

# ROHINGYA INSIDE MYANMAR: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

*Despite living in an extremely vulnerable and unfavourable situation from decades, Rohingyas never get much attention of the international community till recently, when the history of violent massacre, deprivation and displacement took the most epidemic form in 2017 through a series of horrific incidents continuing from the year 2012. The World witnessed history's largest displacement of the people representing a single community within the shortest period. Around 727,000 Rohingya people became stateless and asylum seekers crossing the border of Myanmar. Among the entire Rohingya crisis related issues, the thing that was mostly overlooked was the misery of the unfortunate ones who couldn't escape from these inhuman sufferings, and had no option but to stay within the conflict affected areas of Rakhine State of Myanmar. The latest estimated number of the Rohingya population currently residing inside Myanmar is around 600,000 and among these people more than 125,000 were already facing protracted displacements and living in miserable situation on the camps allocated for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). This paper primarily explores the history of the Rohingyas and the traces of their origin in Rakhine, in order to determine their actual identity. It further determines the approximate number of Rohingyas, currently residing inside Myanmar. By virtue of the status held by the Rohingya community inside Myanmar, the paper tries to give a brief on the rights and protections they are entitled under domestic and international legal regime. This paper further attempts to have a reality check, by comparing the rights and treatments, displaced Rohingyas are entitled to get, with the actual hardship they are facing now living in the camps inside Myanmar. And finally, the paper tries to hold a concise discussion mentioning the complexities that are making the Rohingyas of Rakhine more unfortified and helpless and the possible way out from this unending hurdle.*

## INTRODUCTION

“Rohingyas” who are often addressed to be one the most persecuted minorities of the world, are the indigenous inhabitants from Myanmar's Rakhine state. In the near past, the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine state resulting from escalating violence has caused sufferings of thousands of people on a holocaustic scale. Extreme violence and discrimination are forcing them to leave their country of origin and to seek refuge in other countries. Among them, the largest group of people over 727,000 Rohingyas entered the

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border and took asylum in neighboring Bangladesh. Some other significant number of Rohingyas got temporary shelter in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia and UAE. A number of right based organisations and international community adopted a series of projects and survey initiatives and published reports figuring out the number of Rohingya refugees and asylum seekers around the world. These reports also showed the miseries and inhumane state of the Rohingya people around the world. Rohingya people, who crossed international border, were able to get aids and support from different mainstream human rights and development organisations as well as from the international community, more or less. In whatever condition they are living right now is undoubtedly safer, though not humane enough, compared the trauma they faced while living inside Myanmar, with the unbearable fear of losing the lives of their own and their loved ones. Here, the most vital matter that went almost unnoticed by the people around the world is the part of Rohingya population that remind inside the crisis affected areas of the Rakhine state. In fact, the actual figure of these people could not be retrieved for long, due to the restriction imposed by the Myanmar government in receiving actual information. By virtue of, relentless efforts made by different organisations and by perceiving the overall crisis scenario it could be presumed that, a great number of Rohingyas, though were displaced from the places of their habitual residence, are still living inside Rakhine. Some of them are claimed to be non-displaced though the number is few compared to that of the displaced. This paper primarily provides a short description about the Rohingya people and how they originated. Following their brief nomenclatural discussion the paper focuses on the history of their displacement and view how they were discriminated by pointing the possible reasons out. In the next part, as one of the most vital part of the paper, efforts have been made to map out the actual number of the Rohingyas currently residing in Rakhine. The following part aimed to determine the possible identity or status of the Rohingyas, analysing from different perspectives, why and why not they should be called 'Internally Displaced Persons?' or 'Stateless Persons' or 'Non-displaced Stateless Persons'. According to the status they hold, what are their rights and how they should be treated, as per the international legal framework for their protection, have been discussed in the following part of the paper. This paper also tries to sum up the differences between the rights guaranteed under legal instruments and the rights Rohingya people actually enjoy in Myanmar, by making comparisons. Finally, the paper concludes with a short discussion on the challenges and possible solutions to improve the present situation and protect the rights of this ethnic minority group.

## **LOOKING BACK INTO THE HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF THE ROHINGYA PEOPLE AND THE EVENTS CAUSING DISPLACEMENT**

Rohingyas, who were previously known as Arakanese or Arakanese Muslims, have a long history of their ethnic, cultural and political evolution. The history and origin played a crucial part in leading the Rohingya population towards the situation they are living in right now. Therefore, this part of the paper focuses on identifying the origin and history of the Rohingya population. At the same time, this part gives a brief of the events from different times that caused the displacement of Rohingyas.

### **1. About Rohingya**

Rohingyas are one of the largest ethno-religious minority groups from the Northern part of Rakhine that was previously known as “Arakan”. Majority of the Rohingya population are Muslims and the rest are Hindus. The origin of Rohingya people can be traced back to 7<sup>th</sup> century when Arab Muslim traders settled in Rakhine. Rakhine is basically a geographically isolated area of Western Myanmar that is separated by a mountain range from the Central Myanmar.<sup>1</sup>

### **2. Their Origin**

By origin, Rohingyas are an Indo-Aryan<sup>2</sup> ethnic minority group of Arakan, as opposed to the majority Sino-Tibetan people<sup>3</sup> of Burma (Now Myanmar).<sup>4</sup>

There are basically two theories about the origin of the Rohingya people. According to the first theory, Rohingyas are the descendants of Moorish i.e. Arab and Persian traders, including Mughal, Turk, Pathan and Bengali soldiers and migrants, who arrived between 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, married local women and settled in the region. Rohingyas are therefore, a mixed group of people with many ethnic and racial connections.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nyi Nyi Kyaw, *Rohingya Muslims: Myanmar’s Forgotten People*, RSIS Commentaries, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, 12/2008, 2008, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> The Indo-Aryans are an ethnic group of the late Bronze Age and Iron Age of South Asia which spoke an Indo-European language, known as Old Indo-Aryan. There are over one billion native speakers of Indo-Aryan languages, most of them native to the Indian subcontinent and presently found all across South Asia, where they form the majority.

<sup>3</sup> Sino-Tibetans are the people who speak in Sino-Tibetan or Trans-Himalayan languages (around 300 languages). Mainly the Chinese and Tibeto-Burman population are regarded as the Sino-Tibetan natives. In terms of population it is regarded as the second largest language family after Indo-Aryan.

<sup>4</sup> K. M. Atikur Rahman, *Ethno-political Conflict: The Rohingya Vulnerability in Myanmar*, Dhaka, *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)*, Volume-II, Issue-I, 2015, p. 290.

<sup>5</sup> Abdur Razzaq and Mahfuzul Haque, op.cit. See also, Tessa Piper, “Myanmar: Muslims from Rakhine State: Exit and Return,” *WRITENET*, Practical Management (UK), December 1993, p.2.