

Rohingya of Myanmar: A Distorted Version of Ethnic Crisis

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Abstract

Rohingya issue is the most controversial discussion of the time being. Rohingya of Myanmar have been outcasted from their state [1]. They are being tortured, raped, and murdered by the people of Myanmar. This ethnic conflict has reached an intolerable barbaric level. This is an intrastate ethnic conflict between the major people of Myanmar and the minor Rohingya population of Rakhine. This kind of conflict is an outcome of nationalism [2]. Nationalism is a bond that connects people from the same heritage however, it also distinguishes one's identity from others. This kind of feeling can create an antagonistic attitude towards minor ethnic people. Rohingyas are a victim of this antagonistic feeling. Nationalism has been manipulated to encourage the people of Myanmar to commit such an atrocious and disgraceful crime. This distorted and distasteful version of nationalism is the reason behind the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya.

Keywords: Rohingya; Conflict; Nationalism; Ethnic Cleansing; Violation.

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1. Introduction

Peaceful Coexistence is a term that is quite well received in the present era. Especially when we are living in the framework of “Globalization.” Through the lens of globalization, multiculturalism is necessary for global solidarity and development [3]. Yet chaos, war, conflict, dilemmas, terrorism are common phenomena of every day. We are talking about peaceful coexistence nevertheless intrastate conflict and interstate conflict exist everywhere [4]. Rohingya crisis of Myanmar just happened to be one of them. Clarify the topic, Rohingya issue is an intrastate ethnic cleansing of the Muslim minority Rohingya people of Rakhine, Myanmar. Most people of Myanmar are persecuting them to leave the country [5]. As a result, now the Rohingyas are in a stateless situation and migrating from one state to another. This out casting process is including but is not limited to genocide. The Rohingyas are being tortured, raped, agonized, abused, tormented, and killed by the people, army, and governments of Myanmar. Many catalysts have started the persecution of Rohingya. But the main influential element of this persecution is Burmese nationalism. This version of their nationalism is the one that exaggerated the situation. The Burmese government has used the emotional attachment of its people towards the nation to justify their actions and encourage them to become a part of this sick and heinous inhuman action. Which costs a tremendous number of lives and uncountable casualties. This paper will give a comprehensive idea of the whole situation of the Rohingya crisis [6]. This paper will first be discussed about the origin of Rohingya in Myanmar following the previous conflict, the present scenario, the causalities and catalysts, the role of Myanmar’s government on the Rohingya issue, and the distorted version of Burmese nationalism of this ethnic cleansing. The prime aim of this paper is to scrutinize Burmese nationalism and to connect all the strings between Burmese nationalism and the way they are justifying their actions by using it to massacre the Rohingya people of Rakhine.

1.1. Research Question

1.2.

The Rohingya problem is the most controversial topic of the present discussion. Especially for the Southeast Asian region. Rohingya crisis is an ongoing issue which is constantly occurring since June 2012. This crisis is quite a debatable one especially the reason for its occurrence. This problem has its root from a long time ago. 2012 wasn’t the origin of this conflict, it was simply the year of spark, a catalyst that sparks hatred towards the Rohingyas and leads towards the mass killing of Rohingya people. The beginning and other events are a matter of discussion of historians. Rather, this paper will solely focus on the ideology the people and government of Myanmar are using to justify their actions. The people of Myanmar are involved in this massacre. The question arises as, why they are doing these inhuman actions. What is leading them and encouraging them to do such heinous acts? And the reason behind the silence of the government in this issue. These questions are important to be answered. This paper will scrutinize some events and will try to represent a comprehensive scenario of this. Thus, the research question is, “How the idea of nationalism has been misinterpreted to legalize the violation of human rights upon the Rohingya people of Myanmar?”

1.3. Literature Review

Nationalism is an ideology which talked about the feelings of an individual towards his or, her nation. A feeling of respect, loyalty, bonding, solidarity, and gratefulness. An emotion of love grows inside one by living with a group of people who shares the same common language, history, culture, race, ethnicity, religion, norms, values, and tradition. It is simply a feeling of togetherness, which helps one to defend his or, her country in the tie of need. Nationalism helps us to understand who we are, distinguish us from others and give us a particular identity. An identity to be preserved and respected (Armstrong, 1982).

The ideology of nationalism is not a mainstream political ideology as its overlap with other major political ideology. Nationalism doesn't talk about rational thinking rather it is solely based upon the emotional attachment of a person with his fatherland or, motherland. It is an inner feeling, which differs from everyone in different nations. Also, some feel it more than others. This is a thin ideology but not a less important one. Because the ideology of nationalism can overcome any obstacles which threaten the identity crisis of an individual (Macridis, 1989).

