



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Critical Analysis of Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar and its Impact on Neighbouring Countries**

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**ABSTRACT**

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This article argues that Rohingya as “illegal citizens” in Myanmar and as refugees in other states of South East Asia are a marginalized community of the world and also increase challenges for receiving states. Myanmar has been deliberately declared them illegal citizens and demolished their villages after the latest genocide and build military barracks along the Bangladesh border. So, now almost two million Rohingya are living in refugee camps in different countries. For this article qualitative method and secondary data such as newspapers and articles are used. For ethnic cleansing of Rohingya from Myanmar, government and Buddhist monks used the religion and ethnic cards; they introduced many policies such as citizenship bill of 1982, the Rohingya exodus and 969 movement. As a result, many people fled to neighboring states and become a challenge for the economy and society of receiving states such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

**Introduction**

There is a very old debate of church versus state. This debate gave birth to the idea of secularization. Western secularization has conquered the world and proves that religion should be separated from administration and authoritative duties of government, from the economy, from the nation-state building and other needs of livelihood, otherwise religious majority and the administrative majority can create a crisis in the state just like Rohingya crisis in “Buddhist” majority state Myanmar. Unfortunately, the above-mentioned phenomenon of secularization and separation of religion from state is not very helpful for nation-building in third world states

especially in Southeast Asia and South Asia. In the third world states patriotism and religion make a nation. This patriotism and religion is a genuine method of initiate solidarity, confidence, and a sense of security and protection of others in a group of people and makes them a nation. But this solidarity and nationalism also have a bad impact on a state like Myanmar formally Burma, which consists of many different ethnicity and religion in her territory (Kinnvall, 2004).

The ancient history of Myanmar along with dictatorship, poverty, ethnicity and religious patriotism collectively develop the Buddhist Patriotism in the state. Lawlessness, forcefulness with low financial development especially in Rakhine state formally known as Arakan province, started the crisis in the state. Although the 2008 Burmese constitution gives religious freedom to every citizen of the state, insecurities between "Theravada Buddhists" and "Rohingyan Muslims" are much older. Theravada Buddhists are almost 89% of Myanmar's population; this majority gave them confidence and numerical advantage against 4% Muslims. The points of confinement of religious autonomy are flawlessly clarified in the mastery and bias that appeared close to Myanmar's Islamic group, which are keeping the nation from achieving a consistent and majority rule condition, yet of course, they likewise shed brilliant on an unidentified look of Buddhism. It's kind of fascism performed by high positioned Buddhist leaders and ministers and help to fall the social and religious virtue (Zarni, 2013).

So, in this manner, Myanmar's President Heinlein suggests the outset of the Rohingya from Myanmar nation with the specific goal of disposing Rohingya Muslim from Myanmar. This effort results in multi genocide or massacre of Rohingya Muslims even for Rohingya immigrants (UNO, 2013). The Myanmar government along with Buddhist majority and leadership develop laws against Rohingya Muslims and also support the different movements against Muslim communities such as the 969 Movement. Radical Monks with the help of the government also initiate identity crises, citizenship laws against Rohingya Muslims and also use propaganda as a tool against Islam (Bashar, 2012).

The Rohingya Muslim crisis clearly challenges the existing western point of view of Buddhism. Buddhism clearly painted as a peaceful religion of the world besides non-forceful teachings and agents of peace. But the ancient history of the sub-continent is totally against this concept from "Siddharta Gautama" and emperor of ancient sub-continent "Ashoka", Buddhist Kingdom "Sri Lanka" or "Khmer" Buddhism has a rich history of disputes and forcefulness. This brutal history proves that radical monks can play with legislation and also use force to achieve their goals. On the other hand, Muslims and Islam are generally famous as extremists, fundamentalist terrorists in the western world. In the current situation of Rohingya, the situation is dramatically changed, Buddhists are terrorist and Muslims are victims (Beech, 2012).

