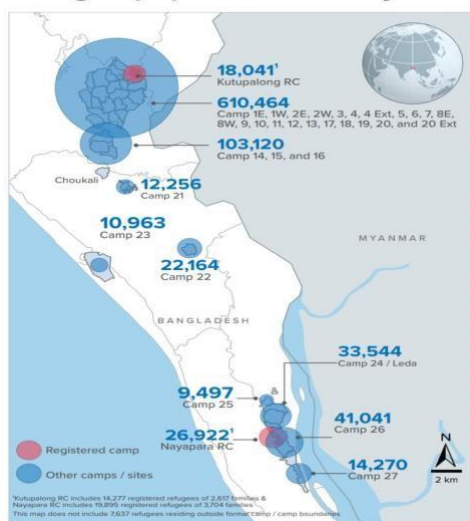


Forced Migration and the Dilemmas of Diaspora – The Case of Rohingya Refugee Women in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh

Statelessness has been a pertinent crisis all over the world since a long time and in the contemporary scenario of a ‘borderless world’, as propounded by Ohmae, the massive influx of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people from one country into another accompanied by their fierce psychosis has led to a precarious condition from a humanitarian point of view. Keeping this context in mind, this paper focuses on the feminisation of forced migration which is extremely crucial because- “It is in the person of a refugee that women’s marginality reaches its climatic height” and also because women are the worst sufferers of ethnic persecution, war, conflict and violence.

The Rohingyas, a Muslim ethnic group hailing from the state of Rakhine in Western Myanmar, have been termed as the “world’s most persecuted minorities” (UNHCR) and at present (as on 15th April 2019) around 9,09,919 refugees live in a sordid situation in the Cox’s Bazar district of Bangladesh , languishing in the fear of ethnic persecution, in the agony of forced displacement and in the dilemma of diasporic identities.

Refugee population density



Source : UNHCR(15th April 2019)

Women experience double fear of persecution because of being a Rohingya and because of being a woman. They are indeed the minority within the minority. After all, “Desecration of women’s honour to demoralize the enemy has always been an important wartime strategy”. (Hans in Samaddar (ed.), 2003). Women constitute more than 50% of the refugee population and have been subjected to Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV). In “In 2013, 12.8% of respondents in a random household survey (n = 148) reported exposure to sexual abuse, humiliation or exploitation (e.g. coerced sexual favours) and 8.1% said they had been exposed to rape (forced, unwanted sex with a stranger, acquaintance, or family member)”. (UNHCR, 2018). All these have led in a conglomerated way to privacy, safety and security issues for the women refugees and prevalence of unhealthy living conditions especially for the female survivors across the enormous number of camps in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh.

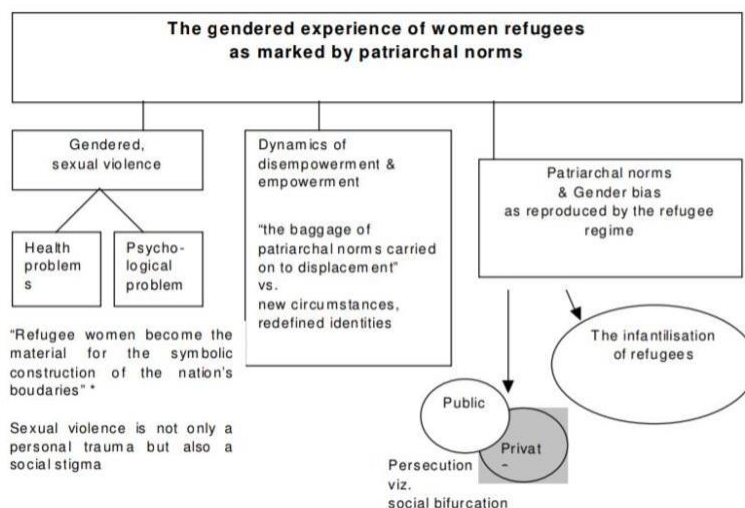
The Rohingya Crisis has a far-fledged devastating impact upon the women who experience the double-edged dilemma as a part of a diasporic population in Bangladesh. Their ghastly experiences from their native state in Myanmar and their horrific tales as refugees in Bangladesh pervade every aspect of their psyche and shatters their identities each and every moment. The identity crisis is augmented by their memories of forced migration and the agony of seeing their families getting slaughtered in front of their eyes. Fatima, a Rohingya woman in her 20s, narrated her experience in Kyet Yoe Pyin village in an interview to Human Rights Watch –

‘Four soldiers attacked and suddenly entered the house. One grabbed the children, two of them grabbed each of my arms They were armed with rifled, pistols, small and long knives, and some were wearing ammunition belts.

My eldest [5 year old] daughter screamed and said, “Please leave us”.... so they killed her.... with a machete. They slaughtered her in front of me.

When they killed her, I became very upset – [The soldiers] said many things to me that I could not understand and put a gun to my head. ... They kicked me in my hip and back, and beat me on the head with a wooden stick.

[Then] one of the soldiers tore off my clothes. Two soldiers raped me; one by one. They were about 30 to 35 years old. They touched too many places in a very painful way – they touched too many places in a very painful way – they touched my chest, they touched my vaginal area. They did it quickly, they only opened their zippers – they didn’t take their pants off. When another soldier tried to rape me, I resisted. Then they burned my leg with plastic, they put it out on my leg.’ (Human Rights Watch, 6th February, 2017).



Source : ‘Why Should We

Listen to Her?’ by Maria Ahlqvist in Banerjee(compiled), 2006

Keeping this context in mind, how can the concept of reconciliation be envisaged in the context of Rohingya refugee women? Is reconciliation ever possible? How can repatriation and rehabilitation be addressed with reference to the condition of women in the refugee camps in Bangladesh? What are the different narratives of forced migration for the Rohingya refugee women? These are certain mind boggling questions that need to be addressed at all levels for the sake of humanity.

The purpose of this paper is three-fold: To examine the health and living conditions of Rohingya women in the various refugee camps in Cox's Bazar area of Bangladesh, to identify and analyze the crisis in women's identities attenuated by the conflicts and dilemmas which the Rohingya women experience as the diaspora and to explore the probable policies that can be adopted for the rehabilitation and repatriation of Rohingya Refugee women.