

Analysis of the exodus of Rohingyas from Myanmar and its impact on India

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Introduction

Rohingyas are indigenous to Rakhine state (also known as Arakan) in Myanmar settled since the 15th century. Collectively they fall under the Muslim Indo-Aryans, a mixture of pre-colonial and colonial immigrations. Considered by the United Nations as the “most persecuted minority group in the world”, the Rohingyas are a stateless group of people concentrated in western Myanmar, and facing brutal assaults from the Burmese state and military. The Rohingyas see themselves as (Muslim) natives of Arakan (Rakhine), a state in Myanmar, whereas Myanmar’s government and the majority Buddhist community sees them as Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh who migrated there during the colonial period and continue to do so. The Rohingyas were stripped of their Burmese nationality by the 1974 Emergency Immigration Act and then the 1982 Citizenship Act. The crisis first started on June 10th of 2012 in northern Rakhine between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims. This resulted in gang rape and murder of Rakhine women by Rohingyas and killing of ten Burmese Muslims by Rakhines. In return, Rohingyas burned a Rakhine’s Buddhist and their houses. As of August 22nd, 2012 it is officially estimated as the total of 88 casualties including 57 Muslims and 31 Buddhists. Nearly 90000 peoples lost their home and around 2500 houses were burned in the crisis. The Myanmar government never allowed a citizenship status to Rohingyas. Hence the majority of them do not have any legal documentation, making them stateless. Until recently, they have been able to register as temporary residents with identification cards known as white cards which began issuing in the 1990s.

Objective

This paper is the analysis of the Rohingya Muslims crises. To know the impact of the Rohingyas in India and to study the approach of the government.

Methodology

The data and sources for this research paper have been taken from newspaper editorials, journals and television.

Rohingyas in Myanmar

The history of movement back and forth between Chittagong and Arakan forms the context for the development of a complex and fluid ethnicity which has over time acquired the name 'Rohingya' for itself. To a large extent the conflict between the Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingya Muslims is based on a debate between the two groups over the historicity of the Rohingya identity in Burmese land. Majority of the Rakhine Buddhists believe that 'Rohingya' is a fabricated religious identity. They go on to cite historical documents to claim that the Burmese past never had any community called Rohingya and that those who refer to themselves by the name are basically immigrants from modern day Bangladesh who were brought in by the British. Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar's Rakhine state, neighbouring Bangladesh, are not recognised by the Myanmar government as an official ethnic group and are therefore denied citizenship. Most Rohingyas are not qualified to be citizens of Myanmar as per the 1982 Citizenship Law, which was promulgated by the erstwhile military junta. While it is claimed that there were no Rohingyas in Myanmar before the British brought 'Bengalis' to Burma, there is sufficient evidence to show that the Rohingyas pre-existed the British-engineered migration (during the British occupation of the Arakan State in 1823) from present-day Bangladesh to Burma. Even those who arrived in Burma post-1823 could not go back to Bangladesh now given that they have no citizenship claims there. This effectively makes them a stateless people. While the origin of the Rohingya crisis goes back to the 1950s, it started attracting greater attention only during the present decade because of large-scale violence and the resultant unprecedented refugee flows into neighbouring countries in South and South East Asia. In addition, the fears expressed by the present and the previous governments regarding a nexus between the Rohingyas and Islamic extremists (especially the Islamic State) have also led to a rise in interest about the issue.

Cause for the Conflict

Since World War Two they have been treated increasingly by Burmese authorities as illegal, interloping Bengalis, facing apartheid-like conditions that deny them free movement or state education while government forces intermittently drive out and slaughter them. While Buddhism happens to be the religion of the majority in present day Myanmar, the region is believed to have been home to a thriving multi-ethnic society in the last 2,000 years. Muslim influence in Myanmar can be traced back to the 15th century. However, those who call themselves as Rohingyas have a more complicated origin which makes their presence within the current borders of the nation problematic in the eyes of the majority. The controversy surrounding Myanmar's Rohingya people is evident in conflicting stories about the ethnic group's origin. The mass exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar and their subsequent plight on the open ocean occupied the world's attention. The root cause of their persecution is religious based ethno- nationalism. It has made the Rohingya the most persecuted people in

