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A Study of Culture of Muslims in Myanmar: Collection of Cultural Resources for National Identity

Maulana Akbar Shah @ U Tun Aung,
Department of Fundamental and Inter-disciplinary Studies, (FIDS),
Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science, (IRKHS),
Internatioal Islamic University Malaysia, (IIUM)

ABSTRACT

Since the contemporary world has seen many atrocity and inequitably with regards to the Muslims of Myanmar, it is liable to a peace maker to trace out the reality of their problems as to why the problem started, when they settled in Myanmar and what are the matters causing their instability and suffering. As a matter of facts, many scholars have already written about their problems and the solutions from different viewpoints and perspectives, but the cultural aspect of them has been rarely touched by any scholar. Since the role of culture signifies custom, dress, language, tradition, religion, food, music's and ways of life of a group of people in certain places, it can support the authenticity and originality of Muslims of Myanmar. When culture of a nation is a contributing factor to determine eligibility of the national identity, a proper survey and study of cultural information of a race is essential. It is because, culture of a race or a community cannot be surfaced in a short period of time and it is a product of long term stay in a place. The land where they stay facilitates them to love its environment, people inspiring patriotism towards their land. That is the reason; this paper is going to highlight a particular area of the culture of Muslims of Myanmar. A qualitative research method is applied to search relevant data and information through available sources including books, magazines, journals, newspapers and library sources. Some of the analysis and interviews were also conducted individually and collectively.

Keywords: Myanmar Muslim, Identity, Islam, dress, culture, language, tradition, religion, food, ways of life

Introduction

This paper is aimed to study the culture of Muslims living in the period between Myanmar Kingdoms and the first Myanmar Democracy rule, (1948-1962). The period of is emphasized because old culture is more than gold reflecting the actual nature of a group of people living in a place for a long period and the identity of a group. Culture is the characteristic and knowledge of a particular group of people. It defines learning and sharing of human patterns or models for living; day- to-day life patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism" Muslims of Myanmar being children of Arab, Persian, Indian and Myanmar origin, they adopt both parental cultures. So, it includes their way of life, idea, belief, behavior, characteristics, language, food, art, craft, etc, and interaction among them. Muslims, being professional in their respective areas of study and working fields, they were awarded proper position according to their merit and experiences, when they came to Myanmar. Being soldiers and sailors originally they were excelled in maritime trade, army affair, language expert, medicine and treatment, construction and transportation, etc. let's start with some professional experiences of Muslim from Kingdome days to the period of Myanmar independence (1948).

Who Are Myanmar Muslims

Myanmar is a member of ASEAN community. Geographically, the Republic of China is in the north; Thailand is in the east whereas Bangladesh and India are bordered in the west while the Andaman Sea is in the southern part of Myanmar. The area of the country is 261,789 sq. miles (678,034 sq kilometers) and its current population is about 55 million. Islam came into existence at the end of the 6th century in Arabia. It began to spread in the 7th century to different parts of the world including Asia and Southeast Asia. Since the Arab Muslims had mastered the maritime trade, they started sailing through the Indian Ocean to various parts of the Asia countries such as China, India, Myanmar, Malacca, Indonesia, the Philippines, etc. and disseminated Islam by manifesting generosity and friendship, technical proficiency in craftsmanship, business and administrative experts. Muslims arrived in Myanmar as traders or settlers, military personnel, and prisoners of war, refugees, and as victims of slavery. However, many early Muslims also held positions of status as royal advisers, royal administrators, port authorities, mayors, and traditional medicine men. The first group of Muslim arrived in Myanmar through the Indian Ocean were Arab traders who set up their business centers and dockyards at the coastal cities of Arakan. The second group of Muslim called Pati who arrived at Myanmar were seafarers, Arab and Persian maritime traders who sailed through Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal during 700 AD to 1500 AD. They set up business centers for trade, dockyards at southern coastal cities such as Patheingyi, Yangon, Pegu, Muttama and Margui. In 1200 AD, the Patheingyi city in the southern coast of Myanmar was known as a kingdom of Muslim Pathi who ruled this coastal region for three centuries (1200 AD-1500 AD). The third group of Muslims was the Pantay or Chinese Muslims, arrived in Myanmar around 900 AD onwards through the northern gate of China. Islam came into existence with the arrival of Arabs, such as Wahab bin Abi Qabsha and Saad Larbish Habshi who were then responsible for Islamic daw'ah in Quankyo, China in the year 628 AD.

Muslims and Their Religion

Muslim are those who accept Islam as their religion. Islam was founded in Arab region, 1400 years ago by Muhammad (PBUH). Islam is manifested by its vital convictions towards oneness of god (ALLAH) called Tawhid. Tawhid is characterized by unification of lordship, his attributions and worshipping to the creator of the universe alone. No one should be brought besides him in terms of worship, believe and obedience. Anyone breaks these rules of unification is called infidel (Kafir) and anyone who brings anyone beside the god of Islam for worshipping is called Mmushirk and his act is called Shirk.

Worshipping of Allah SAW, includes 5 basic tasks: [1] Witnessing there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad (PBUH) is the messenger of Allah, [2] performance of 5 time prayers compulsorily, [3] fasting for a month (Ramadan) in a year without any fail, [4] giving away zakat (charity for poor people), [5] hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah once in one's life). Besides worshipping, Muslims are bound to accommodate ethical values and moral responsibility. The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) thought them to love mankind basically, each other and its basic values are : [1]When they see each other they greet [2] When anyone is invited he has to accept the invitation, [3] When anyone ask an advice from anybody the advice should be given, [4] When anyone sneeze, he has to say (glory to God) and the nearest one who hears it should say (Be mercy on us), [5] Anyone becomes sick he should be visited, [6] if someone is dead anyone near to him should carry him for burial. Islam is characterized by looking after wellbeing of members of the society by observing equalities, justice and moderation. Anyone do not practice these principle are considered to be irresponsible for the community and responsible for failure of disunity.

