

# QUILT OF MEMORY AND HOPE Stories of Women from the Rohingya Refugee Camps

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Cover Photo: Women survivors display their sewing on the final day in a participant's shelter made of bamboo and tarpaulin inside the Rohingya Refugee Camps.

Location: Rohingya Refugee Camps, Bangladesh

Design: Bobby Haryanto, Sigit D Pratama (.this/PLAY)

This book is now an available online exhibition:

https://asia-ajar.org/survivor-story/quilt-of-memory-and-hope/

# Quilt of Memory and Hope

Stories of Women from the Rohingya Refugee Camps

Liberation War Museum (LWM) in collaboration with Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR)





# Notes from the Liberation War Museum

n any mass atrocity, it is the women who suffer most. The same is true for the Rohingya women who went through unbelievable atrocities, suffered brutal torture and gender-based violence. Each of them has a story to tell, but most of them do not have literacy, skill or opportunity to tell their tale in a language we understand. That did not refrain them from sharing their stories among themselves or stored deep in their heart for a day when someone may turn-up with skill to read the unreadable, listen to the silence of the silent. How to reach out to the unfortunate victims and give voice to the voiceless is the challenge we face.

LWM with AJAR in their humble way tried to be with the Rohingya women victims in the camps. The team was amazed by the resilience and potential these women possess. This has been reflected in the embroidered quilts they have woven. Women are familiar with such functional art of their own, making quilts from used clothes, adding beauty to the effort with floral design and motif.

Now with opportunity to express their pain, suffering, hope, and dreams they have reflected their innermost feelings through the art of sewing. Each of the designs has an individual standing behind them, collectively they uphold a message for themselves, for the community, for humanity.

The victims' voice has been raised. It is our duty to listen to that and stand by them in whatever way we can.

### Mofidul Hoque

Founder-Trustee, Liberation War Museum Director, Center for the Study of Genocide and Justice



# Introduction

It's a hot Tuesday morning, the sun is blistering above without a cloud in the sky. Below is a sea of blue tarpaulin roofs, as far as the eye can see, spanning 6,340 acres of land. A jarring contrast to the landscape of green forest that once lay below. In a busy corner of the Rohingya refugee camps, women begin to gather in a small hut, rocking their babies quietly while taking out their books, pens and paper. We huddle together, knee to knee, on the small concrete floor padded by only a thin sheet of plastic. The next three hours are filled with laughter, sorrow, games, fun, and love.

The Liberation War Museum (LWM) of Bangladesh with Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) conducted a participatory study with 87 women in the Rohingya Refugee Camps, Bangladesh in March 2019. The workshops were conducted between March 13-30 with women from over 8 different camps.

As part of our holistic approach, we wanted to create a process to heal, build solidarity and peer support among women survivors through action research. Our goals were to raise the voice of women in a way everyone could participate, irrespective of education, literacy level and age. To do this, we needed to create a process where activities were focused on looking forward as much as looking back. Our findings from the workshop and the sewing sent a strong message of hope from the women and that there is still much to remain optimistic about. Despite the unimaginable sufferings and trauma these women have experienced, they continue to live every day with hope for the future of their children, their community, and themselves.





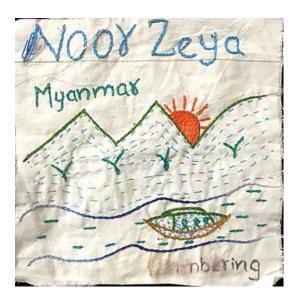
We designed 10 participatory tools to fit the reality and rhythm of life in the camps. Sewing has been a common past-time for Rohingya women since living in Rakhine state and now in the camps. We asked the women to sew a panel to express their feelings, their hopes in life, and their memories. Using these individual panels sewn by the women, we have created 3 'quilts' to bring these individual stories together as a collective voice (available to view as an online exhibition on AJAR's website: https://asia-ajar.org/survivor-story/quilt-of-memory-and-hope/). As the days passed, we watched on as the participants sewing began to tell their stories and remember their experiences, both good and bad. It was a way for them to talk about their memories of home, what they hold close to their hearts, their demands for justice, and many of the themes learned from the workshop began to emerge.

