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The Characteristics of Violent Religious Nationalism: A Case Study of Mabatha against Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

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The Rohingya are “one of the most persecuted” religious ethnic minorities of the contemporary world. Their persecution has been started since the ex-Junta era 1962. Buddhist Burmese Religious Nationalism in Myanmar “plays a key role in the expulsion of the Religious and ethnic minority of Myanmar” such as Rohingya. Research has shown that the Religious-Nationalist monks Association MaBaTha manipulate being Burmese and being Buddhist in Myanmar by using social media, (Zin, 2015) songs, sermons, and pamphlets to spread the hate against the Rohingya Community.

This study aims to answer the following three address questions: (1) Why the Buddhist Religious Nationalism in Myanmar can be labeled as violent? (2) How monks played a control role in anti-Muslim violence and Rohingya atrocity in the name of Race and Religion protection? (3) What are the relations between MaBaTha 969 movement and Rohingya human rights violations? This paper is part of a wider research of the author and uses the descriptive analysis citing journal articles, previous researches/theses. It is mostly literature-based reviews and analysis of the author, based on secondary sources which are from the reports, human rights investigation reports, the NGO reports. This study finds out MaBaTha has the systemic of violent religious nationalism which leads the human rights violations against ethnic and religious Minority, the Rohingya.

Introduction

The international finding of Buddhist Monks' participation in anti-Muslim Riots in Rakhine state in Burma came as a surprise. Buddhism in Myanmar had until then been largely cohort with peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations of 2007 (the Saffron Revolution) (Zin, 2015, p. 375). Myanmar is home to 136 ethnics, including the Rohingya. The 2014 census says 87.9 percent of the population of Myanmar is Buddhist, 6.2 - percent Christian and 43. percent Muslim (Department of Population, 2014). The religiously and ethnically diverse Myanmar was one of the very first voters of yes for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, December, 10 General Assembly of United Nations, party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights [ICESCR], the Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities [CRPD], the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW] and the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC]. In practical life, human rights violations and abuses, especially related to religious issues are surging day by day. On the other hand, the religious riot against the religious minority, especially the Muslims in Myanmar depicts the blood-shed history of "timing of the riots against religious minority in Rakhine State (June and October 2012), to Meiktila (March 2013), Okkan (April 2013), Lashio (May 2013), Kanbalu (August 2013), and Mandalay (July 2014)" (The US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2019) has led many Buddhists terrorist to fuel the religious-based violence and human right deprivations in Myanmar.

The MaBaTha¹, the Burmese Patriotic Association incited 969 movements led by the fugitive and nationalist monk U Wirathu. He introduced the word "Islamophobia" to the community and he plays the key role in excluding the religious minority of Myanmar. He encourages Buddhists to boycott the Muslim businesses in order to Protect the Myanmar Buddhist race and religion because he finds the Muslim, especially the Rohingyas as the brutal invaders to the Rakhine state in order to conquer the whole Burma and threatening to the security of influential Buddhists Bamar People (Kyaw, 2016). MaBaTha gained momentum in political reform, which began in 2010 with the first general elections

¹ The Burmese acronyms for Patriotic "Association of Protection of Race and Religion" in Myanmar which emerged mainly to two circumstances. First, in 1962-2011 after a long period of military dictatorships. Secondly, riots after Buddhists and Muslims conflicts in 2012 Rakhine State in Western Myanmar. MaBaTha or Ma Ba Tha have similar meaning and having space between words make no differences at all.

in two decades, followed by a transfer of power to a quasi-civilian government in March 2011. Burmese Buddhist people always see “religious, ethnic and racial identities are essential components of national identity. Having that kind of attitude leads to Buddhist terrorism, Buddhist militarism and Buddhist nationalism, which were talk of the scholarly world in 2010s (Schonthal & Walton, 2016). Learning about MaBaTha is crucial for two solid reasons: first, history-longed persecution and Human Rights violations has a significant link with the hate speech and hate which are sowed by Religious Nationalist monks. Secondly, it is important to study this as “Religion in Myanmar has been politicized and coined with the word Nationalism in the coutry to normalize the hate and human rights violations of Rohingya in Myanmar”.