Building a Society through Socio-Cultural Harmony

Why Muslims received a friendly welcome from the natives in the earlier days in Myanmar: Myanmar is predominantly a Buddhist country. The Buddhist doctrine teaches the followers the important concept of Sansara changing the mind to be friendly and helpful to others. Good luck and bad fortune is the result of one own deed. If a person does good deed, he will receive the good return and vice versa. The basic principle of Buddhism is called 4 noble truths - They are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the end of suffering, and the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering. A Buddhist knows that suffering in one's life is the reaction of his own deed, they have to end their suffering by doing good deed, and therefore they are generally found mild, helpful, caring for non-interference in the affair of others. Thus, when Muslims came to Myanmar in the beginning of Kingdoms days, Muslims are allowed to live in the country without any disturbance and interference. They can live with dignity; engage in business, trade, education and marriage to local Buddhist women and services with the king's army. Muslims who came to Myanmar are generally found to be prisoners of wars, captives from neighbouring India, Manipure, Assan, sailors from Arab and Persian countries. They are officially authorized by the king to live in allocated quarters, but they needed to serve the king whenever they were required. Why Myanmar kings kept them in the service is a crucial question and in fact those days, manpower in Myanmar is insufficient to encounter the threat of invasion and colonialism and to fill the need of labours in agricultural land. Thus, Muslims were engaged either in the paddy field or in the army substantially.

After thousands of years of their arrival, the population has increased to the millions due to intermarriage between the Muslims and Buddhist natives. Since the nature of services in Myanmar needed male-labours, thus the maximum arrived in Myanmar in those days were male. In due course of time, children of foreign Muslims and the native Buddhists have become Myanmar Muslims with mixed culture of their parents. Generally the fathers have to adopt the local culture, language and attire but they do not relinquish their religion, Islam.

Maintaining Islam While Adopting Local Culture

The identity of Islam and Muslim's existence in Myanmar is relatively uneasy to maintain because the entire society is under the influence of Buddhism. Many thought why not they have been converted to Buddhism although they are living in Myanmar for more than thousands of years. There are two factors influenced this episode. Firstly, they were truly committed to their religion, Islam as it is peaceful and comprehensive. Secondly, the local Buddhists and the authorities of Myanmar in the olden days were moderate and observed a policy of non-interference in the other religion as mentioned earlier. Thus, the existence of Islam and the Muslim society in Myanmar is still concrete and remains intact, although minor disturbances and threat are always in their ways.

The intermarriage between the Muslims and local Buddhist in those days were quite simple as the Buddhist women are liable to convert to Islam according to Muslim marriage. The Buddhist women were decent and responsible to their house whole. After conversion, they do not keep Buddha image in their house nor do they go to their monastery where they used to attend for sermon. The converts and their children are entitled to inheritance and they are treated equally in the family. The wife started learning Islamic tradition, culture, prayer, and ritual, legal and illegal matters. They learnt the Holy Quran and later they became a perfect Muslims. Their children were trained and thought Islam the way they were trained by their husband. Buddhist women were not too demanding when they became Muslim. They treated their husband perfectly and raised their children in Islam without any condition. The noble attitude of the Buddhist women was that when they became Muslims, they ended all their previous religious responsibilities and they never ate the food that is listed as

impermissible according to Islam. They truly followed Islamic rules and worship accordingly. However, the converts continued to maintain many of their tradition, custom and attire, which generally did not affect their family life. They knew that the Muslim women had to wear veil, but their social environment did not allow them to do so and they remained traditionally a part of Myanmar culture.

Muslim Children and Buddhist Culture

Muslim children had to live with their Buddhist counterparts, played together and learn together. Buddhist monasteries were the only sources contributing basic education to people of Myanmar in the olden days. Literacy rate was also quite low in those days. The Muslim children had to learn Myanmar literature including basic rule and regulation of Buddhism, but the children still remain Muslims because the monk in those days were moderate and did not force them to convert and the Muslim parents who carefully nurtured their children to be good Muslims. The monks helped the Muslim children in reading, writing and learning ethical values. The children became polite according to Myanmar culture; they need to stand and hold their hand when they speak to their teacher, they have to bow a bit when they come across before the elders, they cannot throw rubbish, except in a dustbin, etc. The attire of Muslim children is the same with Buddhist that they cannot be easily recognized who is who. The shirt and the vest are worn on the top part and sarong or pant is normally used to cover the lower part. One of the dilemmas for Myanmar Muslims is circumcision for boys according to the Islamic Sunnah. Previously, Myanmar Muslims did not observe circumcision and they liked to remain as Buddhists. By the support of Muslim community's leaders, the parents started to follow the Sunnah later day.

Muslims and Islamic Teaching

There was no record of proper Islamic institution set up in olden day of Myanmar. The individual Muslim teacher from Arab, Persian, and India arranged teaching circle called Halaqah for Muslim children or adults at mosque or at their home. The role of these Halaqah or madarasas was essentially good in maintaining Islam. The teaching included learning of rituals, worshipping, reading the Holy book in Arabic, Muslim's custom, morality, ethical values, Muslim attires for man and woman, Muslim individual responsibility, social collective responsibility, right and responsibility of family members, Muslim marriages and solemnization, roles of parents, children, leaders, followers and helpers, etc. It was in the beginning of Myanmar Last kingdom (Kong Bong), before the British rule, Myanmar Muslim religious scholars started Islamic study in India and Arab, later began teaching back their students in Myanmar.

The madrasahs and Tahfizul Qur'ān, were already opened in Myanmar during the early kingdom days as every mosque entertained the teachings of Islam and the Qur'ān. The Madarasas were established since the Kong Bong Period under the care of Muslim scholars, U Nu @ Kasim and Abid Shah Hussein of King BothawPhaya of Amarapura and Sheik Abdul Halim, Kabuli Maulavi established religious school at Titan Mosque at the period of Mindon, Mandalay. One Qur'ān memorizing school and madrasah were established in Maydu, Upper Myanmar. Early Muslim scholars such as U Nu @ Kasim received their education from this school. Hasan Shah and Sayagyi Pone, Sayagyi Kwar were also famous scholars and the graduates of this school in those days.

