

Working Paper 266

**Revisiting Home: Tibetan
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Home (Land) and Politics
of Return**

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REVISITING HOME: TIBETAN REFUGEES, PERCEPTIONS OF HOME (LAND) AND POLITICS OF RETURN

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the notion of home from the perspective of the Tibetans living in exile in India for the last five decades. Using primary data collected from two Tibetan settlements in India, this paper attempts to portray how Tibet is reconstructed in exile among the three generations of Tibetans. We seek to understand whether the Tibetans feel at home in India or do they carry a sense of homelessness with them.

Introduction

The concept of 'home' has been visited with a surge of academic interest, as the number of refugees, migrants and displaced people across the globe are on the increase. The literature on diaspora and transnational studies reveal that the meanings and significance of 'home' are changing. 'Home', as scholars have noted, traditionally refers to both physical dwelling and symbolic space, and represents a sense of safety, stability and rootedness. But with the number of people crossing borders and boundaries, either out of choice or involuntarily increasing, and more and more people beginning to live away from their native places, there is a rethinking on this concept.

This paper attempts to explore the notion of home from the perspective of the Tibetans living in exile in India for the last fifty years. In the first section, we explore how Tibetans perceive Tibet and how Tibet is imagined across different generations. In this context, the second section seeks to understand whether the Tibetans feel at home in India (or not), or do they carry a sense of homelessness with them? The following section begins with a brief overview of different conceptualisations of 'home' which form the main backdrop for the research findings and discussion presented subsequently.

Changing notions of 'home':

It is well acknowledged in literature that 'home' is a 'multidimensional concept' (Mallett, 2004:64). In this section, the dominant themes relating to home are considered, rather than an exhaustive review of the concept, which has been carried out by other scholars and is beyond the scope of this paper.¹ The purpose of this section is to touch upon recurring meanings of home that one can come across in literature to foreground the research findings.

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¹ Some of the exhaustive reviews are by Somerville (1992), Mallett (2004), and Moore (2007).

The Oxford Dictionary lists eight meanings of 'home' as noun, a dozen meanings of home as used in idioms, and an almost equal number of meanings attached to 'home' as used in adjectives and adverbs. The point that is being made is the centrality of 'home' in our everyday lives which has permeated in language use. Home, as Saunders notes, is "the crucible of our modern society" (cited in Moore, 2007:146). It is related to both physical and symbolic space and is rooted in socio-cultural understandings.

Home most commonly refers to 'house', which is a physical dwelling where one lives. Expanding this aspect of home, Saunders and Williams (1988: 82) define it as a locale which is "simultaneously and indivisibly a spatial and a social unit of interaction". It is the physical 'setting through which basic forms of social relations and social institutions are constituted and reproduced' (Mallett, 2004: 68). Further, it is argued that home denoting the household forms the 'basic economic unit' through which relations of production and consumption can be analyzed. Home is thus related to both the economic and social dimensions.

'Home' also means a private, familial realm which provides a space for close, caring relationships (Sarup, 1992: 90). Again, this view is contested as home isn't the ideal 'haven', and is linked culturally and historically to the changing concept of family. Moreover, in idealizing home as a safe and secure place, it ignores the fact that women and children are often most insecure in their own houses on account of domestic violence and abuse. Home not only represents the space for bringing up a family, but also symbolizes family itself. It 'typically symbolizes the birth family dwelling and the birth family or family of origin...It also symbolizes family relationships and life courses enacted within those spaces.' (Mallett, 2004: 73)

People's dream for ideal homes has been noted in literature. These often take on the form of sentimental or/and romantic notions, may be even a nostalgic search or journey for a lost time and space (Khalid and Al-Ali, 2002; Mallett, 2004). Critics have noted that these notions do not take into account the diverse and lived experiences and understandings of people. A more sophisticated conceptualization is provided by other scholars who reject the divide between the 'real' and the 'ideal' home. They point out that both the concepts – the real home and the imagined /ideal home are integral to the construction of the concept of 'home'.

The significance of the term 'home' is primarily due to the fact that millions of people today across the globe are displaced from their homes on account of wars, economic instability, or genocide. 'Home', in the literature on migration, diaspora and cultural studies, has been widely discussed from this perspective. As Sarup (1992: 90) suggests, the concept of home is tied to a sense of one's identity, "the story we tell of ourselves which is also the story that others tell of us." The question is, how is home connected to a sense of identity?

The connection between home, place and 'rootedness' forms the main link between home and a sense of identity. Home, as Sarup (1992) notes, is in a place, and places are socially constructed and not static. 'Place' is a crucial variable, as all relationships are embedded in a 'place', which gives 'placeable bonding', a fundamental human importance. 'Roots' which in literature refers to being firmly established in a place is also considered a primary need, a facet of one's identity. The search for 'roots'

often begins when people move away from their roots, and this is more so when people cross borders, as migrants and refugees.

While the importance of rootedness and the links between place and culture feature frequently in the migration literature and discussion of migrant's lived experiences, these links should not be construed as unproblematic. Malkki (1992), in a fascinating essay, discusses the implications of positing links between people and places in academics as well as everyday discourse. Malkki notes that the literature on nations and nationalism takes for granted that these are fixed in space, and the map is the most pervasive representation of this idea. Thus, nations are always perceived to have a territorial base. Both nationalist discourses and imagery think of people as being rooted in a place. These arborescent 'roots' are nourished in national soil, the 'homeland', 'motherland'/'fatherland'. In other words, these commonly used terms in the language reveal a tendency among nationalists and scholars suggesting that "each nation is a grand genealogical tree,...rooted in the soil that nourishes it. By implication, it is impossible to be part of more than one tree." This means, simply put, one nation(al), one homeland.

