Migration and the Metropolis: The Everyday Lives of Afghan Refugees in Lajpat Nagar

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Abstract

Once we split open the category of the 'refugee' we see that it means fundamentally different things to be an Afghani refugee than any other community of refugees. The relationship that each community shares with the government, the UNHCR, NGOs and civil society organisations is radically different. Our ethnography addresses this issue by looking at what it means to be an Afghani refugee located in Lajpat Nagar. What memories one has of the homes from which they have been displaced and how these memories shape their attempts to reconstruct their past and inscribe their identity on the physical and cultural terrain of the city of Delhi. The liberties one finds while living in a city not conflict-ridden in the same manner as their homes were before violence spread and the restrictions imposed on them by the city in trying to access a land in which they are legally and culturally treated as aliens.

Keywords: Afghan refugees, memories, migration, Lajpat Nagar, Afghan Street, UNHCR, freedom, restrictions.

Introduction

Through our research we wished to explore the nature of the relationship the community of Afghani refugees located in Lajpat Nagar share with the city of Delhi. We wished to look at their attempts to carve out an identity in Delhi and the general problems they face in being able to access the city. We further wished to identify specific problems they faced in their everyday affairs which were shaped by their identity as Afghanis and the different manners in which they navigated through such issues. However, during the course of our fieldwork, it became clear to us that we needed to begin our foray at a much more rudimentary level- at the category of the refugee itself. We soon realised neither the term refugee nor the urban in which it was located were singular concepts. The word refugee is associated with people who have been forced to leave their country. However, the term refugee implies two sets of movements- that of dislocation the body from one's own country and the other of relocation of that body into a new terrain. These nature of these two sets of movements collectively determine what it means to be a refugee in a foreign land.

As the following section will discuss in greater detail, the experiences of different diasporas seeking refuge in Delhi varies significantly because of the absence of any singular, overarching legal framework on the basis of which matters related to different refugee communities in Delhi are dealt with. This allows for differential treatment accorded to different communities of individuals seeking refuge in India. Similarly, the relationship that each community shares share with the government, the UNHCR, NGOs and civil society organisations is radically different. Therefore, once we split open the category of the 'refugee' we see that the experiences and meaning of being an Afghani located in Delhi refugee is completely unique and different from all others communities in Delhi and even Afghani communities located in other cities. Our

ethnography addresses this issue by looking at what it means to be an Afghani refugee located in Lajpat Nagar. What memories one has of the homes from which they have been displaced and how these memories shape their attempts to reconstruct their past and inscribe their identity on the physical and cultural terrain of the city of Delhi. The liberties one finds while living in a city not conflict- ridden in the same manner as their homes were and the restrictions imposed on one-self in trying to access a land in which they are legally and culturally treated as aliens.

What emerges as collective consequence of all the dynamics discussed above, is a grid formed by the Indian government, the UNHCR and the city of Delhi which refugees have to navigate constantly. The Afghani community in Lajpat Nagar offers a prime example of the operation of such a grid. Firstly, there is a splitting of the Afghani refugee tag between Hindu-Sikh Afghanis, largely located in the western part of the city and mostly catered to by the Gurudwaras; and the 'ethnic' Muslim Afghanis who are located in Lajpat Nagar, usually dependent on NGOs and the UNHCR (Warsi 2015). This indicates that even within the more narrowly defined category of the Afghani refugee in Delhi, other aspects such as religion and location crucially determine the nature of one's experiences. What we discuss in this paper through our ethnography is that within a broader set of overarching features which all Afghani refugees have to face, perceptions of and experiences within the city vary immensely from person to person and are formed and navigated through individual biographical characteristics like age, gender, class and so on.

The overarching forms of constraints that mostly all Afghani refugees in Lajpat Nagar have to face are all predicated on their being perceived as cultural outsiders and pollutants to the local culture and practices. Such an antagonistic perception results in several different forms of discriminatory rent practices, the absence of jobs in fields other than a select few, constricted mobility within the city and low paying jobs with delayed salary payments and very low educational opportunities. In addition to such problems is the overarching institutional constraint that loom large, an instance of which was the large-scale police clampdown we witnessed during our days of fieldwork. While the police operation was officially designated to uncover an international drug trading network operated by some Afghanis, its impact was felt by all who had any connections to the street in Lajpat Nagar for a period which far exceeded the duration of the police operation. Street vendors were removed, police patrolling was heightened and businesses took a huge hit.

Quite to our surprise, most of our respondents did not particularly lament the constrictive socio-economic opportunities or the institutional forms of constrains they had to endure in Delhi. Hence, the everyday forms of freedom, exercised in such forms as getting tattoos, having regular albeit low-paying jobs, a relative sense of stability and having the occasional day off, were all perceived as different forms of 'freedom' fundamentally more important than any overarching forms of constraints one had to endure. While our imagination after the first few rounds of interview was of a situation wherein the everyday forms of freedom were constricted within a larger grid of 'unfreedoms', our respondents spoke in completely opposite terms. For them, it appeared, the freedoms appeared much more significant than the different forms of constraints,

