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Cultural Integration of Afghan Refugees in India

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Abstract: This paper studies the cultural integration of the refugees of Afghanistan in India, which focuses on the way of their dealing with identity, adaptation and belonging through everyday practices. Through primary data collection from 203 refugees who are living in Delhi, the research finds out four important indicator of cultural Integration that includes language learning, clothing, food and marriage norms within the social and cultural context of the host society. Structured questionnaire and descriptive statistical analysis through SPSS is used to apply Ager and Strang's (2008) Indicator of Integration framework to assess the identity continuation, social connection and cultural facilitators of the refugees. Findings show that language acquisition has a key role in access to work, communication and social participation. Although there is challenges of language for elders and those how come from limited educational backgrounds, most of the respondents are talking about their fluency and proficiency in Hindi and English. Clothing acts as a symbol for cultural preservation and also strategic adaptation, where refugees are wearing both Indian and Afghanistan's style to keep the balance and acceptance. Through food they show their cultural flexibility in which they keep their traditions as well as change the recipes with Indian taste and share food with Indian neighbors. Marriage norms underlines a concern between openness and endogamy among the families which shows some changes in social values due to long period of displacement. Generally, the study highlights that cultural integration of the refugees of Afghanistan in India is neither a complete assimilation nor totally exclusion. It is a dynamic process which they form based on the opportunity and structure of the host society. This study provides a meaningful overview about the refugee integration in South, and underscores the everyday practice as an important pathway to cultural preservation and social inclusion.

Keywords: Afghanistan,refugee, cultural integration, identity, language, food, clothes, marriage.

Introduction - One of today's global order's characteristics is refugee movement and forced displacement that changes cultures, societies and policies across regions (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). Among displaced groups, the adaptation process for refugees are more complex as they try to find safety, while at the same time deal with cultural maintenance and social belonging in the new society. Cultural integration, especially through language acquisition, everyday practices and social interactionplays a key role in determining refugees' long-term well-being and participation in host communities (Ager & Strang, 2008). In the context of South Asia, India is an important destination for refugees from Afghanistan since a very long time back; however, it remained understudied. Thus, examining the cultural integration of Afghan refugees is necessary and timely.

Afghanistan's citizens are experiencing displacement due to several decades of war, political instability, intervention of foreign countries, and of course change of regime that took place once again in 2021 with return of Taliban to power. Because of these reasons, constant waves of the country's citizens are seeking refuge for protection in neighboring and distant countries, including India (UNHCR, 2023). Although India is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention like many Western countries, it has hosted various groups of refugees under ad hoc humanitarian arrangements (Bose, 2020). Refugees from Afghanistan, especially those who are living in Delhi, has a special socio-legal status, which often rely on informal network, community solidarity and cultural resources to handle their daily life. In this context, cultural integration is mostly about daily practices of life, adaptation and negotiation, and less about formal policy framework.

According to Berry, cultural integration refers to the vibrant process of refugee's engagement with cultural values and norms of the host society while at the same time maintaining their original cultural identity (Berry, 1997). Contemporary scholars emphasizing that unlike assimilation, integration is a two-way and multi-faceted

process that makes it possible to preserve cultural identity alongside adapting the new culture (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). Cultural integration for refugee communities embeds in the daily practices of life like language use, food, clothing and the norms among families, which form the feelings of acceptance, belonging and inclusion.

The key elements of integration is language, which enables the refugees to have access to work, education, health services and social networks (Ager & Strang, 2008). Being proficient in host country's language, promotes level of communication with local population, facilitates public participation, and reduces social isolation. In countries like India which multi-languages like Hindi, English and other regional languages are spoken, language acquisition can be considered both as opportunities and challenges for Afghanistan's refugees. While learning English may ease communication for some, limited access to formal language instruction and differences in the structure of languages may be a challenge for effective integration (Bloch, 2008). The perception of language acquisition among refugees as a means of empowerment or source of stress, impact their integration seriously.

