Results and Discussion

Section 7a: Ethnography of the Displaced: Towards Embedding the Tibetan Refugee Experience in Darjeeling

7a.1 Tibetans as Refugees

What began as a steady flow of Tibetan refugees into India since April 1959, following the flight of the Dalai Lama into exile, soon turned into a mass exodus. What requires mention is that the historical and political antecedents leading to the flight of Tibetans are part of an exceedingly tangled web of policies, politics and legal ambiguities and it would be beyond the scope of the study to delve deeply into these matters. What follows is a brief description of the prelude to the Tibetan diaspora and the motives for flight. The principal causes that led to forced migration can be traced to the differentiated Chinese policies towards Inner and Outer Tibet in the 1950s (Saklani 1984; Norbu 1979; Grunfeld 1990; Goldstein 1990). 1 “Chinese Communists formulated and pursued two radically different policies: radical communist policy measures in Inner Tibet and non-Communist liberal ones in Outer Tibet. Radical policies designed to replace core Tibetan Buddhist values and key institutions by Chinese Marxist ones was deeply resented and resisted widely in Inner Tibet” (Andrugtsang 1973). This then led to the first wave of forced migration from Inner Tibet to Outer Tibet during mid 1950s and by 1959 into South Asia.

For those Tibetans who fled, the decision followed upon a personal conviction that life in Tibet had become unendurable. The following account of a 42-year-old farmer from southern Tibet testifies to this. The volume from which it comes, “Tibet under Chinese Communist rule” (1976) was compiled by Tibetans associated with the Government-in-exile in Dharamsala. They have translated the statements into English and edited them

1 By “Inner Tibet” the British officials referred to what Tibetans call Amdo and Kham most of parts of which were already incorporated into the neighbouring Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai before 1951. And “Outer Tibet” included Central, Southern and Western Tibet and some parts of Kham, which were under the effective control of the Tibetan government in Lhasa at the time of the Chinese takeover.
slightly by omitting their concluding lines (an oath of truthfulness and accuracy) and by deleting “unqualified personal interpretations of events and actions, expressions of hopes and prayers and emotional descriptions of the Chinese”: “We (the narrator, his wife and daughter) escaped from Tibet because life was getting more and more difficult and tension and fear of persecution was increasing every year. We had nothing that we could call our own. Everything belonged to the commune or the Chinese…the Chinese demand labour from the people and take away most of the products from the lands for themselves. The people, are in fact, slaves of an alien conqueror. The amount of food available is barely enough to feed half the population. Heavy taxes are levied on every article of daily need… What was most unbearable was the increasing hardship and mental torture. I was classified as a middle-class peasant and continually harassed for the crimes I had never committed. Last year, I decided to escape. The Chinese somehow came to know of it. I was blacklisted and accused of turning away from the proletarian socialist revolutionary path and following the way of the reactionary Dalai bandits. I was given the alternative of either making a frank confession of my crimes and wrong thoughts or else facing public trials, imprisonment and torture. I could not change my thoughts as the Chinese wanted and knew that the only change I was going to bring to the whole situation was escaping from Tibet. On the night of March 2, 1971, while everybody was attending the nightly study-cum-meeting session, we fled and headed towards the Nepalese border” (126-127).

Examples such as this, multiplied by the thousands, do serve as individual explanations for the Tibetan diaspora. The motives for flight has also been captured by T.C. Palakshappa in the course of his fieldwork among the Tibetan refugees in Mundgod (South India) interviewed 869 families (Palakshappa 1978: 16-17). His respondents gave five reasons in the following order of descending importance. The first and more general reason given was the popular feeling of acute anxiety about the future of their religion and culture under the Communist regime. They were afraid that they would not be allowed to practice Buddhism and maintain their way of life. The second and more specific reason was that the numerous Tibetans had heard about the atrocities committed

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2 This motive was supported and emphasized by Christoph Von Haimendorf in “The Renaissance of Tibetan Civilization,” Oxford University Press 1990.
by the Chinese in Lhasa such as torture and humiliation in public for anyone unwilling to embrace Chinese Communism. A third reason was that the Chinese authorities were obstructing endogamous marriages among the Tibetans who were forced to take a bride or a groom from the Chinese. This measure, they explained, was aimed at destroying “their race of which the Tibetans were so proud”. A fourth reason was the news that their leader the Dalai Lama had escaped to India. Saklani also writes that many Tibetans she interviewed took to flight after hearing about the Dalai Lama’s escape. The fifth reason was the confiscation of property from the propertied classes. Moreover the Chinese had planned the takeover in such a way that the communities and families were split among themselves. Children were used to spy upon their parents, the wife upon the husband. Palakshappa concludes, the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese had created a sense of insecurity and this insecurity in their daily life was at the bottom of the Tibetan exodus.

While some refugees managed to bring their families, many had to flee alone, leaving their families behind. When they arrived in India, most of the refugees were starving or wounded, ill from the low altitude and stunned by the profound cultural shock of descending on an alien world (Phuntso 2003: 134). On 25 April 1959, the Dalai Lama called an emergency meeting of the few senior Tibetan officials who had accompanied him from Tibet and those who had arrived earlier in India to discuss the situation and plan for the reconstruction in exile. Soon after the meeting, the Dalai Lama re-established the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in Dharamsala to meet both the immediate and long-term needs of the Tibetan people. The Dalai Lama said, “In 1959, when I escaped with a few cabinet ministers, the Tibetan government, which has history of three hundred years also came into exile. The exiled Tibetan government is not a new creation.

3 The meeting was held in Mussoorie, which served as the Dalai Lama’s initial headquarters. The discussion at the meeting was also greatly influenced by Nehru who had called on the Dalai Lama at Mussoorie the day before. His advice to the Dalai Lama was to “rest and consider things well without being hasty”. The meeting identified a few areas of concentration: rehabilitation of the Tibetan refugees, education of Tibetan children, preservation of Tibetan culture and identity, gathering and disseminating information regarding Tibetans both inside and outside Tibet, pursuing the Tibetan question at the United Nations and preserving and promoting unity among the Tibetan refugee community.
Wherever the Dalai Lama resides, the Tibetan people consider that as the seat of the Tibetan government.”

7a.2 Taking Refuge in India: Rehabilitation of the Exiled Tibetans

The Early Years

Initially, two large transit camps had been established to handle the influx of refugees in consultation with the Government of India: one at Missamari, located ten miles from Tezpur in Arunachal Pradesh; the other at Buxa Duar, a former British prisoner-of-war camp situated near the Bhutanese border in West Bengal. “The camps represented an effort not only of the Indian government but also of the opposition parties…united to create a Central Relief Committee that was instrumental in obtaining food, medical supplies and international aid” (Avedon 1984: 73). Within a few weeks after the setting up of the camps, 6000 refugees arrived at Missamari and 1000 at Buxa Duar. As the camps could accommodate not more than 9000 persons between them, simultaneous efforts were made to occupy the refugees with road building works in the cooler regions of North India to prevent fatalities due to intense heat, overcrowding and and an epidemic of amoebic dysentery. The first batch of 3394 people was sent for roadwork in Sikkim in September 1959 in several groups and another batch of 400 to Kalimpong and Darjeeling and some to Bhutan. Later in early 1960 more people were sent for roadwork in the North Indian states of Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. Avedon wrote, “As the Tibetans discovered, in common with one road group after another, contact with the local people, though necessary, was often hazardous. Whatever infectious diseases were present among the inhabitants – tuberculosis in particular passed indiscriminately to the Tibetans who lacking the proper antibodies most often died. Within a few weeks of the exile’s arrival in India it became clear that the task of transition was not only more threatening than that of escape but so universally

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destructive, affecting virtually every family that the survival of the refugees as a coherent group was itself called into question” (1984: 78).

On April 29, 1960, after a little more than a year’s stay, the Dalai Lama left Mussoorie for Dharamsala, which came to be known as “Little Lhasa”\(^5\). In Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama revitalized his administration-in-exile and called a special meeting of the deputies and staff members on 2 September 1960 to formulate new rules and regulations and reallocate portfolios of the Kalon.

Although the roadwork had provided the much-needed temporary employment for the refugees, it turned out to be hard and dangerous. Since most of the roadwork was carried out in mountain areas, the refugees with no practical training of rock-climbing had to risk their lives climbing up the cliffs to explode the blasts. The migratory and unsettled nature of the roadwork proved extremely hard, particularly for children and old people. Many of the roadworkers contracted tuberculosis and other communicable diseases due to lack of nutrition and sanitation. Aware of the possible protracted nature of the Tibetan struggle, the Dalai Lama said, “Some Tibetans at that time, however, put forward the idea of temporarily settling all the Tibetan refugees along the border areas of the Himalayas so that we could be ready to return to Tibet at the first opportunity. But we decided to give priority to more permanent rehabilitation with facilities to enable all the Tibetans to live in homogeneous communities and provide the young with good education, modern as well as our own traditional education so even if the struggle takes generations, new generations could replace the older ones and take on the responsibility.”\(^6\) Thus the Dalai Lama approached Nehru for assistance in the permanent rehabilitation of the refugees. Nehru on his part canvassed the state governments for vacant land. Mysore state immediately responded, offering initially 1500 hectares of an uninhabited stretch of jungle in gently rolling hills at Bylakuppe, 80 kilometres west of Mysore city, situated at

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\(^5\) Though “Little Lhasa” was put on the map of global tourism mostly after the mid eighties, the name had come to be associated with Upper McLeod Gunj from the sixties itself (see passing reference to it in Avedon 1984: 103).

\(^6\) His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s keynote address to the Second International Conference of Tibet Support Groups, Bonn (Germany), 14 June 1996.
the altitude of 900m above sea level. The state government agreed to accept initially 3000 Tibetan refugees and provided a grant of Rs 3,784,800 for the rehabilitation project (Phuntso 2003: 137).

7a.3 Classifying Tibetan Settlements in India

7a.3.1 Agriculture-based Settlements

Soon after, the first Tibetan agricultural settlement was set up in December 1960 at Bylakuppe, accommodating a total of 3217 Tibetan refugees by the end of 1965. For administrative reasons, the settlement was divided into six camps, each with 250-300 hectares of land. In the first few years, the settlers engaged in clearing jungle, digging wells and constructing houses during which they were paid daily wages and given regular rations. The settlers were divided into artificial families of five people, relatives or not and each family was given two and half hectares of land. They were accommodated in one room brick walled, tile roofed single story houses built on a 50 sq.m., part of which also served as kitchen garden. A co-operative society was set up in 1961 and later formally registered. The cooperatives procure and advance seeds, fertilizers and pesticides; market agricultural produce collectively and provide common services such as tractors, trucks and warehousing. Besides, the co-operatives play a crucial role in managing carpet weaving centers, flour mills, poultry farms and other ventures and such as retail outlets in the settlements. In the same year, a school was opened in the settlements, which was later managed by the Tibetan schools society (an autonomous body under the Ministry of Education of the Government of India. When the Bylakuppe settlement first started, a small dispensary was set up in a tent to care for emergency medical needs of the refugees. Later in 1964, a special complex of concrete houses was built with assistance from foreign aid organizations to accommodate a dispensary with in-patient facilities. For the first five years, the settlers cultivated cotton, tobacco, rice, millet, paddy, lentils and oilseeds, all of which failed miserably. Farming in South India

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was so different from Tibet’s unique high-altitude agronomy that many settlers became totally discouraged and helpless.\(^8\)

The Bylakuppe settlement had served as a model for planning other agriculture-based settlements later. In 1962, the second settlement was set up at Chaglang in Arunachal Pradesh, accommodating 1503 refugees by March 1963 on 1,900 acres of densely forested land. In February 1962, the third settlement was opened at Tezu in the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh, accommodating 864 Tibetan refugees. The fourth settlement, established at Mainpat in Chattisgarh in March 1963, accommodating 1726 Tibetans on 750 hectares of land. In May 1963, the fifth settlement was set up at Chandragiri in Orissa, accommodating 3000 refugees. In April 1965, the sixth settlement was founded at Mundgod, nearly 495 km north of Bylakuppe, accommodating 4000 refugees on 2000 hectares of land. By 1969, 21 agricultural settlements for over 20,000 refugees were operating in India, Nepal and Bhutan. Later, eight more agricultural-based settlements were set up at Hunsur and Kollegal in Karnataka, Byhandara in Maharashtra, Bomdila in Arunachal Pradesh, Changtang and Leh in Ladakh, Herbertpur in Uttaranchal.

