'Stateless' Rohingyas: persecution, displacement and complex community development

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Abstract With complex sociopolitical contours around the idea of ethnicity, identity and citizenship, communities are experiencing unprecedented violence and vulnerabilities. The life and circumstances of one of such contentious community, Rohingya, is a telling example of an assault on their identity, culture, and history. The state sponsored violence and persecution had forced them to flee Myanmar. Denied recognition, as refugee or asylum seeker anywhere in the world, more than a million people from the community has become 'stateless' and living in a precarious condition in the camps in Bangladesh. This article explains the process whereby a community's identity and citizenship were undermined, forcing them to become a stateless community. The article explores: what role identity, ethnicity, and politics play *vis-a-vis* minority communities at the 'margin'? What complex challenges does it pose for community work and how community work attempts to take on that challenge? The article explains how sociocultural specificity poses a challenge for community workers to rely on their received wisdom. Therefore, approaches, strategies, and skills require substantive modification and alignment. Drawing upon personal interviews with key informants (coordinators of humanitarian response, community leaders, camp residents, and host community) and analysis of the documentary sources, the article brings forth the nature and character of community work undertaken by people coming from the varied disciplinary background.

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Introduction

The conceptual and practical multiplicity of Community Development (CD) has evolved due to the multifaceted ways in which communities participate in CD efforts (Walzer, 2010) and hence the trajectory of community work has been a tumultuous one. Though CD demonstrated radical possibilities in many situations (Shaw and Martin 2008; Jha 2015), it occasionally encounters complex and uncharted terrains. Over several decades, we have witnessed a simultaneous expansion and constriction in our understandings of the transformative potential of community work (Banks 2011, Jha 2015, Sites et al. 2007) and this, in turn, necessitates a closer examination of the changing expectations and make-up of community practice in a situation of forced displacement, settlement in new geographies and life with uncertainties. The increasing marginalization of people, particularly of communities trapped in armed conflict and sustained 'persecution' puts them in a situation of perpetual social exclusion in various facets of everyday life.

With characteristics of culture, identity, and other markers defining community, the meaning and manifestation of CD have gone through conceptual and empirical enrichment by attending issues of internal hierarchy, and the power structure within and outside the context of inclusion and exclusion (Ife 2010, Kenny 2011, Shaw 2008). Writing in the initial phase of recognition and appreciation of CD, Biddle (1966) referred to 'fuzziness' of its definition. He highlighted that the confusion of interpretations arose mainly due to the variation of methods and difference in the programmatic approach. As CD has historically been a contested field (Mayo, 2008), the role of community workers also diverges from engagement with a stable community to an extremely unsettled, insecure, and unwanted one. At a time when neoliberalism is influencing the nature of the relationship between the state, market, and society, CD is accepted to be 'historically situated, ideologically contested and contextually specific practice, which cannot be considered outside of the material conditions in which it operates and is produced and reproduced' (Shaw, 2017: 26). What Biddle refers as 'fuzziness' in the 1960s and how Mayo, Shaw and others illustrate about engagement with contested and dynamic spaces confirms the ability of CD to adapt to the demands of the situation and respond to the needs of the community in crisis, however, it does not necessarily fit into any precise framework of CD.

Against this backdrop of evolution and progression of community work, the article explores one of the most contentious segments of society in contemporary times, viz. forced migrants. Through an analysis of circumstances of a community trapped in a protracted conflict situation, the article investigates the history and trajectory of persecution of Rohingya in Myanmar that forced them to flee the country. The article, therefore, explores:

how did the Myanmar government create sociopolitical identities for the Rohingya people in the context of the historical development of the nation? What are the needs and concerns of 'stateless' Rohingyas in the camps in Bangladesh? What complex challenges does the enormity of crisis pose for community work in Bangladesh, and how do professionals attempt to take on that challenge at host country? What has been the nature and strategies of community work for ensuring inclusion and facilitating the participation of displaced Rohingyas? The article identifies and explains how the assemblage of community approaches and convergence of strategy are, in fact, central in promoting CD in the camp. The conception of bare life, experiences of exclusion and situation of advanced marginality are the conceptual framework that informs the illustrations and analysis.

