

# India's Position Towards Rohingya Issue in Myanmar

Konsam Shakila Devi\*

Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Indian Council of Social Science Research

E-mail: saki.konsam32[at]gmail.com

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**Abstract:** Rohingyas are the Muslim minority residing in the Rakhine state of northern Myanmar. They are the stateless people and are not recognised by the government of Myanmar as its citizens, and consider them "illegal immigrants". The United Nations described them as one of the most persecuted minorities in the world in 2003. The Rohingya issue in Myanmar is one of the oldest issues which was rooted before independence. During the Second World War, the Rohingya supported the British forces while the Rakhine, another ethnic group residing in the Rakhine state supported the Japanese forces. As a result, there occurred armed conflicts between the two. The conflict continued after Myanmar got its independence and oppression and prosecution continued. In 2012, violence broke out in Rakhine state between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims. India considered the conflict, an 'internal affair'. At the same time, India allowed Rohingya refugees to enter the country. Again in 2017, the military launched a series of violent actions against the Rohingyas following the attack by Rohingya insurgents on security camps in Rakhine State. However, India avoids raising its voice against Myanmar. Therefore, the present paper is an attempt to analyse and examine India's position towards the Rohingya.

**Keywords:** Myanmar, Rohingya issues, Rakhine, Citizenship in Myanmar, India's interest in Myanmar

## 1. Introduction

The Rohingya is an ethnic Muslim minority living in Rakhine (formerly Arakan) State of Myanmar. The Rakhine state is located in the west coast of Myanmar, bordering the Bay of Bengal to the west, Bangladesh to the northwest, Chin State of Myanmar to the north, and Magwe, Bago, and Irrawaddy Divisions to the east. It is also one of the poorest regions of the country. Rohingyas represent the largest percentage of Muslims in Myanmar, with the majority living in Rakhine state. They differ from Myanmar's Buddhist groups ethnically, linguistically and religiously. They have their own language and culture. However, they are not recognised by the government as its citizens, and are regarded as "illegal immigrants" from Bangladesh. Most citizens of Myanmar do not acknowledge the term Rohingya and commonly refer to the Muslim population in Rakhine state as "Bengali", "so-called Rohingya", or the pejorative "Kalar", claiming that they are all illegal migrants from Bangladesh.<sup>1</sup> The Rohingya trace their origins in the region to the fifteenth century, when thousands of Muslims came to the Arakan Kingdom. Many others arrived during the colonial rule as part of British India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After independence, the first government under U Nu recognised the Rohingyas as an ethnic national group of Myanmar. However, the Ne Win who came to power after a military coup in 1962 did not consider Rohingyas as its ethnic group and rendered them foreigners by enacting the 1974 Emergency Immigration Act. The 1982 Citizenship Law of Myanmar also denied Rohingya as its citizen and considers them "illegal immigrants" from Bangladesh. The military government

under the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) which came to power after the military coup on 18 September 1988, officially refers to 135 distinct ethnic groups divided into eight major "national ethnic races" to be citizen of the country. However, the Rohingyas are neither included in the 135 ethnic group nor in the eight major "national ethnic races" recognised by the government. In 1994, the government of Myanmar stopped issuing birth certificates to Rohingya children. In 1997, they were restricted in their movement and no longer allowed to travel outside their township. Rohingyas were also excluded in the 2014 national census. Initially, Rohingya Muslim was permitted to identify as Rohingya, but after Buddhist nationalists threatened to boycott the census, the government decided that Rohingya could only register if they identified themselves as Bengali. In 2015, constitutional referendum was held in Myanmar. In that, Rohingyas' right to vote was cancelled under the pressure from Buddhist nationalists. It can be mention here that, in the 2008 constitutional referendum and 2010 general election, they were allowed to vote with temporary white cards holding. But in the 2015 elections, they lost the right to vote as the President declared their temporary white cards to vote invalid. They were also denied access to healthcare, employment opportunities and higher education.

## 2. Review of Literature

The Rohingyas in Myanmar are one of the most prosecuted, vulnerable, and oppressed minorities in the world. The Rohingya issue in Myanmar is also one of the oldest issues in the country which remained unsolved till

today. A significant number analysts and researchers have worked related to the Rohingya issues in Myanmar. Haradhan Kumar Mohajan, Sarwar J. Minar and Abdul Halim, have worked with related to the history and origin of Rohingya and the issues.

