

My activism: struggling for own liberation with solidarity

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I prepared this essay to go into detail regarding my activism. As I share interviews with other Burmese anarchists, I think it would be wonderful to share mine as well. I notice that I have occasionally expressed a few of my activism here and there via some previous articles while sharing my opinions on many facets of intersectional oppression and struggles. Since these previous articles were intended to share my thoughts on intersectionality, I didn't really explained details about the direct-action projects I organised. In contrast, I will not discuss my thoughts in this essay; instead, I will relate my brief activism as it is.

I'm Hein from Burma. I was born into an inter-religious family with a Buddhist mother and a Muslim father. In terms of ethnicity, I have a mixed of Burmese, Kachin, Shan, and Bengali ethnicities. I was born into a middle-class family. However, I became a working-class individual when I was 17-18 as I dropped out of my Dental Medicine Degree.

Activism and Direct Action

Here, I will list my activist projects and direct actions in timeline wise. All my direct-action projects and activism were the products of my unpaid radical organic activism and my experiences as an underprivileged person who faced discrimination based on ethnicity (race) and religion. So, unlike NGO salaries-paid activists and professionally trained academics, I don't receive income from my activism. I consider myself a working-class activist who only earns from the labor of STEM related employment which has almost nothing to do with my activism. I do all the activism without getting paid in my free time out of my own radical conscience.

Around 2012-2015 (Community Knowledge Sharing)

I co-founded a Myanmar hacktivist group in 2013. We conducted hacktivist projects such as promoting for a cause and so on. Given the political climate of the nation (soon after the Rohingya-Arakan riot of 2012), the group demanded me to promote the nationalist agenda which is inherently anti-Rohingya. I had a big dilemma around this time. This time was a turning point for me to get radicalised.

Around 2012, Burma suffered a series of terrible communal riots between Arakan ethnic people (majority Buddhists) and Rohingya ethnic people (majority Muslims). Followed by the series of terrible communal riots between Arakan ethnic people (majority Buddhists) and Rohingya ethnic people (majority Muslims), Buddhist people from different ethnicities across Burma showed their solidarity with the Buddhists Arakanese people, which necessarily alienate the Rohingya ethnic people and its loosely connected broader social group of Burmese Muslims. Being someone who was born into a mixed ethnic and mixed religious family, I was not immune to racial and religious discrimination by the majority Burmese Buddhist people.

Some nationalist Burmese Buddhist religious leaders founded a xenophobic, racist and right-wing grassroot nation-wide movement started the "969 movement". They boycotted the businesses owned by the Muslims and the business services offered by the Muslims. They publicly targeted the inter-faith marriages, showing their hatred against the Muslims. At that time, I was in relationship with my childhood best friend who is a devote Buddhist. Her family also shared the same sentiment given the pressure by the grassroot 969 movement.

Since I was not mature enough as a teenager at that time, my anger against the Buddhist society pushed me to do a lot of counter-productive decisions including the act of searching for a new relationship. I was disgusted, hated and wanted to destroy the 969 racist movement at that time. As a result, I actively participated in interfaith movements, pro-democratic movements and Muslim solidarity campaigns as a young student.

Around 2014 (Student protests as a common student)

Students from Burma protested “Myanmar National Education Law 2014”. Soon after, I managed to let the hacker groups such as “Myanmar Muslim Cyber Force” and “Myanmar Cyber Pirates” connected with other international hackers. They collectively launched the cyber operation against “Myanmar National Education Law 2014”.

I joined the student protests as a common student who shares solidarity with the student leaders. I, along with some of my friends from my Dental University, distributed food, and drinks to the student protestors in Sule and so on.

Around 2015 (Becoming a dissent)

As a result of my anger and immature conscience given the experiences of discriminations, I was attracted to the radical Islamism of Salafism (not as a political ideology but as a religious revivalism). I considered myself as a Salafi Muslim who think beyond the Islamic sects like Sunni, Shia and Ahmadiyya and beyond the madhhab within sects. My dad is an average Sunni Muslim who don't take religion seriously but who still pray and perform minimal religious duties. My grandfather was knowledgeable when it came to religion. He is a Deobandi Sunni Muslim who was knowledgeable of religious reformist movements in Burma such as Ahmadiyya and so on. My grandmother, in contrast, is a devoted follower of Sufi mysticism. Uniquely, I was attracted to the religious studies of Quran and Hadiths (objectively) literally over the subjective interpretations of each madhhab.

