

Forced to Flee: Voices of the Persecuted



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Maximum number of refugees that have come from Pakistan are from Dalit families

This law is to protect people who have been religiously persecuted in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. People should understand that the maximum number of refugees that have come from Pakistan are from Dalit families. Daughters are subject to atrocities there, they are forcefully wedded and then forcefully converted. Because they were exploited like this, they came to India and have been living amongst us for a long time in different parts of the country. I want to ask the people who claim to do politics for Dalits. Why were you quiet for so long? Why couldn't you see the difficulties of Dalits? Today if the Modi government is taking action to resolve the biggest problem in the lives of these Dalits, why are you getting anxious?

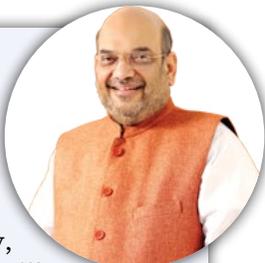
- PM Shri Narendra Modi at Ramlila Ground, New Delhi on 22nd December, 2019



Either they were killed or converted or they came to India as refugees to protect their dignity and religion

It was our imagination that the citizens who are minority here and who are minority in the neighbouring country, would live a life with dignity, would be able to follow their religion with dignity, will be able to protect their family with dignity. But when we look at them after decades, the bitter truth that comes out is that, the minorities in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh did not get a life with dignity. The minorities were persecuted there. Pakistan and East Pakistan (Bangladesh) of that time had around 20% population of minorities. After all where did those people go? Either they were killed or were converted or they came to India as refugees to protect their dignity and religion. Those people who are saying that we are indulging in vote bank politics, I would like to tell them that we had made this promise before the nation during the election, which was supported by the public of this nation.

- Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah on Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019 in Rajya Sabha on 11th December 2019



CAA- an opportunity to live a dignified life in India

This Amendment Act will provide minorities facing religious persecution (in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan) an opportunity to live a dignified life in India.

These minorities facing injustice from long time have received justice today through the efforts of Modi Government.



- Shri J.P. Nadda, *National President of Bharatiya Janata Party, 11 December, 2019 in Rajya Sabha*



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Some Thoughts...

The Nehru-Liaquat Pact of April 1950 failed to safeguard minorities in Pakistan and they continued to be forced to leave their home and hearth. Abandoning their precious pieces of land in which their ancestors had lived for generations and their familiar surroundings, they came away, de-rooted, bedraggled, completely denuded to India in order to survive with a modicum of dignity. While India carried out her obligation under the Agreement, Pakistan deliberately ignored its pledges under the treaty. The cycles of pogrom unleashed on the minorities in Pakistan, especially the Hindus saw a continuous exodus and a depletion of their numbers.

The fate of the Bengali Hindus who were present in large numbers in East Pakistan, was excruciating. They faced systematic persecution, boycott and discrimination in a land which belonged to them as much as to those who had demanded Pakistan. Jogendra Nath Mandal, the first Law Minister of Pakistan, leader of the Dalits who was forced to resign and leave, once he realised that Pakistan was no place for Hindus, gives a heart rending description of how Hindus were hounded out of Pakistan. Mandal's words need to be recalled primarily because, it describes the pattern of persecution that compelled the minorities to leave Pakistan, "Open threats are being issued to Hindus to marry their womenfolk to Muslims. Money is being extorted in the guise of giving protection to them from hooligans. If Hindus dare report to the authorities, punishment often descends upon them. Houses and crops are destroyed and women molested. Koranic prayers are to be said in every school and every Hindu is to attend standing... Hindu names of schools are being changed to Muslim names. Without contributing a pie to the funds of the schools, Muslims are being given 50 per cent or more representation in the administrative bodies. In district and union board elections under joint electorates, Hindus are being terrorised not to vote so as to get as many Muslims elected as possible..." This pattern of persecution continued without respite and got aggravated over the decades.

Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee's description of these people who

became refugees overnight, continues to be the most heart rending and distressing description of them made in the Indian Parliament, “I have seen all classes and conditions of people, men, women, and children, many of whom never knew what poverty and want were. But today they are homeless; they are hopeless. Their physical suffering was great. But what struck me as most ominous and most distressing was the moral torture through which millions of people have passed...”

The torture and discrimination of minorities in Pakistan continued and continues. The steady stream has now been reduced to a trickle but perhaps that is because the minority population in Pakistan, erstwhile East Pakistan and later in Bangladesh continued to deplete. These people who were uprooted over a period of about seven decades, were compelled to leave their homes and land of ancestors and to seek refuge in India and live an invisible life. The CAA has now made it possible for them regain certainty, stability, recognition and dignity. They call India their land, their motherland, they now heave a sigh of relief for they see for themselves finally the possibilities of an existence that is recognised and empowered.

Oral history and testimonies have a definitive place in the understanding, and dissemination of narratives. The plight of refugees who have fled Pakistan is a genre in itself. It pushes us out of our comfort zone, it exposes the many false narratives and it counters the deep rooted animosity that certain political and intellectual groups demonstrate against the granting of Indian citizenship to these hapless, people.

Those who oppose the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) are those who have not lived through the trauma of forced dislocation. Those who politicise it – like the Congress, Communist parties – are deliberately ignoring their past positions and promises. They are betraying their positions made in the past and are indulging in fear-mongering and peddling untruths. But these contrived attempts at disseminating falsehood are falling through. Parties like the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal are in effect insulting the struggle and memories of lakhs of Bengali Hindu refugees who were forced to take shelter in West Bengal because their lives and spaces in East Bengal had turned into living hell-holes. By passing a resolution against CAA in the West Bengal Assembly, the parties who have supported it – the Congress, Trinamool Congress and the Left parties led by CPIM, have betrayed

the refugees struggle for life and dignity.