Haradhan Kumar Mohajan,<sup>2</sup> deals with the origin of the Rohingya, the form of their citizenship, and recent oppression in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. He stated that the Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority group in Rakhine, are considered among the most prosecuted, vulnerable, and oppressed minorities in the world. The Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar has increased the prosecution on the Rohingya Muslims. The Rohingyas were denied Myanmar citizenship leading to suffer from several forms of restrictions and human rights violations. Since the 1970s, a number of crack down on the Rohingya in Rakhine have forced them to flee to neighbouring countries.

Sarwar J. Minar and Abdul Halim,<sup>3</sup> deals with Social Evolution and History of Rohingyas of Rakhine in the Light of Ethnic Nationalism. In their research work, they claimed that in August 2017, over 725,000 Rohingya Muslims and Hindus were ousted from Rakhine State by the military after an attack by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army's coordinated attacks on a military base and security force outposts. They are of the opinion that these events provoked worldwide public and academic interest in history and social evolution of the Rohingyas. Their paper found out that Rohingya community developed through historically complicated processes marked by invasions and counter invasions. The paper further argues that many people entered Bengal from Arakan before British brought people into Rakhine state. The Rohingyas believe Rakhine State is their ancestral homeland and they developed a sense of 'Ethnic Nationalism'. The paper concludes that the United Nations must pursue solution to the crisis and the government should accept the Rohingyas.

There are also significant numbers of researchers and analyst work with related to the Rohingya crisis such as Ishmam Tawsif Hussain, Wafiq Jawad Pranto and Tasnim Alam, Penny Green, Thomas Mac Manus and Alicia de la Cour Venning, Muang Zarni and Alice Cowley, Haradhan Kumar Mohajan and Eleanor Albert and Lindsay Maizland, done on this issue. Ishmam Tawsif Hussain, Wafiq Jawad Pranto and Tasnim Alam, in their research article on "Rohingya Crisis: A Concise Analysis of the Psychological Impact of Ethnic Violence and Eviction",<sup>4</sup> seeks to depict the psychological effects of the mass expulsions, genocide, torture, ethnic cleansing, and violence committed on the Rohingya people by the Myanmar army. The research paper also emphasises on the initiation of the repatriation process and measures to control the refugee crisis. In the paper, they opined that the Rohingya exodus engendered over 1.2 million refugees dispersed across various camps in Bangladesh, specifically in the country of South-East region. They said that the Rohingya refugees are vulnerable to natural disasters and the spread of infectious diseases. They are also been in trauma and

uncertainty about their future. These negative influences have had a psychological impact on their mental health, leading to commit a variety of crimes impacting negatively on the surrounding community. The study highlights the urgent need for the international community to pay particular attention relating to social support, education, violence, food shortages, mental health care, and human rights violations among the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. They recommend that the government and aid agencies need to set up psychiatric institutions for the Rohingya community as well as to provide basic healthcare for individuals who are afflicted with mental diseases. The international community is also urged to continue its efforts to uphold the basic human rights of the Rohingya refugees and to ensure a long-term solution to the problems they are currently facing. Penny Green, Thomas MacManus and Alicia de la Cour Venning, in their report on "Countdown to Annihilation: Genocide in Myanmar",<sup>5</sup> analyse and examine genocide in Myanmar. The report says that the exact number of Rohingya is impossible to verify and the origins of 'Rohingya' terminology are unclear. However, Rohingya and their chosen ethnic designation were accepted by the Burmese State in the 1950s. The Rohingya were issued citizenship/ID cards and granted the right to vote under Myanmar's first post-independence Prime Minister, U Nu, and Rohingya held important government positions as civil servants. The report found out that Rohingya face persecution against the six stages of genocide outlined by Daniel Feierstein: stigmatisation (and dehumanisation); harassment, violence and terror; isolation and segregation; systematic weakening; mass annihilation; and finally symbolic enactment involving the removal of the victim group from the collective history. The report concludes that the Rohingya have suffered the first four of the six stages of genocide. Decades of persecution have taken on a new and intensified form since mass killings in 2012. This marked the escalation in State-sponsored stigmatisation, discrimination, violence and segregation, and the systematic weakening of the community, make precarious the very existence of the Rohingya. The report reveals that these genocidal processes are led by State officials, Rakhine politicians, Buddhist monks and Rakhine civil society activists. The report further demonstrates that the infrastructure and ideological base for mass killings exist, and that the elimination of the Rohingya is well under way. This report concludes with an urgent warning to civil society in Myanmar, to international civil society, to the government of Myanmar and to international states that a genocidal process is underway in Myanmar and if it follows the path outlined in this report, it is yet to be completed. Muang Zarni and Alice Cowley, in "The Slow Burning Genocide of Myanmar's Rohingya",<sup>6</sup> state that the Rohingya, a Muslim minority of Western Myanmar have been subject to a state-sponsored process of destruction since 1978. In this paper they said that the Rohingya have deep historical roots in the borderlands of Rakhine State of Myanmar, and were officially recognised as citizens as well as ethnic group by three successive governments of post-independence Myanmar. It was the then Ne Win government in 1978 that has launched the first large-scale campaign against the