which were largely spoken of as transitory pains which must be endured. The kinds of 'freedoms' our respondents spoke about hardly appear as freedoms when contrasted to the overt forms of discriminatory practices they have to endure on a regular basis. For instance, we felt that having a job which required significantly less skills than one is technically qualified to perform and which pays significantly less than one is qualified to earn, in addition to paying higher rents than local residents despite earning less than them and working longer hours than them, hardly qualifies as any form of freedom. However, their preoccupation with such nominal forms of everyday freedoms was a peculiar yet recurrent theme in our interviews. It became evident to us that such liberties appear significant when they are measured against the much more stark forms of violence and uncertainties their lives in their conflict-ridden homes entailed. What we observed, therefore, was that in an attempt to reclaim their everyday lives in the aftermath of massive and engulfing forms of violence, physical displacement and separation and the loss of homes, the Afghanis of Lajpat Nagar perceive normality on different standards than local residents. And this differential standard is constructed by a constant referencing back to the memories of the troubled life in Afghanistan.

Background

Afghans in India

As of 2014, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has 25,865 refugees and 5,074 asylum seekers registered with them, comprising of several nationalities. Among these, there are 10,395 refugees and 1,305 registered asylum seekers from Afghanistan in Delhi[1]. The numbers indicated above reflect only those who are formally registered with the UNHCR in Delhi. The overall number of refugees and asylum seekers India plays host to, however, ranges around the figure of 224,000, as of 2013, mostly comprising of Sri Lankans and Tibetans (Morand and Crisp 2013).

Yet, India is not a signatory to either the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. As a consequence, India is not obligated to follow any internationally standardised protocol relating to the treatment of refugees or cooperate with the UNHCR in implementing any legislation relating to refugees at a national level. Consequently, domestically India does not have any national legislative framework which deals with issues pertaining to refugees. Barring some exceptions such issues, including repatriation and refoulement, are handled on an administrative and political level, with seldom any recourse to the law. Legally,

[1] While it was the conflict between the Mujahedeen and the socialist government in Afghanistan which began in 1978, that resulted in the violence that erupted in Afghanistan, killing about 2 million people and displacing almost one third of the country; the present day volatile condition of the state is due to the presence of the Taliban and their strict religious laws and punishments.

refugees are treated as any other foreign nationals and are required to regular work permits and visas among other documentations (Warsi 2015).

In practice, however, India has historically taken a relatively liberal stance in relation to refugees[2], reflected in the first instance by the sheer number of refugees that it hosts and continues to allow into its borders. It has also mostly adhered to the principle of non-refoulement meaning refugees located within Indian borders are not forcefully sent back to their home countries, if sufficient doubts about the safety of those individuals in their home countries exist. It is also signatory to several other international treaties, although not specially about, but which overlap with issues pertaining to refugees, such as the 1984 Convention against Torture, Article 3 of which bounds India to the principle of non-refoulment.

There are several reasons for this apparent discrepancy between what India's official stance on the matter is, as reflected by the Conventions and Protocols it is, or more importantly, is not, a signatory to; and its actual treatment of refugees in practice. Some frequently cited one pertain to concerns about the loss of sovereignty, the potential strain on an already exploding domestic population, safety concerns in light of the already very porous international borders with neighbouring countries and so on (Sarkar 2015).

As a consequence of such complexities, the Afghan community in Lajpat Nagar which we worked with, falls under the mandate of the UNHCR. However, there is a significantly ill-defined domain between the operations of the government and the UNHCR. As a 2011 Women's Refugee Committee Report indicates, while it is allowed to have a presence in New Delhi, the UNHCR does not have any formal status in India and operates, instead, under the United Nations Development Program's governmental agreement. The report further states that "At the Government of India's request, UNHCR's operation focuses on New Delhi, In addition, the Government of India restricts UNHCR's operations to work only with individual refugees and asylum seekers from non-neigh- boring countries, as well as Myanmar. Hence, while the UNHCR primarily understands its role in India to be one of 'Refugee Status Determination' (RSD), from the government's perspective, a majority of the affairs related to refugees falls entirely under the mandate of the UNHCR.

The UNHCR attempts to undertake several welfare programs and schemes for the protection of refugees, operating mainly through local NGOs and ground level service providers. However, it finds itself constricted by the limited operational flexibility it possesses in India. The requirement that UNHCR restrict its operations largely to the National Capital Territory of Delhi results in onward refugee movements from other parts of India to the already over-congested city in order to access protection, ser- vices and resettlement opportunities." (WRC 2011).

Hence, in addition to the jurisdictional nightmare between the government and the UNHCR, enters the unique feature of internal movement of multiple refugee communities to Delhi and its

[2] The liberal stance of the country towards the Afghan refugees can be traced back to a long history of relationship between the two countries which began at the time of Sur dynasty and strengthened during the Mughal Empire, which a cultural assimilation between people from both the nations. The present day diplomatic relations between the two nations are also a reflection of this strong history, along with a relation of mutual understanding and trust.

corresponding set of problems which include urban congestion, segregation and potential ghettoisation and consequently the threat of diseases, the lack of healthcare and educational facilities, legal recourse and so on.