There is a broad objective of the study which aims to explain the history and conditions of the humanitarian crisis of the Rohingya. Besides, there are several

specific objectives of the study. These are: (a) To state the root causes of ethnic conflict; (b) To describe the history of the Rohingya crisis; (c) To analyze the humanitarian vulnerability of Rohingyas.

The study is an explanatory type of research that has been conducted in a qualitative approach. Secondary sources have been used for data collection which is based on content analysis. Books, journal articles, the record of government and nongovernment organizations, media (newspaper and television) reports are the sources of data. Moreover, empirical observation is applied herein as the source of primary data. Data has been analyzed in the general approach.

### **Policies of Myanmar Government towards Rohingya**

On 25<sup>th</sup> August 2017, the Myanmar government did the latest violent attack on the Rakhine state. After this attack according to Amnesty International, almost 1 million Rohingya become refugees and IDPs. International research institutes such as OIDA, UNCHR, etc are agreed on some figures such as “24,000 Rohingya Muslims were killed during crackdown, 34,000 people were thrown into fires, 114,000 were beaten to death, almost 18,000 women and girls were raped 113,000 homes of Rohingya were demolished and nearly 115,000 Rohingya homes were burnt by the Myanmar government (Sakib, 2019).

This crackdown did not happen suddenly. Myanmar government had taken some steps previously such as declare Rohingya “Illegal Immigrants” and also pass citizenship Law 1982 against Rohingya. Since 1970’s Myanmar government is against Rohingya community and wants them to leave their homeland. In this section critical analysis of policies of Myanmar government is discussed.

### **Identity Crisis**

There are 135 ethnic groups in Myanmar and Rohingya are one of them. But the issue is that Rohingyas are not considered as citizens by the state of Myanmar since 1982. Their religion and ethnicity make them different from Myanmar nationals. The state doesn’t apply that it’s only because of Theravada Buddhist who denies that Rohingya Muslim are the citizen of Myanmar. Theravada Buddhists who are the majority in the state apply that the Rohingya Muslim minority are “illegal Bengali”. Firstly Myanmar tried to stop people to use word Rohingya for the people of Rakhine state. The reason behind this act was that the “Rohingya” identity was recognized by the 1961 Census. But in the 2014 Census, they were forced to title themselves as “Bengali” (Washaly, 2019).

Myanmar citizens are supposed to have a National Registration Card known as NRC. In 1970 Myanmar government by Ne Win took away the NRC from the Rohingya and setup police check-posts to block the traveling of Rohingya in the state. That’s why the recent governments and population don’t recognize them as a citizen of the state and government don’t serve them any civil rights either. They are

illegal groups of people with the same religion and language in the state (Wade, 2017).

In 1982 Myanmar government pass a nationality law known as Myanmar Citizenship Law. According to this law, a citizen of the state must have evidence of their forefathers living in the state before 1948 and also have fluency in one national language of the state. Rohingya failed to fulfill these requirements. Rohingya were suppressed and challenged community along with illiteracy and poverty. They failed to provide any documentation for their identity and become illegal Bengali (Lwin, 2012).

### **Rohingyan Exodus**

The exodus of Rohingya started in 1978 when the military carries out the operation "Naga Min or Dragon King". This operation was against illegal immigrants of the state. So, the operation targeted the citizen of Rakhine state and makes them leave their country. Rohingya has no documentation to prove them national of the state so they flee to Bangladesh. At that time 200,000 Rohingya fled towards Bangladesh. Bangladesh was also a newly independent and poor state so, she could not bear the weight of immigrants on her economy and resources. That's why in 1979, Myanmar and Bangladesh signed a bilateral agreement for the return of Rohingya, but when these refugees return to their homeland they were jobless, homeless and without any citizenship documentation. So, they became illegal foreigners of the state. After 1990, when the Myanmar government failed to implementation of the election in the state, over 270,000 Rohingya Refugees fled towards Bangladesh again. In 1992 both governments again signed the MoU for the repatriation of Rohingya. After that almost 50,000 Rohingya came back to their home without the supervision of UNHCR. In 1993 Bangladeshi government agreed to involve UNCHR in this process. In August 2017, the Rohingya militant group attacked the 30 police posts and one army camp in the Rakhine state. In reply, the Myanmar army starts ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya. So, almost 1.1 million Rohingya Refugees migrated towards Bangladesh, according to UNICEF 60% of them are children. Besides, there are 40,000 Refugee in India, 5,000 in Thailand, 150,000 in Malaysia, 1,000 in Indonesia, 350,000 in Pakistan, 10,000 in UAE and 200,000 in Saudia Arabia. Now, Myanmar strongly rejected an international plea for the reconstruction of Rohingya refugees. The state also planted landmines with the border of the Bangladesh border to ensure that fugitives do not return to the state (Washaly, 2019).