In a similar vein, connections between nations and culture are given territorial linkages. Anthropologists, notes Malkki, have conceptualized cultures as 'native', 'autochthonous', and 'indigenous', and by ascribing places 'native status', have contributed to this idea. Since the connections of people to places and places to culture are seen as natural, those people who are displaced, such as the refugees, are perceived as uprooted from their homes and culture. This leads to a view of the displaced people as 'problematic'. Malkki (1995) contests this essentialist understanding of people's links to places by contrasting it with the ways in which the Hutu refugees construct nation and identity in exile. This does not amount to the denial of the importance of place in the construction of one's identities. Rather, it is not just the place of birth, or the 'native place' that matters most in the construction of identities, but also the places to which people develop inextricable attachments through remembering, living in and imagining them.

'Home', thus symbolically represents the nation or 'homeland', and hence, is connected to a sense of national identity. Literature on citizenship and national identity reveals the potency of the concept of home, as it complicates the relationship between national identity, citizenship and belonging. An important contribution to literature on this aspect is Arnold's (2004) work on home, homelessness and citizenship. Arnold (2004) discusses the ways in which the link between home and homeland is the cause of both physical dislocation and political exclusion. It is precisely due to perceiving the nation-state as 'home' and ascribing citizenship to those who 'belong' to the nation-state that homelessness for the 'Other', which includes immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers, occurs.

It is important to emphasize that the issue of home, homeland and exclusion has been raised not only in relation to migrants and refugees, but also displaced people within a state, such as migrants from rural areas to urban areas and indigenous people. Parry (2003) notes that migrants in the steel town of Bhilai emphasize the rupture with those left behind in their narratives. At the same time, their notion of 'home' left behind changes considerably after some years. Baviskar (2005) highlights the struggle of the adivasis in Madhya Pradesh in India in terms of asserting their rights. The adivasis claim the forest as the land of their birth and their ancestors, and assert their indigenous identity by naturalizing the connections between their culture and the environment.

The brief discussion on 'home' presented here reveals that 'home' spans a vast conceptual canvas. It denotes physical dwelling and symbolically the nation-state, it is a domain of safety and privacy, but under certain circumstances, may turn out to be a space of violence and abuse. It is a socio-cultural construct, and the meanings surrounding this concept have varied over time. In the context of displacement, migration and transnationalism, home invokes one's sense of identity. It is often conflated with the notion of 'homeland' and, therefore, is intertwined with citizenship and belonging. In the discussion on the Tibetan refugees' perceptions of home in the next section, the multiple understandings are brought to the fore.

Tibetan refugees in India: 50 Years in Exile

In April 2009, the Tibetan refugees marked their 50 years in exile in India. Having arrived in 1959 after the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the subsequent flight of the Dalai Lama to India, an estimated 1,01, 214 registered refugees have sought and found refuge in India. The Tibetans have been accommodated in several 'settlements' set up by the government of India and have managed to become economically self-sufficient. They have a government-in-exile, functional in Dharamsala since 1960, headed by the Dalai Lama. Moreover, the Tibetans are lauded for their success in 'preserving' their culture and identity in exile.

In spite of this scenario, the Tibetans continue to live as refugees in India. The Tibetan youth, though born and brought up in India, are actively engaged in politics for the Tibetan cause. In this context, this section seeks to explore what 'home' signifies for the Tibetans. Is India 'home' or is it perceived as a temporary place of refuge, or is it neither of these, or a bit of both? What does Tibet mean, both to the older refugees, who have actually lived there, and for those who have never set foot in Tibet? The responses of the Tibetans form the focus of the following section.

Research Methodology

Bylakuppe, situated in the district of Mysore, in Karnataka state, India, is home to two Tibetan settlements viz. Lugsung Samdupling (L.S), established in 1960, and the oldest settlement in India, and the Tibetan Dickyi Larsoe (TDL) settlement set up in 1969, with a total population of 11,048 and 4,526 respectively². The data used in the study is based on the field work carried out between July – November 2007. A total of 72 Tibetans were selected and interviewed following purposive sampling. The number of refugees in the older generation (65 years and above) is 12, and middle (35-65 years) and younger generations (18-35 years) are 32 and 29 respectively.

The primary data were collected using interviews which were mainly unstructured. The main themes for the interview were outlined, and pursued as they came up in the discussion. Data was coded into broad categories first and then these categories were refined into further analytical categories and sub-categories. The analysis proceeded from these conceptual categories emerging from the data.

² Figures in 2007, data obtained by the author during field visit, from the Office of the Representative, L.S, and Office of the Representative, TDL

Tibet (Re) imagined in Exile

The striking feature seen across the three generations relates to the visualising of Tibet along the past-present axis. As has been noted by scholars, the Tibet of the past is seen as a pristine and sacred land by the respondents. According to the Tibetans, both young and old, the present Tibet, under the Chinese occupation, is being exploited for its natural resources and the people are poor and oppressed in general. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the objectivity of these statements; the focus is to explore the image of 'Tibet' as reconstructed in exile.

