

Causes of Rohingya Refugee Crisis and its Impact on Bangladesh

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Abstract: The Rohingya crisis is a human right crisis with serious humanitarian consequences. The Rohingyas are an ethnic Muslim minority group living primarily in Myanmar's western Rakhine state; they practice a Sufi-inflected variation of Sunni Islam. With large-scale violence against them in 2012, 2015, and 2017 by other groups in Rakhine State as well as by the government (UNHCR, 2016). The government in Bangladesh provides shelter to the Rohingya refugees mostly considering the humanitarian ground and people's perception. However, this is not thought to be a permanent solution to this crisis for both the Rohingyas and Bangladesh itself (UNHCR, 2019). Bangladesh has become the prime victim of this crisis. The crisis can only be overcome through international involvement. This study tries to investigate the causes of Rohingya crisis and its impact on Bangladesh employed a triangulation research method. Finally makes some recommendations for overcoming the crisis and establishing lasting peace in the region.

Keywords: Rohingya, Refugee Crisis, Human Right, Ethnic Minority, Bangladesh-Myanmar relation.

Introduction

The Rohingyas are a stateless Indo- Aryan ethnic group who follow Islam and reside in Rakhine State, Myanmar (previously known as Burma). An estimated 1 million Rohingyas were living in Myanmar before the 2016- 17 crises. The United Nations refers the Rohingyas as one of the most persecuted and forgotten minorities in the world (UNHCR, 2018). The Rohingyas claim they are indigenous to western Myanmar with a heritage of over a millennium and influence from the Arab, Mughals, and Portuguese. The position of the Myanmar government is that Rohingyas are not a national indigenous race, but are illegal immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh (Noorat el, 2017). Myanmar was decolonized and emerged as an independent nation in 1948. Along with other ethnic minorities, the Rohingyas mostly inhabited in Rakhine (western Myanmar close to Bangladesh) continued to be enjoying citizenship since Myanmar's independence up to 1960s before the military took over. Since then the successive governments in the country refused to consider the Rohingyas who happen to be Muslims as the citizens of Myanmar. The governments continued to arbitrarily brand them as outsiders and specifically as illegal Bengali immigrants which pushed them to be a major stateless community in the contemporary world (Parashar & Alam, 2018). Since the 1970s, crackdowns on the Rohingyas by

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Myanmar's military took place and they were forced to leave Myanmar and take shelter in neighboring countries. The Rohingyas speak their language which resonates with Bengali and Bangladesh particularly its southern part-Cox's Bazar is close to Myanmar. The Rohingyas naturally chose to approach Bangladesh. Bangladesh hosts the maximum number of Rohingya refugees in the world. The Rohingya influx to Bangladesh is not a new phenomenon. Being persecuted by the state authority of Myanmar at different times, the Rohingyas escaped and fled to Bangladesh at different periods. Over the years, they have been living in refugee camps located in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. However, the recent persecution upon them started in late August 2017 which the United Nations described as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" received huge media coverage and created enormous concern throughout the world (Albert, 2018). Most Rohingyas have sought to be a refugee in nearby Bangladesh, which has limited resources and land to host refugees. More than 140,000 people are refugees in the country, many unregistered, according to estimates from the UN high commissioner for refugees. The government in Bangladesh provides shelter to the Rohingya refugees mostly considering the humanitarian ground. However, this is not thought to be a permanent solution to this crisis for both the Rohingyas and Bangladesh itself (UNHCR, 2019). As a geographically small and economically poor country, Bangladesh is overburdened with this terrible humanitarian crisis. Bangladesh has become the prime victim of this crisis. It becomes a security concern for Bangladesh. The religions and political leaders in Bangladesh continue to exert enormous influence on politics, society, and culture of the country. Since people pay attention to significance to religions, political leaders and local people exploring the perspectives of the religions and political leaders and local people about the Rohingya crisis turned out to be a national issue for Bangladesh is deemed significant (Idris, 2017).