This paper makes six contributions to the extant literature on: understanding Burmese Buddhist Religious Nationalism in Myanmar, mainly discusses about the definition and interpretation Burmese Buddhist Religious Nationalism; secondly, the discussion about the key player of the movement 969 and MaBaTha will be followed; thirdly, it adds means and tactics the Radical Monks used to spread the hate against Muslim, especially Rohingya in Myanmar; fourthly, the MaBaTha attempts on legislation of race and religion protection laws and it impacts to the human rights situation; Fifthly, it highlights the linkage between mass human rights violations and anti-Muslim movement; and finally, the analysis part of the article using the framework of the characteristics of violent religious nationalism by (Kiper & Sosis, 2020), and it annotates why Burmese Buddhist Religious Nationalism in Myanmar can be labeled as violent religious nationalism.

Research Design and Methodology

Methodologically, **qualitative orientates**, this paper is part of a wider research of the author and follows the descriptive analysis citing relevant information, articles, and previous researches/theses implement in this whole article. This paper is mostly literature-based review and analysis of the author, based on secondary sources which are from the reports, human rights investigation reports, the NGO reports. This writing will try to answer three addressed questions: **(1) Why the Buddhist Religious Nationalism in Myanmar can be labeled as violent? (2) How monks played a control role in anti-**

Muslim violence and Rohingya atrocity in the name of Race and Religion protection? (3) What are the relations between MaBaTha 969 movement and Rohingya human rights violations?

Literature Review

1) Understanding Burmese Buddhist Religious Nationalism in Myanmar

Religious nationalism in Myanmar, I have consulted with and will focus on the definition of religion by Clifford Geertz (1993), the definition of “nationalism” by Ernest Gellner, Anna Grzymala-Busse (2019), and “Religious Nationalism” by S. Gorski and Gulay Turkmen-Dervisoglu (2013) which are really relevant for the context of Myanmar’s Buddhist Religious Nationalism today. Sascha Helbardt, Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam and Ru Diger Korff (2013) see the religion in Myanmar is a means of political control 7/5/2022 11:19:00 AM because of the 1962 Myanmar Junta’s logic which is “To be Burmese means to be a Buddhist” (Ibrahim, 2018) which is named as “Burmese Buddhist ethno/religious nationalism (Woodward, 2020). Clifford Geertz (1993) defines religion as:

“a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivation seem uniquely realistic” (Munson, 1986).

The word ‘nationalism’ has been defined differently. According to Jewish Czech Scholar Ernest Gellner, one of the most important theorists in ‘nationalism’ study interprets “nationalism as a primarily political principle and held that the political and the national unit should be congruent.” He views on nationalism as two elements, sentiment and movement. The movement is the activating resulting the feelings which is from sentiment, refers to the feeling of anger or satisfaction (Cuff, 2013). Anna Grzymala-Busse (2019) mentions that the fusion of Religion and Nationalism, “religious nationalism has a powerful dynamic in back-boning popular religiosity and attitudes, empowers religious organizations in leveraging policy across a wide range of domains, and shapes the patterns of inter- and intra-state violence” (Grzymala-Busse, 2019). This type of Religious Nationalism mixes fears

in small numbers among religious majority groups by creating the demographically and scientifically indefensible position that the minority groups are increasing in numbers by leaps and bounds, and they will soon overtake the majority religious group (Yusuf, 2018). Philip S. Gorski and Gulay Turkmen-Dervisoglu (2013) see religious nationalism as a social movement that argues to speak in the name of the nation, and that defines the nation in terms of religion. It occurs when people assert that “their nation is religiously based” and when religion is “central ... to conceptions of what it means to belong to the given nation”.