Madrasah Muhammadia was established by Syed Golan Ali Shah in Mandalay during the British administration in Myanmar. He was very famous in his teachings and led the Muslim community in those days. The famous students such as U Ba Din and Bashir Ahmed @ U Pon are still remembered by many Muslims. U Pon opened his madrasah in Sargone,

Shew Bow which still functions in Myanmar. So far, thousands of Muslim scholars have been produced and the Islamic identity in northern Myanmar is the result of their efforts.

The arrival of Muslim scholars during the colonial rule enhanced the organization of several Islamic madrasahs and mosques as those were seen in every town and village in Myanmar till date. Throughout Myanmar, hundreds of madrasahs were operating, financed by domestic donations. The influence of Indian style madrasa was of course undeniable, but in recent years the Arab world influence is being witnessed as some of the madrasahs are using Arabic language as medium of instruction.

The contributions of Indian Muslims were substantial to the community as several educational establishments for both religious and modern sciences had developed. At the initial stage, each institution functioned according to the tradition of their original places in India such as Soorti mosque, Maiman madrasah, Chulia primary school, Hindustani library, Iranian club, etc. Trainers and teachers were generally brought from India and the language used in class was Urdu or other different languages from India like Gujarati, Tamil or Punjabi. The syllabus of the school too was copied from Indian schools or the madrasahs of India.

In the original Myanmar Muslim areas, the language of instruction was pure Myanmar. There were Myanmar Muslims who preferred to send their children to general Myanmar schools where the language of instruction was Myanmar, rather than to Muslim schools where Urdu was the language of instruction. The number of Muslim schools in Myanmar grew steadily, as did the number of attending boys and girls. In many Muslim-populated villages, the leaders and elders made special efforts to build a school.

Madrasah Mohammadia Randeria High School was opened as early as 1867 and is one of the oldest schools in Myanmar. Another Muslim Secondary school called Islamia was established in 1886. In 1935, it became a full-fledged secondary school with English as the major language of instruction. Patail, Muslim school for girls was established in Rangoon in 1925. It became a secondary school in 1956. Prior to the outbreak of World War II, Rangoon had 41 Muslim schools, 11 were private and in five of them English was the language of instruction out of the total of 41 schools. After 1962, many madrasahs with modern educational courses were nationalized due to the policy of General Ne Win revolutionary council. A few famous madrasah like Dar al-Uloom, Sufia, As'adiya and Numaniya, Zakariah in Tingangun are today leading Islamic madrasahs which Muslims have to rely upon. Hundreds of Qur'ān memorization schools exist now in every main town in Myanmar; among them, Swadiqiya and Dar al-Moeen are famous schools.

Profession and Professionals of Myanmar Muslims

The job of Myanmar Muslims in those days was engagement in royal army or in the agriculture sector. Everyone possessed a piece of land where they grew and sold crops. Some of them engaged in breeding cows, goats and poultry while others grew vegetables, beans and other crops on their fields. Both men and women worked together and the land was handed down to their children fairly. In those days, Muslims were assumed to be brave and their bravery and military skills were considered to be superior. They were always asked by the authority to serve in the army, thus half of the Myanmar army in the past kingdoms was filled with Muslim soldiers reigning from general to the ordinary level. Muslims excelled not only in infantry, but were competent in artillery, cavalry and in the navy too.

In the period of Pagan Kingdom (1100-1280 AD), Byatwi and Byatta, Shew PhyinGyi, Shew Phyin Lay and Rahman Khan were closely associated with the King Anorratha and they served in the army at the top level along with thousands of Muslim soldiers engaged in the defense and the agriculture sector of the country. In the period of Ava kingdom (1300 AD), the famous ruler, king Sanay employed thousands of Muslim soldiers in his army. Because of their loyalty and dedication in building the kingdom, the king allocated

500 households to Muslim soldiers in the Capital of Ava. King Bayint Nung, a powerful King of Myanmar who established a huge kingdom, Hantaweddy (1400-1600 AD) far beyond today's Border of Myanmar. In his army, a large number of Muslim soldiers were recruited and engaged in different battles with Portugal, Siam and India. Muslims contribution in the conquest of a large area of foreign territory signifies their loyalty, patriotism towards Myanmar. Shah Shuja, the brother of Magul King Auranzaib along with his family and the army came to the region of Rakhine, Myanmar in the year 1661 when Rakhine King Sanda Thudamma was a ruler of Rakhine. Since then, the decedents of Shah Suja and his army lived in Rakhine and are called Kaman race.

The 17th to 18th century was the period of the Kong Boun kingdom founded by King Aloung Phaya who recruited thousands of Muslims soldiers in his army and built the fourth Myanmar Kingdom. The kingdom lasted about 200 years struggling to defend its territory from the greedy Western colonizers, Greek, Spanish, French and the British, competitively trying to expand their territory beyond Europe. The prominent figures of Muslim officers and scholars served under Kong Boun Kings, Ba Gyi Taw Phaya of Amarapura were U Nu and Aabid Shah.

Muslim generals such as Khan Sahib, Wali Khan, Bo Kar and General Chon were famous among the Muslim army of Myanmar kings. They engaged in the war between Myanmar and the British. A Muslim artillery commander, U Bo Kar, a Myanmar Muslim who was fighting along with Buddhist counterparts against the British army at Min Hla forth near Irrawaddy River in the middle part of Myanmar. The commander of the King's Chivalry wing, Khan Sahib, Wali Khan and Bo Su were the great Muslim soldiers. Captin Yafub was hung in Myin Chan for not cooperating with British.

