BOOK REVIEW

The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide

Azeem Ibrahim, **The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide**, London: Hurst & Company, 2016, xiv + 235 pp.

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Dr Azeem Ibrahim's book 'The Rohingyas' is an important contribution at a time when the dilemma of Rohingyas is grabbing international attention. The author has explained the situation of Rohingyas by tracing their historical background to 9th century at the collapse of Pagan Kingdom as a result of Tibetan-Burmese culture and Mongol invasion in 1286. Then he sheds light on the forty years Burmese rule in 1750's before colonization, colonial period, post-independence era and different struggles for democracy in Myanmar (Burma). In the current situation the helpless Rohingya community is seeking international attention against the prevailing planned persecution, calculated discrimination and systematic violence since its independence in 1948. This book can be viewed as the pre-genocide warning.

Ibrahim in this book argues that the legitimate legal citizenship rights of the Rohingyas have been rejected making them stateless within their own state. Since the independence of Myanmar in 1948, Rohingya are facing the economic boycott which has dismantled their livelihood, bearing the denial of electoral rights, undergoing eviction campaigns, tolerating the hatred against their religion (Islam), destruction of mosques, brooking the systematic communal violence and suffering the basic human right violations. The author claimed that the present situation justifies that "Myanmar now stands on the edge of genocide" (p. 16). The author makes a strong case while dealing with the prevailing narratives about the inter-communal violence in Myanmar as the side-effect of the country's transition from authoritarian military regime to democracy. Author claims that the military regime of Myanmar has consistently and deliberately maintained its international links thus far from the international isolation. At the same time, Aung Sun Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and leader of Myanmar's leading ruling

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political party NLD claims to be committed to a democratic future of the state. Her major political support at domestic level is based on the Burman Buddhist community. Disturbingly she has political dealings with the 969 Movement and MaBaTha due to which democratic credential holding NLD remains silent at the question of anti-Muslim communal violence (p. 56-63). Hence just like Myanmar's military regime, the NLD too has difficult relationship with non-Buddhist minorities as the author writes that we should '…stop believing pleasant myth that Myanmar is finding a way to democracy and that it has an opposition party committed to the good of all its citizens' (p. 15). The book claims that the interlinked religion and politics in Myanmar have been exploited which played a key role in promoting the general narrative that Muslim Rohingya community and Islam are the major existential threat to Myanmar and Buddhism. Thus 'anti-Rohingya sentiment has been deliberately stoked up by a series of regimes since Burma gained independence. And most of the waves of anti-Rohingya violence have either been orchestrated by the state or have seen the officials of the state acting in close cooperation with other ethnic or religious groups' (p. 113).

The international community is silent on the ongoing 'acts of genocide' either due to their economic benefits or the strategic decisions about the foreign policies at the end of military regimes. The regional powers are having foreign investments in Myanmar thus reluctant to criticize the military's brutal treatment with the Rohingyas. Moreover, the author claims that the military regime of Myanmar got a bargaining card vis-à-vis US and EU by having a (military) alliance with North Korea. This means neither the ongoing so-called transition of Myanmar from authoritarian military rule to democracy nor the international attention are an urgent solution to the plight of the Rohingyas. The seven characteristics explained and applied on the Rakhine by the author to determine the results about how ethnic tensions are likely to turn into genocide in the chapter 'genocide and international law' are very convincing. The author uncovers that 'every genocide has happened due to state policy, and only when that state believes it can get away with it in the face of domestic and international opinion' (p. 111). The author

has also made comparative analysis of past genocides of Rwanda and Germany to that of impending genocide of the Rohingyas.

In conclusion the author gives a set of recommendations for multiple front solutions. At the outset the pressure on the Myanmar government should be intensified, International Criminal Court (ICC) should be approached for earlier mass violence perpetrated in the country vis-à-vis the Rohingyas. Moreover the civil society movements like Pan Zagar should be motivated to peruse the government and Buddhist leaders at the domestic level. The author also suggests that the four actors, UN, ASEAN, China and US can play an active role in protection of the Rohingyas from genocide.

Ibrahim argued that there is no simple practical domestic solution to this problem, the people have to stand against the state but the framework of this standing against state is not elaborated. However this book is not only a valuable resource for the scholars of history, politics, policy and law but for those who believe in the protection of humanity. The author presents a research based case by learning from the lessons of the 20th century to prevent an impending genocide.