

**The Network
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**Rohingya/Bengali:
The Profile of Community in 1931-1961**

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Summary:

Based on available Burma census records and intercensal ratios, the population in Arakan Division for 1973 and 1953 are estimated. From this estimates, one can concludes that the currently stateless Rohingya/Bengali population had been considered as non-nationals in 1953 census and foreigner-residents in 1973 census respectively. It further indicates a strong likelihood that, during Burma's first post independence democratic government in 1948-1961, the participation for Rohingya/Bengali group was allowed as an alien parliamentary block.

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Rohingya/Bengali: The Profile of Community in 1931-1961

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There has been considerable gap in our knowledge about the Rohingya/Bengali community within the three decades spanning from 1931 to 1961. The information has been rather sketchy on their total population as well as their immigration status within Burma. As far as British era censuses were in concerns, records up to 1931 are being available. The 1941 census records in Rangoon, however, were destroyed with the advance of Japanese in 1942. In addition to these earlier censuses, there had been The Report on Indian Immigration compiled by Commissioner James Baxter in 1939 of which this discussion will rely heavily on. ¹

As for the decades after independence, it is possible to calculate backward on the Arakan population from few publicly available censuses, starting with 2013 records. ² The 1983 Census record is available. ³ However, the 1973 and 1953 censuses are not available. In order to fill these missing census records, a method of projection has been used to evaluate the population developments for the Rohingya/Bengali community.

With respect to the immigration status of Rohingya/Bengali community, there were spirited arguments raised by the Rohingya writers that, since Burma's independence, the Rohingya/Bengali have all along been recognized as the citizens of Burma. Rohingya writers had cited the seamless integration of their elected representatives within the national parliament led by the AFPFL government of U Nu during 1948-1961. ⁴ From the other sides of the debate, too, the speculation has been that the local Rakhine nationalists may have tempered with the Arakan State immigration records, which effectively deprived the Rohingya/Bengali off their Burmese citizenship. ⁵

On the question of Rohingya/Bengali citizenship, this analysis will highlight even more distressing picture. It is found that the majority of Rohingya/Bengali community had never been recognized as citizens in all Burma's censuses since independence.

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1. [Report on Indian Immigration by Commissioner James Baxter \(1939\)](#)
 2. [Report of Inquiry into Violence in Arakan State, Government of Myanmar \(2013\)](#)
 3. [Official Census Extract for Arakan State, Government of Burma \(1983\)](#)
 4. [Legal Nexus between Rohingya and the State by U Kyaw Min \(2012\)](#)
 5. Private communications, Networkmyanmar.org

SUMMARY IN THIS FINDINGS:

1. The majority of Rohingya/Bengali community, including those who born in Burma, seems to have been excluded as non-nationals from the 1953 census and 1956 electoral roll.
2. In both 1973 and 1983 Census records, there has been the existence of 'foreigners' which attributed to the current stateless persons (White Card holders).
3. There had been an increase in population of Rohingya/Bengali in Arakan State, in the order of 74,000, during the two decades prior to Burma gaining her independence.
4. During the 1953-55 census, there were possibilities of inaccuracies in census takings and that, in the order of up to 173,000 persons may have been recorded as the Pakistanis citizens.

ARAKAN POPULATION ON 2013, 1983 AND 1953 CENSUSES.

On a previous note, it is shown that the intercensal population ratios can be used to predict the total number of White Card holders. ⁶ Here, the same method is used and the total projection for Rakhine and Rohingya/Bengali in 1953 is as follows:

(TABLE - I)

YEAR	BUDDHIST	ISLAM TOTAL	ROHINGYA /BENGALI	RATIOS (R3)
2013	2,333,670;	968,218;	826,019;	
1983	1,425,093;	584,518;	497,602;	1.64 & 1.66
1953	868,959;	352,119;	299,760;	1.64 & 1.66

The total Rohingya/Bengali population estimated in 1953 is about 299,760. The two intercensal ratios "R3" are slightly different: Rakhines for 1.64 and Rohingya/Bengali for 1.66. Of course, the difference in R3 on two communities may not be indicating that Rohingya/Bengali has a higher population growth rate. One must taken into account of the Rakhine emigration over the years to Burma proper, whereas the Rohingya/Bengali were confined to their normal place of residence. The validity for this 1953 data, we shall discuss later.

The intercensal ratio R3, here, is marked for 3 decades. The ratios for a decade R can easily be found that, for Rakhine, R = 1.180 and for Rohingya/Bengali, R = 1.185 respectively. By using these two numbers, we can also project the population for Arakan State in 1973.