Minister of trade Mullah Ibrahim and Mullah Ismail were famous Myanmar Muslim leaders who served the king with great loyalty. Kabuli Maulvi was Iman of Shew Pannet mosque in the king palace, its foundation stone was made of gold and placed by the king himself. The Imam was so favored by the king for he would bring rain in the capital with his supplication when there was drought. In the period of the British rule, Myanmar Muslims along with Buddhist comrades participated and fought for Myanmar Independence movement and many dedicated their life for the country. A Myanmar Muslim soldier, U Dudu participated in Saya San revolution with his Buddhist comrades against the British rule where Saya San was hang by the British. There was Rangoon university student strike against the British administration in 1920. U Ba Shin, a Muslim student was among the first 12 students took part in this great event which became a national day event in the history. Ko Tun Sein, a Muslim student, the president of the Rangoon University Student Union (1931-32), was considered to be a leading figure in student strike and against the British rule. There are many Muslims who shed the blood for the country and Mr. Razzak was a prominent Muslim hero who spent his whole life for Myanmar independence. He was a master mind behind 1920 and 1936 Rangoon university student strike. He was a great builder of numerous nationalists and leaders and he was assassinated along with Myanmar leaders including General Aung San.

Perhaps, PeKhin was an indispensable and unforgettable Muslim leader whose role could never be omitted in the history of Myanmar. His assistance to General Aung San was so great that the general was successful in pursuit of Myanmar Independence from the British. Rashid, a well-known Muslim leader, the vice president of 1936 Rangoon university student union, was so closed to General Aung San. He served Myanmar in different position as minister, patriotic, nationalist, religious leader, etc. The story of Rashid explains how a Muslim intellectual love Myanmar and its people irrespective of religions and races. Hundreds of Muslims scholars and professionals participated in the process of country building and it is impossible to detail all of their contribution here, just to mention their names such as, Major, Tun Nyo, Major Ba Thaw, writer and pioneer NLD leader, Colonel Ba

Shin, noted historian, Kyar (Tiger) Ba Nyein, a great boxer Olympics, Karim Ghani a politician, parliamentary secretary in Myanmar under Dr. Ba Maw, Pinyinmanar Daw Pu, Sultan Mahmood (Health Minister) and U Aung Thin, Legislator. In the religious field, Maulana Hassan Shah, Gazi Hashin, Mufti Mahmood, Maulana Bashirullah were still remembered by many for their dedication in the religious field was quite great.

Myanmar Muslim and Their Social Association

Since the British rule Muslim social associations have been active in literary, scientific, religious, educational and charitable work. The first to set up such an association in 1908 were the Soorties, from the city of Rander in the Bombay District. It was called the Rander Sunni Bohras Soorty Mohamedan Association. Although their number was small (today the Association has a membership of about 15,000), most of them were wealthy merchants. BMO, Myanmar Muslim Organization headed by U Rashid and MTF, Muslim Trust Fund headed by Mr. Warnia were pioneer of assisting educational institutions, religious organizations and scholarship programmes for religious and modern schools. At about the same time (in 1908), the Meimans from the province of Saurashtra in India, established the Rangoon Meiman Jamaat. They too, were a small community, today estimated at 10,000 scattered throughout Myanmar. They are mostly merchants, and their language is Gujrati.

The Shi'a organization was set up in 1909. Several years earlier they had set up a sports' club which they called the Islamic Fraternal Society. 1930, there was another society formed called the Iran Youth League. The Chulia Muslim Association was established on October 20, 1912, by Muslims from Malabar, India. The Chulia speak Tamil and today its membership stands at 150,000.

Until the outbreak of Second World War II, the Muslims from East Bengal formed several organization like, the Dacca Club, the Chittagong Association, the Bengal Association, etc. In 1947 all these organizations merged into All-Myanmar Pakistan Association. The Qadiani or Ahmadi also established their own organization and their members were Punjabi soldiers and policemen serving the British forces. There are some other social associations namely; Muslim Malabar Association came into being, All-Myanmar Pakistan Association, Dawoodi Bohras association, Ismailia community led by Aga Khan, and The Chinese Muslim community.

Myanmar Muslim And Their Political Organizations

Myanmar Muslims have been active in politics since the beginning of the British administration and they wanted Myanmar to be ruled by Myanmar national, thus they are always conscious about the independence of a new nation. The history revealed many organization and individuals earnestly involved in the politics of Myanmar. Young Myanmar Buddhist Association, (YMBA) was established during the period to strike against the British. Concurrently, Young Myanmar Muslim Association, (YBMA) was also established by Myanmar Muslims so as to show unity with Buddhist association in the strategy of nationalist movement against the British policy. When General Committee of Buddhist Association, (GCBA) was established by the Buddhists, General Committee of Myanmar Muslim Association, (GCBMA) had been set up in 1920 by the Muslims with the aim of inter cooperation with the Buddhists. Myanmar Muslim Society (BMS) was established in 1909 by famous Indian businessman, Abdul Karim and S.A. Rahman. Later, a Myanmar Muslim U Ba Oo became the president of BMS for his respectable position and tremendous charitable activities. Members of BMS were children of Myanmar Muslims and Indian Muslims who stayed permanently in Myanmar.

U Thein Maung and U Then Shwe established Renaissance Organization in 1938 in Mandalay to show solidarity with the Myanmar Buddhists, relinquishing Indian culture, tradition and language. In 1945, Muslims decided to establish a political organization called Myanmar Muslim Congress (BMC) at a Muslim educational conference held in Pinyinmana. Participants of the meeting included Saya Chai, Major Ba Shin, Gazi Hashin, U Than Maung, U Tun Sein and Sayagyi Razzak, head of AFPFL, Mandalay. BMC's demands were that Myanmar should know their Myanmar brothers, meaning Myanmar Muslims should be accepted by Myanmar Buddhists as part of Myanmar nation. BMC also supported the integration of Muslim identity that the members should exercise their Islamic obligations with full respect. When BMC was quite active in it was requested to be annulled by Myanmar main political party, AFPFL, thus, BMC leaders U Khin Maung Lat and Saya Chai decided to abolish it in 1956.