\(\textit{7a.3.2 Agro-Industrial Settlements}\)

Many refugees were traditionally nomads and traders and had no idea of farming. Not only was it hard to find relatively large tracts of land, it was also not practical to rehabilitate all the refugees in farming. With a view to expedite the process of rehabilitation, it was found necessary to seek other avenues of resettlement. The Tibetan Industrial Rehabilitation Society (TIRS) was established in October 1965, with its headquarters in New Delhi. It was registered as a charitable society under the Indian Societies Registration Act of 1860. For the next three years, the TIRS launched several small industrial projects. These included a wool mill at Bir, tea estates at Bir and

\(^8\) The agony of the repeated crop-failure was solved in 1965 when a Swiss technical advisor in consultation with the Agriculture University of Bangalore conducted soil tests and also tested the yields of bullock-ploughed and tractor-ploughed fields. This test resulted in the cultivation of maize crop instead of cotton, tobacco and other crops and also the replacement of bullock ploughs by tractor ploughs. The new crop methods proved so successful that by the end of 1966, the settlement became self-supporting (Phuntso 2003: 138).
Chauntra, Tibetan crafts at Bajnath (all in the Kangra valley, Himachal Pradesh), a limestone quarry at Kumrao, a hydrated lime plant at Sataun, a fibre glass factory at Paonta Sahib and a handicraft centre in Puruwala (in the Simour district of Himachal Pradesh). More than 4000 refugees were ultimately settled in these projects. However many of these efforts failed due to lack of technical and managerial skills. The majority of the industrial settlements gradually began to depend more on traditional carpet weaving and roadwork in summer and woolen garment trade in Indian towns and cities in winter (Phuntso 2003: 140). With regard to the TIRS, Girija Saklani observed, “The shortage of funds even for administrative purposes proved to be a formidable obstacle. Donors were reluctant to provide continuous assistance as their earlier aid had been more or less abortive. Besides, after 1971 all voluntary agencies in India were concentrating on relief to the Bangladesh refugees. Under these circumstances, it is stated that the TIRS was advised (mostly by the donors to wind up its activities)” (1984: 232-235). The Society however took the bold step to carry on but decided to reorient its policy and streamline its activities by rectifying past mistakes. It introduced some commercial discipline to prevent any financial irregularities. It decided to pool all financial assistance into a rolling fund and give assistance to the undertakings, which cooperated with the TIRS and furnished full accounts of their working. The TIRS decided to have agricultural-cum-handicraft projects. The undertakings, which were not immediately feasible, were shelved until the required funds were forthcoming and a few others were finally closed (Saklani 1984: 234).

7a.3.3 Handicraft-based Settlements

Before the refugee exodus, Tibetans living close to the Indo-Tibetan border had for centuries shared an intimate cultural and trade relationship with their neighbours. These interactions resulted in the development of many traditional crafts in Tibet. These included metal work, woodcraft, clay modeling, thangka painting, handmade paper, leatherwork, weaving of woolen cloth and carpets. Although in the traditional society there were no institutions to promote these crafts, they were practiced in homes and the
products were sold locally or through traders to different parts of Tibet. In the early 1960s, some Tibetan craftsmen established themselves in Kalimpong, the traditional Tibetan trading post in North India and others settled temporarily in Darjeeling and Nepal. The Dalai Lama stressed that “our performing arts, our literature, science and religion as well as those crafts from which we could earn a livelihood – painting, metalcraft, architecture, woodworking and carpetmaking – these we took special pains to safeguard. To achieve this we employed modern methods although they were altogether new to us and posed many difficulties” (Avedon 1984: 92). The first handicraft-based settlement was founded on a two-hectare estate in Darjeeling in October 1959. Encouraged by the success of the first handicraft-based settlement, other centers were set up in the following years. These included the handicraft centers in Dalhousie, Dharamsala, Kalimpong, Shimla, Clement Town, Rajpur and Dehradun. Similar settlements also set up in Nepal. In these handicraft-based settlements, cooperatives were established to procure raw materials and market the products. While the cooperatives marketed the settlement’s produce both in India and abroad, the settlers engaged also in individual trade of sweaters – knitted initially by themselves but later bought from the factories in Ludhiana to supplement their income. Saklani noted, “In the winter months almost every town in India is thronged with Tibetan refugees – men, women and even children who have almost established a strong hold on the woolen knitwears is that these are supposed to be knit from pure Tibetan wool” (1984: 208). By the latter half of the 1960s, sweater-selling became the supplementary trade of the majority of Tibetan refugees.

7a.4 Some General Comments on the Tibetan Refugee Settlements

At present there are 46 Tibetan settlements in India, Nepal and Bhutan, home to most of the 100, 451 Tibetan refugees in South Asia (Tibetan Demographic Survey 1998).  

9 The Thirteenth Dalai Lama during his exile from Tibet in 1910-11 had used this site as his temporary residence and therefore it has a special sentimental value for the Tibetans. A more detailed description of this handicraft-based settlement would follow later while taking up the ethnographic case of the Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling town.

10 There is a floating population of about 6% which could not be counted. The Planning Council reckons that the population increases by 2.2% per year due to natural growth and influx of more refugees.
Within a span of a few years, the refugees from Tibet became self-supporting and emerged as ‘one of the most successful’ refugee communities in the world.\textsuperscript{11} Melvyn Goldstein arrived at Bylakuppe in January 1966 to do fieldwork among the refugees in South India. Within five years of starting the settlement from scratch in 1960, the refugees at Bylakuppe had “become a tremendous economic success” (Goldstein 1978: 399). He observed very little manifestation of the dysfunctional behaviour commonly associated with the refugee syndrome (Goldstein 1978: 403). Girija Saklani wrote that Tibetans have, on the whole, “successfully emerged from a self-sufficient barter economy into a competitive economy and have adjusted to the new situation which is a tribute to the Tibetan community in exile” (1984: 216).

According to Dawa Norbu (2003: 193), “By far the most fundamental features of the Tibetan success lay in the indigenous leadership and organisation that emerged out of the traditional social and political structures. Such leadership and organisation, especially during the initial and critical years were instrumental in the successful implementation of various projects. They ensured that the NGO funds went beyond mere relief operations to the building of infrastructure.” What is of concern to refugee studies and specifically in the present study on the Tibetan refugees is the “social fact” (Durkheim 1905) that the Tibetan Government-in-exile provides legitimate leadership to the refugee community as a whole, although no state in the world (including India) legally recognizes the Tibetan government (bod-gzhun) in Dharamsala. The Tibetan government-in-exile has assumed a virtual monopoly to represent and act on behalf of the refugees in negotiation with the Government of India and the NGOs concerning relief, rehabilitation and resettlement of Tibetan refugees in India and elsewhere. At the same time it organised the scattered refugees into several settlements and established its direct control over them. From the beginning the Dalai Lama and his officials interacted with the Government of India on behalf of the refugees. They immediately set themselves up as the sole spokesmen for the refugees and even maintained offices in the transit camps. The Government of India tacitly accepted the Dalai Lama’s assumption of leadership over the refugees and partly

as a concession for India’s inability or unwillingness to recognize the “Tibetan Government-in-Exile”, despite persistent pleas and considerable Indian public support for such a recognition, especially after 1962 (Norbu 2003: 194). This policy was in line with India’s desire that settlements should be designed in such a “non-assimilative” way as to enable the Tibetan refugees to preserve their cultural identity and religious institutions while in exile.

7a.4.1 Organizational Structure of the Refugee Settlements

The question of leadership and organisation within refugee communities is a crucial part of the subject-matter of refugee studies. An elucidation of the role of indigenous leadership and organisation in the process of refugee rehabilitation and settlement is therefore deemed critical in the present study. Dawa Norbu states, “The settlements are not completely identical in their organisation, but they follow a pattern, the terms for the functionaries and the levels may differ” (2003: 195). In principle there are three layers of decision-making. At the head is the settlement officer, who belongs to the Tibetan Central Administration. The settlements comprising between 1000 to 8000 people are divided into camps, also called villages. The inhabitants elect a camp leader called chimie. These are assisted by four spokespersons called chupon, representing 250 inhabitants. Originally the chupon represented ten households but as the population has increased, this number is nowadays not strictly adhered to.

Some Illustrations

I. Bylakuppe Settlement

In Bylakuppe, where about half the Tibetan refugees in South India live, there are two settlements: Lugsung Samdupling founded in 1961, therefore also called the “old settlement”. It has a population of 7631 (Tibetan Demographic Survey 1998). The second

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12 This echoes the traditional Tibetan decimal organisation, hence the refugees had no problem accepting this system (Norbu 2003: 195). For more on the traditional Tibetan political system see Goldstein (1971) who writes, “The essence of the Tibetan political system was the delicate balance between centralized and decentralized political authority.”
is Dekyi Larsoe founded in 1969 with 3096 people is the “new settlement”. In addition there about 7000 inhabitants of the monasteries: monks, novices and staff. The four sects in Tibetan Buddhism have rebuilt their famous monasteries, namely Sera, Tashilhunpo, Kargye and Namdrolling next to the settlements. These monasteries and their monk population follow their own organisation and have to find their own funding; they are not part of the settlement administration. The structure of the two Bylakuppe settlements mirrors the three-layered hierarchy with the chupon or “head of ten” at the base. The chupon’s duty is to organize labour for community projects, call for meetings, organize festivals and hear grievances. Such deputies, numbering four in each camp are annually elected. The most important functionary is the chimie or “general leader” nowadays called camp leader. Above these democratically elected positions are the appointees of Dharamsala and chief among them is the Settlement Officer (sku-tsab). He heads a fully staffed office and is accountable to the Department of Home of the CTA. The settlement officers and their staff plan the policies for the settlement for the settlement as a whole with respect not only to economic matters but also to socio-cultural ones. Such policies and projects are implemented through the useful offices of the chupon after consultation with the chimie. Internally, the settlement officer seeks to integrate diverse subcultural units by articulating pan-Tibetan identity. The settlement officer uses the prestige of his office to mediate disputes but only if efforts at the lower levels fail. Externally, often acts on behalf of his settlers in their dealings with Indian legal and political officials.  

II. Mundgod Settlement

The Tibetan refugee organisation at the Mundgod settlement that Palakshappa (1978) describes seems slightly different. We cannot fail to observe the centrality of the Dharamsala-appointed settlement officer and the organizing principle of the social organisation. The economic and political nerve-centre of the Mundgod Tibetan settlement as in other settlements is the Tibetan cooperative society whose membership is open to all the male heads of all the households in the camp. At the head of the cooperative society is the Secretary, a representative of the CTA. The Secretary and his staff who operate the

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13 For more on the Bylakuppe settlement and other Tibetan refugee settlements see [http://www.tibet.net/en/home/settlements/settle/settleindia.html](http://www.tibet.net/en/home/settlements/settle/settleindia.html)
settlement’s secretariat are directly paid by Dharamsala. The Secretary acts as an administrative link between the Dharamsala administration and the Mundgod settlement. Palakshappa notes that “due to the pivotal role he has within the Mundgod settlement, the Secretary, though a paid official, commands authority and in many respects is considered as the king of the settlement” (1978: 43).

The Mundgod settlement consists of nine villages and each village elects a leader called Gambo meaning “the elder” (corresponding to the chimie at Bylakuppe). The village leader acts as a link between the village and the co-operative society’s secretary. The Secretary delegates authority to the village leader and the latter transmit messages and policies from the co-operative society; he tries to solve his villagers’ problems such as getting loans from the bank, mediating in civil disputes, getting fertilizer from the co-operative and above all he gets tasks and projects ordered by the Secretary done by the villagers. The village leader is assisted by group leaders (chupon). The group leaders are subordinate to the village leader and are in constant touch with him. They report to the village leader about the needs and problems of families whom they represent and who have elected them. Dawa Norbu states, “Communication and command flows through hierarchy: from the secretary to the village leaders from the village leaders to group leaders and from group leaders to individual households” (2003: 198).

7a.4.2 On Dharamsala: Little Lhasa

Before undertaking an ethnographic analysis of the Darjeeling Tibetans, it is important to interrogate the role played by Dharamsala\(^4\) (which is at the centre of the Tibetan diaspora) in circulating particularized meanings of Tibetanness, especially those connected to the theme of preservation of traditional culture and return to homeland and

\(^4\) The place name is spelt either as Dharamsala or Dharamshala. But the Government-in-exile, following Indian government surveys, uses the former spelling. Throughout the discussion, the spelling Dharamsala would be used in order to designate the place. Dharamsala is a common name used for Dharmasala proper (the Kotwali Bazaar area) or the Lower Dharamsala, McLeod Gunj or the Upper Dharamsala. Lower Dharamsala is a predominantly Indian area. While many Tibetan establishments are located here, there are more in the vicinity of Dharamsala (for instance the Norbulingka Institute). Dharamsala is used as a generic name for all. Location wise, it is characterized as a hill station in Himachal Pradesh.
the desire to project a sense of continuity in changing external environment. This would enable an understanding later on of the mode and reasons Tibetan refugees at Darjeeling live both inside and outside their ethnic community, of how Darjeeling becomes another space at once central and marginal to the Tibetan diaspora, where Tibetans “mediate between cultures” and groups, in James Clifford’s sense of diasporas as “mediating cultures” (1994: 311), as they become more localized and more cosmopolitan over time.

Kiela Diehl describes Dharamsala as “Both a place of rest or refuge and a place to pass through, both a destination and a place one must leave to fulfill the very promise of pilgrimage” (2002: 32). This focus on Dharmsala as a “place of rest” can be complemented by a play with the root word dharamsala. Dibyesh Anand’s contention is that the “symbolic geography of the place along with a particular implication of the word dharmshala supports the dominant story preferred by the exile elite and their non-Tibetan supporters (the ‘salvage mentality’ or ‘Shangri-La paradigm’ as they are often termed)” (2000: 13). In consequence, Dharamsala is only seen as a static stage for theatrics of Tibetan diasporic culture and politics. This notion of fixity hides the fact that the geography of Dharamsala has had a changing symbolic role for Tibetan diaspora. As Dibyesh Anand notes, “A movement from a poor refugee settlement to one of the most popular tourist destination, a change from a small, dilapidated village to a cosmopolitan small town - all these are indicative as well as constitutive of changes within Tibetan exile community” (2000: 15).