Another important element of cultural integration is clothing. It is expressed through visible practices of daily life and functions not only as an identity marker but also as a site of negotiation between social adaptation and cultural preservation (Entwistle, 2015). For the refugees of Afghanistan, traditional dress functions as an important sign of resistance to cultural erasure and preserving their own culture. Also wearing traditional attire in public spaces attract unwanted attention, stereotyping or discrimination that influence their decision on adapting to the clothing style of the host society. These choices show a bigger concern between achieving social acceptance within host society and preserving cultural heritage.

Food is another important aspect of cultural integration, which closely linked to identity, memory and social belonging (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013). For Afghan refugees, preparing and consuming their traditional dishes allow them to preserve their cultural bonds and have the sense of home in a foreign land. However, having access to authentic ingredients in the local markets might be a serious challenge for them. Taking and using the Indian ingredients with Afghanistan's recipes show how they negotiate with cultural maintenance creatively in the new context. In addition to that, sharing food with the Indian neighbors can help them promote trust, intercultural understanding, better social interaction and social cohesion (Wessendorf, 2014).

Another key factor of cultural integration, especially with the diasporic communities is marriage. The practice of marriage mainly happen in cultural expectation, kinship structure and moral values, which often functions as a group identity mechanism (Kofman, 2004). Afghan refugee's preferences are endogamous marriage, arranged-marriage system and inter-community partnership for the purpose of cultural continuation. At the same time, because of spending long time in India, their idea might have changed regarding the marriage, and the idea of intercultural marriage and changes in gender roles are acceptable for them. These changes show that how the host society's culture can influence on the marriage norms and intimate social institutions of the refugees.

This paper examines the cultural integration of Afghan refugees in India with focus on four important factors: language use, clothing, food habits and marriage norms. It is based on the field survey data which studies the daily life practices of refugees rather than relying on abstract policy framework. The questionnaire based approach enables it to capture and gain first-hand information about the integration assessment, challenges and adaptation of refugees. By showing the real lived experience of refugees, this study contributes meaningfully to understand integration, which is a negotiated process, formed by structural barriers and cultural institutions.

For doing this, the paper engages with Ager and Strang's (2008) influential "Indicators of Integration" framework, particularly the domains of social connection, facilitators (language and cultural knowledge), and identity. While the framework has been widely applied in Western contexts, its application to the Indian setting gives valuable insights into how integration happens in non-signatory, Global South host countries. The findings aim to enrich sociological debates on refugee integration, diaspora adaptation and cultural resilience, while also informing policy discussions on refugee inclusion in India.

Literature Review

One of the main dimension of refugee settlement, which build everyday interactions, social belonging and long-lasting inclusion in the host society, is cultural integration. For refugees, integration is more than an economic and structural process; it is a very deep cultural process that include language acquisition, adapting to social norms, negotiating identity and preserving of cultural heritage (Berry, 1997; Ager & Strang, 2008). Afghan refugees in India forms a different diaspora community whose cultural integration unfolds in a country which is not signatory of refugee conventions. In this country which is multilingual and culturally diverse, they build a historically people to people connection between Indian and Afghanistan (Bose, 2020; Oberoi, 2022).

Mainly the existing studies on Afghan refugee and displacement has paid attention on issues like security, legal status and humanitarian protection, and a very limited work has been done on cultural integration and daily life of refugees, especially in the context of South Asian host countries (Monsutti, 2005; Chatty, 2017). This paper attempts to fill this gap by studying the language use, food, dress, and marriage norms among Afghan refugees in India, which are the key factors of cultural integration. Using the

questionnaire based approach, makes it possible to understand how refugees balance between the adaptations to Indian culture while simultaneously preserve their own cultural identity.

Conceptualizing Cultural Integration: Integration is generally considered as a dynamic and multi-directional process rather than a one-way assimilation to the host society (Castles et al., 2014). Ager and Strang's (2008) important framework recognize social connection, facilitator and foundations as key domain of integration. In this method, cultural understanding and language are the main facilitators which makes the participation in economic, civil and social life possible.

