

Difficulty and Uncertainty: A Focus on Young Rohingyas in Children's Homes of West Bengal

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Exclusion and persecution of a group of people for several decades has recently attracted the attention of the world at large and has come to be known as 'Rohingya crisis'. The colossal displacement of Rohingyas, mainly a Muslim ethnic minority from the Northern Rakhine state of Western Myanmar in 2017 brings them in the limelight. But their suffering is not at all a new one and their plight is going on for more than forty years.

In India Rohingya issue began to cause concerns from 2012, an earlier remarkable episode of Rohingya displacement but the civil society was not so much bothered about it. With the outbreak of Rohingya inflow in Bangladesh in 2017 and the position of our Central Government regarding this community made the issue well-known and complicated one. Connection of Rohingya Muslims with terrorist organizations of Pakistan was clearly stated by the Union Government in its affidavit produced in the Supreme Court in September 2017. Labelling of Rohingyas as a 'risk for security' made their existence more susceptible.

Regardless of the stance of Government it is a fact that around forty thousand Rohingyas are at present in India as declared in different reports and research papers but definite number of these people is hardly known. Earlier studies and reports make it evident that taking the advantage of porous border between Bangladesh and West Bengal a good number of Rohingyas have entered in the state. After entrance many of them become successful to reach their desired destinations like Jammu, Hyderabad, Delhi etc, where as others become the

victims of imprisonment because of their illegal entry within the territory of India. At times families are separated when some of their members are arrested and others are not.

The present study tries to illuminate that every Rohingya life is inflicted with uncertainty since its inception and the difficulty becomes intense with the phase of imprisonment. Particularly when a Rohingya becomes a captive in a Children's Home he/she is trapped poorly within the chain of legal complications. There are two dimensions of confinement in West Bengal depending upon the age of the offender. One is prison known as Correctional Home since 1992 and other one is Children's Homes. Individuals who are in conflict with law are sent to Children's Homes if they are detected and suspected within the age group of 6 years to 17 years after arrest because they can't be placed in prisons that are meant for the adults of 18 years and above and the children below 6 years. It is mentioned in previous studies that a good number of Rohingya children and adolescents have reached different Children's Homes of the state. In their attempt to seek refuge in this land they become captives after crossing West Bengal-Bangladesh border. Many a time they are separated from their families and relatives after arrest either because of their age or because of the escape of their relatives from the clutches of vigilance on the way of journey.

This study chooses to deal with the Rohingyas who are/were confined within the walls of Children's Homes. With the application of data triangulation the research explores the complicity and difficulty faced by young Rohingyas in these Homes of West Bengal. The researcher's interaction with 10 Rohingya girls who belong to the age group of 12 years to 18 years (at the time of interview) in 3 different Homes namely Vidyasagar Balika Bhawan, Sanlaap Shelter Home (also known as Sneha) and Silayan Home is included as the primary data. Secondary information is mainly provided by Prajaak and

Sanlaap. Prajaak is an NGO working with children in different Homes of West Bengal and in this connection it has enlightened the research by sharing their familiarity with Rohingya children. Sanlaap helps a lot by providing their knowledge about a good number of Rohingya girls who have spent some long days in this Home previously. Along with these two organizations some other sources are also consulted for having some more information concerning the issue.

Rohingya situation has drastically changed since August 2017. In India the legal complicacy takes a new dimension since the Case filed in Supreme Court. The case affects very badly the imprisoned section. Because of the changing situation during the course of study the paper becomes able to grasp the two states of affairs (before and after case) of captive Rohingyas in Children's Homes. The observation of situation continues up to February 2018. The study has attempted to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To highlight the Visibility of young Rohingyas in Children's Homes of West Bengal.
2. To look at the background of these Rohingyas before imprisonment.
3. To enquire the difficulties that these young ones are experiencing during confinement in Children's Homes.
4. To explore the consequences of the ongoing Supreme Court Case on this section of population.

In spite of its main focus on the Children's Homes the study cannot completely avoid the Correctional Homes, another aspect of imprisonment because in maximum cases these two points cause parting of families. All the primary cases of this study have their relatives (who are also communicated by the researcher from time to time) in some prisons of West Bengal. Again from the narratives of Sanlaap it is quite clear that in most of the times parents or other

loved ones of the young Rohingyas are sent to prisons on the basis of age if they are arrested together.

The present focus on Children's Homes of West Bengal can unearth many more complications of confined Rohingya life that are not so widely known till now. The study may highlight how the lack of protection system is destroying the young generation of a community. In their most energetic and productive stage of life Rohingya teenagers and adolescents are just trying to be alive in some way.

Labelling a group of people without providing them any opportunity to have a normal life is nothing but an attempt to make them more marginal and the devastating effect of this marginalization can never be limited to the labelled group only.

Key Words: Rohingya Muslims, Myanmar, Exclusion, Persecution, Ethnic Minority, Children's Homes, Correctional Homes.