### **The 969 Movement**

AshinWirathu, the Buddhist anti-Muslim leader of Myanmar started a 969 movement to boycott the Muslim community as well as to locate the Buddhist community in Myanmar. In this movement Buddhist community design the image in which they drew a chakra wheel and wrote 969 on it. The digits of 969 present the triple gems of Buddhism; Buddha, Dhamma (the teachings) and Sangha (a group of friars). The 969 Movement also connects the dots with "Ashoka", the greatest

Buddhist emperor, how the emperor worked and took a harsh decision during his rule and his rule also known in the modern world. Furthermore, the 969 Movement numerically represents the monkhood and properties of Buddha. The initial 9 shows uncommon characteristics of Buddha, and then 6 speak for the Dhamma and then 9 presents Sangha (Arai, 2013).

In this 969 Movements, Buddhist leaders spread 969 stickers all over the state and Buddhist people put them on their cars, taxis, shop, houses, organizations and everywhere else can make their places distinguish from the others. These stickers played many roles at that time, stickers showed Buddhist people from where they can shop, eat and live. On the other hand, these stickers limited every chance of economic growth for Muslim shop holders, taxi drivers, and service providers. Buddhist are the majority in Myanmar and they play this ability to boycott Muslims in every way of life and these stickers helped them (Aggestam, 2002).

The idea of the 969 Movement ironically came from the Muslim community. South Asian Muslims used 786 numerical digits in their homes, shops, and car. The Muslim thinks 786 represents Bismillah-Ir-Rahman-Ir-Rahim, which means for the sake of Allah (Peter Coclanis, 2013). Buddhist leaders took this idea and initiate 969 Movement because they think that if they do business with the Muslim then Muslims have some finance and money which they used against the state and also in the favor of Rohingya (Kinnvall, 2004).

### **Legislative Proposition**

After the success of the 969 Movement, Ashin Wirathu and his supporters support the idea of Safeguarding National Identity. For Safeguarding National Identity, Wirathu and his team make an appeal in National Assembly to prohibit interfaith marriages. The Buddhist majority of the state which supported the 969 Movement came along to forbid the marriage between Buddhist lady and Muslim gentleman. Buddhists argue that if a Buddhist lady marries with the Muslim gentleman, it is estimated that the lady changes her faith and becomes Muslim. They also argue that children of interfaith parents can adopt Islam as religion and become a danger to the world and stain on Buddha (Kyaw, 2013).

So, for the Safeguarding National Identity, Wirathu used the Buddhist pressure group and tried to pass this law. This law further said that, if a Buddhist lady wants to marry a Muslim man, she has to get written permission from her parents and also show the documentation of the groom, either he citizen of Myanmar or not. They also include that the groom tends to change his belief towards Buddhism in the near future. If the man fails to fulfill his promises and shows any discomfort to his wife, his property will appropriate and he will go to jail for 10 years (UNO, 2013).

The National Assembly rejected this idea as a law. The politician argues that we are trying to unify the Myanmar people in one nation and this law can destroy this unification. On the other hand, the human rights organization, women's rights organizations reject the idea. These organizations argue that Buddhist ladies know

their rights and also according to article 16 of Resolution on the Abolition “all form of favoritism close in women’s favor.” These organizations also argue that according to the constitution of Myanmar, “state should not recognize any subject Republic of the Union of Myanmar fabricated in race, birth, religion, official area, status society, sex, and riches”.