According to Berry's (1997) theory of acculturation, migrants and refugees take various strategies of integration, separation, assimilation or marginalization which that depends on their ability and desire to maintain their original culture and associate with the host society's culture as well. Thus, cultural integration does not really mean the loss of their own culture, but it is an effort to keep their culture and while at the same time adjust to the culture of the host country.

In India's context, cultural integration is built by language diversity, pluralism and informal social interaction instead of formal integration program which is led by the state (Oberoi, 2022).In this case, Afghan refugees should handle the situation and consider language proficiency and social adjustment more essential as they do not have a formal refugee status,

Language, Cultural Knowledge and Everyday Interaction: Language acquisition is considered as one of the most important indicators of refugee integration (Esser, 2006; Ager & Strang, 2008). Being proficient in the language of host society enable the refugees to have access to work, education and social networks. On the other hand not being proficient in the language of host society cause them dependency and isolation (Phillimore, 2012). For Afghan refugees in Delhi and Hyderabad, Hindi and English proficiency is satisfactory and decrease in isolation has been shown (Panjabi & Rajan, 2019). However, this language acquisition is not the same for all. Younger people can easily learn the local language and content which is produced in media, but older people attempt to speak in their own languages like Dari and Pashto for emotional continuity (Farooqui, 2020).

Based on studies, participating in language classes and the frequent use of the local language in every day settings speed up the social confidence and cultural familiarity (Kleist, 2018). At the same time, refugees often face challenges and barriers in the lack of formal guidance, age-related learning obstacles and psychological stress that make language learning difficult (UNHCR, 2013). The idea about language proficiency not only impacts functionbenefits positively, but also acceptance within the host society.

Cultural Practices, Dress and Identity Negotiation: Cultural integration involves continuous negotiation between adaptation and visibility. Dress particularly functions as a visible markers of difference and identity (Goffman, 1963). Traditional Afghan clothing allows Afghan refugees to preserve their culture and show ethnic identity, particularly in the context of diaspora (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002). But it can also face refugees to unwanted discrimination, stereotype and attention.

Studies show that migrants often select context dependent strategies and wear their traditional attire in private or community spaces, while adapt to the clothing style in public to avoid social exclusion (Anthias, 2012). Adapting the dress to the host society facilitate social acceptance and decease everyday tension, but at the same time increase the internal tension about their identity preservation.

Access to those cloths which are culturally important, further impacts the identity preservation. Limitation in availability of Afghan clothing strengthen the feelings of cultural loss and displacement in the host society, especially among older and women refugee members (Chatty, 2017). Therefore, clothes choosing are not merely aesthetic but also shows a powerful linkage to belonging, identity and cultural preservation.

Food Practices and Cultural Belonging: Food plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural memory and social connection within refugee communities (Sutton, 2001). Consumption and preparation of Afghan traditional food enable refugees to rebuild a sense of home and pass this knowledge to next generations (Longhurst et al., 2017). From another side, limited access to the authentic ingredients for making Afghan food products can weaken this cultural continuity. Because of limited access to authentic Afghan ingredients in India, refugees adapt traditional Indian recipes as an alternative (Rahimi & Sinha, 2020). This adaptation is what Bourdieu (1990) calls it "cultural improvisation" that keep cultural heritage and at the same time facilitate daily survival.

Scholars consider food sharing as a powerful tool for social bridging, promoting trust and intercultural interaction between host society and refugees (Wise, 2011). Sharing and exchanging food with Indian neighbors by Afghan refugees is usually underlined as a means of social connection and mutual understanding (Nair, 2021). At the same time, using Indian ingredients for making Afghan dishes show hybridztion of culture rather than cultural loss. This method of preparing food reflects integration among refugees while maintaining their own culture as well (Bhabha, 1994). Access and absence of Afghan cuisine in the local Indian markets significantly impact the sense of cultural belonging and emotional well-being of the refugees, especially in their daily life practices.

