



Rohingya Crisis: Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar and the Aftermath

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses about the Rohingya crisis and its impact in the region. It also discusses the present and future of the crisis in Bangladesh. The world's largest persecuted community, Rohingya, faced the largest and most horrible persecution in the last term of 2017-18. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims were tortured, raped and killed by the military and local Rakhine Buddhist. More than six lac Rohingyas have been fled to Bangladesh. Internal politics of Myanmar and the geo-politics of the region are blamed for the persecution. Though the persecution has created a great humanitarian crisis and eased the path of violence and extremism in the region the international community did not play any effective role to make any sustainable solution. The ethnic cleansing and denial mode of the world to the persecution may cause militancy in the region and turn Bangladesh into a battle field.

INTRODUCTION

Rohingya is the world's fastest growing refugee crisis (Humanitarian Aid, 2017). According to historians and Rohingya community the ethnic group has been living in Myanmar since 12th century. Total population of Rohingya of Myanmar is around 2761500. Only 220000 are now in Myanmar and the rest 2541500 are refugee while 890000 are in Bangladesh. On the basis of population Rohingya is the fourth largest community in Myanmar. According to the Citizenship Law 1982 of Myanmar the 800 years old and fourth largest community was not recognized as citizen among the 135 ethnic groups (Aljazeera, 2018) although they were in parliament and ran the state before. In 1951 election five MPs including first two female were elected from the Rohingya community. In 1956 a MP named Sultan Mahmud ran the ministry of Health as a minister. Not only in early parliament but also after

Citizenship Law of 1982 they had members in the House of Representative (Pyithu Hluttaw). Rohingya-led National Democratic Party for Human Rights won four seats in the Burmese parliament in the general election of 1990. But they were not allowed to participate in the election in 2005 (Wikipedia, 2018). Despite of providing the rights and security the military and the fifth largest community Rakhine Buddhists with the support of government carried out several operations that killed and raped a number of Rohingya brutally and forced hundreds of thousands to flee to the neighboring countries especially to Bangladesh. Though Bangladesh has no relation with the problem the crisis has made Bangladesh vulnerable. A large ethnic community has become the victim of brutal persecution which might raise a deep crisis of militancy in the region in near future. With this connection, this study has been undertaken to know about the present Rohingya crisis and to draw future attention on the crisis in the area.

METHODOLOGY

The research questions behind the study were what the Rohingya crisis and its history are, what aftermath of the crisis is and what Bangladesh may face. To achieve the objectives of the study, data have been collected from secondary sources like various news portals, websites, newspapers, articles, etc. Check, cross-check and verification were done to judge authenticity of data collected for analysis. The collected data were arranged under various heads according to the objectives of research and the outputs were explained in descriptive manner.

This research can be justified by two theories of ethnic conflict and cleansing – “**Premordialism**” and “**Instrumentalism**”. Primordialism states that the differences in ethnic identity are the root cause of ethnic conflict. By birth people inherit the ethnic identity and continue it. This difference creates “ancient hatreds” and “mutual fear” of domination. Gradually hates and fear turn into clash and cleansing. On the other hand, Instrumentalism says that “ethnic identity” is not the root cause until it is politicized and become aware about rights. Because of politicization some issues like security concerns, competition, inequality and greed may raise among other groups. From the ancient period the ethnic difference between Rohingya Muslim and Rakhine Buddhist has been continued. The core ethnic difference (primordialism), political success, high birth rate, desire of freedom and global Islamophobia (Instrumentalism) created hatreds and fear among the majority Buddhist. Gradually the hatreds and fear turn into ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslim.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Rohingya crisis

An article entitled ‘Rohingya People’ by Wikipedia (2018) explained the Rohingya crisis and ethnic cleansing very clearly. The Muslims leaders of then Arakan (now Rakhain) wanted to join with Pakistan when British left the area. But the Pakistani leader Jinnah did not accept the proposal and Arakan remained with Myanmar. From the very beginning the minority Muslim

community was oppressed by the majority Buddhist community. So the Muslim community Rohingya tried to get a free Arakan state. Because of the purpose some militant groups were raised. Though they were not so strong they tried to get freedom. These activities introduced them as militant and Bangladeshi entrenchers. They were deprived of government facilities such as education, health, job etc. The media, politicians and some extremist groups created an image of Rohingya as bad, uneducated, uncivilized, Bangladeshi entrenchers, criminals and militant having high birth rate (BBC Bangla, 2017). So majority Barman people don’t want Rohingya in Myanmar. This image is supporting to the extremist group and the government. Several times government carried out operations on Rohingya to strength their popularity. The first operation, operation King Dragon by then government was to sustain power and gain more popularity. In Myanmar the Barman are the majority (68%) and they want other minority especially religious minority to serve as their slave. Not only Rohingya but also other minority groups are victim but Rohingya is the worst among them. Military and the government also follow the hate crimes of Barman. The present councilor of state and *de facto* chief Aung San Suu kyi who got Nobel peace prize is also silent, because if she talks against the Barman extremists, she will be overthrown.

