi silent on the plight of the Rohingya people?", *The Guardian*, 19 May 2015.

⁶⁹ Zoltan Barany, "Burma: Suu Kyi's Missteps", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 29, Issue. 1, 2018, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Bertil Lintner, *The Resistance of the Monks: Buddhism and Activism in Burma*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009.

⁷¹ Htet Naing Zaw, "Ma Ba Tha is a Necessity: Military", *The Irrawaddy*, 19 June 2019.

in an informal alliance. Therefore, monks are supporting military's policy towards minorities in the name of security.⁷² Any voice from the NLD that is critical to this alliance may weaken political position of the party.⁷³ However, the alliance between the military and the monks nowadays dominates Myanmar's policy towards the Rohingya minorities.

4. The Securitization of Ethnic Minorities

The tension between Bamar people and other ethnic communities is rooted in the colonial history of Myanmar. As part of "divide and rule" policy, the colonial rulers instigated conflict among different communities.⁷⁴ Moreover, local communities also did not like the presence of migrants from India who were taking jobs in different sectors of Myanmar.⁷⁵ The colonial rule weakened social fabric of the country.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, when General Aung San emerged as a unanimous leader of the country and started national independence movement, he desired a united Myanmar and reached in the Panglong Agreement in 1947, where he agreed to ensure equal rights for all the ethnic minorities. After the assassination of General Aung San, U Nu became the prime minister and declared Buddhist supremacy in the country. But constitutionally he tried to secure equal rights for all the ethnic communities and took initiatives to resolve tensions with ethnic minorities. During his tenure, there were representations from the Rohingya community in the parliament as well as in the cabinet.⁷⁷ In 1961, he introduced Mayu Frontier Administration (MFA) in the Southern Rohingya region where most of the Rohingyas live. It created opportunities for the Rohingya community to participate in the government activities.⁷⁸

The securitization of ethnic identity started under the Ne Win government, when he took initiatives to marginalize ethnic communities including the Rohingya people. After military coup of 1962, he declared Bamar supremacy and started nationalization process, where the properties of many immigrants were taken under the state ownership. A number of people whose forefathers migrated from India were

⁷² P. K. BalaChandran, "Why Action against Myanmar's Radical Monk is Unlikely", *Daily Express*, 31 May 2019, available at <http://southasiajournal.net/why-action-against-myanmars-radical-monk-is-unlikely/>, accessed on 28 May 2020.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Subhasish Ray, "Beyond Divide and Rule: Explaining the Link between British Colonialism and Ethnic Violence", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 24, Issue 4, 2018, pp. 367-388.

⁷⁵ James Warren, "The Rangoon Jail Riot of 1930 and the Prison Administration of British Burma", *South East Asia Research*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, 2002, pp. 5-29.

⁷⁶ Mary Patricia Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 23.

⁷⁷ Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959, p. 316.

⁷⁸ Moshe Yegar, *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand and Western Burma/Myanmar*, New York: Lexington Books, 2002, p. 51.

compelled to leave Myanmar.⁷⁹ General Ne Win wanted to achieve multi-faceted objectives by securitizing ethnic minorities. When Ne Win observed that many ethnic groups were resisting about his policies, he became concerned about the integrity of the country.⁸⁰ Therefore, he declared a linguistic nationalism in the country and stopped teaching of other languages.⁸¹ He thought that such processes would prevent disintegration of the country. While Panglong agreement of 1947 was based on a federal system of government, Ne Win government found that such federal structure was weakening the integrity of the state.⁸² Therefore, he introduced unitary system of governance and took draconian initiatives to suppress the resurgent groups who were fighting against integrity of the state. Another objective of the securitization process was to establish dominance of the military in the power structure of the country.⁸³ Since his views were tilted towards socialist policies, he took policies to wipe out alternative opinions from the society. He declared the supremacy of Bamar people and adopted policies to eradicate who were against him.