As a result of the hacktivist group using my nickname at their campaigns against Rohingya and Bengali by conflating Rohingya as Bengali and concluding Bengali as post-colonial settlers in Burma, I no longer get along with the group I co-founded.

As someone who come from a family where a lot of family members hold government issued IDs with Bengali as an ethnic identity, I couldn't keep my silence when they accused “Rohingya” people as “Bengali” people. As a result, I was kicked out from it for my Muslim/Bengali bloodline from the hacktivist group I co-founded.

Since youth, I witnessed the forceful conversion of my Buddhist mother into Islam by the family members of my father. I was not aware of it as an oppression until I was mature enough. By the time I reached 17–18 years old and financially independent from my father, I rebelled against such forceful conversion. At first, there were some pushbacks from the family members of my father. Since I was a practicing Salafi Muslim who was studying an academic diploma in Islamic studies, I even raised the issue to the lecturers and professors. However, they all informed me that unless my Buddhist mother converted (at any cost), the marriage is not valid since Buddhism is considered idolatry in their standard. That's where I reached out to some inter-faith Buddhist monks and feminist organizations in Burma to the benefit of my mother's condition. They denied

our request at the fear of being accused as racists or islamophobia given the political situations. So, I reached out to 969 monks for help. They indeed responded and put pressure on the family members of my family with “Race and Religion Protection Laws” to accept the end of the forceful conversion of my Buddhist mother.

At that point, I gave the political environment in Burma another look, paying particular attention to my situation of double blackmail. Beyond the popular identity politics of oppressors and victimized, I was able to observe things. An individual of Bengali descent, who suffered a breakup due to their opposition to interfaith marriages and had to seek the help from the 969 monks. Given that I had to join forces with the right-wing nationalists to survive, and those so-called inter-faith movements showed little concern for the oppressions I endured, I was forced to reflect on my own existence.

“I can’t believe what you say, because I see what you do.”, says James Baldwin, in one of his writings. From then on, I always viewed the mainstream left populism and the inter-faith movements with scepticism. The inter-faith movements to me are like hypocritical false conscience of unity where everyone pretend to share love publicly, but each group think they are objectively true in private. I understood one thing that when it comes to the populist left, they don’t stand in solidarity with the oppressed people. They stand by their political agenda that exploits the sufferings of the oppressed people for their cause of achieving political power.

Around 2015 (Civil Disobedience Movement as a common student)

I took part in the nationwide movement of “Black Ribbon Movement” as a student from University of Dental Medicine. It was a movement of medical professions and medical students against the appointment of military officers to positions within the Ministry of Health in Burma.

Around 2015–2017 (Pro-Immigration)

I co-founded an activist group around 2014 along with activists from Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Morocco, UAE, and Palestine. We were united on the question of pro-immigration, pro-Muslim solidarity, and human rights for refugees. Our campaigns were effective enough to get reported by the mainstream media such as The Mirror UK, BBC, and Reuters. Our movements were also featured by political research organisations like MEMRI. However, after the Charlie Hebdo incident, I decided not to take part in the group anymore since we witnessed the growing influence of Islamism within the group.

That’s when I became aware of Rojava where the revolutionary forces that pushed back the ISIS stood ground against political Islam (Islamism) in the middle east. That’s when I became attracted to left-wing politics. Given the language barrier, I got introduced into Maoism as it was easy to find Burmese translated books on Maoism. I couldn’t read much about Rojava given my limitation on English and political knowledge around the time.

Around 2018 (Hacktivism)

I started writing as an independent contributing author on the topics of open-source technologies, and cyberpunk (Techno-libertarianism) movements in “UG Magazine”, published by Union of Underground Myanmar Hackers (UGMH). To be clear, even though I wrote articles for the “UG Magazine”, I am not and was not a member with Union of Underground Myanmar Hackers (UGMH) or any other local hacking groups affiliated with them. I was surprised to learn that the same group (I co-founded) kicked me out for my Bengali/Muslim bloodline joined the Union of Underground Myanmar Hackers (UGMH) later.