Myanmar Muslim and Their Religious Organizations

To make peace with AFPFL, U Khin Maung Lat formed the Islamic Council for Religious Affairs Organization (ICRA) in 1946. The real unity between Myanmar and Indian Muslims was celebrated when both unanimously agreed to work under the (ICRA) in 1954. The president of ICRA was Justice Minister U Khin Maung Lat and the deputy president was Ebrahim Ahmed Muzahiri. Gazi Hashim was the secretary-general and the rest of the members were Haji Abdullah, second secretary, U Ba Aye, treasurer, Sayagyi U Kar, audit, and other members included Minister U Rashid, Major Ba Shin, U Ba Sein, U Bo Chai, Dr. Kyaw Nyein, U KoKo Lay, Muhammad Bashirullah, the principal of madrasah Dar al-Ulum, Maksood Ahmed Khan, Daw Saw Shew, Jamaluddin, Muhammad Ibadullah, etc. It was a strong union of Myanmar Muslims where all classes of Muslim representatives participated in this organization. The credit goes to this period as the most unified period of Myanmar Muslims in history. In 1946, BMC had a meeting at Zinat Islam Muslim Girls School in Yangon, producing two Muslim organizations, i.e. Myanmar Muslim Women Organization (BMWO) and Myanmar Muslim Youth Organization, (BMYO) where Daw Saw Shew headed BMWO and U Than Maung headed BMYO.

The Indian Muslims also established Jamiat Ulama Islam Organization (JUJO) in 1947. Mufti Mahmood Dawood Yusuf headed the Jamiyyat for five decades. He was an influential religious authority and his office has expanded to 122 branches all over Myanmar and receives full cooperation from Tabligi Jamaat, another influential Muslim Dawah organization. Tabligi Jammaat was also led by one CEO of Jamiat, Muhammad Sawalay and Jamia Darul-Ulum was headed by Muhammad Bashirullah, the deputy president of Jamiyyat. Closed cooperation among these three figures has made Jamiyyat a strong religious organization for five decades causing the entire nation to follow its religious decision and fatwa in any case.

After the collapse of BMC, Pati Congress (PC) party was established by those members who opposed nullification of BMC. U Than Maung who used to be the vice chairman of BMC was again made chairman of PC. U KoKo Lay, Secretary of PC was prominent due to his consistent demand that Muslim communities be granted the status of a recognized national minority, similar to the Kachin and Chin. The veteran U Rashid found a new Myanmar Muslim Organization (BMO) on May 22, 1960 and their prime goal was to emphasize on Muslims' education, social and religious activities. They also launched a campaign among non-Muslims, with a view to lessen the misunderstandings. Initially, the organization was quite successful having more than 500 branches all over Myanmar. Muslim Trust Fund (MTF) was run by a Board of Directors whose main function included scholarships, Muslims advanced studies and assistance to mosques and madarasahs. Their financial assistance went to Muslim institutions, old folk homes, companies, organizations

Muslim ventures, converts centers. Assistance was also delivered to publishing books and setting up of Muslim libraries. When U Rashid died in Pakistan in 1971, BMO also ceased to exist.

On 23 October, 1960, U Khin Maung Lat established the Rangoon University Muslim Students' Association (RUMSA). The organizers were Muslim educators, professors, judges, and businessmen and the alumni organized Muslim lecturers to give talks, publish various studies, translate Muslim materials into Myanmar, develop friendly relations among all Muslims, and encourage mutual help and sports, meet and debate among Muslim students. The student activities included meetings with the members of other religious groups, motivational talks, publication of periodic, and magazines, and training. During the military rule, RUMSA also disappeared gradually. Two new Muslim organizations, Myanmar Moulvi Organization headed by Saedullah was established in 1975 and Myanmar Muslim Organization led by Saya Chai was established 1982. The government kept all religious organizations under the administration of the Religious Ministry. Although they were given independent ruling in their religious affairs, policy matters were strictly controlled by the government.

Myanmar Muslim and Their Language

Muslims are children of Arab, Persian and Indian from their paternal side and Myanmar Buddhist from the mother side made them familiarize with the language of their ancestors. Thus, Muslims, speaking Arabic, Persian, Indian or Myanmar language is not a strange thing. Throughout Myanmar Kingdom period, Myanmar Muslims adopted Myanmar language and they spoke Myanmar language profoundly. But, Indian spoke different Indian languages preferably when the British brought them in Myanmar. Myanmar was made a state of Indian central government in New Dehli, and then exodus of thousands of Indian nationals took place during the British rule. There were different races of India such as Punjabi, Hindustani, Nasapuri, Bengali, Surti, Maiman, Chulia, Tamil, Kakar, Malbari, Pathan, Iranian and Bhora came to Myanmar for different reason. They generally live and engage in their business within their community, thus they maintained usually their mother language among them. In this way, Muslims of Myanmar have varieties of language according to their races in their respective society. However, the most influential language among them was Urdu. Urdu language was Indian sub continental language, thus every Indian irrespective of race and religion speaks and understands this language. During the British period, even the Buddhist had to speak Urdu language if they needed to do the business in the cities of Myanmar.

However, it doesn't remain true after the independence of Myanmar, because many Indians departed to India due to nationalization of their institutions, banks, business, and trading facilities by the revolutionary army led by General Nay Win. Aftermath of the nationalization in 1962, military government started removing Muslims from all key governmental institutions, banking and trading sectors and replaced them with Myanmar officials and the staff. Many Myanmar nationals from the rural regions migrated to the urban cities for setting up of their business during military rule. Same as mechanical and factory workers from rural areas took their position in the factories and mills previously run by the Muslims. Therefore, it is important for everyone in Myanmar to understand Myanmar language and without it one cannot do the business in the country. However, Muslim schools, Mosque and Higher learning centers continue to use the Urdu language in their teaching and learning processes as most of their reference books and religious studies are written and discussed in Urdu and Arabic language. In the circle of Muslims scholars and students, Urdu language is still used. Arabic language is also important for the Muslims as it is their language of holy book, Al Quran and they have to recite it and learn it from their childhood.