Lajpat Nagar

Lajpat Nagar is a colony that falls partly under New Delhi with the other part in South Delhi, in Delhi, the capital of India. It is a residential as well as commercial area mostly known for its Central Market famous as a shopping destination especially for textiles and garments. It is a suburb divided into four parts: Lajpat Nagar I, II, III (north of the Ring Road) and IV (south of the Ring Road). Housing colonies like Amar Colony, Dayanand Colony, Double Storey (also known as Nirmal Puri) and National Park are also located in it (Rajput &Lidhoo 2016). The South Delhi census of 2011, shows how it is a predominantly Hindu region (78.91%) with a small number of Muslim (16.32%), Sikh (2.54%) and Christian (1.53%) population.[3] (Delhi Religion Census, 2011)

Named after the Lion of Punjab, Lala Lajpat Rai, this colony was chosen as a refugee area by the rehabilitation ministry formed by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the 1950s after the India-Pakistan Partition. The place was selected for many reasons among which the elevation of the land and the presence of very few water bodies were important. Another reason was the presence of Hazrat Nizammudin railway station close to the location as the Punjab trains stopped at this station, making it convenient for the refugees to access the location. While Nizamuddin was located for rich elite refugees, Lajpat refugee colony was allocated for people from Karachi, Balochistan, Multan and Sindh. The migration continued till even after 1978, to a then urbanized Lajpat Nagar which could accommodate the population of refugees. It was with the help of the rehabilitation Ministry and the industries and land allotted to them, that these communities built up a life after partition creating the commercial place we see today. The history of migration and rehabilitation is far from being new in this neighbourhood.

Thus, the deposition of the Afghan refugee community in Lajpat Nagar does not seem like a new phenomenon. Moreover, it is due to the limitations faced by the UNHCR to conduct their programs in areas far away from the refugee community that these people are located in a place close to the BOSCO-UNHCR office and the UNHCR office in Jangpura and Vasant Vihar respectively.

The Afghan Street or the “Little Kabul” of Delhi

[3] As the census record of Lajpat Nagar in specific wasn’t available, the composition of religious groups in the region is assumed to be similar to that of South Delhi, where it is located.

The Afghan Street is a tiny neighbour near the Central Market in Lajpat Nagar. The Central Market lies on the eastern side of the entrance to the street while the residential colonies of Lajpat Nagar 1 and 2 are located on the west. It is at a walking distance from the Lajpat Nagar Metro station, making it an attraction for anyone who loves the Afghan cuisine and culture.

As we enter the street, leaving the commercial space of Central Market behind, we are faced with a completely different atmosphere. There is a long street filled with Afghan restaurants, medical shops, beauty parlours, toy stores and a few textiles shops on either side. Then we reach a junction, where the left side is filled with Afghan Bread stalls with Afghan bread stacked up along with Afghan cakes behind the glass counters of the stall. This is a very distinct imagery to look at as it gives you a sense of being an outsider in a foreign space[4]. On the right side of the junction there is a small lane filled with Afghan supermarkets which have different kinds of dairy products than what can be usually seen in an Indian supermarket.There are also some Afghan Burger counters at the end of that lane along with other restaurants. When we return to the junction and walk to the end of the street, we find ourselves between money exchange shops and travel agencies on either side with Dari inscribed advertisement boards with people often waiting outside some of these busy agencies.

Methodology

Research Question

1. What does it mean to be an Afghan refugee in Lajpat Nagar?

2. What kind of memories of home do Afghan refugees in Delhi have and how do they shape their attempts to inscribe their identity on the physical and cultural terrain of the city?

3. What kind of liberties do the Afghan refugees enjoy while living in Delhi and what institutional and social forms of constraints are exercised upon them?

The research work as mentioned before took place is in the Afghan market situated in Lajpat Nagar 2. The street includes Afghan restaurants, medical stores and money exchanges where

[4] Bread stalls are characteristic feature of Persian streets including the Gulf markets, while it is a very strange sight in a street in Delhi.

many Afghans work as employees. This area was chosen as it is a prime location in South Delhi, very close to the central market thus making it interesting to learn its absorption of a refugee population.

We chose observation and participant observation especially in restaurants as our method to understand the daily lives of the members of the Afghani community. It was only after the week of Eid- ul- Fitar (5/6/19) that the workers in one of the restaurants started interacting with us openly. But they were hesitant to give interviews or have proper conversations for almost the next two weeks.

We engaged with everyone who was open to a conversation, which narrowed down the sample group to mostly young working class men in their 20s or 30s, except for one female respondent we got, as she was the wife of one of the respondents. The lack of female respondents was due to the fact that there were few female workers in these areas and they were hesitant to have an interaction with us, without the supervision of their husbands. Thus, the research has a limited gendered perspective in understanding what it means to be an Afghani refugee in Delhi and how the Afghani refugees attempt to recreate space and liberty in a foreign city. The respondents had various occupations from working in restaurants, working as a translator for patients coming from Afghanistan to owning their own bread or Afghani burger stalls. We also faced hostility while trying to get an alternative perspective of the Afghani refugee life, through their Indian neighbours. The Indian respondents almost refused to talk to us about their "uncultured" refugee neighbours, blaming us for giving them any form of importance.[5]

Due to certain events that took place in the field and the difficulties caused by it, our fieldwork was spread over the months of June and July. The 3 distinct events that extended our work from being a 4 week fieldwork to a 2 month fieldwork were as follows:

Eid-ul-Fitar – as a religious festival changed the whole atmosphere of the space, with people as workers almost vanishing from the street by 6 pm and returning by 8 to enjoy the festival season. They would gather in restaurants and interact with each other.