In the context of a refugee camp, where limited livelihood opportunities, isolation, and trauma of women are widespread, we believe our understanding of transitional justice should explore the relationship between human rights education and the healing outcomes through creative art, specifically through creative expression familiar to the community. These quilts are just one and how collective action through art can unite, heal and learn.

We hope this photo book is one way for these women to send a message that balances the sorrow of the past memories with joy and hope for the future. We express deep gratitude to the women who shared their story and expressed a message to the world.







I remember the day when I had to leave my country. During the conflict, we left our country to save our lives. We came to Bangladesh by crossing the river while facing many sufferings. Before that, we passed the jungle secretly and it took several days. It was very hard to leave my beloved Myanmar."

**Noor Zeya** 

I love flowers. I had a flower garden at home in Myanmar. I had always taken care of it. Because of the conflict, I had to leave everything. I miss my flower garden. I want to have a flower garden again as like I had before."

Shahanaz Bibi





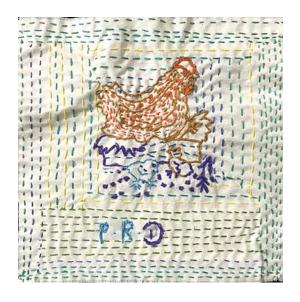
I lost my mother when I was child. I miss her all the time. I feel sad when I look at another child's mother. So, I write 'mother' in Bangla."

Yesmin



In Myanmar, I had a garden in front of my house. I remember the garden and wanted to show it to everyone through my sewing. My flower garden is a symbol of my old life."

**Asmida** 



I love my country very much. I sew a chicken to remember those that I raised. I hope to return to my country safely. Because of the conflict, I had to leave everything. I remember the days when I raised my pet animals and passed the time in my Myanmar house."

Mayasha

This is my house in Myanmar and the lovely garden in front of my house. There was a haystack area for my cows. The love symbol indicates how much I love my house and country."

Jubaida



I am Hamida from
Myanmar. This is my flower
garden where beautiful
flowers bloom and the
butterflies come every day,
which makes me happy. But
I had to leave my house and
garden because of conflict.
The garden is the symbol of
my memory."



Hamida



This is my hope, like a flower. There is my little son. I have a hope for him how he can go back to Myanmar... It makes me realize my mother taught me [sewing] in my childhood. LWM/AJAR makes me realize this."

Habiba







I had a flower garden in Myanmar. I sew the flowers of my garden. Because of the conflict, I had to come to Bangladesh and live in the camp where there was no garden. I miss my garden and old days."

Toslima

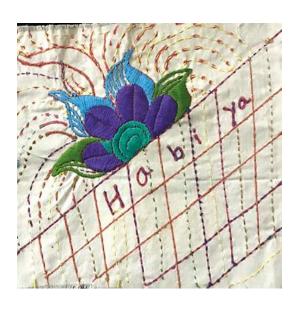
There is a table and books.
A student is learning and studying. The picture reflects my hope that my son can study in our school one day."

Minara



I love flowers. This is the flower of my flower garden in my Myanmar house. But there is no garden in the camp. I remember my old garden and country."

Habiya





Near my house, there was a primary school. The military arrested and gathered people in the school and beat them."

Robida



I love my home very much.
I sew my small house in
Myanmar. I want to fly like a
butterfly and go back to my
country."

Asma

I had a house in Myanmar and a garden in front of my house. The house symbolises the memories I had to leave behind."

Rokiya



There were trees in frony of my house and many birds would visit. I made this as a reminder. There was a water point behind my house. We spent our time playing in our house compound."

