

Institutional Strategies of Identity Constructions and Exclusions: Exploring the State of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar

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Received: 5 April 2018; Revised: 2 August 2018; Accepted: 5 August 2018

Abstract

This article elucidates how the widening cultural and ethnic differences are likely to exclude some identities featured by dissensions in terms of their cultural and ethnic origins in the context of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. The core intention is to explore the process of exclusion of Rohingyas from a specific national identity. The findings show that Rohingyas access to the national identity can be undermined by the perspectives of the majority, who claims for straightforward sense of national identity. In addition, this work notes down the historical evolution of Rohingya Muslim identity from pre-colonial time to post Independent era with number of skirmishes and scuffles. It is found that through various processes of exclusion, Rohingyas in Myanmar are being compartmentalized and restricted to live in an enclave like situations. Even the squeezed socio-political, cultural and economic lives inside these enclaves are supervised. It makes them socially deserted, culturally discriminated, economically marginalized and politically under-represented. The study employs historical and analytical method to dig out the connection between historical evolution of Rohingyas and their present day status.

Keywords: Rohingyas; Identity; Exclusion; Citizenship; Bamar; Military Regime

How to Cite: CK, A., & CS, R. (2018). Institutional Strategies of Identity Constructions and Exclusions: Exploring the State of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. *Otoritas : Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 8(2), 82-97.

Permalink/DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26618/ojip.v8i2.1231>

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INTRODUCTION

The unobstructed and secured life of people in a society has been influenced by several factors. Among them, identity acts as decisive and most crucial as it determines the quality of citizenship. Identity matters in conferring citizenship when policy makers consider complex histories of state, day to day engagements with and within the states and of course it would be more relevant and replicated in a multi - religious and ethnic state. Such understanding would reach to another level when identity differences occur between communities of different backgrounds. Though culture plays a pivotal role in the formation of each identity, territories demarcate each and define it as legal or illegal, citizens or non-citizens, national or alien, insider or outsider. So, it's obvious that there is a systemic or recognized political set up which draws territories or lines between various segments of societies. Therefore, socio, cultural and political identity of a person based on common norms, virtues and practices within a particular boundary would be taken as the prime criterion to determine whether a person is legal or illegal entity (Bond, 2006). Such inclusion or exclusion based on similarities and differences determine the status of a person within an established system.

It is not as simple as to define identity in one sentence or with a structured definition. Because, it's a multi-dimensional term which includes many elements and patterns than we expected. For a definitional purpose, one could define identity as the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute or attributes. But at the same time, in the case of an individual or group of individuals or communities, it varies and as they possess multiple identities structure and attributes. Such multi-dimensions and pluralities are source of contradiction in self-representation and

social action. It again underlines the fact that identity must be distinguished from restricted definitions (Giddens, 2013).

Identities exist and come into lime-light when social and systemic actors internalize or externalise them. Reasons could be of exclusion or inclusion, but it helps them to construct their meaning around this externalization or internalization (Castells, 2011). In order to explain this points vividly, a dissensions between three types of identity building can be discussed here; primarily, legitimizing identity, which is instigated by the dominant societal and cultural establishments to extend their influence and rationalize their well-established domination over all sorts of cultural and social actors (De Haan, 1999). Second is the resistance identity that is introduced by oppressed actors because of their devalued positions by the domination of major identities (Craig, 1994). Thirdly, project identity which exist as the result of a situation when social actors construct a new particular identity that is supposed to change and reform their position and status in society. The main aim of this move would be the complete transformation of existing social structure (Castells, 2011). It makes clear that there are always rationale and legal attempts made by individuals and social actors to make a particular identity more reflective and dominating in society.

In practice, the legitimized systematic set up carry on with its single identity domination on others and it could be able to rationalize the sources of structural domination (Etzioni, 1994). So, legitimatising identity process in societies always discriminate and divide all. It is clearer that in the case of resistant identity, a particular identity based on particular ethnicity, nationalism etc., emerges because of alienation it faces for long and unfair exclusion in social, economic and political spaces (Gibney, 2008). Castells refers to this process as the exclusion of the ex-

cluders by the excluded.

The foundations and interpretations of identity are contested, discoursed and debated these days than before. Precisely, socio, cultural, political and geographic attributes would play pivotal role to determine national identity and citizenship and it can decide who can come in and who should go out. But all these included and excluded identities are in today's society after a long contested process. In order to justify the hypothesis, this paper considers only identity exclusion as a deliberate social and systemic process initiated by the majoritarian government. The 'other' feeling and its practical trajectories can be explained with different levels of social, economic, cultural and political exclusion. At each level of these exclusions, individuals are going through a space deterioration process which ultimately derail and make them as incomplete citizen of a society or state system. An analysis of micro aspects of these processes, once again draw attention into another stage of exclusion: exclusion from public and private spheres.