the world. Religious based ethno-nationalism is a mind-set instilled by successive dictators in Myanmar. It has been used to maintain power by gaining the trust and support of the majority at the expense of minorities. It is a useful tool for the divide and rule strategy so popular with dictators. This mind-set has resulted in and been strengthened by inflammatory anti-Muslim rhetoric. For example, a popular claim in Myanmar is that Buddhism is threatened by a densely populated Muslim Bangladesh whose population wish to flood into Myanmar. However, facts show that no threat really exists. Unfortunately the portrayal of Rohingya as intruders from Bangladesh has successfully inflamed hatred against Muslims. The annihilation of physical existence has been practiced through anti-Muslim pogroms, establishing discriminatory citizenship laws, creating dire living conditions, persecution, and targeting by security forces; tactics that are all deliberately designed to force individuals from their ancestral land. Rohingya also suffer direct persecution in the form of arbitrary arrest, torture, kidnapping and extrajudicial killing. In many cases, victim's relatives are extorted and have to pay a ransom to have their loved ones released. Under such circumstances, the perilous sea journey offers a higher chance of survival. The persecution of this minority group has a long and dark history in Myanmar. In the past, lawmakers and historians collaborated to destroy the legal status and historical evidence of Rohingya people. This historical elimination is ongoing. Rohingya and other ethnic Muslims were recognised as natives of Myanmar in the 1973 census, which recognised 143 ethnic groups in the country. Later the 1982 citizenship law delisted Muslims from ethnic groups with the exception of the Kaman.

Present condition of the Rohinyas

They have often been called the most persecuted minority in the world. The 1.1 million Rohingya Muslims squeezed precariously into the north-west state of Rakhine, in mainly Buddhist Burma, bordering majority Muslim Bangladesh, are stateless and unwanted. The latest military crackdown, which began on August 25, caused almost 90,000 Rohingyas to flee under fire to squalid, overflowing relief camps across the Bangladeshi border in just two weeks. Officially close to 400 people had died by early September, but human rights activists claim to have confirmation of at least 1,000 deaths and believe the figure is much higher. A report released in early September by the Burma Human Rights Network documents the rise of systematic abuses against Burmese Muslims since 2012, including the creation of "Muslim-free zones", denial of ID cards, and the banning of Islamic holidays. The oppression has been mirrored by an upsurge of ultra-nationalist Buddhist groups who encourage an anti-Muslim rhetoric. Myanmar has been under severe attack from the international community in recent times for what is being considered as 'genocide' against the Rohingya Muslims. Faced with the savagery, about 10,000 Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar have rushed into Bangladesh for refuge. This is not the first time that this group has been seeking shelter from the Bangladeshi government on account of being brutally persecuted at home. Last time a mass exodus of the Rohingyas happened was in 2012 when

communal clashes erupted between them and the Rakhine Buddhists who were later represented by the Burmese Army. While Bangladesh remains their favourite destination for decades now, they have been seeking out refuge in other neighbouring countries as well. According to a UN report, at present around 5,500 Rohingya refugees have been registered in India and are living in makeshift camps under precarious conditions.

Rohinyas in India and Government's approach

According to an estimate confirm the presence of about 36,000 Rohingya in India. They are located in the New Delhi area and six other states: Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Assam and Jammu-Kashmir. Completing an accurate estimate of the number of Rohingya living in India is very difficult. Being considered a paradise in an extremely unstable region, India has emerged as the favourite destination for people escaping from Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Afghanistan, China and Myanmar. Around 40,000 Rohingya Muslim refugees live in India across Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan and Delhi. At the moment, only 9,000 Rohingya have been were officially granted refugee status in India. All the others either have received an ID card by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' officers, which do not guarantee them any legal right in their host country, or are considered illegal immigrants. It is no coincidence that, besides New Delhi, most of the Rohingya are concentrated in Kashmir. Fleeing from Myanmar, this minority, which has been denied all rights on grounds of religion, is well received in the only Indian state with a Muslim majority. Many of them have found a decent place to live, a job, friends, and have been able to lean on the health and education facilities run by various non-governmental organizations operating in the area. Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju has said India wants to deport all illegal immigrants even those with UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) papers because Immigrants are susceptible to recruitment by "terror" groups. They not only infringe on rights of Indian citizens but also pose grave security challenges. Influx of migrants also leads to social, political and cultural problems. On August 18, 2017 India's National Human Rights Commission had issued a notice to the Home Affairs Ministry over its decision to send them back to Myanmar. On September 5, Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju said the government had set up a task force in various states to identify and deport Rohingya refugees in India. He maintained that the Rohingyas were illegal immigrants who needed to be deported "as per the law". India on September 7 refused to sign a global declaration adopted at an international conclave as it referred to the violence against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar's Rakhine state. According to Indian government, the Supreme Court should desist from interfering in the matter as the plan to deport Rohingya refugees was a policy decision.