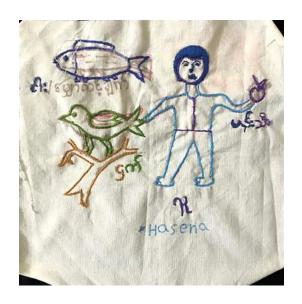
**Nur Fatema** 





My house burned. I remember my house and I hope I can go back to my homeland. My hope is that I can keep hold of my memories, that I can rebuild my home and my children can play there. The children are there."

Mojuna



My name is Hasina. This is my house compound. There was a big tree. Birds were resting on the tree. Many fish were going down the river. I was playing in my house compound."

Hasina

This is my house and flower garden in Myanmar. I had to leave everything and live in the camp. These are the symbols of my memory."

Asma



This flower is not my favorite flower rather a symbol of my imagination that our country was once like a flower, but now our region is destroyed. I want to build this region like a flower."

Rofika





I wish to have a sewing machine for my livelihood and support my family. I also want to learn computer skills for myself. I hold flowers with the hope that my life would be like these beautiful flowers."

Jubaira







I always dream of my native land. I dream of my golden Myanmar. If I were a bird, I would fly to my country land. I have always wanted to go to my Myanmar. The school symbolises my hope - one day when we go back to our country, Myanmar, we can get our Right to Education there."

Senoara

I remember the days when I had taken care of my chickens. I could make anything by my hand and can sew. My hand symbolises that I am not useless. I miss my country and my domestic animals."

Showmila



This is my river of life (from past to present). Here, this is me in my Myanmar house full of happiness and a colorful life. The other is me in the camp with no color in my life. The river is how I had come to camp from my Myanmar. I want to go back my Myanmar."

**Nur Fatema** 





I remember the power of my hands, and all of the drawing and designing that I can do by my hands."

**Toslima** 





I am Maysha from
Myanmar. These are my pets,
and I loved to spend time with
them in Myanmar. My life was
beautiful with my family but
I had to leave everything and
come to the Rohingya Camp. I
want to go back to my old life
and spend the rest of the time
living life happily."

Maysha

The bird is a symbol of myself. I want to fly and return to my home. While I was sewing this, I was reminded of how I had passed my time by sewing on handkerchiefs, pillow covers and dresses at my old house."

**Shomshun Nahar** 



I was seven months pregnant when I left Myanmar. It took many days to come to Bangladesh. I had to walk through the jungle and then cross the river by boat. I saw many people with their cows leave Myanmar. They did not have any food to eat and had to eat banana leaves to survive. I had come on this journey with my children and others fleeing into Bangladesh. This is my journey from Myanmar to the Rohingya camp, Bangladesh."



Chekufa



I draw a picture of myself now living in the camp, and on the other side of the river is my old house and cow in Myanmar. This is my river of life. I remember all of the problems I have faced on my journey to Bangladesh."

Osmida



At an early age, women have been denied education or had to stop going to their school. As a result, the majority of Rohingya women remain uneducated or illiterate. My hope is for 'Education for Women'."

Minara

The military bombed my house. In 2017, I was separated from my parents in a crowd of people fleeing Myanmar to Bangladesh. I live in the camp with my aunty. I still do not know where my parents are. I have written here what I studied in Myanmar. I want to go to school and learn English but I cannot afford to go. In the camp, we can only go to school up to class 5. While drawing this, I remembered my parents."

Lucke





I hope to have the opportunity of education for women, national identity card and justice."

Ruksana



After my mother died, I had to live with my stepmother who abused and tortured me. Now, I live in the house of the leader of my community, but I hope to have my own house where I can live peacefully."

Jubaira



I draw a sewing machine to symbolise the source of livelihood for many women here. I hope to learn more sewing and how to use a computer."

Jannat

I miss my school life. I used to go to school in Myanmar close to my house. I sew the memories of my school and playing with everyone."

