

Historical Background Of Myanmar Country

Posted on October 8, 2018

Introduction

Several nations in Southeast Asia are majority Buddhist, but only Myanmar considers Buddhism as part of their national identity to the point of being exclusive to other religions and cultures (Pinnok, n.d.). The Rohingya are a displaced ethnic (and Muslim) subgroup with historic ties to the Rakhine State of Myanmar despite their religious and cultural ties to the Bengalis of Bangladesh (Ibrahim, 2016; Wade, 2017). Modern political boundaries that paid no mind to demographic distributions have placed the Rohingya in a position to be considered illegal immigrants and cultural interlopers by both Bangladesh and Myanmar, with the Myanmar military periodically committing atrocities against Rohingya communities throughout Myanmar. These actions demonstrate that Myanmar is a Buddhist country in name only because their actions directly contradict the teachings of the Buddha.

Historical Background of Myanmar

Pre-colonial period – brief religious history of Myanmar

During this period, Myanmar was also called Burma. Myanmar is a multi-religious country. It was one of the first countries to receive Buddhism in Southeast Asia. This shows that there was no official state of religion. Instead, the government decided to show the prefer Theravada Buddhism as the recommended religion in the country. This religion comprised the majority of religions. The constitution provided the freedom of worship of anybody who wished to join any religion. In Bamar, there were other minor religions like Christianity, which was most specifically for the people like the Chin, Karen and Kachin people. Apart from Christianity, there was also Islam, which was mainly for the Indians and the Himalayas, followed by the other minority religion, which is the Hindus, which was attended by the Burmese. There was also a kind of worship that involved the spirits and the shrines that were found around the country. It had a relationship with Buddhism, which was recognized as the pantheon. Despite the various religions that existed within the Myanmar community, it is evident that Buddhism as a religion was dominated by 88% of the religions that existed in the country Myanmar.

The rivalry began between Myanmar and the British when the dynasty of Konbaung had an intention of extending its territory into Arakan in the state of Assam. The British possession in India created closeness, which resulted in the contact hence, facilitated the first Anglo-Burmese war. In the years 1824 to 1826, the British were very powerful regarding weapons; they won the battle with the aid of the Siamese. Myanmar lost the war and made it cede Assam and other northern provinces. Another struggle arose in the year 1852, which led to the provision of the second Anglo-Burmese war; the

British government sought to the forests in the southern part of Burma. The British again became the victim of the war, which resulted in the access to the teak, rubies and oil of the upper part of Myanmar. The third war was known as the Third Anglo-Burmese War. It was conducted in the year 1885 when the British government tended to justify the actions that they performed. The British claimed that the independent king, who became last In Myanmar by the name Thibaw, became the tyrant, and he was free to give France the recommended influence within the country. Through the robust nature of the British government, hence it occupied the areas of Myanmar and made it its territory.

Colonial period – the impact of colonial rule on Myanmar and how Buddhism initially intertwined with politics.

Myanmar intertwined in politics when it decided to play a prominent role in many nations and national governments and destinies. It appeared historically and regarded with the events that were taking place. At the same time, Myanmar acted like a living organism that fed the political circumstances of the particular culture, place and even time. It is known that Myanmar metamorphosed with occasions that accommodated the changes in the environment. Due to the synthesis adaptations, the facilitated the divisions into Vajrayana, Theravada, Mahayana. Buddhism relates to politics (Harris, 2010; Oo, 2011). It defies political life and faith that examines the separate spheres. Also, it isolates the historical developments in the religious and political influence, which indicates the complimentary ad interaction forces.

The rule under Ne Win and life after the military coup

In the period immediately after post-colonial Burma gained independence, which was born out of bloodshed. It is time ethnic hostilities were the subject of the day since there were constant wars. The wars were based on intercultural violence in the nation of Burma. Army against their counterpart opposition armies the Karen national liberation communist of Burma tried to revolt with the early year of their freedom from the colonial government. In quick recovery, the other ethnic groups like Mon, pa's, and Karenin who took the arms I the countryside. This marked the start of the longest-running civil war in the war. Afterwards, the situation in Burma became improved. The underlying ethnic groups made the country suffer, under tension remained while the environment quickly deteriorated when leaders came to their senses that the Burmese state would never respect the vows that they made at the time of independence.

