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Tracing the Root Sources behind the Negative Narratives on Refugees with a Case Study on the Rohingya Crisis

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Abstract

The barriers and boundaries are intensifying all across the world. Presently, a major agenda in front of humanity demanding substantial efforts on the global stage is the refugee crisis. More and more people are being forcefully displaced from their homes; they are fleeing persecution, war, violence, and human rights abuses- crossing international borders to seek safety somewhere else. Moreover, there are powerful voices all across the globe that are adamant to disparage refugees. They have been denigrated as a ‘threat to security, ‘illegal’, and faced resentment and received antipathy. This paper aims to trace the root sources backing the adverse disposition of refugees with a thorough analysis of a case study on the Rohingya refugees. Furthermore, the study explores the social and psychological impacts of negative narratives on refugees and host citizens. Host citizens are unable to empathize with refugees and countries are reluctant to provide them with aid which is leading to poor living conditions for the refugee population. The study moves forward to scrutinize how adverse narratives lead to problems in fundraising and lobbying. With this research, recommendations are provided to counter unfavourable dispositions on refugees and potentially resolve the refugee crisis itself.

Keywords: *Refugee, Refugee crisis, Rohingya, Hate speech, Migrants, Human rights*

1.0 Introduction

In the Palaeolithic era, the idea of ‘home’ for humankind was the planet earth itself. Crossing the ‘borders’ was an alien concept as there were no borders. Homo Sapiens travelled long distances and explored their home- earth-unescorted by statutory restrictions. However, with the advancement of civilizations and with the development of complex societies, the idea of ‘home’ completely transformed bounded by intricate sociological webs; the ‘borders’ emerged and so did the concept of crossing the borders.

Today, the barriers and boundaries are intensifying all across the world. A major agenda in front of humanity demanding substantial efforts on the global stage is the refugee crisis. As of mid-2020, nearly 26.3 million refugees (UNHCR, 2020) have been forcefully displaced from their homes and have crossed international boundaries.

Refugees are the people who fled persecution, war, violence, or conflict and have crossed an international border to seek safety in another country (UNHCR, n.d.). These people, at times, evacuate their home countries with nothing more than just clothes on their backs. They had to leave their homes, their occupation, their possessions, and friends far behind with a possibility of never returning.

The United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is a key treaty in international refugee law that defines a refugee as an individual who, on account of a well-grounded threat of being persecuted on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, due to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country (Stashefsky-Margalit et al., 2015).

These definitions highlight three important aspects:

- A refugee is someone who has been forced to leave their homes. Mass human rights abuses, civil wars, internal strife, communal violence, forced relocation, or natural disasters lead people to flee from their homes (Nirmal, 2001).
- They have crossed the national boundary and are outside their home country.
- They cannot return to their own country because they would be at high risk of persecution or other serious human rights violations hence, they seek asylum in another country.

This ever-increasing plight of massive expansion in the number of forced displacements causing sufferers to move to other countries in what accounts for ‘the refugee crisis.’ But the bigger predicament than the refugee crisis itself is the narrative projected about refugees. There are powerful figures with strong and influential voices all around the world that are ascertained to deprecate the refugees and turn them into objects of fear and loathing (UNHCR, n.d.). Rather than assisting the refugees, various countries are becoming hostile towards them due to growing prejudices portraying refugees as a “threat” to national security by calling them “illegal encroachers.” At present, an immediate archetypal example of refugees receiving abhorrence instead of sympathy and solace in the case of Rohingya refugees. Rohingyas are perceived as encroachers in their home country and as invaders or even as terrorists in the potential asylum countries. They live in cramped conditions and are struggling to make ends meet by not succumbing to difficulties. The ongoing issue of Rohingya refugees has incited considerable politics in the Indian Subcontinent. The legitimacy of Rohingyas is a highly contested affair in the mass media. Generally, that native population has minimal direct interaction with refugees on a personal level which provides the surface for misconceptions to float around. Negative views are often rooted in misperceptions about the size of immigrant outgroups, their characteristics, or the costs of providing government services – perceptions that underlie cultural, economic, or security threats (Hainmueller, & Hopkins, 2014).

The core aim of this research paper is to understand the root sources behind the negative narrative on refugees, to scrutinize its impact on the host citizens and the life of refugees, and to formulate ways to resolve this issue of false projection through a detailed case study on the Rohingya refugee crisis.

2.0 The Problem of Unfavourable Dispositions about Immigrant Groups

Preliminary to discerning the root sources backing and nurturing the negative narrative on refugees, it is essential to identify the problem of unfavourable dispositions about refugees, asylum seekers, and other immigrant groups.

Since 2018 more than 2 million refugees have arrived at the borders of the European Union (UNHCR, n.d.). This vast increase came to be represented as a crisis with critical importance for the domestic politics of most EU member states and the EU as a whole, in their struggle to find durable solutions (Heisbourg, 2015 via Boomgaarden & Greussing, 2015). More than 2.7 million people from Afghanistan have been forced to leave the country to Iran, Pakistan, or Europe. About 2.2 million people in South Sudan have been forced to cross into neighbouring countries, the majority of them being women and children (Mercy Corps, 2017). The UN estimates that as of February 2018, about 1 million Rohingya refugees have fled Burma's violent campaign of ethnic cleansing (Alam, 2018).