But today, many of them can only read their Holy Book, al Quran and they really do not understand the meaning the Quran. However, Muslims from Upper Myanmar, either they are from religious circle or from any level, they prefer to speak Myanmar language alone and they use it in their religious teaching or even in the mosque for sermon. Military government has changed standard of social harmony and racial equality in Myanmar. Nationalism and favoritisms has taken a strong position in Myanmar and discrimination and oppression of Muslims has been fur wider reaching to the extreme level. Buddhism is the most favorite religion and Buddhist are given priority in Myanmar. Myanmar language following the Buddhism has been again at essential level and today without knowing and speaking it one cannot survive in Myanmar.

Muslims and Myanmar Arts and Crafts

Myanmar traditional art and design influenced buildings and infrastructures in Myanmar, and the palaces for the king and the minister and public places were decorated with traditional arts and craft. Many Muslims learnt Myanmar arts and craft while working together with their Buddhist counterparts and they used this expert idea when they had to build the buildings for their community. When Muslims built their houses, shops, schools and mosques they maintain the Myanmar traditional design and took pride of their loyalty towards Myanmar heritage and design. Still, there are some mosque remained intact fully decorated with Myanmar artistic design in Mandalay, the second largest city of Myanmar. The Muslim community alone built more than 60 religious buildings around the capital in his time in Mandalay, signifying honesty and noble disposition of the King. The altruistic acts of King Mindon for Muslims are never ending until this day as many mosques built under his authorization are still in function and are being used by thousands of Muslims around Mandalay. The famous mosques like, Mosque of Sa kaing Tan, South Balu, North Balu, Junn, Chone Daunt, Wali Khan, KintarKularpyo, Kalarpyo, South Obo, North Obo, Pan Tay, KatKyaytan, East KonYo, West Konyo, Sakyar, Achuttan, Koyantaw, Otaw, Yatanarpon, Sin Chon, Shia, Amyaut Tan, Baho, Tait Tan, Sai Tan, Day Won, etc are being well used. Approval of worship places, entrusting prominent Muslim subjects in the army and palace administration and authorizing freedom of worship and religious activities in the kingdom were benevolent and unforgettable act of the King.

Muslims' Population

Since the inception of 8th century, Muslims of Myanmar are found loyal to their all successive rulers and live with their coreligionists, the Buddhists without any conflict. This peaceful situation of Muslims existence in Myanmar comparing to the current, ill-fated stage shows a remarkable success of the rulers of olden Myanmar. Consequently the number of the Muslim population since then has increased to the extent of 14 million according to the latest figure solicited by local Muslim's organizations. If we look at the statistics of Myanmar Muslim census conducted by successive rulers, the gradual growth of Muslim population is noticeable. Before the colonization of Myanmar by the British, Muslim's population was 100,000 only. There 20 years basis census chronically revealed that in 1892, the population was 250,000, and in 1911, 420, 00. In 1921, the population increased to 720,000 and in 1952 their number became 2,369,430 according to Moshe Yagar and Taylar. However, the Government's report about census is always different form actual figures as the Muslim Minister Rashid told the Myanmar parliament about the Muslim population in 1953 as one and a half million. J. A. Balie wrote the figure of Muslims population as 500,000 in 2007 in his book of "Myanmarnization of Mynmar's Muslims".

In 2014 the Government conducted nation-wide census programme and declared the entire population of Myanmar as 55 million, but they did not mention a detail number on race

and religion, although they had collected the respective data accordingly. Local Muslim's organization estimated their population as 800,000 in 2007 and the latest figure in 2014 as about 14 million. The Muslims of Myanmar have been living in Myanmar since long ago and they already knew the benefit of loyalty to their respective kings and they say that they will continue to be loyal to any government of Myanmar. There is no sign till date that they do not cooperate with any authority of Myanmar; however, recent oppression against Muslims in Myanmar is really unacceptable to any rational mind. The authority is only responsible for every shortcoming in the country. They have no way but to respect the right of every citizen and the concept of peaceful co-existence so as to establish peace and security which is eagerly sought by everyone.

Muslim Festivals

Myanmar Buddhists enjoy a festival in every month. There are 12 festive months in Buddhism. However Muslims do not participate in all these Festivals for they are just related to Buddhist religion and tradition. Muslims do enjoy their festivals which are relatively under the influence of Islamic religion. For example, Eidul Fitri, Eidul Adha, Shabba Barat, Yawmun Nabi, Lailatul Kadar, etc., Eidul Fitr is celebrated at the end of the month of Ramadan. When the Eid day arrives, Muslims wake up early in the morning, taking the Bath, dressing in new attires, attending congregational Eid prayer at Eidga, cooking special food like shwekyi and Samai, inviting relatives and friends to the best meals at their houses, visiting each other houses, greeting elders and distributing small notes to the children etc. Another Eid, Eidul Adha is the occasion; Muslims celebrate on the tenth Zilhaj of every year. They conduct congregational Eid prayer early in the morning, slaughtering the cows or the goats, distributing the meats to the friends and the poor, and greet each other. The best cows are purchased according to their financial status. They do not discriminate the recipients irrespective of belief and races.

Shabibarat is the tradition of the Muslims of Myanmar, celebrated on the night of 15th of Shaban, (Muslim Month). They believe that on this night, their God, Allah preordain the people on three status, [1] how long a person is going to live, [2] how is a person's status (wealth), [3] how is a person's health, (age). They go to the graveyard, pray to their God for liberation of departed souls from the sin. Muslims are busy visiting the graveyard whole night. The responsible of the cemetery clean the yard before the night fall. Lailatul Kadar is the night Muslims celebrate it in the night time with belief of full of blessings from their God and they believe their holy Quran is revealed on that very night. They engage the entire night with special prayers called Tahajud, recitation of holy Quran, remembrance of the holy Names of their god, engagement in meditation, distributing foods and drinks, and fasting in the next day. They believe that the night is equivalent to 1000 nights. If anyone is able to catch the night, and engage in the prayer, he would have an engagement of 1000 nights. The celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, Mauludun Nabi has been a long time tradition of the Muslims; they celebrate it on 12th of Rabiul Auwal. Muslims arrange a special sermon by a prominent religious leader. They distribute food, sweet to orphans and poor. This celebration is arranged in every town of Myanmar and they invite other co-religionists for unity among the nations irrespective of religion. The Buddhist rulers usually send their letter of felicitation, good wish to the Muslims on the day and wish prosperity and success for the nation and the Muslims.