It is assumed that all privileges of citizenship and rights enjoyed are aimed to pursue a hurdle less life in the public and private spheres of an individual. Here, public sphere refers individual's dealings and engagements with society including civil society, market and state. Private sphere refers freedom and space to lead a comfortable individual life. But the communities which follow different life styles and culture from the dominant one are being totally regulated, supervised and dominated by the state organs. This process of vigilant and deliberate exclusion of the 'other' identities is a historical process. At the same time, the plight of Rohingyas who flee to other countries and engage in constant political struggle to get into the circle of refugee rights seem to be deteriorated day by day. They may be welcomed by the host country but will be isolated and deserted from major streams

of social and economic life. Through various processes of exclusion, like in Myanmar, Rohingyas are compartmentalized or restricted to live in an enclave like situations, where there is no room for integration. Even the squeezed socio-political, cultural and economic lives inside these enclaves are supervised and strictly monitored by the state authorities. It makes them socially deserted, culturally discriminated, economically marginalized and politically under-represented, reflecting inner contradictions and selective segregation of the state policy.

Though we consider democracy would be a better option for a multicultural or precisely plural society, the post-colonial political experiences of Southeast Asian countries exemplify the fact that inherently states are uncomfortable with the idea of cultural diversity. They find multi-cultural entities as a complicated social system which brings out more discomfort to the very idea of the notion of the nation. So, the policy makers are more comfortable only with the less number of social categories. At the same time, some scholars questioned the level of social recognition and acceptance hold up majority communities towards other minority elements in the society. So, it's not the democracy but the rigidity in that particular social system defames democratic norms and values. It is because in such highly prejudice ridden and complicated social structures; majorities often tend to view minorities as outsiders and foreigners. Moreover, three different types of demands, political, cultural and psychological, that any minorities normally make on the state could also pressurize the state to enhance its muzzling activities on the minorities. Demand for more political representation, devolution of power and right to self-determination, protection and promotion of cultural attributes and practices, psychology of cultural clash between majority and minorities etc., put the state in a dilemma.

Among them, the most relevant is majorities' xenophobic fear of minorities. So, it's a fact that societies thrive on diversities face inherent contradictions and risks in majority-minority relationships.

So, this article is devoted to examine how widening cultural and ethnic dissensions are prone to include and exclude some particular identities featured by contradictions in terms of their socio, cultural and ethnic origins in the context of Myanmar. The core intention is to explore the process of exclusion of Rohingyas from a specific national identity - Burmese. The findings show that Rohingyas access and reach to a national or Bamar identity can be ignored by the dominations of the majority, who claims for straightforward sense of this identity. This research work note down the historical evolution of Rohingya Muslims from pre-colonial time to post Independent era has been marked with number of skirmishes and scuffles. It affirms the fact that sense of national belonging for those who lack key attributes of main national identity can be again disregarded by the altogether domination of the numerically strong majoritarian identity. In Myanmar, such majoritarian system through social and systemic dictum has shrunken socio, economic, cultural and political space of Rohingyas and made them to live a life of marginalised minority.

RESEARCH METHODS

This paper carries out a detailed research by employing historical, descriptive and analytical framework with qualitative methodology based on available primary and secondary sources. The contested identity of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar would be described by applying an analytical and descriptive approach that identifies the changing characteristics of Myanmar government in accordance with changes in political regimes and the contours of state's conduct towards Rohingyas. More explorations of the study

are done by applying deductive approach. The primary sources include official documents, reports etc., and the secondary sources are collected from books, articles from academic journals, news-papers and Internet materials. The other sources of information include published research reports, Government of Myanmar and Bangladesh gazettes, and unpublished reports from reputed organizations. The data has been collected from major institutions such as BUIS and several other international non-governmental organizations operating in Bangladesh. The study has also included observations based on authors field trip in October 2017 to Refugee Re-Settlement Camps, Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh and interviews of professionals, academicians, journalists, researchers, and students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evolution of Identity Construction of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar: An Analysis

The instrumentalist construction of Rohingya identity requires a critical in-depth examination of the historical antecedents, then prevailed socio-political contexts, which eventually led to forced displacement and exodus to neighbouring Bangladesh. This section of the paper aims to explore and contextualize the ethnic separateness and contradictions of Rohingyas that have been manifested or interpreted in the history of colonial and pre-colonial settings. In continuation, it will present an enquiry of the modern post-independent Myanmar's authoritative governance, its minority policy regulated by ethnic and political embedding. Modern state system's inherent problem lies with the state's dealing of contested identities or those identities in conflict through systematic violation of rights and social discrimination or exclusion. Plight of Rohingyas present a similar case. In the succeeding paragraphs attempt is to his-

toricize the stages of making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries in Myanmar from pre-colonial to post-colonial periods. This will accentuate to analyze the dynamics of power equations between the majority and minority communities devised by the state which brought in question the survival of Rohingyas, their socio-political rights and displacement induced migration.