The physical location of Dharamsala in the hills of Himachal Pradesh has facilitated its projection and promotion as Little Lhasa. In a certain sense, Dharamsala acts as an accessible substitute for those travelers (often white western). The mountainous terrain

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15 “The place name ‘Dharamsala’ comes from the Sanskrit word dharamshala comprising of two parts – dharma (religion) and shala (house)” (Anand 2000: 13).
16 There seems to be a difference of motive for traveling to Dharamsala between white westerner and others. The influence of a Shangri-La paradigm is less noticeable in the case of Japanese and Korean visitors (for whom Dharamsala is a often only a constituent part of Buddhist pilgrimage circuit in India) or the Indian tourists (for whom it is a replacement for crowded hill stations like Simla). This is not to say that all the westerners who come here are affected by Shangri-La myth or that all non-western tourists are free from it. The distinction made is a result of general observation, which may be highly limited and selective.
of McLeod Gunj and its distance from any big city contributes to the symbolic geography of Dharamsala. There are logistical and practical problems because of such a location and the Government-in-exile recognizes it. However there is reason to believe that it would be slightly more difficult for Tibetans to pursue a strategy of limited acculturation had Dharamsala been near some big city (Anand 2000: 17). The location of Tibetan settlements has been decided entirely by Indian central and state governments.

Drawing upon the usage of the word dharamshala, Dibyesh Anand in his essay (2000) attempts to theorize Tibetan identity discourse in broadly two ways. Dharamshala in popular Hindi usage refers to a “temporary home”. The first way, which has a wide currency among the Tibetan government and non-Tibetan supporters of the Tibetan cause, looks at the experience of diaspora as a temporary phenomenon. It is not therefore surprising that Dharamsala is projected as Little Lhasa in India and several dynamics go on to support such a projection. The institutionalised expression of the theme of preservation of culture is best found at the Norbulingka Institute, which is dedicated explicitly to the preservation of Tibet in both its literary and artistic form.

The idea that Tibetan culture in diaspora is more authentic than one prevalent in Chinese controlled Tibet is supported by few factors. One of them is the passing down of cultural authority through practice of reincarnation. Significant part of Tibetan culture and religion had been embodied within reincarnate lamas, the most important being the Dalai Lama himself. The idea of true cultural authority in exile rather than within Tibet is also supported by the presence of some great mastercraftsmen\(^\text{17}\) who had been trained in their art on Old Tibet and then move to exile.

\(^{17}\) The emphasis on craftsmen, is deliberate in order to highlight the gendered character of traditional cultural practices and their reinforcement by preservation ethos.
7a.5 Tibetan Refugees and the Law in India

The dominant paradigm of “Little Lhasa” as a temporary station where Tibetan culture is being preserved is rendered most problematical by the experiences of Tibetans living as urban refugees\(^{18}\) in Darjeeling. It would be prudent to focus at a general level on the diverse and complicated concerns of India’s as yet incomplete refugee law and practice that would have a bearing on the lives of Tibetan refugees leading an increasingly diasporized existence in Darjeeling.

India’s policy towards the UNHCR and joining the Refugee Convention of 1951 has been ambivalent due to a succession of historical reasons. At first, it found the Convention too Eurocentric. Later, it saw as part of the Cold War between Russia and America and others, since refugee concerns were over-focused on those who had fled from communist regimes. India handled the Tibet and Bangladesh crises with some help from foreign agencies, including the UNHCR.\(^{19}\) Within India there has been some social and political resistance to joining the Convention of 1951 and to altering India’s foreigner’s law to provide specific recognition to refugees to write in protections towards refugees as a matter of legal entitlement. Historic notice is taken of the range of migrations, conquests and refugee absorption, which is now characteristically a part of India’s past and present. Behind this is the social assumption that care and concern are always available for foreigners in India. A general attitude seems to have emerged that India can deal with refugees in convincing and humane way without invoking a cumbersome refugee-specific regime. Rajeev Dhavan (2004: 12) notes an irony that emerges in the policy of both the Indian government and the UNHCR. UNHCR profiles India as a nation in which “local integration” is pre-eminently possible. Local integration acquires a priority over other

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\(^{18}\) There is a growing body of theoretically and methodologically sophisticated literature within the parameters of ‘urban studies’ much of which is applicable to the study of urban refugees as forced migrants. Urban studies’ inquiries into displacement, social and political marginalization and livelihood strategies all speak explicitly to established themes within refugee studies. For more on Urban Refugees see http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo024/.

\(^{19}\) The UNHCR returned operationally to India during the Afghan crisis and has provided some verificatory help in respect of the Sri Lankan repatriations. The status determinations by the UNHCR have been generally respected, even though the Indian government reserves the right to deport at will if necessary. Since 1994, India is a member of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR.
durable solutions\textsuperscript{20} including in particular “resettlement”. This provokes anguish and protest by refugees who feel that “local integration” in India is exaggerated and incomplete and that there is a lack of proper and non-discriminatory approach towards evolving just solutions.\textsuperscript{21}

The legal framework concerning refugee in India has been in a state of undefined and unsettled evolution. India has a liberal constitutional framework that guarantees certain fundamental human rights even to foreigners. However, the Indian statutory regime dealing with foreigners refuses even to acknowledge refugees as a special class of people deserving its consideration. It is here that the determination of citizenship becomes important to the operation of a refugee regime. The basic provision for determination of citizenship in 1950 was Article 5 of the Constitution which states, “At the commencement of this Constitution, every person who has his domicile in the territory of India and who was born in the territory of India; or either of whose parents was born in the territory of India; or who has been ordinarily resident in the territory of India for not less than five years immediately preceding such commencement shall be a citizen of India.” In the Constitutional Amendment in 1986, every person born in India after the commencement of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 1986 had to show that one of the parents was a citizen of India before his or her claim to Indian citizenship was accepted. Thus, if a person was born in India after 1 July 1987 to non-Indian parents that person would not be an Indian citizen. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2004 adds a further qualification, whereby a person born in India can become an Indian citizen only if both his parents are Indian or if one of his parents is Indian and the other is not an illegal migrant. This immediately begs the question as to the status of a child born out of wedlock between an illegal migrant and an Indian. This Act does not allow such a person

\textsuperscript{20} According to Goodwin-Gill, “a durable solution entails a process of integration into society; it will be successful and lasting only if it allows the refugee to attain a degree of self-sufficiency, to participate in the social and economic life of the community and to retain what might be described, too summarily, as a degree of personal identity and integrity.” See Goodwin-Gill 1990: 38.

\textsuperscript{21} This has led to protest to the UNHCR by the Afghan refugees, who allege both discrimination and inadequacy in respect of the solutions. The UNHCR’s view that the majority of Afghan refugees being Hindu and Sikh refugees are susceptible to local integration is not shared by all still less by the ‘Muslim’ refugees who feel they are in limbo. The protest turned violent in the case of the Burmese refugees who in 2003 intimidated and threatened the UNHCR staff with protests outside its office in Jorbagh, Delhi.
to become a citizen of India merely by birth in India. Such provisions do increase the possibilities of statelessness.

Even though the general law on foreigners in India is silent on treating refugees as a distinct class of foreigners needing protection, there have been special legislative measures reflecting India’s refugee policy to address particular problems. Most of these measures have been either compensatory or rehabilitative, as in the case of partition refugees or giving exemptions from the general law applicable to foreigners as in the case of Tibetan refugees. The Registration of Foreigners (Exemption) Order 1957 made several exemptions for certain foreigners from the stringent registration requirements generally applicable to all. Children under the age of 16 were entirely exempted. Rule 3 of the said Order also relaxed certain regulations for, inter alia, “indigenous inhabitants of Tibet region of China.” The Order Regulating Entry of Tibetan Nationals into India, 1950 stipulates that a Tibetan national “at the time of his entry into India obtain from the officer-in-charge of the Police post the Indo-Tibetan frontier, a permit in the form specified.” The permit allows such a person to stay and travel in India for the prescribed period, which is extendable on application.

The absence of an identifiable legal regime to deal with refugee is reflected in the manner and extent to which refugees are protected in India. At a formal level, the Indian government has no specific mechanism or machinery or even normative principles designated for the determination of refugee status and protection. If such a procedure is opened as a formal process, any decision on the determination of refugee status would be a decision of the Government of India and instantly amenable to judicial review by the High Court and Supreme Court. Nevertheless, in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Registration of Foreigners Act 1939 and Section 3 of the Foreigners Act 1946, the central government issued S.R.O. 1108, dated 26 December 1950, regulating the entry of Tibetan nationals into India. The order states: Any foreigner of Tibetan nationality who enters into India hereafter shall 1. At the time of his entry into India, obtain from the officer in-charge of the police post at the Indo-Tibetan frontier, a permit
in the form specified in the annexed schedule; 2. Comply with such instructions as may
be prescribed in the said permit; 3. Get himself registered as a foreigner and obtain a
certificate of registration.

Tibetans like other people who flee persecution in their own land are handled legally
under India’s Foreigner’s Act\textsuperscript{22} from 1946 and the Registration of Foreigners Act 1939\textsuperscript{23}.
Every foreigner who arrives in India must furnish true particulars of oneself, the place of
stay in India and the purpose of visit. Rule 6 requires a foreigner to inform the
registration officer of one’s presence in India and obtain a certificate of registration from
the officer. Thus the government is free to expel refugees as it would any other
foreigners.\textsuperscript{24} However, Tibetans’ “refugee status” is often referred to, indicating the
understood de facto nature of Tibetans’ presence in India as refugees. Kevin Garratt
writes, “In the absence of specific treaty obligations, India’s international protection of
‘refugees’ is based essentially on sufferance” (1997: 32). Under the Foreigner’s
Registration Act, Tibetans are required to obtain a “Registration Certificate” (RC), which
must be renewed on an annual basis. Issued by the Government of India, Ministry of
Home Affairs, under the under the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, this is a
Residential Permit for foreigners. Several Tibetans (especially the ones interviewed in
Darjeeling) asserted that having to renew the registration certificate every year was
problematic and indicative of their changeable and precarious status.

When discussing Tibetans’ status in India, it is important to distinguish between two
different groups. The first are those who fled to India around the same time as Dalai
Lama, 1959 through the early 1960s. These people and their children who are “born

\textsuperscript{22} Section 2 (a) of the Foreigners Act defines a “foreigner” as “a person who is not a citizen of India,” thus covering all
refugees within its ambit as well. Section 3 (1) of the act allows the central government to “Make provision either
generally or with respect to all foreigners or with respect to any particular foreigner or any prescribed class or
description of foreigner for prohibiting, regulating or restricting the entry of foreigners into India or their departure
therefrom or their presence or continued presence therein.”

\textsuperscript{23} The Act empowers the central government to make rules regarding the procedure for foreigners to report to a
prescribed authority about their presence, movements, departure and proof of identity. Section 4 of this act states that
the burden of proof in determining whether a person is a foreigner or not, of a particular class or description, shall lie
upon the person concerned.

\textsuperscript{24} While the principle of non-refoulement is respected, granting asylum is seen as the provenance of the nation-state.
refugees,” the majority of whom remain stateless are nonetheless slightly more advantaged than “newcomers”, or those who came from Tibet after the end of the Cultural Revolution from the mid-1980s to the present. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution in China in the mid-1980s, there has been a constant stream of Tibetan refugees making their way across the Himalaya to seek refuge in Nepal and India, around 2000 and 3000 per year (TIN, 2002). Since 1994, the policy of the Tibetan government-in-exile is to encourage newcomers to return to Tibet after receiving an education (Garratt 1997). The government-in-exile’s justification is that, “new arrivals settling permanently in India to increase in number means that through our own efforts we are assisting the long-term evil Chinese policy of transferring large numbers of Chinese into Tibet. It is unnecessary for new arrivals to stay permanently in foreign parts for all the time. It has become vital that returning in whatever number to our own land of Tibet will maintain the policy of being able to hold on to what is our own” (Garratt 1997: 47).

The Indian government has followed a fairly liberal policy of granting refuge to various refugees. Past experience indicates that entry into India for most refugee groups is somewhat in line with the international principles of protection and non-refoulement. Refugees are generally not allowed to work in India. Some do find employment in the informal sector without facing any objection from the administration. Many refugees are self-employed and work with the restrictions applicable to any other foreigner. However, homes. Tibetan refugees, as a special case, have been granted loans and other facilities for self-employment. Refugees normally have the freedom to move around the country with the restrictions applicable to any other foreigner. However, refugees who enter India illegally or overstay the permitted period have strict restrictions on their movement in accordance with the legislation relating to foreigners, such as the Foreigners Act, 1946, the Foreigners Order, 1948 and the Passport Act, 1967.

25 Julia Hess (2006: 82) notes that this difference in status is reflected in the fact that “newcomers” as of 1994 are not supposed to be granted registration certificates. Sources in the government-in-exile have said that this is an unofficial policy, an agreement between the Government of India and the Tibetan government-in-exile. In practice, this means that a Tibetan must prove that he or she was born in India to obtain a registration certificate.

26 Provisions of the Foreigners Act apply to all - no distinction is made in law between asylum-seekers and other aliens. However, courts have been lenient with regard to the imprisonment terms and fine amounts imposed in view of the special situation of refugees.
As residents of India, they move around freely from place to place unlike foreign visitors to the country. Yet they are expected to comply by the same terms and report to the same office as foreigners do. However this RC document does not entitle them to travel abroad. In fact this was another reason why some Tibetan refugees decide to apply for Indian citizenship, although this choice is far from unambiguous. In recent years, Ministry of External Affairs has issued an Identity Certificate (IC) to RC holders. The IC is a small yellow book in lieu of national passport issued for a period of ten years to allow RC holders to travel abroad. If an RC holder takes up Indian citizenship then the person must relinquish his IC at the nearest passport office. However the overall ambiguity of the refugee status and laxity in enforcing rules has given RC holders sufficient leeway to create several identity papers and therefore negotiate between several contextually determined identities.