It is evident that the refugee crisis is escalating globally and so is the public backlash against the various immigrant groups comprising refugees as well. Refugees, who were compelled to leave their home countries to find themselves helpless in the wake of ever-increasing hostilities. Rather than acceptance and protection from countries, they find the doors closed. The adversities towards immigrant groups are especially critical toward Muslims in Christian-majority countries due to the perceived association with global terrorism (Audette, Horowitz, & Michelitch, 2020). Several extensive studies have been conducted to comprehend the public attitude towards refugees and immigrant groups. In 2016, a survey was conducted in 11 countries; it was found that, in many countries, there was majority support for compassion towards refugees, alongside anxieties about refugee intakes (TENT, 2016). Yet another 2016 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (Pew), found that most respondents in Poland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, and the UK agreed with the proposition that refugees posed a major threat to their country (Wike, Stokes, & Simmons, 2016).

Some prominent causes of tension about refugees among the potential host countries are related to security, culture, and the economy. These concerns result in depreciating sympathy towards refugees. People in Turkey, Serbia, Germany, and Hungary fear that taking in refugees could lead to an increased risk of terrorism, a threat to security. Some specific concerns were about Islam because many associate the religion with “extremism” and/or “intolerance”. The most prominent cultural concern was refugees not adhering to laws and customs, which was most prominent in Hungary, Germany, France, and Australia (TENT, n.d.). According to a study by Ipsos MORI global data, the majority of people (53%) worldwide believe most refugees coming to their country are not refugees, but economic migrants. Three in five on average think terrorists are pretending to be refugees to get into their country. This belief is highest in Turkey and Russia while lowest in Spain and Serbia (Skinner, & Gottfried, 2017).

Although the majority of the refugees or asylum seekers have a genuine and legitimate reason to seek asylum in some other nation - For example, the Syrian refugees are escaping the country due to the civil war; refugees from Myanmar, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Iraq, and Eritrea are fleeing from human rights abuses - yet they encounter adverse attitudes and hostilities which exemplify how negative narratives about refugees have gained momentum and how they influence the general public.

3.0 A Case Study on Rohingya Refugees

The Rohingya refugee crisis is the most urgent refugee emergency on the globe which is proliferating at an alarming rate. It is among the fastest-growing humanitarian crises and is a great cause of worry for humanity. An ethnic struggle in Myanmar, which has its roots in the history of the British colonial era, escalated into an armed conflict in 2017. Around 884,041 Rohingya refugees have fled genocidal ethnic violence in Myanmar which is considered as a ‘textbook’ example of ethnic cleansing by the United Nations (UNHCR, 2021). They live in cramped and most densely populated camps in southern Bangladesh in the city of Cox's Bazar and both Rohingya refugees and local Bangladeshi host communities struggle to meet their basic needs.

3.1 Who are Rohingyas?

The Rohingya Muslims, which are deemed as the ‘world’s most persecuted minority,’ is a religious and ethnic minority of 1.3 million, formerly living in the Rakhine State within Myanmar (Mercy Corps, 2019). They speak Rohingya or Ruaingga, a dialect of Bengali contrasting to the commonly spoken Burmese language in the country.

The Rohingya claim their origins in the region in the fifteenth century, when several thousand Muslims came to the place formerly known as Arakan Kingdom. According to the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation, Rohingyas have been living in Arakan (now Rakhine) from time immemorial. However, the government of Myanmar denies their ancestral claim. They are not considered one of the country's 135 official ethnic groups in majority Buddhist Myanmar (Al Jazeera, 2018). The Rohingya do not enjoy the right to citizenship, as a result of which, they have no legal documents to their name (Hossain, & Hosain, 2019).

3.2 History of the Rohingyas

In the British colonial era, many migrants from today's India and Bangladesh were brought to Myanmar to work as labourers in the British-led administration, however, the native Myanmar population did not favour this decree and were averse towards the Rohingyas. The Rohingya are regarded as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh by Myanmar (Home Office, 2017). Post-independence from British rule in Burma in 1948, a Muslim rebellion flared up the Rakhine State of Myanmar with the demand for an autonomous nation. Over eight decades, many conflicts erupted in the Rakhine state which has led numerous Rohingyas to escape to the neighbouring countries in South Asia. Among the earliest few cases of Rohingyas fleeing to Bangladesh antedates to 1978 followed by another migration that occurred in the early 1990s. Consequently, more than 200,000 Rohingya people fled Myanmar and Rakhine State (Mercy Corps, 2019). The regular military coup uprising in Myanmar has resulted in massive violations of human rights which have rendered Rohingyas helpless. Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a Rohingya militant group, transpired and marshaled small-scale attacks on border police stations. An attack on August 25, 2017, left 12 police officers dead and sparked a crisis against Rohingya civilians (Alin, 2018). That was when the ongoing antagonism heightened tremendously leading to the massive ethnic genocide. The government launched a massacre against Rohingyas involving brutal violence, malicious torture, rape, murder, and incendiarism by the militants. The security forces illicitly killed thousands of individuals, raped women and girls, tortured men and boys in detention sites, and burned hundreds of villages in a targeted manner (Amnesty International, 2018).