While keeping aside the current narrative on majority-minority conflictual scenario and the hegemonic nature of the nation-state, the period preceding to pre-colonial times, Muslim Rohingyas have been the inhabitants of the Arakan state. There are several discourses and views revolve around the pre-colonial life of Rohingyas in Myanmar. One debate initiated with the legitimate question of the ancestral origin of Rohingyas that traces back to the medieval era, when enterprising Arab and Persian traders arrived in Myanmar and settled in the Lower Burma and Arakan regions by the dawn of the ninth century (Yegar, 1972). As the merchant community of Arabs practicing Islam preferred to inhabit in the coastal belt of Southern and Southeast Asian regions due to their economic interests and straight access to Bay of Bengal connecting Indian Ocean maritime trade from ninth to twelfth centuries. Apart from Burma (now Myanmar) Arabs successfully established their trade interests in Bengal, Malabar Coast of South India, Sri Lanka, Malacca due to the proximity of the Indian Ocean (Khan, 1936). From twelfth century onwards Muslims made comparatively dominant presence in the Northern part of Arakan, nevertheless their spatial expansion to mainland was limited, thus Rakhine became substantial concentration of the aforesaid community (Yegar, 1972).

The geographical separation of Arakan state from the central provinces of Burma through Arakan Yoma has provided a distinct spatial identity and sociologi-

cal formation of a different unified entity. There are historical narratives of scholars who argue over the fact that Arakan being geographically congruent to Myanmar during pre-colonial era (Farzana, 2017). Such argument is based on the existence of Mrohaung Kingdom as an independent political unit (Charney, 1998). Although while maintaining no proximate relation with then prevalent kingdoms in Burma, Bengal, Irrawady delta and Mughals of India, historical records point to one major phenomenon when Arakan state came in communication with that of kingdom in Muslim Bengal. One such incident took place in the year 1406, when Arakanese king Meng Soamwun was forced to seek asylum in Ghiasuddin Azam Shah's (Sultan of Bengal) due to a foreign aggression and invasion in former's kingdom. It was only in 1430 CE, the ruler Soamwun was able to consolidate his military and political power with the cooperation of Sultan Jalaluddin Mohammad Shah to recapture his throne and restore his regime (Bhattacharya, 1927; Serajuddin, 1986).

Sultan of Bengal's diplomatic and military assistance became a determining variable in their relation with Arakan ruler, this was further bolstered by the fact that Arakanese rulers despite professing Buddhism were to a large extent Mohamedanised in their attitudes and ideological constructions (Bhattacharya, 1972). The rapid progress in the relation led to an initiation by Arakanese kings to adopt Muslim names to their existing ones (Jilani, 1999; Phayre, 1967). Another political development took place in 1459 CE, when Arakan state set for conquer of Chittagong, and remained under its influence till 1666 when Mughals successfully incorporated it into its regime. Thus the period spanning from fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, Mrauk-U kingdom and Muslim Bengal's relations remained cordial and flourished. The influential feature of such relations could explore new vistas of religious exchanges and tolerance, as

two strands of Buddhism, Hinduism, animism and other belief systems found conducive environment for survival and sustenance, with no significant challenge to their existence (Blackburn, 2000). The catastrophic event which marked the break-up of the social equilibrium happened in 1784 when Burmese Kingdom under Bodawpaya set aggression on Arakan state, conquering and simultaneous incorporation to Ava Kingdom located in Central Burma. Disorder encapsulated the lives of Arakanese, led them to rebel against the oppressive nature of Burmese monarchy.

Accounts of oppression recorded by historians explain the horrendous experiences of Arakanese, as those who denied paying revenue or taxation were brutally massacred (Harvey, 1967). Similarly, in another fateful incident around three thousand labourers forced in the reconstruction projects of Meiktila Lake went missing, such incidents were repeated in the years 1790 and 1797 CE. The systematic persecution and discrimination of Rohingyas forced them to migrate to then British colony of Bengal for their lives (Harvey, 1967). Thus the historical antagonism was cemented between the Burmese King and the people of Arakan, which could be the commencing point of future tensions.