Tibet as seen by the older generation:

There are three sub-themes involved in respect of the old generation's evoking of Tibet- the physical description of Tibet and their memories of life there, the Tibet that is now and the longing to return. The old Tibetans remember the 'majestic snow covered mountains', the 'valleys and pastures', 'clean air and clear waters', and the 'cool' weather. Further, they also invested these physical features with sacred meanings. The waters of the rivers as 'sacred' and 'pure', similarly, the geography of places such as Purung was considered holy, as the Tibetan places of pilgrimage were there. The weather was considered cool and unpolluted, and the respondents noted that food did not rot there, as it does in India. Thus, the land of Tibet itself is reconstructed as being pure, both in religious and environmental terms.

The old generation reminisces the houses where they had once lived, the food of *tsampa* and yak meat that they used to eat, the clothes they wore, their occupations, prayers, and the festivals they celebrated. For the Tibetans, the yak is an integral part of the household economy, and the sheep for nomads and pastoralists. Of the old generation, only two respondents are found to have belonged to rich families, which means, they owned many yaks, and a big house. The rest of them muse that in Tibet, they had to stitch their own clothes out of animal skin and fur, take the animals for grazing and cultivated the land where it was suitable for agriculture. Life was not easy back in Tibet, they note, but still, they miss Tibet all the time.

For those respondents who had left behind siblings or close relatives, the yearning to see them is found palpable. However, many of the respondents now have few close relations still alive, and it is mostly the children of their relatives who are now still in Tibet. Very few have managed to connect back to their relatives in Tibet through telephone. There are some who write and receive letters, but again, these instances are not frequent either. In other words, most of them have not been able to get in touch with their family and relatives back in Tibet.

How does the old generation think of Tibet now? The uniform answer is that Tibet is no longer the same. The respondents explain that through news received through radio and by talking to newly arrived monks, they have come to know that Tibet had changed. The houses they had lived in once have been destroyed, and the surroundings changed. Not only houses, but even the monasteries are no longer there. This is a highly emotional issue, since the Tibetans place great importance on the '*gonpas*' as places of prayer and reverence.

The most often discussed topic among this generation is whether they would be able to return to Tibet during their lifetime or not. They note that as they are ageing they are worried whether they

would be able to set their eyes on Tibet before they died. Half the respondents (6) feel that since the younger generation has been born and brought up in India, they may not have the same intensity of feelings for the Tibetan cause. They also feel that the youth do not have to struggle as hard as they did and that instead of focusing on working for the Tibetan cause, individual priorities have become important. However, the remaining half expresses the confidence that the younger generation would realise its responsibility and carry on the struggle.

Tibet as seen by the middle and younger generation:

In the middle generation, two kinds of responses emerge regarding Tibet. Ten of the respondents in the age group of fifty eight years and above, that is, those who were eight years and above when they came from Tibet, have faint memories of Tibet. These respondents say that they think of Tibet all the time and hope to go back very soon. Like the older generation, they are constantly preoccupied with Tibet, its conditions now and whether they would be able to see Tibet again in their lifetime.

But the remaining respondents opine that they think of Tibet sometimes. As a respondent has noted,

“I would be lying if I said I think of Tibet all the time. I was born in Tibet, but I have never lived there, I have been brought up here...so once in a while, I think of Tibet.³”

The majority of them have said that they imagine how Tibet might have been through the stories that their parents tell them. This Tibet of the past resembles the stereotypical representation of Tibet with mountains, snow and greenery. But the respondents state that though their parents have told them about Tibet and that they also wish to see their country, the intensity is not as much as it is for the older Tibetans. They think of Tibet during festivals and protests and demonstrations, at other times, they are busy with their day to day affairs. This is how a respondent explains her feelings:

“The get together party in Losar, so that takes me back, that my parents came from such and such a place. Otherwise, I don't because ...we haven't been to Tibet, we don't know anything about the country. Your parents tell you, but it doesn't stay in your mind you know...as much as if you had lived there or seen the place.⁴”

Most of the younger generation respondents have been born and brought up in India. Therefore, the Tibet of the past is a picture built on the memories of their parents and to an extent, the Tibet that is represented in school textbooks. Like the middle generation, they describe Tibet as a place of mountains, snow and greenery, but with no electricity and light, yet people being happy. It must be mentioned here that these responses indicate the perceptions of the Tibetans about how Tibet was in the past. Only two respondents have said that the Tibet of the past had also its share of problems like serfdom and lack of education, but, these problems could have been tackled through reforms.

The common strand that runs through the responses across all the three generations is the emphasis on the 'land' or the physical aspects of Tibet. The respondents uniformly stress natural

³ Cited from interview no. 07091002/dated 10/09/2007

⁴ Cited from interview no. VORCO21, dated 21/08/2007

features like mountains, snow, forests and rivers. Interestingly, the flag of Tibet to which the exiled Tibetans pay their respects also depicts mountains covered with snow. The narratives portray an 'ideal' Tibet, the purpose of which is to sustain a vision of 'homeland' that is influenced more by political beliefs, rather than actual historical facts. The image evoked by the physical description of Tibet is part of the construction of national identity rooted in the land, the territorial aspect.

Contemporary Tibet, according to the middle generation respondents is not the same as the Tibet where their parents once lived. This generation is aware of the recent developments in Tibet through newspapers, radio as well as T.V. As the younger generation also accesses the internet, it has become a popular medium for sharing news and views regarding Tibet and the Tibetan issue. Simultaneously, this availability of information also makes it difficult for all the younger generation respondents to share the same image of Tibet. Among the middle generation too, while most of them believe that Tibet was being gradually exploited by depleting its natural resources, two of the respondents have expressed that they would like to go and see for themselves the changes that have taken place and the changes that the Chinese have brought about.