Methodology

Ethical complexity was the central concern for the fieldwork with Rohingya stateless community as they had fled in a precarious situation and experienced prolonged traumatic life circumstances. The article illustrates the 'marginal lives' and contexts of the community amidst ethnic conflict, referring particularly to Rohingyas' fleeing from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The discussion draws from the research that relied on multiple sources of data. The first section of the article that deals with protracted persecution of Rohingyas in Myanmar draw from a review of documentary sources, i.e. academic literature and reports of fact-finding teams on the gradual suspension of citizenship, marginalization of identity, and continuous persecution and forced displacement. Some of these also came up in discussion with Rohingyas in Cox Bazar camp. The subsequent sections are based on interviews with community leaders, focus group discussion with camp residents and personnel of international humanitarian agencies and informal interaction with the host community. The context of anxiety, dilemma, and cultural nuances of the Rohingya community informed the fieldwork process and engagement with participants. The fact that their everyday life is influenced by structural restrictions, violence, social exclusion, and lack of livelihoods (Turner 2016), the selection of participants, translators, and even key informants had ethical consideration embedded in it. With multiple international, national, local, and community actors with elements of complementarities and contradictions in play in the camp, it was ensured that the data collection process should not aggravate dangers for participants, translators, and community leaders in any way. Even the framing of questions, style of communication, bodily gestures, etc. was piloted, recalibrated, and rehearsed keeping the sensitive nature of the field. Some

familiarity with the language and acquaintance with religious and cultural etiquette helped in striking a chord with the participants.

Additionally, the reports of United Nations (UN) agencies and INGO, along with academic writings, was utilized to supplement the field information. Due to the nature of conflict and limited access to the camps, the participants for the study included only the select community leaders and camp residents from amongst the Rohingyas. In an environment of suspicion, distrust, restrictions, and multiple claims over leadership, identification of community leaders was based on the information provided by local NGOs. However, it was cross-checked and vetted with the local network of INGOs, district, and camp administration. I was conscious of the fact that community leaders do have an overview of issues and concerns in communities. Still, total reliance on them might be counter-productive, and hence FGDs became vital to get a rounded understanding of the situation. The observation on camp life, access to services and interaction between camp residents and NGO actors was combined with twelve individual interviews with Rohingya community leaders, three group discussion with camp residents and a series of formal and informal conversation-style discussions with eight leaders of national and international humanitarian agencies involved in the intervention in Cox Bazar, and a brief talk with three people from the host community. Though the framework of *'Do No Harm'* has been influential in the studies with refugee, stateless, and other conflict-affected communities, it was difficult to perceive all possible threats and dangers. Yet, it helped in a systematic and careful selection of participants and related fieldwork endeavours. From a total of nineteen community leaders contacted, twelve leaders willingly and voluntarily responded to the information conveyed about the research in the camp. The participants ranged from different age group; however, due to gender dynamics, only three women could be interviewed. Although two FGDs were conducted with male residents of mixed age group, one FGD was with the female members of the diverse age group. The formal process of obtaining consent through written explanations and consent forms did not work with the Rohingya community due to high illiteracy and general apprehension for signing written documents. The consent was sought orally and at different stages, both for interviews and FGDs.

Community leaders have had an association with NGOs for camp management, and they facilitated in organizing the FGD. However, they did not influence or participate in the discussion. The interview with community leaders lasted for 40–50 minutes, and group discussion was of the duration of roughly 90 minutes each. To have unhindered attention in the interviews and FGDs, the process was tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Though the researcher had familiarity with the language

partially, the communication was supported and facilitated by the translators. The transcripts of the interview and its translation were shared with people conversant with both the languages; the error was minor but was rectified. The informal discussion cum interview with leaders of humanitarian agencies happened in several settings and for several hours. The author's background of teaching and researching community organization over two decades along with community engagement with local, national, and international issues during the humanitarian crisis after Indian ocean tsunami, earthquakes, cyclones, droughts, and floods in South Asia have been useful. Author's rapport with several key individuals responsible for leading humanitarian intervention turned out to be hugely advantageous in accessing the complex field. These key individuals work with Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW), Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO), Save the Children Fund, CARE, International Organisation for Migration (IoM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Uttaran, and other organizations. Most INGO personnel had experiences of humanitarian engagement of ten to twenty years, and national NGO personnel had experiences of community work for over a decade. Based on interviews and discussion, the article brings forth the nature and character of community work by people from varied disciplinary and experiential backgrounds. The article explains the processes of community participation, inclusion, collaboration among diverse stakeholders that illuminates our understanding of the complicated nature of community work with the stateless community.

Identity and contested citizenship: making of Rohingya Stateless community
We live in an 'age of migration' where the mobility of people to different places is either celebrated or contested. The scale of movement is immense comprising different types of migrants—refugees, 'illegal' immigrants, economic migrants, climate and environmental refugees, previously internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, trafficked men, women, and children, escapees of war, violence, and natural disaster, etc. (Jha, 2019). We frequently encounter situations that force particular ethnic communities to flee their country of origin and at times, render the vulnerable population stateless. The number of people being forced to leave their homeland is growing exponentially; it is an estimated 65 million worldwide (UNHCR 2016), and many of them are rendered homeless and stateless. 'Stateless person' are those who are not considered as a national citizen by any state under the operation of its law (Okoth-Obbo, 2007: 68). In fact, statelessness is a condition of unwantedness and unrecognition, and therefore, it becomes a life of 'limit'. This life of limit bases itself on a kind of displacement of

reality—the reality of the state, nationality, citizenship (Samaddar, 2016: 102). The article interrogates this life of 'lack', 'limit', and displaced realities through an examination of identity and citizenship *vis-a-vis* Rohingya community.