Although British colonialism was exploitative, and its expansionism reached its zenith after the fall of Siraj-ud-Daula of Bengal region at the battle of Buxar, the colonial administration decided to venture its territory beyond the Bengal to Burma. Consequently in 1824 British colonial administration adventure in Burma for annexation through various wars found support from Arakanese. By 1885 Arakan, Tenasserim, Pegu and Upper Burma became part of British imperial authority. As a result of the colonial policy Arakan was configured as the buffer zone, indeed in the following years British were quick to instrumentalise the

infamous divide and rule policy based on artificial constructions of ethno-religious and cultural bifurcating lines, thus new avenues of ethnic tensions erupted and became difficult to stem the mushrooming of internally aggrandised differentiations.

Whereas colonial authority's foundations were erected on the destruction or total elimination of traditional monarchical governance and in Burma it was dismantled, replaced in 1920s by a government with limited powers known as parliamentary Home rule. Likewise, the condition of ethnic minorities inhabiting in frontier regions deteriorated due to positive forms of discrimination. The differentiated and selective policy of colonialism became visible when Karen and Federal Shan states were allocated to retain their traditional government. Thus such differential treatment brought forth colonial realities of biased selection for colonial services and constructions and identification of territorial ownership and ethnic dividing lines which suited their political interests (Smith, 1999). Another significant development in the creation of ethnic antagonisms was the consolidation of Arakanese, Karen, and Shan state against the Burmese state by their collaboration with British imperialism.

Despite the fact that Burma was ruled by British through its office based in colonial India and former was treated as the province under the same office for administrative conveniences from 1886 to its departure in 1937. This administrative set up stimulated the exchange of labour force as plantation workers, trade on an intra-regional basis, only to be shunned when Burma emerged as an independent entity separate from Indian administration, simultaneously this political event marked to disturb the population movement involving Indian and Chinese diasporas throughout colonial rule (Brookes, 2000; Dupont, 2001). In certain cases many Indian labour forces decided not to

return to their home country even after the end of British authority over Burma.

Japanese misadventures in Myanmar resulted in the formation of novel ethnic boundaries, this could be better analysed in the efforts of Aung San who spearheaded the national liberation struggle (Farzana, 2017). Initially Aung San and his supporters were inclined to the anti-imperialist project of Japanese, in essence they found this as a conducive environment to thwart British control in Burma. One of the objectives was the creation of a homogeneous Mahabama or Greater Burma, as they found British favouring Arakanese and other minorities as an obstacle for their ideals of a future nation-state (Kratoska, 2002). Eventually Japanese invasion and loyalty of ethnic minorities to British led to the dismantling of protective attitude of latter by the former to the numerically and socially weak population. To add more worries Burma Independent Army conducted systematic blood shed on minorities especially Rohingyas.

Colonial structures of governance and their politics of discrimination generated pre conditions for the indigenous struggle for freedom, on the other hand British utilised the ethnic antagonisms as a tool to deepen divisions which at one level they protected and promoted, left when their political interests demanded new political categories. British were responsible for inculcating nationalist fervour for struggle among minorities, disowned to take responsibility after the initial stage. The onset of World War II left British to participate in wars, and the demarcation of territories comprising Karens became part of Thailand and Burma. In this changed scenario, there are sources which points to Rohingya leaderships' alleged lobbying for the merger of Arakan state to East Pakistan during the partition debacle of 1947, nevertheless such efforts remained in moribund state (Tinker, 1957). Complications for identity of Rohingyas in the mid of twentieth cen-

ture began with the granting of independence to Burma from British in 1948, as the new state vitalised for the creation of homogeneous ideals for nation-state building whereas Rohingyas became the victims of xenophobia (Farzana, 2017). As the demographic concentration of Rohingyas in the frontier areas led to new forms of borderland politics, in simultaneous manner they were denied citizenship and were marked as stateless.

Although guaranteed them with several socio, political and cultural rights and privileges, the post independent Myanmar government seemed to be deliberate in following the 'other'-ing policy towards Rohingyas. It was also a fact that some of the ethnic groups including Rohingyas demanded regional autonomy from the Central government at the time of state formation. Some had gone to the extent of demanding freedom from mainland. In retaliation, the constitutional provisions and coercive apparatus of the state had been injected with Bamar majoritarian chauvinism which eventually created a new cultural framework within the country: Bamar as Us and Rohingyas as Them. The responses and retaliations of some of the militant Rohingya groups had actually triggered the situations into a serious phase. Neither any accommodation steps nor any assimilation attempts were made to include Rohingyas; instead it compartmentalized the Rohingyas as threat to state's cohesion. Due to its structural inequalities and in-built limitations, Myanmar state committed to isolate the people of Arakan province and disabled them through various legal enactments. Such isolation attempts have been visible even in the social structure and composition of Myanmar since independence.

