

# THE ROHINGYA CRISIS IS A TEST FOR THE HUMAN RACE

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Ananda Bazar Patrika, 26, 27 September 2017  
(English Version)

Dark rumbling clouds from Myanmar have already cast their fearful shadows over the eastern part of this sub continent but even so, India, that preaches VasudhaivaKutumbakam, wishes they just blow away. Fate may, however, not oblige as we face the biggest human rights crisis in recent times that may explode on our faces if we are not careful and positive. The whole world is shocked at the undisguised and endless genocide and the India has to take a firm and clear stand. One is not making a plea to open up our borders and set up refugee camps for the Rohingyas, but we need to demonstrate our commitment to human values, that are definitely superior to the immediate requirements of diplomacy. Or else our credibility will be damaged, as foreign policy is no more limited to Kissingers and their secret whispers, missions and cocktails, but is wide open to the world, through TV and print. People now decide more and there is fury building up at the wanton slaughter of innocents and the beheading of little children, irrespective of what religion they profess.

Who are the Rohingyas and what exactly is the problem? If we look at the map of this subcontinent we will find that in our extreme southeastern corner, below Tripura and Mizoram, lies the Chittagong area of Bangladesh. It extends south along the coastline like an arm around the Bay of Bengal and this arm continues even further southwards into Myanmar, through a narrow strip that runs along the Bay and looks at Odisha and Andhra Pradesh from across the waters. This is Arrakan or the Rakhine region that has been known to us as the land of the Maghs. The Rakhine kingdom had ruled the southeast of Bengal in the 16th-17th centuries, with Chittagong as their base. It was then that famous Bengali poets Daulat Kazi and Syed Alaol created their works based in beautiful Rakhine. In 1666, the Mughal governor and general Shaista Khan could finally drive the Rakhine-Maghs out and annexed Chittagong as well as all adjoining areas to Bengal. The Rakhine region of Myanmar was hardly considered as “foreign’ by Bengalis and in the next century, we find Shah Shujataking shelter in that kingdom with his large retinue, after he was defeated by his brother Aurangzeb. He was killed later by his hosts for mysterious reasons. The culture and the language of this region remained somewhat different and till today, most Bengalis can hardly understand the Chittagonian dialect which is so remarkably

distinct from all others in the family. In fact, it is often derided as a rather strange language. All said and done, the Chittagonian tongue is a variant of Bengali and both Muslims and Hindus of Chittagong Division speak in it, as do the Barua-Buddhists and others in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This dialect of Bengali is also the main language of the Rakhine region of Myanmar, that both Muslim Rohingyas and Buddhist Rakhines speak in, though they have a lot of other words punched into it. Though they also speak in the official language of Myanmar, they are considered by the Myanmarese as part of the Bengali-speaking people and the Muslim Rohingyas are emotionally quite close to Bangladesh.

This is one of the chief reasons why the mainstream Buddhist Myanmarese have been persecuting them and encouraged the Buddhist Rakhines to pounce on their Muslim Rohingya neighbours like wild beasts. But history says that these two ethnic groups were once proud to be part of the same Rakhine kingdom that had fought many kings and armies of Myanmar, as well as those of India. Some desperate groups of fighters and sailors of these parts, not all, joined hands with Portuguese outlaws and pirates and constituted the dreaded Magh-Firangi raiders of Bengal. They went deep into the countryside, ravaging and kidnapping people, for p two hundred years till the late 18th century. Myanmar finally defeated the Rakhine kingdom in 1785 annexed the kingdom, but within forty year, they lost it to the British who added the Rakhine strip to its Indian domains. The British started settling a lot of people from the Indian mainland, especially from Chittagong and some from Noakhali in the Rakhine region, more so after they overpowered Myanmarese kingdom in the next few years. The point is that India may have forgotten Buddhist Rakhines and the Muslim Rohingyas of present day Myanmar, but to both these people, India and Bangladesh are an inseparable part of their history, for different reasons of course.

