

Book Review

Saranarthir sange basabas: rohingya o sthanio bangalir pratyohik oviggota

(Living with the Refugees/Coexistence Amid Crisis: The Shared Lives of Rohingya Refugees and Local Bangladeshis)

Ranjan Saha Partha, Obaidullah Al Marjuk and Masahiko Togawa (2024) Rohingya Refugee and Host Community: Everyday Experiences, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Reviewed By Mahisun Binte Wahab Rashti¹

The influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh raises complex questions about the realities of relief and hardship. Has their migration truly eased the struggles faced by the Rohingya, or are they still encumbered by challenges in their new surroundings? For the host Bangladeshi communities, this movement has equally mixed impacts: does it foster stability and opportunity, or does it bring greater strain? These questions defy absolute answers. Each community is marked by diverse experiences, as individuals within both groups encounter the situation through different lenses, shaped by their unique identities and circumstances. For some Rohingyas, reaching Bangladesh brings a sense of relief; for others, however, future uncertainties and statelessness create a sense of unease. Some are satisfied with the international and domestic relief efforts, while others feel sorrow over their inability to return safely to their homeland. This range of responses is influenced by differences in class, gender identity, and social standing. A similar fluctuation between relief and distress is seen among local Bangladeshis as well. Some have gained employment opportunities and additional income sources from the Rohingya influx, while others have faced job losses, decreased earnings, forced career changes, rising costs of essential goods, and disruptions to their daily lives. The prolonged presence of the Rohingya has begun to stir a sense of resentment among many Bangladeshis. As the Rohingya stay continues, distrust and apprehension increasingly emerge between the two communities.

This volume is edited to reflect the varied daily experiences of refugees and their neighbouring Bangladeshi communities. Since the unprecedented influx of Rohingya refugees in 2017, countless

¹ Independent Researcher. Archaeology, Jahangirnagar University. Email: rashti.mahisun99@gmail.com

researchers have delved into Rohingya-centred studies, each bringing their own disciplinary lens—whether political, economic, historical, social, cultural, health, environmental, or developmental. For many PhD scholars and academics, these studies are not only pathways to academic achievement but also ways to deepen both personal and institutional understanding. Refugee studies, in its truest form, leaves no space for a singular perspective; it is, by nature, an interdisciplinary field.

This volume, meticulously curated by three dedicated researchers, embodies an interdisciplinary perspective on Rohingya studies. Contributions from around 17 scholars, both from Bangladesh and beyond, span across 11 chapters, each bringing a unique lens to this pressing subject. The introduction, authored by editor Ranjan Saha Partha, sets the groundwork for Rohingya refugee research in Bangladesh, situating it within a broader context. In the following chapter, sociologist Obaidullah Al Marjuk delves into the historical evolution of Rohingya identity, offering a nuanced look at its complexities. The analytical direction of the third chapter, contributed by Md. Masood Imran and Kaiser Ahmed take an intriguing turn as they traverse historical records, photography, poetry, and firsthand testimonies to construct a layered narrative of the Rohingya experience. They incorporate Mahmud Mamdani's (2020) theoretical insights on the colonial marginalisation of migrants, applying this framework to unravel the particular dimensions of Rohingya marginalisation. Through these varied scholarly perspectives, the volume emerges as a testament to the depth and breadth that interdisciplinary research brings to understanding the Rohingya crisis.

This volume brings together three chapters that delve into the intricate dynamics between refugees and the local Bangladeshi population, each offering unique insights into the interwoven realities of these communities. In their chapter, *"Refugee Crisis: An Anthropological Reading of the Daily Experiences and Adjustments of the Local Population,"* Md. Sajjadul Alam and Rasheda Akhter critically examine how the daily lives of local communities are reshaped by the presence of the Rohingya. Mohammad Masud Rana and Tania Nashin, through their chapter titled *"The Rohingya Influx: Oscillations of Comfort and Discomfort,"* offer a nuanced exploration of the complex and, at times, contradictory experiences of both Rohingya and locals, investigating how the Rohingya's arrival influences personal and communal lives. Ranjan Saha Partha and Imtiaz Hossain's chapter, *"The Rohingya Influx: The Multidimensional Experiences of the Local Population,"* extends this

analysis by moving beyond mere gains and losses, seeking to understand the evolving adjustments within local communities in response to the enduring presence of refugees. Collectively, these chapters provide a multi-layered understanding of adaptation, resilience, and the shared, though distinct, experiences of each group.