Rohingyas, fleeing from Myanmar, represents the fourth largest displaced population group by country of origin. By the end of 2018, this population stood at 1.1 million (UNHCR, 2018). As one of the most significant and rapid forced displacements of a population group, Rohingyas exposes the deep historical roots of conflict in the Rakhine State in the Southeast Asian nation of Myanmar which is bordering with Bangladesh to the north and the Bay of Bengal to the west (Munir, 2017). Alongside several small ethnic groups, two significant populations reside here: the Rohingya and the Rakhine. Myanmar's government refuses to recognize the term Rohingya, referring to this community as Bengalis or Bangladeshis. Apart from the long history of contestation around the identity of communities, an essential factor in Myanmar's colonial history was the British policy of 'divide-and-rule', which sparked historic ethnic tensions between different communities during the colonial period (Farzana, 2016). It is critiqued that the British exploited the minorities' aspirations for their benefit and abandoned them when it suited them (ibid: 287). It is claimed that before 1947, several Muslim Rohingya leaders lobbied to incorporate Arakan to (East) Pakistan, rather than Burma, but the efforts failed (Tinker, 1957: 34).

History informs us that during the colonial period in 1931, statisticians had classified the population of Burma into fifteen indigenous 'races' and 135 'sub-races', which notably did not refer to the Rohingya. The postcolonial Myanmar was instrumental in dividing the communities between 'us' and 'them', i.e. between national races and 'settlers'. The 'us' represents a homogenous population perceived to have a commonality of culture, history, language, and religion. The Rohingya was relegated to the inferior 'other'. The Burmans/Bamar perceived the Rohingya as enemies, for having collaborated with the British and, therefore, as unsuitable for promoting a sense of national solidarity (Farzana, 2016: 288). Through the Constitution of September 1947, ethnicities were differentiated, and hierarchies were created. The Karenni and the Chins were mentioned as 'a constituent unit of the Union of Burma' and were given the voluntary right of secession after a 10-year trial period, whereas the Mon and the Arakanese were not even given a state for themselves (Mohsin, 2019: 6).

Moreover, the tension between the government and the Rohingyas intensified after the Burma Socialist Party seized power and dismantled Rohingya's social and political organizations in 1962. In 1974, the country was divided into predominantly Burmese-dominated 'divisions', and ethnic-minority dominated 'states'. In 1977, the military registered all

citizens before a national census, explained later to exclude them, and, as a result, more than 200,000 Rohingyas had to leave for Bangladesh in 1978 alone (Ullah, 2011). In 1982, Burma Citizenship Law was promulgated that divided citizens into three categories: citizens, associate citizens, and naturalized citizens and their status were colour coded through pink, blue, and green scrutiny cards. According to this law, 'citizens' are those who belong to one of the 'national races' of the country (e.g. Kachin, Kayah (Karenni), Karen, Chin, Burmese, Mon, Rakhine, Shan, Kaman and Zerbadee), or whose ancestors were settled in the country prior to 1823, i.e. prior to the British occupation (Mohsin, 2019: 6–7). It introduced the arduous requirement of demonstrating evidence of ancestral residency in Burma 160 years earlier (Mahmood et al., 2017), which was extremely difficult for Rohingya to establish. Subsequently, most Rohingyas were classified by the State as illegal foreigners. Denied citizenship, Rohingyas became a stateless minority whose community identity was entirely undermined. Over the years, the State in Myanmar has formulated, pursued, and executed plans that resulted in the persistent persecution of Rohingyas in Western Myanmar. The violence and persecution have been state-sponsored, legalized, and initiated by frequent assaults on the identity, culture, social foundation, and history of the Rohingya. The state induced violence based along ethno-religious lines and the policies of exclusion and ethnicization led to experiences of forced labour, removal of citizenship, depopulation of Rohingyas and severe abuse of children, elders, and women. Thirty-eight-year-old woman camp resident recalled.

> 'The armed forces attacked our village and killed my husband in front of me. They also burnt our houses. I saw them picking up two girls who were later raped. We had to flee; else, all of us would have been killed. I don't get sleep even now.'

Campaigns against Muslims in Rakhine State, who make up around one-third of the State's overall population of about 3.2 million, have been described by Human Rights activists and groups as 'ethnic cleansing'. The immediate cause of their plight was described by the UN-mandated Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar as a 'widespread and systematic attack on [civilians]' including 'murder, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence, persecution, and enslavement' with 'elements of extermination and deportation' as well as 'systematic oppression and discrimination [that] may also amount to the crime of apartheid'. (reliefweb 2019). Labelled as Asia's 'boat people', Rohingya's experiences of violence and forced eviction from Myanmar is an exemplary case of 'bare life' where the community is reduced to struggle for biological survival only. Bare life, for Agamben (1998) is a life like animals without political freedom which can

be actualized through suspension of the law and the creation of emergency conditions that legitimize violence and can lead to death. Therefore, such deaths are not mourned or memorialized, as opposed to the political life of a citizen.