- Deportation of illegal Afghani refugees- By the second week of July, police patrolling had increased in the street as the police caught some refugees residing illegally in the area, according to what our respondents informed us, though this claim could not be confirmed with any police officers. It was after this event that refugees refused to have any form of conversation with us.

Alleged Refugee involvement in Illegal Drugs distribution- On July 19, Delhi Police Special Cell busted an international drug cartel involved in the import, reconstitution and

[5] Based on a conversation we had with an Indian Toy Store owner (Indian respondent) who had lived in the neighbourhood for more than 50 years.

distribution of Afghan heroin. Police said they recovered around 150 kg high-quality Afghan heroin, valued internationally around Rs 600 crores, from five arrested persons, including two Afghanistan nationals. This incident resulted in the heckling and harassment of many Afghans in the street that they refused to interact with us further.

Thus, the time and space of the field played a major role in the methodology followed in our research work.

Ethnography

Our initial foray into the field was in the days leading up to Eid. As mentioned earlier, we began by sitting in restaurants and observing the proceedings. What struck us initially was that both social and economic lives of the individuals centred around the rituals and festivities of Ramzan. Businesses, even ones with Indian owners, modified their timings to accommodate Afghani employees to leave by around 5:30 pm to break their fasts at sunset. We observed that the medical shops and travel agencies on the street wound up businesses by that time leaving, usually, just a few Indian employees to handle affairs. The restaurants on the other hand were flooded in the evening. The transition from almost complete vacancy to uncontainable footfall was rather sudden, but punctually repeated everyday. Some shops even had separate areas with traditional Afghani floor seating, equipped with plush pillows and lined with fine carpets, separated into booths by wooden partitions. The seating became an important marker of regional authenticity within the larger Muslim festivities. It was pointed out to us that raised chairs and tables were quite uncommon in Afghanistan, seen as a sign of western influence, and people preferred dining on the floor on the comforts of rich carpeting.

Quite naturally, interviews were difficult to conduct during this period. Most restaurants we spoke to asked us to come after Eid. The days, which were light on footfall during this period, were mostly used as the time for sociality, with large congregations of neighbouring Afghans within specific restaurants. Some restaurants had Afghani bread stalls lined on the pavement in front of them. During this period, we observed the doors of some restaurant would be opened in a manner which made the bread stalls seem like an extension of the establishment. Bread-sellers often intermingled with the restaurant workers inside restaurants, leaving their stalls on the pavement and catering to customers as and when they came.

The Afghani men, largely regardless of where they worked, would dress in traditional attire-- in different colours of the ‘payraan and kuilah’[6] while few women would be seen, wearing either a ‘tombaan and a ‘parahaan’[7] with a shawl to cover their head or a ‘Burkha’. With usually fair

[6] These are traditional clothes worn by Afghan men. Payraan is the overshirt , while Kuliah is the cap.

[7] Traditional Afghan pants and overdress worn by women.

complexion and Dari/Farsi language, the visual and cultural starkness of those who frequented the street from the rest of the market was perhaps the most vivid in that period of our fieldwork. Two other features struck us during our initial stint at the field. First, most Afghani restaurants had very intricate mirror work lining up the interior walls. Even in restaurants which did not have mirror art, there was an overwhelming presence of mirrors. We could not initially determine the reason behind this preoccupation with mirrors. When enquired, we were told that it was quite customary in Afghanistan. Second, the shops also had several audio and visual markers of their Afghani identity-- almost every restaurant had a large map of Afghanistan woven unto a carpet lining their walls. Some restaurants also had tapestries and hanging carpets displaying intricately woven designs, portraits of prominent people from Afghanistan's history, characters from Persian folklore or scenes from Afghanistan. Most of these rugs and carpets, we were informed, were carried from Afghanistan and not found in India.

We also observed that like only some restaurants became social hubs during the day, some restaurants were receptive to our inquiries and our requests for interviews while others completely shut us out. It was later pointed out to us that the latter were the restaurants and shops with Indian owners. The ones which had Afghani owners tended to be smaller establishments and where people were willing to speak with us and give us interviews. These were also the ones which became social hubs during the day, hosting people from outside. On some occasions, we even observed people who worked elsewhere would wait tables and serve food in these restaurants as some of the other waiters were indisposed or busy chatting. This free-flowing form of sociality was very interesting to us and pointed us in the direction of the larger argument we are making-- that the manner in which freedoms and liberties are experienced within the category of the Afghani refugee differs according to one's location in other contexts, place of employment in this case, and is inscribed within larger constrictive processes, seen here in the form of not being able to converse freely or being unable to partake in the revelry.

A substantial amount of our fieldwork was spent interviewing individuals who worked in one specific restaurant. Mastaan, Rameen, Simar, Faiz and Kamal all provide insights into the various ways one experiences the city as an Afghani refugee. Mastaan and Rameen work as waiters at the Usmaan restaurant. Rameen is the senior among the two and often manages the restaurant. Faiz works as a waiter too and stays in Delhi with his mother, wife and 11 month-old child. Kamal is the manager of that restaurant. We developed a close relationship with all of them and had multiple conversations over the course of our fieldwork. While initially they provided some standard replies, with time they began to open up to us and provide reflections and insights about their time in Delhi.Through their testimonies, the restaurant became a snapshot of how the everyday aspects of life in Delhi are differently perceived and navigated by Afghani refugees. At a primary level, they help display the tremendous diversity of experiences that are entailed within the single category of the 'Afghani refugee' in Delhi and on a secondary

level, such a snapshot speaks of those different biographical features which shape how an individual perceives of life as a refugee in Delhi.