Minara





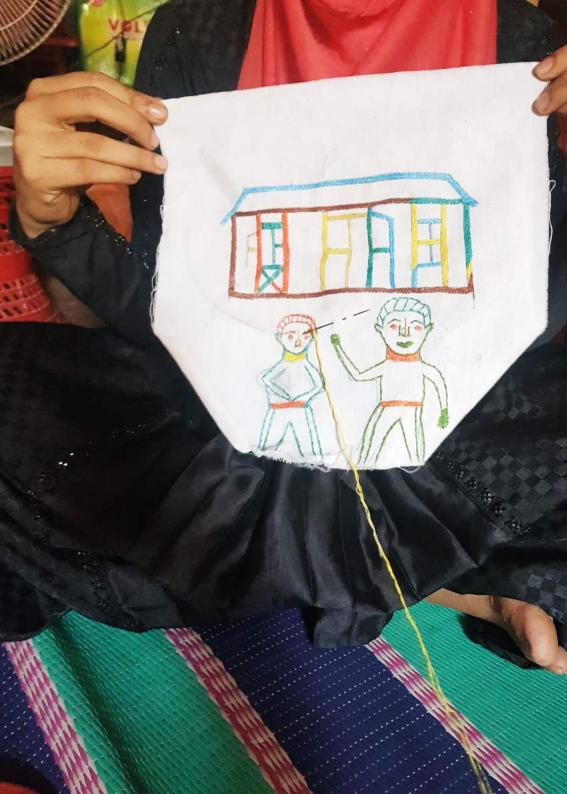
I remember the days how
I studied with my friends
in my house and garden in
Myanmar. I wish to go back to
my country."

Minara



These are the sources of livelihood. I want to learn computer and sewing for my future to be independent."

Jannat





When the war started, I had just finished building my new house. I had to leave it behind and come to Bangladesh. I miss my home very much."

Rokiya

In Myanmar, I had a house and trees next to it. The cars outside of the house belong to the Myanmar military. I miss my home very much."

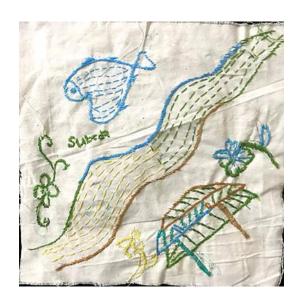
Hamida



This is my house. The Military came to my house and destroyed everything. The person in the house is my father, who was tied up by the Military, brutally killed, and then burnt his body. I miss my house and country. I hope to go back to my country."

Kosheda





This is my river of life. This is my old house. I am from Myanmar where I attended school up to class 9. I have 4 brothers and 3 sisters, we all lived together in the house, and we had lots of land in my country. To make a living, my family cultivated many crops and raised domestic animals. I faced many challenges on my journey coming to Bangladesh."

Subeda



I miss my home in Myanmar. I love my country very much and hope to return."

Asmida

I have a dream to go back to my country and want to live in a peaceful environment.
Where there will be a garden in front of my house."

Shahena



I am from near the
Bangladesh border. I stayed with
my mother because my father
ran away to Malaysia. I have
9 siblings. We were making a
living by cultivating our land in
Myanmar. My house was burnt
by the military, so we had to
run away to Bangladesh. I love
my house and trees. I miss my
house and I want to go back to
my country and hope to make a
house in my country again."

Azizda



I love my homeland and my home. I am not happy in the camp. I want to go back home."

Hasina



I really miss my home in Myanmar. So, I decided to sew the words 'In our Myanmar' with my house."

**Noor Kolima** 

I am from Myanmar. I lived with my husband, two daughters, and two sons. I had a big house in Myanmar and had many domestic animals (like cows, goats, and hens). We had been cultivating our own land. My husband had a job with Red Cross in Myanmar. I studied up to class 9. When the military came to our area and fired everywhere, we ran away with our children to the jungle, and waited until the fire stopped. But we heard the military burnt our house. We came to Bangladesh on 11 September 2017. I drew a flower garden, my house, and my daughter's picture at the time when she went to school."