The refugees tell their own tales, These tales and excruciating experience of having being evicted is best heard from them. The anguish of the Hindu refugees living at Majnuka Tila, and Adarsh Nagar, in Delhi can be heard and gauged from their own words. People living in these camps faced religious and social persecution in Pakistan. “It is better to commit suicide by throwing ourselves in front of a truck rather than live a life of persecution in Pakistan,” exclaimed Gopi who had migrated from near Karachi. The tales of Dilip Halder and Sukhchand Mondal, who were forced to flee East Pakistan, for instance, are stories that can never be forgotten. Their tales of being evicted, of being betrayed and of being forgotten, cuts through every sympathetic heart that hears them.

This booklet compiles a few stories of refugees who had migrated to India from the Sindh Province of Pakistan and from East Pakistan. Their psyches continue to be traumatised. These are stories that human rights activists, constitutional patriots, and foreign based academics will never tell you. In fact there has been a systematic attempt to suppress these in the name of preserving a false secularism.

However, the pall of gloom and uncertainty has begun receding, they believe that the enactment of the CAA has liberated them and handed them back their lost dignity and honour. They were euphoric and were seen celebrating, the day the CAA was passed by Parliament. They had passed the worst, a new beginning beckoned them. We need to hear these stories repeatedly so that the memory of our collective suffering, the narrative of how huge masses of people were turned into refugees overnight is never forgotten or allowed to recede.

I would like to thank Shri Adarsh Tiwari, Shri Abhay Chandel for putting the entire document together, Shri Deep Halder for stories of trauma and persecution of Bengali Hindus from East Pakistan, Ajit Kumar and others for making great efforts to document and record these suppressed experiences from the past.

- Dr. Anirban Ganguly

Director

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation

Voices of the Persecuted from East Bengal - East Pakistan

They must have thought I was dead

1. Safal Halder

Safal Halder stays in a one-storeyed house at Purbo Palli, Kalikapur in a forgotten corner of south Kolkata. The road outside leads to the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass that connects Ultadanga in the north to Kamalgazi, Rajpur and Sonarpur in the south, running a distance of 21 kilometres along the eastern rim of the city, along which high-rise buildings in glass and concrete have come up. In this lower-middle class locality is still trapped the memories of residents who made a new country home after an arbitrary line was drawn up to create East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Halder hailed from Lakhikhai village in Bangladesh's Khulna zilla. He grew up amidst growing tension between Hindus and Muslims. There was a riot in 1964. Hundreds were forced to leave from his village. "I must have been fifteen¹⁵ or sixteen¹⁶ at that time. We didn't have birth certificates those days. I had lost my parents early and was staying with ageing relatives. They told me to leave while I could and make life in new land. I was already married



and I feared for the safety of my new bride. There were headless bodies on the road and limbless men and women hiding their horror inside dark rooms. But my matriculation examination was due. I waited to clear it before I crossed over to India, as it would be easier to get a job." "I got these scars when my wife and I were crossing the border on foot. A group of Muslim men attacked us with axes. I asked my wife to run as I tried to hold them back. I was staring death in the face but I wanted her to be safe. Two sharp blows fell on my head. I lost consciousness and dropped to the ground. They must have thought I was dead because they did not hit me anymore. Later, the group

of men and women with whom we were travelling came back in search of me, found me still breathing and took me with them. My wife was in that group. I lost a lot of blood, but survived. “On this side of the border, near Kolkata, the golden words those days for people like us, homeless refugees from East Pakistan, were: Daak ashbe.

[call will come] This meant we would be transported from the transit camps, set up at various places in West Bengal, to the permanent Mana camp in Raipur, now in Chhattisgarh, then part of Madhya Pradesh. Years later, I could come back to Bengal and start life afresh. I cry for those left behind in Bangladesh!”

CPIM ordered the massacre of these refugees

2. Niranjan Halder

Niranjan Halder stays at Bose Pukur in Kolkata’s southern fringes. A veteran journalist, most of Haldar’s study material is critical of the Left Front rule in West Bengal and the way the Communists have betrayed the Hindu refugee. Refusing to remain shut on the Marichjhanpi massacre committed by Jyoti Basu’s government had stunted Haldar’s career. The veteran newsman is one of the most prolific writers on Marichjhanpi where thousands of Bengali Hindu refugees – mainly Dalits – were killed by Jyoti Basu’s police in 1979 just because they wanted to settle down

finally in West Bengal build up a life for themselves. They asked for no dole, no support, they simply demanded that they be allowed to live in West Bengal having been driven out of East Pakistan. When the communist parties were struggling to come to capture power in West Bengal, a number of their leaders had promised these refugees, then living in Madhya Pradesh, that they would be welcomed to West Bengal once a proletarian government was installed there. But that promise was forgotten the Left Front came to power. The proletarian government led by Jyoti Basu and his party the CPIM ordered

the massacre of these refugees so that they could be evicted. The communist government in West Bengal retaliated by arm-twisting the management of newspapers Niranjan Haldar worked with to put him on 'desk jobs'. The bylines dried up, but Haldar never stopped digging into the whys and hows of Marichjhanpi. Or examining the plight of Hindu refugees from Bangladesh. This 86-year-old is considered a living Wikipedia on Marichjhanpi in Kolkata's research circles. "I came to India in 1949 from East Pakistan. But here too the

political climate made it difficult for people like me to speak the truth. Communism landed you in all kinds of trouble. There was no one to speak up for Hindus like me," he says. Niranjan kept the embers of tales of the massacred of Marichjhanpi burning, in his own way he struggled to let the world know how the communists treated Bengali Hindu Dalit refugees who were forced to leave their home and hearth due to religious persecution and discrimination in East Pakistan.