Around 2018 (Atheist movement in Burma)

I started to consider myself an atheist. I got to know about the censorships, blasphemy laws and state oppressions of Burma against the progressive Buddhist revivalist movements. I started to collect censored books and VCR tapes.

I became an admin of Facebook groups with tens of thousands of members which are organized by “Burmese Atheists” where atheists and humanists unite under a broad banner. “Burmese Atheists” was founded by Thiha JP who also co-founded “Food not Bombs Yangon” and “Books not Bombs Myanmar”. I was invited to become a member of “Burmese Atheists”.

Later, I acted as a “Spokesperson of Burmese Atheists” and started to form affiliations for “Burmese Atheists” with several international humanists and atheist organizations.

Around 2019 (Direct Action against the blasphemy laws)

I started several direct-action projects against the censorships, blasphemy laws and state oppressions of Burma by uploading all the censored books, audio files, video files from the VCR tapes I managed to collect.

There were at least 10 Buddhist revivalist movements that were censored in Burma. Some of them reached similar conclusions. Some are just unique. Some were indeed reactionary. Some were progressives.

I created an app called “Shin Okkahta” where people can listen freely to the censored audio and video files from the VCR tapes I managed to collect as well as read censored books in scanned PDF format.

You can read more about Venerable Ukkaha in the following articles and academic dissertations.

- Link (1) — libcom.org
- Link (2) — Die-Human, Born Human: The Life and Posthumous Trial of Shin Ukkaá'á'ha, a pioneering Burmese monk during a tumultuous period in a nation's history by Janaka Ashin (Doctoral Thesis › Doctor of Philosophy › King's College London). Accessible at: kclpure.kcl.ac.uk

I created an app called “Shin Nyar Na” where people can listen freely to the censored audio and video files from the VCR tapes I managed to collect as well as read censored books in scanned PDF format.

You can read more about Venerable Nyar Na in the following articles and academic dissertations.

- Link (1) — www.frontiermyanmar.net
- Link (2) — <https://www.ias.asia/events/buddhist-heresy-myanmar>
- Link (3) — The Making of an ‘Inside Enemy’: A Study of The Sky-Blue Sect in Myanmar by Hiroko Kawanami, Lancaster University — eprints.lancs.ac.uk

These two direct-action projects took around 1 year to finish and these two direct-action projects around 2019 included the following tasks:

- Travelling to get the books that survived the seizure of the state.
- Traveling to Buddhist libraries, bribe the officials and monks if needed to.
- Scan the books and convert into PDFs (page by page with a scanner)
- converting VCR tape files into audio format (MP3).
- converting VCR tape files into video format (MPEG).
- Video editing and uploading to YouTube.
- Audio engineering to reduce noise and putting to web hosting.
- Developing Android applications and publishing them via Android App Stores.

“Shin Okkahta” and “Shin Nyar Na” apps were reported massively by the right-wing Theravada Buddhist conservatives and got unpublished on Google Play store. The third-party alternative android app stores still host the apps; however, the app won’t work anymore as I’ve removed the servers, and I was migrating these documents (converting to audiobooks), audios and videos to YouTube.

Since 2021-Present (2024)

Direct Action against the blasphemy laws

As someone who believes in unconditional free speech and universal human rights, I tried my best to work on some direct actions against the blasphemy laws in Burma which I think of their existence as reactionary.

Rage against the blasphemy laws (Venerable Shin Ukkaha's censored Buddhism)

I uploaded all the censored audio and video files of Venerable Ukkaha from the VCR tapes I managed to collect to my YouTube channel. Also, some other two-three Buddhist revivalist movements who were also censored. All of these direct-action projects from 2019 included the following tasks:

- Traveling around Burma to collect the censored materials (bribe the officials and monks if needed)
- converting VCR tape files into audio format (MP3).
- converting VCR tape files into video formats.
- Travelling to get the books that survived the seizure of the state.
- Scanning the books and converting into PDFs (page by page with a scanner)
- Video editing and uploading to YouTube.

All of the censored audio and video files of Venerable Ukkaha were successfully uploaded to my YouTube channel since 2022.