Due to persecutions, more than 6,00,000 Rohingya have fled from Rakhine to the other neighboring countries of Myanmar (Edroos, 2017). The two countries which have been most affected by the Rohingya refugee crisis are Bangladesh and India.

3.3 Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has been the leading asylum for refugees coming from Myanmar since the 1990s fleeing human rights abuses executed by the government and military. At first, during the 2017 crisis, Bangladesh was unwilling to receive Rohingya refugees in the country but international pressure made Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina concede. Bangladesh has indisputably absorbed the highest number of refugees coming from Myanmar, however, the ever-growing number of refugees is burdening Bangladesh. Up to an extent, it is viable that officials are displeased with the refugees because, in a country where 24 million people live below the poverty line, it is challenging to host 9,14,998 Rohingyas. Refugees reside in desperately miserable conditions in the camps. Bangladesh regards the majority of people who have crossed its borders and are residing outside of camps as having illegally invaded the country. Bangladesh has even strived to stop Rohingya refugees from crossing its border. However, there are many Islamist groups, who possess powerful influence in Bangladesh's politics, supporting the Rohingya cause, and sheltering them.

Bangladesh condemns the actions of Myanmar towards Rohingyas and holds the government of Myanmar accountable for the refugee problem in their country. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called on the UN and the international community to pressure Myanmar's government to permit the return of thousands of Rohingya refugees. She remarked that Bangladesh would offer the refugees temporary shelter and aid, but that Myanmar should soon "take their nationals back." Refugees in Bangladesh have been banned from leaving overcrowded border areas. Police check posts and surveillance have been set up in key transit points to stop Rohingya from traveling to other parts of the country (Al Jazeera, 2018).

Earlier, natives and even the media sympathized with refugees but over time, there was a change in the narratives. There was widespread negative coverage on Rohingyas from Bangladeshi media houses. "Rohingya camps are store-house of weapons", "NGOs are supplying weapons to Rohingyas", "Big arms haul in Rohingya camp" were among some headlines that appeared in Bangladeshi newspapers (Shishir, 2019). Rohingyas were portrayed as drug traders, criminals, and security threats by the Bangladeshi press media. The Prime Minister termed the Rohingya Muslims as a "threat to the security" of Bangladesh. These opinions are magnified and circulated by media, policymakers, and therefore the general public, which may shift the tone of the narrative over time (Wadud, 2020).

3.4 India's take on Rohingya Refugees

The tumor of unfavorable discourse on Rohingyas referring to them as “terrorists” has metastasized in India as well where over 40,000 Rohingyas live (O.P. Jindal University, n.d.). 2019 statistics show that more than forty thousand Rohingya refugees migrated to India, where they fear the threat of deportation by the Indian government (Kinseth, 2019).

India is a non-signatory state to the 1951 Refugee Convention of the United Nations and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Numerous Rohingya Muslims residing in India are registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The Indian government has in the past adopted a stricter stance towards Rohingya refugees than towards other refugees, presumably based on national security concerns concerning the Rohingya (Yhome, 2018).

The problems of the negative narratives are seemingly evident in India. For instance, a crackdown against Rohingyas began in the state of West Bengal when officials claimed that Rohingyas were illegally becoming citizens of India (Ellis-Petersen, & Hassan, 2021). The NRC exercise in Assam to identify and deport "legal" immigrants, the demonization of the Rohingya Muslim communities in Delhi (especially in light of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country) are some of the many popular narratives against refugees in the country. Religious right-wing Hindutva trolls have inculcated the Rohingyas to be an instrument of Islamic terrorism and have been accused of carrying out militant attacks in parts of India (Chaudhury, 2018). In the past three years, India deported about 100 Rohingya refugees to Myanmar (Rahman, 2021). Rohingya activists said that deporting people back to Myanmar was like “throwing us into hell” (Ellis-Petersen, & Hassan, 2021).

The polarised political and social atmosphere in the home country where a minority gets mob-lynched and in the host countries where refugees are being targeted is a telling marker of the dangerous stance of the ruling dispensation vis-a-vis people belonging to particular groups which put them under significant risk. It is palpable that negative dispositions on refugees can ignite serious consequences and thus, there is a climacteric need to trace down the causes behind these adverse narratives and acknowledge the impacts conscientiously.

4.0 Root Sources behind Negative Narrative on Refugees

The question of the key drivers of public attitudes towards refugees is notably debated in the literature. With the careful and meticulous analysis of the Rohingya refugee crisis, it has been established that political leaders, media outlets, and native citizens from host countries are increasingly perceiving refugees as a threat to their nation and have developed a set of prejudices against them. These key drivers of public opinion incorporate real-world anxiety about economic, cultural, and security issues. Therefore, it is essential to scrutinize the complex process through which opinions are formed on the individual level and highly crucial to comprehend these sources.

4.1 Confusing Refugees with Immigrants

A considerable source of resentment towards refugees surfaces because of a sense of unclarity among the general public regarding refugees and other immigrant groups. Quite often, refugees are clubbed together with migrants and asylum-seekers. Migrants and asylum-seekers can be negatively depicted as a particularly mobile and predatory subset of “foreigners”. The terms are habitually used with negligence and often interchangeably in a generally negative sense, or they are used in an altogether adverse manner.