Those who stayed back in East Pakistan faced humiliation...

3. Mana Goldar

Mana Goldar lives in Pather Sesh village in South 24 parganas. The village which has to be accessed through mud road stands literally at pather sesh – end of the road. Mana's home has baked mud on one side, tin on three sides and a whirring ceiling fan for summers. There's a large bed and a moda (cane stool). On one side is a dressing table where a small mirror with



pink plastic frame is supported by Dale Carnegie's translated essays; next to it, there's a puja stand with a framed Laxmi. Mana is a Namashudra refugee from what was once East Bengal. 'My father named me after the Mana camp in Raipur, in what is today Chhattisgarh. I was born there in 1965 and lived there for twelve years. The Mana camp had thousands of refugees who crossed over to India from East Pakistan. Those were days of extreme hardships. Those of us who stayed back in East Pakistan faced humiliation, rapes, maimings and killings. Wonder how that country is now.' Mana remembers life in refugee camps when Congress ruled the country. "It was so long

ago, but I remember that life. Widowed mothers and their kids were kept in a separate enclosure that had a barricade, so that they wouldn't face unwanted male attention. When the children grew up, they were given permanent settlements in places such as Malkangiri (Odisha) and Koraput (also in Odisha). But the lands were infertile and farming was the mainstay of us refugees from East Pakistan. Whatever cultivation took place was mostly done by the adivasis. There was nothing for us except odd jobs. In West Bengal, the CPM government had no love lost for us. We had to face hardships here too when we came to West Bengal, the government extended no help."

Communists betrayed refugees

4. Kalachand Das

Kalachand Das, a retired factory mechanic, has stayed in Mana Camp, Raipur. Mana Camp is now the name of an area just outside Raipur airport. It has proper houses now, unlike in the past where there were only temporary camps for refugees like Das. "Some Bengali Muslims from East Pakistan

had slipped into those camps, hiding their religious identities. We others got to know there would be major problems, considering what they did to us back in East Pakistan. So we threw them out." Das is a Bengali Hindu refugee from what is now Bangladesh. He hates the Communists for the way they had betrayed the

Hindu population that came in from East Pakistan, especially the Dalits. He says there has been no one till now to talk

about the Hindus left behind in Bangladesh. "They should be taken care of."

Congress-Left Front treated refugees shabbily

5. Teacher NC Mullick

NC Mullick had crossed over to India during the riots of 1970 in East Pakistan's (now Bangladesh) Faridpur district and was packed off to Mana camp. He remembers refugee leader Rangalal Goldar along with the other refugee leaders, Raiharan Barui and Satish Mondal. He remembers those difficult days in Mana camp, of living like pigs in a pen, standing in queue for

a whole night for one bucket of water. "The government had sanctioned ration for us, but the quantity could sustain nuclear families, not extended ones. And most of us had large families those days that had to survive on very little. The Congress government at the Centre treated Hindu Bengali refugees rather shabbily. The Left Front government in West Bengal was worse."

Became a single word: Refugees

6. Jyotirmoy Mondal

Jyotirmoy Mondal, a human rights activist, travels into the remote districts of West Bengal to help widows who are branded witches by families and neighbours with an eye on usurping their property. He doesn't help the widows because he wants to sit on a dais, nor for awards or to be on TV talk shows. He helps

them because there is no one else to speak up for them. Like there was no one to speak up for Hindus in East Pakistan when riots broke out. "It was 1956-57 and hundreds of thousands of masons and farmers, fisherfolk and potters, land owners and landless, became a single word: refugees. The riots were a rumour at first. But when the

headmaster in my village school fell to a traitor's sword, hell broke loose. The headmaster had gone to stop a riot in the next village and tell the Hindus and Muslims, many of whom had been his students, not to kill each other for the sake of religion. The killings stopped but when the old man was on his way back, a Muslim man hacked him into two. As the headmaster and two of his young students fell, 'Allah ho Akbaar' cries filled the night



sky like venom spreading into arteries." Mondal doesn't want those days back gain. Or hear those cries.

Could not save many Hindu Refugees

7. Santosh Sarkar

Santosh Sarkar spent his adult life in a tiny village called Pather Sesh setting up Pather Sesh Sobuj Prithibi Unnayan Samiti (Pather Sesh Green Earth Development Society), an NGO to promote refugee children's education, deliver better health services to rural women and better living conditions not just in Pather Sesh but neighbouring villages like Gourdaho and Lakhinarayanpur. It has been a fulfilling life, with awards from the state and recognition



amongst the people. But Sarkar has a lifelong regret: "We could not save so many Hindu refugees from East Pakistan who had come to West Bengal looking for a new life." Sarkar is a refugee himself. And is a witness to the hypocrisy of the CPM government in West Bengal towards Hindu refugees. He has waited a lifetime to see the political climate change: For a government to speak up for Hindu refugees from East Pakistan/Bangladesh. He wishes his dream will come true soon.