Rohingya in Rakhine State with the intent to erase their identity and legitimise their physical destruction and continued to the present day under the civilian-military rule of President Thein Sein's government. They further state that since 2012, the Rohingya faced renewed waves of hate campaigns, violence, killings and ostracisation with the aim to destroy and remove permanently them from their ancestral homes in Rakhine State. The destruction of the Rohingya is carried out both by civilian populations backed by the state and perpetrated directly by state actors and state institutions. They argue that despite growing evidence of genocide, the international community has avoided the suffering of Rohingya's large scale genocide because no powerful member states of the United Nations Security Council have any appetite to forego their commercial and strategic interests in Myanmar to address the slow burning Rohingya genocide. Haradhan Kumar Mohajan in his research paper "The Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar are Victim of Genocide",<sup>7</sup> which was published in 2018 deals with the genocide taken place against the Rohingya muslims in Myanmar. In his paper, he clearly mentioned that the Rohingyas in Myanmar face violation of human rights for decades. Not only that, they are also the mostly dehumanised and persecuted ethnic minority group in Myanmar. They are also stateless and exile in its own country. He further stated that since 2012 the persecution upon the Rohingya in Myanmar falls in the genocide and in 1917, they faced the final stages of genocide. Eleanor Albert and Lindsay Maizland, in their article on "The Rohingya Crisis",<sup>8</sup> deals with the living conditions of Rohingyas refugee specially in Bangladesh. They say that more than 500,000 Rohingya refugees are living in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Most of the families are deprived of enough food and sustained livelihood. This study further reviews the Bangladesh Government's stand and that of international community as well. They also focused on the humanitarian responses, forestry and wild life, disaster risk management, shelter facilities, WASH activities, health facilities, adolescent sexual reproductive health, gender-based violence, and human trafficking to understand the current situation of Rohingya refugees in camps.

Coming to India's stand towards the Rohingya issue in Myanmar: K. Yhome and Jayashri Ramesh Sundaram have work on this issue. K. Yhome in his issue brief on "Examining India's Stand on the Rohingya Crisis",<sup>9</sup> examines India's approach towards the Rohingya crisis and explores ways for India to strengthen its role in finding solutions. In this brief, he argues that the 'Rohingya crisis' is a tragedy that was in the making for over several decades. He further says that the root of these conflicts is the inability of the majority community to accept that the nation is a multiracial, multilingual and multireligious society. He says that the root of these conflicts is the inability of the Buddhist majority community to accept that the nation is a multiracial, multilingual and multireligious society. He says that India's Rohingya position has two aspects. The first concerns the implications of India's stand on the Rohingya refugees; the second, how India can play a role in finding a solution to the crisis. In his analysis on

India's response to the Rohingya crisis, he is of the opinion that it has evolved swiftly, and a combination of factors seemed to have shaped India's approach. Jayashri Ramesh Sundaram, on "Decoding India's Stand on the Rohingya Crisis",<sup>10</sup> says that since Myanmar independence, the Rohingya community has been facing identity hardships as they were not recognised as an official ethnic group in Myanmar. He says that like India, and other ASEAN member countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Cambodia have also ignored the protection of the refugee community's rights. Nevertheless, ASEAN countries have at various forums condemned Myanmar and Aung San Suu Kyi for the "man-made humanitarian disaster". The condemnation, although seen by the international community as weak and ineffective due to the committee's non-interference policy. He argues that the Rohingya crisis has put India in a spot like due to Myanmar's strategic importance for economic, political, land and counter-Chinese influence. He further analyse the ideological and policy measures of the BJP between 2014 and 2018 on matters of citizenship and refugees. He says that BJP's approach towards Rohingyas is the labelling of Rohingyas as 'illegal' and 'national security threat' and seeking repatriation of the community from India and Bangladesh. Amidst diplomatic mess of 'Hinduisation' and lack of strategies, India currently seems to have also elapsed on serving regional (economic) interests as well.