Methodology

This study is qualitative research, employed a triangulation method. Triangulation also known as mixed-method research is the act of combining several research methods to study one subject. triangulation is very useful in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. The triangulation of methods employed in this research is comprised of content analysis, in-depth interviews, and a robust internet search to carry out this research. Apart from content analysis, the researchers conducted several in-depth interviews to achieve comprehensive insights into the subject, interviews were done with the different religious leaders- Islamic, Hindu, Buddhists, and Christian and political leaders in Bangladesh, specifically in Sylhet. Beyond document analysis and interviews, we also used a rigorous internet search for the pursuit of this study.

Who are the Rohingyas?

The Rohingya are an ethnic Muslim minority group living primarily in Myanmar's western Rakhine state; they practice a Sufi-inflected variation of Sunni Islam. The estimated one million Rohingya in Myanmar account for nearly a third of Rakhine's population. The Rohingyas differ from Myanmar's dominant Buddhist groups ethnically, linguistically,

and religiously (Albert, 2017). More specifically say that Rohingya is an ethno-religious term meaning Muslim people whose ancestral home is at Arakan or Rakhine in Myanmar. According to the 1982 citizenship laws, there are three categories of citizenship in Myanmar (Burma Citizenship Law, 1982).

- a. Citizen: people who lived in Burma before 1823.
- b. Associate citizen: people who required citizenship through the 1948 Union Citizenship Act.
- c. Naturalized citizens: people who lived in Burma before 4 January 1948 and applied for citizenship after 1982.

In the 1950s, the Rohingyas were recognized as a separate ethnic group and a part of the complex pattern of ethnicities in Burma. Comparatively, they were well integrated into the Burmese political and social system. However, the Rohingyas were steadily losing their existing rights and under the 1982 legislation, the Rohingyas were denied full citizenship due to ethnic classifications used in 1948 (Blakemore, 2019).

The Emergence of the Rohingya Crisis

The Rohingya Muslims are mainly the people of the Northern part of Rakhine state. Before 1784 Arakan was an independent kingdom. The Arakanese had their first contact with Islam in the 9th century. The Rohingya Muslims were mixing with Muslims from Afghanistan, Persian, and Turkey (Medecins Sans Frontiers, 2002). Although the arrival of Muslims in Arakan started in the 9th century, the first Muslim kingdom was established in 1430. There was a glorious history of Muslims in Arakan from 1430 to 1638. Particularly the reign of 11 Muslim kings from 1430 to 1531 was the most important for Arakan Muslims. The 11 kings were respectively Solaiman Shah (1430-1434), Ali Khan (1434-1494), Kalima Shah (1482), Mathi Shah (1492), Mohammad Shah (1492-1493), Nuri Shah (1493-1494), Sheikh Modullah Shah (1494-1501), Shah (1501-1523), Illias Shah (1523-1525), Jalal Shah (1525), Ali Shah (1525-1531). Since 1638, the decline of Muslim domination in Arakan began. The Arakanese Muslims of that time were the Rohingya Muslims of today's Myanmar (William & Keith, 2013).

In 1784 the guerrilla war was triggered by the Burmese army against the Rohingya Muslims. An unsuccessful attempt was taken by the Rohingya Muslims in 1796 to overthrow Burmese rule which resulted in the exodus of around two-third Muslim Arakanese population into the Chittagong area or today's Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. It was the beginning of an influx of the Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh (Albert, 2020). During the Second World War, the British promised to establish Rohingya autonomy in the northern part of the state. As a result, the Rohingya Muslims supported the British government and Buddhist Rakhine supported the opponent's power- the Japanese. But the promise was not kept by British and Burma became independent in 1948. Some of the Muslim Rohingyas continued arms rebellion and demanded an independent Muslim state within Burma. They failed and a military coup was held in 1962 under General Ne

Win's party claims that the Rohingyas are an illegal immigrants and settled in Burma during British rule (UNHCR, 2018). In 1974, the Emergency Immigration Act stripped the Rohingyas of their nationality, rendering them foreigners in their land. The violence impoverishment and religious intolerance all are the reasons behind the exodus of Rohingya Muslims from Rakhine to Bangladesh from 1978 to 1992 (Medecins Sans Frontiers, 2002). The report of IOM shows that in 2014 and 2015, Rohingya's migration in different countries has increased in a significant number. Violence broke out again in northern Rakhine state on 25 August 2014, when militants attacked government forces. In response, security forces supported by Buddhist militia launched a Clearance Operation that killed at least 1000 Rohingya people and forced more than 300000 to flee their house (Medecins Sans Frontiers, 2002).