Lost Marble House

8. Sankari Halder

Sankari Halder retired as Deputy Chief Manager from United Commercial Bank after 30 years in service. She is 73, but remembers Partition too well. "Partition is a niggling pain, a scar refuses to heal. Even so many years later when my memory fails me, it's a tough ask to go back to my girlhood days in Bangladesh, walk back to my first home in Khanjanpur village of Bogra district. It's been a long time and the memories are anything but pleasant. I didn't know what Partition meant. I was an infant when it happened. But I knew it meant losing home. And family. While most of the family had crossed over to Hindu-majority India (my elder brother and sister were completing their higher studies here), my father refused to leave. I was in Class IV at an American missionary school, when my life took a big turn. Though as a child I was spared the details of the horrors inflicted on Hindus who stayed behind, I do recollect sensing a feeling of discomfort, of fear and horror. We belonged to the land-owning class; we had a big house, a palatial one with white

marble, balustrades, ponds and a garden that didn't seem to end. And courtiers. Earlier, they would sit in our courtyard for Baba to hear them out, solve their daily problems. Later, I remember them, those same people (mainly Muslims who would till our land) who would directly walk upstairs, to our drawing room, and talk to my father rather insolently. For the safety of our family, Baba decided to leave behind his beloved land and everything he owned. We (Baba, Maa, me and my younger sister who was born just after the Partition) set forth on a journey to an unknown land and an unknown destiny. We were accompanied by some of our Hindu courtiers. I remember my mother hiding all the gold she had inside her saree. She looked as if she was pregnant. We came to Siliguri in North Bengal, and then moved to the place which would be our next home (if you could call it that). It was in a remote corner of Siliguri, with no transport to take us there or bring us back to mainland. It was a forest with a patch cleared to build huts. We walked long stretches.

Sometimes truck drivers took pity on us and give us a ride.

Why did we go there? Well, we couldn't afford anything else. And even for buying that plot of land in the wilderness, Baba had to sell off all of Maa's jewellery. From a marble house with chandeliers we shifted to a mud house with thatched roof. The nearest school was two-and-a-half kilometres away. With my books held close to my chest, I would walk that distance every day. On some days, some kind public bus conductor would give me a lift without ticket. To make ends meet, I started giving tuitions when I was got to Class VII. For teaching three small boys in the neighbourhood, I would earn Rs 30 (which was a decent amount then). My elder sister, after completing her higher studies, took up a teaching job in Siliguri and took me with her to live in the school's staff quarters. The teachers were kind and gave me books as my parents had no money to buy them. In college, I used to help others with their PhD research, jotting down

pages after pages of research material. There was no Xerox then. In return, they would buy me books that I couldn't buy. I never bought one book in my entire academic life. I got a gold medal in Economics and a hefty scholarship as I completed my M.A. I gave the money to Baba. I had no personal luxuries, no desire ever to buy anything for myself. My teachers wanted me to pursue a PhD in Economics and stay in academics, but fate had something else in store. I had taken an examination for a bank probationary officer's job and got through. I joined as a probationary officer in the United Commercial Bank. Indira Gandhi had just nationalized banks and it was considered a good profession to be in. It was a cushy job that would bring much-needed financial stability to my family. We could finally look beyond the uncertainty of the past. Since then I have moved cities, left Siliguri to settle in Kolkata and bought apartments. But home is still that lost land. That marble house with the never-ending garden of wonders."

Let them live here in peace

9. Sukhchand Mondal

Retired school teacher Sukhchand Mondal still remembers Kadambari village in Faridpur zilla, in East Pakistan, that he once left behind. Even at 80, he gets these flashbacks: On the riverbank, on a relatively dry patch of land, there is the local market. Large round tin pots, round, with river fishes wriggling inside, the fresh catch of the day, are found here, sometimes the famed Hilsa of the Padma river. And sugarcanes, jackfruits, mangoes, tortoises, all put out for sale. A bustling bazaar. It is

in this bazaar that he had once cried for the ripe green guavas that his father had refused him, saying something about the monsoons and stomach problems. He remembers when blood of Hindus were split in the streets and his family had decided to leave for India, the villagers had come to see them off. The two sisters-in-law had waved goodbye to each other, eyes crimson with crying. Kadambari fades into a blur, as Sukhchand says let those people come home. Let them live here, in peace.

No one could escape those Policemen

10. Dilip Halder

Dilip Halder, 80, remembers the day he left East Pakistan. He still tears up remembering the severance of his umbilical chord with his land of birth. His family and he walked a long distance to reach the Khulna jetty. He remembers it like it was yesterday. "Khulna jetty was a busy thoroughfare. Men from makeshift hotels came looking for customers. Sellers sold knick- knacks. It was a long

journey from here to hope. Under the glare of a merciless sun, we walked to the Khulna station. On the way, I saw a city for the first time. Paved roads, cars moving fast, a huge mass of humanity on streets. Barishal Express was transporting Hilsa, hope, men and memories to stations unknown. The Madhumati Hilsa was a big hit on the other side. Pakistani policemen in uniform filled the Benapole [in East

Pakistan/Bangladesh] station in droves, checking migration papers and, keeping an eye on who is taking away more than he has declared. Many were without papers, praying they won't be found out. But no one could escape those policemen. Men were forced out of compartments. Some were allowed to remain inside after paying bribe, but

they were pushed around, their belongings rummaged, their gold and silver taken away, and their women eyed with greedy eyes." When the train finally left Benapole, Halder had sighed a big sigh of relief. "I want the government to give people left behind some hope. So that they too can find a new life here. Live with dignity as a Hindu"



Voices of the Persecuted from Sindh, Pakistan

They never see us as one of their own

1. Radhe

Dignity is as vital to life as water, food, and oxygen. And it is in the search of this basic respect as a human being that Radhe left his home and hearth in Sindh, Pakistan and moved to India. He has been living in a refugee camp in north Delhi for the last seven years but the scars of his life in Pakistan are still fresh in his mind. “Hindus in Pakistan are treated like slaves, we are seen as second-class citizens. They never see us as one of their own. Even the judicial system turns a blind eye to the many injustices suffered by Hindus and other religious minorities.”

Radhe shudders as he talks of his horrific experiences in Pakistan, where forced conversions to Islam, harassment of Hindu women on their way to temples are the norm. Minorities in the country don't even have the bare minimum opportunities for good education, or employment or better life.