Ethnic cleansing

The 1978 operation forced 200000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. After that a secrete repatriation agreement was held between Bangladesh and Myanmar in which Myanmar acknowledged that the Rohingya had legal residence in the country (Corr, 2016). Later on to destroy the identity of Rohingya the government started to use the term ‘illegal immigrants’ instead of ‘Rohingya’. Finally by the approval of Citizenship Law in 1982 government officially declared Rohingya as illegal immigrants. To be sustain in Myanmar Rohingya supported the democratic movement of NLD and because of that the junta government banned the Rohingya led NDPHR, imprisoned the leader and carried out operations from 1991 to 1992. They killed men, raped women, destroyed houses and burnt religious places. The oppression forced

250000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh in second period. Under the supervision of UNHCR some Rohingyas backed their home. To destroy the historical tie the junta government changed the name of 'Arakan' to 'Rakhine' in 1989. Now government, media and the other people of Myanmar don't use the term Arakan and Rohingya. Several times they force foreign delegates not to use the terms 'Rohingya'. In 2012 there were several riots between Rohingya and Burmans. The riots left 78 people dead, 87 injured, 140000 displaced and most of them were from the Rohingya. The communal violence or alleged abuses by the security forces were going on so that thousands of Rohingya people continued to flee from Myanmar to the neighboring countries (BBC News, 2018).

The massive operation was started in 2016 and it is continuing. In response to the attack of Arakan Salvation Army (ARSA) the operations were carried out. It is thought that this group is nothing but an organization which works to legalize the operation of Myanmar authority. Shuvo (2018) noted that since August, 2017 at least 7 lac Rohingya have been fled to Bangladesh. (Petersen, 2018) Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) informed that "At least 6,700 Rohingya, including at least 730 children under the age of five, were killed in the month after the violence broke out." (BBC News, 2018) According to analysis of satellite imagery by Human Rights Watch "288 villages were partially or totally destroyed by fire in northern Rakhine state after August 2017". "There are also around 117, 000 people staying outside the camps in host communities." (BBC News, 2018). It was difficult to collect the exact information from the Rakhine state as entrance of journalist was limited. All the information was collected from human rights activists and other unauthorized sources.

How does Myanmar justify the persecution?

Myanmar gives a fake blame on Rohingya Muslims saying that they are combating terrorism. They identified Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) as a terrorist organization which attacked on police check posts. They also claimed that the organization has connection with international Islamic militant organizations. But it was found

that ARSA is a very weak and old-fashioned organization for which it is not possible to carry out a massive operations. ARSA also claimed that they have no connection with international militant group. Their activities are also not like the militant groups. It is an ethno-nationalist movement (Biswas, 2017). It is also claimed that ARSA is nothing but a government patron organization which legalizes the operation of government.

The operation carried out by Myanmar government and extremist on Rohingya Muslim is very intentional and pre planned. Their intention was proved several times. Some of the proofs are given below.

During the Rohingya crisis media played a vital role. International and the local media of Bangladesh played a very important role to focus the persecution which had shaken the world. Because of media the whole world was concern about the ethnic cleansing. During the crisis the largest portion of the news was about the Rohingya crisis. At least two journalists were prisoned by Myanmar Government for their investigating report. They investigated and found that military of Myanmar along with local people were persecuting the Rohingya people (BBC Bangla, 2018). The report says "Bound together, the 10 Rohingya Muslim captives watched their Buddhist neighbors dig a shallow grave. Soon afterwards, on the morning of Sept. 2, all 10 lay dead. At least 2 were hacked to death by Buddhist villagers. The rest were shot by Myanmar troops, two of the gravediggers said" (Lone, 2017). In another report a BBC journalist Jonathon Head said that he identified burnt villages where even plump trees were burnt. He was able to experience the burning in a Muslim area by Rakhine Buddhist and police. He explained his experience as "On our way back we saw a large column of smoke rising from a cluster of trees in the rice fields - usually a sign of a village. We got out and raced across the fields to reach it. We could see the first buildings in the village ablaze, but only just. Houses in these villages burnt to ash in 20-30 minutes. It was obvious the fires had just been lit. As we walked in, a group of young, muscular men carrying machetes, swords and sling-shots were walking out. We tried to ask them questions but they refused to be filmed. However, my Myanmar

colleagues did speak to them away from the cameras and they said they were Rakhine Buddhists. One of them admitted he had lit the fires, and said he had help from the police. As we walked further in, we saw the Madrasa (Islamic religious school) with its roof only just on fire. Flames licked up the sides of another house opposite; within three minutes it was an inferno. There was no-one else in the village. These men we saw were the perpetrators. Household goods were strewn across the path; children's toys, women's clothing. We saw one empty jug reeking of petrol and another with a little fuel left in it in the middle of the path. By the time we walked out, all the burned houses were smoldering, blackened ruins" (BBC News, 2017).