7a.6 Placing Darjeeling district in the Tibetan Diaspora

To be in exile is to have been deprived of a land and the temporal rhythms of life appropriate to it. To live in exile is to live as an alien and perhaps in a state of “elend” or misery, the English and German words do in fact share the same root (Tabori 1972: 31). At the same time, in an increasingly transnational world of diaspora cultures and communities one is obliged to take account of how the place or places one is supposed to return to are constantly changing and evolving. The “myth” in myth of return increasingly denotes not only the greater or lesser likelihood of a person eventually returning, that is the “when” of return but also the “where” of return and the very possibility that one cannot return and the very possibility that one cannot return home either because home no longer exists or because it has moved elsewhere. In describing the life of Tibetans in exile, using the phrase “myth of return”, it would be important to

27 There is a growing body of literature that pronounces the demise of a place called home see Massey 1991; Bammer 1992. Globalization, the opening up of the local economy to international capital, migration flows and the impact of information technologies which transit events happening on the other side of the world live into people’s homes are all implicated.
exercise caution in ascribing one single or even one dominant orientation to enforced existence outside Tibet, given the size and spread of the Tibetan Diaspora in India and elsewhere. On June 12, 1998 the exile Tibetan population had reached 122,078 from the initial estimated population of 80,000 in 1959 out of which 85,147 live in India and 13,720 in Nepal. The next largest group of exile Tibetans in Asia lives in Bhutan with 1584 and 109 in the Russian Federation and Japan together. The United States of America and Canada has the largest share of Tibetans in the West with 7000 in total followed by 2,243 in Europe of which 68.6% are distributed in Switzerland alone (Tibetan Demographic Survey 1998: 7). While there is no confusion among Tibetan refugees regarding the whereabouts of their homeland, after more than forty years in exile Tibetan refugees have developed relationships to multiple homes. James Clifford notes that even a specific longing for “home” may be focused on more than one place, particularly in the case of people living in a multiply centered diaspora network (1994: 305). Clifford has however been criticized for overemphasizing the multilocal or global nature of diasporas at the expense of people, like Tibetans, who remain sharply focused on a literal territorial center (Venturino 1997: 107). While home for the Tibetans lies without a doubt over the Himalayas, Darjeeling has emerged as the community’s home in exile among other settlements throughout South Asia, Europe, Australia, the United States and Canada. The “place” Darjeeling is however not strictly speaking a home to the generation of Tibetans who escaped into exile. Protracted exile however has produced a new generation of India-born Tibetan refugees who oscillate between the need to keep the notion of the homeland alive on the one hand and of the different kinds of material investments and emotional or social ties with host populations as a creative result of being the heirs of the displaced.

7a.6.1 Darjeeling as a Temporary Home/A Place of Rest or Refuge!

The most widely accepted meaning of the name Darjeeling is “the place of dorje” - Dorje among the Tibetans and to those who speak languages akin to Tibetan could just be a
name of a person, a thunderbolt or even a reference to a Buddha. Consequently, ‘the place of Dorje’ has been translated as “The Place of the Thunderbolt” (Waddell 1978: 299) where ling means a place in Tibetan. Some are of the opinion that it was named after a Lama who once lived there and constructed a monastery on the Observatory Hill. E.C. Dozey records that there was monastery atop the hill as far back as 1765, which was branch of the Phodang Monastery of Sikkim (Dozey 1989 [1922]: 79).

Today except for a makeshift arrangement the monastery does not exist on account of the historic structure being removed by the Gorkhas in order to accommodate a temple to house the Hindu Shiva-linga in 1775. The monastery or what was left of it was later shifted to a sight near the Gymkhana Club but it was removed once again, this time to Bhutay Basti (officially called Bhutia Busti) where it still stands today, to allow the St Andrews Church to be built. Despite the shifting of the monastery twice, firstly by the Hindus and then by the Christians, there is an exceptional religious tolerance and the Hindus and Buddhists worship together at the Observatory Hill without any apparent trace of enmity. The early Nepali Settlers called Darjeeling ‘Gundribazar’ and perhaps this name survives in the truncated “Bazaar”, which is what the population of the surrounding locality call Darjeeling. Despite the suburban population adopting the abbreviated name it is still possible to hear the name Gundribazar amongst the old folks living in the neighbourhood.

The Tibetan refugee/diasporic segment of Darjeeling’s ever-shifting population cannot be understood without taking cognizance of the changing politico-ethnic boundaries of the place with its ebb and flow of administrators, nomads, traders, tourists, pilgrims and groups of varied ethnicities. The ways in which Tibetan residents of Darjeeling understand “where they are” depends on the physical, historical and personal resonances for them between Darjeeling and other places and more specifically on what their route to Darjeeling has been. Members of the oldest generation in exile came to India from areas

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28 Dorje-den is the Tibetan for Buddha Gaya in Bihar. Translated it would mean the diamond seat or the throne of Buddha at Gaya (H.Jaschke: A Tibetan English Dictionary) where den translates as the throne and dorje represents the Buddha himself.

29 “Ling” as an independent word is difficult if not impossible to find in the Tibetan vocabulary. However, it is extensively used as a suffix to denote a place e.g. Namling, Phuentsholing among others.
that were proximate to Darjeeling through Eastern Nepal, Bhutan and India’s North East Frontier Area after escaping from Tibet in 1959 on foot over the Himalayas. But refugees from far-flung areas of Tibet such as Amdo and parts of Kham were not so fortunate. They experienced more trauma and fatigue. Most of them had to trudge for more than a month while twenty days were often an average span of their trauma-filled flight.\footnote{According to the Secretary of TRSHC (interviewed on 30/9/06 at TRSHC), most of the people at the Centre have come from U-Tsang province in Tibet (about 70%). About 20% from Kham and 10% from Amdo province.}

The winter out-migration of Tibetan refugee sweater sellers and traders to the plains of India and their return to the mountains to celebrate Tibetan New Year (Losar) in February is an important reminder of the refugee community’s continuing dependence on their hosts and of the need to reconsider the tentative relationships that most Tibetan refugees have with their co-ethnics, that is the Bhutias (Tibetans who came to Darjeeling prior to 1959) and other ethnic groups such as the Nepalis comprising of (Khambus, Murmis, Limbus, Chettris, Gurungs, Tamangs, Yolmos); Lepchas; Sherpas; Rajbansis) residing in Darjeeling Town. Focusing on the problematic, which Tanka Subba spells out with respect to the history of Darjeeling would be crucial in order not only to apprehend the Tibetan refugee – host relation (‘local integration’ in refugee law) in Darjeeling but also to understand the import of the shifting nature of territorialized or deterritorialized (in Appadurai’s sense) identities in the refugee/diasporic context. Tanka Subba states, “It may be further said that the history of a region should not be mixed up with the history of a people. The former is often space bound but the latter is seldom so. The lack of such an understanding among pro-establishment scholars have given rise to an unnecessary debate over what length of time a people requires in order to be eligible to claim a region it inhabits. If the Nepalis had more than three centuries’ association with Darjeeling would they be considered eligible for claiming it? It is indeed unfortunate that such questions have to be raised, the answers to which lead us nowhere, they neither solve our problems nor enlighten us in any way. Yet we have to live with them?” (1992: 29). Such claims and counter claims of different ethnic groups over a region and its relation to time has had profound implications towards forging refugee identities of Tibetans and in determining the nature of their integration (the concept of integration will be elaborated upon later (see Harrell-Bond 1986; Bulcha 1988) in the host society since 1959.
A brief outline of the history of Darjeeling at this stage would aid in understanding the more literal or geographically based notions of ethnic identity and displacement. The territories of Darjeeling district were acquired by the British from two neighbouring states, Sikkim and Bhutan in 1835. The whole tract of Darjeeling comprising of firstly, the Hilly region; secondly, the Terai; thirdly, the Dooars belonged to the Raja of Sikkim. Between 1780 and 1810 Nepal annexed a portion of Terai and the Hilly region of Darjeeling. In the Anglo-Nepal war in 1817, the East India Company wrested away the territory from Nepal and restored to Sikkim. As a mark of respect, the Raja of Sikkim gifted the territory, scarcely populated by Lepchas to East India Company in 1835. Prior to the Passage of Councils Act 1861 Darjeeling remained under Non-regulation scheme. In Councils Act of 1861 distinction between regulated and non-regulated provinces ceased to exist. The Act No. XV of 1874 declared Darjeeling as a Scheduled District granting a special status along with other four districts of Bengal. These districts were kept outside the ambit of general laws in operation throughout the rest of India. The Government of India Act 1919 had replaced the term Scheduled District by a new terminology “Backward Tract”. The Government of India Act 1935 brought in its wake significant changes in the administrative system and substituted the “Backward tract” by “Excluded” Area or “Partially Excluded Area” with the intent to provide special status to certain areas including the district of Darjeeling. The policy of ‘excluded’ and ‘partially excluded areas’ was designed to alienate the tribes from general population and divide the country playing on ethnic distinctions. The colonial concept of exclusion found expression in the Indian constitution in the form of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules wherein certain mechanisms were evolved for the administration of tribal areas. The tribal policy initiated by the British and subsequently adopted by the Government of India facilitated the process of ethnic consolidation among groups. Not all groups could translate ethnic identity into political gains (Sarkar and Bhaumik 2000: 15-16).

31 For closer scrutiny of the “deed of grant” wherein part of present Darjeeling was “granted” away by the Raja of Sikkim to the British see Dash 1947: 37-38.
7a.7 Pre-Exilic Tibetan Hosts

Although literature does exist on the post-1959 Tibetans and their trials and tribulations under Chinese rule and in the diaspora, there is scarcely any literature on the Old Tibetans who were residing in Darjeeling prior to 1959. Ethnographic encounter with these early Tibetans known as the Bhutias\textsuperscript{32} reveals how they not only aided in the adaptation of Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling (Subba 1990) but also helped in shaping their identity in exile. O’Malley (1927: 188) writes that the Bhutias are of “Tibetan stock, the name meaning the people of Bhot, the sanskritic name for Tibet (which is a corruption of the Mongoloid Thubot).” A large number of Tibetans began settling in Sikkim from the middle of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century and got mixed up with the local people, particularly the Lepchas. The early history of the Bhutias in Sikkim is shrouded in myth and legend but a common belief is that they came from eastern Tibet. Some theories suggest that they may have been exiles from the great Tangut (Tibetan) Buddhist kingdom of Minyak, which flourished at the eastern end of the Central Asian Silk road between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{33} The legendary ancestor of the Sikkim Bhutias, Guru Tashi was apparently a younger prince from the royal house of Minyak who lived in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Since he had no prospect of inheriting the throne of Minyak, he traveled with his family to seek his fortune and arrived at Sakya monastery in Tibet. There his eldest son performed what was then considered the miraculous feat of erecting the pillars of the new monastery that was being built and he became known as Khye-bum-sar (Rhodes and Rhodes 2006: 5). Thereafter the family settled in the Chumbi valley from where they made contact with a Lepcha chieftain living near Gangtok. The descendants of Khye-bum-sar’s three sons who settled in Sikkim and in the Chumbi Valley formed twelve clans one of which was called the Nam-tsang-khopa and it was from this clan that Laden La, a highly influential figure in Darjeeling and Tibet during the first three decades of the twentieth century was descended. Although little is

\textsuperscript{32} A general term applied to a number of groups bearing varied degree of affiliation with Tibetan culture.
\textsuperscript{33} The Minyak kings reputedly came from the kingdom of Urgyen, where the Lotus-born Buddha, often known as Guru Rimpoche or Padma Sambhava was born in the eight century. All Sikkimese Buddhists including Laden La hold Guru Rimpoche in great veneration.
known of their early years, these Bhutia clans brought Buddhism with them and established Nyimapa temples and monasteries throughout the region.

In 1907, the first ever demand for “separate administrative set-up” for the district of Darjeeling was placed before the government by the leaders of the Hill people.\(^{34}\) The three communities comprising the Hill people had already developed various sorts of interdependence; agrarian and trade being two most important sectors in this regard. A common forum for interaction between the three main hill communities of Darjeeling was non-existent until the establishment of the Hillmen’s Association. It is evident that an informal association of these three communities had already come into existence in 1907 itself (Subba 2000: 78). According to Bagahi and Danda, the Hillmen’s Association came into being in 1921 to “safeguard and advocate the legitimate interests of the hill people in the sphere of politics” and under the leadership of ‘Bahadur Rai, Hari Prasad Pradhan and Laden La’ (1982: 342). The influence of the Tibetan émigré community in the region is amply demonstrated through the life and works of Sonam Wangfel Laden La. He was born in 1876 in Darjeeling, possibly in Bhutia Busty or in Ging and into a Sikkim Bhutia Lama family, who were small landowners in the region. He was the first local boy to be given a “European” education in Darjeeling, as well as a comprehensive education in his own Sikkimese Tibetan culture. After successfully completing his education, he was the first local hill boy to be appointed to the Imperial police Force in Darjeeling at officer rank. As regards the relationship with Tibet, after the Younghusband military expedition of 1904, Laden La did play an important role in establishing a good rapport between British India and the Dalai Lama. When the Dalai Lama sought refuge in India in 1910, Laden La was assigned to his party on a full time basis and from then until 1914 he was continually involved with Tibetan affairs.\(^{35}\) His interest in local politics continued and he advanced the view that Darjeeling be separated from the rest of Bengal and became the President of the Hillmen’s Association twice. As Tanka Subba (1992: 80-81) writes, “a cursory glance at the various memoranda…indicated a tremendous strain that Laden La the key figure in the region until the mid 1930’s had taken to keep the Hillmen’s

\(^{34}\) The “Hill people” were referred to here as the Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalis (Subba 2000: 76).