Marriage Norms, Family and Cultural Continuity: Marriage arrangement is one of the most important cultural institutions among refugees that functions as mechanisms

for social cohesion and preserving cultural norms (Kofman, 2004). For Afghan refugees, marriage within their own ethnic community is frequently seen, and considered this is very important for preserving cultural traditions, religious and language values.

Among the Afghan refugees, the common type of marriage is arranged marriage which shows the continuation of pre-migration norms (Monsutti, 2005). However, exposure to the host community and long period of displacement can bring gradual changes in their perception about marriage, gender role and selection of partner. Based on studies, migration often brings gradual changes in family practices rather than a complete transformation (Charsley, 2012).

Intercultural marriages may still face resistance because of concerns about the community acceptance and cultural differences, though it is increasingly seen in diaspora settings. Endogamous marriage preference among the diaspora communities imply continuous efforts for preserving cultural identity, even if they adapt to the larger social norms within the host society.

Methodology: This study uses quantitative method to examine the cultural integration of Afghan refugees in India. It main focus is on language learning, food habits, dress and marriage norms. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire to find out the respondents' experience and attitudes of integration in the Indian society. Places like Lajpat Nagar, Bhogal, Ashram, Tilak Nagar and Malviya Nagar in Delhi where mostly Afghan refugees are residing were selected as the research areas. The study population included those who lived in India at least for two years to make sure enough cultural exposure. Purposive sampling is used and a total number of 203 respondents were selected based on the relevance and consent, ensuring the ethical matters of the research.

The questionnaire contains a total of 21 items that include the key aspects of cultural integration like language proficiency (Hindi, English and regional languages) dressing, food habits, and perception towards inter and intra-community marriages. Responses were rated based on five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree). To make sure that the questionnaire was clear and understandable, both languages of English and Dari/Persian were used to allow respondents to choose their preferred language.

All data were collected in person and through a face to face interaction with respondents. Every participant was informed about the objectives of the study, confidentiality, anonymity and their voluntary participation in the whole process of data collection. Ethical guidelines were seriously follow during the study to consider sensitivity to percipients' refugee status and cultural dignity.

For analysing the data, the tool Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) is used. Descriptive statics like frequencies, percentage, means and median are applied to summarize demographic information and cultural integration patterns. The analysed data underlined the adaptation trends, preservation of Afghan cultural identity and the challenges they faced in social and cultural integration. Overall, this methodology gives a precise, clear, systematic and ethical framework for studying and evaluating the cultural integration experiences of Afghan refugees in India.

Findings and Analysis: This part summarizes the key findings on the cultural integration of Afghan refugees in India based on data collected through questionnaires. It examines how refugees integrate into Indian society through indicators such as language use, clothing, cuisine and intermarriage.

Table 1: Demographic Background

No.	Variable	Category	N	%	Total
1	Gender	Male	132	65.0	203
		Female	71	35.0	
2	Age	Below 18	5	2.5	203
		19-30	96	47.3	
		31-40	61	30.0	
		41-50	31	15.3	
		51-60	10	4.9	
3	Marital Status	Single	111	54.7	203
		Married	92	45.3	
4	Religion	Muslim	197	197	203
		Sikh	2	2	
		Other	4	4	
5	Education	No Formal Education	50	24.6	203
		School Student	27	13.3	
		Under Graduate	64	31.5	
		Post Graduate	44	21.7	
		Ph.D.	7	3.4	
		Other	11	5.4	
6	Year of Residency in India	Below 5 Years	51	25.1	203
		6-10 Years	140	69.0	
		11-15 Years	9	4.4	
		Above 16 Years	3	1.5	

The respondents profile shows that 65% of participants are male and 35% female. Most are young and economically active, aged 19–30 (47.3%) or 31–40 (30%). Over half are single (54.7%), and 45.3% are married. They are predominantly Muslim with a small number of Sikh and other groups. Education levels are different, which 24.6% from no formal schooling to higher education, 31.5% undergraduate and 21.7% are postgraduates. Majority of them have lived in India for 6-10 years which indicate their long term settlement and cultural integration.

