

The Plight and Persecution of the Rohingyas in Myanmar

By [Asif Haroon Raja](#)

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Muslims in whole of Buddhist governed Southeast Asian Myanmar face persecution but the Rohingya minority community is suffering the most. The radical Buddhists of Arakan State that are in majority have been involved in enormous atrocities against the minority Rohingya Muslims ever since 2003. They have been brutally murdering Muslims, including women and children and are doing all this barbarity with the backing and support of the Myanmar regime, political and religious leadership and the law enforcement agencies.

Leader of National League for Democratic movement Aung San Suu Kyi, who is Nobel peace prize winner, has so far failed to condemn the violence mainly because it is being carried out by the backbone of her own political network.

The Myanmar government has annulled the citizenship of more than four lakh Muslims. Having lived there for 7 centuries, Rohingyas have suddenly become stateless with no identity and are marooned and forsaken by the world. Rohingyas are among the most persecuted minorities in the world. The cruel subjugation of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar has crossed all the boundaries since 2012. The world and the UN are quietly watching the genocide and none is coming forward to stop the ethnic cleansing and provide succor to the 140,000 displaced Rohingyas.

History

Delving into the background history of Rohingyas, one finds that Muslim Arab traders had started arriving in Kingdom of Arakan (now called Rakhine) from the time of Caliph Haroon Rasheed in 8th century, thus initiating the spread of Islam. Arab, Turks, Persian and later Mughal traders used to visit this piece of land. Similarly Islam expanded in Indonesia and Malaysia because of the Muslim traders. Later, people belonging to various ethnicities came to the region which included Bengalis, Turks, Pathans and others. 'Rohingya' were developed from different stocks of people concentrated in one geographical location called State of Rakhine. Afterwards, many people in the north of Arakan province accepted Islam. In 1430 A.D. a Turk King Sultan Suleman Shah established his Sultanate and introduced his currency. Kalma Tayiba and names of the four Caliphs were written on the coins.

This region was ruled by the Muslim rulers till 1784, after which these lands were captured by the Burmese. The British after capturing Bengal in 1757 kept expanding their rule. They captured Arakan in 1825 and Burma in 1828, and placed the two regions under the Viceroy of Delhi. Hundreds of thousands of Bengalis flooded into Arakan in search of work. By 1941, one-third of population was from Bengal. This migration was resented by the locals. During

the 2nd World War, the Japanese captured most of the areas of Burma and entire region became a war zone.

State of Rakhine (Arakan) has a very odd geo strategic location in Bay of Bengal. It is one of the poorest provinces of Myanmar. Among the 3 million Rakhines, there are about 1.3 million Rohingyas in Rakhine State who have been living there for centuries, and others are Buddhists who are in majority. In 1942, the Buddhists carried out massive genocide of Muslims and almost 150000 Muslims were massacred. During the military rule (1962-88) in Burma, Rohingyas were treated as foreigners and gradually their nationality was taken away. During that era, ethnic clashes between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims intensified and as a result of suppression more than 200,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh. Only 32600 were given formal protection as refugees.

In 1982 when Burma name was changed to Myanmar, they passed a new controversial law for citizenship and declared the people of Rohingya as Bengalis and they were denied citizenship. They claim that among the Rohingyas, over one million are Bengalis and are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Rohingyas lost the Myanmar's citizenship since they were unable to prove their presence and settlement in the country before 1823. Fact of the matter is that all Rohingyas are not Bengalis. They have a rich history and they are a mixture of Turks, Arabs, Mughals and even Pathans and all speak Rohingya, which is different from Burmese language. Denial of their citizenship by Myanmar is the root cause of all the issues faced by them today. Previously they used to have some relief as they had camps in Bangladesh in the Cox's Bazar region, but after Hasina Wajid came to power, this relief was also snatched from them. Her regime has refused to accept them.

Rohingya is a separate State and its people have separate entity. They have almost 4000 sq km area. A huge mountainous system separates them from Myanmar. They have 24 identified blocs where oil and gas are in abundance and exported to province of Hunan of China in the north. One of the reasons behind China's silence is their strategic interests. Rohingyas can sustain their identity, as Arabic and Persian are taught in their schools. They have their own language, culture, beautiful geography and resources. They say that since Myanmar regime is not giving them the citizenship, then it has no right to rule them. They complain that the only crime committed by the Rohingya is that they are Muslims. They argue that 150000 people in East Timor were given independence just because they were Christians.

The Myanmar Government says that we have given citizenships to many illegal Bengali immigrants, but they keep on entering into Myanmar every year which is getting arduous for us to control. This argument is baseless because they should frame a proper channel to halt this immigration. The Government argues that 1.3 million Rohingya are not citizens, have no voting or basic rights and are Bengalis. There are restrictions on family size and access to jobs. State terrorism on such flimsy pretext is unjustified. Since 2012 about 140,000 Rohingyans have become refugees and are living in dilapidated camps. Rohingyas say that who has given the right to Myanmar junta to support and promote their persecution even if they are illegal immigrants.

This phenomenal human rights violation in Myanmar got no effectual denunciation from the West. U.S. Candidates like Senator Rand Paul are not even bothering to discuss and condemn the massive massacre of the Rohingya Muslims in their 2016 Presidential campaigns. The UN role is also deplorable. Brad Adam, executive director of the Human

Rights Watch's Asia Division criticized the role of United Nations with respect to the ongoing onslaught in Myanmar. UN's top official in Myanmar, Renata Dessallien senselessly issued a statement after seeing the plight of Rohingyas cramped in boats in high seas for months and many 'floating coffins' after they were refused entry by Muslim States. He stated, "The UN recognizes and appreciates the recent improvements in the conditions in Rakhine, including efforts to improve the situation of the internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Government has started to enable IDPs to return to their places of origin and is assisting with livelihood enhancement, health and education." This statement was travesty of truth. One reason of West's apathy is Islamophobia.

The underlying acts and human rights violations have left no justification for the international community to still remain immorally biased and mum. Muslim countries of ASEAN who turned away the boats of the starving refugees are equally guilty. Hundreds of mass graves have been discovered in Thailand and Malaysia. They probably died of hunger. While India is aspiring to become the policeman of South Asia, China is getting ready to become super power, but both have showed complete disinterest in this human tragedy.

The most shocking and appalling role is that of the Muslim World. Despite having the ability to exert pressure on to the Western countries to put sanctions over Myanmar to force it to stop human rights violations against the Rohingya Muslims, up till now no move has been made.

Although OIC has appointed special envoy and a fact finding mission for Rohingyas and have also announced \$200,000 for humanitarian aid, but it has not played any decisive role. It should devise a strategy to provide humanitarian relief to the refugees and those stranded in high seas and also exert pressure on the oppressors to grant citizenship to the Rohingya Muslims who have been living there since 14th century, or else grant them the status of a separate State. The UN should step forward to resolve this human tragedy speedily. If urgent steps are not taken, it will have dangerous implications about which I will write separately.

The writer is a war veteran/defence analyst/columnist/author of 5 books, Director Measac Research Centre, Directors Board of Governors TFP. asifharoonraja@gmail.com

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