Among the younger generation, while the majority of the respondents have a negative view of the recent developments in Tibet, a few of them opine that the information that they have about Tibet is insufficient to really get a true picture, and that they would like to visit Tibet and see for themselves. Two of them said that there has been material progress, but there is lack of religious freedom. Another respondent said that if you were not involved in political matters, it is fine, and the remaining two felt that there is a lack of clear information, and that until they saw for themselves, it is difficult to conclude.

The responses show that while there is uniformity about the image of Tibet as it was in the past, the notion of contemporary Tibet has nuances within a general picture of exploitation under the Chinese. Among the younger generation, the voices that differ represent a divergence from the stereotypical views held by the majority. The numbers, though small, are significant as they veer away from essentialist constructions and pave the way for plural views of nation. Among the older generation, the theme of return is prominent, with a wish of dying in homeland. But what about the middle and the younger generations? While they have been actively engaged in the issue of Tibet and are part of the reconstruction of Tibet in exile, do they feel at home in India or is there a feeling of homelessness?

Tibetans in India: Not/ At Home, and Home away from home

The main themes emerging from the data categorisation are mainly of three types: 'not at home', 'home away from home' and 'India is home'. Within these main themes, there are variations, which will be discussed under the main theme. The findings are presented generation-wise to highlight the generational differences in the perceptions of India as home (or not).

Older generation: Home is where the heart is

Among the older generation, the prominent theme has been that they do not feel at home in India or Bylakuppe. For them, their present habitat is merely a temporary shelter. The younger generation Tibetan writers poignantly express the older generation's preoccupation with Tibet as home and their attitude towards their present state of living in India. The poet Tsundue (2007) notes how his father

refuses to repair the leaking roof, with a hope bordering on certitude that they will be going back anyway. Our conversations with the middle generation Tibetans reveal that their parents had not planted a single fruit bearing tree like mango or even palm trees, thinking that their return to Tibet was imminent.

For the old Tibetans, going back to Tibet is a reality that remains merely postponed. The nostalgia for the past (in) Tibet, the hope of return and the feeling that their present dwelling is a temporary shelter influence their perception as not being 'at home' in India. Interestingly enough, one-third of the older respondents feel that India has been their 'second home'. Considering the fact that the older generation people think of refuge and their lives in India as transitory, this response is surprising. This also highlights that not all the older generation people hold that Tibet is their only home. Moreover, it also denotes the complexity of feelings towards 'home' which one has left, and the current residence. One of the respondents expresses his feelings thus:

"I can't think a lot. I can't say so much. Tibet is my first home and I always want to go there and I want to die there. But in case I am not able to go there and die there, I won't have any regrets that I am dying here because this is my second home."⁵

For these respondents, though Tibet would always be their real 'home', the land of their birth, and sought for in death, they acknowledge India as their present home. This is a place where they have their house and family, and are 'free to eat when you want to, free to sleep where we want, free to go where you want.' Thus, until Tibet becomes free and they are able to return, India is home for them.

There are two responses which differ from the rest and are discussed here. Two respondents report that when they had gone out of the settlement for a few days, the home they thought of was Bylakuppe, but when they came back to Bylakuppe, then, they thought of Tibet as their home. This is the expression,

"When I go out, I think constantly of home here because my wife and children are here. So this is home. But when I am here, I constantly think of Tibet and that is the home"⁶.

These kind of responses are indicative of place identity, or the fact that people develop memories, and attachment with the places they live in. Bylakuppe is the place where the family lives and is a known and secure place. Basu (2008), in a study on refugees in Darjeeling, has noted the place-making activities of the refugees, and 'emplacement' by anchoring themselves to new places. But, it must be underlined that India is not considered 'homeland', the native land which forms the link to their identity as Tibetans and to the place of their birth and their ancestors. The links to 'homeland' are thus through ancestors or birth, while, 'home' could be any place where one finds shelter and a sense of security. In other words, there is a disjuncture between home in its sense as dwelling of the person and the Tibet that is the dwelling place of the body politic.

⁵ Cited from interview no. 07082800/dated 28/08/2007

⁶ Cited from interview no. 07082900/dated 29/08/2007

Middle and Younger Generation:

Among the middle and the younger generations, there are mainly three kinds of responses, and these are discussed in detail below. The responses of the middle and younger generation reveal that within a generation also, there is no homogeneous response about the notion of home.

(i) We are guests in India:

Among the middle generation, 31.25% of the respondents have expressed that they do not consider Bylakuppe or India as their 'home'. According to them, they are not uncomfortable staying in Bylakuppe nor the Indian government has ill treated them and also their neighbours are kind. They say that though they have grown up in India and are settled here, they feel like outsiders or at the best, guests. The different expressions such as 'guests', 'outsiders', and 'living on the threshold of the house' are used to underline their attitude towards India as not being their 'real' home. They point out that as refugees, they cannot claim their right to live in India or to be treated in a certain manner. In other words, 'home' is also a place to exercise one's choice and live with security. As the respondent has noted, their house is not their 'home' since they have been living in India on the basis of 'kindness' of the state and the neighbours. At any time the state or the local people may decide to withdraw this kindness, and then one will have no choice but to leave.

It is important to note that the relations between the Tibetans and the local Indians have not always been tranquil. Although there have been no large scale riots on the scale witnessed in Dharamsala in 1996, the Tibetans in Bylakuppe too are aware of this episode and acts of violence by the locals remind them of their fragile status in India⁷. Thus, as noted by some of the elderly respondents in Vahali's (2009:277) study, such incidents compel them to remember that 'they are living on an alien soil, which can never be ours'. The sense of powerlessness and vulnerability and having to rely on the 'kindness of others' is conducive to a feeling of not being at home in India.