Table 2 (see in last page)

The findings from the table 2 show that language plays a key role for Afghan refugees to integrate into Indian society. Most of the respondents said about their proficiency in Hindi, English and other regional languages. It is almost three-quarters of respondents that their responses are

agree and strongly agree. This emphasizes the important function of language skills that are essential for employment, communication and social interaction. The small number of strongly disagreement indicates that language barrier exists for a minority of respondents.

More than fifty percent of the respondents had taken language classes since their arrival in India which show their effort for language adaptation. However, for those who had not taken such kind of classes, it implies unequal opportunities because of financial issues, time barriers or lack of institutional support that my cause their integration to slow down for some groups. Using the Indian languages in daily life, received the strongest positive responses that more than four-fifths said they are using regularly. It underlines that language learning in daily life has promoted interaction across ethnic lines, social inclusion and trust within the host society.

Nevertheless, for a big number of respondents learning local language is a challenge, which shows language adaptation is not very simple, particularly for adults and elderly group who are dealing with multilingual environment. The high level of proficiency and continuous obstacles for some of respondents highlights that integration is slow and gradual process that is formed by education, background and duration of staying time in India. Majority of respondents reported that language ability directly promote integration, and this is supporting the perception that language functions as connector to employment, social connection and institutional participation. Nearly all respondents agreed that successful integration requires learning local languages. Overall, it shows that Afghan refugees in India are strongly motivated toward language and social integration, though it is important to have accesses and availability in language learning programs easily.

Another indicator for studying cultural integration is clothing. For Afghan refugees in India it is a way of negotiating identity, visibility and being accepted in daily life. Clothing functions both as symbol of cultural maintenance and flexible tool of adaptation. 69.5% percent of respondents agreed that traditional Afghan clothes help them preserve their cultural identity and by this express their identity belonging in a diasporic world. A high number of 72.9% said that they feel comfortable while wear their traditional clothes in public areas, which shows the tolerant social environment in India that visible cultural differences do not cause isolation and exclusion. The small number of disagreement, reveals that self-expression of Afghan identity in public is generally accepted.

Similarly, a high number of respondents (61.1%) believe that adapting their drees to Indian design and norms facilitate integration, underlining a system of outward adjustment practice for refugees to build inclusion and social acceptance. The 28.1% percent of neutral responses shows variation across personal and situational context. Access to traditional clothing does not seem to a big problem. A number of 40.4% disagree responses show that thy face difficulty finding traditional Afghan dressing in the local market. Discrimination is not reported very prevailing. 45.3% of respondents show their disagreement about Afghan clothes that attract bias. There might be some feeling of discomfort, but clothing is not mainly the reason for exclusion. Generally, clothing functions both the roles of culture maintenance from one side and promoting adaptation on the other. Afghan refugees found the balance of keeping their cultural identity and blending it with contextual adjustment which is necessary for coexistence without a cultural loss.

Food as one another important indicator of cultural integration. It shows that Afghan refugees in India balanced between their cultural preservation and adaptation in their daily life and use the food as an identity marker from one side and as connector to integration from another. Three-fourth of the respondents reported that prepare their traditional Afghan food, which this highlights food as a key player for maintaining cultural identity, particularly when other markers are too much. Home-made food helps them keep their traditions, collective memory and a self of self-expression. At the same time, finding the Afghanistan's ingredients for most of the respondents is a big challenge. Many of them disagree that obtaining Afghan food products is difficult, which shows in the urban market they can find what need of the markets offer alternative for them. This material support by the host society helps not only cultural continuity but also lower their integration stress.