\(^{35}\) For more on Laden La see Rhodes and Rhodes 2006.
Association true to its name. It was his status as ‘Sardar Bahadur’ and the respect he wielded among the Nepalis that enabled him to stop this Association from turning into a Gorkha Association” (1992: 80-81). In December 1934 he organized a meeting in Darjeeling with the express intention of resolving the internal disputes of the three hill communities. After that meeting, Parasmani Pradhan proposed the establishment of the Hill Peoples Social Union and in February 1935 they published a magazine called “Nebula” (short for Nepali-Bhutia-Lapche). The petition submitted by the Hillmen’s Association in 1934 had recommended that Darjeeling should not be incorporated as part of Bengal but should have a separate status. However the Government of India Act 1935, ignored these petitions and Darjeeling was integrated into Bengal as a “partially excluded area” and at the same time it was decided that a representative from Darjeeling should sit in the Bengal Legislative Assembly.

Ruling elites of pre-exilic Tibet who had fled from Tibet before 1959 had already secured a comfortable niche in the socio-economic environment of the region. Some of them had come along with their cattle and others with enough riches, gold and precious stones, to be soon counted among the richest in the region. It was also these refugees and the Bhutias who extended financial and other forms of assistance to those less fortunate refugees coming after 1959. The cultural affinity between the Bhutias and the Tibetan refugees would have had a role in creating a temporary home for Tibetans in exile. However, the proposition put forward by Tanka Subba that proper adaptation of groups is a function of cultural affinity requires further examination. Subba (1990: 68) notes that the “Bhutias like their Tibetan refugee co-ethnics are Buddhists and have been successful throughout in staying away from the influence of Christianity.” With regard to the linguistic connection, the Bhutias are familiar with the Tibetan language, although the Bhutias of the region call their language “Sikkimese”. Some of the kin terms like “Pala” or father; “Amala” or mother or “Achala” or sister were well known and understood by the local communities in Darjeeling. As the number of Indian Tibetan Bhutia began to grow they felt it necessary to remain organized. At the initial stages some associations were formed but they began to affiliate themselves under one banner appropriately named as “Kidu Chu” – an umbrella organization of ten Bhutia associations. The office of Kidu-
Chu is located at N.B. Singh road below Laden La road car park, Darjeeling. As one Bhutia respondent said, “All Tibetan Bhutias are Buddhists and regard Dalai Lama as their spiritual head. We celebrate Tibetan New year. Other important festivals include Saka Dawa (Buddha Sakyamuni’s Birth, Enlightenment and Parinirvana); Zam ling Chisang (Universal Prayer Day); Choekhor Due Chen (Buddha Sakyamuni’s first preaching at Sarnath. We speak Tibetan and our script is known as Umay and Uchen.” Bhutias also take part on the occasion of Phupati with members of other ethnic groups. The president of Kidu-Chu on the occasion of Phupati said, “We are here to promote communal harmony and national integration. Anyway, it said Buddhism evolved from Hinduism and this is why we are taking part in these celebrations.” The general secretary of Kidu-Chu added, “We also celebrate Laxmi puja and Bhai tika during Diwali. Dussehra and Diwali have evolved more as social festivals in the hills and we have always been part of this event.”

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36 Excerpt from an interview with a Bhutia respondent on 19/05/05 in Bhutia Busty.
Section 7b: Darjeeling Town Refugees: Cultural Preservation, Local Integration and the Pragmatics of Identity

7b.1 Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre in Darjeeling Town

Situated at “Hill-side” Lebong West in the area locally known as “Hermitage”, the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre\(^1\) in Darjeeling town is one of the oldest refugee centres in the Tibetan Diaspora. This refugee settlement came into existence on October 2\(^{nd}\) 1959. It initially provided base for distribution of emergency relief to Tibetan refugees who had brought nothing with them apart from the clothes they wore and the little provisions they managed to bring along during their hazardous trek over the Himalayas into India. The “Hill-side”, a small estate comprising 3.44 acres was originally leased and eventually bought from St Joseph’s College. There was space to build and develop a small community outside the town but easily approachable by motor road. The Hill-side had a special significance for Tibetans, for it was here that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had spent his exile in India between 1910-1912 following the Chinese invasion of Tibet at that time.\(^2\)

When the Centre first started in 1959 there were four workers, two males and two females. According to the official website of the Tibetan Government-in-exile, that is, tibet.net, the total population of the settlement in recent times is 650. Under-enumeration in the case of Tibetan refugee populations is a problem at the local level and arises due to the floating nature of such populations. The number of absentees at the time of enumeration at the particular household level remains high. Further, it is difficult to convince the purpose of survey data to refugees. The community has to be constantly reassured of the direct and indirect benefits of survey data.\(^3\) Such surveys are rarely taken

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\(^1\) The address of the Registered Office of the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre is: 65, Gandhi Road, Darjeeling – 734101, West Bengal, India.

\(^2\) The reference to Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s association with “Hill-side” Darjeeling by some the inhabitants of TRSHC in their introductory remarks about their current place of residence in the host society is suggestive of the symbolism that is consequential in enabling them to live the present in historical terms.

\(^3\) However, the extent of net under-enumeration was lower in the Tibetan Demographic Survey 1998 exercise due to two reasons: (a) the field enumerators went from house-to-house and recorded the data; (b) a fair presence and excellent participation by the “immobile” population of the enumeration day (Tibetan Demographic Survey 1998, Planning Council, Central Tibetan Administration 2000: 40).
very seriously by the members of the Tibetan refugee community in Darjeeling town. Given below is the population data of TRSHC gathered from local sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>More in number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the above table, the total population of TRSHC was highest in 1970. The rise in population was due to the steady flow of Tibetan refugees into Darjeeling from Sikkim, few from Lhasa, Shigatse and Amdo province. There has been a steady decline in population of the settlement through the 80s and 90s. In the 90s, there was out-migration of population to Dharamsala and other settlements in India and abroad (America). It is reported that about eight to nine families left for America in the 90s (Official Records, TRSHC Darjeeling). The Welfare Officer mentioned that the reasons for out-migration are for search of better economic opportunities, that is, for livelihood and business.
The table below shows the age-wise distribution of population at TRSHC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above 85</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-84</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-59</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-25</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-13</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Again, the data on age is notoriously unreliable in the older generation of Tibetans. This is because of the Tibetan system of age reckoning. It is not a common practice for Tibetans to celebrate their birthdays.

7b.1.1 We Animate the Spirit of Self-Help!

Driven out of their homeland and into a different environment and without any knowledge of the language, customs and social institutions of the countries where they had sought refuge, the long term rehabilitation of the refugees posed innumerable difficulties. Unlike the rehabilitation strategy for the permanent agricultural settlements like in the South of India which were built at the behest of Tibetan Government-in-exile, the TRSHC began with an altogether different approach to rehabilitation. The comparison with other settlements with regard to the approach is apparent from the statement revealed to me in the initial stages of my research by the Secretary of the Centre who said, “Darjeeling refugee centre does not seek help from Dharamsala. It is independent. Only in need, does it seek assistance. It is not like the refugee centres in the south of India (rgya gar).”
A ten-member committee\textsuperscript{4} was formed in Darjeeling to organize a rehabilitation centre which came to be known as the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre. The current members of the committee include Khedroop Thondup\textsuperscript{5} – President, General Secretary and Treasurer – Chimay Rinchen, Mr. T. Lawang, Ms. N.L. Ladenla, Dr. T. Wangdi, Mr. Dawa Tsering, Mr. Dorjee Tsetan, Mr. Sonam D. Pasang, Mr. Jampa Tenzing, Mr. Dorjee Thokme and Mr. Palden. Over time, the TRSHC has acquired a simple administrative structure consistent with its ethos of self-help, unlike the administrative structure seen in the Tibetan settlements in south India. Besides the President, there is a Secretary and an Assistant Secretary of the Centre. The Workshops has a Manager and an Assistant Manager. The school has a Headmistress. The Hospital has a Doctor-in-charge. There is also a post of an Accountant. The Welfare Officer, who is the representative of the Central Tibetan Administration does not look after the everyday affairs of the Centre but has under his jurisdiction the Darjeeling Municipal Area and its adjoining areas.

The initial fund for setting up the TRSHC was raised locally by subscriptions, donations, charity shows and an exhibition football match. This was augmented shortly afterwards from contributions by a number of voluntary agencies through the Central Relief Committee notably CARE, Catholic Relief Services, American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees, National Christian Council, The Red Cross, World Veterans Federation, American Friends Committee, Church World Service as well as several individuals. With the reception of this aid, the Tibetans who fled from Tibet back then gradually became labeled as refugees. Their ambivalent response to relief programmes in the subsequent years came through in that with client-group compliance and dependency there has also been indifference in the refugees’ reactions to the relief programmes arising out of the resultant perceived loss of status and dignity of the group.

\textsuperscript{4} The founding members of the committee include: Ms. Gyal Thondup – President, Mr. T. Lawang, Mr. G. Tesur, Mr. Tenzing Norgay, Mr. & Mrs. Joksari, Mr. T. Tethong, Monsignor Benjamin, Mr. Chumbay Tsering and Ms. Tesur.

\textsuperscript{5} Khedroob Thondup is the nephew of the 14\textsuperscript{th} Dalai Lama. He was born in Calcutta in 1952 and educated at the Jesuit school in Darjeeling, India, and later at the University of San Francisco. After returning to India, he served as special assistant to the Dalai Lama and traveled with him extensively. In 1986, he was appointed to run the Tibetan Refugee Self-Help Centre in Darjeeling.
Given below is an excerpt (in the form of few articulated statements) from the Report which the Secretary of TRSHC showed me during my conversation with him which was centred around the history of TRSHC and of Tibetans in exile. “But right from the start, we realized that what was needed was the determination to stand on our feet and rely first and foremost on our own effort – in short, the spirit of Self-Help (rang tsho). It is no exaggeration, in fact, to say that without self-help there can be no rehabilitation, be it economics, social, psychological, cultural or spiritual. Outside assistance is, of course, necessary. But no matter how generous others prove to be, no refugee could ever be rehabilitated in the fullest sense of the word without ‘Self-Help’. And this vital element could only come from within our own community (mi sde) from within our own selves.” This sums up in categorical terms not only the orientation of the inhabitants of TRSHC to life in exile as a whole but also provides a glimpse of the form and the limits to the relationship which they intend to forge with their hosts; other diasporic members of their ethnic group, Non-Governmental Organizations and the State. “Refugee relief programmes because of their self-evident humanitarian derivation are particularly prone to the neutralizing conformity which the label conveys about refugees’ status and their situation” (Zetter 1991:45). What began as the labeling of target groups – in this case the Tibetan as ‘refugees’ who are recipients of aid led on the one hand to client conformity and loyalty with the institutionally imposed stereotype and on the other to a gradual transformation of the identity expressed through the adoption of Goffman-like metaphors to describe alienating feelings like “we are foreigners here”; by asserting individuality and by not remaining acquiescent.

7b.1.2 Self-Help through Handicrafts

In 1961 the Centre was fully registered as a Charitable Organization under Indian Law. It has also received exemption from income tax on all gifts and donations made to it. The Centre has undertaken multifarious activities ranging from the production of handicrafts and training of artisans and craftsmen to the Homes for the elderly, care for the sick and

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6 In the context of refugee studies, labeling is a “process of stereotyping which involves disaggregation, standardization and the formulation of clear cut categories. In the institutional setting these characteristics assume considerable power for labeling simultaneously defines a client group and prescribes an assumed set of needs (food, shelter and protection) together with appropriate distributional apparatus” (Zetter 1991: 44).
the orphaned. The production of handicrafts continues to be cornerstone of the Centre’s economy. Besides traditional items such as Tibetan carpets, wood carvings, metal and leather works, the emphasis is also on testing new production lines incorporating traditional Tibetan motifs which would find a ready market in Darjeeling and elsewhere.  

During the financial year for the period April 1998 to March 1999, sales reached a total of Rs. 53,45,538. more than half of which represented foreign exchange earnings from export sales. The Centre had been exporting to 36 countries all over the world (Report TRSHC 1999).

The report brought out by TRSHC emphasized that “in traditional Tibet, market for fine handicrafts was limited and master craftsmen who had to undergo long periods of apprenticeship were few. Fewer managed to escape from Tibet and hence it was of the utmost importance for the future of handicrafts that skill and expert knowledge of these masters be passed to a new generation of workers.” This was conveyed by the Manager of the Workshop who pointed to some of the objectives for the promotion of handicrafts. “We impart useful and marketable skills to refugees who would otherwise have to earn a precarious livelihood living as coolies or unskilled workers." Without skilled craftsmen, the centre would not be able to produce and sell handicrafts (lag shes) which provide the main source of income. Training programmes ensure survival and growth of traditional Tibetan arts and crafts." As exiles who feel that their culture and very identity as Tibetans under siege in their homeland, the replication of Tibetan “tradition” through promotion of art and crafts in the diaspora becomes a self-conscious and strategic undertaking. The Manager of TRSHC, aware of the threat of assimilation in the context of living in a host society stated, “Even in India, Tibetans face other more subtle forms of assimilation. The coolies or unskilled workers who form the backbone of the Darjeeling economy belong to the Nepali community of Darjeeling. Contrasting the occupations and occupational skills which Tibetans can develop and preserve vis-à-vis the “hazardous occupations” of the Nepalis, signifies for the Tibetans a certain self-attestation of a perceived sign of progress; of creativity and continuity in exile. It does not however point to the making of categorical or essentializing judgments about the “locals-Nepalis” or “citizens”.