6. [Citizenship, Census, White Cards and Illegals by NetIPR.](#)

(TABLE - II)

Year	Rakhine/ Buddhist	Islam Total	Rohingya/ Bengali	Arakan Total
1983	1,425,093;	584,518;	497,602;	2,009,611;
1973	1,207,706;	493,264;	419,917;	1,700,970;

PRE-INDEPENDENCE DATA

Against the popular trends, let us assume the migration of Rohingya/Bengali were not influenced by other political factors, such as the independence of Burma, the Mujahid rebellion and the 1934 legislative moves against Indian immigration. There was also the large-scale communal conflicts of 1942 between Rakhine & Rohingyas, which is being overlooked for practical purpose. There has also been ample grounds to assume that the General Ne Win government's expulsion of Indians migrants in 1964, as well as the 1971 Bangladesh War of Liberation were having no impact upon Rohingya/Bengali population.

Taken aside all those factors, the 1931 Census records and that of Baxter's report can be used to project the migrating population. On Para. 11 of 1939 Baxter's report for Arakan Division, which had given Indian immigrant number of 217,801 whereas the total population for Arakan was 1,008,535. From this table, we can project the population forwards, using the intercensal ratio, $R = 1.13$;

(TABLE - III)

Year	Migrant Numbers	Ratio
1931	217,801;	1.13
1941	246,115;	1.13
1951	278,109;	1.13

Now, lets compare the 1951 projection of (278,109) with Table-I, 1953 projection (352,119). There has been an increase about 74,000 persons during two decades. The indication is that there had been a steady flow of Rohingya/Bengali migrants, approximately 4,000 a year, during the two decades prior to Burma's independence.

The Baxter's report had given further information on the migrants in Arakan. On Para. 66, the detail information has been given that out of 217,801 migrants in 1931, the 210,990 (97%) were living within Arakan Division which includes nowadays Buthidaung and Maungdaw Townships. Out of these

210,990 living in Arakan Division, the 80% were reportedly born in Burma.

THE 1953 CENSUS TAKINGS: THE MUJAHID STYLE ?

Burma's first census after independence was conducted on 1953, with the help of United Nations. Because of the insurgency, the census had been taken in three stages; first in the cities and towns, then onto rural areas. Because of prevailing security consideration, the 1953 census came to its close in 1955. Projection for foreigners in Arakan Division 1953 is:

Islam Total in 1953: 352,119 --> Arakan Division Only: 338,034

(TABLE - IV)⁷

	Arakan Div.	Buthidaung Tsp.	Maungdaw Tsp.
Total Population	338,034;	130,000;	208,034;
Pakistanis	173,615;	80,000(60%)	93,615(45%)

As it has been noted in previous section, in 1931 the 80% majority of Rohingya/Bengali were born in Burma. Why then, can we ask, that there were more than 173,000 may be reported as foreigners -- the *Pakistanis*?

In this respect, there are two possibilities. The first is the individual's choice. Some within the Rohingya/Bengali community may have voluntarily opted for the Pakistanis citizenship. In fact, immediately after Burma's independence, there were a large pool of Indian migrants including Pakistanis, total number close to 2 millions. Burma's state-to-state relationship with Pakistan was exceptionally good and that the Pakistanis appears to enjoy special privileges. Moshe Yegar (1972) wrote the status of Pakistanis in those days as:

"... Even the mujahids' rebellion had no effect at all upon the life of the Pakistanis in Burma. On the contrary, the Pakistanis enjoyed special privileges granted by the Government of Burma which permitted them to hold celebrations and to raise the Pakistan flag on the occasion of Pakistan Day that falls on March 23." ⁸

The second possibility was the inaccuracy of census enumerator, who may politically allied to Mujahid rebels, made the decision to report people in his area as "Pakistanis". This scenario is entirely plausible since many Rohingya/Bengali migrants were illiterate and, as noted by Milton Lieberman's 1954 report on Burma census; ⁹

7. The Table - IV is constructed by the information from two sources:

[\(1\) The Problem of Burmese Muslims by Dr. Mujtaba Razvi, Pakistan Horizon \(1978\)](#) and [\(2\)The Scotsman, 18 May 1949](#)

8. [The Muslims of Burma by Moshe Yegar \(1972\)](#)

"... During the 1954 enumeration a new twist on the security problem was encountered when, in certain areas, persons attached to insurgent forces, carried on the Census enumeration work and from all accounts did a creditable job."

(Note: The Lieberman's report did not exactly specify that in which area of Burma such operation(s) have taken place. However, there is strong possibility of Arakan Division.)

