

## The Struggle for Unity among Arakan Muslims - August 1960

From 1958 the monthly "Guardian Magazine" published many articles about the history and culture of Muslim communities in Arakan. One such article was authored by Mohamed Akram Ali who, [writing in the "Guardian Magazine" for August 1960](#), made the following noteworthy observations in an article on Pages 31-32 which he entitled "Unity Among Ourselves". He wrote:

*"I feel very sorry to mention that there is a lack of unity among the Arakanese Muslims themselves. The main causes of the disruption of unity among them are racial and sectional prejudices. Some of them style themselves as Roewengyas while others call themselves Kamans and Chittagonian descendants etc. and they take pride in being so called. Some of them have a deep-seated sense of localism and therefore take pride in their birth places such as Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Akyab, Mrohaung, Kyauktaw, Kyaukpyu, Sandoway etc. If we go on in this way, I can say with certainty that we will not be able to achieve any good work, nor will we be able to get unity among ourselves. This will indeed hamper the progress of our community in particular and of Arakan in general. I should therefore like to request my people that they should forget the past and make the future bright by sinking their racial differences. Then only, I hope, we can reach our goal without fail."*

At the time (1948-1962), four main designations for Arakanese Muslims were competing for attention:

**Roewengya**, especially favoured by the Muslim scholar U Ba Tha which U Kyaw Min also mentioned as recently as 11 August 2014 ([as an alternative designation to Rohingya](#)) ; **Rwangya** which had been promoted since 1948 by the indigenous 'Yakhain Kala' (and which Khin Maung Yin in '[Salience of Ethnicity](#)' 2005 says is a term by which Rohingyas are also known) ; **Ruhangya** which seems to have been favoured by Chittagonians resident outside Arakan; and **Rohingya** to which I find scattered references in the Guardian Daily for 1960, which appears to have emanated from Maungdaw and was also favoured by the Mujahid.

As we know, it was **Rohingya** which eventually captured the market to become the dominant political force, thus achieving perhaps the unity among Arakan Muslims which Mohamed Akram Ali had advocated over 50 years ago, although the Kamans, I understand, are today not at all happy with this and fear that they too may be engulfed by the Rohingya juggernaut sooner or later.

Another article in [The Guardian \(daily\) of 3 August 1960](#) quoted the Ruhangya Youth League in Rangoon as claiming that Ruhangyas "numbered about 400,000 in Arakan and altogether about 700,000 all over Burma." It is intriguing then that, though there was chaos and controversy in Rakhine State at the time of the 2014 Census, the large number of Rohingyas reportedly living outside Rakhine State completed the Census without controversy or confrontation. We might well ask how they did it.

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