



*Power structures, class divisions
and entertainment in Rohingya
society*

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Research and Learning Team

Acknowledgement

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Glossary

<i>Ailshiari</i>	Traditional Rohingya song
<i>Aqiqah</i>	Islamic tradition of the sacrifice of an animal on a child's birth
<i>Alemder</i>	Teacher or a religious scholar
<i>Aon Maisha Chas</i>	Crop that grows in a particular month of a year
<i>Apuang</i>	Work under chairman, responsible for documentation
<i>Bhitali</i>	Traditional Rohingya song
<i>Boli Khela</i>	Traditional Rohingya sport
<i>Chohodda</i>	Traditional Rohingya game
<i>Dakoa</i>	Announces news on behalf of chairman
<i>Dang Khela</i>	Traditional Rohingya game
<i>Dome</i>	Diener/Undertaker
<i>Dudu</i>	Traditional Rohingya sport
<i>Fajja</i>	Borrowing land from neighbors for cultivation
<i>Faldoni</i>	Traditional Rohingya game
<i>Firni</i>	A sweet item made with rice and milk
<i>Gila Toktta</i>	Traditional Rohingya game

<i>Guli Khela</i>	Traditional Rohingya game
<i>Gundi</i>	Traditional Rohingya game
<i>Halal</i>	Prescribed food by Islamic law
<i>Haram</i>	Forbidden food by Islamic law
<i>Haijja</i>	Cleaner
<i>Hukumot</i>	Combines all governmental administration under this term- Police station, Army, Nasaka border guard force, Myanmar Intelligence
<i>Imam</i>	Worship leader of a mosque
<i>Jari</i>	Traditional Rohingya song
<i>Kani</i>	1 <i>Kani</i> = 2.5 acres
<i>Koache</i>	Noodles
<i>Kralu</i>	Traditional Rohingya sport
<i>Kralum</i>	Traditional Rohingya sport
<i>Kralung</i>	Traditional Rohingya sport
<i>Kurbani</i>	Sacrifice programme of Eid-al-Adha (second of two Islamic holidays celebrated worldwide each year)
<i>Lohaluhi</i>	Traditional Rohingya game
<i>Maitella</i>	Barber

<i>Malabuchi</i>	Traditional Rohingya game
<i>Methor</i>	Cleaner
<i>Milad Mahfil</i>	A programme where people pray for wellbeing of a person or a departed soul
<i>Mon</i>	1 Mon= 40 kg
<i>Morich Khela</i>	Traditional Rohingya game
<i>Moulovi</i>	Religious scholar
<i>Murrobbi</i>	Senior and respected person of the society
<i>Napit</i>	Barber
<i>Nattokar</i>	Performer of the programme that comprise both dance and drama, where men perform as female
<i>Nattonach</i>	Comprise of both dance and drama where men perform as female
<i>Ola</i>	Traditional Rohingya song
<i>Pagri</i>	Turban
<i>Palki</i>	A covered litter for one passenger, consisting of a large box carried on two horizontal poles by four or six bearers
<i>Panch gola</i>	Traditional Rohingya game
<i>Pani pora</i>	Water blown on after reciting verse from Quran (central religious text of Islam)
<i>Pirshaheb</i>	Sufi master or spiritual guide
<i>Puli-pitha</i>	Rice cake

<i>Qawwali</i>	Traditional Rohingya song
<i>Raingum</i>	Voluntary post who work for chairman
<i>Refet</i>	Traditional Rohingya game
<i>Sajda</i>	Prostration during prayer of the Muslims
<i>Segum</i>	Informer, he informs community's news to chairman
<i>Seingum</i>	Voluntary post who work for chairman
<i>Shemai</i>	Vermicelli
<i>Tabij</i>	Amulet
<i>Tamasha</i>	Comprise of both dance and drama where men perform as female
<i>Tang</i>	Tax
<i>Tarana</i>	Traditional Rohingya song
<i>Uji</i>	Head of the household
<i>Ukatta</i>	Chairman

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Executive summary

In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, large numbers of Rohingya people are living in makeshift settlements and camps. Some Rohingya people have lived in these settlements for years since they fled to Bangladesh, but a large number of people also arrived since late August 2017. BBC Media Action is working alongside many other organisations to address Rohingya people's needs. Little is known about many aspects of this community's culture, which would help to make more effective and relevant communication products and programming. In order to learn more about the Rohingya community's culture and traditions, a formative study was carried out in May 2018.

This qualitative study was conducted at four different locations: Kutupalong, Uchiprang, Shamlapur and Leda. Sixteen small focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, with five participants included in each. FGD groups included people who had arrived both before and since August 2017. Both men and women, ranging in age from 18-40+ were included in the study.

To understand the social and cultural aspects of Rohingya society for relevant and engaging media outputs, this study focuses on people's lives while they were in Myanmar to capture their true characteristics.

Key Findings

- Participants felt aspects of their life had changed over time. They consistently referred to two significant events, whereafter their life in Myanmar became more difficult, due to increasing restrictions being placed upon them and increasing insecurity.
 - 1992: Myanmar Government establish *Nasaka* – an interagency force comprised of 1200+ immigration, police & intelligence officials, mainly active in Rakhine state, charged with securing the border and enforcing policies¹.
 - 2012: Riots and communal clashes between Rakhine Buddhists (also called 'Mogs') and Rohingya Muslims. Many died or were displaced².
- The findings of this study draw the life of Rohingya people back in Myanmar. Most of the Rohingya people lived with their extended family. For many people this was due to strict government regulations on building house extensions, or a new house.
- They attended school as well as religion-based education like *Maktab*³ and *Madrassa*⁴, though girls were not able to study in *Madrassa*. Overall, strict regulation limited their access to education. All Rohingya people were only able to study up to class ten in recent years due to regulations and challenges.

¹ <http://blog.crisisgroup.org/asia/2013/07/16/myanmars-nasaka-disbanding-an-abusive-agency/>

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-18395788>

³ refers to elementary schools in Arabic. Though it was primarily used for teaching children in reading, writing, grammar and Islamic studies such as Quranic (Quran is the central religious text of Islam) recitation.