### **Government’s Radical Policies**

Theravada Buddhists were living in the area from 1057 and have a majority in the region. During World War II, the British and Japanese fought in the area, after that Buddhist Burmese fought for their freedom from colonialism. As a result, Buddhist became administrative and political parts of Burma. They have the authority to administrate their own state make legislation; in short, they were participating in all types of business in the state. Buddhism was selected as a national religion at the time of independence. Buddhism’s beliefs were contradictory to Muslim beliefs and Muslims did not agree gave the same spot to Buddha as they gave to their prophet. So, this issue became a hurdle in nation-building. Both religion leaders want supreme authority but they forgot about religious tolerance towards each religion (Juergensmeyer, 2010).

Buddhist was in majority in the state so they made their government democratically but the leader and minister of the government was pro Buddhist and they tried to counter Islam by countering Rohingya. For example under the governance of Mr. U Nu populace of Burma supported the vision of the “Burmese Buddhist Approach to Socialism”. This idea joined the Buddhist religious extremism with the governing body. At that time U Nu was trying to achieve “Shanghai Buddhism as the administration religion”. But practically this approach failed because the administration body only focused on the Buddhist majority area for the development of infrastructure and financial investment. The states which have a religious minority in it such as Arakan didn’t get any infrastructure or financial investment (Akins, 2014).

Another example is the government of Mr. Ne Win. Mr. Ne Win led Burma from 1958 to 1981 as Prime Minister and also as President. During his government, “Nationalistic Xenophobia” increased in common people. The public treated Muslims and Rohingya Muslims as outsiders and danger to economic growth and border security. As a result law of citizenship of 1982 was passed and Rohingya Muslims become illegal Bengali and foreigners of the state. Burmese government also starts operation Naga Min 1978 and operation Thaya against Rohingya Muslim to purify the Burmese nation (Akins, 2014).

After the many events when western world become Islamophobic and some Muslims become strain on Islam, the Buddhist patriot leader started to make their public against Islam and Muslims for instance, Mr. TheinNyan the 8<sup>th</sup> President of Myanmar the head of New National Democracy Party also use the slogan of safeguarding the nation and make 1982 law of citizenship legitimate. He was the defender of the Buddhist Burmese race and against any blend in the Burmese

Buddhist race. At the same time, Wirathu's teaching and speeches of hatred took place in the Burmese society and many movements like 969 Movement and Safeguarding National Identity took place. President TheinNyun in front of the United States High Commission in October 2012 legitimately declared that Rohingya are not subjected to Myanmar and they need a new alternate kingdom for themselves. These movements made the public angrier about Rohingya and they become brutal against Rohingya. As a result, Rohingya becomes the most suppressed minority in the world (Zarni, 2013).

### **Rohingyan Crisis's Impact on Neighboring Countries**

Rohingyan crisis multiple times emerge in Myanmar and resulted in the migration of the Rohingya to many states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, and India. In this section impacts of the Rohingya Crisis on neighboring countries will discuss.

#### **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is a Muslim South Asian state and also a neighboring state of Myanmar. Bangladesh always opens her border for the Rohingya Muslim since the first legal and illegal migration. Bangladesh herself belongs to third world states. She cannot accept that much burden on her economy and population. So, Bangladesh and Myanmar twice signed an agreement for the resettlement of Rohingya in their homeland. After both agreements, few people go back to their homeland, but unfortunately after both agreements situation becomes worse for the Rohingya so they migrated again in Bangladesh. Now 1.1 million refugees are in Bangladesh but now they cannot move back. According Jonathan to BBC head of South East Asia Correspondent, "now Rohingya Muslims cannot go back to their homeland and villages because Myanmar government destroyed their homes and villages and made police and army barracks. Myanmar government also made landmines with the border of Bangladesh so no one silently crosses border." If Rohingya refugees cross border then they have no place to live and nothing to do with their life. He further said that "after the agreement of resettlement of refugees, Myanmar government builds a refugee camp of 25000 houses for refugee with communal toilets with the help of India and Japan. The condition of refugee camp is very poor, the houses are already broken and people cannot live there. The refugee camp is not their homeland. The government bulldozed many villages but when Jonathan tried to interview officials, the officials denied it" (Jonathan, 2019).