Yesmin





My one leg is limp. I have no income-earning member in my family. I want to have a sewing machine for livelihood and go back to my house."

**Noor Fatema** 



I love my house and there were trees in my house. I want to have my own house."

Alkama







I want to build a house where I can live peacefully without intervention. I don't like camp life, so I want my own house and a garden."

Jannat

I am from Myanmar. When I was 6 years old, I attended Madrasa, and I never went to school. I had a house and land in Myanmar. I cultivated my land for a living until the military burnt down my house. I had a flower garden in my house, I love flowers very much, so I sew a flower. I want to go back to my house."

Habiya





I want to build a house where I can live peacefully without intervention. I don't like camp life and I want my own house and a garden."

Jannat



This is my home with my mother in Myanmar. Now I live with my mother in the camp."

Jubaida



I love my country very much and want to show this by sewing a map. I want to go back to my homeland."

Habiba

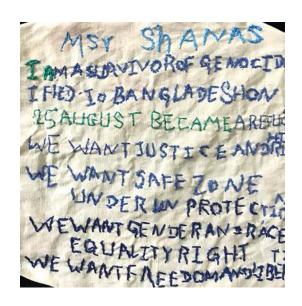
I am from Myanmar. I lived with my husband and two daughters, and two sons. I had a big house in Myanmar and had many domestic animals (like cows, goats, and hens). We had been cultivating our own land. My husband had a job with Red Cross in Myanmar. I studied up to class 9. When the military came to our area and fired everywhere, we ran away with our children to the jungle, and waited until the fire stopped, but we heard the military burnt our house. We came to Bangladesh on 11 September 2017. I sew my house, my coconut tree, and mango tree. I miss everything that I had to leave behind."

Yesmin



I am a survivor of genocide. I fled to Bangladesh on 25th August 2017, when I became a refugee. We want justice and rights. We want a safe zone under UN protection. We want gender and race equality. We want freedom and liberty."

Shanas





I remember how the military had come to our village in their military cars. They burnt the houses and land. I feel traumatized to remember those days."

Mor Zeya



I miss my house and trees that I grew up around in my homeland."

Tosmin

I made a house by my own hands, but the military burnt my house down. I miss my house very much."

Rokiya



There was a house and coconut tree in Myanmar. I remember how the military burnt the houses and tortured the people. I am missing my house."

Yesmin



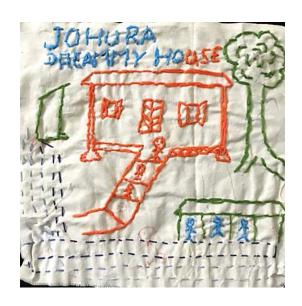


I am from Myanmar. I had a house and land in Myanmar. I farmed my own land, and there was a garden in front of my house. I miss my house very much, I am very sad, so I sew myself crying. I want to go back to Myanmar."

Baluwarkato





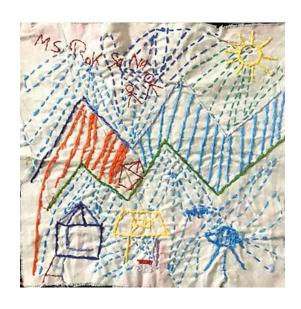


This is my river of life. My school where I used to go. I, along with family, lived happily in my country. Now, we live in the Rohingya camp in Bangladesh. I wish to have my dream house in Myanmar."

Johura

This is my journey from Myanmar to Bangladesh. I lived in Myanmar but had to come to Bangladesh due to conflict. I, along with many people, came to Bangladesh by boat. I saw many people running to save their lives."

Roksana



This is my story. I want to show my journey from childhood to present to everyone. It's my house where I lived happily with my family. I used to attend school with my friends. But the Myanmar government took away our education rights. I also played with my friends and went to the market. I was happy in Myanmar. One day the military came to our house and attacked us. I, along with many people still left in Myanmar, had to hide in the bushes to save our life. The journey took 15 days from Myanmar to Bangladesh, without food. Now, I live in the Rohingya Camp in Bangladesh."