Ashim Kumar Chakrabarty¹ said that "the Rohingya genocide is a tragedy affecting. The villages of Rakhine state have been burned down and LIP to 1000 people killed as hundreds of thousands flee across the border into Bangladesh".

Mawlana Md. Motiur Rahman,² mainly identified two reasons for Rohingya exodus to Bangladesh and for giving shelter in Bangladesh. One of the two reasons is that the major parts of Rohingya are Muslims and Bangladesh is a Muslim populated country. Another reason is mainly that Myanmar is graphically contiguous and neighboring Bangladesh.

Are the Rohingyas's residents of Myanmar?

Until 1784, the histories of Arakan (now called Rakhine) and Burma were completely different. In 1826, the British conquered Arakan (having been part of the Burmese kingdom for a total of forty years out of the previous 500). It is thus useful to set out some of the historical records about the ethnic make-up of Arakan both before and during the period of British colonial rule. Burmese officials argue that the Rohingyas are not Burmese. To address the charge of the extremists that Rohingyas only arrived in Arakan during the British period, it is useful to examine the census record of the British colonial era. The British census of 1911 identified the Buddhists of Arakan (that is the Rakhine) as having a population of 210,000 and the Muslims as numbering 155,000. Some 30,000 Rohingyas returned very soon after the British conquest, which indicates that both the Rakhine and Rohingya communities grew at similar rates in the first eighty years of British rule. The period between 1948 and 1961, a small number of Rohingyas were serving as members of parliament and even after the military coup, several Rohingyas remained in parliament as supporters of the Burma Socialist Program Party. In 1959, a Rohingya student association was one of the approved groups at Rangoon University (Ibrahim, 2016).

¹ Thakur of Durgabari mandir, Sylhet. interviewed on 10 December 2019.

² Khatib of SUST central mosque, interviewed on 2 December 2019.

Major causes responsible for the Rohingya crisis

All of the respondents mentioned some basic reasons which are responsible for this ongoing Rohingya crisis. The Muslim leaders identified the core cause of this crisis is religious. The majority of the Rohingyas people are Muslim. All of the Muslim religious leaders claimed that Rohingyas are attacked because they are Muslim. Though some non-Muslim are also affected the main target of this ethnic cleansing is the Muslim community who are living in Rakhine state.

In Myanmar, since the return to relative democracy in 2011, extremist Buddhist organizations were in the heart of inter-communal violence. Both the major political parties, National League for Democracy (NLD) and Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) are dependent on these organizations for much of their electoral supports which giving them substantial influence over the political process. Equally, there are emerging evidence that old military regime funded and supported one of the major groups of extremists to foster instability. Instead, the existence of inter-communal violence opens the possibility of returning to the military rule, of course, to protect the nation from violence. Despite the changes since 2008, the military remains very powerful and many former generals sit in parliament as part of the USDP. They retain control of the economic resources of the country (Ibrahim, 2016). Two extremist Buddhist organizations are promoting violence in Myanmar, these are:

- a) 969 Movement: It is a loose organization of extremist Buddhist monks, which grew, out of the 1988 popular revolt and is now responsible for much of the anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar.
- b) MaBaTha (The Patriotic Association of Myanmar): An important extremist Buddhist organization which was formed officially in 2014 with the active support of the military. It is very influential in Myanmar's religious education and active in demanding laws to limit the rights of Muslims. This organization along with the 969 Movement implicated anti-Muslim violence (Ibrahim, 2016). After the overall analysis, three major causes we found that promoted ethnic cleansing and anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar. These are: Firstly, Buddhist religious extremism Secondly, international politics Thirdly, limited democracy, and dominance of the military in Myanmar.