Mastaan claimed that living in Delhi gives him a sense of freedom which was missing, or impossible to even conceive of, in Afghanistan. He feels like the master of his own fate and no one in Delhi takes decisions on his behalf, including his elder brother. In a moment of characteristic bravado, the hunky Mastaan told us about how he had quit his previous job as a gym instructor on a whim since he was bored with the monotonous life such an occupation offered. The fact that he could not only have a regular job, but also change it so easily according to his whims and fancies is just a single instance of his exercising a liberty inconceivable in his conflict-ridden home. Similarly, Mastaan spoke about his visits to discos and parties in Hauz Khas and his freedom to drink, smoke and freely interact with women. His several tattoos are yet another testimony to the world of freedoms that Mastaan exercises in Delhi. The ink on his body too speaks of the romantic notion of the world that he espouses-- the flow of the river near his homeland as a reminder of what he has left behind and another one proclaiming the name of his lover in Afghanistan, the permanence of which was effaced by his proclamation about his lack of inhibitions in 'dating' Hindu or Christian women in India, in line with the multicultural experience Delhi offers him. His other memories include his college days, pursuing a degree in Business Management. He expresses a desire to soon return to university in Delhi and complete his education, which he then hopes to put to use by setting up his own business-- a supermarket or a restaurant or both.

Three things become evident through Mastaan's insights about his life in Delhi. The most evident is his sense of Delhi as a place of unbounded freedom. He exercises such freedoms in several gestures like going to parties and getting tattoos. However, his usage of the word 'freedom' to describe such actions is insightful. There are several instances of individuals having regular jobs, attending the occasional party and getting tattoos who experience a crippling sense of constraint. Indeed, often it is precisely such aspects of one's life which produce an intolerable monotony that creates an effect which is quite opposite to any sense of freedom. Mastaan's and several of our other respondents' views to the contrary are informed by the different standards against which they perceive normality. This is the second aspect that Mastaan's insights made evident, namely that such ordinary aspects of everyday life are not significant in themselves but gain significance and are perceived of as different forms of freedom when they are measured against the constraining conditions which prevailed in Afghanistan. It is precisely because such ordinary aspects of life as having a regular job was not plausible for most of our respondents in Afghanistan that even low-paying jobs with very long working hours are thought of as a liberty. Similarly, such long hours and low wages means that Mastaan is able to take a day off only once in a month or so, but his excursions on that single day appear to be spectacular expressions of freedom. Such a constant referencing to life in Afghanistan, while natural, creates situations where what would otherwise be perceived as a cruelty and injustice by local residents (such as rent expropriation, constriction of geographical mobility and so on which are discussed later) is

thought of as temporary inconvenience which must be endured, or in Mastaan's case as things which need not be worried about at all when appraising Delhi and its opportunities. The third aspect in Mastaan's testimonies is the contradiction between the imagination of the entire city of Delhi as one which offers a progressive and multicultural way of life and their actual geographical limitation to only a few specific parts of the city, in and around Lajpat Nagar. Mastaan's dreams of opening a restaurant or supermarket business speaks of his perception of the limitless economic opportunities that Delhi will potentially offer him if he completes his education. However, it is instructive to note that the two most commonly found establishments on 'Little Kabul' are restaurants and supermarkets. Hence, while Mastaan thinks of his dreams as unbounded, the fact that he desires to run a supermarket or restaurant business and not anything else informs us about how even they are in reality crucially bounded by his immediate surroundings. Similarly, while Mastaan speaks of his free mobility within the city (going to different parties and discos) most of his days are spent commuting between the nearby Bhogal, where he lives, and Lajpat Nagar, where he works. A vast majority of his life in Delhi is hence limited to this well-defined geographical area and his experiences and dreams are similarly shaped by it.

A man in his mid-30s, Rameen is a senior in the restaurant when compared to Mastaan and thus often manages the restaurant. He is married to Simar, with whom he fell in love and to whom he decided to get married in Afghanistan after his first marriage had broken down. He lives with his wife in a small apartment in Bhogal. He has a daughter from his first marriage who lives in Afghanistan. A lawyer in Afghanistan, his occupation as a waiter in Delhi does not accord him the same joys it does to young Mastaan. Thus, his sense of youthful exuberance is entirely missing to make space for a sombre demeanour.

His conversations with us revolved mostly around the several complications he had to face in his life as a refugee in Delhi and in his endeavours to provide for his family. Similar to Mastaan, he works at least 10 hours a day but often receives his meagre salary as a waiter after periodic delays as the restaurant does not run in profit. This creates several difficulties in paying rent on time to a landlord who insists on charging Afghans more rent than he does local Indians living in the vicinity. Similarly, he says he can't rent an air-conditioner because of the inflated rates and therefore has to see his young, newlywed wife suffer in the unbearable summer heat. In addition, the landlord insists on periodically increasing rent by 10 per cent, which has made his residential arrangement a major hurdle to be traversed. The financial constraints felt by Rameen are very different from those felt by Mastaan as he has to provide for his wife, and his family back in Afghanistan, including his daughter. Being a waiter after having a career in law in Afghanistan is frustrating to Rameen as he sees it as a form of social and economic demotion.