Sometimes Myanmar authority permits journalist to visit the areas and set a situation to blame on Muslim Rohingya. During the visit some Hindu Rohingyas were managed and forced by the Myanmar authority to tell (lie) that their houses were burnt by Muslim Rohingya. They showed some photos also. But this claim was void by the Hindu Rohingya who flew to Bangladesh. They said that their houses were burnt by Buddhist Rakhine. Jonathon Head identified a Hindu man and Hindu woman who torched the houses wearing Islamic dress. Photos of the moment were taken and showed to the journalist to show that Muslims burnt their houses. But these photos were fake and the incidents were pre planned. The Myanmar authority uses more several fake photos to describe Rohingya people in Myanmar as terrorists. Even they used photos of the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 to blame Rohingya Muslims as terrorist (Head, 2017). This proved that the ethnic cleansing was not just a communal violence rather a pre planned operation having deep politics inside.

Future of Rohingya and the region

During the Rohingya persecution the 'jihad' was the most trafficking word in Indonesia. Various sources said that Islamic State (IS) has plan to attack in Myanmar. Al-Qaeda also mentioned the oppressed Rohingya people several times. In the sub-continent, South East Asia and especially in Bangladesh either the two militant organizations or their affiliated organizations are present. No

doubt the two militant groups and other conspirators will try to use the Rohingya people. Already the US vice president has said the hate will continue and give birth of new hate. The then prime minister of Malaysia also expressed his tension about the militancy that may arise in the region in near future. There is strong possibility to use the oppressed Rohingya community to create militancy in the region (Wikipedia, 2018).

Not only Myanmar and Bangladesh, Rohingya crisis may spark militancy in both South and South East Asian region. A report says that at least two militants were arrested by the police of Indonesia who targeted the embassy of Myanmar at Jakarta. The plan of attack was for the persecution on Rohingya in Rakhine (Myanmar Times, 2013).

Another report of BBC Bengali Service said that in the social media of Indonesia the word 'jihad' and 'martyred' have been increased. The report also said that a militant group named 'Islam Defenders Front' opened a registration system for the people who are willing to go to Myanmar and fight for Rohingya community. Affiliated groups of IS and Al-Qaeda also encouraged people to fight against Myanmar. The invitation of 'jihad' is not just a mere invitation rather a huge number of people are being engaged with this. BBC says 76 thousand people clicked on an instagram account in which Rohingya people were invited to jihad. They were using different hashtags to invite people to jihad. They also shared videos claiming that jihadists from Indonesia and Bangladesh had already reached to Myanmar (Hodge, 2017).

In the subcontinent and South-east Asia right now two militant ideologies are active. One is Al-Qaeda and other is ISIS. Both targeted the Rohingya and Myanmar. The concern of the two organizations is a matter of concern for the area. Already they have targeted and if they found an oppressed community of course they will try to use them to destabilize the peace in the area.

What Bangladesh is facing and will face

Being weak economically, politically and diplomatically compared to India, China and Myanmar Bangladesh is the second worst victim of the crisis while the first victim is Rohingya Muslim. Bangladesh is now in a great dilemma. It

is very difficult for a developing country having a huge and dense population to bear the burden of additional 890000 uneducated and unskilled people having a high birth rate. But the people of the country have a great sympathy over them. International community also wants Bangladesh to accept them. Because of internal and external pressures the government could not but accepted the huge population. Though the government accepted it wants a peaceful solution of the crisis. The government wants to ensure repatriation and respectful citizenship of Rohingya in Myanmar. Bangladesh is now facing two problems and may face more problems in future. Ineffective repatriation treaty and diplomatic defeat have already been faced. She may face militancy in future.