### 3. Research Methodology

The paper is an attempt to analyse and examine India's stand towards the Rohingya issue in Myanmar. The methodology adopted for the paper is descriptive and analytical. Data are collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are collected from Government archive, Annual Reports, Press Release, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Press Release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nay Pyi Taw, Reports, etc. Secondary sources are collected from both published and unpublished work such as Books, Journals, Newspaper, Articles, Working Paper, Thesis, etc.

### 4. Rohingyas issue in Myanmar

The Rohingyas issue in Myanmar can be traced back before independence. In the Rakhine State, the Rohingya and the Rakhine had been peacefully coexisting over the centuries. The conflict started after the annexation of Arakan (now Rakhine) state by the British on first January 1886 after the Anglo-Burmese War in 1885. The annexation of Rakhine state to the British India marked the beginning of the colonial period and the end of the peaceful co-existence between Muslims and the Buddhist in the Rakhine State. During the annexation, a large numbers of Muslims flow from Bengal to the Rakhine state. The flow of Muslim into the Rakhine state is viewed as a demographic threat to the majority Rakhine Buddhist who feared losing their livelihoods and historical homelands. The relation between these two communities became bitter during the Second World War. During the War, under the British colonial rule, Japanese forces attacked Myanmar. The Japanese armed



the Buddhist Rakhines to fight against the British and the British used Muslim forces for counterattack. In 1942, Japan occupies Myanmar with help from the Japanese-trained Burma Independence Army (BIA). During this period of Japanese occupation from 1942-1945, Muslim population in Myanmar supported British and the Buddhist supported Japan resulting to the rivalry between Buddhist and Muslims causing communal violence. Both Buddhist and Muslim communities also formed armed units and attacked each other. It resulted in serious clashes between the two. During this period, the British promised Muslims an autonomous area in northern Rakhine as a reward of their support to the British. In January 1944, the British defeat Japanese force, and reestablished British control in Myanmar including the Rakhine State. However, the situation was not stable even after the British re-captured Rakhine and the confrontations between the Muslims and the Buddhist did not end. The British also did not fulfil the promise given to Muslim after Britain liberates Myanmar from Japanese occupation. In 1947, during the creation of India and Pakistan, the Rohingya leaders wanted incorporation of northern Arakan (now Rakhine) with East Pakistan but failed.<sup>11</sup> On January 4 1948, Myanmar gained independence from Great Britain and Rakhine became part of it. However, Rohingyas were not invited to the pre-independence negotiations or to the signing of the historic treaty that established the Union of Burma.<sup>12</sup> Tensions continued to erupt within the country. Muslims from the Northern Rakhine State took up arms to protect themselves and to either annex their region with Eastern Pakistan (now Bangladesh) or to become an autonomous area within Myanmar.<sup>13</sup> As a retaliatory measure, the government removes Rohingya civil servants. There were some attempts at building a stable and peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists in Rakhine State. However, the effort was failed after Ne Win's staged a coup in 1962, which brought Myanmar into a centralised socialist state under the control of the military. Since then, there has been series of issues in the Rakhine state. Large scale attack against the Rohingya took place. Oppression and prosecutions against the Rohingyas also continued. The prosecution following the attacks in 2012, 2016 and 2017 were some of the deadliest attacks against the Rohingyas.

## 5.Prosecutions against the Rohingyas

In 1978, a wide-scale census operation known as Nagamin (Dragon King) was conducted. The operation was carried out by the Burmese immigration officials in northwestern Rakhine where the government considered that many illegal immigrants were living there. The aimed of the operation was to screen out foreigners. Amnesty International argued that the operation was a kind of campaign which directly targeted civilians, and resulted in widespread killings, rape and destruction of mosques and further religious persecution.<sup>14</sup> In that operation, mosques and historical schools of Islamic monuments were destroyed. There were also killings, mass arrests, torture, and other abuses.