Moreover, food support social interaction. Nearly half of the participants talk about sharing Afghan food with their Indian neighbors and friends, which help them build good connection. Neutral responses by some of the respondents indicate that food sharing with neighbors and friends, depends on their social openness. But the positive impact shows food as welcoming and non-threatening way to bridge cultures. Also, it shows that because of the limited availability of Afghan cuisine in the market, their sense of belonging is not weakened. Most of the respondents show their disagreement or neutrality, which shows that belonging has its roots in home practices and community network rather than market access. It underlines the flexibility and of the refugees to maintain their identity beyond the structural barriers.

There is a very clear sign of adaptive integration is the prevalent agreement that changing Afghan recipes with Indian ingredients allows cultural heritage to thrive while adjusting to local life. This hybridization keeps traditions sustaining through strategic adaptation instead of resisting and accepting full assimilation. Overall, Afghan refugees in India kept a good balance of cultural preservation and modification for their integration. Food serves a role of collective identity symbol and at the same time as a tool for cultural negotiation and social connection.

The findings on marriage as another marker of cultural

integration shows a complex balance between preservation and adaptation among Afghan refugees in India. Most of the respondents agree with endogamous marriage and marrying to someone from their ethnic group as it help them keep their cultural identity, value and kinship connection. The scores of mean and median further confirm this collective tendency toward cultural preservation. About arranged marriage the attitude is contradictory. While many respondents support this as a community practice, the biggest number of them stay neutral, which shows they have different views, particularly the young and educated generations who are influenced by the host society's norms. This neutrality is sign of coexistence between tradition and emerging preferences that shows a transitional phase.

Views on intercultural marriage received very cautious responses. More than half of the respondents remain neutral, which implies such kind of attitude is neither accepted nor rejected, but it seems sensitive and dependent on the context. Neutrality might be a sign of ambiguity that they have fear of cultural dilution or are concerned about acceptance rather than refusal. From another side, a high number of respondents agreed that marriage expectations have changed since their living in India, and it reflects that interacting and being in touch with Indians influenced their perception about choosing partner, gender role and marriage norms. But still there is a high preference of partner selection from their own ethnic community, which underlines the importance of their shared culture and religion. At the same time, neutral responses and lower number of disagreement reflect the individual's independence in such kind of choices. Overall, marriage among Afghan refugees in India functions as a factor of cultural negotiation. No doubt that integration is not a complete assimilation, but it is a strategic and selective adaptation that core values are kept among the families, while the reinterpretation from the traditions also slowly transformed through interactions with the host society.

Discussion: The findings of the study on the Cultural Integration of Afghan Refugees in India reflects a comprehensive understanding about how Afghan refugees navigate identity, belonging and adaptation within the Indian society.

Through the key cultural factors of language, clothing, food and marriage norms the findings reflect that Afghan refugees have a keen desire for integration in the India society while at the same time maintain their own cultural identity very actively. They findings bring out that integration is not a direct process of assimilation but it is a balance between cultural preservation and adaptation that are impacted by social acceptance, individual agency and provided opportunities.

Language is one of the most important indicators that make Afghan refugees able to have meaningful connections within the host society. Majority of the respondents reported about their proficiency in Hindi, English of another local languages, which underscores the importance of language ability for work, communication and social participation. Using the Indian languages in their daily life shows that language has become a means of social trust and daily interaction for them. However, there are a few respondents who are facing language barriers, especially those who are coming up with new scripts or have limited access to learning opportunities. It reveals that while linguistic integration is becoming better, but still remains unequal process that is formed by availability to resources, level of education and staying time. The active participation of Afghan refugees in learning classes show their strong tendency for inclusion, which is suggesting language learning is not only a skill but also as a way of for opening the door of dignity, social acceptance and a sense of belonging in the host society.