Seno Ara





I am Yesmin from Myanmar.
This is the house where I used to live with my family — my husband and four children. We had land that we farmed in the lake to make a living. One day the military came to our village and fired everywhere. They also burnt down our house and destroyed everything. We ran away with my family into the jungle and waited until the military had gone. Later on, we came to Bangladesh on 11 September 2017."

Yesmin



I am from Myanmar. Now, I live in the camp with my old parent and one sister. One of my legs is disabled, and I am the only earning member of my family. I came from a poor family, and I supported my family by sewing cloth in Myanmar. I want a sewing machine to continue supporting them. I draw my hand as a symbol of myself and the strength of my family. I do almost everything by hand and I feel that my hand is an important part. I write 'ABC' and 'Teacher' as a symbol of education. 'Tailor' as I am the supporting member of my family. 'Cook' as I am doing house chores. And finally, 'Artist' as I can draw."

**Fatema** 

This is my school. One day, the military came to our school and suddenly burnt it down. Everyone was running here and there. I could not forget that day."

Morium



This is my school. One day, the military came to our school and suddenly burnt it down. Everyone was running here and there. I could not forget that day."

Morium



After the military burnt my house, I came to Bangladesh by crossing the river. I saw many dead bodies in the river during my journey. I miss my country very much. This was the period when I crossed the river from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The military burnt our houses, so we had to run away with our family. I saw many people screaming and running here and there. I also saw dead bodies in the river during my journey. We didn't want to, but we had to leave our country. I want to go back to my country with my family."

Seno Ara





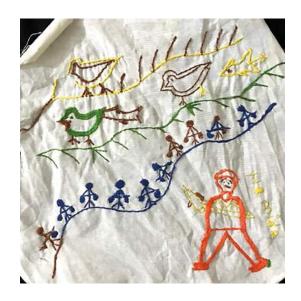


I love my country — it is in my heart. The broken heart indicates that our all rights have been taken away. We want our rights back."

**Noor Zeya** 

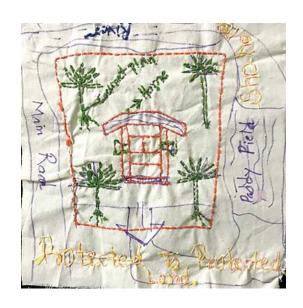
I lived in Myanmar. The military had come to our village and fired everywhere. We had to run away to survive. I had seen many people running to the forest, some went towards the mountains, some were nearer to the river. I sew what I remember."

Hamida



This is the scenario of my village in Myanmar. My house was next to the main road. There were paddy fields and a river. I remember the day when the military came to our village and burnt my house and started shooting everywhere. I had to leave everything. I miss my homeland."







I had a beautiful house and garden in Myanmar. The military came to my house and burnt everything. I had to come to Bangladesh in 2017 with my family members. Now we live in the Rohingya camp in Bangladesh, altogether. But we want to go back to our country."

Minara



This is my village in Myanmar. The military destroyed our village and burnt down houses. People were running from every direction. I wonder when I will be able to see my village again."

Mor Zeya

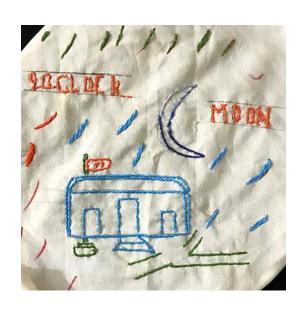
This is my house. There was a coconut tree beside my house. The military shot a longshell at my house and burnt it down. People were scared, screaming, crying, and running everywhere. I saw many people crossing the border by boat and climbing the mountain. Many dead bodies were floating over the river during my journey from Myanmar to Bangladesh."