⁴ Religious school or college for the study of the Islamic religion.

- Men were the ultimate decision maker in the family and in the society. Though women had limited rights to give their opinion, the ultimate power holder in the family was a man. Moreover, women were not part of any of the four levels of power structure found in Rohingya society: the family; the *Murrobbi* or senior and respected person of the society; the local government and *Hukumot* (a term that combines all governmental administration including police, army, Nasaka border guard force and Myanmar intelligence).
- In the agricultural-based society of Rohingya people, they could own land for cultivation as well as household land, but they had to pay higher tax and were under strict regulations. Some men also owned small shops, also by paying higher tax. They ran some bigger shops in the local market with the partnership of Rakhine Buddhists, also referred as 'Mog' people. Men undertook most economic activity, while women's activity was limited to cultivation and raising poultry within the household boundary.
- In a family, property was distributed according to Islamic Sharia law⁵. However, women's ability to receive property was challenging as brothers often opposed it. Moreover, a woman's property was also taken care of by male members of the society.
- The majority of people followed Islam as their religion, though a few Hindu people also lived in some villages. People arranged events/ceremonies during birth, marriage and death, in which religious activities were included.
- Class divisions existed in the society. Class was divided based on occupation, wealth and religion. Educated people were respected, while people with certain occupations (including cleaners, barbers and undertakers) were perceived as lower class. Community people prioritised those people who had money. Class divisions were also present between Muslims based on following different Islamic Sharia law and between different religions.
- Games, sports and music played an important part in Rohingya people's life. Boys and men used to play games and sports and enjoy festivals. Girls could play games and enjoy festivals before reaching puberty, but after puberty they used to play indoor games and do indoor activities. Music was an important part of life for both males and females.
- Rohingya people preferred face-to-face communication from trusted people in order to get information.

⁵ Sharia, Sharia law, or Islamic law is the religious law forming part of the Islamic tradition. It is derived from the religious precepts of Islam.

Section I: Research methodology

Programme of research

BBC Media Action conducted a qualitative study to understand different social and cultural aspects of the Rohingya community's life, to provide insight for effective interventions at present and in the future. The objective of the qualitative study was to explore social and cultural aspects of the Rohingya community in Bangladesh. As such, the research questions for this study were:

Research questions		Sub questions
1	What is the pattern of family and power structure of the Rohingya community?	What is the family structure of Rohingya people? What is the power structure of the Rohingya community? Who is the decision maker in the family and in the community? Who were the influential persons in Rohingya community? Who are influential now? How do these networks work? What is the ownership pattern of property?
2	Are there any class divisions in the Rohingya community?	What made people upper / lower class in their society before? How does their social position in Myanmar now affect their experiences in camp?
3	What are the characteristics of religious orientation, custom and law of the Rohingya community?	What is the religious orientation of the Rohingya people? Are there any obligations in marriage? For example: endogamy or exogamy. What infractions or violations are punishable in the society? Which agency is designated by society and empowered to act on its behalf?
4	What are the entertainment modes and festivals of Rohingya people?	What entertainment did Rohingya people used to have in Myanmar? What did they prefer? What entertainment do people have access to now? What do they prefer now? What kinds of fairs, cultural / religious festivals did people organise previously? What myths and tales do Rohingya people pass down from parents to children?
5	What are the sources of information for the Rohingya people?	What were the sources of information used by the Rohingya people in Myanmar? Which source was trusted most by them? What are the sources of information used by the Rohingya people in Bangladesh? Which source is trusted most by them?

Research methodology

To understand the culture of the Rohingya community, a qualitative study was conducted. To gather different views and to assess social norms, small focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted at Kutupalong, Uchiprang, Shamlapur and Leda. Four different study locations were selected to collect diversified data. Different arrival times, genders and age groups helped to understand culture from different dimensions.

Profile of the FGD participants

- Rohingya people
- Arrived in Bangladesh before August 2017 and arrived since August 2017
- Included both male and female
- Age-range of participants who arrived in Bangladesh before August 2017 was 25+ and age-range of participants who arrived in Bangladesh after August 2017 was 18-24 years and 40+ years

Sixteen small FGDs were conducted by selecting Rohingya people. Participants included both those who had arrived in Bangladesh before August 2017 and people who had arrived since August 2017. Out of 16 FGD groups, four groups were conducted with Rohingya people who arrived before August 2017, with the rest of the groups involving participants who had arrived in Bangladesh after August 2017. Each FGD included five participants and separate groups were conducted with men and women. Participants who had arrived in Bangladesh before 2017 were aged 25+. Participants who had arrived in Bangladesh after August 2017 were divided into two groups: ages 18-24 and age 40+.