According to Iselin Frydenlund (2018), the Buddhist Revivalism in Myanmar overlapped with ethnic Majoritarianism, which leads to the axiomatic position of the term “Buddhist Nationalism” (Frydenlund, 2018). Religion (Buddhism) and Nationalism (being Burmese) have long associated in Myanmar (Phone, 2014). Burmese Buddhism is seemingly synonymous with Myanmar culture and an associated identity. This important element of “Burmeseness” or “Being Burmese” is well echoed in the statistics because the vast majority of Burmese people, 87.9 percent follow Theravada Buddhists (Lehr, 2019). Buddhist Burmese Nationalism, the minority discrimination and Buddhist fears of Islam is nothing new in Myanmar and History is testifying that there are many instances of religious based conflict between the Burmese Majority and other Indian/Muslim people. The Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar seemingly became talks of the academic and media world in 2011.

2) Mabatha and the 969 Movement

The 969 movement was seemingly established in 1990 and was likely inspired by a book by U Kyaw Lwin, who initially adopted the number 969 as cosmologically stronger than 786 – the number of Southeast Asian Muslims which pointed out their business properties. 786 indicated in the phrase “In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful”, at the same time 969 was associated to “Three Jewels of Buddhism”: the nine attributes of the Buddha, the six attributes of Dhamma, and the nine attributes of the sangha. Supporters, both lay people and monks collectively see and accuse the Muslim of having economics privileges, abusing women, and fast, uncontrolled population growth (Husarski, 2017).

To have a better picture of what has happened to the Rohingya community, the narrative of Buddhist nationalism – the driving dynamics behind the Islamophobia underpinning the violence

against the Rohingya (Rosenthal, 2018). Initially, the inaugural meeting minutes of MA BA THA (the association of protection of race and religion) testifies that there are threefold mission for the formation of the association: (a) to advocate to the public about the need for the racial protection and the dangers of religious conflict, (b) through “unity and maintenance of discipline” to build peaceful co-existence among different religions in Myanmar, and (c) to shield “race and religion within a legal framework” (Frydenlund & Hayward, 2019). MABATHA can be seen as a specialized campaigns-oriented organization, rather than formal organization. The name of the organization reflects well about “How Buddhist Burmese see religious, ethnics, and racial identities as essential ingredients of national identity” (Schonthal & Walton, 2016).

Burmese Nationalism was introduced in the early decades of the twentieth century as Militantly Burmese Buddhist ethno/religious nationalism. It changed the Burmese perspective on Muslim from valued partners into existential threats to Buddhism and Burmese Buddhist culture. Historically, anti-Muslim sentiment was intensified after an episode of anti-Indian riots (1930s) and the military coup (1962) by General Ne Win (Woodward, 2020). The Radical Monks (MA BATHA Monks) always justify by using the narrative of threat, disregard for the suffering of a religious other, even violence as forms of virtuous self-defense, and portray themselves as “Buddhist Martyrs” (Schissler et al., 2015). Leading Buddhist Monks have inaugurated the organization for the Protection of Race and Religion, it is known for the abbreviation of “MABATHA” aiming to promote Buddhist interest in Myanmar (Frydenlund, 2015). Supplementarily, in the Buddhist Trinity – Lord Buddha himself, Dhamma or his teachings, and Sangha or monastic order – the role of the monks in the majority Buddhists Country such as Myanmar is seen as under the leadership of the monks in social and political affairs (Kawanami, 2009). Crisis Group Asia (2013) reports that the monks in Myanmar, especially the radical monks have been influential in Burman nationalist organizations, and they have been prominent in ethno-nationalist movements for those ethnic groups that are predominately Burmese (International Crisis Group, 2013). The hate campaign by MA BA THA proliferated a popular conspiracy theory, which is the claim of polygamous and hyper-fertile Muslim men are aiming to Islamize Myanmar by luring Buddhist women into interfaith marriage and converting the latter to Islam (Kyaw, 2016).