The role of the Myanmar military (*Tatmadaw*) in daily life

The role of the Myanmar military in daily life is just about national reconciliation. For instance, for example; the senior general by the name Min- Aug made a decision I the armed forces to his speech where he addressed the towering statue of the Myanmar o its three kings. Through his

communication, he stated that the military is the sole unifying force and the protector of the Constitution. Secondly, the role of the army is evidenced when it cooperated with the government and its citizens to hold the general election that stood by Aung San Suu Kyi, who was known to be the pro-democracy leader. The militia seized power in the year 1962 coup to suppress the opposition leaders. They also marched in the parade, signaling the time of 1945 when the nationalist's leader fled the army and became against the Japanese forces.

History of the Rohingya

Demographic and Religious History

The Rohingyas typically stay in Arakan, neighboring Bangladesh's Northernmost Township, having a population of around 80- to 98 percent of the total population. A classic Rohingya family contains three or five children surviving; however, records show that, at times, 28 children in a family can survive. Averagely, Rohingyas have 46 percent more kids than the Myanmar nation. By the year 2014, over 13 million Rohingyas were living in Myanmar, and over 1 million were living overseas. In Rakhine state, 40 percent of the total population are Rohingyas, and when the overseas population is included, it makes a percentage of 60. These Rohingyas make the largest world stateless community. Numerous Rohingyas have moved to southeastern Bangladesh, a town of more than 900,000 refugees. Over 100,000 Rohingyas living in Myanmar stay in internally displaced campsites, and the state has restricted their movement.

The Rohingya people have freedom of religion. The majority of these Rohingyas are Islam, including Sufism and Sunni Islamic blend, but some of the Rohingyas are Hindus. Since the government has restricted their education opportunity, the Rohingya people have Islamic classes as their only learning option. The Madarasas and mosques are available in many villages. Traditionally, women's prayer place is home, and men participate in congregational prayers.

Where the Rohingya claim to belong vs. where Myanmar and Bangladesh claim they belong

The Rohingya people claim to belong in Myanmar. These people stay in the Rakhine estate, where they have been living together with Buddhists for many years. This person claims to be the offspring of the Muslims, maybe the Arabs and Persian traders who had moved to Myanmar many years ago. The Rohingyas speak a language close to Bengali dialects living in Chittagong, Bangladesh. The Myanmar people claim to belong in Myanmar. These people claim to be the only ethnic groups in Myanmar. The Bangladesh people also claim to belong in Bangladesh. This leaves the Rohingyas as stateless people.

Conflict

The Rohingya conflict involves violent series in the northern part of Rakhine state in Myanmar, formerly known as Arakan Burma. This conflict is characterized by religious violence between Rohingya Muslim and Rakhine Buddhist communities, Myanmar forces attacking the Rohingya civilians, as well as the armed clashes existing between the Rathedaung township and Buthidaung Maungdaw bordering Bangladesh

.The religious conflict mainly arises from the social and religious differences between the Rohingya Muslims as well as the Rakhine Buddhists. In the Second World War in Myanmar, the Rohingya Muslims fought the Rakhine Buddhists who were connected with the Japanese. After independence in 1948, the major Buddhist country refused to give the Rohingya Muslim citizenship. As a result, this person were subjected to a governing authority that discriminated against the Rohingya Muslims in the country. This discrimination is related to apartheid among various international political analysts.

The local people of Rohingya Mujahideen fought against the government forces in an effort to secure the densely populated areas such as the Mayu Peninsula situated in northern Rakhine state. However, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Rohingya Mujahideen lost much of their support as well as momentum, resulting in their surrender to the forces of the government. By the 1970s, a movement of Rohingya Islamists emerged, forcing the Burmese government to launch an enormous military force called King Dragon Operation. This force worked on a command that was to fight back this movement in the 1990s. These are the main causes of the conflict as well as the aggression against the Rohingya. However, the government did not manage to defeat the Solidarity Organization of Rohingya (ROS). Later, in 2016, the amount of October violence erupted at the border of Myanmar- and Bangladesh between the new insurgent groups and the government forces. This resulted in 40 deaths. not evident.]