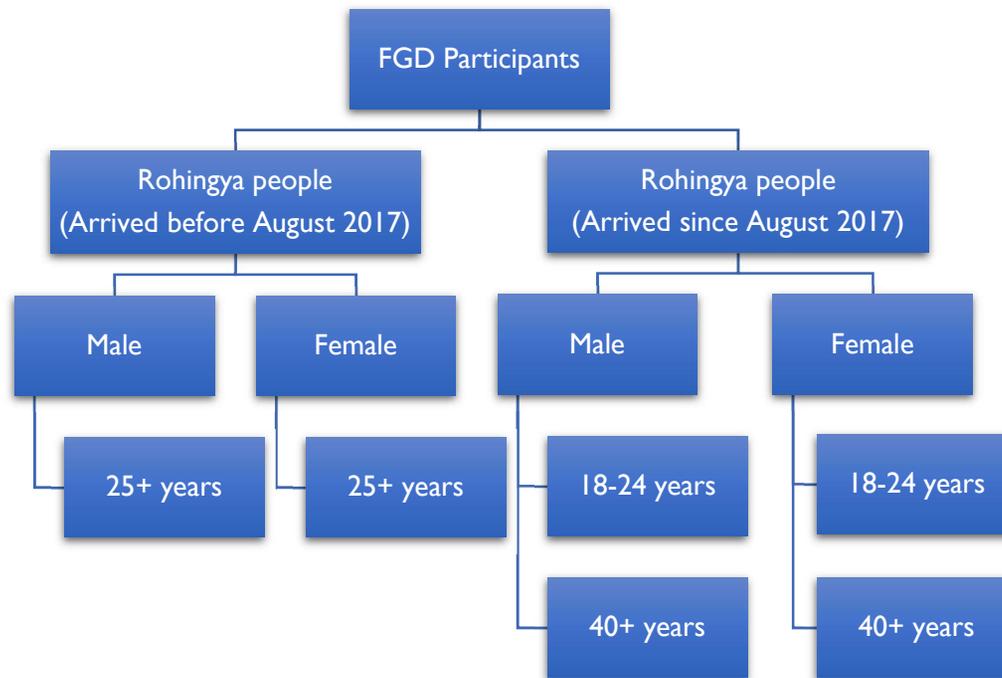


Figure 1: Sampling strategy for FGD of Rohingya people arrived before and since August 2017

Data collection method

A qualitative research approach was applied for this research. For primary data collection, focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted. To formulate problems and to have a better understanding, help was taken from secondary literature.

Focus group discussions:

Focus group discussions were conducted with Rohingya people using open-ended questions with the help of an interpreter. The FGDs were conducted face-to-face and with recorded consent. The duration of each FGD was approximately 90 minutes. These FGDs were conducted in the Rohingya camps. Data obtained from the FGDs helped us to understand the Rohingya community.

Literature Review:

The BBC Media Action research team has already carried out several prior studies about the Rohingya community. Findings from those studies, along with other academic reports, were used as sources for formulating research questions and to have an understanding about the community.

Strengths and limitations of the study

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Since August 2017, a large number of Rohingya people have arrived in Bangladesh. Different actions have been taken to minimise the challenges they are facing. However, knowing about the culture of the community is necessary in taking effective action. This qualitative study helps us to understand the different cultural aspects of the Rohingya community. Also, this study allows us to understand gender and age dynamics among this community.▪ Understanding from this study provides insights on designing effective interventions. Therefore, Rohingya people will be able to relate the interventions with their lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Rohingya people who were part of the study are not in a natural setting, they are far from their land living in a tough situation. Therefore, their responses were not spontaneous.▪ This study used purposeful sampling. People of all other camps and different ages were not part of it. Therefore, some views, perspectives or experiences may not be represented in the findings.▪ The researchers were not familiar with the language of the Rohingya community, so interpreters were used for the discussions. It was therefore more difficult to enter into more detailed discussions with the community while using interpreters, because probing was difficult.

Methodological challenges

- The fieldwork time of the study was limited. For that reason, some aspects of the community's culture were not covered in this study in the limited time.
- Data collection was limited only to FGDs. Some other methodologies to study culture – like observational techniques – were not used in the study because of the time limitation or other logistical challenges.
- The Rohingya community's culture is not well documented in their sources. Lack of familiarity about this community and limited time to become familiar with their culture made it hard for the researchers to probe in depth.

Section 2: Research findings

While recalling various social and cultural aspects back in Myanmar, participants stated how different aspects of their lives have changed over time. They mentioned about the formation and activity of the Nasaka border security force and, later, the renewed conflict in 2012; and noted how their life had become more restricted at these times. Older people mainly mentioned about the time of formation and activity of *Nasaka*, describing it as a major crisis moment in their life. However, young people mentioned about 2012, as this is a time when they recalled their life becoming harder.

The *Nasaka* was an inter-agency force established in 1992, comprising around 1200 immigration, police, intelligence and customs officials. It was mainly active in Rakhine state. In this area, it was the most prominent state authority and was charged not only with securing the border, but also with enforcing various policies. The force faced many allegations of serious human rights abuses, imposition of forced labor and extortion.⁶ Participants described how the formation of the *Nasaka* and its activity caused great difficulties for many Rohingya people.

In 2012, riots and communal clashes between Rakhine Buddhists and Muslims started, deteriorating the situation for Rohingya people in Rakhine state. Many Rohingya people died or were displaced during that time.

Participants mentioned how they used to live their life in Myanmar. They gave an idea about their locality, family pattern, education system, class divisions, power structures, ownership patterns, religious orientation, ceremonies, entertainment and source of information back in Myanmar and how these aspects have changed over time. The changes in these aspects can be understood while exploring the findings.

Below is a map of a typical Rohingya village, created by combining the descriptions of five different villages given by study participants. From the map it can be understood how the villages of Rohingya people were formed and what the major institutions were.

⁶ <http://blog.crisisgroup.org/asia/2013/07/16/myanmars-nasaka-disbanding-an-abusive-agency/>