By the helm of monastic order, in both negative and positive examples of the monk's involvement can be seen in Myanmar history. By the influential role of the monks and the sponsorship of Myanmar Military has encouraged the radical Buddhist monks to undermine other religious minority groups and have developed little to no empathy for minority group in Myanmar. According to Matthew J. Walton & Susan Hayward (2014) the population explosion of Rohingya in Rakhine state, Buddhist extremists (MABATHA) envisioned it as a threat to Buddhist legacy, and accordingly, they developed anti-Muslim narratives (Walton & Hayward, 2014). The hate rooted inside the monks, from the prominent monk of MA BA THA U Wirathu² answers to the interview of TIME magazine depicts that "when you leave a seed from a tree to grow in a pagoda, it seems so small at first. But you know you must cut it out before it grows and destroys the building". He later said in the interview that "[Muslims] population is exploding so fast, and they are stealing our women, raping them ... They would like to occupy our country, but I will not let them." "We must keep Myanmar Buddhists" Including the former president of the country, U Thein Sein used to refer him as "son of Lord Buddha"(Akins, 2018). In the following subtitle, I will try to depict the means to spread the hate against Muslim in Myanmar by MABATHA.

3) Means of Spreading the Hate Against Muslim in Myanmar

The 969 Nationalistic Movement and its leader, Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu are accountable for raising speech of hatred and enmity. The movement seeks to isolate and displacement of Muslims, especially 15 % of the population of Myanmar of about 60 million people, predominantly living Muslim Rohingya from Rakhine state (Driss, 2016). Although MA BA THA monks always claim that they have never forced their follower to violence against the Muslim, on the other hand, in order to condemn Islam or any other religion, in the absence of Buddhist Religious textual references, the radical monks (MA BA THA Monks) have resorted to inventing racist and nationalist interpretation of their ancient mytho-political-religious narratives of the past (Yusuf, 2018). The core focus of the teaching of MA BA THA is to preserve the Buddhist faith from the outside threats (Bakali, 2021). Even

² Ashin Wirathu is a prominent monk connected to both the 969 Movement and Ma Ba Tha. He got involved with the 969 Movement in 2001 and was imprisoned in 2003 for inciting religious conflicts.

though there are no reliable empirical evidences to support the claim that the Muslims in Myanmar are using unfair practices to profit at the expense of Buddhist Business, the MA BA THA's central goal was to uphold a nationwide boycott of Muslim businesses in Myanmar (Diamond & MacLean, 2021). To successfully implement and enjoy the exclusion of Rohingya and Muslim (4.3 percent) of the country population as a threat in community, the radical monks always claiming that they need to be protected even the Buddhists population is (87.9) percent of the country (Department of Population, 2014). The sermons and teachings full of allegorical stories and misinterpretations, such as "life of Buddha" of the Buddhist Radical Monks exploded in newspapers, journals, and books, and on social media, mainly Facebook. Christina Fink (2018) and Min Zin (2015) annotate that due to the effective use of Facebook to create a virtual community linked by shared fears, the Buddhist Ultranationalist Movement has emerged and gained momentum. Additionally, Christiana Fink comments on the using Facebook of Buddhist ultranationalists remains as a platform to stoke fear, normalize hateful views, and facilitate acts of violence against Muslim in Myanmar(Fink, 2018). The narratives created by the (MA BA THA monks) especially "Buddha was a devoted nationalist who defended his race and religion in both his previous lives as a Buddha-to-be and in his life as Gautama Buddha. Occasionally, this narrative is used to depict the Burmese people – the Burmese Nation (hinting to 135 ethnics groups³ of Myanmar) (Foxeus, 2019).

Using anonymous theme song (Diamond & MacLean, 2021):

"Buddha's lights shine. We stand for our race and religion from the enemy who will destroy us in this era. They live in our land; they drink our water; they insult our businesses and our children. They sin against the owner of the house. They break the offshoots from the branch.

Ungrateful, self-centered people. We brothers and sisters will take the oath. We will be loyal to our religion. We will buy things from the same religion's shops. We will find our life partner only from the same religion.

³ According to the 1982 Citizenship Law, "the Law only recognizes 135 groups of ethnic people, but the Rohingya Muslim from the Rakhine State are not listed as 135 groups of ethnic people in Myanmar".