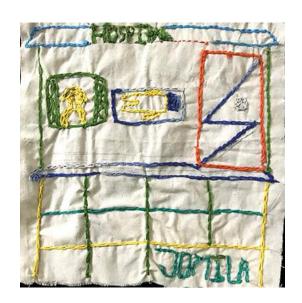
**Nur Nahar** 



I am from the Moon Group.
This is my school where I
learned 'A, B, C, D, E,...' There
was a playground where
children would play. This is
my memory. I hope to get back
our right to education and for
our children to go to school in
Myanmar again."

Khushida





I want to be a doctor. I want to serve the people, especially those who are less fortunate. So, I sew hospital and me as a doctor taking care of the patients."

Umme Jomila





The Myanmar government has taken away our rights, tortured us, and killed our people. We faced discrimination everywhere. At last, they forced us to leave our country. Now, we live in the Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh. I sew scales as a symbol of justice. We want justice."

Nore Zeya

I draw my river of life from past to the present. I had a house and tree in Myanmar but had to leave everything behind after the military tortured us. I will never forget my house, my country. I have faced many troubles coming to Bangladesh."

Osmida



I had a house in Myanmar but had to leave everything behind after the military tortured us. I will always remember my past life. Along with my family, I have faced many troubles coming to Bangladesh. We want to go back home with full safety and security."

We Work with the Arms and

Asma



I had a house and chicken in Myanmar, but had to leave everything behind. My memories of my home and country will stay with me forever. I miss my home and my domestic animals. I want to go back home."

Shayka



I lived in Myanmar when the military fired on our home. I remember the day I was running from the shots. They burnt my house and destroyed everything."

Seno Ara

The Myanmar military shot a gun at my house and burnt it down. I lost my house that day. The two flowers are symbolic of my hope. I have a hope that our life in the future will be shining like flowers."

Seno Ara



I had my house, trees, and cows in Myanmar. The military tortured us and made us leave behind everything. I came to the Bangladesh by river and faced many difficulties."

**Noor Fathema** 

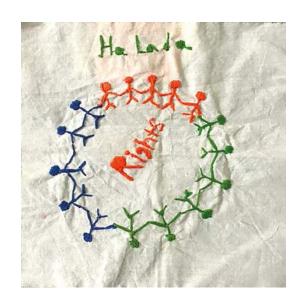




This is my house where I had a beautiful garden. I was happy with my family. But the military killed my father, burnt my house, and destroyed everything. So, I had to leave it all behind. I want to return back to my home."

Khushida





We are united. We live together. We want to get our rights. Unity is our strength. This is my hope. "

Halada

I lived in Myanmar with my three sons and two daughters. I raised cows, goats, and hens. I draw my hand because I love to sew flowers, and have taken care of my family with my hands."

Razuma



I had a beautiful house and garden. The military came to my house and burnt everything. We were running in all directions to save our lives. I could never forget the day. I want to show everyone that the military burnt my house."

AS MANAGE MANAGE

Asma



This is my home, where I lived happily with my family. My children would play wherever they wanted. The flower garden and trees give gave us peace and clarity. But we had to leave everything behind due to the conflict. I wonder when we will go back to my country. I miss my home and garden."

Toyoba

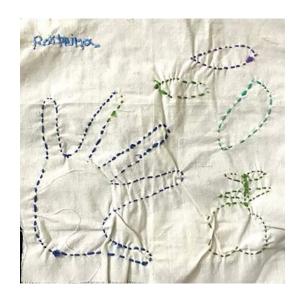


These is the stories of victims - 'Victims' Death Scene'. I saw many dead bodies floating in the river and on the roads. The whole place was terrifying. I want justice by sewing the stories of victims with my own hands."

Shamima

I was from Myanmar. I lived with my mother and grandparents. My father left us after running away to India with a new wife. Now, I am staying with my family in the camp. I pass the time by sewing on pillow covers and doing house chores with my hands. My hand symbolises the support I give to my family."