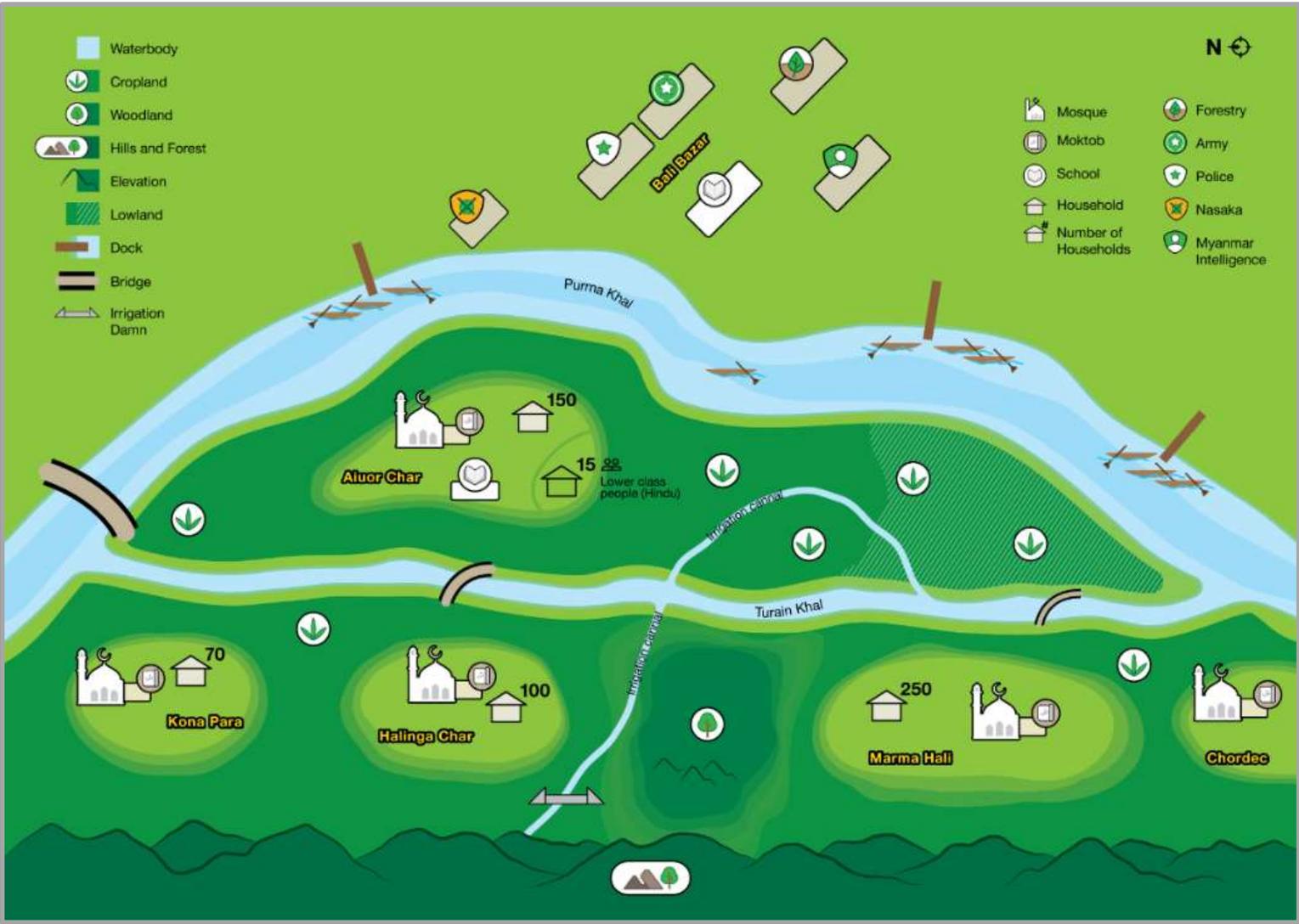


Figure 2: A map combining five villages described by participants

Family pattern

Most people lived in a multi-generational family group in Myanmar.

In Myanmar, most Rohingya people used to live in a large family, with parents, grandparents, siblings and grandchildren all living together. A few nuclear families (including just parents and children) also existed.

Most of the time, people lived in the same house as their wider family members and built partitions to provide some separate space for different generations, sometimes with separate arrangements for their cooking. However, some people lived in a smaller, nuclear family after their marriage. Usually, after getting married, a man continued to live with his parents, with his wife moving in to live with her in-laws. But if tension built up in the family because of conflict or a bad relationship between family members, the man typically separated from the household and built his own house within the same plot of land. It was also normal that, when the size of the family become larger, parents requested their grown-up children to build a separate house or room, which involved taking permission from the government or *Hukumot* by giving money.

Before the 1990s, a man could marry more than once, but this practice was banned after the 1990s. Marrying more than one was punishable by the government through imprisonment and a fine. Some male participants in the study described how they found this rule oppressive. Despite the ban, before 2012, study participants described how men were still able to marry more than once. A widower could marry again three years after his wife's death, after getting permission from the *Nasaka*. An affluent man could take another wife by giving bribes to the *Nasaka*.

After 2012, it become more difficult for girls and boys to get married and study participants described how, in order to get permission for marriage, they had to give large amounts of money (up to two million Myanmar kyat – around USD 1,300) to the government.

"Those who had a lot of money could marry twice by giving money to Nasaka." - Female, 21, Uchprang

Education system

Rohingya people attended school as well as religion-based educational institutions like Maktab and Madrasa.

In the Rohingya community, all the children were enrolled in the local Maktab at an early age (3-5 years old), where they were taught about the basics of Islam. Girls stopped going to the Maktab when they reached puberty, although most of them continued their study at home

After completing Maktab, boys could go to a Madrasa. In the Madrasa, boys had to study for twelve years to get a certificate and turban (*Pagri*), which was a symbol of achieving the highest level there.

Some boys also went to Burmese school, which were run by Mogs (the Rohingya community's term for Rakhine Buddhists). They were able to study up to matriculation, intermediate or even bachelor level. Most of the girls learned to read up to class 4 in the schools run by Mogs in their villages. After that, they needed to move to Maungdaw district to attend higher level classes. Sometimes they were sent to those schools for higher education, but because of security issues their parents didn't always feel confident to send them there, because the schools were situated far from their villages.

The situation started to change from the 1990s. Study participants described how the Burmese government became more oppressive against Rohingya students. Participants mentioned that it became harder for Rohingya people to pass exams, but Mogs and other Burmese students could easily pass, because of the teacher's partiality.

"If they (Mog students) failed, the teachers gave them extra marks to let them pass the exam. But we couldn't get a good result even after giving a good exam." - Male, 23, Kutupalong

According to study participants, after 2012, they couldn't study beyond class 10 because of regulations and challenges. Getting permission from the chairman and *Hukumot* was hard. The location of the schools for studying at higher level was far from their villages. Moreover, perceived bias of the Mog teachers in the schools made it hard for Rohingya children to continue study beyond class 10. Besides all these obstacles, very few families could afford to educate their children as a large amount of money was required. This situation was even worse for girls: after the recent conflict between Mogs and Rohingya people, the number of enrollments of girls in primary education decreased due to security reasons.

Power structures

Men were the ultimate decision maker in the family.

In a Rohingya family, the head of the household (*Uji*) always took key decisions. Usually, an older man was the head of the household, although a woman could also be the head of the family and could take any kind of decision if her father-in-law, husband or any other male adult was absent from the family. Widows who had children usually stayed in their in-laws' house but, if someone was childless, they usually went back to their parent's house and stayed there under the care of her father or other male adult family members.