Table 4.1: Perceptions of 'Home' among the Middle and Younger Generations

Category	Perceptions of Home			Total No of Respondents
	Not at Home	Second Home	Home	
Middle Generation	10 (31.25%)	12 (37.50%)	10 (31.25%)	32 (100%)
Younger Generation	11 (37.4%)	9 (30.6%)	9 (30.6%)	29 (100%)
Total	21 (34.23%)	21 (34.23%)	19 (30.97%)	61 (100%)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages of the number of respondents to the total respondents

Among the younger generation, 37% of respondents have mentioned that they do not feel at home in India. The striking note in the response of the younger Tibetans is that when they were young, they felt very much at home in India as their house, family and relatives were here. It was only when

⁷ Dharamsala witnessed a large scale rioting in 1996 in which a large number of Tibetan shops were burnt down and Tibetans were threatened by some local people that they leave the place.

they grew up and came to know of their refugeehood and Tibet's issue that the feeling of India not being their homeland took root.

Ummm {long pause}... I thought this is my home when I was kid...like when I was 13 yrs old or 14 yrs old or 15, 16...that time I was very happy. This is my home. All my relatives are here; our home is here so I thought it was our land, our homeland... Later we came to know that this is not our homeland, we are staying as refugees in India, our homeland is Tibet, and it is occupied by China. So then I think our homeland is Tibet, this not our homeland, we have to go back to our homeland⁸.

The respondent makes an important point- the implication that since they are Tibetans and refugees, the 'land' on which they are living is not their own, and by extending the same logic to their house, that too is not their 'home'. Such responses point to a profound sense of not being at home, either in Bylakuppe or in India, unlike those respondents for who India is a second home.

There is a significant difference between the feelings of 'not being at home' for the older generation and quite opposite for the middle and younger generations. For the older Tibetans, there is at least in their imagination, a 'home' they can return to, which is Tibet. While for the middle generation, though Tibet is 'home', it is a home they have never actually lived in. One of them who had visited his cousins in Lhasa has an interesting experience to relate. According to him, the weather was too cold, and he found it very difficult to adjust to the climate. For a month, he could not have a bath. Secondly, he found the ways of living of his relatives and himself different. In fact, he says, 'everything is so different...it is so cold. If my children ever go back there, they will not be able to adjust back there'.

Perhaps the perceptions of these Tibetans can be best expressed in the pithy words of one youth:

"Parents are from there, but we have settled here...we have to go back. Our country is there, we have come from there, but we have nothing there⁹."

For the younger Tibetans unable to feel at home in India, Tibet too is an unfamiliar place. The country where they have been born and brought up, have houses and occupations and live in, is not their homeland. But the territorial space they refer to as their home country is a place where they have 'nothing', that is no links except through memories of previous generations. This is the predicament of all the younger generation people who are unable to feel at home in India while carrying the feeling that Tibet is their home only in a tenuous way.

(ii) Home is where the Hearth is:

Among the remaining respondents, 37.5% of the middle generation respondents have reported India as their 'second home' or 'home away from home'. The high percentage of response of 'home away from

⁸ Cited from interview no. 07080100 dated 01/08/2007

⁹ Cited from interview no. 07082000/dated 20/08/2007

home' or 'second home' indicates that though there are limitations imposed by their legal status as refugees, the Tibetans have still managed to settle down, and construct a sense of 'home' in India.

For them, Tibet as the first home is the land their parents have come from and they would always harbour the desire to go back when Tibet would be free. But at the same time, India is a second home too, the 'home' where they were born and their children have been raised, have painstakingly built up their house and cultivated the fields. There is also an additional reason. These respondents note that they have grown up and lived in India, and their food and living style have become more like the Indians. They are familiar with the country and its inhabitants. Although there are minor issues sometimes, they could still 'sing, dance, drink *chang* and spread our feet'. In other words, they enjoy a measure of freedom, especially religious and cultural freedom in India. Hence, it is not only Bylakuppe that they consider as 'home', as a respondent notes,

"This is our second motherland. It is true that we will go back, but it seems to me that we won't forget this country. I was born here..."¹⁰

Hence, the second home is not merely a place of residence, and shelter, but also a second motherland, a country which the Tibetans accept as their own. There is no conflict between their feelings for Tibet as home and India also as their home. These views at the micro level challenge the political narratives that a person, a national can belong to one nation only. The notion of one national home for a people, irrespective of their lived experiences and circumstances, is therefore, contested.

Among the younger generation, 30.6% of the respondents feel that India is their second home. This generation too, like the middle generation, thinks that they will return to Tibet sooner or later, and till then India and Bylakuppe is 'home'. What is interesting in these responses is that India, though 'home', is still referred to as a second home, the home that has been adopted as one's own, but not the first home, which still continues to be Tibet. Thus, it is the 'original' homeland, the native place of their ancestors which is home for them. Although they have been born in India, their links to Tibet through descent is given more importance.

Nevertheless, this generation has developed an emotional attachment to Bylakuppe as well as India. It comes to the fore when they say that they would miss India 'a lot' when they go back. The respondents say that they would perhaps visit India often since it is not too far from Tibet, and they are 'so attached' to the country. Some of the male respondents of the younger generation even visualise that new avenues of trading could be established between Tibet and India when Tibet becomes 'free' and that they envisage the likelihood of travelling back and forth between the two places.