Considering this fact more in detail, a scholar argued that the Burmese governments have vindicated a dual and contradictory policy which reflected cultural homogeneity rather heterogeneous elements for national unity (Silverstein,

1981). He added that the divide and rule policy of British government had actually benefited the minorities in colonial Myanmar but made the majorities desperate. However one of the architects of Burma's national liberation movement and a personality known for liberal attitude towards religious minorities, Aung San and prominent post independent leaders like U Nu, Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League (AFPFL), stood for national unity through the introduction of more assimilation and integration projects and questioned hegemonised socio, economic and political space of Myanmar dominated by right wing extreme groups (Brooks, 2000). Moreover, instead of culturally segregated space between each community which had artificially created territorial, cultural and ethnic divisions, these liberal minds advised for national integration through a nationally integrated culture, education system and common and regional languages.

Demographically weak in representation, the Muslims in Myanmar had been exposing their deteriorating positions to the national leadership in post independent society through their political leadership. They looked the nationalistic approach rooted in cultural hatreds and Islamophobia as the negation of their constitutional rights that Aung San had facilitated to them. Apart from that, minority leaders smelt the majoritarian cultural agenda to purge them and sweep away their cultural and ethnic distinctiveness. Even within the first three decades of independence, minorities, particularly Rohingyas were shoved to the periphery of the state's national narrative and consequently, Bamar dominated Burmese society emerged. The general assumption among Burmese people about Rohingyas is that they had collaborated with the British during anti colonial struggle and therefore any compromises with Rohingya Muslims were found impractical. In order to carry out their cultural agenda,

Bamar dominated state system used religion as a tool through which they constructed questions of belonging and disrobing of that belonging. A scholar opines, "the Rohingyas, being Muslim, were represented as "other" because they did not practice Buddhism, the dominant religion in the country. The Rohingyas were deemed inferior "outsiders," justifying an exclusion from benefits that were reserved for "insiders (Farzana, 2017)."

The inherent nature of Myanmar government reflecting anti Muslim sentiments since its inception as an independent entity was replicated even in the framing of the Constitution of the Union of Burma. It clearly discriminated the Mon and the Arakanese in the process of providing voluntary right of secession. So, the very first constitution of the country had actually inculcated the seeds of othering process. For instance, some of the major ethnic groups were provided with provincial autonomy nevertheless on the condition of their full political, legal and cultural loyalty to Burmese state. Eventually, the constitution enabled some of these major identities including Shan, Kachin, Karen, Karenni and the Chins to gain a legal status - constituent unit of the Union of Burma. Such political and cultural considerations had not occurred in the case of groups like Mon and the Arakanese. Even minorities including Hindus and Christians have not faced wide spread socio, cultural and political negligence from the government except the case of Christians in Kachin state. It is more spurious in the case of Muslims, coupled with long legal and political negligence which forced the Muslim minorities to live in muzzled situations.

In addition to limited and weak constitutional representation of minorities, the varying governments in Myanmar have been preoccupied with the habit of excluding these particular minorities from political and legal committees that were supposed to use as a platform to de-

mand for more resources for their concerned provinces. For instance, the representation of Rohingya Muslims in the Panglong Agreement, 1947, was abysmally low. The need of this agreement was the presence of multi-cultural identities and their different perceptions on the newly independent structure and working of government. But Muslims from Arakan region were not invited, instead Rakhine Buddhists given the right to attend the agreement.

In short, the exclusion of minorities and the attempts to disable them with less political and social recognition had been the state agenda for long. The Rohingya Muslims were formally excluded from such legal platforms. But at the same time, the political representation of Muslims was not obstructed in the initial stages. The British accommodation policies and harmonious relations with some of the early Burmese leaders, minorities particularly Rohingyas were able to represent the Myanmar parliament. Later, such political rights to contest election and hold constitutional positions were also minimized on the basis of identity clashes (Smith, 1999).

The political scenario in Myanmar has also witnessed the deterioration of democratic values and introduction of military regimes in 1962. Aim was to create a Bamar dominating political system in which minorities had to compromise at all levels. On March 2, 1962, politically motivated military leaders took control of the whole state by overthrowing a democratically elected government. But they justified their action as “an attempt to restore order in an increasingly chaotic political scene” (Taylor, 2009). The root causes of such military take-over were basically two; first, disappointments of right wing extreme Burmese groups on British policy of positive discrimination to the minorities and its continuation in post independent Burma. Secondly, the constant demand of Rohingya Muslims and

other ethnic minorities for the creation of separate political units within Burma (Taylor, 2009).