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7 Among the successful items is footwear and coats which while keeping the traditional Tibetan styles are modified for suitable wear with European clothes. “The immense popularity of these items as well as the several letters that TRSHC receives from all over the world have proved the success of this venture” (Report TRSHC 1999).

8 The coolies or unskilled workers who form the backbone of the Darjeeling economy belong to the Nepali community of Darjeeling. Contrasting the occupations and occupational skills which Tibetans can develop and preserve vis-à-vis the “hazardous occupations” of the Nepalis, signifies for the Tibetans a certain self-attestation of a perceived sign of progress; of creativity and continuity in exile. It does not however point to the making of categorical or essentializing judgments about the “locals-Nepalis” or “citizens”.

9 Excerpt from an interview with the Manager, TRSHC held on date at the TRSHC. “Our wool is from 100-per-cent Tibetan sheep from Ladakh,” says the Manager of TRSHC, where the threatened culture is proving to be resilient (in “Spirit of Tibet” by Carleton Cole, published in World Tibet Network News, Canada Tibet Committee, downloaded on 24/05.2007). The Centre had been able to train 1600 persons in various crafts, of which 1000 to 1200 persons have left the Centre to set up their own enterprises (Report TRSHC 1999).
assimilation. We must preserve our culture (*rig gzhung*), our religion (*chos*), our Tibetan language (*bod skad*): otherwise we would mix into the local population.”

There are in total thirteen workshops at the Centre namely, wool sorting; wool washing; wool spinning; wool dyeing; carpet weaving; old workers – ball making; carpet trimming; leather work; tailoring; wool knitting; painting; wood carving; shawl and apron making. Over the past four decades, the Centre has been able to train 1600 persons in various crafts. The objective of training individuals in the various crafts is to make persons able or self-supporting. About 1000 to 1200 persons have over the four decades left the Centre on their own discretion to set up enterprises (Report TRSHC).

Work is allotted based on skill and ability. The old and the weak are given lighter work. They mainly perform simple chores such as winding thread into balls and caring for the toddlers in the centre's nursery. The familiar sight at the Centre is that of elderly men gathering bundles of wool to be sent to the spinning factory. A homemade wooden ladder with crooked rungs leans against one of the buildings. On top of the building, wool is kept for drying in readiness for the next stage of production. In the spinning room, rows of elderly women feed rolls of wool into a rotating bicycle wheel. In the carpet-weaving hall, young women work in pairs creating Tibetan carpets. Thick white threads are attached vertically between horizontal wooden poles. The weavers painstakingly tie multicoloured threads around each white strand to produce colourful knots and these are then packed tightly together using a heavy bronze comb. The centre's handicraft shop has a large range of items such as placemats, silk wall-hangings and woodcarvings. Handmade carpets are the shop's most popular item and are exported overseas. The waiting period to obtain one of these labour-intensive works of art is six months.

The wage rate is fixed at Rs 300 per month regardless of whether an individual is in a position to actually do the work. This provision provides relief to those who are unable to work and battered due to the long years of toil and the mental anguish caused by the

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10 The extent of “mixing” with the local population which the Manager pointed out would be discussed while taking up the case of Tibetans living in the main town. It is important to recognize that the threat of assimilation is particularly acute for the refugees since if the assimilation were to be successful, the label-refugee would be blurred and pressure for repatriation would be lost.

11 As told by the Manager of Workshops at TRSHC on 20/05/2005.
conflicting demands of exile life. The day’s work begins at 7 in the morning and ends at 5 in the evening punctuated by lunch and tea break (for an hour from 11 to 12 in the afternoon followed by a tea break at 2). This work schedule is ritualistically followed by the Centre’s inhabitants. The community bell can be heard ringing from even the remotest corner of the Centre which serves to remind the inhabitants of the time to resume and close work.

7b.1.3 Housing and the Refugee Label

For the Tibetans their designation as refugees was instrumental in gaining access to important resources. In this process, their aspirations were filtered into the housing programme at TRSHC which they accepted with gratitude. The initial responses of the refugees to housing in the self-help project was one which seemed to indicate settlement in the host society but retaining at the same time a strong belief in “return” (“repatriation” in legal terminology) to Tibet as a paramount and still achievable objective. With more than four decades into exile, there are few indicators of such temporariness with respect to their attitude towards settlement and resettlement in host societies.

The form and the location of housing at the TRSHC set within the context of rehabilitation have given a distinctive physical identity to the label-refugee. This has accentuated the development of a “refugee consciousness” among the inhabitants of TRSHC. The refugees who fled the invasion of Tibet could not come to Darjeeling in groups but came as individuals leaving their family members, spouses, children, fathers and mothers behind. It was difficult for them to retain their pre-exilic identities drawn upon past norms – community, village, notions of extended family in the housing programme. Exile for the Tibetans has prevented village re-formation. The architectural style of the houses at the TRSHC has faint resemblance with the houses in Old Tibet. In 1970, there were wooden sheet houses. By 1990, four buildings with 200 rooms made of brick came up in the area. Tibetans show great interest in indoor decoration. Most

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12 Houses in TRSHC have small windows like the blockhouses which were the most common type of civilian housing in Old Tibet. Blockhouses had flat roofs and small windows. These houses were usually of two storeys – the wall base is laid with stone and the upper part is earth-piled solid.
families have auspicious patterns on the indoor walls. In the sitting room, the inner wall is painted with blue, green and red stripes respectively representing the sky, the earth and the sea. There are also houses which have altars for worshipping Buddha or images of the Great Kings of Tibet or pictures of the Dalai Lama, the Potala Palace or the Norbulingka. Doors and windows are highlighted with red, blue and white cloth screens, with a canopy (consisting of red, white, blue, yellow and green cloth pieces) around the parapet of the roof and its corners. While the appearance of houses from the outside is unostentatious and reminiscent of dwellings found in Old Tibet (in regions such as southern Tibet and around Lhasa and Shigatse), the furnishings in the inside of some houses (particularly the interior of the house of one of my respondents who worked in the woodcarving section to which I had access) are strikingly modern with television sets, high-tech radio cassette recorders, digital cameras and piles of expensive looking western clothes that are either gifted to them by their patrons in foreign countries or sent to them by their kinfolk in the diaspora.

Housing which becomes the obviously recognizable symbol of their refugee status creates a distinction between refugees and non-refugees, between “the Tibetan refugee” and their “categorical other”. The label becomes through institutional processes, a potent tool of differentiation far removed from the initial premise that refugees need shelter. That the type of housing as seen from the outside clearly does not serve as a clear cut objective indicator of the levels of prosperity or deprivation of the Tibetan residents of TRSHC, is revealed by two Nepali youths in their late 20s belonging to the Brahmin caste – Chhetris who live in the neighbouring Hermitage area. On having made a point to the Nepali youths in a deliberately provocative manner in the form of “how poor the Tibetans appear from the look of the houses in which they live,” they immediately replied with the intention to correct, in their judgment, my somewhat touristic perception or lack of knowledge about the actual status of the Tibetans living in TRSHC. “What others (they were referring to the tourists) see in the refugee camp is eyewash. Yeh sab dikhava hai (this is only a show). Woh bare amir hai (Most of them are well off) and are in government (gzhung) jobs, have with them ration cards, doing good business (tshong las
This sense of relative deprivation of the Nepalis is something which they have learnt to live with now. The older Nepalis are reconciled to the fact that the Tibetans are characteristically more hardworking than they are which is the reason for their economic success in the Darjeeling area. Numerically in an absolute majority, Nepalis know, albeit to their cost, that they can afford not to be hardworking, indolent and yet survive, an option unavailable for Tibetans. The Nepali unemployed or under-employed youths who are in large numbers, are of the opinion that it is the external assistance from foreigners in the form of donations and gifts that have given the Tibetans an edge over their neighbours in the competition over resources. The claim by Nepali youths that the refugees at the Centre are not poor (a kind of perceptual data) had to be corroborated by collecting further data in the form of statements made by other ethnic hosts in the area. Till then the perception of the Nepali youths had to be taken on face value but it did serve as an important pointer to the unfolding refugee-host dynamic in the Darjeeling Municipal Area.

7b.1.4 We are also a Welfare Institution!

Since its inception, the Centre has undertaken the task of helping orphans, the aged, the infirm and the needy among the refugees. The Centre has 89 old and infirm persons as well as 42 orphans who have no means of their own. It provides free housing, food, medical care, education for children, pocket money for children, uniform and stationeries. The provision of these services consists of the bulk of the Centre’s expenses.

“Although the production of handicrafts forms the main activity and is the primary source of income, the Centre was not planned to be and has never been solely a business concern” (Report TRSHC 1999). This statement is echoed by my key informant, a resident of the Centre and who works for a travel agency in Darjeeling town. He emphatically said, “The Refugee Centre is like a cooperative (mnyam las). Anyone

13 Interview of two Nepali youths at the Hermitage on 22/05/05.
14 “Most of the orphans have been sent to various schools across India and several have been sponsored for study abroad. These orphans have no known relatives or any to care for them and thus are entirely dependent on the Centre. With the generous help of several individuals scattered all over the world, the Centre has been ...able to lay the foundation for their future” (Report TRSHC).
wanting to join is welcome. We know that we are good in doing business. See how we attract customers. It is seen in the display of the items in our shop. If I enjoy with the money earned, what about my brothers and sisters in Tibet. Running after money will not give us anything. One life as a beggar is not bad, if it is led sincerely and honestly.” 

The statement – “If I enjoy with the money earned, what about my brothers and sisters in Tibet” is consistent with the currently emergent consensus that diasporans are deeply implicated both ideologically and materially in the nationalist projects of their homelands (Werbner 2002: 120). Something more is at work than merely the nationalist agenda served by Tibetan diasporic groups. What is evident is the moral trajectory of Tibetan exile subjects and the projection of an “ideal Tibetan refugee” to “significant others”. It is indicative of the development of a Tibetan cultural self-consciousness in exile which according to Ekvall (1960: 376) focuses on the concept of oneness which has religion as its most important attribute among others such as Folkways, Race and Land, that gives assurance of belonging, provides guidance for mutual recognition and differentiates and excludes those who do not belong. In ethics, it sets up compassion and the creation of merit as the ultimate ideal governing motivation consistent with the Tibetan notion of “karma”. It also conditions the Tibetan’s intellectual life by furnishing a purpose of existence.

7b.1.5 Medical Care and School

Another field of welfare work undertaken by the Centre is the medical programme which benefits not only the refugees of the Centre but also the locals. A hospital was established in 1961 through American Relief Services. From a small infirmary, it has grown into a 20 bedded hospital staffed by a well qualified and experienced doctor, 2 nurses and some helpers. Apart from normal consultation and treatment, the Centre’s medical unit carries blood test, screening for T.B., vaccinations, pre-and post-natal care. The overwhelming majority of those who avail of the medical facilities themselves are poor. A further extension of the medical services offered by the Centre’s hospital is the establishment of

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15 Excerpt from a conversation with my key informant - a Tibetan man of 40 years at the TRSHC on 20/05/05. He introduced me to his father who arrived in Darjeeling from Amdo province of Tibet after the Chinese invasion of Tibet. He had visited India on a pilgrimage several times before 1959.
an X’Ray Clinic and a Pathological Laboratory in Darjeeling town. The X’Ray Clinic consisting of a small unit along with the requisite generator was set up by a grant given by the Government of West Bengal through the Hill Affairs Branch Secretariat, Darjeeling. The clinic is entirely staffed by trained boys and girls of the Refugee Centre.

In June 1960 the Centre started a small nursery school. Within a short span of time, the school grew up into a full-fledged primary school. The primary school follows the syllabus of the Central Tibetan School Administration and caters up to KG II. The present enrolment in the Primary school is 45 which include children from the nearby Tibetan settlements. Shortage of funds has forced the Centre to severely limit the admission. The junior and senior students attend the different schools and colleges in and out of Darjeeling town. The children are not only provided with free education up to class XII but also free clothing, meals and textbooks (Report TRSHC 1999). However those students who continue to receive financial assistance from TRSHC for their college education are required to work for the TRSHC for three to five years (for which they are given remuneration) once they complete their education. If they get a better employment offer during this period, they have to pay back the amount received for their college education to the TRSHC. At present there are 7 Tibetan students employed by TRSHC under this scheme (Office Records, Welfare Office, TRSHC, Darjeeling).

The Central School for Tibetans Administration was set up as an autonomous organization by a resolution of the government of India, Ministry of Education and Youth services (New Ministry of Human Resource Development) in 1961 and was registered under the Societies Registration Act (XXI of 1860). The Central School for Tibetans, Darjeeling was set up in 1961. Initially the school was in the N.B.M.R. building which belonged to Ministry of Defence and other rented buildings ‘Digpatia’, ‘Ray Villa’ and ‘Kailash’. The N.B.M.R. building had been taken over by the Tibetan School Society which was also set up in 1961. By 1966, N.B.M.R. had been demolished and the new

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16 The teaching and curriculum in Tibetan schools is similar to schools of the host country, India. One major difference is that Tibetan language and culture is an integral part of the curriculum of most Tibetan schools. In the secondary schools, Tibetan children follow the syllabus established by India’s Central Board of Secondary Education and take their national examination to be eligible to enter higher education. It is only at the primary level that an intensive Tibetan culture and language curriculum is implemented.
block with ten class rooms and a multi purpose hall was constructed. Later the Administration constructed a three storied building which today houses a girls dormitory, dispensary, senior class rooms, science laboratory, dispensary, music and dance room. Later, next to the ten class rooms another building had come up which was meant for primary classrooms and class VIII and IX. The first principal, Lhawang Paljor started the school with 30 students and five teachers in 1961. At present there are 518 students and 42 staff. Affiliated to C.B.S.E. the school offers course in Humanities and Commerce. Special emphasis is laid on preservation and promotion of Tibetan culture, protection of environment and inculcation of human values. Career Counseling too receives equal importance with trained staff with frequent visit of Department of Education, Dharamsala counselor.17

7b.2 Our Early Period of Exile!