Warm your national blood and wake up, Myanmar If we need to, we will make a fence with our bones.” The song MA BA THA used for every single event and campaign to against the Muslim in Myanmar. Nickey Diamond and Ken MacLean (2021) assert that the key word for this song is “destroy” because the Southeast Asian Theravada countries believe that Buddhism will be swallowed after 5,000 years after the Buddha’s death (Diamond & MacLean, 2021). Believing now that the Muslim minority in the country would be the treat for the disappearance of Buddhism from the whole world.

Additionally, the pamphlets distributed by MABATHA in 2015 included “the ultimate duty of the citizens was to protect the Burman Race, making nationalism visible as a weapon against an enemy [Muslim], than a tool for upholding patriotism (Than, 2015). The bright-colorful stickers posing the word “969” popping up in all over the cities, likely to be a whole country to notify the Buddhists that “is it eligible to communicate or buy in that shop or not”. The new “buy 969” stickers and banners were introduced to boycott the Muslim business all over the country (The Observers, 2013). Boycotting trade with Muslims and shop, only buying where there are 969 stickers only is proving that Buddhist loyalty to the race and religion of Myanmar (Akins, 2018).

4) Mabatha’s attempts on Legislation of “Race and Religion Protection Laws”, Fueling Dynamic of Human Rights Violations

Ronan Lee (2021) sees MaBaTha has political agendas, which include advocating policy changes that targeted to curtail the rights of both ethnic and religious minorities in the country (Lee, 2021). Not only the means of spreading hate against Muslims in Myanmar presented in previous subtitle, but also the attempts on legislation of “race and religion protection Laws” is utterly crucial for this study. Historically, the legislation role of Monks has been seen since the reign of monarch in Myanmar. The monarchy and the Monks are hugely interdependent and “King used the Monks, so the monks used the monarchy” (Aung-Thwin, 2009). Since 1961, when parliament adopted Buddhism as the state religion following a constitutional amendment, Burmese Buddhist Religious Nationalism has been mingled with political and religious objectives. MaBaTha plays a key role in proposing the Race and Religion Protection Law, and collecting millions of signatures from Buddhist citizens in its favor (Md Zahed, 2021). In compliance with Iselin Frydenlund (2018), the most influential agenda of 969 movement and MaBaTha is to pass four laws, “to protect race and religion,” in order to stop the

“islamization of Myanmar”(Frydenlund, 2018). The four “Race and Religion Protection Laws” are listed as: (1) the law Regarding Population Control and Health/ the “Population Control Law⁴” (2) the Buddhist Women special Law/ the “Interfaith Marriage Law⁵” (3) the Law Concerning Religious Conversion/ the “Religious Conversion Law⁶”, and (4) the Law on the Practice of Monogamy/ the “Monogamy Law⁷” (Equality Myanmar, 2016). The Equality Myanmar, the pioneer organization of Human Rights and Human Rights Education in Myanmar annotates with the fact that the package of law is intentionally targeting to the Muslim community not only the restriction of freedom of religion but also the law can be used as a legislative tool to abuse other human rights covenants (Equality Myanmar, 2016).

The Population Control Law: the law allows the government to implement population control measures in areas designated by the president with high population density, growth, maternal and child mortality, poverty or food security (International Crisis Group, 2017).

The Buddhist Women’s Special Marriage Law: related to the marriage of a Buddhist woman to a non- Buddhist man needs an application to be submitted to the township registrar, who will display it publicly for fourteen days. Only without any objection has been lodged, the marriages can be approved. The non- Buddhist spouse of Buddhist woman is restricted from attempting to convert wife’s religion, Buddhist faith to others. He must also no insult Buddhist Faith. If non-Buddhist husband violates any provision, he is liable to three years imprisonment or a fine and forfeiture of joint property and custody of children (International Crisis Group, 2017).