In addition, the Burmese soldiers had been continuously engaged in scuffle and skirmishes with minorities which are inhabited in the porous border line. So, the military leadership projected these minorities as a potential threat within the nation and rejected any political attempts to accommodate minorities’ demand for provincial autonomy (Smith, 1999). At the same time, minority leadership considered military as a tool being used by government to annihilate minority from the region and to promote Burmese nationalist agendas. It was not alone Rohingya Muslims but ethnic groups like Shan and the Karenni were also questioned on the issue of their allegiance towards Burmese state.

After military coup, and the establishment of military controlled political and civilian system led to plethora of anti-minority measures have been vindicated to check political demands of minorities particularly at border sides. Burmese majoritarian chauvinism became the face of military government and budgetary allocation for the socio, economic and cultural advancement of minorities was reduced. Under the leadership of General Ne Win, military was given full freedom to deal with minority protests and it has adopted tougher approach by violating all human rights. Some of the parliament political committees in charge of national security were filled with right wing Burmese extreme leaders and they have become successful in projecting minorities as anti-national elements within Burmese sovereign unit.

Later in the year 1974, the military government went into the extreme of making changes in the citizenship law of the land. They criticised colonial administration for giving much preference to minorities and discriminating Burmese identities in any legal enactments. The

Citizenship law drafted by British during colonial period which, as per the views of military leaders, weighed citizens belonging to minorities better with reservation in any political, administrative and cultural spaces but mistreated Burmese ethnic groups. Military leaders blamed minorities for their loyalty towards a foreign government in the colonial period and thought that it made Burmese groups to have a weak representation in provincial self-government. In retaliation, the military government decided to scrap some particular clauses from the Citizenship act and amended it. The culturally and politically motivated amendments made to the Constitution brought out major institutional and structural changes by increasing more Burmese ethnic representation in administrative and legal activity.

At the national and provincial level, the military juntas had been charged with more cultural nationalist programmes which divided the administrative division into two: demographically Burmese inhabited and dominated divisions and ethnic minority-dominated states. According to the political geography perceptions, the purpose of government was to quell the political voice of ethnic minorities where they are demographically habituated more. The Frontier Area boundaries, recognised by colonial and early civilian government of Burma as minority areas with provincial autonomy, were again divided into small pieces. The intention was to divide them geographically and make them weak politically. Moreover, it led to bifurcation of the central Burma, areas with more Burmese population, into different political divisions with more political representations (Callahan, 2004). But the result was nation-wide protest and the then scenario has been “marked by occasional outbreaks of public protest, non-cooperation with government economic policies and, of course, continued insurgent activities” (Moscotti, 1977).

In the evolution of identity polarisa-

tion in Myanmar, it could be observed that the military regimes have also been carried out a pro Bamar identity agenda which seems successful in maintaining anti Rohingya feelings among general public. Military has been labelled as a protector to secure the life of Bamars from minority threats. Such attempts instigated the public to demand for more military presence at the border sides and later, the Myanmar government militarized its border lines in the name of securing its borderland zones (Callahan, 2004). Such actions would be clarified when we see the attempt of Myanmar Army Tatmadaw to establish military bases and installations near to Rohingya settlements. Nevertheless, it is argued that some of the Rakhine region was fully militarised by justifications to ensure sovereignty, security and to monitor development schemes and to enhance control (Khan & Khan, 2009). What it has produced is social and cultural separation of ethnic minorities from the mainstream. Consequently, the burgeoning military strength and presence over Rakhine state had badly impacted the day to day life of Rohingyas.

Following the drastic changes made to the 1974 Constitution, various initiatives and policies undertaken by the military government in the name of uniting the nation, to cop up secessionist and insurgencies and to promote and establish Buddhism as the state’s only religion. Keeping these objectives in mind, military started to dismantle social and political organizations of Rohingyas. This new dimension of diluting ethnic embedding with states national policies actually adversely impacted social harmony of Myanmar. In the year 1977, Military actions like Operation Nagamin or Dragon King Operation carried out an anti-minority agenda which resulted in the detention and killing of many Rohingyas. But government claimed that the operation was inevitable for the secured life of the country and it intended to verify the unifica-

tion identity of all the citizens. At the same time, the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs on November 16, 1977 explained that the action conducted detain the infiltrators who filtered into the country illegally.

Much before the conclusion of national census, state of Myanmar directed its authorities to commence the process verifying proofs of identification, enumeration of foreigners to be expelled and registration of citizens (Peiris, 1978). Drawing heavily on the constructed identity of Rohingyas as alien or foreigner to the Arakan state, military junta invested great deal of its authoritative intellect during Operation Nagamin to redefine the problems of Muslims as prior to the period of military rule. The projection of military's exclusionary nationalist standpoint and their orchestrated strategies came in contrast with the ethics of the constitution of a nation-state whose demography is characterised by the presence of conglomeration of ethnic and socially diverse groups. Horrendous outcome of the operation Nagamin marked the state's policy as that of the promotion of humanitarian crisis. Human rights violation, forceful internal displacement rendered 200,000 Muslim Rohingyas to take refuge in the neighbouring Bangladesh connected to the state by Naf River (Mattern, 1978). By the year 1978, the hostile attitude of Burmese military Junta through state sponsored exclusionary schemes against the ethnic religious population of Rohingyas became apparent.