The early period was unanimously remembered as one of extreme social and economic hardship. Poverty, hunger, lack of work and problems of housing were, for understandable reasons, areas of reminiscence. The Tibetan youths (the new generation) who served as my informants relayed the early exile experiences of their ascending generation. They talked about the difficulties or struggle (due to their lack of knowledge of the local language) their preceding generation had to go through in their attempts to forge meaningful relations with “locals” or “citizens”. Their struggle was a mixed baggage which comprised of cooperation from expected or unexpected quarters, insults and fears that seemed to serve as retrospective inventories of the kind of life that could be expected to attach to refugeeess. These framed the nature of Tibetan refugee – host relationship as it unfolded in the Darjeeling region in the subsequent decades.

The refugees who chose to stay in the Refugee Centre and other settlements were those who were not in a capacity to establish themselves privately mainly due to the lack of

17 For more on the Central School for Tibetans in Darjeeling see http://www.cstdalumni.org/.
capital. Others resorted to alms collecting.\textsuperscript{18} Like other Nepali residents of Darjeeling, Tanka Subba, a Nepali scholar, states from his recollections as a young boy, “I saw at least 2 to 3 Tibetan alms collectors come to my house everyday. Most of them came singly with a sling bag and a rosary chanting \textit{Om Mani Peme Hung}. The alms collectors lived in sheds in the town areas. There used to be little communication between them and the local people but the latter readily offered pulses, rice and coins. The non-Tibetan respondents, specially the Bhutias, spoke of their eagerness to know about the future of Tibetan refugees in the region” (1990: 55).

The following excerpt of an interview with a Tibetan youth, who is studying in Loyola College in Chennai, summarizes aspects of refugee life brought up by many informants in their chronicles of early hardship faced by their preceding generation who first arrived from Tibet: “My father and grandfather are there to give advice. They told me how they suffered, when they came here, they had no financial assistance\textsuperscript{19}. Gradually my grandfather did small business. He always tells me to do your education well only then you would not suffer like them. Without education (\textit{shes yon slob sbyong}) you cannot do anything, he says. The duty of our elders was to motivate us. From what they told us, it seems that our identity as refugee was very marked then. Now we can pay to go to school (\textit{slob grwa}).”\textsuperscript{20}

The following passage shows that the early years were associated with social and economic hardships. It acknowledges that “suffering” is attached to poverty, to the fact that ‘financial assistance’ was not forthcoming in the beginning. The whole figure of the refugee appeared thus to be constructed from the stigmata of poverty. It also suggested that the identity as refugees made them a special kind of people but which caused them to

\textsuperscript{18} It is difficult to assess what percentage of those refugees resorted to alms collecting. Even those who were once engaged in it are unable to give any tentative figure. It is generally agreed that they constituted a large number and were conspicuous in the town area.

\textsuperscript{19} The term “financial assistance” used by the respondent is a pointer to the acute awareness that refugees have of the presence or absence of aid organizations in their lives or the support that is extended to them by individual donors.

\textsuperscript{20} Interview with Tibetan youth aged 19 years at TRSHC on It is important to note that for the new generation India-born Tibetans, their identity as refugee was something which had to be cognitively learnt. Tenzin Tsundue in his essay, “My Kind of Exile” emphasizes this point, “When we were children in a Tibetan school in Himachal Pradesh. Our teachers used to regale us with tales of Tibetans suffering in Tibet. We were often told that we were refugees and that we all bore a big ‘R’ on our foreheads” in www.friendsoftibet.org on 15/06/07.
“feel bad”. The appropriate remedy was not a protestation of injustice but an overcoming of the state of poverty arising out of exile through initiation into education at an early stage of one’s life. The passage ends with a reference to how their lives have improved since the beginning. By improvement, the respondent meant not the augmentation of their political worth as refugees but the betterment of the economic conditions of individual lives reflected in their greater access to quality education. It suggests that it is possible to improve despite the refugee label.

For instance, a respondent talked about the improvement in his socio-economic status as compared to his father. He said, “We had nothing when we came here. My father had a coolie’s job. We had to take help from the refugee camp then. I did many things. I had a tailoring job in Delhi, Mumbai. I learnt tailoring from Tungsung. I did think of doing a garment’s business then. I got a trekking job for four to five years. Left that and now I have a garment’s business in town. Now I do not take help from the camp. Things are alright now.” What is avoided by the respondent in the conversation is any reference to the involvement of locals in Tibetan refugee life in the early years. The role of locals in Tibetan refugee life is an issue that is not voluntarily taken up for discussion by Tibetan refugees, especially when conversations with them were struck in the Darjeeling town context. They remain guarded in this respect for the sake of what many Tibetans in course of the conversations have stated “communal harmony or peace”. For instance, a Tibetan in his 20s stated, “They know we are refugees. We do not discuss communal things you know. We do not talk about Tibet and all with the locals (sa gnas).” On being asked why he frequents the Refugee Centre, he stated that he has friends there and likes to hang around in the evening after work. His visit to the Centre serves the unstated purpose at an individual level as well, by allowing one to reassert or reproduce one’s Tibetan identity which has struck deep roots within the TRSHC in the last four decades.

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21 Excerpt from an interview with a Tibetan at his garments shop in Darjeeling town on 26/05/05.
22 Excerpt from an interview with a Tibetan youth at TRSHC on 26/05/05. His residence is in Darjeeling town. The word “communal” to the Tibetan had a specific usage which referred to the “local community” (mi sde) of host groups in Darjeeling town. The usage of the word ‘communal’ indicated in the context of the interview an awareness of the need to prevent the possible rise of communal feelings that would disturb the prevailing social order in the area.
The Tibetans who do visit the Centre frequently are not unaware of the goodwill that they acquire among the settlement residents.

In a general way however, while most Tibetans mentioned that early exile was characterized by great hardships, they hastened to add that they did not face any overt or real threat to physical security; locals in fact donated without any qualms. They however unanimously attested to the fact that the feeling of helplessness was palpable stemming due to their unfamiliarity with the topography and language of the region and their perceived lower status attached to their identity as refugees.

7b.3 There are no Refugees in this Area!

As has been already noted, Darjeeling town and its environs has been a heterogeneous and cosmopolitan crossroads of human and other traffic. The town’s resident population comprised many different, interspersed categories of people having different ethnic identities sharing neighbourhoods and continual streams of visitors, travelers and other less permanent inhabitants. This plurality meant that it was difficult to fix or classify a person in the street by virtue of his or her locale. Further it becomes impossible to discern who among the residents might be a refugee from Tibet, owing to the racial and religious affinity between Tibetans refugees and other communities residing in Darjeeling town.

“Any person with a preliminary knowledge of the Himalayas is aware of the fact that the entire Himalayas, not to talk of merely Darjeeling, Sikkim are inhabited principally by the Mongoloid people. Be it Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan or the Himalayan border areas of India from east to the west, the people by and large bear Mongoloid features” (Subba 1990: 59). Shakabpa wrote, “The majority of the people in the U-Tsang region of Tibet are of short stature, round-headed and high-cheek bone, therefore slightly different from those of other two regions, the people of Dote (Kham) and Dome (Amdo) are tall, long-headed and long-limbed” (1984: 6). The Nepalis have a large number of groups like the Tamangs, Yolmus, Sherpas, Gurungs who are Buddhists or their culture is to some extent Tibetanised. However some neighbourhoods in Darjeeling town are generally known to be more populated by Tibetans than others and they are just as mobile as other residents.
in the township (see detailed map of Darjeeling town brought out by the Darjeeling Municipal Corporation). The distribution of the Tibetan populace in West Bengal is given below:

Table 7.3: Distribution of Tibetans in West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region - West Bengal</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Absentees as on 12 June, 1998</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
<td>2411</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghoom, Darjeeling</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalpaiguri, Jaigaon</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalimpong</td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurseong</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oodlabari</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salugara</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siliguri</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonada, Tashiling</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17297</td>
<td>761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


7b.3.1 The “Bhutia” Label: Problematic of Assimilation

The major feature of the socio-cultural landscape that aided the Tibetan town refugees in their quest for a sheltering anonymity and scope for progress in their socio-economic trajectory was the presence of Bhutias who happened to be the well-established ethnic Tibetan immigrants of Indian nationality who lived in the Darjeeling region since the colonial times and even earlier. This fortuitous situation was put to use by Tibetan refugees seeking to conceal their “refugee” status. Their frequent usage of the Bhutia identity is revealed at the time of initiating a conversation with them. A respondent who had a shop in Mahakal market, (the most trendy and fashionable market selling garments and other accessories) on Ladenla road was most unwilling to talk anything about
himself, despite the presence of my key informant (a Bhutia) who knew him well. He vigorously claimed to be a Bhutia, in other words, an immigrant from the pre-exilic era, an Indian and to know nothing about any refugees.\(^{23}\) He said that he had lived in Japan for four years but then came back to Darjeeling to take up business. He insisted that there is similarity between Bhutias and Tibetans in terms of religion and place. “We are Buddhists, we are one,” he said. On being asked why he decided to remain in Darjeeling, he explained his situation in the following words: “I know this place better than any other place.\(^{24}\) I do not want to go and stay in any other part of India. It is convenient to do business in India but given the chance I would like to go to America (\textit{a mi ri ka}) you know, there is opportunity (\textit{go skabs}) there.”\(^{25}\)

On furthering probing which became possible after some degree of trust was established, what came to light was the fact that the respondent was socialized into becoming aware of the connection between his identity as a Tibetan refugee and the place – Darjeeling (he had many Bhutia friends, like my key informant who was a Bhutia). His knowledge that the Bhutias are Tibetans and diasporics of an earlier era like the Tibetan refugees themselves initiated the process of ‘emplacement’, by creating a sense of belonging to the place (Darjeeling) which in the imaginative sense formed part of what he, echoing my key informant called, “the Great land of Tibet”.\(^{26}\) This similarity of sentiment generally held by Tibetan refugees and Bhutias echoes the British colonial perception that the Bhutias and Lepchas were unlikely to shift their loyalty from Tibet as they were strongly integrated by a common heritage, religion, language and culture. They all belonged to the

\(^{23}\) Laying claim to Bhutia identity is a common strategy adopted by most Tibetan refugees doing lucrative business in Darjeeling town area. It serves a strategic end of securing ties to Indian citizenship and providing business opportunities in a condition of anonymity and security. For more on the Bhutias refer to Chapter 7 of this research study, pp. 176 - 179.

\(^{24}\) For the respondent, “\textit{knowing this plac}’” meant a certain degree of identification with the place – Darjeeling, its history and geography.

\(^{25}\) Excerpt from an interview with a Tibetan shop owner at Mahakal market, Darjeeling town, on 19/05/05. The source of the respondent’s knowledge of the three places - Darjeeling, India and America that he mentions is both experiential and imaginative. Here we see the process of diasporic identifications at play. While feeling of belonging to Darjeeling is greatest, the place is evaluated in relation or opposition to India. America is there in the distant horizon, for him an abode of prosperity, a projection into the future. Tibet as a place is not mentioned by him in the initial phase of the interview.

\(^{26}\) My key informant, a Bhutia, in the numerous conversations with him, once interjected and told about the historical fact that the King of Sikkim used to traditionally give tributes periodically to the Dalai Lama of Tibet at Lhasa, as demonstration of his allegiance to the Lamaist State. He told that he had read it somewhere but could not recollect the source.
Tibeto-Burman group and adhered to a pan-Buddhist religion of ‘Lamaist Buddhism’ from where they derived their ethnic identity. The British policy of encouraging Nepali migrants to Darjeeling throughout the second half of the 19th century and in the subsequent period originated from the colonial design to outbalance the original ethnic domination of the Lepchas and Bhutias in the region (Dasgupta 1989). The British found in the Nepali immigrants, a group of loyal subjects whose allegiance would lie with the British and not with the Dalai Lama of Tibet. The overwhelming predominance of the Nepalis which became a paramount reality towards the end of the 19th century contributed to the acceptability of Nepali language as the lingua franca of Darjeeling region. The Nepali language gradually forged an ethnic link between the various groups who had migrated from Nepal. Even the Lepchas and the Bhutias inspite of their religious and cultural differences with the Nepalis slowly accepted Nepali as the lingua franca.

A sample of a conversation between two Tibetans (a Tibetan refugee and a Bhutia or a Tibetan refugee and a fellow Tibetan refugee) when they meet for first time typically starts with the exchange “Tashi Delek” followed by the question: “are you a Tibetan?” and the Other answers with a certain sense of pride: “Yes I am a Tibetan” (la yin nga bod pa yin). This commonality of identity generates a feeling of warmth between them. But even as they become conscious of their mutual identity as Tibetans, most of the time the Tibetan refugee becomes acutely conscious of the limited grasp that a Bhutia or a fellow Tibetan refugee has over the Tibetan language and expectedly so. This uneasy scenario is more common among Tibetans of Nepal, Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. However, since they are extremely eager to know more about each other, the conversation lapses into Nepali or English or even Hindi. This explains why the interest

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27 In order to understand the ethnic domain in the context of Darjeeling spelt out here, it is particularly relevant to recall Michael Fischer’s (1986: 230-331) essay, “Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory,” in which he states, “The different ethnicities constitute ‘a family of resemblance’: similar, not identical; each enriching because of its inter-references, not reducible to mechanical functions of solidarity, mutual aid, political mobilization or socialization. It is the inter-references, the interweaving of cultural threads from different arenas that give ethnicity its phoenix-like capacities for reinvigoration and reinspiration.”