The situation of Bangladesh refugee camps is also worse. According to the World Health Organization, there were 60,000 births in refugee camps in 2018. So, camps are crowded without any maintenance. Many different types of diseases are spread in the camps. Refugees are involved in many crimes such as smuggling, human trafficking, and prostitution. These camps are also like the worst place to live (Md Saddam Hossain, 2019).

## **Malaysia**

Malaysia is another state of Southeast Asia with a majority Muslim population. Since 1970 many Rohingya cross the Bay of Bengal and Andaman sea and reached Malaysia. According to UNO Malaysia 80,000 registered Rohingya refugees and thousands of unregistered Rohingya refugees along with many other national asylum seekers. For this purpose, the Malaysian government founded a department known as Instant Comprehensive Registration System (ICRS). That department deals with refugees which come from all over the world including Rakhine. ICRS registered refugees by using a biometric verification system. Through this technology, the Malaysian governments supervise them and track their activities. UNCHR also launched a Rohingya based tracking system in Malaysia. UNCHR system only focuses Rohingya refugee but ICRS monitor all registered refugees. Because of this system if any Rohingya refugee gets involved in any type of illegal activity like drugs, smuggling, prostitution, human trafficking, etc, they can find them. The systems of ICRS and UNCHR are also useful in other manners. Malaysian government decided to facilitate Rohingya refugees with jobs, education and health services. For this process those systems are helpful. All of these facilities will be given to the registered refugees. So, unregistered refugees cannot get these facilities (Nadarajan, 2018).

## **Thailand**

Myanmar and Thailand share the same sea line. Many escapees of Rakhine state tried to move forward to Thailand because Thailand is right behind Myanmar and it is an easy way out. But Thailand Prime Minister Mr. General Prayuth Chan-Ocha gave a very racist and cruel statement about Rohingya refugees who seek asylum. On 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019, he gave a statement during presenting his new government policies, "I am sympathetic with Rohingya but they do not belong to Thailand, they are changing from Thai Nation in their looks and appearances. If you want more of escapees in your country then it's up to you". He as a chairperson of International Security Operation Command (ISOC) also gave a three-step action plan to block Rohingya refugees in the state. In the first step Thai Navy cannot allow any boat of Rohingya Refugee in the Thai Territory, in fact, the Thai Navy will give them safe sea passage towards Indonesia or Malaysia. Afterward if any boat comes around full of starved and ill Rohingya, Thai government will give them food, fuel, and other assistance but the refugee cannot land on Thai territory. The Thai government will provide all types of assistance on the boat. In third step if some refugee secretly lands on Thailand, Thai government treat them as illegal migrants and there is no place for illegal immigrants in Thailand (Phasuk, 2019).

All of these steps are illegal and inhuman under International Law. According to International Law, the Thai government is obligatory to allow asylum to any asylum seekers even Rohingya. Thailand's insensitive "push back" of Rohingya Refugee towards Indonesia and Malaysia is not appreciated.

## **Indonesia**

Indonesia is not a direct neighbor of Myanmar but a member of ASEAN and Southeast Asia. Indonesia is receiving Thailand's "push back" refugee. Indonesia is also a Muslim state so she opened her borders for refugees but she also cannot bear that much burden on her economy. So she is an active state to resolve this solution and help the other states who have refugee camps like Bangladesh. During his visit to Bangladesh refugee camps, the president of Indonesia made promises for more aid to Bangladesh and Refugee camps. Indonesia also offloads Rohingya refugee boats on her shores and gave them medical assistance, food, and shelter (Md Saddam Hossain, 2019).