Apart from historical and ethnic facets of the plight of the community, there is also a case of neoliberal accumulation behind the persecution of Rohingyas. Highlighting the neoliberal turn, Saskia Sassen (2017), explains that the community has been displaced and excluded as part of the massive land grab under the broader economic agenda. Under this plan, 1.27 million hectares of land in Rakhine state was designated for agricultural development, the Chinese port and Special Economic Zone, and for oil and natural extraction gas megaprojects (political economy) by the military and the state, which are using religion and ethnicity as a veil. Thus, one realizes the methods whereby politics is governed by the economy and 'territorial' appropriation and accumulation that adds to their vulnerability. Moreover, it shows how the intertwining religion, ethnicity with natural resources pushes Rohingya towards a situation of statelessness.

Despite a massive crisis, we find that the media coverage and international attention on the issues were initially lackadaisical. In contrast to European 'Migration crisis' in 2015–16 that drew enormous attention worldwide (Jha and Wani 2017), Rohingya's plight was mostly unnoticed and undermined both by the international and Asian media (Brotten and Verbruggen (2017) and humanitarian agencies in the initial phase of violence and forced migration of the community. Their predicament remained a blind spot for neighbouring countries in particular and the international community in general. In the backdrop of growing Islamophobia, the fleeing Rohingyas are portrayed as a potential security threat and therefore, as an unwanted population. The insensitivity of polity, society, and even judiciary towards Rohingyas in South Asia is discernible. On 14 August 2017, the Indian government had declared deportation of roughly 40,000 Rohingya immigrants including previous 14,000 who are already recognized with UNHCR for 'serious national security threat' (The Economic Times 2017). Writing on the treatment of Rohingya in India, Kinseth (2019) reported 'most recently, 31 refugees - including 16 children and six women - were left stranded in the barren "no man's land" along the India-Bangladesh border for four days after Bangladesh denied them entry and the two nations failed to agree on what to do with them'. The fleeing 'boat people' were denied the chance to embark anywhere. For them, the only place turned out to be Bangladesh, although, without getting recognized as refugees. It elucidates how a 'stateless person' who is not considered as a national citizen by any state under the operation of law, turns out to be a nowhere person or an alien in the world. The ethnic politics had relegated Muslim minority

Rohingyas in Myanmar at the receiving end of citizenship. The politics of the country foregrounded preferred memory and conveniently pushed the history of Rohingya to the background through forcible and deliberate problematization of their past and present. We have observed how identity played an important role in citizenship construction and the uncertainty that surrounded Rohingya's life. The practices of citizenship denial in their country of birth and the lack of formal acknowledgement to the country where they are temporarily residing confirm that they belong nowhere. Their situation of unbelonging and statelessness demonstrates a condition of incompleteness, insecurity, and displacement of reality. In the quagmire of nationality and ethnic origin, the instances of violence and forced displacement faced by the Rohingyas result in driving their lives and circumstances into a life of lack. The everyday life of the Rohingya, therefore, demonstrates a peculiar form of non-citizenship. They lack the right to belong to the place within which they were born and raised. The lack looms large even where they are allowed to camp themselves, without formal recognition as refugee or asylum seeker or any other defined categories under international law and protection. Writing after World War II, Hannah Arendt described how millions of people were rendered non-human through denationalization procedures and forced migratory movement. As 'the scum of the earth', such people 'lived outside the pale of the law' (Arendt, 2004: 341–353) and were homeless, unprotected beings that no state was willing to adopt. It is in the context of Rohingya's experience of the denial of 'a right to have rights' and unbelonging to any place whatsoever, we are engaging with their lives in the camp and the complex nature of CD.

Crossing the border: the camp and community intervention
It is estimated that Bangladesh, where most of the Rohingya fled to in different phases and specifically since the year 2017, presently shelters around 1 million refugees in severely overpopulated camps close to the border in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Due to geographical proximity, the Rohingyas of Myanmar, living in a milieu of 'well-founded fear of persecution' cross the Naf river to enter Bangladesh in search of a safe place to live. This exodus turned out to be the fastest growing refugee crises in the world (UNHCR 2018). To respond to the influx, the government of Bangladesh had promptly coordinated with NGOs, international humanitarian organizations and UN agencies. Engaged in the intervention since the beginning, INGO respondent shared.

> 'The government support came in the form of services for safety & security and arrangements of police, army and government agencies, including a designated department called as Refugees, Relief and Repatriation

Commission (RRRC). The government also allotted land for Rohingya's settlement in forest areas and facilitated cutting down of the trees. Bangladesh army and police were involved in initial site planning and distribution of food and the non-food item.'