Moreover, the long work hours, he explained prevented him from enjoying his daily life, limiting him to few visits to monuments in Delhi and preventing him from creating a friend circle beyond

the street and with Indian residents. Life in Delhi for him limited his life in different ways, though it gave him relatively more stability.

Thus, unlike Mastaan, he does not see his life in Delhi as a magnificent improvement from his older life. The sense of loss and the pain of separation is felt much more potently by Rameen, longs to meet his daughter and his family in Afghanistan. While he recognises the relative stability and security his life in Delhi provides him, he has bigger ambitions in life-- resettling in a 'developed' country like Canada or Germany and therefore sees his stint in Delhi as transitory. Most of his thoughts are around what he can do to achieve his objective of relocating to the west.

The dissatisfaction of having to live a constrained life was seen in Rameen's conversations, even while we were trying to interview other respondents. He constantly reiterated his problems even when we talked to Simar, his wife.

Rameen's experience gives a reflection of the overarching constraints that affect the life of a refugee in a foreign country. The bureaucracy becomes responsible for the financial and occupational difficulties they face. The implementation of demonetisation and its adverse effect on the refugees in terms of availability of jobs or the police clamp down that we witnessed in the street at the period of our fieldwork are a few examples of the problems that refugees face in foreign country. Yet, the restraints they experience is not limited to bureaucratic control over the people through policing and surveillance but also from the latent hostility from the locals of the place, which we experienced too from the sour behaviour of the Indian shopkeepers in the street who refused to have anything to do with the Afghan refugees.

While Mastaan's young age and romantic notions predispose him to experience the city in a specific manner, Simar who is also a young lady of 20 and married to Rameen, emerges as a contrast to Mastaan in some ways, despite their similarities in age. She is from Kabul where she finished high school but had to leave before she could get her certificates. She learnt to speak English on her own in Delhi. Initially, she would stay at home while her husband worked but as the financial situation became more dire, she started working as a saleswoman at a supermarket across the street from the restaurant. She too displayed Mastaan's zeal for life in Delhi, although in a much more measured expressions. She claims that Delhi is the safest place she had been to and had never faced any trouble with men or the police during her stay here. She admitted that her life revolves between her home and work but on the occasional day off, she enjoys visiting monuments with her husband. Unlike Rameen she does not ache for moments of solitude, rather she gets bored in times when she is alone, spending most of that time surfing the internet on her smartphone. Like Mastaan, and unlike her husband, she feels Delhi is very suited for long term residence and looks forward to working and spending time with her colleagues in the supermarket. She admitted that their finances were a recurrent source of worry but does not take it to be one which either makes her too unhappy in the short run or one which is insurmountable

in the long run. According to Simar, when she was at home, everyday, she would leave her home she would say *khuda hafiz* in a very literal sense, not knowing if she would return in the evening.

Simar emerges as a contrast to both her husband and Mastaan, despite being related to them both in relationship and age respectively. Like Mastaan she enjoys her life in Delhi with its relative sense of stability and security. Simar too, like others, makes a constant reference to her life in Afghanistan to appraise her conditions in Delhi. She recognises the severe financial constraints that her family has to navigate, several of which are detailed by Rameen, which forced her to take up a job that now takes up the majority of her day. However, a combination of her young age and her experiences with significantly more stark and fatal forms of violence in Afghanistan means that her outlook to life is much broader, making such financial travails seem insignificant. Mastaan's love for sociality is shared by Simar but is expressed in much more measured tones. Unlike Mastaan, she doesn't feel like attending parties and going clubbing but prefers spending her day with her colleagues in the supermarket than being alone at home. Similarly, her days off are spent with her husband exploring Delhi but unlike Mastaan, such explorations are geared towards solitude.

Hence, we observe an affirmation of the traits that Mastaan's conversation highlighted-- experiencing Delhi as a place of liberties and freedoms; a constant referencing to life in Afghanistan to appraise conditions in Delhi; and the localisation of mobility to a single part of the city through a combination of economic and cultural factors. However, within such overarching commonalities, the everyday aspects of life in Delhi are experienced and navigated through individual biographical features. Hence, the meaning of being an Afghani refugee in Delhi alters fundamentally depending on such features like age, gender, social location, class position and so on.

Kamal is the manager of the restaurant and like Rameen, in his mid-30s. He has a wife with him in Delhi and is expecting a child in the near future. Unlike Mastaan, Rameen and Simar, he belongs to higher socio-economic strata thus providing a contrast to all this other respondents and their experiences. Kamal has degrees in business and finance, computer sciences and engineering and also a diploma in English language. Back home in Afghanistan, after graduating from university, he successfully ventured into several successful businesses- including a travel agency and a media consultancy service. Unlike other respondents, Kamal seemed to possess very nuanced and chiselled political opinions which he voluntarily offered to share with us. According to him, unnecessary conflicts and political bickering was the reason why his beloved country became a war zone and why well-meaning, ordinary citizens continue to suffer the consequences of political upheavals. He claimed that the conditions in Afghanistan were unspeakable and he was incapable of expressing them in words, although he did give several detailed accounts of the horrors he had to endure. Kamal was the only person we interviewed who spoke about the specific kinds of violence he witnessed at home.