There is a substantial disparity between these terms, and it is important to acknowledge the difference. The definitions of refugees were discussed earlier in this paper which will be used here for reference.

Migrants are those individuals who leave their country of origin and move to another country seeking a window of opportunities - better job opportunities, quality education, familial longing, etc. Unlike refugees, they are not forced to leave their home countries, they are not fleeing from persecution, and, in most likelihood, have no fear of returning to their country. However, migrants are seen as ‘predators’ by the residents who are coming into their country to steal their jobs, they are seen as competition and threats and therefore, are not always warmly welcomed by the locals.

An asylum-seeker is someone who has left their home country and is looking for protection from persecution and human rights violations in another country, but who hasn’t yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is on hold to receive a decision on their claim for asylum (Quiroz Villarreal et al., 2021). Seeking asylum is a human right as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations which suggests that everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

People fail to understand that refugees are different from mere migrants, they carry with them the horrors of torture, persecution, and violation, they carry with them the fear of never being able to go back home, they enter the country with a hope to get protection and aid which they fail to receive amidst the lack of sympathy from the masses. Depicting migrants as a mass of individuals fleeing their countries – with no disparity between refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, or those simply fleeing harsh conditions – will only drive collective imagination progressively towards dehumanizing them (Faustini, 2017).

It has also been noticed through various studies that the people tend to be more sympathetic towards refugees and advocate the idea of providing them asylum but the mere confusion between migrants and refugees leads to adverse attitudes. People are unaware of the disparity between migrants and refugees. Hence, confusing these terms and intertwining their meanings is noticeably misleading and can result in serious consequences for the lives and safety of these populations. Very often people use the term “illegal” to describe refugees, migrants, or asylum-seekers as is the case with Rohingyas. Rohingyas who reside outside the refugee camps in Bangladesh are considered “illegal.” In India, Rohingyas are perceived as “predators” and “illegal immigrants.” Irregularly entering a country, or staying in another country with irregular status, should be considered an infraction of administrative regulations and not a criminal activity because judicially and ethically, an action performed by a person can be legal or illegal but a person cannot.

4.2 Hate Speech

While the freedom of speech empowers democracy, absolute freedom of speech and expression can prompt hate speech, which threatens democratic values, propels instability, and endangers law and order. There is no standard definition for hate speech, and the characterization of what is 'hateful' is highly contested.

According to the United Nations, hate speech is generally understood as any type of communication, verbal, non-verbal, written or actions, that attacks or uses derogatory or discriminatory language concerning a person or a group based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender or another identity factor (UNHCR, n.d.). Typical hate speech involves epithets and slurs, statements that promote malicious stereotypes, and speech intended to incite hatred or violence against a group (Curtis, n.d.). Hate speech may also comprise of nonverbal depictions and symbols (Curtis, n.d.).

Many regions all over the globe are encountering an upsurge in refugees which has also been accompanied by a pronounced rise in attacks and hate speech targeting refugees and immigrant groups. Hate speech became a concern in the field of international law after the Second World War when Nazi plans of extermination of the Jewish population were accompanied by public hatred campaigns (Nowak, 2005; Van Blarcum, 2005). And recently, hate speech has ignited ethnic conflicts in many places like former Yugoslavia as well as the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar (Southwick, 2015). Genocidal oppression against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar was ignited by the sheer hatred towards the Rohingyas and articulation of that hatred. The majority population in Myanmar holds a set of prejudices against the minority because of their descent, race, ethnicity, religion, language, and identity. Hate speech and harmful misinformation lie at the core of Myanmar's inter-ethnic violence (Minority Rights Group International, 2019).

Hate speech can cause psychological harm, as well as physical harm to its victims as hate speech, can instigate violence. And the social groups that extensively fall prey to hate speech customarily suffer from historical social marginalization and oppression which accounts for social inequality as is the case with Rohingyas who have been marginalized in Myanmar historically.

Hate speeches have created a negative narrative towards the refugees, immigrants, migrants, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons. This is particularly evident in Europe. More than a million individuals have crossed into Europe in 2015 fleeing from war, persecution, and poverty. This unprecedented wave of migration has led to the increase of hostile attitudes towards refugees, and islamophobic and xenophobic hate speech at all levels (Council of Europe, 2016). In a report by the EU Project, Bricks Against Hate Speech, a significant hike in the use of hate speech, often blaming immigrants and minorities for the difficulties of their own country, has spread in most countries (Faustini, 2017). In 2016 a poll was conducted by the Brookings Institute in the US which displayed that 46% of Americans who opposed accepting refugees were concerned about refugees's potential links to terrorism (Telhami, n.d.). Although the statistics display that the refugee population is the least likely section of a society to get indulged in a violent act.

Hate speech around Rohingyas has its traces in their home country, Myanmar, itself where Rohingyas are routinely victimized and denied the practice of basic rights. The explicit inflammatory speech has customarily and deliberately been incited in Myanmar aiming to trigger violence and atrocities against this minority group.