The fact remains that camps are the extremely cramped set-up of bamboo shacks and the area is always susceptible to cyclone and floods. Despite, prompt settlement effort, 'the trust deficit was palpable among the Rohingyas. Haunted by their brutal experiences in Myanmar, they were suspicious about everyone and everything. By taking them into confidence and by arranging smallest but crucial requirements such as food, floormat, solar lights, utensils, etc. we could win their trust and from there on community became responsive', shared a local NGO respondent.

The community leader, Rahman[1], also confided that 'the government was sympathetic in letting us come in through the border and the local people provided us food and shelter for the first few months. Government appointed Officials as camp-in-charge (CiC) who supported the community and the NGOs/INGOs'. Specific organizations had undertaken responsibilities for shelter, distribution of foods, cash transfer, provision of medicine and health services, etc., added Nishat. Moreover, the prominent international agencies such as Oxfam, CARE, Save the Children, ICCO, IRW, Action Aid, and others have been actively engaged in the humanitarian response. These international agencies are assisted by local NGOs like UTTRAN, Pulse Bangladesh, EKATA, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, and many more. Both sets of NGOs claim to complement each other's work, the complexities and subtleties were apparent that will be discussed in the following sections.

In due course of time, effective internal structures for coordination of the emergency response was developed, and specific needs and concerns were addressed. The entire response is divided into twelve crucial sectors, and all programmes are organized through sectoral thrust. It is observed that the community-based character of Rohingya society has a mechanism to maintain a sense of solidarity and collectivity through the tradition called *samaj*. Wherever required, the community workers work through *bouiddou* (spiritual healer), *fouyirr* (religious scholar), and *moulvi* (Quran reciter), etc. to connect with the community. These local realities, though ignored initially, were given importance subsequently, shared by INGO respondent. Afterwards, training of community outreach members was organized, which helped in understanding the community's priorities, gaps in services and infrastructure in a coordinated manner. It also facilitated access to

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1 Name of the respondents throughout the paper have been changed for confidentiality.

information for various functions. The task of community involvement started with identifying community connectors and initiating communication with them. Officially CiC is the chief administrator of the camp who is assisted by the local leader, *manjhis*, from every block. The *majhis* were initially the interface between government, aid agencies and the NGOs on one side and the Rohingyas on the other side. Naseer, a community leader, expressed 'The efficiency of community governance through *manjhis* varies and depends upon the nature and character of individual *manjhis*, some of them are biased and rude.' Numerous grievances about corrupt practices and partisan approach of *Manjhis* during aid distribution and conflict resolution was brought out in the interview and discussion. Another NGO participant added, 'too much reliance on *Manjhis* by INGOs depict their dependency syndrome; gradually, they go out of hand'. An INGO respondent indicated that 'the traditional governance system among the Rohingyas is patriarchal; it has been a stupendous task to incorporate the voices of women and children into the strategies for designing the program'. The ground situation prompted NGOs to explore other options such as 'self-help, skill training, voluntary training, etc. for promoting women leadership which fed into the larger strategic planning process' shared NGO respondent.

However, the history of sustained oppression and chaotic nature of their arrival, transitory nature of the intervention and shifting regulatory approaches hampered the process of community consolidation in the initial phase in Rohingya's settlement in the camp.

> 'We were torn and spread out, family members got scattered, and there was no leader in the community. We depended on people like school teachers and older people etc. but outsiders did not give their voice adequate importance. Only the Imam had some control over the community, but service providers were confused and tentative in posing faith in the community.'(Naseer, camp resident).

Though the camp residents mostly appreciated the community involvement in aid distribution, the scope for participation of the community in decision making seems to be quite limited. Participants were forthright in sharing that they lacked the confidence to participate in any meaningful manner. The INGO respondent, however, had a different take 'With gradual stabilisation of crisis, the agencies no longer perceive Rohingyas just as the recipient of assistance. The focus is shifting on self-reliance, where we look at them as a resource to contribute to their wellbeing. There has also been an effort to engage them in mapping the skills, qualifications and expertise and explore how they can be engaged in various socio-economic processes. For example, how a paramedic, teacher, carpenter or other skill-set could be utilised making community self-reliant'.

To address the conflicting perception and community's expectation, a coordinated effort was facilitated to bridge the information gap and ensure participation of Rohingyas in specific programmes. In the beginning, information management mechanism among different stakeholder was largely absent that led to chaos in the camp, said Muddasir.

> 'We had to go through several experiments; it was trial and error. Learning from failure, we gradually improved, and the system is now much better and effective. Now the Upazila Nibahi Officers (UNOs)/ Deputy Commissioner (DC) is responsible for the local administration related to the host communities while the RRRC/CiC is the authorities for the camp's population'.

