

## AFGHAN REFUGEES LIVING IN INDIA

By Vasudha Arabandi

Afghanistan and India both have a rich interconnected history that can be first traced down to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, with the establishment of the Khalji Dynasty in Northern India. The two countries played the part of both, friends and foes in the past and continue to do so till date. Afghanistan in the past few decades has been ravaged by war and many other factions, be it local in the form of Taliban, or in the form of American troops that have made it extremely difficult for peace to be restored in the country. Due to the political, social and economic situation in Afghanistan, many have fled the country as refugees. India due to its close proximity, historical ties and relatively peaceful political environment has been a popular destination for many Afghans that have had to leave the country, beginning in 1979 with the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. Whilst India has neither signed 1951 convention on refugees nor the 1967 protocol it has generally accepted Afghan refugees without any major hassle, leading to a sizable population residing in India. According to the United Nations High Commission For Refugees (UNHCR), there are at least 11,000 Afghan Refugees living in India, mainly in New Delhi. Lajpat Nagar, which was a colony built for partition refugees from Pakistan acts as home for most of the refugees.

“The two countries played the part of both, friends and foes in the past and continue to do so till date. Afghanistan in the past few decades has been ravaged by war and many other factions, be it local in the form of Taliban, or in the form of American troops that have made it extremely difficult for peace to be restored in the country”

Afghan refugees living in this region have integrated into the fabric of the colony, simultaneously maintaining parts of their culture and heritage. There are many departmental stores in the area that, apart from the usual products, try and cater to the Afghan community by storing items like Khajoor (an Afghan dessert) and Chilgoza (a local pine nut found in Afghanistan). These bustling areas are witness to men in Pathani Salwar Kurtas and women in Abayas that have now integrated into the social fabric of the community, creating their own Afghanistan in a foreign land. The Afghan community that resides here is also an important economic part of these areas which can be inferred by just the sheer number of shops in that have signs in English and In Dari (the official language used in Afghanistan). These stores range from Money exchange shops, Chemists and even local Afghan Eating joints, that provide traditional Afghan food like Kabuli Pulao, Chapli Kebab, Ghosht Dopiaza and many other local delicacies.

“Afghan refugees living in this region have integrated into the fabric of the colony, simultaneously maintaining parts of their culture and heritage. There are many departmental stores in the area that, apart from the usual products, try and cater to the Afghan community by storing items like Khajoor (an Afghan dessert) and Chilgoza (a local pine nut found in Afghanistan).”



Street seller at 'Kabul Delhi' - Photographed by Kirti Narain for Homegrown Magazine

While Afghan Refugees have found safety and respite in the India, they still face a large number of issues. Most of these can be traced back to India not formally being a signing member of any refugee convention that makes the treatment of refugees extremely arbitrary and to the whims and fancies of the government; like the issue of “statelessness”, that many refugees are privy to. Despite living in India for many years like in the case of immigrants who have been living in India since the Soviet invasion back in 1979, they enjoy little to no rights due to their lack of identity as citizens and no proper procedure in place to tackle it. This statelessness makes it very difficult for Afghan refugees to witness any form of upward social mobility considering the limited options that they have without any sort of proper paper work, making entry into the formal sector extremely difficult and leaving only menial underpaying jobs for them

Despite the large number of hardships that the refugees from Afghanistan have had endure, they have found a new home in India, providing them with basic safety and a chance at a better tomorrow; irrespective of how their lives are affected by the lack of recognition. Some refugees are optimistic about returning to their homeland once again when peace returns to the country, while some plan to migrate to more developed countries with the help of organizations like the UNHCR. However, until then, India is home to these refugees and they play an important role in the communities they are part of.

“Despite the large number of hardships that the refugees from Afghanistan have had endure, they have found a new home in India, providing them with basic safety and a chance at a better tomorrow; irrespective of how their lives are affected by the lack of recognition.”



An Afghan Refugee eating at a local Afghan restaurant whilst sharing his experience with the UNHCR

## REFERENCES

BAHA, LAL. "AFGHAN REFUGEES: SOCIOECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS." *Islamic Studies* 25, no. 2 (1986): 161-79. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20839765>.

Bose, Ashish. "Afghan Refugees in India." *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 43 (2004): 4698-701. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4415703>.

Krishnan Suhasini , "A Guide to Delhi's 'Little Kabul built by Afghan Refugees with Love'", 26<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

<https://homegrown.co.in/article/802669/a-guide-to-delhi-s-little-kabul-built-by-afghan-refugees-with-love>

Report of Refugee Population in India , Human Rights Law network , November 2007  
[https://www.hrln.org/admin/issue/subpdf/Refugee\\_populations\\_in\\_India.pdf](https://www.hrln.org/admin/issue/subpdf/Refugee_populations_in_India.pdf)

Safri, Maliha. "The Transformation of the Afghan Refugee: 1979-2009." *Middle East Journal* 65, no. 4 (2011): 587-601. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41342742>.