

ECONOMIES OF EXILE: A STUDY OF TIBETAN REFUGEE LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES IN INDIA

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Abstract

This study explores the occupational structure and livelihood strategies of Tibetan refugees in India, with particular attention to the nature of their employment—whether self-employed or otherwise—and their participation in cooperative and society-based initiatives. Primary sector involvement includes agriculture and construction, while the secondary sector focuses on agro-based and handicraft industries. The Tibetan Handicraft Industry and the Tibetan Industrial Rehabilitation Society, both established in 1959, exemplify successful efforts in aligning traditional skills with sustainable employment. The tertiary sector, largely service-oriented, includes financial and interpersonal services.

Keywords: Socio-economic integration, Cultural identity, Resilience, Self-employment, Occupational structure

Introduction

According to the UNHCR Report 2020, the number of Tibetan refugees living in India is estimated at over one lakh. The Tibetan refugees paved their way to India back in 1959 when China attacked and invaded Tibet in 1950. They have endured struggles that encompasses various challenges such as socio-economic integration, culture and identity preservation, political uncertainty. Many face difficulties in accessing education, employment, and healthcare facilities. Despite all the pertaining issues, they have shown resilience and carved their niche to attain to optimum opportunities and availing empowerment through various means.

Tibetan refugees living in India often rely on various means for their livelihood. These include traditional Tibetan crafts such as carpet weaving, painting, handicrafts which are sold locally as well as internationally. It's essential to understand the type of occupation as whether the income is earned through self-employment or by other means. Further it's also essential to be aware whether they are involved in primary, secondary or tertiary sector initiatives or in cooperatives and societies.

Primary sector initiatives involve agriculture and allied activities, working in the construction sector. Whereas the secondary sector includes agro based industries or handicraft industry. Initiatives such as Tibetan Handicraft Industry (1959) and Tibetan Industrial Rehabilitation Society (TIRS, 1959) have been a successful prospect in aligning skills with employment. The tertiary sector initiatives include mostly services, financial intermediation.

Livelihood, in addition, is not only confined to employment or economic opportunities but it comprehends employment security, financial security, and social capital. It is because they are mostly involved in the informal sector which encompasses a wide spectrum of economic activities, catering to a diverse range of needs and demands. It is also labour intensive which means a significant proportion of their population is engaged in jobs such as carpet weaving, sweater selling, small restaurants etc which employs labour.

Hence it is essential to enhance adaptability, resilience, raising the standard of living and quality of life subsequently. Standard of living encapsulates material wellbeing or tangible factors which are measured by income, access to goods and services, acquiring skills and expertise. Quality of life, on the other, encapsulates intangible factors such as person's overall wellbeing which is both physical and mental, and community wellbeing.

References

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2020). Global trends: Forced displacement in 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2020/>

(Tibetan Handicraft Industry and Tibetan Industrial Rehabilitation Society information could be cited from relevant organizational reports or publications if you have them.)