Ineffective repatriation treaty

Though a repatriation treaty named ‘arrangement’ was signed on 16th January, 2018 between Bangladesh and the Myanmar the treaty was not suitable for Bangladesh. Bangladesh wanted to ensure participation of international community especially UN and UNHCR in the repatriation process but it was not happened (Osborn, 2018). International community especially UNHCR wanted to be involved but as there was strong resistant from Myanmar it was not happened finally. In 1978 the repatriation process was undertaken by UNHCR. Bangladesh also tried to ensure a time frame in which repatriation will be completed but this was not included in the treaty (Hossain, 2017). So may be the whole repatriation process has become nipped in the bud. Actually the treaty does not make any sense. Myanmar military and extremist persecuted Rohingyas not to take them back. They burnt the houses and destroyed all sign of Rohingya. By killing and raping they gave a clear message to the Rohingya people that they don’t want them. None of the initiatives and even a single word shows that Myanmar has a little will. In a word, Myanmar will never take them back. It’s simple math.

To ensure respectful citizenship of Rohingya in Myanmar Bangladesh sought the support from China, India and Japan (Hasnat, 2018). Unfortunately China and India directly supported the persecution on Rohingya by Myanmar and

they never want the repatriation process. Rohingya people also don’t want to back to Myanmar. They don’t trust their government as government did not keep their word before. They think they will be oppressed again so they want to stay in Bangladesh until death. BBC talked with some of them and they expressed their view about the repatriation process as, “No. No dear, we would not like to back. Though they made the treaty they will oppress us. I would like to die in Bangladesh. At least we are getting food and living in peace”; “People of Myanmar are fraud. They made treaty but there is no trust on it. If no international force is appointed there we will not go”; and “First they have to recognize us as citizen, provide us the right of free moving and our land back. But they are not giving us the citizenship. We don’t know how long they will keep us in the (reception) camp after returning. They may detain us for a long time” (Babu, 2018).

Diplomatic defeat

Already the crisis proved that importance of Myanmar is much higher than that of Bangladesh even if in logical and humanitarian ground. The more the Indian and Chinese projects increase in Myanmar the more the importance of Bangladesh will be decreased. The Kaladan project of India will definitely lessen the dependency of India upon Bangladeshi transit. The deep seaport and oil-gas pipeline will increase the importance of Myanmar to China. Besides, there are a number of projects already have been taken by India and China. So in this region Bangladesh will be a bin of problems which will take all problems of others on her shoulder without uttering any word. Even in conflict with Myanmar she will not get any support. Though Myanmar showed a very unfriendly behavior by sending Rohingya and violating border rules, Bangladesh could not take any action against them. Even she did not dare to cut the diplomatic tie with Myanmar. Not only that if militancy arises in the region Bangladesh will be the worst sufferer though the spark will also burn Myanmar and India both. Bangladesh will be fully responsible for the militancy and may face the problem of being ‘battle field’ and having ‘proxy war’ by super powers like that of in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

Militancy

Rohingyas are an oppressed community, their children are growing up seeing themselves refugee and oppressed. No doubt they have and will have strong desire for freedom. Government is in doubt that this desire will be used to raise militancy in Bangladesh. Rohingyas are poor, uneducated and have the habit of involving in crime so it will not be so difficult to get them engaged in terrorism. If they get weapon and become militant then Bangladesh will be the worst victim. Bangladeshis have strong doubt that behind the militancy there are the USA and Israel. The doubt was not only expressed by the people but also by the ministers of government several times. At least three ministers and one ruling party leader directly accused Israel for the terrorist attack in Bangladesh. Reaction of the USA after the Holey Artisan attack on 2nd July, 2016 mentioned the doubt. Finally realizing the suspicion of Bangladesh the then US ambassador to Dhaka Marcia Bernicat said, "I have been sad to see reports lately of some people who are saying that US offers to provide counter-terrorism assistance are either our effort to invade Bangladesh, or take over Bangladesh, or control Bangladesh in some way, or even to drag you onto a battlefield. We have no such desire to occupy this country in any way." (US Embassy in Bangladesh, 2016). Her statement was like a rain in desert. For a while Bangladeshis took a breath of peace though there was doubt about the intention of the USA. Israel is providing training and weapon to the military of the Myanmar amid of the crisis. This sort of support was not taken by Bangladesh easily. The security experts and general people think that Israel has a long term plan and the plan is to raise militancy in the area.

CONCLUSION

Internal politics of Myanmar and geo-politics of India and China will continue ignoring the human rights of 'world's most friendless people'. Though it is a huge burden on Bangladesh she has no way out to get rid of this. To solve the problem and combat the upcoming problem Bangladesh has to be strong enough by politically, economically and diplomatically. If Bangladesh could take a very strong position about the crisis and she could

influence international community to make some effective actions then the problem will be solved. But the country is not able to do that. Because of geographic position, Arakan will be more important to China and Myanmar. They will take more and more projects there. The other Rohingya people will also flee to Bangladesh. This will also encourage India to push 40000 Rohingya to Bangladesh. All these points will surely inspire militancy in the region. No doubt if effective steps cannot be taken right now, Bangladesh will be the worst sufferer.

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