Clothing as another factor of cultural expression shows a sophisticated navigation between adaptation and identity preservation. Majority of the participants talk about their traditional attire as a pride and feel comfortable in public, which show the acceptance of cultural diversity in India. This acceptance and tolerance functions as two processes. From one side, it allows the refugees to keep their cultural self-expression; on the other hand, adjusting to the social environment outwardly. In the finding more than sixty percent show agreement on adjusting their clothing style with the India design. It shows their flexibility that preserve their cultural heritage and blend with the cultural norms of the host society to adjust with the local expectations. Lower number of responses about discrimination reflect that clothing functions as tool for social connection and self-affirmation. Therefore, cultural integration is not about losing one's own culture, but about adjustment and evolvement the culture of the host society.

Food gives further insight about how Afghan refugees maintain their cultural identity through daily practices. The high number of responses in preparing traditional Afghan dishes underlines the important role of food as a vital connection to homeland, memory and cultural identity. Being able to find the Afghan ingredients without any serious challenges in Indian markets reflect that role of diaspora networks and urban infrastructure in facilitating cultural continuity. Also, food functions as social bridge which promotes the informal space for mutual respect and intercultural understanding through sharing Afghan dishes with Indian neighbors and friends. The combination of Afghan recipes with Indian ingredients highlights a creative adaptation of Afghan refugees in which they preserve their culture in a novel way. Through this culinary negotiation it can be understood that integration is not about losing their roots, but it is about evolving our culture in a new environment.

Marriage norms show the most complicated interplay of integration and adaptation. The preference for inter-ethnic group marriage demonstrate a continuing effort for

preserving cultural traditions, norms and community cohesion. However, willingness toward arranged marriages and intercultural unions shows transformation. Neutral responses show that tendencies toward intercultural marriage has interpreted cautiously. While maintaining cultural boundaries, they are increasingly exposed to diverse perspectives and transformed gender roles within Indian society. Changes in marriage expectations since their settlement in India implies a gradual transformation in family values that are influenced by cross-cultural linkages and generation shifts. Thus, marriage among Afghan refugees functions as a tool for cultural maintenance and a space where slow adaptation happens.

Overall, the discussion shows that Afghan refugees in India are active agent of integration rather than a passive receiver of change. They kept a balance between their cultural preservation and context flexibility to show that integration is successful when both belonging and self-preservation are allowed. The findings suggest that considering an appropriate social policy, especially one which provides equitable access to language learning and community support can further support this process. In the experience of Afghan refugees, integration is not loss of identity, but is rebuilding of it in the pluralistic and diverse social fabric of the host society.

Conclusion: They study on Cultural Integration of Afghan refugees in India shows integration is a complex, multifaceted and an ongoing process that find its root in daily practices instead of institutional framework. By analysing of language, clothing, food and marriage traditions, this research highlights how Afghan refugees deal with cultural preservation and adaptation in India's diverse socio-cultural society. The findings show that cultural integration among Afghan refugees is well balanced between full assimilation and rigid separation. The dynamic interaction is formed by social support, individual agency and the informal acceptance structure of the host society. Language seems the most important and effective factor of integration. Being proficient in Hindi, English or other regional languages promotes their ability to communicate, find jobs and make social connection. While language challenges is there, especially for older category and less educated members most of them have very strong desire in learning and using local languages. They consider it crucial for their acceptance, freedom and dignity. This underscores the importance of language learning opportunities as a symbolic and practical way of inclusion. Cultural expression through dress among Afghan refugees shows that they have an effective balance between their cultural heritage and adaptation. Most of them continue to wear their traditional attire for expressing their identity, while also taking the Indian styles to show belonging and decrease social exclusion in public spaces. Low frequency of discrimination about clothes highlights the tolerance of India's social environment and culture, where new and difference culture are accepted. This reflect that the prevailing way of integration is cultural coexistence.

The practice of food makes it further clear that Afghan refugees creatively preserve their culture while at the same time associate with the host society's culture. Preparing traditional food and sharing with Indian neighbors not only maintain cultural heritage, but also strengthens intercultural understand and social ties. Taking Afghan recipes and using India ingredients signals a hybrid cultural identity that developed without losing its roots. Adaptation of such of culinary demonstrates flexibility of refugees to redefine their identity through daily cultural practices of life.

