

Popular Narrative About Bengali Community In Gwadar Neighbourhood.



This article is based on the personal experiences of my mother's life and her family, as I've been listening to her story throughout my life. This story has left a huge impact on me and my thought process.

My mother's story portrays her real life experience which she faced during the Pakistan War (1971) during that time my mom was young when she lost her friends and family. The misfortune doesn't end here, she also lost her home where she spent her entire childhood, adolescence till the day she got married and moved to another home where she ran over countless new relations, and new parts of life.

Migration and the refugee crisis have been a constant element in the political agendas. And yet, refugee crises are not a recent phenomenon. People have always moved between countries and continents in search of better working opportunities or to escape life-threatening situations. My family was one of them. This incident left an everlasting impact on their mind, that agony cannot be described in words.

Effort to objectively work on the idea of migration, although started from home but unfolded many other stories of refugees in Gwadar and outside Gwadar rather all over the world. This made me realise

the most affected element is their identity, which they are always negotiating with the local surrounding. This research on my own community is a way to make sense of that fear I have been carrying inside since childhood.

Bengali Identity and Official Recognition of Pakistani Citizenship

It is the documentation of the actual aftershocks of that particular loss that one has to go throughout life which left an insightful effect on me while connecting with much deeper issues of my community.

In this research a major issue of identity crisis is highlighted and most examples are taken from Gwadar since the Bengalis living in Gwadar are unfortunately being neglected and their issues are not being highlighted. In contrast, countless stories, articles and documentaries about Bengalis living in Karachi or other countries can be found easily.

How Bengali Refugees Came To Pakistan (Gwadar)

Most Bengali people are living in Karachi. The reason is that; during the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, numerous Bengalis migrated to the port city of Karachi looking for work. A considerable number of them got jobs in Karachi and set up a good foundation for life.

In a recent article, Rakib Al Hassan mentioned that:

Before 1971, Bengalis were the second largest linguistic community in Karachi. During the British rule, Urdu-speaking traders brought fishermen from the coastal areas of then East Bengal to Karachi because of their fishing skills. The group comprised both Hindus and Muslims. The traders set up fishermen's colonies by the sea during the first half of the twentieth century. The Bengali-speaking fishermen quickly adapted to the environment in Karachi and made it their home. (Rakib Al Hassan June 18, 2021)

In an interview with a senior Bengali citizen of Gwadar, cover name; Muneer Hussain, I found that these people (from Bangladesh) were also good in farming; they were brought in the same time period in Sindh and were allotted lands for farming.

According to some unpublished facts; these people were later deported back to Bangladesh who upon reaching Bangladesh were not allowed to even step out on the land of Bangladesh by the government of that time and were again sent back to Pakistan considering that they were no longer a part of Bangladesh.



Fish market Dim ZIR Gwadar

The biggest of all is the issue of identity and official recognition of Pakistani Citizenship, which means having Pakistani Identity cards

Bengalis who came to Pakistan before 1971 may be somewhat better off, but those who migrated after the fall of Dhaka in 1971 met with difficult circumstances. These Bengalis are yet to receive an official identity card to access the basic services of the Islamic Republic of

Pakistan. Unfortunately the procedure of getting a work permit is also quite complex, as one has to cross several stages, and often have to pay bribes they cannot afford.

Since most Bengalis living in Pakistan lack CNIC, they cannot avail the opportunities mostly Pakistani citizens do. They also do not own any property nor can they get education. Moreover, they do not possess their own houses and live in rented apartments because for owning property there is a need to have an official recognition of citizenship by state.

Furthermore they do not have the right to vote, ultimately lacking access to local politics. Thus local political leaders are least concerned about their common issues. There is also a deficiency of communication and transport between Pakistan and Bangladesh. Therefore these people cannot visit their loved ones nor can they send any gifts and money, vice versa.

Livelihood of Bengalis and Their Problems

Since most Bengali people do not have an official identity card in Pakistan, they are also poor, mostly fishermen or laborers.

Professionally, the Bengali-speaking people of Karachi are mainly involved in the local fisheries. They are also the main driving force in Pakistan's 25 billion rupee fish export sector. Many of them work in ocean-going trawlers. These people are a permanent source of cheap labour in the economic life of Karachi. Lack of citizenship certificates makes it easier for employers to defraud them. The absence of birth registration certificates (known as B-form) has hampered the education of many and without a computerized National ID Card (CNIC), they are barred from matching requirements of high-paid jobs.

Furthermore, Bengalis live in overpopulated slums, the environment is very dirty. These slums are uninhabitable and do not have electricity. The city civic body supplies drinking water only once a day. As the younger generation cannot pursue higher education, they have to work in grocery stores or sell vegetables on the roadside.

Resultantly, many people migrated to Gwadar for better opportunities and source of income. Gwadar was less populated at that time and was far easier to live here in comparison to Karachi. They did not face any sort of discrimination in Gwadar and can easily work with the local people of Gwadar, mostly fishing. However, the core issues

remain the same, of identity. They were still officially not recognized by the state as citizens.

Discriminated By Colour and Racism

Being minorities in Gwadar they are targeted because of their black complexion. However, there exist other black people too. This discrimination has been started from the partition of East and West Pakistan.

In an article Kari B. Jensen, has discussed about the variation of complexion from light to dark among Bengali people.

However, the historical origins of the Bengali people are diverse because of **migration streams, trade routes and invasions during thousands of years**. As a result, skin colouring varies greatly within the Bengali population, from white to dark brown. Even among siblings, skin tone can vary significantly. (Jensen 2020)¹

On the other hand female Bengalis were initially suspected of being prostitutes, the character assassination happened even in schools, and universities by fellow students and staff at times. They were looked down upon with subtle ways of humiliation (further discussed in later interview section). Whereas in the same region 5% of some educated Baloch families were getting married to Bengali girls because of their talent and loyalty.