Nationalism is an ideology, which can also be used as a major political tool. It is an ideology that is pure and dangerous at the same time. Because this ideology relates to people's emotions which is less reasonable sometimes and swept away whatever obstacles stand in the way. A legitimate political government can use it in its interest. Provoking people is easy to gain a particular objective by using nationalism. It is an influential political tool that can create dilemmas among nations and within a nation. Great and disaster are two sides of the same coin name nationalism. By using it for a political purpose it could be a dangerous instrument of destruction (McCarthy, 2017).

The Rohingya issue is one of the mainstream events of the present time. Rohingya people of Myanmar are being outcasted from their nation. They are being tortured, tormented, oppressed and worst-case scenario are being killed by the extremist Buddhists of Myanmar. Their life and survival are remaining in a cliffhanger now. They have become a stateless community. Their home has been burned down. This crisis is a result of a distorted version of Burmese nationalism (Mahmood, 2017). Historically, Arakan was ruled by Muslim rulers in the ancient period not so long ago. Its root is far older. Muslims were dominating business, agriculture, and a lot of other aspects. It has witnessed 350 years of Islamic rule. However, Arakan was occupied by the Buddhist king Bodabaa in 1784. From that time the conflict between Muslims of Arakan and Buddhists has begun and led to the Rohingya crisis of the present time (Tha, 2017). The present crisis of Rohingya is not the first time. The crisis of Rohingya people was seen in the years 1938, 1942, 1974, 1978, 1982, 1988, 1991, 2001, 2010, and the crisis of 2012 which is still ongoing. The Rohingya people of Arakan, especially the people of Rakhine, were the main victim of this persecution. Rakhine is the main living zone of the Muslim Rohingya people which has been targeted by the extremist as it is also holding more than half of the Muslims of Myanmar (Kim, 2017).

The recent crisis has begun in June 2012. When a group of Buddhist extremists had killed 10 Muslim Rohingya by accusing that the Muslims has raped a Buddhist girl and later killed her. The situation got worse and soon the riot broke down among the Arakan villagers and the Rohingya community. Nearly 78 people were killed. The government took fewer to no steps to prevent the casualties (Walton, 2014). After the crisis "969 movements" became a name of terror for the people of Rohingya. They are the extremist groups who are brutally acting

against the people of Rohingya of Rakhine state. They are influencing other people of Myanmar to act against Rohingya by saying that they are a threat to Myanmarization. They are provoking religious ideology to pursue their goals. Even the prime major Buddhist religious leaders are participating in this massacre (Driss, 2016).

The government is practically playing a neutral position. However, their neutrality has been proved as partiality and biasness. The government is taking no step to save the Rohingya people from the aggression of the Buddhist people. Their silence is just increasing the number of casualties and the number of dead bodies. The government is ignoring the human rights convention they had a sign in United Nations. This inhuman ethnic cleansing is a pure violation of human rights (Gans, 2003).

Nationalism is the most crucial element in this whole crisis. The nationalism in this issue has been manipulated by the leaders of the Burmese community. Burmese nationalism is also known as Myanmarization has declared an open war against the Muslim community of Myanmar. And, Rohingya people have become their prime target. This distorted version of nationalism has caused the destruction of a lifetime and a nightmare for the Rohingya People. This blind nationalism is nothing but a manipulation of the actual nationalism and full of killing, torture, massacre, and genocide (Boon, 2015).

2. Theoretical Framework

Nationalism has proven to be one of the most tenacious ideological bonds binding human beings together into separate political communities [7]. Nationalism is a thin ideology; it is at the same time a political ideology and a bond that create a bond among people of the same identity. This ideology is based upon the emotions of the people. People who shared a common culture, religion, language, race, ethnicity, common past or history, and most important territory [8]. Geography is a crucial factor for this kind of bonding. When people live under a shared umbrella, they embrace the feeling of this loyalty towards their country or, nation. From a subjective perspective, Nationalism is mainly a feeling that people have of being loyal to and proud of their country often with the belief that it is better and more important than other countries. From an objective perspective, it is a desire by a large group of people to form a separate and independent nation of their own. A nation is the center of this ideology. Nationalism is the most peculiar ideology among other ideologies. It is not an age-old ideology like other political ideologies rather it is a newly emerged concept, introduced at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe and spread out through the nineteenth century. Nationalism itself is a thin ideology but it can be heavily influential. For various political purposes and state interests, it has been merged with other ideologies to gain a particular objective. Nationalism is a powerful tool of persecution. It can be used to gain something by rallying people under a common legitimate government by invoking nationalism. Throughout history, many incidents have been encountered in which nationalism has played a vital role. Ideologies are not just about constructing doctrinal positions [9]. They are also about establishing the legitimacy of one's political claims and the illegitimacy of one's opponent. Nationalism is also important to maintain a status quo and to destroy one. Some have obtained independence by using it and some have used it for barbaric outcomes. Ethnic conflict is one of them. As nationalism creates bonding between shared communities, it also creates a feeling of "Us" and "them". An aggressive or distorted version of nationalism is nothing but a manipulative tool the politicians or, the elite use to gain their interest. Nationalism is one of the mainstream ideologies which got its importance