The information management, coordination process at camp level, communications and advocacy strategies, etc. reflect the convergence of efforts of professionals with diverse skills and disciplinary background. Yet, some critical insights indicate the hurdles that will be explained in the following sections. Despite these efforts, the need for a better endeavour to make the information dependable was articulated during the interview. Some reports (TWB 2018) indicate language as an impediment in the communication process. However, the INGO respondent do not find it a significant concern.

> 'The language spoken by the Rohingyas are quite similar to the language spoken by the host community. The agencies are consciously recruiting host community at the grassroots levels so that the communications with the Rohingyas can be improved. The written communication creates some problem as the script used by the host community is different from the script used by the Rohingyas. The host community uses Bangla script while the Rohingyas use Burmese script. Hence, Burmese script experts are involved in translation.'

The community leaders, in a way, corroborated this.

> 'Now, more or less, all humanitarian workers understand and speak Rohingya. We have noticed that few groups in Cox's Bazar are teaching Rohingya language to humanitarian workers, particularly those who work within the camps.'

The CD approach endeavours to support people in the process of constituting themselves as actors of their own lives and their environment. By exhibiting cultural sensitivity, professionals have acknowledged the importance that the Rohingyas place on *purdah* (gender segregation and the covering of women's bodies). The community seemed to be appreciative of the practice to separate queues for aid distribution, sensitive communication for family planning and motivational strategies for hygiene and sanitation. The sense of dislocation, helplessness, and anxiety that portrays

their inability to decide for themselves and therefore controlled by others has partially been tackled. NGOs had started community Cohesion Centres (CCC) for both camp and host community women and adolescent girls. They shared the plight and persecution of Rohingyas with the host community that helped in making the host empathetic. CCC is viewed as one of the best practices of trust-building and intercommunity solidarity for livelihood avenues. Also, efforts to promote women as a critical decision-maker in the response process have been attempted. The active presence of women and girls community health volunteers in a rather patriarchal and conservative community is easily observable. The small but significant contribution of community work in achieving women's participation and thereby making positive change in patriarchal set-up was discerned. Although this has brought energy and enthusiasm in a rather gloomy atmosphere, it also recognizes and affirms the possibility of change through community engagement. Besides, the recognition and preservation of cultural norms and values were perceived as crucial for ensuring community participation in various activities. In this process, people are encouraged to recognize themselves as a self-supporting community, and gradually the dignity and self-worth were regained to some extent. Yet, the legitimacy of community in the camp remained ambiguous for the practitioners that resonated in the tentativeness in their approaches and responses.

Challenges for community work: cooperation and contestations
Following initial settlements in the camps, the present section highlights the complexities of the community engagement over the years. Despite the involvement of local representation in the coordination structures; in practice, the camp residents complained that international actors dominated the most processes. On the recommendation of the UN Inter-Sector Coordination Group, now Bangladesh-based NGOs are co-leading the process. However, with the increase in compliance standards, there has been perceived apprehension among government officials and INGO personnel regarding the ability of the local people to deal with these. The engagement of a large number of professionals in Cox Bazar fuelled resentment among the local community; they felt that they are not getting enough share—in aid as well as in employment. Cases of violent protests erupted where the locals of Cox's Bazaar area targeted the vehicles of many international aid agencies and blamed them for ignoring their 'legitimate' demands of share in aid and employment opportunities. They accused the international aid agencies of promoting outsiders in employment, that include both expatriates as well as people from other regions of Bangladesh. With a massive inflow of people, the land and forests around Cox's Bazar are being overused.

Tensions between the Rohingyas and the host communities have escalated over the use of agricultural land and firewood. Job opportunities for poor people in the host community, especially those who are reliant on day labour, have been severely affected owing to significant inflows of people in the area. Increasing competition for employment has added to the intercommunity tensions. Moreover, Inter-communal marriages and relationships between host and Rohingya communities are further complicating the situation. Members of the host community find Rohingyas threatening the moral and economic fibre of the Bangladeshi society.

The INGO respondent confided that initially, they had employed a good number of expatriates that created some resentment and frustration among the local actors. Leading an INGO intervention, Mahmud shared.

> 'The influx was sudden, and the crisis was unprecedented that demanded competent and experienced intervention. In the absence of capabilities for managing emergencies locally, technical expertise from expatriates turned out to be crucial. Later on, it was realised that many of the expatriates had no humanitarian or any development experiences, and quite of them recruited for avoidable non-technical positions.'

The stakeholders do express the need to deploy ecosystem-based approach to address the concerns wherein the Rohingyas and the host community are considered a part of the same ecosystem as they live in close proximity rather than separate plans for the Rohingyas and the host community. To ease the tension in their field engagements, many international aid agencies, subsequently, involved local partners in implementing the programmes as it turned out to be a time-tested approach, shared INGO respondents. However, the intervention approach in the camp still indicated the power dynamics and idea of superior expertise and competence that undermines local capabilities. The competing and contentious discourse on the humanitarian assistance to the conflict-affected community provides a sharp critique of an assistance regime negligent of the resources, perspectives, and capacities of refugee populations (Harrell-Bond 1986). With prior field-based experiences, the humanitarian agencies claim to have learnt to value ideas, views and indigenous knowledge of the affected community. However, the participants observed that 'the agencies come with their preconceived notion and attitude and certain top-down initiatives are projected being based on indigenous knowledge'.