Another clashed started after the movement for

democracy in 1988. Following the military cracked down the movement for democracy and captured power, the military's presence in northwestern Rakhine increased dramatically. The military junta initiated to settle the Buddhist Rakhines into the Townships of Buthidaung and Maungdaw. However, confrontations occurred between the Muslims and the Buddhists communities in these two townships. In that, many Muslims were killed, mosques were burned and there were cases of raped and robbery. This led to another mass Rohingya exodus. Some 250,000 Muslim refugees from Myanmar fled to Bangladesh in late 1991 and early 1992 for political, social, and economic reasons.<sup>15</sup>

In May 2001, another anti-Muslim riot broke out in the town of Taungoo in the Bago Division between Yangon and Mandalay. In the riot, mosques, muslim businesses and residences were destroyed leading to the displacement of Rohingya. After the riot, Myanmar government confiscated Rohingya's land and forced the Rohingya to relocate within the country.

## 6.Major persecution against Rohingyas from 2010 onwards

### 6.1. Prosecution in 2012

On May 2012, fresh conflict started in Myanmar after a report of raped and murdered of a 28 year-old Buddhist woman, Thida Htwe, by three Muslim men in Ramri Township on May 28, 2012 in southern Rakhine State. As a retaliation of that, on June 3, a large group of Rakhines villagers in Toungop town, southeast of Ramri, stopped a bus and beat and kill ten Muslims on board. On June 8, thousands of Muslims in Maungdaw town in northern Rakhine State destroyed property of Arakan residents and killing an unknown number of Arakan.<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, violence then quickly spread to Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State, where Rohingya and Arakan mobs attacked each other. The violence then spread more broadly between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims across four townships throughout the state. President Thein Sein then declared a state of emergency. The attack against the Rohingya was claimed to be organised, incited, and committed by local Rakhine political party operatives, the Buddhist monkhood, and ordinary Rakhine villagers, directly supported by state security forces.<sup>17</sup> In the violence, the government has done little to prevent the persecution of the Muslim minority by upholding the Burmese nationality law, which denies the Rohingyas' citizenship and voting rights.<sup>18</sup> In the conflict, Rohingya men, women, and children were killed, some buried in mass graves, and their villages and neighbourhoods were razed<sup>19</sup> leading to the displacement of about 140,000 in different Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Rakhine State. It is reported that local police did not stop the initial violence; instead, they supported ongoing attacks on Rohingya villages and denied international humanitarian access to Rohingya areas and camps. The incidence in 2012 is considered by many as concrete evidence of ethnic cleansing and genocide policies against the Rohingya. Human Rights Watch released a report after an investigation into the role of the central government and local authorities during the 2012

violence in Rakhine State. In the investigation, it was found out that the acts committed against the Rohingya and Kaman Muslim communities in Rakhine State beginning in June 2012 amount to crimes against humanity carried out as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, President Thein Sein said that the Rohingya pose a threat to national security and that they should be resettled in any third country that is willing to take them. In a Press Release, the military also expressed that:

“the violence in the Rakhine State are neither the conflict between two religious groups of different faith nor humanitarian issue. It was only the violence conflict between two communities within a State of Myanmar following a criminal act. As a result of the riots, 88 people lost their lives of which 31 people were Rakhine and 57 were Muslim Bengalis. Similarly, houses and religious buildings from both communities were burnt down. Reviewing the above-mentioned destruction, loss of lives and injury, it is clear that it was not a case of persecution or oppression by one race to another.”<sup>21</sup>

### 6.2. Prosecution since 2013

In 2013, another anti-Muslim violence broke out in Lashio, Shan state. In the riot, Buddhist destroy a mosque, orphanage and Muslim-owned businesses, displacing at least 1,400 Muslims. According to International Development Committee in August 2014, about 87,000 Rohingya had fled from Rakhine State to Bangladesh by boat through the Bay of Bengal, and about 200 people had died in this incidence.<sup>22</sup>