Marriage norms show a slow movement but considerable site of transformation. Arranged marriage and endogamy are the prevalent way to preserve their faith, language and family traditions. However, staying for a long period of time in India and being exposure to Indian society, brought some flexibilities toward their attitudes, especially among younger generations. The increasing openness toward intercultural marriage and changing the roles of gender show a gradual shifts in values and indicate that how cultural preservation and change coexist within the diaspora settings.

Overall, this study sums up that the cultural integration of Afghan refugees in India is characterized by strategic adaptation, agency and negotiated belonging. Afghan refugees do not forget their cultural identity, but instead redefine in alignment to the pluralistic context of Indian culture and society. Their experiences show that integration is more successful when refugees are empowered in their adaptation and host society provide space for cultural diversity. Promoting community initiatives, language programs and intercultural dialogue can deepen the process of integration and make sure that cultural integration is a two-way process for enriching both the host society and refugees.

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Indicator	Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean
language	I am proficient in Hindi, English, or other regional languages of India.	37.4	36.5	10.8	14.3	1.0	2.00	1
	I have attended language classes since arriving in India.	18.7	41.4	8.9	23.6	7.4	2.00	2
	I frequently use Indian languages in my daily interactions.	42.4	39.9	10.8	6.9	0.0	2.00	1
	I have faced significant challenges in learning the local language.	21.2	30.5	17.7	24.6	5.9	2.00	2
	My proficiency in the local language positively affects my ability to integrate into Indian society.	28.6	50.7	15.8	4.4	.5	2.00	2
	I believe that learning the local language is important for my integration into Indian society.	36.9	55.2	6.9	1.0	0.0	2.00	2
Clothes	Wearing traditional Afghan clothing helps me maintain my cultural identity while living in India.	33.5	36.0	20.7	8.9	1.0	2.00	2
	I feel comfortable wearing traditional Afghan attire in public spaces in India.	31.5	41.4	18.7	8.4	0.0	2.00	2
	Adapting my clothing style to Indian culture has helped me integrate better into the local community.	22.2	38.9	28.1	9.9	1.0	2.00	2
	I face challenges in accessing or purchasing traditional Afghan clothing in India.	18.7	21.7	19.2	32.0	8.4	3.00	4
	Wearing traditional Afghan clothing often attracts unwanted attention or discrimination in my current community.	7.4	17.2	30.0	31.5	13.8	3.00	4
Food	I regularly prepare traditional Afghan dishes at home as a way to preserve my cultural identity.	32.0	44.8	15.8	6.9	.5	2.00	2
	I find it challenging to access authentic Afghan ingredients or food products in India.	10.8	22.2	17.7	37.4	11.8	3.00	4
	Sharing Afghan food with Indian neighbors or friends has helped me build social connections.	21.2	33.5	29.6	12.3	3.4	2.00	2
Food	The lack of availability of Afghan cuisine in local markets impacts my sense of cultural belonging.	9.9	22.7	26.6	32.5	8.4	3.00	4
Marriage	Adapting Afghan recipes using Indian ingredients allows me to maintain my cultural heritage while adjusting to life in India.	28.1	41.9	23.2	5.4	1.5	2.00	2
	Marriage within one's ethnic group is important to preserve cultural traditions.	27.6	34.0	27.1	8.4	3.0	2.00	2
	Arranged marriages are viewed as a preferred practice within my community.	24.6	21.7	36.9	12.8	3.9	3.00	3
	Intercultural marriages are generally accepted within the Afghan diaspora community.	11.3	20.2	51.2	15.3	2.0	3.00	3
	Cultural expectations regarding marriage have changed since living in India.	13.8	38.4	33.5	11.8	2.5	2.00	2
	I prefer my life partner to be from my own community rather than from the Indian community.	33.0	28.1	24.6	9.9	4.4	2.00	1