As a Muslim state, the public of Indonesia has extremist emotions for the Myanmar government and people. Indonesian officials of counter-terrorism are concerned about the reaction of extremist groups of the state. They are worried that the genocide of 2017 may lead to the war between Muslims and Buddhists. According to Surya Muhammad on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018, Indonesia's Hindu community faced problems in helping and aiding in Rakhine state because the Islamic extremist group wants them to only help Muslim Rohingya. The head of Militant group JamaahAnsharulTauhid (JAT) posts a letter to Myanmar embassy from jail. The letter contains three Quranic verses and proves that jihad against Myanmar is legal due to their violent attack on Muslims of Rakhine including children and women, Myanmar government killed them, raped women beat people and make them homeless. There was also an attack on Buddha temple in Indonesia during a walk of solidarity against Myanmar. There was also a plan to attack Myanmar Embassy in Indonesia (IPAC, 2018) and these reactions from Indonesian militant groups created a law and order situation in Indonesia.

## **India**

India is also a neighboring state of Myanmar and there were few refugees moved to India during violent attacks on Rakhine by Myanmar police and army. India and Myanmar are connected with a small border that is far away from Rakhine state so India is not facing many problems by Rohingya refugees. But India is playing a very active role in rehabilitation of Rohingya Refugee. India and Japan mutually supported construction of 25,000 houses in refugee camps in Myanmar. India also praising Bangladesh internationally and nationally for her efforts for the refugee. India claims that its issue of regional security and ASEAN and UNO must solve this issue. On the forum of ASEAN India recognized the pressure on Bangladesh's economy and resources and make promise to financially and administratively support refugee camps in Bangladesh. Indian government further shows some concern about illegal Bangali status of Rohingya Muslims and openly said that Rohingya belongs to Myanmar's Rakhine state and they must go their homeland. That's why India and Japan funded the refugee camp of 25,000 houses in Myanmar (Sakib, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

On 25<sup>th</sup> August 2017 world saw huge crackdown conduct by a government against her citizen. Those citizens were lived in the country since the independence of the country. The country is Myanmar and citizens are Rohingya. This massive attack legitimizes by the government but this attack makes almost 2 million people refugee of the whole world. Many of them fled to neighboring country and also many of them did not make it drown into sea or killed by their own army.

This incident becomes rapidly grown humanitarian crisis because of a lack of interest in international organizations and major states like UNO, ASEAN, OIC, European states, etc. at the start of this crisis 1970 not a single country paid attention despite Bangladesh was receiving hundreds of thousand refugees. Now it becomes cancer for international and regional societies with lots of implications. Firstly, some countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia open their territory for Rohingya refugees. Now, these countries have almost 2 million people to feed, not only for a feed but their other needs to be fulfilled. Rohingya populations also increasing in camps, new babies are born and daily people are leaving Rakhine. So, Rohingya becomes burden on states. Hosting states need more funds for the habilitation of Rohingya.

Secondly, hosting governments are worry, where the refugee will go next. Refugee camps are temporary homes, not a permanent solution. Hosting governments receiving refugees continuously but they don't know what to do with the existing community because Rohingya refugees have no place to go and live again. Myanmar already said that "Rohingyan needs a new place to live." So, this refugee is useless group of people in the world.

Thirdly, Rohingya is a useless group of people because they are living in different states as a refugee and not legal citizens of any single state. So, they cannot get education and legal jobs to feed their families. As a result they are involving themselves in illegal activities like human trafficking, drugs, smuggling, and prostitution. So, they are also creating law and order situation in hosting countries.

Fourthly, UNO (international organization), OIC (religious organization) and ASEAN (regional organization) must talk about the solution to this problem and show some interest and sympathy for the escapees. These institutes should pressurize and boycott Myanmar for creating this humanitarian crisis in the world. If the Rohingya issue does not discuss the international forum then it doesn't be solved and the population of refugee camps will increase and law and order situations will become worse.

In the end, if the Rohingya crisis not solved it can worsen the situation internationally and will make other countries brave enough to start ethnic cleansing towards their minorities. So, the Rohingya crisis becomes worse day by day for the world and very few people are trying to solve this issue.

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