The targeting of the Rohingya is especially common during the time of elections to gain public support. The subjugation and condemnation of the Rohingya have become extremely normalized in the country. And these preconceived ideas regarding the Rohingya which were seeded in Myanmar spread to host countries as well. Bangladesh, which was initially adamant to provide Rohingya refugees aid, witnessed a change of attitude and opinions of the masses. In India, the influence is much larger. India has been reluctant to Rohingya Muslims in the name of ‘National Interest.’ The inflammatory speech regarding Rohingyas being related to terrorism is evident in India. With the recent flaring controversy over the government's Citizenship Amendment Act (2019), which re-ignited the debates over citizenship, refugees, and protection of human rights, the hate speech on refugees has aggravated.

Anne Brasseur, Ambassador of the Council of Europe during the No Hate Speech Movement, said, ‘Hate speech adds to the suffering of the refugees, hinders their integration, and prevents us all from seeking workable solutions within our communities. To hate and increase the problems and sorrow, or to sympathize and lend a helping hand – this is the choice we all, as members of society and as human beings, need to make (Council of Europe, 2016).

4.3 Press and Media Portrayal

The media is the root of information for the general masses. It holds the potential power to influence public opinion. Undeniably the media plays a major role in shaping public attitudes towards refugees, which in turn can reflect on behaviour Johnson-Cartee (2005). suggests that “knowledge is socially constructed”, and specifically the news media plays a progressively powerful role in the process of establishing political reality (Wadud, 2020). The role of the media is far-reaching in providing a platform for complex issues to be unfolded, problematized, and presented to the public. The European Court of Human Rights has continuously described the role of the media as a ‘public watchdog’ because they set forth information and ideas on matters of public interest, and the general public too has a right to receive the information. Being a facilitator of public communication and discourse, the media is widely perceived as an essential tool for managing the increasing diversity in society and promoting inclusion (Council of Europe, n.d.). How a crisis is depicted and narrated in the media affects how the general public will perceive it. It has also been found through various research studies that the media can influence policies on refugees as well. Media roles in covering humanitarian crises are important because the critical coverage of a crisis can force the government to intervene during a humanitarian crisis (Robinson, 2002).

News coverage can also play an impactful role in informing natives about international affairs and media has a significant role to play in setting the public agenda and shaping the perspective of countrymen through the selection of narratives.

Extensive scholarly work has established a few key themes or frames that have consistently recurred over time and across countries, constructing an ambivalent portrayal of refugees and asylum seekers as innocent sufferers as well as intruders and threats to the physical, social, economic, and cultural well-being of the host country. And a large amount of research work has found that media coverage of refugee and asylum issues is dominated by problem orientation (Greussing, & Boomgaarden, 2017). The refugee and migrant populations are identified with terrorism, crime and are blamed for exploiting limited public resources that would otherwise be used by host citizens. These types of media coverage shift the focus of the public from sympathizing with refugees to doubting whether they deserve help and protection or not.

In 2015, Europe faced the arrival of over 1.25 million refugees fleeing from war-affected countries (Greussing, & Boomgaarden, 2017). The general masses largely got to know about this issue via domestic media. It was encountered as a significant political and humanitarian challenge for the EU and its members. While reporting the arrival of the refugees, the media played a primary role in framing these events as “crises”. Such a perspective of the arrival of refugees being a ‘crisis’ contributed to negative and hostile attitudes and behaviors by the public towards the newcomers (Council of Europe, n.d.). Some media houses have portrayed the traumas of Rohingyas, however, The U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis claimed that the suffering of Myanmar’s Rohingya Muslims was worse than it has been portrayed by the media (Meixler, 2018).

Bangladesh has a vast media system with many publications and media houses but it has often been criticized over the quality of the journalism in the country with poor journalists’ ethical standards and many journalists being indulged in corrupt practices. The coverage of Rohingya refugees has been quite varied in Bangladeshi media; while some media houses support them others have depicted them as an economic burden and a threat to national security. The research has found that Rohingya refugees are considered a threat to public health and that they are spreading AIDS and other diseases. This narrative appears to have generated anti-Rohingya sentiment among the local people (Wadud, 2020). The media has also portrayed the Rohingya refugees population in a negative light for not using birth controls and populating their country.

India, the largest democracy in the world, has a long and distinguished tradition of investigative journalism in the public interest, even causing governments to fall (George & Verghese, 2003). Many news coverages represent Rohingya refugees as a threat to security, they focus on illegal crossing of nation-state's borders and refugee's links with extremist groups. For instance, a Hindustan Times report says that "The government has told the Supreme Court on Monday that many Rohingya refugees had links with global terror outfits and allowing them to stay in India would pose a security threat to the country" (Islam, 2017). The Times of India report says "A section of Rohingyas may have used Indian territory to try and enter Bangladesh before the alert along the international border" (Islam, 2017).

