**Statelessness and National Security Dynamics: Case Study of the Rohingya Refugees in India**

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Abstract

Statelessness can be defined as that state of denial by virtue of which an individual or a group of individuals looses their identity as nationals in a particular country. According to the United Nation (UN) Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons adopted on 28 September 1954 and enforced on 6 June 1960, a ‘stateless person’ is someone ‘who is not considered as a national by any State under operation of its law’. Since everyone has the right to a nationality, lack of effective nationality or lack of formal recognition due to ‘statelessness’ practically leads to negation of the basic civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights of the people who are victims of this legal anomaly. Although the UN Convention entitles a stateless person several rights such as minimum standards of treatment, the same rights as citizens with respect to freedom of religion and education of their children, right to association, right to employment and housing among many others—the same are hardly realized in their true sense of term. Moreover, the intricacies of ‘statelessness’ runs deep. By its very nature, statelessness is not always well understood. As a result, in many countries the magnitude of this phenomenon is indefinable and scope is largely ignored. Nevertheless statelessness impacts the daily lives of over 12 million people all around the world. Stateless people are found in all regions of the world. Most often the stateless people lead ‘invisible lives’ on the margins of society. They frequently lack identity documentation and are often subject to discrimination that adds on to the plight of this vulnerable section of the population.

International migration and statelessness go hand in hand and is a global concern today with significant influence at both domestic and international level. At the domestic level it creates complications by adding dynamism to the demography through unwanted population influx; whereas at an international level it pose a threat to national sovereignty and thereby constrain inter-state relationship. South Asia is a region whose history, territory, identity, cultural vivacity and connections among states are *raison d être* of widespread international migration. This in turn renders ‘nation-states’ to appear more fluid, malleable and unpredictable than ever before, as a result of which new conceptions about ‘nations without states’ and ‘diasporic nations comprising of a host of new transnational communities’ comes into view before our eyes while older ones disintegrate. Therefore, the issue of ‘statelessness’ in South Asia, challenging the conceptual rubrics of the nation-state system, and having perceivable impact upon politics and international relations is a crucial matter to look at. Accordingly, the paper will attempt to delve into the issue of ‘statelessness’ by considering the particular case of the Rohingyas of Myanmar and their plight as stateless people consistently migrating to neighbouring countries in fear of persecution by the state. Their unfortunate fate in these neighbouring countries in turn pushes them to drift farther away to other neighbouring states and thereby multiplying their plights rather than reducing them. Although the drifting plights of the Rohingyas (the case in point here) seem to add on to the refugee discourse at large; it seldom comes out with a plausible solution to this problem of statelessness. It is perhaps in this context, one has to understand first, ‘why something is needed to be done?’ before envisioning ‘what needs to be done?’ If one critically asses the concept of ‘statelessness’ from a national security perspective a significant insight may be obtained. Therefore, linking the concept of statelessness with the security concerns of a polity, the paper will try to appraise whether international migration of the Rohingya refugees in India endangers national security and thereby makes it binding on her to formulate policies and undertake initiatives at an international level. It will be argued that the magnitude of national threat perception is one primary factor that influences the state’s action/inaction towards the issue of statelessness.