The Religious Conversion Law: the law offers chances to the state to regulate religious profession and conversion, and allow the state to interference in the right to freedom of conscience and religion. The law leads Religious Conversion Scrutinization and Registration Boards at the township

⁴ **The Population Control** laws was adopted by the Hluttaw on 27 April 2015 and signed by then – President U Thein Sein on 19 May 2015.

⁵ **The Interfaith Marriage Law** was adopted by the Hluttaw on 7 July 2015 and signed by then – President U Thein Sein on 26 April 2015.

⁶ **The Religious Conversion Law** was adopted by the Hluttaw on 21 August 2015 and signed by then – President U Thein Sein on 26 August 2015.

⁷ **The Monogamy Law** was adopted by the Hluttaw on 21 August 2015 and signed by then – President U Thein Sein on 31 August 2015.

level participating of five local officials and two local elders chosen by the township administrator (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

The Monogamy Law: is aimed to target religious minorities where polygamy and extra-marital affairs are perceived to occur more frequently, especially the Muslim community (Human Rights Watch, 2015). And the law makes it a criminal offense to have more than one spouse or to live with an unmarried partner who is not a spouse or to engage in marital infidelity (International Crisis Group, 2017).

According to Chole White (2015), the package of laws and ongoing discrimination against Muslim especially, Rohingya and stereotypes about women, violate international norms and obligations (International Crisis Group, 2017). Based on the stigmatization of stereotyping which is often the basis for large-scale othering and discriminatory practices, the laws can be seen as targeting ethnic minorities and disproportioning impacting Rohingya (Jones, 2017). The "Laws for the protection of the Race and Religion" had created massive resentment among the Muslims minority Rohingyas as they found it discriminatory and undignified. The law contributed to further worsening the inter-communal tension in Myanmar (Zaman, 2020).

Research Findings and Discussion

1) The Anti-Muslim Movements, Mass Violence and Human Rights Violation

The religious nationalistic movement, such as 969 movement by MA BA THA is fueling an insular nationalism and aggravating fault traces in inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations. Amresh Gunasingham sees "the rise of militant, ultra-nationalist strand within a segment of Theravada Buddhism associated with the perpetration of violent incidents against Muslim Minority in Myanmar. The notion that Buddhism is under the threat or in danger of being wiped out resonates with Burmese Buddhist majorities (Walton & Hayward, 2014).

Myanmar is party to four core international human rights instrument and two optional protocols, namely: CEDAW⁸ the Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination Against

⁸ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified on 22 July 1997.

Women, CESCR⁹ the Covenant on the Economics, Social, and Cultural Rights, CRC¹⁰ the Convention on the Rights of Child, CRC-OP-AC¹¹ – the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, CRC-OP-SC¹² - Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography and CRPD¹³ - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹⁴. Although Myanmar has not ratified most international human rights treaties, it does not mean that the state has no obligations and responsibilities to protect citizens from being violated and prevent collective-violence against Myanmar citizens. There is international Law which is binding to all the states are provided already.

The violations of human rights of the Rohingya community have been well documented by international organizations and UN already. And the UN labels the Rohingya as the world's most persecuted peoples. Anthony Kuhn (2014) adds on the argument that “the Rohingya and Human rights groups say Myanmar's government fails to protect the Rohingya from the human rights violations, and even from the ethnic cleansing (Kuhn, 2014) and (Fortify Rights, 2014). Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2014) and Min Zin (2015) buzz with the comments on the violent episodes in Rakhine State and elsewhere in Myanmar not only affected to the Muslim community of the state, but also impacted to the Muslim of the whole - Country. The violence against Muslim, especially the Rohingya was not new since 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, however nation-wide hate campaign subjecting to the Muslim community from 2012 to 2015 is unprecedented (Kyaw, 2017; Zin, 2015).

Andrew Riley, Yasmin Akther, Mohammed Noor, Rahmat Ali and Courtney Welton-Mitchell (2020) did small-scale research about the mental health situation of the Rohingyas from the Bangladesh, Cox Bazar where most of the fled Rohingya are evacuated, and they found out that there are noteworthy levels of systematic human rights violations in Myanmar, such as restrictions related

⁹ Covenant on the Economics, Social, and Cultural Rights, ratified on 06 October 2017.