4.4 Influence of Politics and Leaders

Politics and political leaders also have a hand in creating a narrative on refugee groups whether it is positive or negative. Government policies and laws play a huge role in how the countrymen will perceive the arrival of the newcomers inside the national boundary. Government policy- economic policies, policies on immigration, policies on providing asylum, etc- directs the context in which public attitudes towards refugee populations are formed. The policies are set at the national level and also get influenced by international and regional agreements and conventions. Governments may adopt a restrictive approach to immigration in the belief that this will be popular among voters. However, setting unrealistic targets that cannot be met may increase public unease by cementing a belief that migration is 'out of control' (Dempster, & Hargrave, 2017). Many politicians do tend to link refugees with economic, security, and cultural issues to gain the support of native citizens. Political parties set propaganda against the refugee population to win voters. Political parties with extremist ideology disfavour refugees on grounds of their religious or ethnic identity.

The plight of the Rohingya started at home when the Myanmar military attacked them in which politics and political leaders were bearers or even promoters of hatred. State Chancellor Aung San Suu Kyi, who is a popular face worldwide and is the de facto leader of Myanmar, has avoided the discussion on the dilemma of Rohingyas. She and her government do not give recognition to Rohingya Muslims as an ethnic group of Myanmar and have blamed the eruption of violence in Rakhine on "terrorists".

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate does not have control over the military but has been criticized for her failure to condemn the indiscriminate use of force by troops, as well as to stand up for the rights of the over one million Rohingya in Myanmar (Al Jazeera, 2018).

There have been many other instances when political parties and leaders defamed Rohingyas to gain support. An independent candidate Kyaw Soe Htut used an anti-Rohingya slogan on his campaign posters. The posters had three Banyan leaves — a symbol used by Myanmar’s Buddhist majority — and the slogan “No Rohingya” (Kapoor, 2020).

Many political observers suggest that one reason the ruling party of Bangladesh gave asylum to Rohingya refugees was to gain support among Islamist voters and to avoid any political issues with pro-Islam groups. The ruling Awami League activists campaigned that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the “mother of humanity” for giving shelter to the Rohingyas using the refugee issue for political gains (Wadud, 2020). However, the Prime Minister's outlook on Rohingyas changed drastically over time when Bangladesh faced the refugee crisis at its peak, she called them a threat to Bangladesh's security.

India has always been welcoming to refugees but in the case of the Rohingyas, the government has been reluctant because of security concerns. The Bharatiya Janata Party in its 2014 election manifesto promised to “address the issue of infiltration and illegal immigrants in the Northeast region on a priority basis.” (BJP, 2014). There is a conception that the Rohingya approach might have been driven by a “trend” under the BJP-led government towards Muslims, citing the proposed 2016 Citizenship Amendment Bill that recognizes “non-Muslim refugees” in India as “citizens” of the country (Sahoo, 2017). Moreover, India’s Home Affairs Ministry has issued instructions to concerned states to identify illegal Rohingya and repatriate them to Myanmar (Sahoo, 2017).

Dr Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region and Minister of State for Prime Minister's Office 2021, expressed that the Central Government was “considering ways” to deport the Rohingya Muslims. He said that the CAA does not grant citizenship to Muslim asylum-seekers. As a result, the Rohingya Muslims can be deported back to Myanmar. He further stated that the CAA is also applicable in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir which holds a sizable Rohingya population (The London Story, n.d.).

4.5 Social Media

Today, almost everyone around the globe has access to the internet and people are using social media ever-increasingly to share their opinions with others. Social media has become a weapon to spread hate speech and false information. Posts on social media can spread to the masses in a very small amount of which accounts for mushrooming for misinformation.

A study by two Ph.D. students from Warwick University, the UK, who examined the use of social media in their native Germany between 2015 and 2017 reported that with the escalation of online anti-immigrant attitudes, the areas which had higher Facebook users saw up to 50 percent more anti-refugee incidents — majorly violent crimes like refugees homes being set on fire — as compared to the national average. They link this to the spread of hate posts. ‘Social media can push potential perpetrators over the line,’ says Mr. Schwarz. ‘Their opinions get more intensified [from reading hate posts] and, at some point, they might decide to assault someone’”(Jacobs, 2018).

Social media, especially Facebook have contributed to furthering the crimes against Rohingyas in Myanmar. It was extensively used by locals in Myanmar for sharing posts to defame Rohingyas by spreading hate speech. In March 2015, the chair of the UN’s Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, when investigating the episodes of the violence, said that social media had acted as a catalyst to the levels of acrimony among the wider public. A special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, added: “We know that the ultra-nationalist Buddhists have their own Facebook and are inciting a lot of violence and a lot of hatred at odds with the Rohingya refugees or other ethnic minorities. I’m afraid that Facebook has now turned into a beast, and not what it originally intended” (UNHCR, n.d.). United Nations investigators have faulted social media platform- Facebook- for playing a “determining role” in the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya in Myanmar.

In Bangladesh, online hate speech towards refugees increased since the Rohingya exodus in 2017. Anti-Rohingya inflammatory speech and false narratives have spread to India. In India, a Facebook post that falsely accused Rohingya Muslims of cannibalism went viral, along with posts that threatened to burn their homes if they did not leave India (Goel, & Rahman, 2019).

4.6 Economic Burden

One of the key drivers leading to a massive rise in the negative dispositions against the refugee groups is the economic burden. Host countries often perceive the refugee population as an extra economic liability on their scarce resources. Various studies from different regions across the globe exhibit concerns regarding the economic burden of aiding refugees. An International Organization for Migration (IOM) report presenting global Gallup data displays that people who rate their country’s economic situation as ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ are almost twice as likely to say that migration should decrease than those who rate it ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ (IOM, 2015).

