

Aspirations and Struggles: The Journey of Refugee Doctors in India's Healthcare System

India, a melting pot of cultures, has long been a refuge for countless individuals seeking safety, dignity, and a chance for a better life. Among them are the remarkable stories of Pakistani Hindu doctors, whose journey from persecution to opportunity paints a vivid picture of India's commitment to humanity and inclusivity.

In a momentous move, a hundred and thirty-two migrant Pakistani Hindu doctors have conquered the National Medical Commission (NMC) exam, a gateway to realising their dreams of practicing medicine in India. Among these skilled professionals, thirty-two have found solace and welcome in Gujarat, where they are poised to contribute to India's healthcare sector.

The Indian government's unwavering support for these qualified medical professionals is nothing short of awe-inspiring. With gratitude and hope, they recently gathered to express their appreciation to Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, recognising the government's crucial role in enabling their integration into Indian society.

The heartwarming journey of these doctors is a testament to the strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Dr. Dashrath Kumar's tale of perseverance is particularly inspiring. Arriving in India from Pakistan in 2006, he faced numerous challenges before becoming an Indian citizen in 2016. Unfazed by hardships, he dedicated eight months to prepare for the NMC exam, and today, he stands proud as the owner of his own medical clinic.

In a similar vein, Dr. Om Prakash Rathi's pursuit of his medical aspirations was nothing short of remarkable. Having arrived in India in 2007 and obtaining Indian citizenship in 2016, he worked tirelessly as an assistant in a private hospital, all while preparing for the NMC exam. His dedication bore fruit, proving that resilience and determination know no bounds.

The story of Dr. Rajkumar Jesrani further illustrates the triumph of hope over adversity. After coming to India in 2009 and finally being granted citizenship in 2016, Dr. Jesrani can now fulfill his lifelong dream of starting his own medical practice.

India's progressive measures, such as introducing the NMC exam for migrant doctors, demonstrate the nation's commitment to recognising and embracing the talents and skills of those who seek refuge within its borders. By providing a platform for these doctors to contribute to society, India is not just empowering these individuals but also enriching its healthcare landscape.

While India's humanitarian spirit shines through in these success stories, the broader picture of refugees and stateless individuals highlights the need for comprehensive legal protections. India's approach to handling refugees on an ad-hoc basis, without a specific legal framework, often leaves them in a state of uncertainty and vulnerability.

Noorjee Bheel, a Pakistani Hindu doctor whose journey reflects the struggles faced by many other refugees and stateless individuals. He arrived in India in 2004, seeking safety and dignity, only to encounter legal barriers preventing him from realising his medical ambitions. After working briefly with a private hospital in Jodhpur, Noorjee set up a clinic on the outskirts of the city, hoping to fulfill his dream of becoming a registered medical practitioner in India.

However, when the government announced a screening test organised by the National Medical Commission (erstwhile MCI), Noorjee's plans were halted. The medical and health department termed him a "quack" and barred him from running the clinic to sustain his family. Despite pleading

that he was a qualified doctor, showing them his documents, and explaining that he was doing this for a living, his pleas fell on deaf ears, and a case was filed against him.

To appear in the screening test, Noorjee needed Indian citizenship, but his application had been held up due to the ongoing FIRs against him. Despite his efforts, including meeting Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandavia, a resolution seemed elusive.

Noorjee's struggle highlights the challenges faced by many stateless individuals and refugees who lack recognised citizenship in India. Without legal status, they are deprived of essential rights, including access to education, employment, and healthcare. The absence of streamlined procedures for recognising their qualifications further compounds their hardships, preventing them from contributing their expertise to society.

Noorjee's plight underscores the urgent need for comprehensive legal protections for refugees and stateless individuals in India. Their right to live with dignity and practice their chosen profession must be safeguarded. By enacting such laws, India can create a more inclusive society, where dreams are not obstructed by legal complexities, but where the talents and aspirations of all can thrive.

In conclusion, India's journey with refugees stands as a testament to the power of compassion and resilience. The success of Pakistani Hindu doctors in realising their medical aspirations reflects India's commitment to embracing diversity and empowering humanity. Nevertheless, the story of Noorjee Bheel serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges that persist in the absence of comprehensive legal protections. By charting a compassionate and inclusive path, India can truly exemplify the power of unity and lead the way in creating a brighter, more equitable future for all. Upholding the rights of refugees and stateless individuals is not just a humanitarian duty but a step towards building a society that nurtures the potential of all its members, regardless of their background or origins.

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