The ambiguous and complex trajectory of Burmese government's policy towards the plight of Rohingyas was aggravated in the year 1982 when the military junta regime under General Ne Win destroyed the socio-existential domain by the promulgation of Citizenship law of Burma, aimed to promote its fractured strategy of exclusion. Though this law, constitutionally the exclusion was codified for further marginalisation or sys-

tematic negation. Such codification through legislation mechanism was devised by the government to wedge possibilities for the flourish of Rohingya identity's dispersal. The distinctive Rohingya identity which received maturity through interactions for centuries in the Arakan state was dismantled at the altar of an exclusionary post-colonial state and nation building. The sustained humiliation and manifestation of hatred was internalised in the citizenship law, as it brought forth three categories of citizenships that are-citizens, associate citizens, and the naturalised citizens based on their ancestral association with the state, moreover these three criteria had colour identification as blue, pink green for determining their status provided by the state with reference to their citizenship (Farzana, 2017).

While scrutinizing the endemic prejudice of Burmese Citizenship law, political project embedment through this law made ethnic nationality of Kachin, Karen, Burmese, Chin, Rakhine, Kaman, Shan, Mon, Zerbadee and Burmese as 'Citizens', the tangible argument for provision of identifying as national races was derived from their ancestral presence prior to 1823 in the state, the year of the advancement of British colonialism in Arakan state. Those who failed to produce reliable documents or proofs pertaining to the inhabitation of their forefathers before the stipulated benchmark year of 1823 were relegated as 'associate citizen'. Another classification of 'associate citizens' were derived from the fact that those persons who could obtained qualification under the 1948's promulgated Union Citizenship Act, nevertheless could not process requirements of the law under 1982.

The third category within the law is designated as 'natural citizens', in this category persons were guaranteed the aforementioned citizenship status if their ancestral lineage resided and settled in the state prior to the year 1948, which culmi-

nated in the departure of British colonial administration. Apart from historical affiliation, the three categories of citizenship also required the applicant to be having good moral character, aged 18 years and above, and should be capable to speaking any of the national languages. Legal provisions, and exclusion of Rohingyas from the category of 'national races' initially necessitated the state of Myanmar to deny citizenship as well as other guarantees facilitated to citizens. In this compromised scenario, Rohingyas found themselves in enigma of their future; this was due to the issues involved in producing 'conclusive evidence' of the domicile documents and their migration proofs prior to the establishment of British administration in Arakan state (Farzana, 2017). The controversial scheme of registration for citizenship proved futile for the children to secure their nationality as their parents could not obtain the same, and these developments were directed to make them as stateless.

The politicisation of the citizenship norms were detrimental not only to the Rohingyas, even those who could acquire 'natural citizen' status were supposed to perform duties same as the 'full citizens', with no rights in equal terms. Manipulation of citizenship procedures by the self-interested politicians in power cast and re-cast in accordance to the feasible structures of governance. Vulnerabilities posed to Rohingyas begin with their statelessness, as they are kept aloof from the public goods and welfare schemes. Nevertheless despite the denial of citizenship status, Rohingyas were allowed to cast their preference or vote in the national election held in 1990 (Oberoi, 2006). The prolonged state practices of human rights violation and ethnic discrimination turned in contrast with the granting of permission to participate in elections for Rohingyas, although nearly two hundred political organisations of civilian nature whose registrations were cancelled and activities

proscribed. Among the political parties, there were certain groups which represented the Rohingyas like National Democratic Party for Human Rights and Mayu Party, which could garner electoral gains in the Northern region of Arakan state. Immediately after de-registration the notoriety of the state was came to limelight when townships of border areas like Rathidaung, Maungdaw, and Buthidaugh had to face the brunt of state sponsored Operation Pyi Thaya or Prosperous Country (Abrar, 1995; Abrar, 2000).

