

## THE SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

Volume 3, Issue 2, 2023

### **THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

#### **The Pakistani Hindu Refugee women in Jodhpur, Rajasthan**



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#### **Introduction**

Forced Migration has become a global phenomenon, especially in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. People are forced to leave their nation, and their identity and relocate to a place/space unknown to them. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) defines a forced migrant as any person who migrates to ‘escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation, or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood’ (Hugo, 2005). It has affected the lives of people across ages, gender, and social background. However, gender is a critical factor that shapes the experiences and outcomes of forced migration. This article, based on the interview conducted with the Pakistani Hindu refugee women, will explore the causes and experiences of forced migration from a gendered perspective, highlighting the differential impacts on these women, who seek refuge in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India.

#### **Causes of Migration – Case of Pakistani Hindu Refugee Women**

The constant struggle to remain in their country of origin or return to it, claiming it as one's own, renders a huge population of people stateless, refugees –the ones who belong to nowhere. The religious minorities who decided to stay back in the country of their choice, after the partition of the sub-continent became the 'other', a fearful identity that they live with. This category of 'Pakistani-Hindu' represents the 'paradox of the situation' (Sethi, 2021). Unlike the other refugees seeking refuge in India, Pakistani Hindu refugees seek recognition with a historical and cultural genealogy that differs from the understanding of the refugee definition given by UNHCR (Chatterji, 2012). They are deeply connected with the host country, India, based on religion, history, and culture, thus becoming a 'unique case of migration' (Nizami, 2022).

Though the state of Pakistan was formed based on being a democratic and tolerant nation, as envisaged by its founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah, which would respect the rights of the non-Muslim population (Ishapani, 2017). But things did not remain the same. Rather post the 1970s and 1980s, with the state of Pakistan supporting hardline radicalised ideas, 'legal persecution' and 'extrajudicial persecution' became legitimised, leading to the violation of the rights of religious minorities in the state (Rahman, 2012). Consequently, religious discrimination, exploitation, forceful conversion, abduction, and rape of young girls and forceable marriages started to be on the rise (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2020). According to the Universal Just Action Society, since 2012, factors like regular killings, abduction, and forceful religious conversions have been prime factors for crossing borders. Alongside, reports of discriminatory economic policies resulted in issues of unemployment, unequal wages, and loss of jobs among others (FIDH and HRCP, 2015). Unfortunately, people belonging to the Dalit, nomad community suffer from further discrimination because of their caste identity (Malik, 2002).

### **Implications of Migration**

The Pakistani Hindu women refugees have been enduring the legacy of the partition of the subcontinent. 'Dishonouring' and humiliating the 'other' women became an everyday phenomenon during this period, something which still haunts the lives of Hindu women back in Pakistan. The female body of the minority Hindu 'other' in Pakistan serves as a terrain through which the dramatic act of violence is exchanged, since 1947. The violence done on Hindu women in Pakistan served as a metaphor, 'indicating the place that women's sexuality occupies in the all-male and patriarchal arrangement of gender relations, between and within religious or ethnic communities'

(Menon and Bhasin, 1998).

Fleeing these insecurities and a life full of uncertainties, when these women enter Indian territory, they face a different set of challenges. These refugees do face a lot of issues within the Indian territory. Their experience of migrating is traumatic and taxing because of the high cost of migration. The family has to prioritise who will migrate first amongst them all, resulting in the breaking of the family.

Not only do they have to take care of the household but also have additional responsibilities of meeting their daily needs. To meet their daily needs, these women are put in new spaces which they haven't encountered until now. They are left with no choice but to accompany their husbands, by engaging in livelihood activities. In doing so, many of the Pakistani Hindu refugee women end up challenging the traditional gendered roles that ascribe men as breadwinners and women as homemakers, deeply embedded in patriarchal norms. For women, leaving behind their maternal family rips them off. Since the majority of them aren't a part of the decision-making process of travelling to India, they live under the constant fear of not being able to see their parents again.

Further, because of their caste identity and the stigma associated with their Pakistani identity, they are left with little or no choice but to be able to access livelihood options in India. It is important to look at the overlapping identities, in their context, as the intersectionality of these identities puts them in a far more vulnerable condition, producing a whole matrix of hierarchies. Since it is difficult for men in the community to get a decent livelihood opportunity, these women are compelled to accept a variety of accessible occupations to contribute to the family's financial well-being. As they become independent, crucial here is to underline that it is not out of choice that they venture out into the public arena, but out of pure compulsion, hence, breaking the old, gendered norms.

Moreover, they face challenges in accessing healthcare services, including reproductive health services, during forced migration. They may lack access to menstrual products, contraceptives, and safe abortion services, putting their health and well-being at risk. They often face barriers to accessing basic services, including healthcare, education, and protection. Women's reproductive health needs are often overlooked in humanitarian responses, and women may face obstacles in accessing contraceptives, prenatal care, and safe delivery services. Women and girls are also often excluded from education and skills training programs, which can limit their opportunities

for economic empowerment and social integration.

The process of assimilation of this community has been a question out of sight. The analysis states how even after becoming citizens of India, nothing major has changed for them, as they still lacked basic facilities of sanitation, water, and electricity. Even though on paper they become Indians, they are still identified as Pakistani refugees, someone who is always seen with suspicion. Even though religiously, culturally and based on language, the case of Pakistani Hindu refugees stands out expectational to be able to integrate with the locals, unfortunately, nothing much has been achieved in this regard, as they still rat the periphery.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, forced migration is a complex phenomenon that affects individuals and communities in diverse ways. Addressing the differential impacts of forced migration and its implication for Pakistani Hindu refugee women is essential for promoting gender equality, preventing gender-based violence, and ensuring the protection and empowerment of all individuals affected by forced migration. It is thus important to recognize and address the gendered implications of forced migration to ensure that the rights and needs of all individuals are met, regardless of their gender identity.

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