(iii) This is Home:

For the old Tibetans, Tibet has always been 'the home' and India is for only a few, a second home. Among the middle and the younger generation, a higher percentage of respondents consider India as a 'second home' and a 'home away from home'. The novel note in this research in the theme of Tibetans and the issue of home(land) is that for almost one third of the respondents of the middle and younger generations, responded 'India is home'.

¹⁰ Cited from interview no. 07091103/dated 11/09/2007

Among the middle generation, 31.5 % of the respondents consider India as their home, and the percentage for the younger generation is 30.6%. The perception of the middle generation is akin to those who consider India as their second home, namely, that of having grown up and living in India, the presence of family and friends and secure means of livelihood. A few respondents also add that they have been born in India, and that they had never seen or lived in Tibet. So for them, India is the only home they know.

The younger generation Tibetans have been born in India, and they emphasise this fact when stating that India is home for them. They also add that they 'eat, dress and live' the way Indians do. We have observed that the Indian restaurants in Kushalnagar attract quite a number of Tibetans, both of the middle and younger generation. Within the settlements too, the canteens of the monastery serve typical Indian snacks like dosa, puri as well as staple food like rice, dal, and roti, and both the monks and lay Tibetans are customers. In fact, Indian snacks and 'chicken biryani' are as popular as *thupka* and *momos*. The youth are familiar with Hindi and Bollywood songs are quite popular. The Tibetan youth and the Indians in Kushalnagr wear similar kinds of dresses and are consumers of similar entertainment sources and media.

What about Tibet? For these respondents, Tibet is the homeland of their parents, and through this connection, Tibet is their 'homeland'. India is the home they have been born and live in. In the responses of these Tibetans, there is no conflict observed in respect of the notion of a dual homeland and home. These voices disrupt the overarching narratives of 'homeland' and challenge the discourse of Tibet as the authentic homeland.

The generational perspective on whether India is a home, or a potential home for the Tibetans reveals that there are multiple narratives on the subject. It is among the older generation of exiles that the 'nostalgia' for home is clearly evident, and this is true not only for the Tibetan refugees in Bylakuppe, but for the older generation of Tibetans elsewhere in India too (Vahali, 2009; Wangmo and Teaster, 2010:14). This 'nostalgia' is not unique to Tibetan refugees alone, and as Anand (2000:277) and Basu RayChaudhary (2004) note, it has also been seen in the case of Palestinians and the Bangladeshi refugees of Partition (1947).

The narrative on 'home' becomes more complex when we consider the middle and the younger generations. Although Tibet continues to be evoked as 'home', India too is regarded by many as their 'second home' or 'home away from home'. But the narrative of India as 'home away from home' is fractured by those Tibetans who are constantly reminded of their refugee status and the ensuing equation of powerlessness vis-à-vis the local Indian community. Moreover, some of these Tibetans regard India as the home till their eventual return to Tibet, which for them, is always the original home. In other words, refugee status as well as lingering 'nostalgia' for Tibet brooks the response that India is not home for a section of the respondents of the middle and younger generations.

In spite of this scenario, the fact is that the Tibetan refugee community, fifty years on, 'does not live in a makeshift tent city' (Falcone and Wangchuk, 2008: 181); refugees have built their houses and monasteries, and have carved economic niches for themselves in the informal economy. The middle generation has settled down in India, learnt the local language, and some have Indian friends too. The

younger generation, having grown up on the Tibetan national anthem as well as Bollywood Hindi songs, navigates the Indian social space with a fluency acquired through their education, language skills and having much greater interaction with Indian peers as friends and neighbours. India, for this section of Tibetans is thus 'home', just as Tibet is their 'home'.

Amidst the changing notions of 'home', of Tibet as well as India, the intriguing question is, what about the 'nostalgia for homeland' and the desire for return (Anand, 2000, 2002; Falcone and Wangchuk, 2008) which the scholars writing on the Tibetan community in exile have noted? Is there really a shared 'nostalgia' among all the exiles and if it does exist, does it also automatically stimulate a desire for return to Tibet, the imagined homeland?

Revisiting the 'nostalgia of home' and the politics of 'return':

The Tibet in the exile community's construction is 'a particular space-time projection of homeland' (Anand 2000:277) and it is on this projection that nostalgia lingers on. Both Anand (2000) and Falcone and Wangchuk (2008) have discussed the theme of 'nostalgia' among the Tibetans for the homeland though in slightly different ways. First, let us discuss their views and then critically reflect on them based on the findings of this research.

According to Anand (2000:277), the Tibetan diaspora has a longing for the Tibetan homeland, which for the older generation is now fixed in nostalgic memories of Tibet and life lived there before the year 1959. The memory of this generation has been passed on to the later generations, who carry this nostalgic longing for an 'idyllic homeland', not the contemporary Tibet, but the pre 1959 Tibet, frozen in time. The projection of Dharamsala as 'Little Lhasa', 'naming' practices and the inclusion of images of places in Tibet in cultural motifs are cited by him as examples of diasporic longing for a homeland as well as creating familiarity in a strange environment.

This theme is echoed by Falcone and Wangchuk (2008), but there is a difference in explaining the concept of nostalgia. Falcone and Wangchuk (2008: 180) too note that the exile community has reconfigured and re-framed Tibet, by an idealised Tibet and 'nostalgia for the Dalai Lama installed upon his seat at the grand Potala Palace in Lhasa...'. The nostalgia that Tibetans of the second and third generations share, is for an idyllic and romanticised Tibet, which is explained by referring to Appadurai's concept of 'nostalgia without memory' and Baudillard's concept of 'hyperreal', the process by which a simulation is done without having an original referent (Falcone and Wangchuk, 2008: 179).