The presence of large numbers of refugees can put a strain on the host country's place and an enormous strain on the country's economy. The direct and indirect costs of hosting the refugees, i.e., pressure on public goods and services, have far-reaching consequences for the country (Dzimhiri, 1993). For instance, in the case of Bangladesh, a country that has settled many Rohingya refugees for a long time became adverse towards them because of the undeniable economic strain on the developing country. Bangladesh struggles to provide basic needs to many of its local citizens themselves, an upsurge in refugees added to its burden.

5.0 Impacts of Negative Narrative on Stakeholders

Through the case study and examination of root sources of negative disposition on refugees, it has been established that the consequences can be far-reaching and deleterious not just for refugees but also for citizens from host countries. Repercussions of adverse narratives can be observed on fundraising and lobbying as well. In this paper, we try to explore the manifold impacts of false narratives on the stakeholders and scrutinize how it changes the dynamics between refugees and native populations.

5.1 Impacts on the Host Communities

The primary maleficiaries of false narratives are the native citizens of the host country because they get erroneously influenced by a false discourse on refugees advanced by media outlets, powerful public figures, etc. The natives, who have minimal to no personal interaction with refugees, falsely perceive them as a threat to the nation's security based on media portrayals and the voices of their leaders.

They hold grievances against these "outsiders" which further leads to a polarization among 'us' and 'them'. Within this narrative, refugees and asylum seekers are established as deviant or alien to the host society, disrupting its cultural identity, language, and authentic values (Gilbert 2013). Host countrymen see them as a liability to their nations and their limited resources. People tend to develop strong biased opinions against people who are different from them in terms of religion, race, caste, color, nationality, etc.

As natives believe or are made to believe, refugees are predators of their job opportunities and other public services meant for the citizens of the host nation. Right from the moment of arrival on the land, a refugee population may compete with locals for the limited resources such as water, food, housing, and medical services. Their presence inflates the demands for basic life necessities like education, health services, infrastructures such as water supply, sanitation, and transportation (Barman, 2020).

Just like a maze of leaky funnels, false narratives detract conversations on policies and funding away from protecting refugees and supporting their host communities (Uzelac, 2018). Owing to false dispositions on refugees, host citizens fail to empathize with them and displease the idea of them seeking refuge in their country. This results in inadequate fundraising for those in need.

5.2 Impact on Refugees

Refugees leave their home countries because of the fear of persecution, violation of human rights, and other factors endangering their lives in the home country, but the negative narratives and the false perceptions towards refugees adopted by other people affect them mentally and socially. They get allotted separate areas, separate education centres, and in some places aren't even allowed to seek jobs outside their allotted areas to earn a living for themselves. Because of the "outsider" conception, refugee children in educational institutions are being taught separately because of the negative narratives. This has led to refugee children being bullied by their peers.

The refugees usually reside in the refugee camps allotted to them by the government of the host countries. The living conditions in these camps are very hazardous. These refugee camps lack clean drinking water, adequate housing, sanitation, and other basic facilities. Apart from adverse living conditions, refugees are being denied basic education as well in comparison to the other citizens of the host countries. Being denied even basic education, refugees lack the opportunity to gain knowledge and hone skills to excel in economic spheres leading to deteriorating living conditions and lifestyle.

In Bangladesh, the refugee population resides in an extremely dense locality and distorted camps lacking basic sanitation. They find it difficult to fulfil even basic needs and depend on aid and funding. The unfavourable disposition held by Bangladeshis about them adds to their daily miseries as they face regular criticism and backlash. With the onset of COVID-19, the services inside the camps were reduced to the bare minimum.

In India, the enactment of the CAA has inculcated a sense of fear in the minds of Rohingya Muslims. In a report by the Anadolu Agency, Ali Johar, a youth Rohingya leader speaking of the CAA said that the CAA has instilled fears in the minds of the Rohingya Muslims and more than 3000 persons have left for Bangladesh to avoid the hateful vilification and deportation on account of being Muslims (The London Story, n.d.). There have also been instances of Rohingya Muslims converting their religion to avoid adversities.

6.0 The Way Forward

After a thorough analysis of the Rohingya refugee crisis and how negative narratives have been developed, it is clear that some steps need to be taken to combat the situation. Following are some ways to combat the false and adverse dispositions:

6.1 Increasing Interaction

A majority of bitterness is caused because of a lack of direct contact between refugees and host citizens. The only information that host citizens have about refugees are those which are narrated by political leaders, the press, or social media. The refugees' personal stories - problems they faced, how they have been oppressed, etc- should reach the masses. Negative dispositions can be combated through exposure to personal stories that portray experiences of the refugees from members of the refugee group themselves. There have been instances when natives displayed empathy for the oppressed refugees after being exposed to their personal stories, photos, videos, etc (Audette, Horowitz & Michelitch, 2020). conducted a study to see how personal narratives of community members can impact the public's attitude towards them. They investigated how personal narratives can reduce backlash toward immigrant outgroups by examining attitudes toward Somalis in Kenya. They found that personal narratives offer an effective strategy for attenuating both negative intergroup and policy attitudes that are typically considered resistant to change.