"Usually, the father is the ultimate decision maker in the family. In the absence of the father, the elder brother plays that role. If there isn't any elder brother, then the mother or elder sister gives the decision." - Male, 25+, Kutupalong

According to men, when they were in Myanmar, they took decisions after consulting with all the family members. However, according to female participants, the final decision was always given by older people such as the father-in-law or husband. Moreover, in the absence of a husband or father-in-law, the elder son of the family took decisions. Women described how they were dominated by their husbands or other men in their family or community.

In Rohingya society, some ideologies existed which made woman inferior to men. Women believed that a husband had the right to beat his wife if she did something wrong, suggesting the existence of domestic violence in the society.

"The wife's paradise is under the feet of her husband and husbands will beat us if we do not listen to them." - Female, 40, Uchiprang

In the Rohingya community, men were the only livelihood earner in the family. Women were not permitted to go outside to earn money. They raised poultry and planted vegetables within the house boundary or *ghera* and had freedom to sell those products. But, to sell their produce, they took help from younger boys, who were able to go to the local market. Women usually saved any money they earned and bought clothes

and cosmetics with the savings, for which they did not require any permission from the *Uji* or their husband. Unmarried girls were allowed to work in the fields before reaching puberty, as were elder women.

"A married woman can cultivate vegetables within the ghera. She is not allowed to go to the field or the bazar. During cultivation within the ghera, if any male outsider comes to visit the house, she rushes inside" - Female, 40, Uchiprang

In the community, power structures were formed combining four different levels where *Hukumot* (police, army, Nasaka border guard force, Myanmar intelligence) was the highest power holder.

Rohingya society maintained different steps to solve problems or make important decisions. This power structure of the Rohingya community was described by study participants to be the same across different locations and for those who arrived in Bangladesh at different times.

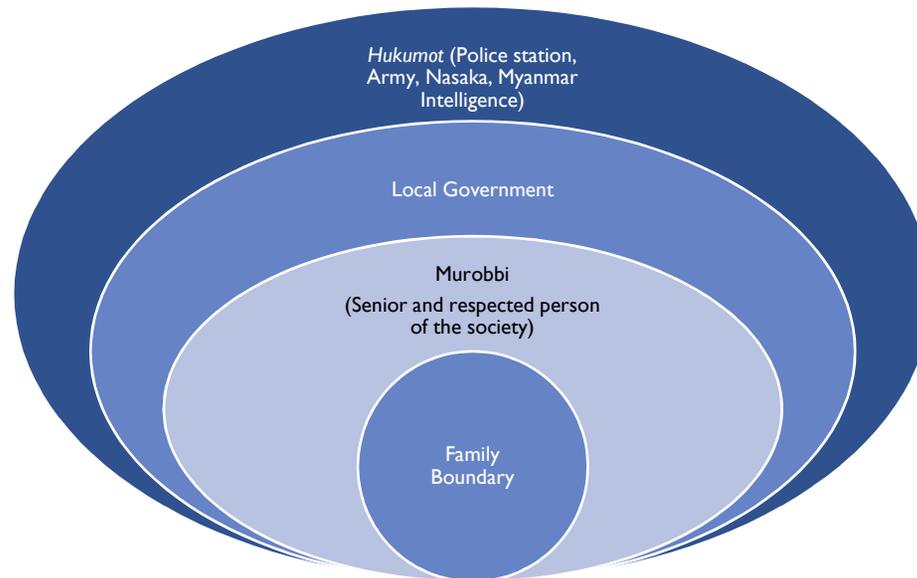


Figure 3: Different levels of power structure

Family boundary

When Rohingya people wanted to take any decision or to solve any problem, they tried to do so first within their family by consulting with the family members. This could be a dispute between husband and wife or a dispute between siblings about property distribution. The *Uji* (head of the household) tried to take the final decision. If there was any incident of theft or robbery, they tried to resolve it by going to the house of the accused person and discussing the issue with them.

Murobbi (senior and respected person of the society)

If the problem was not solved or any decision couldn't be taken within the family boundary, people went to a *Murobbi*. This could be the *Imam*⁷ of the mosque, a teacher or any educated person. They tried to give a solution to the problem in front of the people of the society.

Local government

If a *Murobbi* couldn't solve any problem, people moved to the next step, local government. The head of the local government was the chairman who was known as the *Ukatta*. The local government worked under the *Hukumot*, or government.

A chairman could be selected or could be elected, and he could be a Rohingya or a Mog. The process for selecting the chairman involved all the community people gathering in one place, with those who wanted to be chairman standing in front of the group. The people gave them support by raising their hands, and the candidate with most support was elected to the post. According to the study participants, most of the time the people who were successful in becoming the chairman were those who were able to give bribes to the *Hukumot* or government.

The chairman solved various problems like land purchases or disputes about various issues, but study participants described how they often had to pay him lots of money. He also had the power to give permission for marriages, building houses, giving *Tokenshah* or travel to another village. The chairman worked with the help of members and the *Apuang* (who was responsible for documentation). Two voluntary workers, the *Seingum* and the *Raingum*, also did various work within the local government system. The *Seingum* had 10 households and the *Raingum* had 100 households under them. When any kind of local development like a road or bridge construction was necessary, the chairman told these officers to arrange labour from the society. They also got orders from the army to collect workers for construction.

The chairman also selected two people named *Dakoa* and *Segum*. They were not part of the local government, but they worked for the chairman. The *Dakoa* announced news on behalf of the chairman and the *Segum* worked as an informer. He tried to inform the chairman and other members of the local government about everything that was going on in the Rohingya community.

Hukumot (Police, army, Nasaka border guard force, Myanmar intelligence)

The *Hukumot* was the highest power in the Rohingya community. The police, army, *Nasaka* border guard force and Myanmar intelligence were the main parts of the *Hukumot*. When there were problems that local government couldn't solve, people went to the *Hukumot*. Study participants described how they had to obey the decision of the *Hukumot*, or else risk punishment by imprisonment or large fines.