Ne Win's strong policies against minorities were supported by the monks because they found that his policies could secure and strengthen the dominance of Bamar people. In last six decades, a continuous process of securitization has been continued where Rohingyas were one of the major victims of the process. Though initially military took the initiative to securitize Rohingyas, after 2001, radical Buddhist groups also contributed in the securitization process. The securitization process in Myanmar was held in two ways. First, by the "speech act", where the security actors raised concern about different referent objects and second, by adopting emergency security measures by which the government initiated to marginalize or eliminate ethnic communities. There were multiple referent objects in the securitization process: national, societal and economic security.

The narratives of securitization of the Rohingya minorities occurred in two ways. Firstly, some securitization narratives were developed, where Rohingyas were identified as threat to national security. Secondly, some of the narratives were promulgated locally to identify Rohingyas as a security threat for the local Buddhists in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. However, during the Japanese invasion in Burma in 1942, most of the Rohingya people were in favour of British army.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Renaud Egretreau, op. cit.

⁸⁰ Ardeth Maung Thawngmung, *Beyond Armed Resistance: Ethnonational Politics in Burma (Myanmar)*, Honolulu: East-West Center, 2011.

⁸¹ Paul Keenan, *By Force of Arms: Armed Ethnic Groups in Myanmar*, New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt. Ltd., 2008, p. 13.

⁸² Nehginpao Kipgen, "The Quest for Federalism in Myanmar", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 42, No. 6, 2018, p. 615.

⁸³ Nicholas Farrelly, "Discipline without Democracy: Military Dominance in Post-Colonial Burma", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 3, 2013, pp. 312-326.

⁸⁴ Harrison Akins, "The Two Faces of Democratisation in Myanmar: A Case Study of the Rohingya and Burmese Nationalism", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 38, Issue. 2, 2018.

Before independence, some of the Rohingya leaders communicated with the Muslim leaders of India to include Arakan⁸⁵ as part of Pakistan.⁸⁶ Moreover, after independence a radical Mujahedeen group of Arakan demanded a separate state for them.⁸⁷ Therefore, there is a narrative that Rohingyas are “others” in Myanmar society.⁸⁸ Ne Win identified them as a threat to national security. Ne Win’s narratives were supported by many local people and legitimized him to take tough measures against the Rohingya people. Due to military’s marginalization policies, a number of radical and terrorist groups have been trying to legitimize their clandestine activities against the state of Myanmar. On the other hand, the formation of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and their coalition with the northern alliance⁸⁹ helped radical Buddhists to narrate that all Rohingyas are terrorists.⁹⁰ After 9/11, when global initiatives intensified against terrorist groups, the military and the monks found it as an opportunity to legitimize their position that Muslims are perpetrating terrorism in Myanmar.⁹¹ In this background, a fear of segregation of the Rohingya region emerged in Myanmar that if “Bengalis” remain in Myanmar, the integrity of the country will be threatened.⁹² Ne Win government’s securitization process continued for six decades and contemporary radical Buddhists intensified this process by projecting Rohingyas as national security threat to Myanmar.

In the societal level, some of the security threats originated from the colonial history of Myanmar. When the British expanded their colony in Myanmar, Christian missionaries found it an opportunity to preach Christianity in the country.⁹³ On the other hand, before British rule, the monasteries received funds from the monarchs.⁹⁴

⁸⁵ The previous name of Rakhine.

⁸⁶ T. Gibson, H. James and L. Falvey, *Rohingyas: Insecurity and Citizenship in Myanmar*, Songkhla: Thaksin University Press, 2016, p. 67.

⁸⁷ Brahma Chellaney, “Myanmar’s Jihadi Curse”, available at <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/rohingya-crisis-myanmar-jihadism-by-brahma-chellaney-2017-09?barrier=accesspaylog>, accessed on 27 February 2020.

⁸⁸ The ‘otherisation’ process is illustrated in the fact that the official documents refer to them as “Bengalis” or ‘Bengali migrants’, thus not son of the soil. Such kind of narrative that is rooted in the concept of otherness, makes securitization easy and acceptable to the locals.