He might live in a refugee camp now, but he lives a life



of dignity in India. Talking about his move from Pakistan to India, Radhe's face lights up, he wipes his tears and says with a smile, “No one can ever separate a person from his/her country and soil; that bond is unbreakable. Though I used to live in Pakistan, a Hindu naturally belongs in India. I will tell you why—because it's here that I will finally live a life of dignity, be given the respect every human being deserves.”

Radhe owns a small shop in the refugee camp, selling cellphone covers and other accessories. Reaping the benefits of technologies such as PhonePe and PayTM—just a few

of the boons of Digital India—he believes that life in India is thousand times better than the life of indignity in Pakistan.

With a confident smile about his future in this country, he

expresses his gratitude to Prime Minister Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for CAA, “I can finally rest here without worrying about what’s going to happen the next minute. Our future is now going to be safe.”

Kafirs, no place in Pakistan

2. Sitaram and Gomti

Imagine living in a country but never being treated as one of its own. Imagine being always seen as the outsider. Imagine being hated, despised and disrespected every moment. Imagine fearing for the life and well-being of yourself, your loved ones, your children. That’s the horror which was the everyday life of Sitaram and Gomti in Pakistan, who migrated to India in 2013 with their family of eight.

“We may have lived in Pakistan, but we were never considered Pakistanis, not for a day were we seen as citizens of Pakistan—with the rights that belong to Muslims of that country. Not just that, we weren’t left alone in peace, we were insulted day-in-day-out for being Hindus, people used to call us agents of India, fifth columnists working there



against the country,” says Sitaram, his facial muscles tightening as he recalls the horror.

Their Hindu identity earned them a lifetime of hatred in Pakistan, where they faced religious persecution and were repeatedly reminded that they were ‘kafirs’, who had “no place in Pakistani society.” Their children weren’t spared either, as they were discriminated against in schools for being Hindus.

We pray to God for protection, but what do you do when the very Gods themselves, their abodes, fall prey to people blinded by religious hatred and intolerance? “They didn’t stop with us, they also went for our Gods, our temples. Hindu places of worship were regularly vandalized, broken down, insults hurled at Hindu way of life and worship.” Joining his palms together, Sitaram says, “India’s Prime Minister has saved us, he has given us Hindus from Pakistan protection from persecution and salvaged our dharma.”

As a mother, Gomti can never forget how her children were not allowed to study or even apply for jobs. Referring to life in Pakistan as a ‘living hell’, Gomti says “it was a never-ending nightmare. Our cows were slaughtered before

our eyes. We simply couldn’t bear the pain, the fear and the oppression that were our constant companions; and we decided to find refuge in Bharat—our real motherland. And like a mother, she welcomed us with open arms, applying a soothing balm to our many wounds.”

Even life in a refugee camp seems preferable to the atrocities they suffered in Pakistan. Poverty is better than dishonour, the constant fear of being dishonoured. When asked about the hue and cry by those opposing the CAA, Gomti’s response is simple, “We have experienced great pain and suffering in Pakistan and have come with great hope to our motherland. At last, we are living a life of dignity. Do not kill our dreams again by opposing the CAA.”

Path to freedom wasn’t smooth

3. Prem

One doesn’t need eyes to feel the threat of violence, to feel the hatred of others scorching their skin. And that’s why Prem, a blind man originally from Sukkur in Sindh Pakistan, finally couldn’t tolerate the fear, the hate and

the violence that Hindus faced in his ‘homeland’ and fled to India. He landed up in the Majnu Ka Tila refugee camp along with a dozen of his family members, and it’s here in India, that he can finally breathe freely, not cower in terror, as

he did back home in Pakistan.

When told about the CAA and that the Modi government has granted citizenship rights to Hindu refugees fleeing from religious persecution, a warm smile lit up his face. “We Hindus are treated as untouchables in Pakistan. Even if we try to play with Muslim children, people hurl abuses at us. Can you imagine that? That’s not all. Hindu women, our daughter, our daughters-in-law are constantly abducted, even kids get death threats every day.”

There was no other option than flee to India to escape from this life of terror, abuse and uncertainty. But the path to freedom wasn’t smooth. “I had to lie to government authorities and their overlords, had to tell them we were going on a pilgrimage to India. Had they known we were leaving Pakistan for good, they would



have forced us to stay and convert us to Islam.”

Doesn’t he think of his home anymore, don’t memories of home haunt him? Tears well up in Prem’s blind eyes and he says, “At the end of the day even birds return to their nests but we will never go back home. It was the most difficult decision of our lives but there was no other option. Today, we can call ourselves Indians with pride. We will never forget Narendra Modi ji’s favour to people like us.”

Let us live like you do

4. Gyandas

The story of Gyandas and his family is now well-known across India. On the very day the historic Citizenship

Amendment Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha, Gyandas was blessed with a daughter. The little one was aptly named

‘Nagrikta’ (citizenship), as her birth brought her family the respect they had so long yearned for, to belong to a country, to live a life of dignity, to not be tagged as ‘homeless refugees.’

Gyandas will at long last become a citizen of India. His earlier life was all about uncertainty and now thanks to PM Narendra Modi’s vision, he is able to dream of a better life. “Our children will now be able to go to schools, we will have access to healthcare, we will have the same employment opportunities as other citizens of India. We will finally lead stable lives and have a future to look forward to.”

After years of indignity and suffering, Gyandas is now looking to a life of opportunities,



of hope. And he has a message for those opposing the CAA, people he calls his ‘brothers and sisters’. “What will you gain by protesting against this? If people like us, who have lost everything, are finally getting some basic rights from the government, rights you keep taking for granted, why are you opposing it? Please open your eyes, see us and our lot in life. We also are Indians. Let us live like you do, with dignity and as citizens of the world’s biggest democracy.”