Although the local government gave permission for marriage and building houses, the *Hukumot* or *Nasaka* border guard force had the authority to give final permission. The tax system and property registration were also sectors where the *Hukumot* was directly involved. Money was an important factor for getting favours from the *Hukumot*. Study participants described how the *Hukumot's* support could be bought with bribes. Except in extreme incidents like murder, people didn't want to go to the police station most of the time because of the chance of being harassed.

⁷ Worship leader of a mosque.

Property ownership pattern and distribution

People could own property, but had to pay high taxes and were under strict regulations.

Rohingya people in the study mentioned about the changes they had seen over time while talking about the ownership pattern of the land. Since 1992, they had to pay extra taxes and from 2012 the restrictions became stricter.

Most of the Rohingya people owned the land which they lived on and cultivated. But they described how they had to pay taxes (known as 'Tang') at a high rate to the Myanmar government. They had to record their land with the *Hukumot*. In the record, the name of the owner was written alongside the head⁸ of the *Hukumot*. People were able to sell their land, although it required a permit from the *Hukumot*.

"If we wanted to sell our land then we needed to go to the Hukumot and ask for permission. If they allowed, then we could sell our land. Both seller and buyer had to pay the Hukumot." - Male, 18-24, Uchiprang

Most of the Rohingya people were farmers. They cultivated various crops and vegetables. Rice paddy was the main crop, which was cultivated once each year, during the monsoon. Rohingya people referred to this crop as 'Aon Maisha Chas', which means something that grows in a particular month of a year. In other months, people grew potatoes, betel leaf, pepper, jute, corn or garlic which they referred as *Kheti*.

Study participants said that they had to pay high taxes to the government, whatever was grown on the land, as a portion of their cultivated crop. The tax rate might have varied from region to region. One male group mentioned that they had to pay 140kg of rice for cultivating 2.5 acres⁹ of land. Another male group said that they had to pay 168 kgs of rice for the same amount of land. Beside paying tax for cultivating different crops, participants described that the government used to snatch rice on a regular basis, requiring 14kg for 1 *Kani*¹⁰ of cultivated land.

Sometimes, Rohingya people borrowed land from their neighbours (*Fajja*) with a written document. Male members of the family or any *Alemder*¹¹ would attach that written document as a witness. The land owner required a certain percentage of the crop from their cultivated land, and this arrangement was mentioned in the document.

"Land owners required 1 mon¹² out of the total rice that is cultivated in 1 kani field" - Female, 25, Uchiprang

Besides farming, there were some Rohingya men who owned small shops like tea-stalls, betel leaf stores or grocery stores. Rohingya people were not allowed to do big business. In some big markets there were some big shops which were run by Rohingya people in partnership with Mogs. Study participants described how doing business also involved paying taxes to the *Hukumot*. From 2012 onwards, due to increased restrictions and larger taxes, people said it was difficult for them to be involved in any businesses at all.

⁸ Chief of the local police station or chief of the *Nasaka* border guard force office.

⁹ 43,560 square feet.

¹⁰ 2.5 acres.

¹¹ Teacher and *Moulvi* or a religious scholar

¹² 40 kg.

In the family, property was distributed according to Islamic sharia law.

Like men, women also could be the owner of property. Participants mentioned that in the Rohingya community, the property was distributed between successors according to the Islamic sharia law, where women got one-third and men got two-thirds of their father's property. Women got a share of all property, including land, gold, cattle and trees, from their parents. In most of the cases, husbands or their sons took care of and used the women's property. However, female participants mentioned that it was only possible when there was a written document prepared by the parents before their death. If the parents died before distribution, sometimes brothers did not want to give their sisters the property they were due. They sat with their relatives and the elder people of the society (*Murubbi*) to solve this matter. If the brothers gave a bribe to the *Murubbi*, he would support the brothers. Sometimes, sisters needed to fight with their brothers to get their part of the property.

Sometimes, if any unmarried man or woman looked after his or her parents, the other siblings didn't claim their share of the parent's property. Instead, they gave him or her the property as their marriage expense.

Religious orientation and ceremonies

Islam was the religion for the majority of people, although a few Hindu people also used to live in the villages.

In the Rohingya community, Islam was the religion followed by the majority of people. A few Hindu people also lived in the villages. Most of the Rohingya community were Sunni (*Hanafi*¹³) while a few of them followed Wahhabism¹⁴ and a very few people followed Sufism¹⁵. Female participants mentioned about a group of people called *Darahoj*, who practiced prostration (*Sajda*) once during prayer and did not get married. They used to disseminate Islamic information from door to door.

In the Rohingya community, *Imams* and *Moulovis* were the leaders of religious activities. These people must have studied in the Maktab and the Madrasa. *Pirshahebs*¹⁶ were also present in the Rohingya community and held great power in the society. Rohingya people described how they would frequently go to these religious leaders for: not only for religious solutions, but also at times of sickness to get holy water (*Pani pora*) or amulets (*Tabij*), believing that these would help them to get cured.

People arranged events and ceremonies during birth, marriage and death in which religious activities were blended in.

Rohingya people celebrated a range of events and performed different ceremonies during birth and marriage. They also arranged events to mark a death. On all the occasions, religious activities were blended in. However, after the *Nasaka* came, people had to get permission to perform any of these ceremonies. More restrictions were seen after 2012.

¹³ The Hanafi school is one of the four religious Sunni Islamic schools of jurisprudence.

¹⁴ Wahhabism is an Islamic doctrine and religious movement.

¹⁵ Sufism is a mystical form of Islam, a school of practice that emphasizes the inward search for God and shuns materialism.

¹⁶ Sufi master or spiritual guide.

Birth

After the birth of a child, the Rohingya community organised a ceremony called *Aqiqah*¹⁷. On this occasion they sacrificed a cow for the newborn child. Before 2012, they used to arrange this programme separately but, after 2012, participants described how they had started to merge this programme with the annual sacrifice (*Kurbani*) programme of Eid-al-Adha¹⁸. To celebrate this, they had to get permission from their chairman (*Ukatta*) and the local government (*Hukumot*). They divided the meat into seven parts. If the child was a girl, then one part was kept for her and if the child was a boy then two parts were kept for him. The parts were kept for their own consumption. They gave one part to the poor and other parts to the neighbours. Participants described how, sometimes, the chairman (*Ukatta*) or member took a large amount of the meat forcefully.