from emotions not from rational thinking. And human emotion is something that can be easily manipulated. It is an ideology that can obtain anything it desires as it relates to public opinion. Because national identity is a part of one's identity.

3. Research Findings

The Rohingya crisis at present has become a controversial topic. It is one of the devastating ethnic cleansings of history [10]. This is persecution where the active legitimate government of Myanmar is taking the side of the extremist Buddhists and providing support in this heinous ethnic cleansing process. Rohingya crisis is not a new concept or, not even a crisis that just came out of nowhere. The root of this problem can be traced to the 1784 period when the Buddhist king Bobadaa seized Arakan from the Muslim rulers, who were ruling Arakan for almost 350 Years. The roots of Arakan Muslims have a diversified origin which includes Bengali, Arabs, Moors, Turks, Persians, Mongols, and Pathans [11]. Their language is a mixture of Arbi, Farsi, Urdu, and Bengali. Waqas Malik Bin was the person who brought Islam into Arakan. Suleyman Shah was one of the prominent Muslim rulers of Arakan. Muslims were famous for trade, business through the seaport, and agricultural works.

After the invasion of Buddhists in Arakan, the conflict between the Muslims and Buddhists was inevitable. Persecution of Rohingya Muslims and displacement were occurring at an alarming rate. Myanmar is in Southeast Asia [12]. Sharing borders with Bangladesh, North China, India, and Thailand. The persecuted Rohingya people had started to take shelter in those nations. This was affecting all the other countries too. Arakan province is in Southwest Myanmar on the Bay of Bengal coast and border strip with South Bengal. So, most of the Refugees are shifting to Bangladesh for their safety. Almost more than half a million people have moved to Bangladesh [13].

In 1824, Britain occupied Myanmar. Until 1948, Myanmar was under the colonial rule of the British. In 1937, Britain had declared Arakan an independent colony. In 1938, nearly 30 thousand Muslims were killed by the Buddhists [14]. During the Second World War, in 1942, another gruesome massacre occurred. Nearly 100 thousand people were killed and slaughtered by the Buddhist Alms. After the independence on 4th January 1948, Arakan was annexed with Burma. However, the Burmese government didn't legalize the Rohingyas as an ethnic group of Myanmar. Though the rest 135 ethnic groups were included [15]. Which is a sure sign of the beginning of the discrimination. In 1962, Myanmar openly declared Islam as their first enemy. At that time, they seize 90% of the Muslims' property [16]. They have been deprived of education, travel, employment, business, trading, health care, and any other basic rights a citizen of a free state gets. The Rohingya people was an outsider in their state and wasn't getting any privilege from the state. Rather, the oppression and expulsion were at their highest rate. In 1967, the new communist government has withdrawn the citizenship of the Arakan state which simply represents them as a stateless and identity-less people. In 1974, the government exiled 200 Muslim families of Arakan and nearly 300 thousand people were thrown out of the state. In 1978, almost 10 thousand Muslim Rohingya were being killed [17]. 500 thousand people were displaced among them 40 thousand people die in the sheltering process and meantime. 1982 Civilization law simply declares that Rohingyas are not citizens of Myanmar rather they are the illegal migrants of Bangladesh. 1988 and 1991 were

described the same situation where hope for Rohingya in Myanmar was absent [18]. In 2001, after the 9/11 attack the Buddhists attacked Rohingya villages and burned down their homes, the massacre occurred at the same time. After the 2010 election, a hundred thousand Muslims were slaughtered again.