Even the dead weren’t spared

5. Sukhnand

The Majnu Ka Tila refugee camp in central Delhi is now home to hundreds of homeless, the very air there carrying many tales of torture, hopelessness, discrimination and oppression that these people had to face in Pakistan. Labelled as ‘refugees’, having fled a life of utter ignominy and

fear, not all of them are ready to speak up about their lives in Pakistan. Some of them move away, not wanting to be heard, while some others silently beseech us to move on, not open up raw wounds with questions about their past.

After walking through many

hutments, coming across many walls of silence that refuse to be broken, we finally meet Sukhnand, the head of the refugee camp in the area. He has been given the huge responsibility of being the voice of his homeless brothers and sisters, of the 135 families living in the camp. After years of religious persecution, torture and discrimination, Sukhnand and his family, along with a group of 483 Hindus, finally decided to free themselves from the cage and fled to India from Sindh, Pakistan.

However, Sukhnand and his lot aren't the only ones who had to make this difficult choice to leave home behind in search of safety. He recalls how in 2011, around 150 Hindus were forced to leave Pakistan. "There has been a constant movement of persecuted Hindus from Pakistan to India. There can't be many Hindus left there now," Sukhnand laments.

The people differ, but their stories remain the same. They all have been witness to the nightmare of forced conversion, threat to the lives of their near and dear ones, and the sheer helplessness of not being able to protect their daughters,



wives, mothers and sisters—the most vulnerable lot falling prey to the majoritarian Muslims of Pakistan. Even the dead weren't spared as Muslims there created many obstacles for Hindus performing the last rites for the departed.

"We were constantly asked to leave Pakistan but if we tried doing so, they would catch us and forcefully convert us to Islam. We were told, "Pakistan is not for you...go away, you are spies, you are traitors, you are on the payroll of India, we will crush you, we will convert you'," Sukhnand shudders, as if he can still hear the echo of those threatening cries.

Hindu children and girls are the easiest to prey upon in Pakistan, Sukhnand tells us. "Hindu kids are forcefully made to recite the Kalma, our girls are always at the risk of being kidnapped and

converted. 14-15-year-old girls are abducted, converted and married off to Muslims. And we cannot turn to any authority in Pakistan to hear our pleas, they simply aren't interested. Even the courts and panchayats there turn a deaf ear to our plight. The Hindu minorities have no one to speak for them in Pakistan, no leader, no saviour."

December 11, the day the Citizenship Amendment Act was passed by the Indian Parliament, was an occasion more colourful than Holi, more joyful than Diwali, for Sukhnand and his tribe of homeless brothers. They can now look to a future filled with hope, leave behind the past filled with terror. "Our children will go to schools here, get education, they too will become doctors, engineers, join the police and army to serve the nation. We don't have to live in fear every day anymore."

Sukhnand, the leader of the camp, also wanted us to hear the story of Lakshmi who came away to India from Sindh, Pakistan in 2011. Lakshmi can't stop crying as she narrates the many horrors Hindu women face in Pakistan, the oppressive feeling of constant insecurity,

the fear of abduction, forced conversion, harassment and worse, molestation. "They treated us worse than animals. I want to put all that, the horrific past behind me. I want to make a fresh start and the nagrikta kanoon (citizenship law) gives us the chance to do so at last."

Sukhnand doesn't have any ill-feeling towards those protesting against the CAA. All he has is a plea for them to understand the fate of persecuted Hindus in Muslim-dominated nations such as Pakistan. "Muslims have 52 nations where Islam is the state religion. For Hindus, Hindustan is our sole safe harbour. None of us wants Muslims living here to be uprooted from their homes. We know the pain of losing one's all and we don't want that for anyone."

Holding up his hands to those opposing the CAA, Sukhnand says, "All we need, all we are asking for, is for you to not oppose something that's giving our oppressed lot a ray of hope. We have been persecuted. Don't hate us, welcome us with open hearts. We are hungry, not for food, but for some love and respect."

Can they go and live our lives in Pakistan

6. Mohan & Mangal

Mohan's fate isn't much different from his cohabitants in the refugee camp—forced conversions, daily discrimination and lack of opportunities for minority Hindus was also part and parcel of his life in Pakistan. He, too, has left behind a traumatic past in the search for security. Fearing for their lives, Mohan and his family left Sindh, Pakistan. He refuses to name the district, the fear of being hounded still fresh in his mind. CAA has given Mohan the peace he has always wanted in life, but never found. With a heart filled with hope, he looks forward to a life of dignity, refusing to even entertain the possibility of ever returning to Pakistan. That nightmare is finally over.

His kids were forced to read the Quran, those little impressionable minds were drilled with the tenets of holy jihad—life had become almost unbearable for Mangal, who escaped from Sindh with his family of ten. “We were



landless peasants; after a day's of backbreaking work, we weren't even paid our hard-earned wages. And when we were, that was snatched away by Muslim goons. The police wasn't interested in helping us. We were constantly advised to convert in order to lead a better life, our women and girls were stalked, harassed. How long can one live this way?”

To those clamouring against the CAA, Mangal has only one question, “Sahib, can they go and live our lives in Pakistan...?”

Life of never ending miseries

7. Sacha Prahlad

We made our way through the camp, our hearts heavy hearing such tales of injustice and inhumanity. Some of the inhabitants, people labelled as ‘refugees’, who have lost homes, land, and their collective past, spoke to us only on the condition of anonymity, many others were too scared to speak, or be clicked—they were worried about their kith and kin left behind in Pakistan. Those unfortunate ones would be persecuted and forcefully converted to Islam, they feared.