⁸⁹ It is a coalition of four ethnic insurgent groups: the Arakan Army (AA), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA).

⁹⁰ Thomas M. Sanderson and Maxwell B. Markusen, “Myanmar and Its Rohingya Muslim Insurgency”, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/myanmar-and-its-rohingya-muslim-insurgency>, accessed on 10 March 2020.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Shafiqur Rahman, “Myanmar’s ‘Rohingya’ vs ‘Bengali’ Hate Speech Debate”, *The Diplomat*, 21 December 2019.

⁹³ Benedict Rogers, “The Contribution of Christianity to Myanmar’s Social and Political Development”, *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2015, pp. 60-70.

⁹⁴ Penny Edwards, “Grounds for Protest: Placing Shwedagon Pagoda in Colonial and Post-Colonial History”, *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2006, pp. 197-211.

When the British government withdrawal fund for monasteries, it came as a shock for the Burmese monks.⁹⁵ Therefore, in the societal level, there was a sense of an insecurity about the foreigners and other religions in Myanmar. They feared that the expansion of other religion would be a threat to Buddhism. There were religious riots against Muslims in 1938. When General Ne Win was taking draconian actions against Rohingyas, the radical monks and Burmese society remained almost silent on the issue. The Muslims, particularly Rohingyas were the major victim of any kinds of military operations or religious riots in Myanmar. Such operations received one kind of rationale because the securitization narratives established Rohingyas as a threat to the society of Myanmar. The radical monks in Myanmar developed a narrative that the expansion of Muslim population is a threat to the security of Buddhism. Particularly, Ashin Wirathu claims that the countries of Southeast Asia like Indonesia and Malaysia, were Buddhist dominated country, but the expansion of Islam marginalized Buddhism.⁹⁶ In this respect, they narrate that Muslims are threat to Buddhism and an unscrupulous expansion of Muslim population will wipe out Buddhism from Myanmar.⁹⁷ In Myanmar, a large number of male population go to the monasteries as monks. Therefore, there is a surplus of girls in the society who are not able to manage husbands for them.⁹⁸ The Buddhists are claiming that Muslims are using it as an opportunity to convert Buddhist girls to Islam. Monks claim that these trends are threatening the demographic stability in Myanmar and radical monks argue that Muslims have a mission to increase their population in the country. Therefore, new laws are adopted to regulate marriage system in Myanmar.⁹⁹ Moreover, the radical monks also view that Muslims are not respecting local culture and are a threat to local values.¹⁰⁰ According to Buddhist radicals' narrative, Rohingya are "Bengalis" which was earlier propagated by the military rulers. Buddhists narrate that "Rohingya" identity is a political construct of various separatist movements led by Muslims.¹⁰¹ At first, they targeted Indians especially those who entered Myanmar during British rule, later they included all the Rohingyas including those who were living in Myanmar before British rule. Now all Muslims are considered as security threat for Myanmar, including

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Niklas Foxeus, op. cit.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Carlos Sardina Galache, *The Burmese Labyrinth: A History of the Rohingya Tragedy*, London: Verso, 2020.

⁹⁹ Melissa Crouch, "Constructing Religion by Law in Myanmar", *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, Vol. 13, Issue. 4, 2015, p. 1-11 and Melissa Crouch, "Promiscuity, Polygyny, and the Power of Revenge: The Past and Future of Burmese Buddhist Law in Myanmar", *Asian Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 85-104.

¹⁰⁰ Joe Freeman, "Can Anyone Stop Burma's Hard line Buddhist Monks?", *The Atlantic*, 6 September 2017.

¹⁰¹ A. K. M. Ahsan Ullah, "Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Seeking Justice for "Stateless"", *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, Vol. 32, Issue 3, 2016, p. 286 and Aye Chan, "The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar)", *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2005, pp. 396-420.