In May 2015, the Rohingya Muslim refugee crisis drew international attention following the discovery of mass graves in Thailand and Malaysia. In May 2015, Malaysian police found 139 suspected migrant grave sites in 28 people-trafficking camps along the Thai border.<sup>23</sup> It can be mention here that prior to the recent violence, Malaysia was the preferred destination for many Rohingya. Between 2012 and 2015, an estimated of 112,500 risked their lives on smuggler's boats in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea in the hope of reaching Malaysia, where there is a Rohingya community and potential work in the informal sector.<sup>24</sup> Inspector General Khalid Abu Bakar of the Malaysian police said that some of the 139 graves discovered, were more than one body. The graves were found in 28 camps in the state of Perlis, in Malaysia's farnorth.<sup>25</sup> According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a combined 31,000 Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshis fled Myanmar and Bangladesh by boat during the first half of 2015.<sup>26</sup>

### 6.3. Persecution in 2016

Another prosecution occurred after about 400 Rohingya militants attacked three Border Guard Police (BGP) posts in Maungdaw and Rathedaung on October 9, 2016. In the incident, nine police officers were killed, and stole 10,000 rounds of ammunition and 62 firearms.<sup>27</sup> Police initially claimed the attackers had links to the Rohingya Solidarity

Organisation, a militant group believed to have been defunct for decades. Later, the government claimed that the assailants were members of a jihadist group called as Aqa Mul Mujahidin, led by a man who was trained by the Taliban in Pakistan. However, a few days later, Aung San Suu Kyi told the Hindustan Times that “it was just information from just one source, we cannot take it for granted that it's absolutely correct.”<sup>28</sup> As a response to the attacks, the military deployed overwhelming retaliatory force against nearby villages, followed by extensive “clearance operations” brutal counterinsurgency operations.<sup>29</sup> The military has been accused of wide-scale human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, gang-rapes, arson, and infanticides.<sup>30</sup> But Myanmar has denied the incident. On November 12, the same year, 60 armed members of the Rohingya militants killed lieutenant colonel and injured 12 others. After this incident, security forces destroyed and more than 90,000 had fled from Myanmar.<sup>31</sup> Approximately, 120,000 Rohingya displaced in the 2012 and 2016 attacks remain effectively trapped in Internally Displaced Persons camps in central Rakhine State, with severe restrictions on freedom of movement and access to health care, education, and livelihoods.<sup>32</sup> By the beginning of December 2017, more than 688,000 Rohingya were forced to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh and 392 villages were partially or totally destroyed.<sup>33</sup>

### 6.4. Persecution in 2017

On August 25, 2017, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked 30 security camps in Rakhine State and killed about 12 Myanmar police officers, and one Tatmadaw man. After the incident, the Myanmar's Government, for the first time declared the ARSA a terrorist organisation. However, ARSA claims that it is fighting for the rights of Rohingyas and is not linked to any terrorist groups. Following the ARSA attacks, military deployed more than 70 battalions into Rakhine State. The military along with Border Police and armed Rakhine villagers also carried out a series of large-scale attacks against Rohingya villages in the guise of counter insurgency operations. The military action led to the deaths of at least 10,000 Rohingya and forced displacement of more than 800,000 to neighbouring Bangladesh.<sup>34</sup> The United Nations described the military act as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing". Amnesty International said that the military raped and abused Rohingya women and girls. The Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) surveys show that in the violence at least 6,700 people, including 730 children were killed. Among them, 69 per cent were killed gunshots, 9 per cent were death due to burnt in their houses and 5 per cent were beat- en to death.<sup>35</sup> According to analysis of satellite imagery by Human Rights Watch, after August 2017 at least 288 villages were partially or totally destroyed by fire in northern Rakhine state.<sup>36</sup> However, the Myanmar authorities framed these armed attacks as operations designed to target insurgents responsible for the death of 12 security personnel during the terrorist attacks of the ARSA.<sup>37</sup> The military also claimed that the fighting has displaced a further 30,000 ethnic Rakhine Buddhists as well as Hindus, and accused ARSA of equally cruel

sectarian attacks.<sup>38</sup>

On August 27, 2017, there was again mass-killing of Rohingya by the Myanmar Army and Rakhine collaborators in the village of Gu Dar Pyin in Rakhine State, which is known as the Gu Dar Pyin massacre.<sup>39</sup> On August 30, there was again a mass-killing of Rohingya in Tula Toli village officially known as Min Gyi village, in Maungdaw Township in Rakhine State, which is known as the Tula Toli massacre.<sup>40</sup> In that Tula Toli massacre, entire village was destroyed. Human Rights Watch confirmed through Satellite imagery reviewed that a total of 746 buildings were completely destroyed by arson in the Rohingya villages of Tula Toli and Dual Toli.<sup>41</sup>