Both these conceptualisations however, overlook certain aspects while emphasising other aspects. While it is observed that the Tibetan exiles construction of the Tibet in the past is largely that of an 'idyllic'past fixed in pre 1959 past, it is important to note that this vision has not gone uncontested either, as the autobiographies of Tashi Tsering or the writings of Tsundue reveal. The educated Tibetans of the second and third generations, though a minority, are quite aware of the inadequacies of the pre1959 Tibet including serfdom and lack of education. But even if one ignores these emerging voices in the diaspora as not part of the larger discourse of the exile community, yet the flaw in these conceptualisations persists, as explained below.

While the data reflect that the Tibet of the pre-1959 period is 'frozen in time', as Anand (2000) has accurately noted, the same cannot be said of the contemporary Tibet. According to Falcone and

Wangchuk (2008:180), in 'much of exile discourse, authentic Tibet is past and future, but definitely not present.' It may be noted that among the Tibetans in Bylakuppe too, the 'past' is presented in a homogeneous shade, as a peaceful, snow clad, spiritual homeland. It is also correctly noted by the authors that contemporary Tibet is presented as 'less Tibetan' than before due to the impact of Chinese occupation¹¹. Moreover, among the older generation and a few middle generation respondents, the 'nostalgia' for the past is evident.

The main weakness is that it is not only the past of Tibet that is the part of the larger discourse of 'homeland' in the exile community, but the Tibet in the present is also actively constructed among the exiles of the middle and younger generations. The pre 1959 image of Tibet is largely built on the stories and memories of the older generation, but there are other sources of information which the middle and the younger generations make use of for reconstructing the present day Tibet. There are mainly three sources of information for the exiled Tibetans, the most pervasive one being the media, the new stream of refugees entering India every year, and contact with Tibet through travel to Tibet or telephone links with the relatives back in Tibet.

The media sources comprise radio channels, the most popular ones being Voice of America and Radio Free Asia which give weekly updates on the situation in Tibet. There are also the VCDs secretly made in Tibet and smuggled in to India, which are circulated all over the settlement. These sources concentrate on specific kinds of news, such as the arrest of prisoners, Chinese atrocities and the like, and give a one-sided view of Tibet¹². In the settlement, there is a cable connection, through which multiple news channels are available and the Tibetans in India get snaps of information and images on China as well Tibet as it 'is' now.

Some of the Tibetans in the settlement are also in touch with their relatives back in Tibet. The Kalachakra ceremony that took place in 2006 in India saw many Tibetans come to India for attending the ceremony and seeking the blessings of His Holiness¹³. This provided an opportunity to a large number of exiles, especially from far flung areas such as Kham to get back in touch with their relatives and the link is now maintained through telephone. There are also a few Tibetans who go to Tibet as religious pilgrims every year. Lastly, there are the 'new arrivals' from Tibet, who are religious pilgrims, aspiring students and monks and nuns fleeing persecution. This people to people contact, although a trickle, infuses news of the happenings in Tibet into the exile community.

The younger generation of Tibetans are also connected to Tibet and the rest of the Tibetan diaspora elsewhere through the internet. It gives them an opportunity to exchange views, share information and discuss the changes in the exile community as well as in Tibet. The information

¹¹ The Chinese have held the view that Tibet was part of China, even before 1959, while Tibetans in India insist that Tibet was an independent state. Both sides have cited historical sources and engaged in lengthy arguments to support their views.

¹² There are frequent reports of arrests of Tibetan political dissidents in China and some of the political prisoners include monks and nuns also. See Amnesty International Report, 2009 "UN Human Rights Council, Tenth Session, Compilation of Statements by Amnesty International", retrieved from

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/IOR41/011/2009/en/9c61cce5-64be-474d-aa99-12a43b1cd44f/ior410112009en.pdf>

¹³ China had allowed the visit for religious purposes, and the Tibetans were able to visit India with proper documents.

available on China, though filtered, presents the Chinese version of developments in Tibet. There are very active Tibet networks, and forums on the internet, the popular ones which the respondents have cited are Phayul.com, Tibet.Net, Free Tibet, and so on.

It is through these multiple sources that Tibetans in Bylakuppe get fragments of information and images of Tibet. The stories of the political prisoners who come to India represent the gruesome face of the Chinese prisons and suppression of freedom. While the news channels and Chinese sources present glossy pictures of development in the Tibetan cities, the internet gives access to a bewildering range of news and views on Tibet. The Tibetan refugees construct a contemporary image of Tibet by putting together these bits and pieces of stories, pictures and news emanating from different sources. The gaps that are left are filled in with memories of what Tibet was, and part imagination aided by the media of what Tibet is at present. This contemporary Tibet resembles a 'collage' assembled through multiple and at times contradictory versions of events and images.

The middle and the younger generations are aware of the fact that the Tibet of the older generation has now undergone irreversible changes, and that the past cannot be retrieved. Even if this Tibet is less 'Tibetan' than in the past, nevertheless it also finds a place in the exile community's imagined picture of the homeland. In fact, it is over the issues and events in contemporary Tibet that the refugees in India stage their protests and not over the past or future. A large space in the struggle of the exile community is directed at the 'wrongs' and 'rights issues' taking place in Tibet presently; these may be human rights issues, issues of religious or cultural freedom or environmental degradation of the Tibetan plateau. Thus, we argue, contemporary Tibet, as visualised by the exile community, should also be considered especially when ascribing 'nostalgia' for the past Tibet among the middle and younger generations.