Marriage

During marriage, people from the Rohingya community organised various events. Study participants described how, before the *Nasaka*, a big programme was arranged during marriage, which continued for 7 days.

Before the marriage, the groom's family went to the bride's house and fixed the marriage by giving a nose pin to the bride. This was called *Chaot*. Then, both families arranged a program called a *Mela*, where people were invited to eat, with the bride's family preparing food like *Koache* (noodles), sweets, biscuits, cake and tea to entertain their new guest. Then, male members of both families would sit together in a mosque to fix the date of the marriage.

In the houses of the bride and groom, the families arranged a program called *Holud*, where relatives and neighbours put turmeric on the faces of the bride and groom. Another programme called *Mehendi* involved female relatives and neighbours applying henna to the bride's hands. At these occasions, the bride's friends used to sing *Ola* songs, sometimes using a radio set to play music and dance in the bride's room.

On the wedding day, the bride wore clothes and jewelry sent by her in-laws, with the in-laws typically providing a minimum of two dresses. The bride was prepared by her sisters-in-law and female neighbours. Some families arranged a programme (*Milad Mahfil*) where people used to pray for the well-being of the newlyweds. Musical programs were also arranged, mostly by the groom's family because the bride's family often wanted to concentrate on the smooth running of the wedding ceremony itself. The groom's family also arranged *Tamasha* or *Nattonach*, where men dressed as women and danced in a yard covered by tarpaulin. When they danced in the yard, only males could watch them, as women were not allowed to come in front of men. They also danced when the bride's palanquin¹⁹ (*palki*) started for her in-laws' house. These people or *Nattokars* took approximately 50,000 Myanmar kyat for their performance. The bride's family arranged beef and rice to feed their guests during the wedding. Those who were rich also arranged dessert items like vermicelli (*Shemai*) and fruits.

¹⁷ Aqiqah is the Islamic tradition of the sacrifice of an animal on a child's birth.

¹⁸ Eid al-Adha 'Feast of the Sacrifice', also called the 'Festival of Sacrifice', is the second of two Islamic holidays celebrated worldwide each year. The other one is called Eid al-Fitr.

¹⁹ A covered litter for one passenger, consisting of a large box carried on two horizontal poles by four or six bearers.

Seven days after the wedding, the bride would typically come back to visit her family with her husband – this was known as *Firana*. The bride's family would arrange some snacks such as *Firni* (a sweet item made with rice and milk), rice cake (*Puli-pitha*), vermicelli (*Shemai*) and juice to entertain the new bride and groom.

In the Rohingya community, dowry plays an important part. Study participants described how the groom would typically demand many things like gold, money, furniture (a bed, wardrobe or others) or a bike from the bride's family. These items would have to be given to him before the marriage.

Many changes can be seen in how marriage has been celebrated in the Rohingya community over time, including the need to take permission for the marriage from the chairman and the local government (*Hukumot*). Participants in the study said that, after 2012 they were not able to arrange large programmes any more, and were given only two hours for completing the whole marriage programme. People described how, due to these restrictions, they would arrange a simple marriage ceremony and, sometimes, a small programme (*Mela*) in their house for relatives. Participants described how the chairman and the member would often attend these programmes and would take money from the families.

Death

In the Rohingya community, any death would be marked by a *Fatiha* program and a *Milad Mahfil*, where people got together and prayed for the departed soul. To arrange these programmes, people needed to take permission from the chairman.

Class divisions and relationships between different groups

In Myanmar, different class divisions could be seen in the Rohingya community based on occupation, religion and wealth.

Educated people were seen respectfully in the society. But cleaners, barbers and undertakers were perceived as low class.

In the Rohingya community, educated people such as teachers and *Moulovi* – who were known as *Alemdar* – were respected by the community. However, people from some certain occupations such as cleaners (*Methor/Hajija*), barbers (*Napit/Maitella*) and undertakers (*Dome/Diener*) were not seen as equals. In the villages, some people from these occupations lived very close together in the corner of the village. According to the study participants, these people were lower class and there was limited communication between them and other Rohingya people. Different classes would occasionally visit each other's houses and celebrate different occasions together like Eid, marriage or *Aqiqah*. However, marriage was not allowed between the different classes.

“We never marry off our daughters to a barber even if he has money. Though he has money, he has no position in the society” - Female, 38, Shamlapur

People who had money were respected by the community.

Rohingya people gave priority to those who had a lot of money. Wealthy people were held in greater respect in the society than other people. In the community, mixing between people from different economic background was also common.

There were class divisions among Muslims based on different forms of Islam.

Sunni people led the society and, according to study participants, there was no connection between different religious groups. It was very uncommon for people from different religious groups to visit each other's house. Study participants said that Sunnis felt they belonged to a higher position than other religious groups; and believed that only they (Sunnis) followed the Islamic rules correctly. Female participants also mentioned that Wahabi people used to eat all kinds of foods without maintaining *Haram*²⁰ and *Halal*²¹ whereas Sunni people would only eat *Halal* food.

Rohingya people's relationship with Mogs and Hindus deteriorated over time and limited connections with Hindus could be seen in recent times.

Some Mog and Hindu people also used to live close to Rohingya people's houses. Most of the study participants said that, before the *Nasaka*, they used to visit each other's houses during different occasions and that Mogs used to prepare *Halal* food separately for Muslims during different occasions. But this situation of harmony changed after the *Nasaka* arrived.

"Before 1989, we celebrated different occasions together like Eid or other religious festivals of Mogs. They made different food for us." - Male, 60, Leda

The relationship between Rohingya people and the Mog community deteriorated over time due to a series of ethnic clashes. It was evident from the study participants that Muslims disliked Mogs as well as Hindus. They said that they disliked Hindus because, if Muslims arranged any kind of programme, the Hindus would secretly inform the Mogs about it.