Moreover, community engagement in the camp had not been able to respond beyond the essential services. After the initial phase, when Rohingyas got settled in the camp, they got tired with idle life and started exploring avenues for mobility and livelihood opportunity. The mandate and approach of humanitarian intervention were generally negligent

towards their dignified life due to government's restrictive policy for integration. The strategy of the State has been disciplinarian and guided by the idea of surveillance and restriction of integration. It was observed that the fear, insecurity, and lack of safety is paramount in the psyche of the community that had faced tremendous violence. One of the community leaders, Rahil talked about the need to address risks of exploitation, trafficking in persons, and drug trafficking. The safety is mainly a serious concern during night time. Rahil expressed 'the gangs need to be better controlled and night patrolling should be ensured'. He suggested that some of these concerns can be tackled with work and livelihood engagement for the unemployed youth. However, this is not how state and INGOs are responding to the community needs. As most stakeholders are convinced about temporality, impermanence, and sensitivity *vis-à-vis* community-in-conflict, the endeavour towards sustained community work remained limited. Few respondents shared that 'some collectivisation initiative for ensuring rights turned out to be misguided as the Rohingyas wanted to form a political party which was construed as a threat for national security'. A community leader from host community showed his anguish 'Rohingyas are trying to form an association and forging alliances with organisations around the world; they have online TV and other forms of communications through which they keep contact with the outside. But all of these have a negative impact as they are presenting everything as negative'. Local resentment and hostility are fuelled by a perception that the presence of the Rohingya is increasing local poverty by forcing down labour rates. The marginalization of the Rohingyas, their exploitation locally and the likelihood of growing hostility towards them will require new approaches to a protection framework that extends beyond the camps.

State, INGOs, NGOs, and the community: tension and contentions
In the backdrop of complex realities, it is crucial to absorb some of the nuances that do not appear easily in public discourse; however, its subtleties are vital for understanding the community work in the camp. Although conventionally UNHCR has the mandate to assume the role of the central agency during the refugee crisis, it was IoM that took over the prime position in Cox Bazar due to political and bureaucratic influence in the initial phase, shared a prominent participant. As a result, subtle conflict in the operational sphere could be experienced. Besides, Bangladesh has been an NGO hub over several decades where several NGOs have emerged through the route of microfinance. These NGOs have evolved as a social entrepreneur and function in a corporate style. Despite being a small country, the NGOs from the northern and western part of the country is not considered and accepted

as a local organization. Hence all major NGOs of Bangladesh had to struggle to set their foot in Cox bazaar in the process of establishing rapport, both with the Rohingyas in the camp as also with the host community outside. Though in the formal interview, the relation between INGOs and NGOs seem smooth but deeper exploration revealed the subterranean tension. It was shared that there were instances when local NGOs instigated host community against the INGOs and demands were made for localization of resources. The pressure resulted in the written and unwritten norm of allocating at least 20 percent grant to the local organization as also allocate at least 20 percent resources for the host community. Following the need to pursue localization of humanitarian intervention, the policy of grand bargain and the charter for change was agreed upon between donors, UN agencies and NGOs. Although the Grand Bargain commits donors and aid organizations to provide 25 percent of global humanitarian funding to local and national responders, the Charter for Change is an initiative through which INGOs commits at least 20 percent of humanitarian funding to national NGOs. However, it has further intensified the divide between the locals and the expatriates, shared the INGO respondents.

Furthermore, the smooth sounding governance and camp management system had tremendous bureaucratic hassles. Though all project needs to get approved by RRRC, yet it goes to district administration for clearance certification, which is a cumbersome process. With time, the community practitioners observed that the corrupt practices had set in. The NGOs conveys that these processes compromise with the protocol and accountability mechanism. NGOs do not even get access to space for any community activity, due to lack of space in an extremely dense camp. Besides, governmental restrictions also affect their access to the community. At camp level, the community experiences heightened monitoring, surveillance, and restriction on mobility. In the pretext of cases of human and drug trafficking, close fencing within the blocks and lanes are going on. In an already cramped space, the community is finding this suffocating and inhuman. Besides, owing to security reasons, the mobile network is minimal. Beyond the basic needs, the life of the community is entirely controlled and surveilled, leaving them to live a bare life.