Kamein.¹⁰² Nowadays, the Burmanization process has become more “Islamphobic” compared to age old “Indophobic” narratives.¹⁰³ In the beginning Ne Win targeted all the people who settled in Myanmar from India including Hindus and Muslims, but nowadays the military and monks are targeting mostly Muslim minorities.

The securitization of Muslim minorities in Myanmar is also connected with the economic insecurities of the majority Bamar people. When the British left India, some of the migrants from South Asia were established businessmen in Myanmar.¹⁰⁴ After Ne Win’s arrival in power, there were narratives that foreigners are taking control of the economy of Myanmar.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, Ne Win started nationalization process and many Indians whose forefathers migrated to Myanmar were forced to go back to India. Ne Win’s securitization process targeting the minorities continued for last six decades. The military rulers used this securitization narrative as an opportunity to establish Bamar supremacy in Myanmar. In Myanmar, there are some Muslim restaurants who use 786 number as signboard to show that they sell “Halal Food”.¹⁰⁶ The Buddhists radicals narrate it that the Muslims are developing a separate economic order to control Myanmar.¹⁰⁷ The radical monks vandalised many Muslim restaurants and financial shops identifying them as threat to the security of Myanmar. The radical Buddhists started Movement 969¹⁰⁸ alternative to the Muslim’s 786. Radical monks propagated the idea that Muslims are a threat to the economic progress of the Buddhists communities in Myanmar.

On the other hand, due to job scarcity, there is a fear among the Rakhine Buddhist community that Muslims are occupying jobs with less salary which is a cause of unemployment of the Buddhist people in Myanmar. Therefore, they compelled government to adopt new laws to restrict travelling of the Rohingya people in other parts of the country. In addition, it is also argued by some of the scholars that military sponsored draconian operations against Rohingyas in 2017 is connected with the geo-economic interest of the military and multinational companies.¹⁰⁹ Military wants to establish mega industries in Rakhine state, where

¹⁰² Kamein is a predominantly Muslim ethnic group in Myanmar enlisted among the 135 ethnic groups of the country. Earlier, they were not targeted by the governments or by extremists Buddhists, but nowadays they are also targeted by radicals as like as other Muslims.

¹⁰³ Renaud Egreteau, op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ Robert H. Taylor, *The State of Myanmar*, Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009, p. 275.

¹⁰⁵ Josef Silverstein, “Problems in Burma: Economic, Political and Diplomatic”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1967, p. 118.

¹⁰⁶ International Crisis Group, Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar, *Asian Report No. 290*, Brussels: International Crisis Group, 05 September 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Jason Szep, “Special Report: Buddhist Monks Incite Muslim Killings in Myanmar”, *Reuters*, 08 April 2013.

¹⁰⁸ International Crisis Group, op. cit.

¹⁰⁹ Saskia Sassen, “Is Rohingya Persecution Caused by Business Interests Rather than Religion?”, *The Guardian*, 04 January 2017.

foreign multinational companies would invest. Military operations are initiatives to vacant the region for new industrialization. Therefore, the securitization process of Rohingyas is also connected with the military's economic and financial interests.

By securitizing minorities, the government of Myanmar adopted different emergency measures against them. Many of these measures affected all the minorities and some of them are specially developed against the Rohingya community. The spirit of the Panglong agreement of 1947 was that Myanmar would be a multi-racial and multi-religious country. Based on the spirit of the Panglong agreement, the 1948 Citizenship Act defined the principles of citizenship in the country. Though all the inhabitants of Myanmar were not included in the law, the law was more accommodative than the successive laws. However, General Ne Win did not follow the Citizenship Law of 1948 and in 1974 he adopted a new immigration act, where he decided to exclude many people who are not originally from Bamar race. Later, the 1982 Citizenship Law introduced a new nationality system in the country and it categorized citizens of Myanmar in three categories which ultimately restricts the citizenship of Rohingyas.