Principle of Buddhism vs. anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar

MaBaTha (The Patriotic Association of Myanmar) as the organization for the protection of race and religion led by Buddhist monks was responsible for most anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar. Where the principle of Buddhism is non-violence, MaBaTha promoted anti-Muslim violence in the country. Buddhism stands for truth and peace. Therefore, if the

Buddhist cultures vanish, truth and peace would vanish steadily as well. This country was founded with the Buddhist ideology (Wade, 2017). Ven Sanghananda³ and Bishop Bejoy Nicephorus D'Cruze⁴ said that “Buddhist is based on the principle of non-violence. So Myanmar’s Buddhist leaders are deviated from the fundamental principles of their religion and get involved themselves with violent activities”. Other causes behind raising this Rohingya crisis are:

a) Burmese nationalism; b) Geographical location of Myanmar; c) International politics; d) Economic interests of Myanmar’s government; e) Trade interest of superpower neighboring countries as the interest of China, Russia, and India; f) Politically wrong decisions of the ancestors of the Rohingyas; g) Limited democracy h) Military dominance in Myanmar.

Ven. Sanghananda said that “in the Buddhist religion, there is no place for religious extremism. Gautama Buddha was a non- violent principle”.⁵

The Impact of Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the prime victim of the Rohingya crisis. All the respondents think that the Rohingya refugee crisis is now a global issue which is a matter of concern for most of its neighboring countries. But the prime victim of this crisis is Bangladesh. Because of the maximum number of Rohingyas are taking shelter in Bangladesh. If the Rohingya refugees never returned to Myanmar, it will be a matter of long term crisis for Bangladesh. All of the religious leaders have mainly predicted three major negative impacts of the Rohingya influx in Bangladesh.

a. Security threat through the expansion of militancy b. Environment degradation c. Expansion of HIV and AIDS

Bangladesh provides shelter to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees and an enormous population has created a vulnerable situation in the Bangladesh-Myanmar border area. The Rohingya camps in Cox’s Bazar district might turn to be a fertile ground for recruitment by Islamist militants. With little love for Myanmar and alienated from Bangladesh, the stateless Rohingyas seem to be vulnerable and desperate and are likely to become militants to uphold their interests. The movement of the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) and the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) is well known. They are fighting for autonomy or independence for Rohingyas. When established, the activities of both organizations were confined to Arakan, but following a series of pushes and the disappointment of not finding shelter in Bangladesh, they have expanded their operations well beyond the Southeastern region of Bangladesh. The illegal small arms trade, a flourishing business along the border, is also a security concern for Bangladesh.

³ Principal of Sylhet Buddha Bihar. Interviewed 2 December 2019.

⁴ Chairman of Sylhet Presbyterian Church, NoyaSharak, Sylhet. Interviewed 15 December 2019

⁵ Principal of Sylhet Buddha Bihar. Op.Cit.

Bangladesh's Border Guard has only one border observation post (BOP) to keep a vigil on the 129 km border. Pushed back refugees live in the border jungle and get involved in smuggling. Although Bangladesh law enforces seizures of huge firearms and explosives in their operations, smugglers can be able to escape arrest using advance information supplied by refugees within the camps (Rahman, 2010). Moreover, anti-social activities are reported to have been increased among the unregistered Rohingyas in the camps. The social vices in the Rohingya refugee community, commercial sexual exploitation, fake marriages, the fake proposal of work, and the prevalence of sexually transmitted infection (STI) have threatened the local social life and damaged the stability of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border region (Rahman, 2010). So it is clear that if the Rohingya crisis is not resolved as soon as possible, it will be a major security threat for Bangladesh in the future and its negative impact will fall on the environment, society, and economy of Bangladesh.

The Rohingyas offer services at a much lower rate than the local population and such practices are upsetting the job market in the region. About 90% of the lower-skilled laborers and staff employed in local hotels, motels, ports, and small businesses are all of Rohingya origin. They also work as rickshaw pullers and day laborers. As a result, Bangladeshi workers are losing out on their jobs. The Rohingya refugees are adding extra pressure on the existing crisis of the land and forests in the Cox's Bazar region. Bangladesh has lost a considerable area of reserve forest for providing land to the refugees for the construction of their shelter. Moreover, the refugees and undocumented Myanmar nationals are regularly cutting off valuable trees and destroying woods in the reserve forests in the Bandarban and Cox's Bazar areas causing serious harm to Bangladesh's environment, ecology, and bio-diversity (Islam, 2012).