Moreover, the uncertainties of future keep Rohingyas in a situation of limbo that hampers any long term community solidarity, collectivization, and futuristic plans. An articulate community leader explained, 'the Bangladesh government's response can be seen through two phases- till the general election in 2018, the response was more sympathetic towards the Rohingyas that was acknowledged widely; however, the approach after that changed towards negotiation for repatriation, stringent regulation and stricter surveillance'. The political approach within Bangladesh has been

to steer clear from considering refugee status for the Rohingyas; instead, the strategy is to treat the situation as a temporary crisis. The position of Bangladesh that Rohingyas are 'forcibly displaced nationals of Myanmar' exemplifies the failure of the host state to acknowledge that the Rohingyas are stateless refugees with specific protection needs. With the repatriation as the primary goal, longer term planning and infrastructural investment is not something the state is considering so far. The idea of repatriation is impractical, considering the extremely hostile situation in the Rakhine state. Women respondents were particularly wary of this plan due to experiences of sexual violence. Fearing such a move, a camp resident shared.

> 'Even if the government here throws us out, we will not go. We cannot go back. Our family members and relatives were slaughtered in front of our eyes. We were hounded for years and chased away. Return is not an option for us.'

Though push for repatriation scares the Rohingyas and it has enormous implications for the protection and wellbeing of the community, a large number of people are tired and exhausted in the camp as well. A camp resident stated 'We would like to return to our place if we are given citizenship and our nationality is recognised by Myanmar government. For this, we require the presence of mediation of UN agencies there.' Many camp residents echoed this sentiment. It seems their bare life in the camp is preparing them to take the risk of violence and persecution that is involved in the return.

We have realized that the sociocultural context, with its specificity, poses a considerable challenge for community workers while dealing with a community in perpetual limbo. The reliance on community leaders, though important, it manifests its own internal dynamics with power relation, hierarchy, and patriarchy operating within the community structure. Therefore, organizational approach, strategy, and skills vis-à-vis community require continuous modification and alignment.

Conclusion

The article sought to demonstrate the transition of a community from a status of full citizen to second class citizen to a non-citizen to a stateless community in eight decades; tracing the route from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The challenges that it throws was responded through humanitarian agencies with an assemblage of community work strategies. The camp as a complicated sociospatial setting with lurking impermanency and uncertainty kept community intervention strategies continually evolving. As community work in the camp is called upon to focus on unsettled lives of the

stateless community, the practitioners had to continuously negotiate with the government, INGOs/NGOs, host community and Rohingyas and had to do a balancing act. They had to comprehend stated and elusive messages and motives from varied stakeholders. Within the public sphere, CD work is filled with 'risk, uncertainty, and ambiguity' (Hoggett et al., 2009: 27) and it has been explained that such risks and uncertainties get accentuated in the conflict-ridden humanitarian crisis. The process of 'influx management' was attended through sensitivity, but the Rohingyas remained a subject of pity and minimalist assistance, bereft of rights and entitlement. Despite humanitarian aid with a community approach, the power structure within and outside remained skewed, and Rohingyas life hardly transcended from bare life situation. The liminal figure of Rohingyas finds themselves in extraterritorial space, between clear-cut sovereignties (Ramadan 2013) that pose a unique challenge for community work. The life of community within camps is produced through this ambiguity, risk, and uncertainty, and the community work has to be continuously alert about this.

The community practitioners are conscious of the fact that they are working within a complex ecology of camp life with fluctuating situations, a multiplicity of programmatic goals and objectives, and community anxieties and feelings. The meaning and manifestation of community engagement with the Rohingyas is anything but homogenous, and the intervention exhibit the value of convergence of methods and strategies brought forth by practitioners with diverse competence and experiences. The processes of convergence or collaboration come with tensions and complexities to respond to distinct approaches and social expectations. The nature of Community work in the camp provides an example of how to engage within politically volatile and conflict-ridden areas of practice. The community work that takes place around significant issues of human survival is rightly referred to as 'survival development' (Ife, 2013) which encompass conventional survival arenas of health, poverty, and shelter, etc. as well as the emerging field of crisis and emergency response. The 'Survival development' approach with active community engagement had demonstrated the potential to reduce community anxiety and tension. It could minimize stereotypes and misconceptions between the communities to facilitate care and support for the stateless community. One also discerns the influence of political approach of the state, inter-country dynamics, and conditionalities of international grant and donations, ideological orientation, and previous experiences of stakeholders that has distinct and subtle influence in the community work in the camp. The community work with Rohingyas in a way reflect its limits; it shows the fundamental constraints while engaging with a community trapped in political and ethnic crisis and a community at the margins of citizenship and nationality. It echoes the observation of McCrea et al. (2017:389) that

despite transformative trajectory of CD, 'one needs to acknowledge the compromised, compromising and increasingly inhospitable environments within which much contemporary practice operates' and hence the prospect of collectivization is waning. The perpetual condition of vulnerability, insecurity, and overall precariousness of Rohingyas manifests itself in the what Wacquant (1996) calls 'advanced marginality' where the community work seems to be extremely restrictive, minimalist, and transitory.

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Acknowledgment

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