THE CLUE ON "OTHER FOREIGN RACES"

The details of 1973 Census for Arakan State isn't available. However, the comparison of 1983 and 1973 censuses was made by S. Gunasekaran and Mya Than .¹⁰ In that paper on Table 5, Percentage Distribution of Racial Groups, which I reproduce below for ease of reference:

(TABLE - V)

GROUP	1973	1983
Rakhine	4.00%	4.50%
Indian and Pakistanis	1.90%	1.40%
Other foreign races	1.20%	1.90%

The 1983 national population is of 35,307,913 and that of 1973 is 28,921,226. Arakan State total in 1973 is 1,712,838.¹¹ The comparison of this number with the projection in Table-II Arakan Total validates our method of calculation. This Table translates to 'Other foreign races' in 1983 (670,850) and 1973 (347,054); 'Indians and Pakistanis' in 1983 (494,311) and 1973 (549,503). The 1983 "Indians and Pakistanis" has exact match to Table II of Rohingya/Bengali column, but none of them has made an exact match for 1973. Nevertheless, we can be certain that the population data for Rohingya/Bengali is lying within this four sets of numbers.

We can therefore conclude that the 1973 census had registered the current stateless (White Card) group of Rohingya/Bengali as foreigners.

9. [The Present Statistical and Census Programme in Burma by Milton D. Lieberman, Civilisations \(1954\)](#)

10. [Population Change in Burma: A comparison of the 1973 and 1983 censuses by S. Gunasekaran and Mya Than \(1986\)](#)

11. [Population of Burma: An analysis of 1973 census by M. Ismael Khin Maung \(1986\)](#)

EXCLUSION FROM ELECTORAL ROLLS IN 1956

In Table-I, the projected data for 1953, the Rakhine accounted for 868,959 and Rohingya/Bengali 352,119 (Islam Total). The 1956 official data for Arakan Division was reported 887,500 whilst population of Burma being given as 19.86 million. ¹²The closeness of 1956 official census data (887,500) and the Table-I projected data for Rakhine only (868,959) is, in fact, suggesting that the Rohingya/Bengali group had been excluded as non-nationals from the census and electoral records altogether. This further indicates that the U Nu's AFPFL era administration had allowed the existence of an alien parliamentary block, as it was in the old British days. A less dramatic interpretation has been that the descendants of those Rohingya/Bengalis whose forefathers were born in Arakan Division had been allowed to participate in the national political processes, with the proviso that Burmese citizenship would later be granted.

Upon reflecting these historic records, one can conclude that the Rohingya/Bengali community, indeed, have travelled a long, long journey towards their rightful place as citizens of Burma. Let us hope that their journey ahead wouldn't be much further.

End Of Report.

12. Some Minority Problem in Burma by Geoffrey Fairbairn, Pacific Affairs (1957), Footnote 9.

List of Resources, the Location URL:

- [#A] [Report on Indian Immigration by Commissioner James Baxter \(1939\)](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19390715_baxter-report.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19390715_baxter-report.pdf)
- [#B] [Report of Inquiry into Violence in Arakan State \(2013\)](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/20130429_Rakhine-Commission-Report.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/20130429_Rakhine-Commission-Report.pdf)
- [#C] [Official Census Extract for Arakan State, 1983](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19830101_Census-Extract.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19830101_Census-Extract.pdf)
- [#D] [Legal Nexus between Rohingya and the State by U Kyaw Min](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/20120825_rohingyas-nationality-by-u-kyaw-min.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/20120825_rohingyas-nationality-by-u-kyaw-min.pdf)
- [#E] Private communications, Networkmyanmar.org
- [#F] [Citizenship, Census, White Cards and Illegals](http://www.netipr.org/policy/node/41),
(www.netipr.org/policy/node/41)
- [#G] The Table - IV is constructed by the information from two sources:
(1) [The Problem of Burmese Muslims by Dr. Mujtaba Razvi, Pakistan Horizon \(1978\)](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19780901_pakistan-horizon.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19780901_pakistan-horizon.pdf)
(2) [The Scotsman, 18 May 1949](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19490518_the-scotsman.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19490518_the-scotsman.pdf)
- [#H] [The Muslims of Burma by Moshe Yegar \(1972\)](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19720101_muslims-of-burma-by-moshe-yegar.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19720101_muslims-of-burma-by-moshe-yegar.pdf)
- [#I] [The Present Statistical and Census Programme in Burma by Milton D. Lieberman, Civilisations \(1954\)](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19540101_burma-census-by-milton-lieberman.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19540101_burma-census-by-milton-lieberman.pdf)
- [#J] [Population Change in Burma: A comparison of the 1973 and 1983 censuses by S. Gunasekaran and Mya Than \(1986\)](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19860101_census-comparison-1973-and-1983.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19860101_census-comparison-1973-and-1983.pdf)
- [#K] [Some Minority Problem in Burma by Geoffrey Fairbaim, Pacific Affairs \(1957\), Footnote 9.](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19571201_minority-problem-in-burma-by-geoffrey-fairbaim.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19571201_minority-problem-in-burma-by-geoffrey-fairbaim.pdf)
- [#L] [Population of Burma: An analysis of 1973 census by M. Ismael Khin Maung \(1986\)](http://www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19860401_analysis-on-1973-burma-census.pdf)
(www.netipr.org/policy/downloads/19860401_analysis-on-1973-burma-census.pdf)