



The Policy Advocacy team of Asylum Access Thailand (AAT) interviewed Pari, a 17-year old Pakistani refugee who now lives in Bangkok, Thailand, with her mother, two brothers, and two sisters. Currently, she is a member of the Democratic Collective Advocacy project (DCA). In this blog, she shared her journey to Thailand from the country of origin, Pakistan, her life and experience in Bangkok, as well as her work in the DCA project.

Interviewed and written by  
KEITO TAKAHASHI  
Policy Advocacy and  
Communication Assistant  
December 24, 2021



# Refugee Interview

*Pari, DCA Group Member*

## *Pari's Life in Pakistan as A Minority*

Pari was a grade six student in Pakistan when she had to give up her education and flee her country to Bangkok, Thailand, in April 2016 due to a religious issue. She could not practice her religion, Ahmadiyya, which is the minority religious group in Pakistan since the religion was not acknowledged as the national religion of Islam. With the government order to subdue Ahmadiyya, hate crimes that jeopardize Ahmadiyya lives often occurred

Pari's brother was the victim that encountered such a threat. One day, he came home beaten by two men after a religious conflict between Ahmadiyya and another religious group. Pari herself has never faced violence since she lived in and never went out of her Ahmadiyya community, which strictly limited her options in her life.

Some of them were egalitarian, believing all humans are equal. Regrettably, the reality was that the majority of people threatened Ahmadiyya's lives with the belief that Ahmadiyya was not Muslim, which shall get ousted.

## *New Life in Bangkok*

Five years ago, 2016, Pari started her new life in Bangkok, Thailand, and is content with the situation that she can practice her religion without any fear. Nonetheless, although she successfully obtained the UNHCR card approving her refugee status, she still has two significant problems; the absence of work rights and legal status. Her family, community members, and she cannot work in the formal sector due to the lack of work permits and are unable to make earnings for rent, medical services, and food. Even though they could work in the informal sector, sometimes their employers exploited them, refusing to pay wages by taking advantage of their weakness that they do not have legal status and cannot report to the police. Due to the lockdown measure under The COVID-19 outbreak, many in her community lost their jobs in the informal sector that was the only lifeline for them to make little earnings to live.

In daily life, she lives, imagining the authority raids one day, with the fear of being arrested, detained in the immigration detention center, and, worst case, deported. Furthermore, language barriers are another critical issue in communicating with neighboring local Thai communities as well as in education. Notwithstanding the students' willingness, receiving an education is still challenging due to the requirement of Thai proficiency and limited admission. She has also applied to a school so as to continue her education, yet five years have passed since the last response. Even though every child reserves the right to education, not many of them can enjoy decent education for the record as it stands. As such, dozens of issues, which stem from the absence of work rights and legal status, still stand in her way.



***The DCA group provides me with great knowledge and training to become a human rights advocate for my community.***

### *The Democratic Collective Advocacy Project*

Asylum Access Thailand (AAT) launched the Democratic Collective Advocacy (DCA) project in 2020 to gather a group of representatives from refugee communities and train them to be great advocates for their communities regarding human rights issues. In a bid to strengthen the necessary skills and knowledge of being an advocator, it has offered a wide range of advocacy training such as global and Thailand refugee situation, team-building skills, storytelling methods, leadership, power analysis, and stakeholder mapping.

A workshop conducted by AAT in 2020 prefaced Pari's decision to join the DCA group and be a self-human rights advocate. "The DCA group provides helpful and useful information, knowledge, and training to my community," she said. So far, she has learned all about human rights to deal with issues around her. Four Pakistani members, including herself, joined the group and supported learning from one another. After each workshop, she transfers knowledge and lessons to her community members since she believes the key to successful self-advocacy is to discuss all the issues in the community with all of the community members so that every single member can have a shared understanding. She mentioned that the DCA group plays a significant role in identifying, dealing with issues, and supporting the community.

For the final exercise, the DCA group members are working on one activity in which they can synthetically implement the skills and insights they have learned, so they can have the practical experiences of designing project plans to achieve their goals and objectives from their own creativity. After a thorough discussion from the team, DCA members have decided to come up with a video to voice the issue of 'Right to Work.' Pari hopes as many as the general public will watch the video and deepen their understanding of the issue.



Pari has undergone countless hardships in her country of origin, Pakistan, for the reason of the religious minority. In order to escape from suffering, she has fled and sought asylum in Thailand, and today she can freely practice her religion. Nevertheless, residual issues remain in her life in Thailand regarding work rights and legal status. Thereupon, she stood up herself and joined the DCA project to self-advocate through the video so as to obtain work rights that could enable them to boost refugee capacities and be independent substantially. She believes that communication and dialogue with local Thai communities and society could allow us to have a shared understanding of refugee issues. The video could be the first step that enables herself and refugees to do so. She appreciates helpful and supportive locals and is now making an effort in learning Thai to communicate with them more. She, one day, hopes to complete her education and help other refugees who are in the same situation as she is.