On September 2, 2017, Myanmar Army and Rakhine collaborators killed more than 10 Rohingya in Inn Din village of the Rakhine State of Myanmar, which is known as the Inn Din massacre.<sup>42</sup> However, the Myanmar government claims such massacres of the Rohingya never happened and has acknowledged only one mass grave, containing 10 “terrorists” in the village of Inn Din.<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Watch claimed that the massacre was part of the military’s campaign of ethnic cleansing.<sup>44</sup> UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has described the violence as ethnic cleansing and the humanitarian situation as catastrophic. However, Myanmar’s government has denied charges of ethnic cleansing, saying that the military took “full measures to avoid collateral damage and the harming of innocent civilians” in Rakhine State.<sup>45</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi also denied that ethnic cleansing is taking place and accused critics of fuelling resentment between Buddhists and Muslims in the country.<sup>46</sup> On August 2018, a report published by UN investigators accused Myanmar’s military of carrying out mass killings and rapes with “genocidal intent”. Again, in this, Aung San Suu Kyi rejected allegations of genocide. Perhaps, Myanmar’s Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICOE) admitted that members of the security forces may have carried out “war crimes, serious human rights violations, and violations of domestic law”, but there was no evidence of genocide.<sup>47</sup>

## 7. India’s stand

India has been accepting Rohingya refugees and permitting them to live in various parts of the country over the years. Most of the Rohingya came to India either before 2012 or after the violence in Myanmar in 2017. During the conflicts between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State in 2012, India considered it as an ‘internal affair’ and reluctant to comment on the failure of the Myanmar government in rescuing Rohingyas from violence. However, India allowed Rohingya to enter India and extended long-term visas to Rohingyas. This visa helped to prevent forcible removal of the community from the country. Their children were permitted to attend school, and offered basic help. During this period, India followed its age-old tradition of tolerance and understanding which manifested itself in its policy of protecting and assisting refugees and its “strict adherence to the principle of non-refoulement and voluntary repatriation.” However,

India’s stand and attitude towards Rohingyas change after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government under the leadership of Narendra Modi came to power in May 2014.<sup>48</sup> The changed in India’s attitude can be observed in 2015, when Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia all turned away an overcrowded boats carrying Rohingyas attempting to land on their shores, leaving 1200 in the high seas. In that situation, India was called to help rescue the Rohingyas, but India decided to look the other way. India also avoids raising its voice against the military junta of war crimes and crimes against humanity. India during the present government considers Rohingyas as ‘illegal’ and ‘national security threat’ and seeking repatriation of the community from India and Bangladesh. On August 2017, India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Myanmar after the ARSA attack on police and army outposts in northern Rakhine State. In the visit, Narendra Modi condemned the attack. However, India was silent about the Rohingya refugee crisis. Kiren Rijiju, the then India’s union minister of state for home affairs said that “We have told states to create task forces to identify the Rohingyas, wherever they are, to start the process of deporting them”.<sup>49</sup> On December 14, 2017 India’s President Ramnath Kovind visited Myanmar on the invitation of Myanmar’s President U Win Myint. In the visit “India expressed its support for the agreements reached between Myanmar and Bangladesh for the repatriation of the verified displaced persons from Rakhine State and underlined its readiness to continue to assist in addressing this complex issue”.<sup>50</sup> However, Bangladesh later suspended the proposed repatriation of Rohingya refugees after the refugees expressed their unwillingness to go back to Rakhine. In this matter, India fails to demand a timely resolution. Rather, focused on developmental assistance that India has given to Myanmar for infrastructure development in Rakhine state. India believes that giving material and financial aid into Rakhine state would resolve the Rohingya situation. India does not want to go against Myanmar because in the movement for Democracy in 1988, India along with international communities were against the military and supported democracy in the country. This led Myanmar to come closer with China. India does not want it to repeat again because of the importance of Myanmar for India. India’s long-term objective is to restore peace in Rakhine, so that Rohingyas in India and Bangladesh can be safely repatriated. India fears that prolonged conflict in Rakhine could force more Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh, who may then head to India through the porous India-Bangladesh border.<sup>51</sup> India’s stand on Rohingya approach is also seen as driven by a “trend” under the BJP-led government towards Muslims. It can be mentioned here that, on 8 January 2016, the lower house of the parliament of India approved a bill called as Citizenship Amendment Bill, according to which residency and citizenship rights would be given to undocumented non-Muslims from Muslim majority countries. However, under this bill Muslims were not allowed to get the citizenship.