On the other hand, despite legal restrictions on Rohingyas' participation in economic activities, their presence in the local economy is apparent in various ways. Refugees often sell the aid and relief supplies provided by development organizations in the local market as an adaptation strategy, facing severe financial hardships. This form of adaptation is feasible only when refugees manage their livelihoods without defying the governance of the Bangladesh government and UNHCR's administration. However, as refugees are restricted in their movements, they venture beyond the camps in search of work, adapting their strategies to move from passive aid recipients toward integration into the broader governance structure. The participation of Rohingyas in the informal economy as a source of 'cheap labour' also impacts the local labour market. This topic is explored in two chapters of this volume, presenting research findings on these dynamics. In the chapter titled *"The Proliferation of Development Agencies in Rohingya Refugee Camps and Its Impact on Bangladesh's Mainstream Community,"* Nurul Huda Sakib and Faria Ahmed discuss the interactions between Rohingya refugees and development agencies, their engagement with the local population, and various aspects of institutional processes affecting the local economy. In another chapter, *"Crisis of Livelihood: Informal Economic Activities of Local Communities Near Rohingya Camps,"* Kazi Mahmudur Rahman examines how the presence of Rohingya refugees has influenced the informal economic activities of the host communities. This chapter is based on qualitative research conducted with the local communities adjacent to the Rohingya camps.

Since 2020, environmental concerns have moved from peripheral considerations to central elements of international and institutional frameworks alongside ongoing humanitarian relief efforts. The Rohingya refugees, frequently held accountable for environmental degradation in Bangladesh, face an uncertain future with limited prospects for repatriation. To ease the strain on Cox's Bazar, the relocation of refugees to Bhasan Char has begun, reflecting a broader strategy to manage environmental pressures. In his insightful chapter, *"Bangladesh, Refugee Influx, and Its Environmental Impact from One 'Matrix' to Another,"* Imtiaz Hussain examines the ecological

toll of hosting millions of refugees. Using robust statistical evidence, he captures the urgent environmental crisis provoked by this massive influx, particularly within the context of Cox's Bazar, where burgeoning tourism and rapid infrastructural growth only compound the degradation and narrow the scope of potential solutions. Hussain's discussion expands to consider the readiness and timing required to face nature's retribution, as triggered by such crises. In his concluding analysis, he explores a theoretical model of environmental degradation shaped by authoritarianism, presenting the Rohingya refugee experience and that of their host communities as part of a wider global narrative of ecological vulnerability under forced migration and restrictive governance.

Drawing from the research of Ibtisam Afrin, the chapter "*Anthropological Analysis of Resistance and Protest: Context of the Rohingya*" engages deeply with the complex, anthropological dimensions of resistance and protest among the Rohingya. This chapter foregrounds the diverse and often underexplored forms of resistance within Rohingya refugee camps—whether through sporadic escapes or organized protest rallies—revealing a unique layer of power dynamics at play in these events. A closing commentary by Manosh Chowdhury, titled "*Rohingya: Identity Politics, Brutality, and the Self-Other Paradigm*", adds a reflective depth to the volume. This volume stands out by bringing together both seasoned and emerging scholars to examine the Rohingya crisis through diverse academic lenses—a valuable contribution to Bengali scholarship, where such work is limited. Notably, it moves beyond viewing displaced people simply as "*marginalized*" or "*passive*" entities. Instead, it highlights the Rohingya's active agency, their motivations for action, their politics of resistance, and their adaptation strategies. This approach not only amplifies the voices of those displaced but also positions them within the broader, often overlooked narratives of resilience and agency.

The book weaves experiential insights with rigorous scientific inquiry, analyzing the Rohingya crisis within its historical framework and exploring its intersections with the environmental, social, and cultural fabric of the host community. I believe that this volume will become an essential reference for academic research, development initiatives, and further studies focused on the Rohingya issue.