Before 2015 election, military rulers took initiatives to satisfy radical Buddhists and adopted four major laws to protect Buddhism. These laws imposed restrictions on the people of other religion. The Population Control Law (May 2015) gives the government power to implement population control measures in any areas of the country. However, government applied this law against Rohingyas and ordered Muslim couples that they cannot take more than two kids. The Buddhist Women's Special Marriage Law (August 2015) provides that any marriage of Buddhist woman to a non-Buddhist man requires approval of the authority. The Religious Conversion Law (August 2015) adopted tough provisions for any religious conversion. The Monogamy Law (August 2015) made it a criminal offence to have more than one spouse or to live with an unmarried partner. All such laws mainly targeted Muslim population of the country.

Ne Win's securitization process found a new direction when the military and the radical Buddhists formed an undeclared alliance against Muslims, particularly against the Rohingya community. While Ne Win identified Rohingyas as foreigners, nowadays Rohingyas are considered as a threat to the national, societal and economic security of Myanmar. Earlier security narratives were developed by the military government but nowadays the radical monks also play pivotal role in the process of securitization against the Rohingya community. Moreover, Ne Win's securitization measures were mainly dominated by the military operations and changing citizenship law, but at present, new laws and narratives are developed by the radical monks to target Muslims. The alliance between the military and the radical monks pushed the

NLD and civil society organizations (CSOs) in a silent mode. Therefore, there is no voice within Myanmar who can talk in support of Rohingyas against any kinds of persecution.

5. The Consequences of Securitization

The securitization of ethnic minorities had remarkable consequences in the socio-political arena of Myanmar. As mentioned earlier, a number of forces dominated political space of Myanmar during the independence movement of the country. The iconic leadership of General Aung San led the country towards a secular state but his assassination changed the trajectory of the country. His successor, U Nu, allowed a special position for Buddhism in Myanmar. At the same time, U Nu's government tried to achieve a peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflicts in Myanmar. U Nu could not succeed because radical Buddhists and ethnic minorities, both were not satisfied with his policies. After U Nu, the military government of Ne Win in 1962 transformed the country from a democratic state to an authoritarian one where Ne Win emerged as the central figure in the political space of Myanmar. At the beginning, the Buddhist nationalists hoped that Ne Win would resurrect pre-British Kingship structure of government and would re-establish the respectable position of monasteries in the society. But his socialist policies distanced him from religious groups. In the last seven decades, the securitization of ethnic minorities, which was started by Ne Win, affected the political, social and economic policies of the country and made significant consequences which have connections with the intensified ethnic violence in Myanmar.

By securitizing ethnic minority issues, military established itself as the sole saviour of the country.¹¹⁰ Military developed narratives that they are working for the integrity of the country and military actions are unavoidable to secure integrity of Myanmar. Such narratives legitimized military's unscrupulous control in the political space of the country. In the different phases of the political history of Myanmar, military regimes adopted new doctrines to legitimize their position in the political space of the country. The draconian military operations in different parts of the country soured the relations between the military and the ethnic minorities. As a consequence, a number of resurgent and terrorist groups organized in the country and they were threatening the geographical integrity of Myanmar. Military needed to take strong actions against these groups, which ultimately led the country towards violence.

¹¹⁰ Mikael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999, p. 119.

The securitization process diminished multi-cultural fabric of the society. The divide and rule policy of the military government soured the relations between the Bamar people and ethnic minorities. After the fall of Ne Win, the new government started a negotiation process with the ethnic minorities. Later, military took an initiative to enlist ethnic groups and identified 135 ethnic minorities in the country. Though the declared policy of the military was that they would start negotiation with ethnic groups, they have instigated tensions among the ethnic groups for ensuring their stronghold in the political space.¹¹¹ Such policies of military helped to develop radical Buddhist groups who spread hate speeches in the society and instigated violence among the ethnic minorities. The dream of a multi-ethnic society has been faded due to divisions among the different ethnic communities. The Rohingya community emerged as the worst victim section of such ethnic violence. The hatred instigated in the society influenced Rakhine Buddhists to enact violence against the Rohingya community in every sphere of life.