¹⁰ Convention on the Rights of Child, ratified on 19 July 1991.

¹¹ Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified on 27 September 2019.

¹² Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography, ratified on 16 January 2011.

¹³ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified on 07 December 2011.

¹⁴ See on https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=119&Lang=EN (accessed on 11 October 2021).

to freedom of expression, association, religion, education, and travel, marriage, childbirth, healthcare, and more. Percentage wise, (99%) of interviewees had faced exposure to gunfire, destruction of houses and belonging (93%), witnessing dead bodies (92%), torture (56%), forced labor (49%), sexual assault (33%), and other events (Riley et al., 2020).

In June 2012 alone, there are around 688,000 Rohingya people had to flee from Rakhine to the nearest neighbor country Bangladesh because of the tension between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims while MA BA THA and their followers were enjoying the unabated racist vitriol against the Rohingya on social media especially on Facebook. According to Muhammad Abdul Bari (2018), the exodus of Rohingya in 2012 has something to do with hate against Muslim by Ashin U Wirathu, who is notorious with his “Buy Buddhists and shop Buddhists” slogan (Bari, 2018). Some scholars such as Syeda Naushin Parnini, Mohammad Redzuan Othman and Amer Saifude Ghazali (2013) reaffirm that human rights violations against Rohingya are because of the Military sowed hatred and resentment among the Buddhist (Parnini et al., 2013; Zaman, 2020) While the whole sees Buddhism as the peaceful religion, the mass human rights violations and incitement of violence by Buddhist majority in the name of religion portrays Buddhism as violent religion (Zaman, 2020).

2) Why Buddhist Religious Nationalism in Myanmar is violent?

According to Mark Juergensmeyer (1996), “violent religious nationalism [VRN] is usually seen as the outcome of religious involvement in politics or the politicization of religion (Juergensmeyer, 1996). Additionally, the relation between violent religious nationalism and large-scale human rights should be highlighted, especially in the country such as Myanmar (Coclanis, 2013).

Jorden and Richard (2020) encompass following characteristics of violent religious nationalism:

1. a group of people who labels themselves as common national and (ethno-) religious identity and falsify an imagined community, such as a Christian nation, Buddhist nation, etc.
2. a social movement which intensifies from the restriction on the religious marketplace to the violent separation of communities based on religious identities.

3. resulting in episodes of violence objecting a group of civilian population based on an aspect of their social identity – for instance, religion, sexual orientation, political affiliation, etc (Kiper & Sosis, 2020).

MaBaTha creates imagined Community (Bria, 2013; Foxeus, 2019): Among the country struggles with a range of political and socio-economic challenges relation to the transition between religious groups highlights since 2012, precisely with the rise of 969 movement and MaBaTha (Walton & Hayward, 2014). History long rooted Buddhist Burmese Religious nationalism always claims that Burma [Myanmar] only belongs to Burmese [Burman] who are religiously Buddhists. Apart from them, others are the trespasser or threat of the country (Bakali, 2021). Barker (2009) defines the religious nationalism as when religion is “central to conceptions of what it means to belong to the given nation” (Gorski & Turkmen-Dervisoglu, 2013). Buddhist Religious Nationalism was seen as an important tool to unify the kingdom against British Colonization. Since the monarchal time, Religion (Buddhism) was employed as a significant element to see other faiths that provoked the rise of Buddhist Nationalism in Burma during Colonial Period (Smith, 1965). History testifies that Buddhism in Myanmar has been imbued with being Burmese, the majority population of the country. In 1960, U Nu won a landslide election after a strong campaign of legitimizing Buddhism the state religion (Yutthaworakool, 2017). MaBaTha views on nationalism as a weapon against the foes; nation-building and development are less important than upholding patriotism or national spirit. MaBaTha sees the nation is under the threat of what they term as “those who hold wrong beliefs,” while the country is under the control of “Buddhist-Burman Government”. MaBaTha finds other faith followers as “wrong believers” against the Burman nation and Buddhism (Than, 2015). Since the colonial period the Buddhist Nationalist cultivated the close link between Buddhism and (Burma) ethnic identity. They always claim that Burma as a Buddhist country and proposed legislation that would promote Buddhism (Foxeus, 2019).