Ruksana



This is my house in Myanmar. My life was as beautiful as a flower. Now, it is just a memory. There is nothing left to lose. But there is hope in my heart that one day I will return to my home, where I lived happily with my family. I hope to get justice too so I sew 'bissar' [justice]."

Subeda





I sew my home in Myanmar. I had to leave my house when the Military attacked us. I saw my house on fire. I miss my home and hope to return one day."

Yesmin





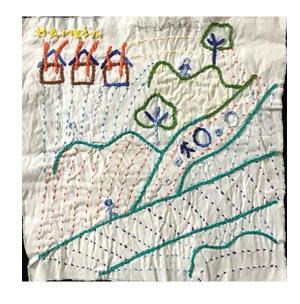


This is my journey from
Myanmar to the Rohingya Camp.
I came to the camp by river with
other people from my country.
We all faced many difficulties. I
don't want to live in the camp for
the rest of my life. It's my hope
to return to my country. So, I
sew the words 'I want to go my
house. We want to get our native
status, when we return to our
home'.

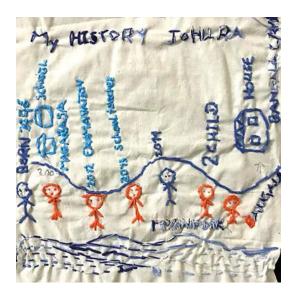
Asma

I lived in Myanmar with my parents. I had a house and flower garden, but the military burnt it down. I sew my burning house. I left in 2017 and came to Rohingya camp."

Hamida



This is my story of how I came to Bangladesh. When I came to Bangladesh, I was pregnant and faced many troubles. This is my story. I was born in Myanmar and went to school there. I had attended class up until 2012. In 2014. I became a school teacher and got married. I have 2 children. I lived in my home happily with my family. But we had to leave our home and country due to the conflict. I came to the Rohingya camp in 2017. I want to show my journey to everyone so I sew 'My History Johura'."



Johura



I was born in Bangladesh. I love Bangladesh, so I sew the flag of Bangladesh. At this present moment, I consider myself as a boat floating in the river. I don't know what would become of our future. I don't like living in the camp and I want my own house."

Jomila



I draw my memory of my home and flower garden in Myanmar. I would love to spend time in my flower garden and give food to the chickens. My hope is to return to my home."

Shayka

I sew my memory. The military fired on my people, killed my family members, and destroyed everything. They raped and injured me. I ran away with my one daughter, who luckily survived, from Myanmar to the Rohingya camp in Bangladesh. That day was a nightmare for me."

Dildar



I lived with my family in Myanmar, where I worked our land. I studied up to class 4 and grew up with my 12 brothers and sisters. I sew my past to present life — how we grew up in Myanmar, used to go to school, spend time with friends, then one day had to leave my country because of conflict. We came to Bangladesh with other people from our country by boat. I don't like camp life and hope to return to my homeland."



**Jesmin** 



This is my beautiful town with houses, gardens, schools, and madrasas. Everyone was happy. Children were playing everywhere. The military fired on our town, destroying everything, and we had to leave our country. We came to Bangladesh in 2017. I don't like camp life. I miss my country very much. It is my hope to go back my country."

Noora

peace and happiness. You are str to keep going everyday, even in the



Stay strong, stay positive and b

that someday we can all live in ong and brave, and remember e face of the trauma and

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Message	of	Peace

This is an open letter from one survivor to another, to anyone suffering the pain of war. I hope that someday we can all live in peace and happiness. You are strong and brave, and remember to keep going everyday, even in the face of the trauma and separation that life has brought upon us.

Know your pain and suffering does not define who you are, it only speaks to that moment of your life. Keep sending strong messages of peace and let's stand together for a better future and to ensure others do not suffer the same as we did. Stay strong, stay positive and be there for other survivors around you.

From, A refugee from the world's largest refugee camp