On his way back from work, he was accosted by armed men who stopped his car and beat him to an inch of his life and took away his car and all the belongings on his person. He had to hitch a bicycle ride home, which he says is a miracle in itself because people are very hesitant to stop on roads precisely fearing events akin to what he had just endured. Once he was home, his mother, who is a high-ranking government employee, insisted that he move to India. He spoke about a recent bomb explosion which occurred during a wedding and which rocked Afghanistan by its core saying it has become impossible to enjoy even a moment's pleasure there as one literally never knows when tragedy might befall (newspaper clipping cite). In his opinion, things will never go back to normal there and all he hopes to do is to convince his mother to move to Delhi with him, although he realises that chances of that are very bleak.

He has made the most of his life in Delhi. Similar to Mastaan and Simar, he enjoys the myriad of hitherto unknown freedoms that living in Delhi affords him. He enjoys driving his car without any sense of impending doom, going to parties and visiting the cinema, drinking and smoking. He casually even narrated an incident of accidentally running over some people. While he is happily married, he admits that it feels liberating to be able to converse openly with women without constantly looking behind one's shoulders. Unlike any of our other respondents, Kamal claimed to have a host of Indian friends who he hangs out with whenever possible. He feels some of the complaints that people like Rameen expressed were their own making. Specifically, he relayed through personal experience how it was the lavish lifestyle and ostentatious display of wealth by Afghans that lead to Indian brokers charging them more than other residents. He said that he was able to negotiate a rent which was less than market price by removing all pretences of a lavish lifestyle, refusing to overpay and insisting on seeing a cheap and compact house. In the end, he said, even the broker expressed his shock at meeting an Afghan who does not have 'larger than life' desires. Similarly, most of his worries pertained to the politics in the South Asian region and in Afghanistan, in addition to the economic downturn that India is presently enduring. For him, financial stability is linked to business cycles which are themselves informed by political processes. Since, according to him, India was undergoing an attitudinal change in its stance on refugees, the government is tactically making it difficult for people to migrate to India from Afghanistan-- by introducing measures such as high rates for visa applications, flight tickets and so on. His imagination seemed restricted to the wealthy medical tourists who fly to India for treatment and not with the impoverished migrants who have to seek refuge here. He faced no problems with the police and takes pride in being a law abiding citizen. On one occasion, he informed us, he even accosted an Indian man who was harassing a woman on the streets and called the police on him. For Kamal, the most pressing need was neither the rent payment nor meeting women but rather ensuring that his business was backing to the level it was before the downturn began.

Kamal's story becomes a snapshot of the freedoms experienced by people from higher socio-economic strata. His air of authority in commenting on the problems of Afghan refugees in India, his casual attitude towards the accident he caused, his education qualifications and his concerns

as a refugee seem to be very different from the other three respondents. Thus, though Mastaan and Simar experience a sense of freedom and stability in the country, it is evidently very different from the experience of freedom faced by Kamal due to the social capital and networks he has access to. For instance, his flexible working hours, personally owned car and higher financial ability make it much more convenient for Kamal to have parties with his Indian friends and go out drinking. Mastaan on the other hand, works long shifts and makes less money comparatively and thus limiting his ability to exercise the same freedom

Thus, the manner in which freedom is exercised depends crucially on one's specific location within the larger category of the Afghan refugees in Delhi.

Recurring Themes: Employment, Tattoos and memory

Throughout the fieldwork, there were certain themes that repeated itself through the voices of our respondents.

Employment- The challenges faced by refugees in creating a livelihood is very different from that of other marginalized communities of the country. Most of our respondents were employed in jobs that they were not trained in as they were restricted by the unavailability of jobs especially in the Afghan Street. They had to choose between working in restaurants, supermarkets, beauty parlours, travel agencies and so on, and having a bread stall, an Afghan burger counter and so on.

- Abdul W. is a young man in his 20s, who has stayed in India for around two years. He stays here with his wife and child, who was conceived after he came to India. He is a very hardworking man who told us that he sets up his bread stall at 8 in the morning and shuts it at as late as 10 at night. Besides his bread counter, he frequently works as a translator at a private hospital. Sometimes he waits tables in other restaurants, as we saw during the period of Eid and also later during our fieldwork. He is a skilled tailor and worked at a boutique before setting up the counter to sell bread.'
- Abdul K. has a stall near Abdul W's where he sells Afghan burgers. His stall seemed popular and was much more frequented by both locals and Afghans than the bread stalls nearby. Hel has a family of six comprising of his wife and five children, who are sent to Don Bosco School. Abdul also laments the lack of job opportunities that Delhi has to offer. He worked as a plumber in Afghanistan and claims that he is very skilled in the profession, having undertaken several large scale projects back home. In his opinion, in Delhi no one evaluated him on the basis of the services he had to offer as a plumber but rather by his ethnicity and his status as a refugee, denying him the opportunity to ply his trade. Instead, he had to learn how to make burgers so that he could set up his stall, for which he also had to make several rounds at the police station seeking permits.