Apart from national level celebration, there are societal and individual celebrations engaged by the Muslim, such as arrangement of grand feast on an occasion of marriage ceremony, circumcision of children, birth of baby, and supplication for liberation deceased family member, etc.,. All these ceremonies are arranged at their respective residence. The marriage ceremony which normally has two parts, the first part is solemnization of the bride

and groom which is arranged at the mosque and the Walima or the feast at a grand hotel or at any public place. The food Biryani with mutton, beef or chicken is the favorite and Faluda, a kind of drink is must for this kind of celebration. The Muslims religious schools arrange certificate awarding ceremony at the end of every school year where they call everyone in the town and a great feast is organized by the society. People in the society contribute different type of charity, both cash and kind to the committee.

Myanmar Muslim Food

Myanmar Muslims are the children of Arab, Persian, Indian, Native Buddhists and Chinese, their food varied from the Arab taste to Chinese relish. But they like spicy food for most of their foods are influenced generally by Indian spices which are easily available as India is next to Myanmar. Three types of food lovers are found in Myanmar Muslim society according to their levels and positions. The high level loves to have ready-made food prepared at Hotels and restaurants where Arabian, European, Chinese food or Myanmar traditional foods are available and according to their background and taste they eat. The middle class people of Muslims, office workers and Government servants particularly in towns, love to cook their food at home. Their food is not variety, but still two or three types of curries and rice is compulsory. The curries, basically bean with spices and vegetables are must with one tasty curry, either beef or fish. These people love to spend their holiday at mini restaurants where they love to take Biryani either with chicken or mutton, a special Indian food. Kinds of special drinks are also available: Farluda made with milk, Putin, dried fruits, pistachio, kishmiss. Ice-cream with variety of taste or Lessy made with Yogurt is very famous in Myanmar. These three foods Biryany, Farluda and kimaplata are favorite of all time in Myanmar. Even Buddhist or Christians love these foods and they order them in their special events and occasions.

The third level, people of rural and particularly farmers and workers enjoy at Myanmar traditional foods available in every corner of the city or the village. The rice, vegetable curry and fish sauce (Ngapi) is essential in their lunch or in dinner. They do not bother about expensive curries, they love if fish curry or any Myanmar traditional food called Muhinga (vermicelli with fish soup), Owwnokuatswae (noodle with coconut soup). For the farmers, it is very easy to arrange their lunch as they just catch some fish at their firm and plucks any kind of vegetable around the field, and then they put rice, fish and vegetable in an earthen pot and cook. This is the simple way of food preparation for rural population and they do not bother for their food when and what to arrange, thus their life is easy and no worry providing healthy and longer life.

Myanmar Muslim Social Responsibility

Culture of Muslims of Myanmar includes their social, moral and ethical responsibilities towards themselves and the people around them like their parents, siblings, children, relatives, neighbours, friends, poor, society, community, organizations and the government. Being Muslims they attain this culture thought by their Islamic religious teaching which carries through generation. These responsibilities facilitate the members of society to become friendly, peaceful and prosperous. The most significant element in a society is peace and that is only achievable when people living in the society becomes friendly, prosperous understand their responsibility. Therefore, they need to make sure that they are friendly and create such an environment by which they will be prosperous.

When a Muslim is born, he is given services: a good name is given, reading religious rituals, shaping the head, charity by feeding the poor and relatives with slaughtered goat or sheep (two goats for girl and one for boy). When parents see their children growing up, they teach them basic knowledge of religious, social and moral values: prohibiting from sin and

crime, motivating in goodness, sending them to school, establishing business opportunity and marry them when they reach puberty. They make sure the best selection of the bride and the groom, they follow criterion of selection of the spouse shown by their prophet that one must be of [1] religious or pious, [2] good family member, [3] good looking, [4] and professional. Vis a vis, the children when they grown enough, they are responsible to look after their old parents, maintain their family dignity by behaving well with other, expansion of the wealth received from the parents, visiting to the friends of their parents and engage in charity on behalf their late parents.

Anyone becomes a student, he is thought to keep five significant principles; whenever they see a teacher he has to welcome him wholeheartedly, approaching him to seek the knowledge, deal him with utmost respect, learn the knowledge till he obtains it wholly and apply the knowledge properly in a good cause. When a person becomes a teacher; he is responsible to teach his students till they understood, advise them till they are civilized, not hiding any knowledge his pupils supposed to know, protecting them from any harm and send them to the right person or the professional from whom they can further study. And also members of the society are trained to be a righteous person who are helping the others, treating others equally, talking others friendly, making others prosperous and guiding them to be a true and righteous person.

While a man is married and becomes as a head of the family, he is liable to treat his partners and members with full respect, trusting them and handing over them the expenses, dressing them nicely, keeping himself honest, educating them and be kind to every member of the family. When a woman is married, she is responsible to look after the work of her house whole, saving whatever given to her by her husband, not to mingle with other man while controlling herself, respecting relatives from both sites and one is diligent and proactive in the family.