The securitization of ethnic minorities by the military and the monks spoiled the political space of the country. Hatred is rooted so deeply in the society of Myanmar that the democratic forces and CSOs become silent against the suppression of Rohingya minorities.¹¹² The rise of radical Buddhism in Myanmar started a bottom-up securitization process, which helped military to instigate social hatred against Rohingyas. Such factors spoiled the democratic space of the country. In 1990 election, where the NLD received absolute majority, the party nominated Muslim candidates to take part in the election.¹¹³ But, during the 2015 election, the NLD did not allow any Muslim candidate from the party.¹¹⁴ Moreover, during the 2012 and 2017 violence against Rohingya community, the NLD remained completely silent. When international communities were raising questions about the silence of Aung San Suu Kyi, she continued supporting military's actions fearing that her sympathy for Rohingyas might weaken her relations with the radical Buddhists of Myanmar. Suu Kyi established Annan Commission under the leadership of Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), with the responsibility to find out how the conflicts among the ethnic minorities can be resolved. But when the commission came with recommendations, it seems that Suu Kyi and her government are not interested to implement the recommendations fearing a Buddhist backlash. Moreover, the government suppressed CSOs and human rights bodies and prevented them to talk anything against the military's operation in the Rakhine state.

¹¹¹ David Brenner, "The Tatmadaw's Divide-and Rule Tactics in Myanmar", *The Diplomat*, 17 March 2014.

¹¹² International Crisis Group, *Myanmar: The Role of Civil Society*, Bangkok/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 6 December 2001.

¹¹³ Azeem Ibrahim, *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Genocide*, London: Hurst and Company, 2016, p. 41.

¹¹⁴ Oren Samet, "A Muslim-Free Parliament in Myanmar", *Foreign Policy*, 09 October 2015.

The securitization process affected the human rights standard of Myanmar. In the name of security, military adopted draconian laws in the country. It helped them to avoid the compulsions of maintaining human rights standard. Military's steps against human rights blocked negotiation process with the ethnic minorities and many ethnic groups organized resurgent movements in Myanmar. The political suppression and social oppression diverted many groups to take arms against the state. The government failed to develop any negotiation process to eradicate the tension, rather military adopted strong military measures. Therefore, many resurgent groups are active in different regions of Myanmar. The rule of General Ne Win widened the social division in the country. The successive military regimes continued his legacies and adopted policies which ultimately strengthened military's positions in the power structure of the country.¹¹⁵

Though after 1988, military declared for reconciliation, there was no progress in this regard and increased mistrust among the ethnic communities deepened violence in the country.¹¹⁶ When Aung San Suu Kyi came to power in 2015, she started a negotiation, terming it the 21st Century Panglong process. But the long-standing mistrust between the military and ethnic groups is preventing any progress, rather new alliances of ethnic groups like Northern Alliance are reorganizing. Such developments are threatening the prospects of future reconciliation in the country. In addition to state level, there were subsequent consequences of securitization in the societal level. The long process of securitization by the state helped extremist groups to emerge in the society. Though military regimes were suppressive against Buddhist monks who were raising voice against the military rule in the country, when new radical groups emerged, military developed a nexus with radical groups. On the other hand, the military did not develop any mechanism to make distinction between terrorists and peaceful minorities. Therefore, any military operation goes against all sections of minorities, no matter who is a terrorist and who is not. Such policies are also escalating tension in the society.

Military's polices helped radical Buddhist groups to use violence against Rohingyas in Myanmar. The riot of 2012 was a consequence of the prevailing support of the military towards radical groups. The country entered an era where reconciliation became more difficult. The securitization process increased social hatred in the country. The extremist Buddhists monks considered the Muslims as threat to the society.¹¹⁷ The "hate speeches" of radical monks weakened Buddhist

¹¹⁵ Roger Lee Huang, "Re-thinking Myanmar's Political Regime: Military Rule in Myanmar and Implications for Current Reforms", *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 19, Issue 3, 2013, pp. 247-261.