Later in the day, we came across Sacha Prahlad, another person who fled from Sindh to India in the search of a better

life. Sacha finds it difficult to control his emotions while talking about the CAA. “We had to take a decision, no matter how difficult it was. We could either stay there with problems that would never end, the miseries that would only multiply, or come away to India.”

Sacha can’t thank Narendra Modi ji enough for bringing a ray of hope to their lives in the form of the CAA. “The Modi Sarkar has finally ended our terrible tryst with destiny, for the first time our hearts are filled with happiness. We can look forward to a life of respect, a place where we can breathe freely. We will now become proud citizens of India.”

We refugees have roots in India

8. Ravi Master

A teacher does not need a classroom to teach, the whole world is his classroom. Ravi, aka Ravi master, who speaks English fluently, may have left behind his classroom in Sindh,

Pakistan, but has found new students at the Majnu Ki Tila refugee camp. CAA has brought back hope into the life of this teacher, who wishes that Hindu refugees get their citizenship certificate soon. He hopes his

children get educated and are able to do what he couldn't – change their lot in life.

Back in Pakistan, Ravi had translated The Bhagavad Gita and many other scriptures into Urdu, though it was anything but easy to do so. Right now, he hopes to set up a small business, thanks to the citizenship bestowed upon them by the Modi government.

The teacher that he is, Ravi master also has a few words of wisdom for those opposing the CAA. “These people should



remember that we refugees have our roots in India, just like them. If we are finally getting a chance at happiness after the misery of so many years, why are you denying us that opportunity?”

In Pakistan, can't afford justice

9. Ramchandra

Ramchandra has left behind his home in TandoAllahyar district in Sindh, Pakistan and is now staying at the Adarsh Nagar refugee camp with his five children. His wife, however, is still in Pakistan. Why? Because he didn't have enough money to bring her to safety, to India.

Ramchandra can't stop worrying about his wife, who is still leading a life of uncertainty in Pakistan, where minority women are the most vulnerable.



“In Pakistan, our girls and women are regularly abducted from our Hindu colonies. The police and courts turn a deaf ear to us. We have neither the money, nor the connections to get ourselves justice.”

Where did the rest go?

Did the earth swallow them?

10. Nehrulal

Nehru Lal, head of Adarsh Nagar camp, escaped to India in 2013 with around 400 others, who ran away from Pakistan, from a life filled with injustice, indignity and insecurity. He had to leave behind two brothers and two daughters in Pakistan and getting them to safety to India is his topmost priority.

Why would a man leave everything, his home, his family, even his children and flee to another country? Nehru Lal gives out statistics, hard facts, which forced him and many like him to make this desperate move. “At the time of Partition, the number of Hindu minorities in Pakistan stood at 23 per cent, which has now been drastically reduced to 3 per cent. Where did the rest go? Did they die? Were they killed? Did the earth swallow them up whole?”

Hindu minorities are treated as untouchables in Pakistan. They aren't even served tea in



hotels and restaurants. “The owners tell us to wash the used cups ourselves, only then is tea served to us. Not just this, if we go out to eat, we have to wash the utensils once the meal is over. In India, you cannot imagine the pathetic life we Hindus live in Pakistan.”

Nehru Lal can never forget a horrendous incident where three Hindu girls were abducted in Karachi, and could never come back to their families. “We organised mass protests, but nothing happened. Eventually, those three girls were brought to court in burqas, so that we couldn't recognise them and were forcefully converted to

Islam.”

Does he have any message for those opposing the CAA in India, demanding that Muslims of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan also be given citizenship? Nehru Lal answers without batting an eyelid, “Let them (Muslim refugees) come here and within 10 years, India will become another Pakistan.” He may be far away from politics, but Nehru Lal believes that some politicians are opposing the CAA simply to appease voters of a particular community.

Now that citizenship of India is no longer a dream, but reality,

what does he hope for? “Unlike Pakistan, where there was only darkness and uncertainty, the possibilities are infinite here in India. Our children can now study here and get good jobs. Now there is hope, whereas in Pakistan there was only despair. Pakistan is a hopeless country.”

Nehru Lal dreams of giving back to India, the country which has welcomed hundreds like him with open arms. “We will work hard and carve out a new life in India. She is our motherland. Modi Sarkar has given us so much, we will ensure we empower this great nation further.”

A half-baked bread tastes better in India

11. Meera Devi

Meera Devi doesn't even need to be asked about her ordeals in Pakistan, no prodding whatsoever. She bid goodbye to Pakistan and its many horrors with nine of her family members in 2014. Even after five years, the memories of the brutalities on Hindus by Sindhi Muslims are fresh in her mind.

“Muslim zamindars there

don't pay us wages after making us do all the hard work in their farms. For a job worth Rs 100, we were paid a measly Rs 20.” Her husband now works as a carpenter here and earns Rs 300-400 a day.

It's not just the money though, it's the life of oppression she lived in Pakistan that haunts her to this day. “We were never allowed to celebrate

Holi or Diwali. On days of Hindu festivals, streets were deliberately kept dull and dark. Everything bore a deserted, desolate look.”

Hindu kids feared being beaten and bullied in school. “Parents never knew whether their children would even return home from school or not. Pakistani Muslims abducted my cousin sister and till date, we have no idea where she is, whether she is even alive or

not.”

Wiping away tears, she says incidents such as these made life in Pakistan unbearable, and they came away to India. “A half-baked bread tastes better in India than a fully-baked one in Pakistan, because here we can eat, breathe and live in peace, comfort, security. Modiji is like God to us. He heard our cries. We thank him from the bottom of our hearts.”

We have returned to our Mother

12. Kanji Thakur

Kanji Thakur lives in a house that has a mud path leading up to it. Greeting us first is the tulsi plant growing in the middle of the house, a symbol of security.

