


Chapter 6

Rooting the Self in the Quest for Justice: Challenges of Women Refugees in India

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the intersecting themes of displacement, trauma, and resilience in the lives of Tibetan, Afghani, and Rohingya women refugees in India. It highlights how social media and digital platforms have emerged as vital tools for refugee women to voice their experiences, build supportive communities, and create pathways for economic and social empowerment. Drawing from real-world examples, the chapter juxtaposes these success stories against the systemic challenges refugee women face, such as stigma surrounding mental health, economic precarity, and intersectional inequalities. By engaging critically with the dual realities of empowerment and adversity, this chapter aims to provide actionable recommendations for leveraging digital platforms to foster resilience, build inclusive communities, and advocate for justice in a geopolitically sensitive landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2018, an Afghani couple started a social enterprise called *Silaiwali* in an attempt to do something meaningful for their community. The enterprise now provides livelihood to more than 70 Afghan refugee women (Gupta, 2024). In another corner, Fariba Hakimi, an Afghan refugee who escaped the onslaught of the Taliban regime four years ago, still lives in the margins of New Delhi with unaccepted refugee status, and the uncertainty of life chipping away at her will to live (Aswani, 2021). Amid the social upheaval caused by displacement, most refugees in India live in a state of deprivation, desperation and despair. Forced human migration is said to be a defining feature of the 21st century. Refugee issues have become prominent socio-economic and political point of discourse that balances adaptation with survival. As a result, the exile diaspora seeks to find social networking and economic activities through the digital world.

With trafficking and exploitation festering these refugee communities, while they escape their countries for social, political or economic reasons, host countries present their own set of gendered challenges. In reimagining and reinventing these experiences from a feminist intersectional perspective, we find that the lived experiences of refugee women consist of a struggle between the newness of the host and the remnants of their home. This chapter seeks to explore this gap by examining how Tibetan, Afghani, and Rohingya women refugees in India navigate the complexities and contradictions of displacement through digital access.

The Rohingya community makes up the world's largest stateless population, with a rough estimation of about 2.8 million people (Sullivan et al., 2024). Subject to religious persecution in their home country, they were forced to flee and many of them have found refuge in neighbouring countries. While their conditions have been documented in our neighbouring countries, there is less transparency about their treatment in India. From the sliver of news reports that do cover their crises, it is revealed that the detention centers add to their horrors—and perhaps twice as much for the women within those walls.

The question of women's rights has toppled many regimes in Afghanistan. After the Taliban's takeover in 2021, Afghani women refugees have struggled with patriarchal and traditional practices that still follow the domestic unit amidst heavy radicalisation in the community. Driven by safety concerns against sexual and gender-based violence, women make up the largest demographic of Afghan refugees in India. Fears of sex slavery and destitution push many of them to seek any employment they can get, but the cost of living for these refugees serves as a larger detriment today.

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