Post-Coup Myanmar – the democratization of Myanmar and the ascension of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

The year 1988 marked a time of transition moment when a decision was made that witnessed the emergence of Dew Aung Suu Kyi, who was the daughter of the national general Aung San. She addressed the people at many mass rallies, asking for a democratic state. Sometime later, she founded the National League for Democracy, which arose and became the primary opposition party. She worked very hard in the campaign all over the country, seeking significant people wherever she traveled. When it reached the year 1989, she lost her popularity and became tired. The SLORC put her under arrest hence limited her from engaging I the elections. In recent years, the government passed a martial legislature that aimed at arresting thousands of people, involved students and other political figures. It was one way of weakening the opposition, but the time of voting detained the majority of the overwhelmingly for the opposition party. I the election that occurred I the year 1990.

This left the opposition party winning 392 out of the 485 seats that were contested. The government became dissatisfied and refused the results and later refused to hand over power. This led to the arrest of the elected Members of Parliament, and some were forced to reduce their politics; many people escaped to exile, like students and those who were fighting for democracy. The territory remained under the CPB and KNU. In the year 1990, the student's army joined guerrilla warfare, which was against the Burmese Army.

The role of the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (referred to by its Burmese-language acronym, MaBaTha), the most prominent nationalist organization in Myanmar (*Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar*, 2017)

The role of the associations was to inspire national debates where the pieces of the section of the legislatures were to be considered, for instance, Myanmar's assembly that aimed at protecting race and religion. Secondly, the association is meant to preserve Buddhism against the perceived threat of Islam. Thirdly, the association proposed laws that viewed the light of violence. The association tried to present the political interests of the people. Its emphasis was on the religious cleavages during the election period. It also tends to serve the importance of the undemocratic forces. The civil society groups had voiced their stand of being in opposition to the bills that are made in parliament. They are meant to deny the people's rights.

The Buddha Teachings

The 4th noble truth contains a guide explaining the end of suffering, the Noble Eightfold Path (Walpole, 1974). These eight liberation paths are sub-classified into three important Buddhist practice elements, including mental discipline, wisdom as well as moral conduct. These eightfold paths taught by Buddha are practical and can be done by all his followers. These eightfold include right mindful, right effort, right concentration, right concentration, right livelihood, right understanding, right speech as well as the right actions. This factor's main objective is to perfect and promote important Buddhist training as well as discipline, such as wisdom (panna), mental discipline (Samadhi) as well as ethical conduct (sila)

Ethical conduct (silla) comprises the universal compassion and love concept for all humankind. The Buddha provided this teaching for the good of everyone. In Buddhism, there are qualities that a man should develop to attain perfection. These qualities include wisdom (pinna) and compassion (karuna). In this case, compassion encompasses kindness, love, charity, tolerance, as well as other emotional qualities. On the other hand, wisdom represents intellectual qualities. For individuals to be perfect, they have to develop all two qualities since the absence of wisdom in a compassionate person results in a fool tender, r tender-hearted person. These qualities include three of the eightfold qualities: right livelihood, right speech as well as right action.

In right speech right speech means abstaining from lying, slander, hatred, disunity, and enmity talks, and backbiting in the community, avoiding harsh, malicious, impolite, abusive and rude language, refraining from useless, gossip, foolish bubble and idle speech. As a result, individuals should use truthful, meaningful as well as friendly words at the right time and right place. If one has nothing meaningful to speak should remain silent.

In right action, the main aim is to promote peaceful honorable as well as moral conducts. It admonishes people to avoid stealing, illegal sexual intercourse, destroying life and aiding others in living an honorable and peaceful life.

In right of livelihood, people are required to refrain from earning a living through the use of harmful means like trading intoxicating drugs, drinks and poisons, cheating, killing animals, as well as selling lethal weapons and arms. Therefore, Buddhism is against any kind of war in the country.

Mental Discipline

It contains the other three eightfold paths: right mindfulness, right concentration and right effort.