Rage against the blasphemy laws (Venerable Nyar Na's censored Buddhism)

I uploaded all the censored audio and video files of Venerable Nyar Na (the monk in blue robe) they sent me via online to my YouTube channel. Since he is still alive (in his 90s) and facing surveillance from the military junta, I upload all his recently provided audio and video recordings on my channel. This includes video editing, audio engineering (since they don't have proper tools to record their discussions), and graphic designs prepared for the videos.

Since 2019, this has been an activism I invest around 5hrs every week. These direct actions are not just one-time deals but long-term repeated tasks. Each video is a violation of the blasphemy laws enforced by the reactionary military juntas since the 1960s. So, if I start to count each video as one direct action, I will have almost 1000 direct actions by now.

Rage against the blasphemy laws (Audio Books Censored Buddhisms)

I was also working on making audiobooks out of the censored books on Buddhist reformist movements that were suppressed by both the state and the grassroots Theravada supremacists as well as the ultranationalist conservative monks. The audiobooks are also being uploaded to my YouTube channel where everyone with interests can come and listen. Some volunteers have joined and offered to help. Volunteers are actively helping me with creating new audiobooks out of the censored books on Buddhist reformist movements. These direct actions are not just one-time deals. They're long-term repeated tasks.

Audiobook on rare left-wing books

I don't see the left-wing audiobooks as acts of direct resistance, since there hasn't been any censorship against left-wing literature in Burma. In fact, the situation has been quite the reverse. Until the 1980s, leftist ideology was the standard among politicians in Burma, to the point where the first authors identifying as pro-capitalist Marxists (similar to Dengists) and liberals were viewed as unconventional—almost revolutionary—because they were challenging the prevailing norms.

I'm translating post-left anarchist texts into Burmese to make them accessible in the Southeast Asian anarchist library. Additionally, I'm working on translating materials related to freed market anti-capitalism, individualist anarchism, and egoism through the Center for a Stateless Society (C4SS). That way, any working-class individuals from Burma and grassroots student activists could read it without any limitation for free.

The texts are available at the links: <https://sea.theanarchistlibrary.org/category/author/hein-tet-kyaw> and <https://c4ss.org/content/category/burmese>.

Speaking out at UNHRC

I prepared the statement on behalf of “Burmese Atheists”, condemning the 2021 military coup in 2022. The statement also includes the points of solidarity with Rohingya community. The statement was featured at UN Human Rights Council, 49th Session.

Also, in 2024, I prepared the statement on behalf of “Burmese Atheists”, condemning the massacres of unarmed civilian population from Arakan and Rohingya by the military junta and the Arakan Army. The statement was featured at the 25th Meeting — 56th Regular Session of UN Human Rights Council. The statement also includes the points of solidarity with unarmed civilian population of Rohingya community, Arakan community and broader Burmese community. I also condemned the far-right Buddhist ultranationalist agenda of Arakan Army that viewed both Rohingya and Bengali ethnicities as post-colonial settlers on the statement too (which is essentially the same with the Myanmar military junta).

Fundraising for Humanitarian Aids for people in Burma

As the “Burmese Atheists” spokesperson, I led the whole operation of fundraising for Humanitarian Aids for people in Burma. The recipient locations and organizations which were provided by the humanitarian projects of “Burmese Atheists” under my initiative includes the orphanages, refugee camps, senior care shelter, autonomous NUG education center, workers' unions, and grassroots mutual aid initiatives.

Some of these humanitarian projects were mainly funded by the international affiliates of Burmese Atheists such as Humanist Mutual Aid Networks and some were the products of the local crowd funding projects by the local atheists in Burma.

Fundraising for Myanmar Spring Revolution

I do Independent Fundraisings for humanitarian aids and security equipment for Local Defense Forces, not affiliated with NUG exiled government and the People Defense Forces, affiliated with NUG exiled government. I worked closely with humanists, atheists, secularists, existentialists, progressives and non-authoritarian left-wing activists across all over the world for the fundraising events for Myanmar Spring Revolution. Since there are a lot of events I visit and help to fundraise for the cause, it's hard to list the details.