As per empirical research data from the year 1991-1992 shows that Rohingyas spanning the population of approximately 270,000 sought asylum in Bangladesh fearing persecution (Oberoi, 2006) Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies [BISS] 2009, July 22). Even after two decades, recently in 2017 nearly half million people of Rohingya ethnic origin were forced to leave their livelihood, and faced state orchestrated violence and destruction of lives and properties ultimately, as in such a militarised environment Rohingyas made mass exodus to Bangladesh and residing in makeshift camps located in its south eastern provinces. From a nuanced understanding of the ethnically divided political conundrum of Myanmar lies an emerging second force predominantly the role of monks in the orchestration of violence. The Ma Ba Tha organisation of religious hardliners has been involved in spitting venom of anti-Muslim sentiments; another prominent was the formation of 969 movement beginning in 2014 with its stated objective of extermination of projected propaganda of Islam's expansion. United Nations has issued its concern for the Rohingyas from time to time, and recognised the Burmese militarised state actions have been described as 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing'. In response to rising international criticism of military regime, the state termed the displaced persons as those who could not provide

relevant proof of their identity.

A comparative analysis of the Burma's constitution of 1947 and that of the 1982 stands contrary in dealing with acknowledgement of the status of Rohingyas in the state. The former is characterised by notion of inclusion, although the rip progress in the hegemony of military in state affairs altered the previous position to that of exclusion (Citizenship Law, 1982). The critical analysis of the identity negotiations in Burma under Military junta points to creation of artificial demarcations on populations based on Burmese history, and cultural aspects, their policy were aimed at segregation of certain ethnic identities which they categorically termed as non-Burmese. Thus the state control over identity formations on instrumentalist basis produced distorted history of the people of Burma. The prevalent history was configured practically as stories recounted by the state and its elites (D'Costa, 2011). Ironically the ethnicity as an independent variable in the state versus Rohingya conflict was not the real causation factor, but it is the dubious state sponsored imagined project of nation-state building based on inclusionary-exclusionary notions of statehood and nationhood. For Rohingyas attainment of citizenship will be a marker of recognition of their status within the state of Myanmar.

CONCLUSION

Under the modern state system, especially in post-colonial states, minority religious and ethnic groups were subjected to selective discrimination, or were forced to augment struggles to consistently remind the state for their marginalisation and requirement for an egalitarian society with a holistic approach of institutions for greater integration. In the case of Rohingyas in Myanmar, state has left no dearth in terming their presence as illegal. The state's biased attitude has drawn from the premise that Rohingyas possess

a different cultural and political identity incongruent to the majority. It encouraged the Myanmar government to set its policies against Rohingyas. The long years of negligence towards them resulted in social stratification and unequal access to state's resources. The seclusion of Rohingya identity as the 'other' and deliberate systemic attempts to wreck their existence in the region have also made them to re-organise themselves to protect their distinctive identity. In choosing the name Rohingya, the Muslims identified themselves with the history and geography of Rakhine state and thereby aimed to legitimize their fight for autonomy.

Against this backdrop, the Rohingya, as a distinctive group, appear to have their origin first and foremost in a political movement that emerged from a historical moment of separation and since then has been reinforced by their shared suffering under the military regime. In short, differences in identity and contradictions in cultural norms between two communities made the life deplorable for Rohingyas in Myanmar. So, here in this context, identity can be viewed as an outcome of self-constructions and externally imposed factors. This paper proved that the non-recognition and mistreatments of the Rohingyas by the Myanmar State was framed to the cultural domination of dominant Bamar; and the Rohingyas are subjected to the subordination and it continues to be marginalized within the State of Myanmar. Eventually, in the whole discourse of selective marginalisation of Rohingyas, state has projected its nation and state building process determined by the interplay of power distribution through the constructions of us and them. Pertaining to that, the changing socio-political, cultural and economic circumstances created an inverse status and separated the Rohingyas into enclaves within the state. Such status categorically degrades them as socially segregated, culturally tied, politically handicapped and

economically marginalised.

These plights are the products of deliberate political, cultural-economic policies and attitudes of Myanmar government and society, where arrogance of the state and the political regimes in power prevented to explore solutions from a human centric approach. Being excluded on the name of identity and live a life of incomplete citizens is extremely a vulnerable situation. The Bamar dominated and Buddhist favoured Myanmar government's policies have ultimately deteriorated the space for Rohingyas. Identity plays an inevitable role on conferring citizenship and delegitimizing the 'other' as alien. The post-colonial period has actually shown that Rohingyas have not been considered as citizens and the political authority played crucial role in reinforcing the traditional ethnic-religious cleavages where privileges flowed to those group identities enumerated in the nationalist imaginations. Until and unless the Rohingyas are not provided with political rights, the long unresolved problems of statelessness will continue in future and such uncertainties, backwardness, and incomplete citizenship without any legally permitted rights would soon earn them a new name, marginalized minority.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We extend our sincere gratitude to the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Indian Council of Social Science Research for providing us with the financial support during field visit to Bangladesh and Myanmar.

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