The 'nostalgia of homeland' is palpable among the old generation. This 'nostalgia' is something that cannot be sensed among the majority of respondents of the middle and the younger generations. The consistent engagement with present day Tibet even if from a distance, and the awareness of the changes being wrought there have changed the perceptions of what going back to 'homeland' means for the refugees in the present context. It can be best seen in the following response of a Tibetan woman respondent of the middle generation:

"Tibet was my first home, India is my second home, and hopefully, when we go back, Tibet will be my third home."¹⁴

There is in this response, the clear perception that even in the eventuality that they do go back to Tibet, it will be the 'third' home and not the Tibet of their parent's times, which is the 'first' home. The nostalgia of the first generation is replaced by a pragmatic outlook based on an understanding that the past will no longer be there. In this context, it seems that it is the academicians who are caught in the idea of 'nostalgia' with or without memory. The Tibetan refugees themselves seem to have moved out of this frame into the present changing contemporary Tibet, even if this too is based on partial, fragmented and opaque collection of facts and fiction.

¹⁴ Cited from interview no. 07091304 /dated 13/09/2007

Politics of return

'Back to Tibet' was a slogan that the activist groups launched as part of their anti-Chinese demonstrations in 2008. Placards were painted and banners held. This though, was not the first time that the 'rhetoric of return' (Anand, 2000:277) has been deployed in the exile community politics while raising the Tibetan issue. Does the Tibetan community envision the possibility of return to Tibet in the foreseeable future?

The Tibetan refugees' theme of return represents a diasporic longing for home in the sense of a 'collective national return' to a homeland (Anand 2000:277). It is an expression of patriotism of the refugees towards their nation and many Tibetans respondents at least in theory yearn for return to Tibet, once the Tibetan issue is resolved (Falcone and Wangchuk, 2008: 180). But as Ganguly (2001) notes, the older generation sees the possibility of return growing dimmer and is at times sceptical whether the younger generation would ever go back.

On the theme of return, the responses from Bylakuppe are revealing. The older generation wants to return but is no longer sure of this event taking place in their lifetime. Moreover, they are very specific that they would not like to return to a Chinese occupied Tibet or a Tibet where His Holiness does not reside. The older generation Tibetans have remained refugees for more than half their lives and would rather remain as refugees than return to Tibet with a Chinese passport. Vahali (2009) notes the experience of an older generation refugee who did return to Tibet, but came back after a few years as she found living in Chinese occupied Tibet a much more alienating experience than living in India.

Among the middle generation and the younger generations, almost half the respondents for each generation (50% and 54.4% respectively) say that they would return to Tibet after it has regained genuine autonomy as proposed by the Dalai Lama or gained complete independence. This response has been marked by other researchers too, in different locations (e.g Falcone and Wangchuk, 2008: 180). But at the same time, there is a scepticism that many would choose not to go back to Tibet as the Tibetans have settled themselves here and have begun to invest in India. Even the older and middle generation Tibetans voice doubts that the younger generation will go back to Tibet (Ganguly, 2001; Vahali, 2009).

Among the remaining respondents, many in the middle generation are doubtful that the Tibetan issue could be resolved soon. There are also practical difficulties in returning to Tibet, even in the case of a resolution, such as low job prospects, the possibility of conflicts for resources between the Tibetans already present in Tibet and those who have newly arrived, and the difficulty in settling down all over again. Similarly, many respondents among the younger generation are evasive about return. In fact, as Hess (2006) has noticed, there is an occidental longing to move to greener pastures such as America as there is a reluctant acceptance that Tibetan autonomy/*Ranzen* is not visible on the horizon. This situation leads us back to the scene described earlier – Back to Tibet - what is the significance of the 'rhetoric of return'?

As the word 'rhetoric' suggests, the theme of return is intended to produce an effect, the audience being the international sympathizers and supporters of the Tibetan movement. More importantly, through the theme of return, the exile community as well as the government-in-exile are staking a political claim to Chinese occupied Tibet as their 'homeland'. The insistence on return to Tibet

is an expression of their political aspirations for a free/autonomous homeland as well as a signal to the Chinese state that this struggle is being actively pursued. The theme of return, hence, needs to be understood as a collective political claim of the Tibetan community on Tibet as their homeland, rather than an expression of personal desire or sentiment to return.

Conclusions

The multiple perspectives on 'home' reveal the diversity of ways in which the Tibetans perceive the concept 'home'. There are differences in the construction of the category 'home' not only among the different generations, but within the same generation too. 'Home' for the older generation, is always Tibet, and in this sense, is not a mere physical dwelling, it is the 'homeland' of the Tibetan exile body. The other two generations, while positioning themselves collectively as Tibetan refugees, envision Tibet as 'home' and express gratitude to India as a 'generous host'. But as individuals born and brought up in India, consider India as 'home away from home' and even as 'home'.

Home and homeland, thus, are no longer fixed and unchanging categories. The changing perceptions of home indicate that the identities of the Tibetan refugees are not moored exclusively to a territorial conception of Tibet as the only homeland. At the same time, India figures in their mental map somewhere between a renter, second home and home itself. The narratives also disrupt the conflation of 'home' and 'homeland' and reveal the possibility that people might conceive of more than one 'homeland'. The theme of 'return to Tibet', which the refugees so strongly espouse, reflect that in considering the notions of 'home', the politics in exile needs to be considered. In revealing the disjuncture between home and homeland, the concept of 'home' is conceptually useful.

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