¹¹⁶ Lee Jones, "Explaining Myanmar's Regime Transition: The Periphery is Central", *Democratization*, Vol. 21, No. 5, 2014, pp. 780-802.

¹¹⁷ Michael Jerryson and Iselin Frydenlund, "Buddhist, Muslims and the Construction of Difference", in Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson (eds.), *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in Theravada World*, Singapore: Springer, 2020, p. 275.

values in the society. The society became violent and killing Muslims is sometimes considered as a responsibility for the protection of Bamar race and Buddhist religion.¹¹⁸ Military tries to earn legitimacy by supporting the radical Buddhist groups. Many traditionalists, who bear Buddhists beliefs that any life should not be killed, are marginalized and suppressed by the military.¹¹⁹ The military and the radical monks have emerged as a narrator of Buddhism, whose narratives contradict with the traditionalist Buddhist values.

The longstanding military rule and securitization process prevented CSOs to talk in favour of ethnic minorities in Myanmar. During the independent movement of Myanmar, a number of CSOs were very much vocal about the rights of ethnic minorities. In fact, newspapers of that time played influential role in organizing movements against British colonialism. However, things have been changed after the military coup of 1962. The securitization process of ethnic minorities weakened the positions of CSOs and security actors developed a dominant narrative which suppressed democratic and liberal opinions. In recent years, no civil society organization is seen to talk about the rights of Rohingyas. The undemocratic rule for long times weakened the democratic institutions of Myanmar.¹²⁰

The securitization process of minorities is deeply connected with the violence against the Rohingya minorities. The primary securitization narrative by the military was against the immigrants from India, who were influential in the areas of the economy and business of Myanmar. Therefore, Ne Win took measures to nationalize many industries of the country which were owned by migrant people and whose forefathers migrated from India to Myanmar during British rule. Rohingyas were also in this process of marginalization. However, after the emergence of radical Buddhism, they have targeted the Muslim population in Myanmar. Moreover, the restrictions on the movement of the Rohingya people, denial from jobs and isolating them in their localities have marginalized Rohingyas from the mainstream society and they lost their relevance from the social and political life of Myanmar.

The marginalization of Rohingyas trapped them and they fell prey to becoming small arms transporters and drug smugglers. Many Rohingyas were compelled to join illegal business activities for their economic survival.¹²¹ It led them

¹¹⁸ Matt Schissler, Matthew J. Walton and Phyu Phyu Thi, "Reconciling Contradictions: Buddhist-Muslim Violence, Narrative Making and Memory in Myanmar", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 47, Issue 3, 2017, pp. 376-395.

¹¹⁹ Bruce Matthews, op. cit.

¹²⁰ Nehginpao Kipgen, "Militarization of Politics in Myanmar and Thailand", *International Studies*, Vol. 53, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 153-172.

¹²¹ International Crisis Group, *A Sustainable Policy for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh*, Asia Report No. 303, Brussels: International Crisis Group, 27 September 2019.

towards financial insecurity. The long securitization process of the ethnic minorities weakened the process of nation building in Myanmar. The securitization narrative developed by the military segregated many ethnic groups from the mainstream politics of the country and they have joined violent and criminal activities, which are threatening the integrity of Myanmar. It helped military to legitimize their stronghold in the power structure of the country but the national integrity of the country has been weakened. The longstanding rivalry between ethnic communities prevented any effective reconciliation process, which ultimately led towards unscrupulous violence. The securitization process weakened multi-cultural structure, marginalized ethnic communities and deepened mistrust. Moreover, the rise of radical Buddhism and their consent to the securitization of ethnic minorities instigated hate speeches and hate crimes in the country. The ongoing ethnic violence in Myanmar is the outcome of the military's longstanding securitization and marginalization process, which is nowadays supported by the radical monks of the country.