Documentaries of refugees' personal experiences are an effective tool to counter false news, extreme speech, and adverse disposition. Mass media, especially social media, can be an influential tool to reach the masses and bring refugee's stories and their voices upfront. They can turn out to be a medium to amplify the unheard voices of community members.

6.2 Eliminating hate speech

International law prohibits incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence (KAICIID Dialogue Centre, n.d.). Hate speech that does not cross the verge of persuasion to assault someone is not something that international law requires states to prohibit. However, majors should be taken to eliminate hate speech. In the case of Rohingyas, explicit and inciting speech by the majority group in Myanmar led to the eruption of physical violence which led people to leave the country and seek refuge somewhere else. Hate speech lies at the core of the Rohingya crisis which spread to asylum countries as well and influenced the attitude of the host country's citizens. Countering troublesome hate speech starts by realizing that while freedom of expression is a fundamental human right that should be protected at any cost, any speech which can harm a targeted community is the exploitation of that

freedom. Any inflammatory speech that aims at inflicting damage should be avoided and eliminated. Social media is a popular platform for the fabrication and dissemination of hate speech. Effective actions are required to supervise and control any form of explicit speech and expression on online platforms.

6.3 Scrutinization of False News

Many of the media houses, taking cognizance of the recent spurt in fake news, the sensationalization of news of "national interest", glorification of "patriotic" events, and demonization of "anti-national" activities and persons, need to be more vigilant and present unbiased reports to prevent the shifting of public narrative to the extreme of barbarism. Conflict sensitive reporting will help banish the outgroup fallacy and counter the 'us' against 'them' conception. Fake news or distorted information about the refugee population regularly appears on social media. Steps should be taken to examine the facts behind any viral news and false information must be taken down.

In 2019, the BBC and several tech firms, including Google, Twitter, and Facebook, announced that they would join forces to fight disinformation. The plan includes the development of an early-warning system for organizations to alert each other rapidly when they discover life-threatening disinformation, to undermine it before it can take hold. In 2019, Apple also launched a media literacy initiative to equip young people with critical-thinking skills to enable them to detect fake news (UNHCR, n.d.). Rather than spreading misinformation, social media has the potential to be utilized for the good. It can be used to engage people in refugee causes, collect donations for refugees and provide genuine information on the refugee population. Social media is widely used by many NGOs, activists, international organizations, etc.

6.4 Financial aid

As observed through the analysis of root sources behind negative discourse, the economic burden is among the key drivers that concern the host country and causes it to be reluctant to provide aid to "outsiders" when its citizens are struggling to make ends meet. This is what happened in Bangladesh, the country that was extremely willing to protect Rohingya refugees turned hostile towards them due to the accelerating economic burden. This calls for a pragmatic solution. A country must be funded and aided with adequate resources to settle the refugee population. Financial aid should be provided by international organizations to reduce the burden on host countries. Many non-profitable organizations provide funds to host countries to lighten the economic burden.

6.5 Employment policies

To enhance economic development and lessen the economic burden, the government can start employment plans for refugees aiming at sustainable development goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth). Providing work opportunities can help them reach their potential and they can turn out to be an asset for the nation rather than a liability. From a much wider and more longer-term perspective, someone's economic impact should be evaluated after providing them with the opportunities to overcome barriers. Popular debate, either from a humanitarian or nationalist perspective, presupposes that refugees impose a set of burdens on the asylum countries. But empirical evidence suggests that refugees contribute economically to their host countries, even if this takes some years to achieve (Parsons, 2016). There are palpable economic and social advantages to countries receiving migrants. And many of the European and other developed economies require immigration to meet their present and future workforce requirements (Møller, 2015).

7.0 Conclusion

The problem with the refugee crisis is that refugees are not seen through a humane eye; they are labelled as thieves of resources and harbingers of terror. Our current perspective towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants give us a reflection of an exclusionary set of policies that chisels out the human out of someone seeking sanctuary. There is a need to adopt a human-rights approach to address the issue of refugee status because no human being can ever be illegal and every human being has a right to be protected from undue persecution. The study has revealed that people who are the host citizens of the country where refugees travel in search of protection look at refugees as a threat to national peace, security and resources. The case study of Rohingya refugees brings to light a brutal reality and gives us a clear picture of how Rohingya refugees have been facing the brunt of inhuman treatment and communal subjugation. Through a thorough analysis of the root causes contributing to the negative narrative persisting around refugees, it has been discovered that there is a lot of confusion in the hearts of the people, which is only aggravated by the unhealthy and false representation of refugees through the media and press. In addition to that, the portrayal of refugees and asylum seekers as economic burdens has created a picture in the minds of the people that has contributed to hate speech and communal aggression towards them. The way forward must be a path of inclusion and understanding. Communication between parties and stakeholders is necessary to ensure the erasure of misconceptions and prejudices, that resultantly contributes to eliminating the hate speech and violence surrounding refugees. False media and information must be scrutinized so that biases, prejudices and contempt

towards refugees aren't propagated. Government authorities can play a vital role in keeping aside a budget for refugees to provide them financial aid and make systemic amendments to ensure employment and livelihood opportunities.

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