During the Second World War, the Japanese occupied Myanmar and it was the turn of the British to be running away and then regrouping to fight this dirty war, by giving arms to both the Myanmarese and the Rakhines-Rohingyas. After Myanmar became independent in 1947, its new nationalism targeted not only prosperous Indian settlers but also Muslim Rohingyas, who were more enterprising. In 1962, Myanmar's military ruler, General Ne Win played to mass sentiments and nationalised most industries which compelled Indians to leave. The military rulers then turned the heat on the entrepreneurial Bengali Rohingya Muslims and encouraged the Buddhist Rakhines to raid, torture, pillage and kill their Muslim neighbours, in successive waves of violence. Myanmar also deprived Rohingyas of their citizenship rights and stopped basic amenities but when this did not uproot

them, state-inspired riots were unleashed. The Rohingyas retaliated by forming the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) who sought and received support from Muslim terrorist organisations in Pakistan and the Middle-east. There is information that many Rohingyas are linked to the ISIS and are indeed 'terrorists' but this is the full context. They have also attacked government and security outposts in Myanmar in retaliation, but these give the Myanmar state further reasons to step up their genocide in the Rakhine region.

The situation is going out of hand and one had expected the Indian Prime Minister who visited Myanmar on the 6th and 7th of this month to have counselled President Htin Kyaw and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to take initiative for a cease fire and try for a just political solution. We do not know if India has sent any message to the real culprit, General Ming Aung Hlang, who is masterminding this pre planned war on humanity, and Aung Suu Kyi has lost her image and the world's support by appearing to be playing his pretty puppet. We definitely need to counter China's major presence in Myanmar and its avowed plan to encircle India, by being nice but three facts are clear. We can never match China's open ruthlessness and we can never compete with their massive funding, but the third hard fact is that Myanmar also needs India to balance the Chinese dragon, as they do not intend to be their stooge. Diplomacy has its requirements but so does humanity and India needs to emerge as a principled country that upholds its values over immediate gains. Its deals with an unpopular military regime is frowned upon by all and those who believe in history believe that regimes held by force have to go, sooner or later.

Besides, ever since Myanmar was ruled by the military junta, it has never really been enamoured by India and though PM Modi signed 11 MoUs during his visit to that country, we have no news whether he raised the burning issue of genocide in Myanmar, that has already led to the exodus of four lakhs of Rohingyas to Bangladesh. This has not only disappointed democracy loving people all over the world, including the vast majority in India, it has deeply offended the only neighbour who is still with India, i.e, Bangladesh. With an undeclared war going on in instalments on our west; a shattered relationship with Nepal in the north, and almost open India-hating in Sri Lanka, our only bet is with Bangladesh, that is anyway quite disappointed over water and other issues. Besides, India's inability to stop and punish those guilty of sustained aggression on Indian Muslims is only weakening the secular forces in Bangladesh who fight a daily battle against Islamic extremism. The fact that India chose to lash out against 'terrorism' is interpreted to be against Rohingyas and that it did not mention the brutal military offensive against minorities is open to criticism. Unending streams of terror-struck and maimed people cross the Naf river

and pour into Bangladesh every day, and these include several raped women and mauled children who may never recover from this apocalypse. They carry tales and body marks of horror that make people shudder even on TV and social media. Bangladesh is literally struggling to feed and give shelter to this human tsunami from the Rakhine region.

The least India was expected to do was to reiterate United Nations' unambiguous condemnation of the sustained 'ethnic cleansing' that Myanmar is engaged in, but India did not. The UN Security Council has chastised the ARSA for attacking the army, but has also condemned Myanmar for "excessive violence during the security operations". It also called for "immediate steps to end the violence in Rakhine, de-escalate the situation, re-establish law and order, ensure the protection of civilians". China had cleared this stand and India could just have taken a similar stand, instead of appearing to support only the junta in Myanmar. We need to support Bangladesh's struggle against Islamic extremism as trouble makers like Turkey's Erdogan and the ISIS are fishing in troubled waters, too dangerously near our borders. Even Buddhist Thailand has openly condemned Myanmar's excesses in the name of Buddhism and so has Muslim Indonesia. India just cannot afford to hug General Ming Aung Hlang and his killers. To condemn a whole people as terrorists without examining the deep roots is a shallow act that does irreparable damage even within India and India needs to step up a 'Mission Humanity' immediately by sending a planned series of plane loads and shipping fleets full of relief material to Bangladesh so that it can provide substantial relief. Or else other nations will step in and breathe over our shoulders. Massive medical and financial aid can still save the day for India and retrieve its image from present one of being a clumsy, witless giant that hits entire populations with fat clubs, because it cannot fix its arrows on those terrorists who need to be shot. As the world's largest and most successful multi-cultural federation, India needs also to declare that it does not subscribe to narrow Islam-phobia and think for a moment what its attitude would be if the Rohingyas were Hindus.