6. Conclusion

In the top-down approach, the political authority's "speech act" needs consent of the audience. As securitization theory suggests that without the consent of the audience, securitization may not be successful. Nevertheless, in horizontal and bottom-up securitization, where some of the audience act as security actor, securitization process becomes comparatively easier and it upholds the legitimacy of the security actors. In case of Myanmar, military's longstanding securitization process found a special legitimacy when radical monks appeared as a security actor. Therefore, it can be argued that horizontal and bottom-up securitization provides special legitimacy for the political authority to adopt emergency measures for securitization. Due to horizontal and bottom-up securitization, societal and political differences become deeper. It escalates social hatred and complicates social relations among the ethnic groups.

In the political history of Myanmar, the religious monks played a role in legitimizing the political authority. A cosmological relation between kings and monks developed social fabric of Myanmar, which was diminished by the colonial rulers. As a result, monks and British rulers had a conflicting relation in the colonial Burma. In fact, the nationalist movements in the country mainly started by the religious monks. General Aung San's emergence as a unanimous leader facilitated the independence movement of the country. But, the relation between monks and the state power in the post-independent Burma was suspicious. The military rule deepened the distance between the military and the monks. The uprising of 1988 and the formation of the NLD forged a strong alliance between traditionalist monks and democratic forces to fight against military rule. On the other hand, the rise of radical monks appeared

as an opportunity for the military. After Saffron revolution, the military suppressed traditional monks and developed an undeclared alliance with radical monks to get legitimacy for their activities. The alliance made notable changes in the political space of Myanmar and strengthened military's position in the society as well as weakened the role of traditionalist monks in the social and political life of Myanmar. Moreover, the democratic forces and CSOs became silent fearing that raising voice against radical monks will weaken their position in the political space.

The securitization narratives developed by the military regimes found a new wave after the alliance between the military and the monks. The ethnic minorities were identified as a threat to the national security and national integrity of the country. In the societal level, the radical monks raised voice that the Muslims, particularly Rohingyas, are threatening the demographic stability of Myanmar and they are not respecting social and cultural values of Myanmar. Such narratives help military government to adopt draconian security measures. The military changed the citizenship law of the country and adopted new laws to marginalize the Rohingya community. Moreover, new restrictions are imposed in the day to day life of Rohingyas. At the same time, before the 2015 election, military approved different laws to fulfil the demands of radical monks. Such laws imposed restrictions on the personal and social lives of minorities. It also legitimized the military to take suppressive actions against the Rohingya community.

The longstanding securitization process and the inclusion of radical narratives against ethnic minorities strengthened the legitimacy of military rulers as champions of Buddhist people. It helped radical monks to entrench their position in the country. The traditionalist monks became irrelevant in the new political set up. The democratic and civil society voices are silenced. The horizontal and bottom-up securitization made any reconciliation more difficult, because the social hatred deepened the divisions, which may not be easy to address through the state policies. The military's alliance with monks facilitated the horizontal and bottom-up securitization process, which helped both to exert more power and to ensure their stronghold in the social and political space of Myanmar.

Finally, it can be argued that the longstanding ethnic conflict in Myanmar is rooted with the supremacy of the Bamar identity and radical Buddhism. The founding fathers of independent Myanmar dreamt a multicultural and multi-ethnic state. However, the failure of secular and liberal forces led the country towards social and political division. The military exploited the scenario and a continuous process of securitization of ethnic identity deepened the division in the society of Myanmar. The rise of radical monks helped military to intensify their securitization process and confirmed their stronghold in the political system of the country. Therefore,

any reconciliation process needs to deal with the deeply rooted social and political divisions of Myanmar. A continuous dialogue and concerted action from all the active forces within and beyond Myanmar can help to re-establish the shattered fabrics of the social and political space of the country.