In the right effort, prevention of an unwholesome mind state and evil, removal of unwholesome mind state in society and evil, which are existing, production and increase of the wholesome mind and development of a whole state of mind are involved. Therefore, this eightfold path ensures that the people in the society are in their right state of mind and evil is minimized in the community.

In the right mindfulness, many actions that need to be minded are involved. They include attention and mindfulness in regard to feelings or sensations (vedana), mind activities (citta), thoughts, things, ideas and conception (dhamma) and body activities (kaya). Hence this eightfold in the mental discipline fosters good acts in the society.

In the right concentration, this right of mental discipline results in decollement or trance, which includes Dhyana's first stage. In this stage, unwholesome thoughts and passionate desires such as ill-will, worry, lust, skeptical doubt and languor and joy feelings, as well as happiness, are managed together with other mental activities. The second stage involves the suppression of intellectual activities, developing the on-pointedness and tranquility and retaining the joyful feeling. The third stage involves the disappearance of the joyful feeling with retained happiness. Finally, the fourth stage includes the disappearance of both the happy and the unhappy feelings.

Wisdom

Right understanding and thoughts make wisdom in the eightfold path.

In the right, though, the selfish thoughts are excluded, and the non-violent thoughts and love thoughts are involved, and these acts are considered wise acts. The acts such as violence, ill-will and

hatred are classified as unwise thoughts in all environments, such as the social, political and individual.

In the right understanding, understanding of substances the way they are is emphasized. In this case understanding of the noble truth is the greatest understanding in the society. However, the *Tatmadaw*, the people and the government of Myanmar do the contrary to these teachings. For instance, the Rohingya are discriminated against in Myanmar and are left to suffer contrary to the Buddhism teaching that reinforces the way people should relate to each other.

Conclusion:

Despite their insistence, the part of the Myanmar population that supports aggression toward the Rohingya based solely on the fact that they are not Buddhist and have different cultural norms and observances is in direct contradiction to the teachings of the Buddha. Those people are using Buddhism as a means of identification based on religious commonality in spite of the fact that their religion stands opposed to such behavior.

References

- Harris, I. C. (2010). *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>. A history of the infusion of Buddhism with Burmese identity from the colonial period through approximately 2009. This highlights the politicization of Buddhism throughout different eras in Myanmar's history.
- Ibrahim, A. (2016). *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*. C. Hurst & Co. London. This book discusses the ethnic history of Myanmar as it pertains to the Rakhine State and Rohingya claims of citizenship in both Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- .B – *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar*. (2017). Retrieved from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/290-buddhism-and-state-power-myanmar>. An attempt to understand the nuances of social strife in modern Myanmar focusing on the MaBaTha, an organization that's currently taking the lead in pushing a pro-Buddhist/anti-Muslim political agenda.
- Wade, F. (2017). *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim 'Other'*. Zed Books Ltd. London. A contemporary discussion of how Buddhism is used both as a base for a national identity and as a means to fuel the fires of xenophobia in modern Myanmar.
- Walpole, R. (1974) *What the Buddha Taught*. Grove Press. New York. This book discusses the teachings of the Buddha through the lens of a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk. It is as close to an unbiased explanation of Buddhist ideology as one can find, with none of the Western presuppositions found in

most contemporary discussions of the Buddha's intent.

A – Pinnok, J. *Burma: Buddhism and the Rise of Burmese Militant Nationalism*. The Foreign Report.

Retrieved from:

<https://www.theforeignreport.com/2013/07/01/burma-buddhism-and-the-rise-of-burmese-militant-nationalism/>. A quick overview of how Buddhist nationalism took hold in Myanmar and what it means for the current political climate in Naypyidaw.

Oo, M. (2011). *The Covert Objective of YMBA (1906 – 1920) and its Activities*. retrieved from:

https://www.academia.edu/8462398/The_Covert_Objective_of_YMBA_1906-1920_and_Its_Activities.

This article provides historical reference to the Young Men's Buddhist Association, an organization founded at the turn of the 20th century that was instrumental in wielding Buddhism as a base for national identity.