The recent crisis began in June 2012. The accruements were that some Muslims raped a Buddhist girl and ended up killing her on May 28th. In June, they killed 10 Muslims by beating them [19]. The local police took no steps to prevent this incident [20]. As a result, the Rohingyas attacked the Arakan villages and soon riots broke out between those two groups and the government took no steps to prevent it. They provide no support or, any aid. Soon, the anti-Muslim hatred broke out throughout the whole of Myanmar [21]. The Buddhist monks and political leaders influence the people to rally against the Muslims of Myanmar. Mass killing has become a common phenomenon. After that from today, a huge number of Rohingyas had been killed, displacement became a common issue. Muslims were thrown out of their house. Demolition of Muslim houses, mosques, and Islamic institutions occurred rapidly [22]. The whole situation swept away the Muslim Rohingya community out of Myanmar. Buddhist extremist group 969 movement take massive brutal killing spray against the Rohingyas [23]. All the people of Myanmar are directly or indirectly participating in this massacre. But the most important part of government is doing nothing to protect the Rohingya people.

Now, it is important to understand why the people of Myanmar are doing this and the reason behind the action of the government [24]. Nationalism is a crucial element here. They are justifying their action in the name of nationalism, their Burmese ideology. Religion is also a vital player here. Nationalism is a bonding of solidarity among the peoples who share the same ideology, culture, religion, history, language, etc. Rohingya had been outcasted from the beginning of history. Throughout the timeline, they had suffered a lot. The brutal and succinct action of the Burmese people was inhumane [25]. They took the “us” and “them” into another whole new level where they started to see the Rohingya people as a threat to their community and wanted to get rid of them. Multiculturalism is a common issue nowadays. Yet, the people of Myanmar want to serve the majority and dispose of the others [26]. They invoke their nationalism to create a killing spray machine. Their version of nationalism is nothing but a distorted version of nationalism.

When we are talking about nationalism, it must be limited between state boundaries. And different people live in a state with a different perception. Nationalism doesn't give anyone the right to dispose of one ethnic group. In the case of the Rohingya people, they are being tormented by the Myanmar people in the name of their version of nationalism [27]. They want to create a singular community, a prominent Buddhist community by getting rid of the Muslim Rohingyas. The government is taking no step, even a leader like Aung San Suu Kyi is silent here. This issue became a political game even for world leaders. The silence of the political authority is encouraging the extremists to continue this massacre. A government must protect its citizen, but Myanmar never considers the Rohingya as their citizen to begin with because they think Rohingyas are different in terms of culture and every issue. So, they oppressed them. But now they want to discard them to build up a singular community [28]. This distorted and insane version of nationalism has created a lot of damage and yet there is more to come.

4. Recommendations

In the globalized world, no states are separated from each other. The world has become a global village. Still, nations are more like a family in the global society. Conflict and war are inevitable. Chaos is everyday news. However, as it has been mentioned earlier that no states are inseparable now, the sentence itself is not vague. Even an intrastate conflict will affect other states. The present world structure is more like a game of domino now. If one falls, the fall of the other is impossible to stop. The Rohingya crisis is intrastate. However, it is not limited only to Myanmar. The neighboring countries have already related to the issue. A large amount of Rohingya refugees is moving to Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, which became a problem for those countries. Rohingya genocide is a violation of human rights. It is the responsibility of other powerful nations to interfere in the problem and resolve it as soon as possible. The casualties are already uncountable. The latter part will be more devastating. United Nations should make their stand to stop such acts. Their concern is crucially necessary. They can send troops as it is already beyond the limit of human rights violation rules. Soft power diplomacy has proven nothing but utter failure as the Myanmar government is unwilling to take any steps to stop this crucifixion. Powerful countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, and China need to take hard steps to prevent further destruction. Neighboring countries of Myanmar need to take strict foreign policy and impose sanctions upon Myanmar which will force them to take some steps. Regional Organizations SAARC and others also put pressure upon the Burmese government to halt this persecution. The regional power China and India need to stop double playing and need to focus on the actual problem and cooperate to find a suitable solution to deem the problem.

5. Conclusion

The Muslim "Rohingya" crisis in Myanmar is not new, but its rate of recurrence has worsened. With passing time its intensity is increasing at an alarming rate. Though it is an intra-state ethnic conflict, yet many are suffering because of this massacre. The distorted version of nationalism that is being followed by the people of Myanmar to violate human rights and persecute this ethnic cleansing is inhumane, heinous, barbaric, brutal, and succinct. Nationalism never gives us the right to destroy a community to build up solidarity among us. Nationalism is about the respect of one group from another, the diversity that differentiates us yet brought us together. But the people and government of Myanmar are killing Rohingyas in the name of Myanmarization. It is the responsibility of all to prevent such incidents from happening and to protect the Rohingyas from the aggression of the government and extremists of Myanmar.

6. Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest associated with this publication.

7. Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or nonprofit sectors.

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