## 8. Factors influencing India's attitude towards Rohingya

There are multiple factors which influence India's response to the Rohingya issues. K. Yhome has pointed out three phases of India's response to the Rohingya issues in Myanmar.<sup>52</sup> The first phase started after the conflicts between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State in 2012. The second phase began in mid-2017 with the announcement of India's plans to deport the Rohingyas who have settled in different parts of India. India's approach in the third phase was driven by the need to find a role in finding a resolution to the crisis by strengthening its quiet diplomacy. As a result, high level visits took place between India and Myanmar. On 9 September 2017, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Myanmar and agreed to provide assistance under the Rakhine State Development Programme in conjunction with the Government of Myanmar. In the visit, Narendra Modi urged that the situation in Rakhine State be handled with restraint and maturity, focusing on the welfare of the civilian population alongside those of the security forces.<sup>53</sup> On December 20, the same year, Foreign Secretary of India Dr S. Jaishankar made an official visit to Myanmar and signed MOU on Rakhine State Development Programme. This MoU is the first Government to Government agreement signed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar with a cooperation partner focused on socio-economic development and livelihood initiatives in Rakhine State. The purpose of this agreement is to help the Government of Myanmar achieve its objective of restoration of normalcy in Rakhine State and enable the return of displaced persons.<sup>54</sup> From May 10-11, the next year, the External Affairs Minister of India, Sushma Swaraj made two days visit to Myanmar. During the visit, issues related with peace & security matters, developments in the Rakhine State including return of displaced persons, India's development assistance to Myanmar, ongoing projects, and other issues of mutual interest were discussed. India also reiterated its readiness and commitment to helping the Government of Myanmar in addressing issues related to Rakhine State.<sup>55</sup>

Niranjan Sahoo pointed out three main factors which influence India's response towards Myanmar.<sup>56</sup> Firstly, India is concerned about growing security concerns over global jihadi groups such as the self-proclaimed Islamic State and al-Qaeda, and the actions of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) promoting the rise of ARSA as a new terrorism machine. There are also intelligence agencies warning of serious emerging threats, and the Pakistan-based terrorist outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba seeking to arm the Indian Rohingya. In this situation, India felt that it would be a security risk to have more Rohingya refugees in the country. Secondly, Myanmar is important for India because of its strategic location as a gateway to Southeast Asia. Cooperation with Myanmar is important to achieve its broader regional objectives in solving the problem of insurgencies in northeast India and assisting India's Act East policy. Therefore, India backed the military government and also reluctant to openly

condemn it. Third, the presence of China in Myanmar continues to guide India's dealings with the country. Devasheesh Bais also pointed out three factors Influencing India's Rohingya Response i.e. sensitive Northeast India, political disposition, geopolitical interests and Indian foreign policy.<sup>57</sup>

Overall, India's position towards Rohingya issue is influenced by factors such as strategic importance of Myanmar, India's economic interest, political interest, security reason, northeast India, China factor, India's geopolitical interest towards Myanmar, Act East policy, the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport project and economic interests.

## 9. Conclusion

The Rohingyas issue in Myanmar is an old aged issue which is deeply rooted in history. India reacted the Rohingya issue in different direction. Before the BJP came to power in 2014. India accepting Rohingya refugees and permitting them to live in various parts of the country. However, India's stand and attitude towards Rohingyas change after the BJP came to power. Narendra Modi government considers Rohingyas as 'illegal' and 'national security threat' and seek to deport Rohingya from India. As a result, India felt that it would be a security risk to have more Rohingya refugees in the country. India believed that normalcy can happen only after the return of the displaced persons to Rakhine state and believed that socio-economic development in Rakhine State is the only long-term solution to solve the conflict in the Rakhine state. India's position towards the issue is guided by securing its interest towards Myanmar. India always wanted to have good and cordial relations with Myanmar. As such, India's voice towards the issue is not static and change according to the situation and time.

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