After due introductions, Kanji starts to tell us his story. He was forced to come to India with a group of 28 others. “A Muslim landlord had taken away my land, my means of livelihood. That and many other reasons forced me to leave Pakistan, but one particular incident proved to be the proverbial last straw.”



After his land was snatched away, he pooled in all his savings and brought a Maruti Omni, Kanji tells us. He used to drive it as a taxi to earn a living. But this did not go well with Muslim landlords who felt they hadn't been able to crush him fully. And

hence they went after him with all their might to strike their deadliest blow.

Kanji finds it difficult to narrate the events of that day. “I was returning home after dropping off my last passenger for the day. Suddenly some armed masked men blocked my way and threatened me. I knew they were after my car. But I was desperate—after my land, I couldn’t let go of the car too. I didn’t stop the car and fled fast. That’s when I decided to leave Pakistan for good.”

Kanji shows us a photograph of his beloved car, telling us that he was eventually forced to sell it off. “Now that we have come to Bharat, this is our motherland. We have returned home to our mother and I don’t wish to go anywhere else.”

The stories we hear from Kanji are similar to the countless others we heard in the refugee camps, stories no human-

rights activists will tell you—of kidnapping, forcible marriages of Hindu girls, their conversion, heckling of Hindus during Hindu festivals—tales of daily abuse and public humiliation.

But Kanji wants to leave it all behind like a dark dream and he has hope in his heart, especially because of the CAA. “We have finally got our long-sought freedom thanks to Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. We are indebted to them not only in this life, but the other seven lifetimes as well.”

As we get ready to wind up our conversation, Kanji’s grandson saunters in with some of his drawings in hand. “Look at this toddler’s sketches,” the proud grandfather says, “now in India, each one of us will have the opportunity to discover our talent, nourish it, excel in it. We, our future generations, will not be suppressed anymore. Decades after Independence, we are finally free, in India.”

Victims of a Forgotten Genocide

Bengali Hindu Refugees



A Bengali Hindu refugee woman cooking food for her family



A family of Bengali hindu refugees fleeing to India with a handful of their belongings



A Bengali Hindu refugee woman taking shelter under an umbrella with all her belongings



Bengali Hindu refugee infant suffering from malnutrition



Bengali Hindu refugees walking towards India to seek save themselves from being persecuted in Bangladesh



Bengali Hindu refugees being vaccinated in the refugee camps



Bengali Hindus being driven out of their homes



Bengali Hindu refugees fleeing from East Pakistan on Bullock Carts



Bengali Hindu refugees camped alongside Howrah's train station in Calcutta



Bengali Hindu refugees fleeing from Bangladesh to India with their belongings



Bengali Hindu refugees toward India from Bangladesh to escape by Pakistan army's genocide



Bengali Hindu refugees relieving themselves during Monsoon rains in Haringata Refugee Camp



Bengali Hindu refugees sheltered in India in 1971, having fled from East Pakistan to escape Persecution



Bengali Hindus fleeing East Pakistan for India's refugee camps (1971)



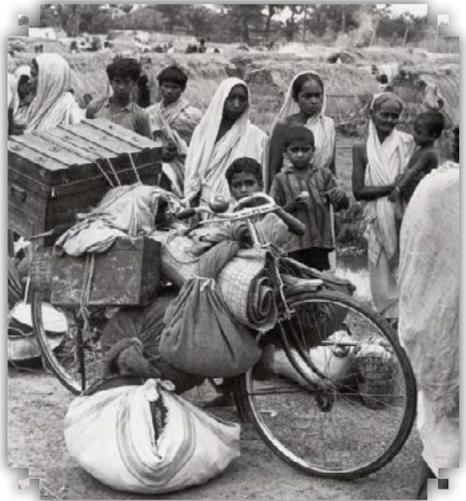
Haringata Refugee Camp, 1971



Milk distribution to the refugees of East Pakistan in 1971



Overloaded buses of Bengali Hindu Refugees



Refugees from in East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) in India, 1971

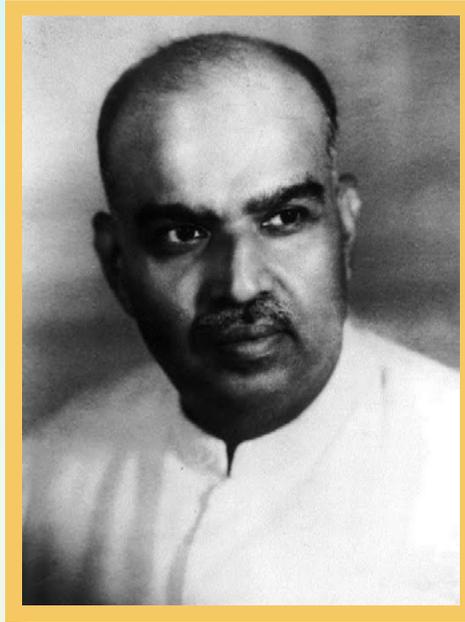
Bengali Hindu Refugee Photos Credit: Flickr.com

Hindu Refugee Camp in Adarsh Nagar, New Delhi



Hindu Refugee Camp in Majnu ka Tila, New Delhi





Islamic State is Pakistan's creed and a planned extermination of Hindus and Sikhs and expropriation of their properties constitute its settled policy. As a result of this policy, life for the minorities in Pakistan has become nasty, brutish and short. Let us not be forgetful of the lessons of history. We will do so at our own peril. I am not talking of by-gone times, but if anyone analyses the course of events in Pakistan since creation, it will be manifest that there is no honourable place for Hindus within that State. The problem is not communal. It is essentially political.

-Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee

(In Parliament on his resignation as Minister of Industry and Supply,

19th April, 1950)

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