Writing articles on Myanmar Spring Revolution

- I started reporting with articles about Burma in “Solidarity” magazine of Alliance for Workers Liberty since 2021.
- I started writing my personal political views (uncensored and a bit casual) on libcom.org since 2022.

Reforming Islam & Free Speech

I worked closely with Burma's interfaith movement until 2016, especially with some moderate Buddhist groups, Sufi community, and Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

I distanced myself from Sufi community since I noticed the most influential Sufi leader from Burma named Al Haj U Aye Lwin shared the discredited HIV/AIDS origins theories against homosexuals and transsexuals as well as the conspiracy theory of homosexuals and transsexuals being mentally ill and filthy (inferior).

I distanced myself from Ahmadiyya community since 2019 when a controversial Australian/Iraqi Shia imam named “Imam Tawhidi (The imam of peace)” exposed the homophobic and transphobic quotes by the caliphs from the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. Ironically, Ahmadiyya are considered as the most moderate and peaceful Muslims and actively under an on-going genocide in Islamist countries like Pakistan. Yet, most Ahmadiyya scholars refused to condemn homophobic and transphobic quotes by their caliphs and unconditionally supported those quotes.

In 2023, I founded a website called “Myanmar Muslims: Shia Library” with the help of an influential Shia imam from Burma. Since he is already the founder of Myanmar Shia Library, he has all the books and materials to be uploaded. Now, the website is mainly handled by him. Here, it doesn't mean that I am endorsing Shia Islam. I'm aware that most of the Shia clergies and Shia fundamentalist Islamists are still homophobic, transphobic, and misogynistic as much as Sunni Islamists, Christian nationalists and Buddhist ultranationalists.

Atheism and Secularism

I am currently a member of Progressive Atheists Inc. from Australia, taking part events organized by Progressive Atheists Inc., working closely with atheists, humanists, existentialists, and rationalist organizations as well as individuals from Australia. I am also a member of Humanists Australia and responsible as the role of a Video Editor for Humanists Australia.

I was recently recruited by Atheist Alliance International as a Regional Director of Australasia. I'm responsible to work closely with and assist the atheists, humanists, and rationalist organizations across Australia.

Locally for Burma, I led a small pressure group against the influential Buddhist monks and Islamic imams. We monitor almost all their religious teachings via audio recordings and expose them once they have talked against the social justice. We expose their sexist, patriarchal, misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic, authoritarian, autocratic, feudalistic, and discriminatory views, and make sure so-called progressives don't turn a blind eye to those religious scholars since most so-called progressives pretend to be blind (acting hypocritically) when it comes to the politically incorrect quotes of religious scholars (especially from their own community).

Summing up

All my activisms are not the products of some philosophers or ideologies but are merely the reactions to the oppressions I suffered as an individual. For that reason, I tried to struggle for myself. Later, I became aware that my liberation is tied to the people across several social categories. I tried to rebel against what I can as an individual at a time while also trying to understand more about the historical events and philosophical streams that cause the oppressions I'm suffering.

I'm confident that the discussion on historical events is necessary in contrast to some superficial left-wing groups that claim to work together without the discussion on historical events out of the fear of infighting. From my experience as a co-founder of several activist groups which later became alienated its own co-founders because of the growing influence of right wing ideologies such as Buddhist ultranationalism and Islamism, I have learnt my lesson that the discussion on historical events is necessary to determine the principles of the fellows who are active in the struggle or the social movement. Given all these historical records of red-brown alliance for common immediate political goals, simply sharing an immediate political goal superficially won't be productive in the long run, in my opinion. That wouldn't be necessary for short-term and superficial fundraising groups who normally focus on virtue signalling though.

I believe all of my activism and direct actions prove a fact that I value pragmatic solutions that are bold in upholding the values I admire (at broadest term – universal human rights and individual liberty) over simply following the doctrinal templates of preconfigured tasks of whatever-ism from 18th or 19th century totalitarian leaders.

I will try my best to keep posting about the rich experiences of other Burmese anarchists in a hope that the global anarchists will be informed that there are anarchists in an under-developed country under a civil war (Burma) who are rich in experiences when it comes to mutual aid or direct-action.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
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Hein Htet Kyaw
My activism: struggling for own liberation with solidarity
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usa.anarchistlibraries.net