I tried to interview some people in Gwadar from the Bengali community, how they came from Bangladesh and how they survived, but most were reluctant to talk much in fear of the unknown.

Miss Sadia Rafiq (cover name) a 60 to 67 years old Bengali lady is among the brave ones who spoke. She has been living there since 1973. She lost her family in 1970 and misleadingly moved to Pakistan with some people of brothels when she was about 10 to 11 years old for a better life. After coming here, she was stuck in Karachi for 3 years and then was moved to Gwadar where she realized that she was misguided and she had nowhere to go.

Sadia Rafiq: I was very young when I came to Gwadar. People used to give strange and discriminatory looks because they believe we were

¹Jensen, Kari B. "Colorism in Bangladeshi Society." June 2020.

of lower cast and Hindus who clean wastes. I also wore 'Sadhi' just like Hindu community. They used to call us Hindu and Bhangi (someone who cleans wastes), I did not like that. Sometimes they also called us prostitutes. Then, I stopped wearing 'Sadhi' and hated being called Bengali , because of this discriminatory behaviour. Then I got married. Thing became a little good. My husband had a business. But still we did not have a CNIC because of that we could not buy our own house, we used to live in rented apartments. After, a lot of hurdles and paying bribes to officials finally our CNIC were made. Like us, many families also migrated from Karachi to Gwadar for better lives and CNIC. Today, I have my own house and I have made extra rooms. The rooms are used to Bengali migrants who come to Gwadar for CNIC. Some of these female migrants give home tuition while their men working in fisheries. Earlier, in Gwadar there were no issues just like card everyone worked without CNIC but these days' people without CNIC are being watched out. However, Bengali people still work for their survival. Sometimes like nomads they move to towns for work and earning. Today, some people still do not like us in Gwadar. Firstly, being experts in fishing, local fishermen do not like this. Secondly, they call us Bengali in a tone with loath if it's a derogatory word .

This is the story of every second migrated person like Sadia and Rafiq

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1. Their home and life



2.



Constitution :

When we talk about identity, we can't ignore the main and political issue where identity needs proof to show your permanency or existence through National Identity Card (NIC). The biggest problem refugees are facing. Let's see what constitutional laws are.

According to constitution and law

", 1. Citizenship by birth. - (I) Every person born in Pakistan after the commencement of this Act shall be a citizen of Pakistan by birth if

(a) Any one of the parent of the person was, at the time of birth a citizen of Pakistan or a permanent resident of Pakistan; or:

(b) He has been ordinarily residing in Pakistan. For the period of ten years commencing from the date of his birth.²

Question arises here, if they have the right to get citizenship according to law then what is the main reason they are not being granted?

The immigration policy of Pakistan allows immigrants in the country on the basis of humanitarian grounds. The people who fled their regions due to war to save their lives especially in the case of Bengali

² Riaz Fatyana, "further to amend the Pakistan Citizenship Act. 1951", *BILL*, 1951, 01.

refugees and Afghans. The Bengalis after partition have lived long here but still there are unrecognized as citizens. They don't pose an identity here

The Government has each and every record of a single person then it should investigate and arrest those people who are actually involved in crime or enemy of Pakistan but unfortunately victims are those who are innocent.

These days the Bengali population of Karachi are demanding citizenship while they have lived here for more than 40 years but still not considered as citizens and are not given CNICs and passports. In this regard PM Imran Khan also emphasized on the grant of proper citizenship as they have lived most of their lives here and children who grew up here still lack identity. Despite that 99 percent Bengali and other families have no identity yet or their CNIC has been blocked.

These points are conclusions of various Bengali people which are based on observation and in-depth, in-person interviews with middle-class women and men in Gwadar. They were asked to share their own perceptions and experiences of being minorities.

- Without NIC they cannot make the B-form of their children and can't get admissions in schools.
- If in any condition they complete their schooling with great marks but can't continue their further studies, they are just hapless.
- Most people cannot find a good job.
- Some families are dying to meet their loved ones who were lost during partition but can't even go to other countries.
- They cannot travel even within Pakistan because you need to show NIC for security in every check post. This act is for our security of the nation but poor innocent people who can't raise their voice are facing.
- Offering Hajj and Umrah is just a dream for them. During the interview I felt tears in their eyes ready to flow down. They were full of emotions.
- Concept of home is a feeling of relaxation, shelter, security and permanence but they are deprived of this blessing because they can't even register their home for themselves.
- Can't purchase mobile SIM card or any other gadgets that need to be registered by NIC, account etc.

- For the sake of money some average officers do harass by calling them to head offices and do queries and blackmail them to take money.
- I found some victimized people who live in Karachi. Their lives are more difficult, a term I heard “bhatta khori” is very common in Karachi. It means if a victim person start any kind of their own business that battakhor people (a group of gang that citizen of Pakistan) demand money from them to continue, if they refuse them they kill or damage their business. Some people for this cause also moved to Gwadar.

Conclusion

I have talked to many people and this research concludes that the main issue remains the “CNIC”. There are nearly 2% people who have CNIC while 98% still lack CNIC. Their daily life is impacted due to lack of CNIC. They are psychologically disturbed. Bengali girls were initially seen as lower class and prostitutes but this behaviour is changed with time. However, collective discrimination of Bengali people still remains there. Mostly these people are working in fishing and factories. Some of the educated females are giving home tuitions to help their partners and fulfil their livelihoods.

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