"Hindu people don't like us. They work as spies against Muslims and report to the Mogs. Hindu people are mostly engaged in business. Therefore, our men still have to talk with Hindus, especially in the bazar." - Female, 40, Shamlapur

Entertainment and festivals

Study participants described how, in Myanmar, Rohingya people didn't have many options for entertainment because of the restrictions under which they lived. People mentioned about the entertainment they used to have earlier, when there were fewer restrictions. Older people mentioned more modes of entertainment than younger participants in the study.

Boys and men used to play games, sports and enjoy festivals. Girls could play games and enjoy festivals before reaching puberty, but after puberty they used to only play indoor games and do indoor activities.

Games

Young boys used to play tip-cat (*Dang Khela*) – a game in which a short piece of wood, tapered at both ends, is struck lightly at one end with a bat, causing the wood to spring into the air so that it can be batted for a distance. They also used to play marbles (*Guli Khela*) and to fly kites or *Gundi*.

²⁰ Forbidden food by Islamic law.

²¹ Prescribed food by Islamic law.

In the Rohingya community, girls were not allowed to go outside after reaching puberty. Girls who went out of the house were perceived badly.

"A girl can play outdoor games until she is 10 or 12 years old. If anyone older than this plays, people will say that she has bad character. After 12 years, a girl need to concentrate on prayers rather than playing" - Female, 37, Shamlapur

At a young age, before reaching puberty, girls used to play *Lohaluhi* (hide-and-peek), *Faldoni* (rope jumping), *Chohodda/Malabuchi* (a pretend cooking game played with small pots, plates and coconut shells) and *Refet* (played with marbles). *Panch gola* was one of the favourite games, played with five small stones. Married and unmarried girls used to play a game together named *Gila Toktta* which was similar to tip-cat. Another game named *Morich Khela* was played by both Rohingya boys and girls children: it was played by continuously hitting the water with a stick made from coconut leaves.

Sports

Boli Khela (wrestling) was popular among the Rohingya community, although younger study participants mentioned that they hadn't seen this game in their lifetimes but had heard about it from their father or grandfather. Only a few of the elder study participants mentioned that they had seen this game while they were young. They could mention the names of a few popular *Boli* (wrestlers), such as *Momtaz Boli* and *Sonali Boli*.

Rohingya people used to play *Dudu* in moonlight by making a court in an open space. However, from 2012 onwards they described how they weren't allowed to go outside their home after dark to play this type of sport.

"In moonlight we used to play Dudu. In the open field we made courts and played this game. But from 2012 onwards we weren't allowed to go outside after dark and couldn't play this game" – Male, 25, Kutupalong

People also used to play *Kralu/Kralum/Kralung*, which was a sport like beach volleyball, played with a hand-made ball made of rattan. Each side had three players who passed the ball across the net using their feet. Football and rowing also were popular sports played by the young men.

Festivals

Sometimes during a *Boli Khela* (wrestling) event, members of the Rohingya community would arrange a fair or *Mela* where people were invited to eat and take part in *Tamasha*: a dance and drama performance where men acted as women. Other fairs involved kite fighting and rowing. Many people from adjacent villages would come to these events. As Rohingya women were not allowed to go to a public place, they were not able to attend the fairs, except for young girls who hasn't yet reached puberty.

Other mode of entertainment

Female participants in the study recalled some other modes of entertainment and mentioned about hearing stories from their mother in their childhood. The stories were mostly stories about Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w) and his daughter Fatem'a. Women also gathered to chat while

doing household chores like cutting vegetables; and also used to do sewing. A few female participants mentioned about playing games on a mobile phone and particularly mentioned the game called 'snake'.

Both males and females enjoyed music as a mode of entertainment, men also had access to a television to watch movies.

Music

Participants mentioned that they listened to music for entertainment. Male participants used to listen to Bengali, Hindi and Rohingya songs, which they would collect from the local shop on a mobile memory card for their phone. Hindi movie songs were very popular among the younger people and there were some Rohingya singers whose songs were very popular among men and women of the Rohingya community, with *Abu Taiyob*, *Taher* and *Yusuf* being most popular. People listened to these songs through mobile radio and also used to sing by roaming from one place to another. Women could hear the songs through the male members of their families. Female participants also mentioned about a singer named *Hajara*, whose song they had heard on mobile radio.

Older people mentioned some traditional songs like *Qawwali* and *Ailshiari*. In *Qawwali*, two groups of people answer each other in forms of songs. During rice implantation while working in two adjacent fields, people used to compete in an exchange of songs and insults, called *Ailshiari*.

Both younger and older people mentioned the *Tarana* song, another traditional song which is popular among the Rohingya community. They also mentioned about *Jari* and *Bhitali*. According to the participants, these songs reflect their lifestyles and sorrows. Rohingya women also mentioned about *Ola* songs, which were usually sung by Rohingya women during someone's wedding preparation.

The participants also mentioned some names of their traditional instruments, which included sitar, mandolin, shaker, violin, harmonica and cymbals.

Movies

There was no electricity in Rohingya villages, although solar power was used by more affluent families. There was no television sets available in Rohingya households as they were not allowed to buy these, but Rohingya people did have some limited access to television. Male study participants mentioned watching movies as another sources of entertainment and that they liked to watch Hindi and Bengali movies, both on television and on their mobile phones. In the local market, there were shops where movies and songs could be copied onto mobile phones; and many study participants said that they shared movies with others using Bluetooth. Participants said that, in some local markets, the Mog arranged a television and played movies from a video tape and Rohingya people could pay to watch.

Sources of information

People preferred face to face communication from trusted people.

Rohingya people had some trusted sources of information, like *Imam*, *Murobbi* or any educated person. Study participants mentioned that they always trusted an educated man for any kind of information, as they believed that the source was reliable. However, if an educated person was involved in any kind of nefarious activities, like taking drugs or quarreling with others, he was less likely to be trusted by others.

Radio was also a source of information for Rohingya people. Study participants said that they sometimes gathered in the mosque to listen to someone's radio set and later disseminated the information. Some participants also mentioned about mobile phones and television as a source of information, although use of these media platforms was restricted within the Rohingya community.