MaBaTha leads the Movement: In order to counterattack Muslims representation phrase, the number 786, “In the Name of Allah, the compassionate and Merciful”, which are mostly indicated, they are Muslim-owned (Zhang, 2015), the MaBaTha merely starts the movement by artefacts, such as stickers and flags with the 969 logos on it. The sticker and emblems show the Buddhist flag, the number 969 in Burmese Alphabet, and King Asoka’s pillar, the latter being one of the older symbols

of Buddhist political power. The emblems are distributed and glued on the display of shops and taxis throughout the country. In order to create the Muslim as a threat of the country, MaBaTha claims that they successfully depict the unity of Buddhists Burmese people (Frydenlund, 2018). On the other hands, the establishment and introduction of technologies [especially Facebook and the Internet] underpin the radical monks to spread their hate and mobilize the people easily via DVDs and YouTube with sermons of nationalist monks (Frydenlund, 2018). Rather than being a bridge to religious harmony and peace, Religion [Buddhism] in Myanmar is employed to sponsor xenophobia, conflicts, hatred and violence by spreading false information through social media (Yusuf, 2018).

MaBaTha fuels series of Violence: From 2012, after the formation of MaBaTha to 2014, Myanmar suffered violence, Buddhists attacking Muslims (Cheesman, 2017). Although Buddhism is meant to be non-violence, extremist views and violence against Muslim communities, including Buddhists monks have been surprised. Even though prominent monks are claiming that they [MaBaTha] never forces their followers to resort violence, many lives were taken, and many people turned into homeless, stateless in Rakhine State (International Crisis Group, 2013). The MaBaTha leaders, U Wirathu and other supporters calling for citizens to backing the president's proposal and casting the Rohingya as a threat to the Burmese "motherland" (Walton & Hayward, 2014). Hyper-local incidents, such as conflicts over land, animal slaughter, or domestic abuse, additionally brutal rape and murder of a Muslim woman by Muslim men in Rakhine state in 2012 were cited by religious nationalists to justify their position (International Crisis Group, 2017) The violence against the Rohingya is linked to the popular campaigns in 2012 Myanmar's Nationalist Ideology revival (Equality Myanmar, 2016).

Conclusion

The movement can be seen as a mere organization, but the influential role, monastic – society order, and MaBaTha's momentum on the political agenda led the successful implementation of violence against the curtailed group of ethnic and religious minority in the country. This paper discloses three addressed questions of the Buddhist Burmese Religious Nationalism's affiliation to the Rohingya Muslim Human Rights violations in Myanmar. The 969-movement led by Ma Ba Tha – the sever

Buddhist Nationalistic tendency in Myanmar is bringing bad reputation to the national images of Myanmar. First, the discussion of “Monks and their own political agenda can be vividly seen in the name of Race and Religion protection in Myanmar”. The Radical monks, Ma Ba Tha followers and lay peoples incite hate speech by using social media [especially Facebook] pamphlet, stickers and DVDs, it leads the followers to resort the violence in some major cities of Myanmar. Secondly, not all the religious nationalism are toxic but the characteristic and nature of Violent Religious Nationalism by Jorden and Richard (2020) can clearly be seen among the movement, and implementation of MaBaTha. This paper notes that “Buddhist Burmese Religious Nationalism as violent religious nationalism” and it fuels the long-lasting episodes of violence, atrocities and human rights violations against the Rohingya. Thirdly this paper posits the attempts of MaBaTha to legislate the “four packages of Race and religion Protection Laws” have significant impact to not only the Rohingya Muslim community but also to other ethnic religious minority of the country.

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