What Abdul W. and Abdul K. had to say about the discrepancy between their qualifications and their employment in India became a recurrent idea which all our respondents echoed as they too had similar experiences.

Though the UNHCR had tried to implement many innovative ideas for the Afghan refugee community according to their skill set and convenience to place them in different occupations the implementation of demonetization by the Government of India in November, 2016, the whole scenario has completely changed as the Aadhaar Card and Bank account became compulsory to the common sector and a salary more than Rs.10,000 could not be given to the employee in cash. Since the Aadhaar cards were not available to these refugees, their job options reduced drastically.

The opportunities available to women were much broader due to the fact that they were skilled workers. As one of the senior officials from UNHCR explained, women were more skilled in traditional works such as embroidery skills and food production. She further explained that in 2015 as part of Project Livelihood a catering service called 'Ilham' was formed with 7 refugee women and is stilling going on successfully. The Fair Trade Forum India also combined with the UNHCR formed production groups of Afghan refugees in Bhogal and Wazirabad. They work on crochet quilts and other hand skills. Thus, as in most of these traditional skills women were more employable, the job opportunities they received with the help of UNHCR was more when compared to men. Thus, it can be concluded that employment is very important crisis that the Afghan refugees face in India, as it limits both men and women to certain occupations either restricted to a street or restricted to their culture.

Thus, it can be concluded that employment is a very important crisis that the Afghan refugees face in India, as it limits both men and women to certain occupations either restricted to a street or restricted to their culture.

Tattoos- Most men we interviewed had tattoos inked on their bodies though this practice is against their cultural and religious laws, which are strictly followed in Afghanistan. While Mastaan's tattoos reveal the name of his lover in Afghanistan whom he lost and the flow of the river near his homeland, Rameen's tattoos speaks of more serious affairs-- 'one life one chance' is written on his arm in his native language along with the name of his daughter whom he misses. These symbols thus become an indication of the form of freedom that the refugee experiences in a foreign state where cultural and religious restrictions do not prohibit him from forms of self-expression.

Memories- Memories manifest in different forms in the life of the refugees. It remains an affective notion to many like Mastaan whose best memory of home is the smile of his first lover's face. When we asked Faiz Ahmad, a waiter in Usmaan restaurant, if he had brought any material objects from home when they came to Delhi, he informed us that he carried the bullet

with which he had been shot in Afghanistan as it was the most poignant memory he carried from Afghanistan. Thus, for others memories serve as a reminder of what they might have escaped and everything that life has to offer in the future.

Memories also play a significant role in the refugees' attempt of the physical reconstruction of Afghanistan in a lane in Delhi as it is shaped by what one remembers of their home while at the same time being restricted by the limited availability of things with which such a space can be recreated. The street becomes a reminder of the memories of the erstwhile home through the food, the culture and the atmosphere created, thus making it a haven for the small community of Afghan working class refugees in Delhi. The public street acts as their very own neighbourhood for these Afghani refugees who spend most of their day in the company of their countrymen here, in effect generating the aura of their homeland, subsequently also allowing them to sustain themselves culturally and socially, not to mention, financially. It is important to understand that they have woven a web of interconnected social relations in the fluid, frontierless space of the street, and these social relationships have as much tenacity as social relationships shared by people who live in stable neighbourhoods and share residences. Thus, 'Little Kabul' transforms into a social space for interaction and a community of brotherhood, especially for refugees similar to most of our respondents, who work long hours in the street, while engagement with their actual neighbourhoods remains rather limited to their simply being unattached inhabitants.

Conclusion

Our fieldwork broadly addresses the areas we identified in the beginning of this report. Firstly, it speaks of the various different ways in which being an Afghani refugee in Delhi can be experienced by members of the same community. Mastaan, Rameen, Samar, Faiz and Kamal provide crucial insights into the significant variations that exist in the manner in which life in the city is perceived by Afghani refugees. We began by dissecting the single category of 'refugee' to see how the lack of a standardised legal framework in India allows for differential treatment being accorded to different refugee communities, which correspondingly changes what it means to be a refugee and how one experiences and lives through such an identity. In this case, we see how even within the more narrowly defined category of the 'Afghani male refugee' there can, and do, exist equally large variations in experience and perception, depending on one's gender, age, social and economic location and so on.

At a broader level, our fieldwork in Lajpat Nagar leads us to understand that given the magnitude of the violence that most of our respondents have witnessed and the specific attacks on their lives that they have survived, they are predisposed to having altered standards for perceiving normality. Tangible threats to their lives in the form of bombs and armed assault have been replaced by more latent forms of attack such as rent expropriation, long working hours and

police clampdowns. These renewed forms of attack do not register the same level of potency as the earlier ones. Consequently, most of our respondents chose to focus much more on the minimal freedoms accorded to them than the overarching forms of restrictions exercised upon them, while recognising them nonetheless.

Though the respondents quoted here delve into the nuances of the difficulties of living as refugees, it must be reiterated that the larger concerns that were reflected in nearly all of the respondents centred around the concepts of liberty and constraint. While employment became a restrictive factor in their lives with its imposition of greater input and poorer output, the choice to engage in (cultural) activities prohibited in their homeland gave them the much needed respite to feel alive again.

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