If a person happens to be a staff or a servant to any institution or any person, he is available ahead of the availability of his bosses, he goes back home after every one leave their work, takes anything with the knowledge of the responsible, performs their assigned task carefully and professionally, spreads a good name of their bosses to the others. Anyone who has become the head of the society, he is liable to be conscientious, positive, be kind to others, tolerance towards others, understand others of their good and weak points and he is farsighted. As a matter of fact, it is not the same while duty and responsibility are discussed, responsibility is related to individual involvement, if one performs it he can earn a good image in the society and if not, may be harmful and there is no punishment or penalty for him. When duty is concerned it is official and related to a society or a country. If a duty is not fulfilled, one can be solicited to compensate it or can be penalized for the failure of one's duty. A man must understand that he is a member of the society; he is liable to perform his duty for the benefit of his society. He is more responsible to the society than his own affair; otherwise society would be suffered because of a member's irresponsibility.

Influence of Buddhist Belief and Tradition

Particularly in the kingdom days, Many Muslims believed in the spirit and soul of the dead people as it was in Myanmar tradition. At times of difficulty, natural disaster and hardship caused by severe disease or the poverty, they believed that it had happened because the bad spirit does not like them. Then they worshipped the spirit or they offer the spirit some food or money. Sometime, they beat a big plate or cooking pot together with a stick in a house and in the community to chase the bad spirits. They only believe that the bad spirit is gone from their society when the period of the difficulty was over. There, many go to soothsayers and palmist, astrologers and they believed following the instructions of these artists would remove their difficulties. Sometimes they go to Buddhist monks or Muslim

saints or Ustads and attained some kind of talisman and amulets which they believed can cure their disease and solve their complications. The Muslims of Myanmar do not marry during the rainy season (July-October) because the Buddhists never celebrate marriage ceremony during this period for it is the period of Buddhist fasting months. They keep low profile and engage most of the time meditating or busy helping each other. They avoid travelling, gossiping, quarrelling and try to enjoin each other and feeding poor and busy in charitable activities. Myanmar Muslims are very careful in this period, not to commit any act might insult the Buddhist, thus they even do not celebrate any happy occasions in this month, even marriage ceremony.

A Buddhist woman remains in the labour-room for seven days observing the full nature of Buddhist tradition at the time of delivery of her baby. Muslim women are authorized to avail 40 days rest for their giving birth to their babies and there is no restriction to stick to their labour-room for seven days, but they too remain seven days in their labour-room according to Myanmar tradition. They do not know why they need to stay like Buddhist but, they remain influenced by the tradition. Muslims also use traditional medicines, herbal medicines, when they get sick, the fresh mother uses all local medicines according to its need. For example, the mother needs to apply turmeric power cream on her body for 7 days in her labour-room. The Buddhist celebrates birth-day of their baby by giving his/her a good name and shaping the head of the baby by reciting Buddhist rituals. Muslims too enjoy the celebration of their new born baby by giving him/her a beautiful name while shaping their head. But Muslim call it Thaniyah according to Islam, letting taste some honey or date to the baby and a goat is slaughtered and distributed to the needy for a female baby and two goats are slaughtered for a baby boy. Muslims of Myanmar keep two names compared to the Buddhist who usually have only one name and the reason is that they want to identify their Muslim identity with Islamic name with their native name, ie, Maung Maung @ Muhammad Ismail .

The elders usually tell stories to their children at bed time. The stories include traditions of Buddha, folktales, and sometimes, they tell stories of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions. They love to tell the stories of One Thousand and One Nights. Some of them love to play music, listen to the music of some famous Muslim musicians like Ali, son of Mullah Ismail. Beyond the British days, many Muslim artists came up as Musicians and vocalists such as Chit Kong, Khin Maung Htoo, Than Pe Lay, etc.,. Some of them believe in reincarnation of one soul after its death and the soul is reincarnated in someone's womb. There are many stories about reincarnation in Myanmar traditions and the elders told these stories to their family members when they are free particularly at bed time. One of Myanmar months called Tagu which falls in the month of April. The Buddhists celebrate the water festival in this month. They throw water to each other till the one is wet. In the past, they used to spread a few drops of perfumed water but nowadays water is pumped out in pipes causing harm to others. Till independence, Muslims participated in the festival. Especially Muslim officials working for the government had to participate in the festival, but no more after military rule.

In the olden days, every Muslim child had to be trained at the Buddhist monastery. They had to learn how to write Myanmar literature, poems and the proverb. Many Muslim poets were produced during the kingdom days and among them U Nu @ Muhammad Kassim was one of the famous Muslim writers. He wrote more than 60 books during his life and the most renowned book was an introduction to Islam presented to the then king of Myanmar called Bo Thaw Phaya, U Wine. Many Muslims youths in the later stage, envied at U Nu and his writing, developed their poetry skill further. They started composing special poem in the glory of their creator, Allah and their prophet, Muhammad PBUH. They arranged competition programme among the students and the poets at the end of Shaban, the month

before Ramadan, Muslims fasting month. One of the Myanmar Muslims' cultures is that they do not know the deed of charity because there was no such tradition in the past. Everyone is self-sufficient and earn money whether they are rich or poor. Thus, Myanmar Muslims never engage in giving charity. However, when the Indian Muslims came to Myanmar, the Islamic Shari'a law regarding Zakat and fitrah taught them about charity and helping each other in need.

Interaction among Muslims in those days was generally found to be friendly. No caste system existed and dealings between the rich and the poor were acceptable. In any occasion, like marriage, religious functions and funeral ceremonies, they were helping each other without any prejudice and partiality. When Muslims are often found praying together either officers or soldiers, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, old or young, prostrating before their god, it is understood equality and justice is among them. They are also found eating together in every celebration and occasion. A variety of food is placed in a big plate from which they eat together. They invite their neighbours and Buddhist friends at their celebration where they offer best food of Halal and they also go the celebration of their Buddhist friend's house or marriage ceremony. Their utensils and crockery are carefully kept clean and separate so that they do not contain any unclean elements which can cause reasons for impermissibility according to their religion.

Conclusion

In a nut shell, one can conclude that the culture of Muslim in Myanmar has been historically very earliest, qualified and authentic as many significant events at every stage and level are full of proof and supportive attestation. This cultural finding truly supports the theory of Muslims national identity in Myanmar. Thus, there should not be any doubt about their national identity and citizen right in Myanmar.

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