Role of the UN and OIC in Resolving Rohingya Crisis

All of the respondents gave the same opinion that UN (Union Nation) organization failed to resolve the Rohingya crisis. Azeem Ibrahim in his book argues, the UN has been warned repeatedly how bad the situation is, and it has continued to publish highly critical reports. But as ever its impact is limited, in part by the enduring politics of Security Council, this case it is most likely that China and Russia would back the Myanmar military and also by the fact it has multiple roles in Myanmar (Ibrahim, 2016). All the Muslim leaders agreed that OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) has also failed to protect the rights of oppressed Muslims in different countries of the world. Rohingya crisis is not a new crisis. So in reality we find the bitter truth that UN organizations are not sincere enough to overcome this type of crisis. All interviewees have agreed that UN organization fails to ensure the security and right of the Rohingya minority. On the other side, OIC takes initiatives to protect Rohingya Muslim and encourage Gambia to create a complaint against Myanmar in International Court of Justice (ICJ).

The Gambia accuses Myanmar of genocide at top UN court

The small West African nation of the Gambia has filed a lawsuit at the UN's top court formally accusing Myanmar of genocide against Rohingya Muslims. The UN's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar said in August 2018 that the army's tactics were "grossly disproportionate to actual security threats" and that "military necessity would never justify killing indiscriminately, gang-raping women, assaulting children and burning entire villages" (BBC NEWS, 2019).

Myanmar rejected the report. It has consistently said its operations targeted militant or insurgent threats. In 2018, prosecutors at International Criminal Court (ICC) which would normally investigate allegations of war crimes as opposed to the ICJ- opened a preliminary inquiry into Myanmar's alleged crimes against its Rohingya Muslim minority. But the fact that Myanmar has not signed up to the ICC complicates the legal case there and no charges have yet been filed. The Gambia filed a lawsuit to the ICJ- sometimes known as the world court- at the Hague on 11 November 2019. The country, which is majority Muslim, also has the support of the 57 member Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and a team of international lawyers (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Both it and Myanmar are signatories to the 1948 Genocide convention, committing, preventing, and pushing the crime of genocide. In its filing, the Gambia asked the court to implement an injunction to make sure Myanmar immediately stops atrocities and genocide against its Rohingya people.

Abubakar M Tambadou, the Gambia's attorney Spearheaded the effort. He previously worked at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda investigating the 1994 genocide there. Tambadou told BBC that he was motivated to act after hearing stories of brutal killings, rape, and torture from survivors on a visit to a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh (BBC NEWS, 2019).

Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran⁶ said that "since the Gambia is an African Muslim country, it files a lawsuit for Rohingya from its consciousness, while the case may take many years to reach a final ruling".

On 23 January 2020, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Gambia v. Myanmar delivered its order upholding The Gambia's request for provisional measures. On the same day, the ICJ fixed 23 July 2020 and 25 January 2021 as the respective time-limits for the filing of the Memorial by The Gambia and the Counter-Memorial by Myanmar. The procedural law of the ICJ, however, will allow the parties to pursue incidental proceedings side by side in different stages of the case until the final judgment. And, the result of some of the incidental proceedings may definitively determine the outcome of the case (Ahmed, 2020).

⁶ Former mayor, Sylhet City Corporation. interviewed on 6 December 2019.

Conclusion

Bangladesh's government has been praised by people and countries all over the world for giving shelter to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina achieved the title of 'Mother of Humanity' for this intelligence. All the religious leaders interviewed also praised the Bangladesh government for her decision to shelter the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. But it would not be the permanent solution to this crisis. At present, the Rohingya refugee crisis is one of the national crises of Bangladesh. So the government should seek ways to overcome this crisis based on the opinion of the people of Bangladesh. The government should take decisions based on how the country's intellectuals, civil society, religious leaders, and above all the masses are thinking about the issues to overcome this crisis.

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