India's record on International Refugees

Since independence, India has followed ad hoc policies when it comes to refugee settlement. India has been hosting large numbers of refugees without any specific law in place since 1971, when a massive flow of people came from war-torn Bangladesh. It relied on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recommendations – or what is also called as customary international law. According to the UN data, refugees in India number approximately 200,000. In the first half of 2014, the UN Refugee agency estimated that there more than two million refugees living in India if one goes back to partition. They arrived during peak migration crises and conflicts, including the Partition in 1947, the Tibet crisis of 1959, the creation of Bangladesh 1971, civil wars in Sri Lanka and wars in Afghanistan. In India, there are 9,200 refugees from Afghanistan, of which, 8,500 are Hindus. There are also more than 400 Pakistani Hindu refugee settlements in major Indian cities. India never signed the UN refugee convention, which spell out the rights of refugees and responsibility of countries. But we have signed 4 other international UN convention.(i)UN convention on human rights(ii)UN convention of civil and political rights(iii)UN convention against enforced disappearance.(iv)UN convention against torture. That means India cannot send back refugees to a place where their lives and liberty would be seriously threatened. But Government has relied on the Foreigners Act 1946 that's gives the state wide power to detect and deport illegal migrants. Police and law Enforcement agencies should be instructed to step up surveillance of Rohingya or anyone suspected of being from the minority as a preparatory step. Other hand India can be support country like Bangladesh who giving shelters to Rohingya refugee to providing food and resources. Nearly 40000 Rohingyas have their home in India now. India has been receiving Rohingya refugees and allowing them to settle in the different parts of the country over the years, especially after the communal violence in the state of Rakhine in 2012.

How should India deal with this crisis?

India, a traditional home for Myanmar's pro-democracy activists, has been reluctant to either speak out about the violence against the Rohingyas or accommodate them in significant numbers. Beijing's closeness to Myanmar clearly worries New Delhi. Its reluctance also comes from the fact that Myanmar's assistance is seen as significant in dealing with the insurgency in the Northeast. Although New Delhi's reluctance to speak out publicly about the violations against the Rohingyas is understandable, it can ill afford to ignore the crisis in Myanmar. Even if human rights considerations are the least of New Delhi's worries, it is clearly in its interest to ensure that stability and peace return to the Rakhine state. When peace returns to Myanmar, India can ask the latter to rehabilitate the Rohingyas (like it did vis-à-vis East Pakistan refugees after the 1971 war). A stable and democratic Myanmar will naturally gravitate towards New Delhi. The Rohingya crisis, if it remains unsettled,

can become a path toward radicalisation and pose a greater security threat for India. There are reports of increasing radicalisation among sections of the Rohingya community. A December 2016 report by the International Crisis Group spoke precisely about this challenge and highlighted how rights violations can lead to radicalisation. New Delhi should use creative diplomacy to persuade Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya crisis. It should perhaps consider appointing a special envoy for this purpose who should hold tactful negotiations with Myanmar's military, Ms. Suu Kyi, Dhaka and Beijing in order to bring an end to the crisis. The government has stationed 6,000 soldiers on the India-Bangladesh border to keep a strict vigil against any Rohingya influx.

Conclusion

India's refusal to criticise the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD-led government in Myanmar on the Rohingya conflict has raised eyebrows in the neighbourhood. In the name of counter-insurgency operations, the Myanmar army had driven away at least one-third of the 1.1 million Arakanese Muslim or Rohingyas in Rakhine state to Chittagong in Bangladesh. With China supporting Myanmar, and the Islamic world, with the exception of Turkey, remaining quiet, Hasina banked on India's record of taking an ideological stance and turning the heat on Myanmar. New Delhi is persuading Myanmar to take back the Rohingyas. India doesn't want to create any kind of unwelcoming environment between both sides which would interrupt the developmental work of both countries. So India has to take very restraint steps and balanced approach regarding Rohingya issues, followed pragmatic position then only it can maintain its leadership position in this region. The prospect that democracy will be reinstated in Burma and that the Rohingyas will be safe to return home in the foreseeable future seems extremely unlikely. . The study reflects over the uncertain future of the Rohingyas and the ways to find durable solutions to their plight. In this case, humanitarian intervention should be non-biased of narrow national interest. Help should not be for those who can lobby or can give something in return but for those who are in need.

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