28 Other set of differences between Tibetan refugees and Bhutias were articulated by these two groups. “There is a feeling in the Tibetan refugees that they are a bit different than us. They think that we are not as patriotic like them” (excerpt from an interview with the Bhutia respondent on 24/09/06 at Bhutia busty). In course of the conversations, many Tibetan refugees have commonly expressed their view that in order to live peacefully with the majority community – the Nepalis and Indian Buddhists such as the Bhutias, it is best to make “friends”. Friendship therefore becomes a strategy for social integration at the local level.
starts with the question “Are you a Tibetan?” for it begs the question “Is it sufficient merely to look like a Tibetan?” “Who is more Tibetan and who is less Tibetan?” – to questions of authenticity. To be a Tibetan, Tibetans must surely be able to speak their mother tongue but the facts show that not all Tibetans in the diaspora can speak Tibetan. Fewer can read and write in face of the pervasive influence of the Nepali language speakers which includes the Bhutias of the Darjeeling region. The effective literacy rate of the Tibetan exile population stood at 74.5% in 1998 while the general literacy rate was 69.3% (Tibetan Demographic Survey 1998). The table below demonstrates the Tibetan language ability by place of birth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Birth) Region</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Tibetan Language (Read, Write, Speak) - Total population</th>
<th>Tibetan Language (Speak Only) – Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>40382</td>
<td>31077</td>
<td>9305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central India</td>
<td>8934</td>
<td>6378</td>
<td>2556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East India</strong></td>
<td><strong>16659</strong></td>
<td><strong>10273</strong></td>
<td><strong>6386</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North India</td>
<td>24629</td>
<td>17841</td>
<td>6788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South India</td>
<td>25576</td>
<td>19384</td>
<td>6192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West India</td>
<td>1159</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While the entry of Nepali language into the private conversations among Tibetans is unproblematic for the Bhutias, it is of major concern among Tibetan refugee families living in Darjeeling town. A Tibetan refugee (a shop owner) in Dragon market expressed his concern. “My niece is going to a good English medium school now. I am seeing that she is forgetting Tibetan language. Her mother has arranged for a private tutor to teach Tibetan to her. But I try to speak in Tibetan to her at home.”

29 Excerpt from an interview with a Tibetan refugee at Darjeeling town on 24/05/05.
Understandably what is generally held is that speaking, talking and writing in Nepali by Tibetan refugees amounts to assimilation that has to be resisted. The term “assimilation” is used here with some reservations. It does not suggest that the social world into which the refugees were trying to insert themselves was itself a stable, fixed point of reference to which newcomers had to “adapt”. On the contrary, the “locals” of Darjeeling town were for long caught up in the same fluid, contingent social field as the refugees, albeit having different trajectories, predicaments and concerns. The problem of the Nepali migrant subjectivity is not different from those of the refugees. “His subjectivity was bitterly torn between the calling of the home and the hard reality of never returning to see it again. There was optimism and hope when he said, ‘Darjeeling will take care of me’. But there was also a fear of the uncertain.”

The town refugees’ assessment of their actual relations with Bhutia immigrants and vice-versa vary considerably. Some informants say that Tibetan refugees and Bhutias have got on very well together and a good deal of cooperation exists between them. My respondent (a Bhutia) spoke about his childhood friend (a Tibetan refugee who lived in TRSHC). “He did not hesitate to mix with others in the town. He was like this from young years. We played football at the local club – Viva sporting club and in Darjeeling Government College and Himalayan sporting club. It is his sporting spirit that has helped. He is like a non-playing captain. Now he works like a liaison man. He even knows some police personnel in town. Any trouble in TRSHC everybody goes to him for help. In the Centre the people are orthodox type. They think that young generation if they mix with local guys, they will get adulterated. My friend (groots po) is different. But I see that the Centre’s members can choose to have less and remain with their limits. A very good quality, very few Tibetans are like that. My friend did not choose to go abroad.” My Bhutia respondent hastened to add that there is mutual support between Tibetan refugees and the Bhutias. His remarks testified to this, “Last year wool that was being imported to Darjeeling was seized at Dalkhola by commercial tax check post. I called up commercial tax office and got them (Tibetan refugees) out of the problem. They need us for the day to day problems and interactions with local authorities. We need them also. In my marriage

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30 For more on the nature of Nepali identity see Golay 2006.
(chang sa), I was not getting a groom hat. The self help centre has a cultural section. They lend hats to other Buddhists. I got the groom hat from them. In schools too when some Buddhist functions are to be held, we approach the refugees for assistance. Anybody can come of help later that is why I help others.”

Other informants believe that the Bhutias had desired first and foremost to distance themselves from the Tibetan refugees when they first arrived, even when support was extended to them. Conversation with an elderly Bhutia, a former Councillor of the Bhutia Busty Ward revealed this aspect. “Tibetan refugees who came with precious stones and gold did not go to the Centre. They settled in different parts of Darjeeling town, even in Bhutia Busty area. The refugees used to stink. They coughed all the time. We avoided contact with them. Refugees would not stay in queue for collecting water. Khampas were brute people. They carried the habits of Tibetan highlands with them to India. They did not take bath when they came here. Many had T.B. In schools the Tibetan refugee students used to vomit. In Bhutia Busty some Bhutia families gave them shelter. My family had given rented accommodation to a Tibetan refugee when he came here. We had even given him permission to enter our kitchen. He told me about stories of Chinese atrocities. He told of the times in Tibet when the Tibetans never trusted their own brothers who could be spies. They did not sleep all day long. Such a grave situation was not there when they came to live with the locals of Darjeeling.”

Many other residents interviewed at Bhutia Busty spoke of their unwillingness to associate too conspicuously with the Tibetan refugees. “We Bhutias do not take part in any political activity that is for the cause of Tibetan independence,” said few

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31 Excerpt from an interview with a Bhutia respondent who worked in a government office in his mid 40s at Bhutia Busty on 24/09/06.

32 Excerpt from the interview with the former councilor of Bhutia Busty on 29/09/06. Both conjunction and disjunction is seen to characterize Bhutia-refugee relationship. Tibet that is portrayed by the refugee in the excerpt is a picture of Tibet which assumes an unShangrila-like appearance, which violates western sensibilities of a pristine Tibet. Exile is therefore a “place of refuge” where normal social relations are restored at the intimate level of the family.

33 Interview with few Bhutia respondents in Bhutia busty on 24/9/06. This is not to suggest that the Bhutias are indifferent to the Tibetan cause. On the contrary, Bhaichung Bhutia, the Indian football captain who has his home in Sikkim took the decision to drop out of the team that would carry the Olympic torch on its Indian leg in New Delhi. “I sympathise with the Tibetans and their cause. I have sent a letter to the IOA (Indian Olympic Association) refusing to carry the torch,” Bhaichung Bhutia told The Telegraph (The Telegraph, Calcutta, Tuesday 1st April 2008). Bhutia’s
respondents. The disjuncture that exists in the refugee-Bhutia relationship which exists is further revealed in the subsequent discussion with the Bhutias about the Bhutia encounter with the refugees. One Bhutia respondent echoed the sentiment of the youth members of his community. “The Tibetan refugees used the term ‘Ghyagar Khampas’ to denote Indian citizens. They see Bhutias at a lower stage than them. They do not express it openly. Their reason maybe that our Tibetan language is not good. We do not have foundation about that. We are comfortable here since we are interacting with Indian Nepalis and India is where we belong. So we do not mind if the Tibetan refugees feel this way about us. But sometimes we have to talk in Nepali in order to put them down."

Nepali language here is deliberately used as an instrument of domination by the Bhutias to keep the Tibetan refugees at bay. The use of Nepali is a constant reminder not only of the minority status of the Tibetan refugees but also of the threat of assimilation. However, speaking fluent Nepali is the easiest method adopted by Tibetan refugees to fend off outsider’s suspicion. The other is by negating the refugee label in front of outsiders by passing themselves off as Bhutias.

For an outside observer, it becomes well nigh impossible to distinguish a Tibetan refugee from his Bhutia counterpart or even Nepalis based on physical or cultural traits. Locals in Darjeeling town insist emphatically that they can immediately tell who is a Tibetan refugee when they see one. For them, recognizing a Tibetan as refugee becomes an intuitive exercise, a “feeling”, a combination of physical appearance, mannerisms and behaviour ranging from “ways of walking” to “ways of speaking a language” among others. Using the “adoptive label” of a Bhutia therefore does not conceal the actual identity of a Tibetan as refugee in contexts where the traffic existed between Tibetan refugees and locals. The strategy of invisibility arose not out of a generalized fear of repression or expatriation. It particularly worked in allowing them to avoid involvement with strangers, particularly when it entailed revealing one’s status. The play of identities in shifting contexts opened up avenues whereby they could become self-employed or join

decision points to how Sikkim and Darjeeling as “places” continue to be implicated in the ongoing debate on Tibet’s historical and geopolitical status.

34 Interview with a Bhutia respondent in Bhutia busty on 25/9/06.

35 In traditional usage, “passing” refers to the practice of assuming the identity of another type, class or groups of persons in order to be recognized as a member of that group, for social, economic or political reasons (Yeh 2002: 237).
the competitive market, obtain licenses for trade and spend leisure time in town. The use of Bhutia identity by Tibetan refugees shaped by the nexus of relations in gaining success in business and employment did not go unnoticed by Bhutias and Nepalis. One Bhutia respondent living near the Tibetan dominated Dragon and Mahakal market spoke about the Bhutia-Tibetan refugee relationship in the following words: “Human beings have the tendency to settle down in the place where they come to stay. This was true for the Nepalese in Darjeeling. Tibetans came as migrants before 1959. They came as refugee after 1959. Earlier Bhutia people were not literate, so they allowed refugees to take advantage of the name of “Bhutia”. After sometime, when literacy among Bhutias grew, competition among Bhutias and other Scheduled Tribes\textsuperscript{36} to get government jobs intensified. If an outsider comes, then it creates problems for us. Bhutia Welfare Association did raise protest against Tibetan refugees taking up government jobs under the Scheduled Tribes certificate.”\textsuperscript{37}

The visible success in charting out a career in exile became a source of worry for the refugees and produced caution in their management of social relations. For they knew that their achievement did create what they often say, feelings of "jealousy, envy and deprivation" among locals. Previously, the Tibetans were sore about the Gorkhaland movement precisely because it had severely affected their economy which principally depended on tourism (Subba 1987-88). The sheer numerical majority of the Nepalis must have dissuaded them from any intention of opposing the Movement. As Tanka Subba notes (1992: 207) that “the racial similarity between different ethnic groups could also be a point of disadvantage. The Lepchas, Bhutias, Tibetans and Indo-Mongoloid Nepalis belong to the same racial stock and look alike. As a result, the CRPF personnels chasing the GNLF activists, who were mostly Nepalis could not distinguish between these various groups. They arrested them indiscriminately, beat up before locking them up in the cells and even shot at them. So many Lepchas, Bhutias and Tibetans suffered from police torture and offensive though they had practically nothing to do with the

\textsuperscript{36} The total population of Scheduled Tribes in the Darjeeling Municipality is 12747, of which 6448 is male and 6299 is female (Census of India 2001).
\textsuperscript{37} The Bhutia respondent was an elderly man. His family members were helping him narrate. Excerpt from an interview with a Bhutia resident in Darjeeling town on 29/09/06.
Movement. Even where no such thing happened they suffered from as much tension and anxiety as the Nepalis did” (Subba 1992: 206-207). In recent times, the All Gorkha Student’s Union (AGSU) has on few occasions vociferously expressed their resentment to the emerging domination of Tibetan refugees in the region and their alleged or surreptitious use of Voters’ Identity cards for gaining employment or commerce. Four Tibetan youths interpreting the relation between Tibetans and Nepalis, hastened to add that “Nepalis think good about Tibetans, they want to make friends with us; Nepali girls nowadays want to get friendly with Tibetan boys because they think we have a lot of money (dngul). They are in a majority, there is no point avoiding them.”

For Tibetan refugees, sensitivity to potentially hostile feelings of locals is deemed crucial in order to maintain peace and order. It enables them to gain self-confidence and avoid potential conflict, by invoking an ideal image of a “non-violent Tibetan refugee”.

7b.4 Tibetan Aloofness and Citizenship

The desire for anonymity arose out of the need to circumvent excess bureaucratic entanglement. By virtue of not remaining spatially isolated as in a camp, refugees in Darjeeling town could translate this desire into a workable reality in the form of obtaining ration cards, entering their names in the voter’s list and procuring Scheduled Tribes certificate by using the surname “Bhutia”. The passage to obtaining Indian citizenship was thus clear but had to be arranged discreetly. The need to buy nationality was deemed more necessary for those refugees who had become wealthy on account of owning houses, restaurants, hotels, shops or valuable items like taxis and cars. Wealth made them visible in town areas which necessitated the procurement of citizenship documents to deal with “exposure”. Identity documents on the one hand signaled permanent residence in Darjeeling town but it did not have a fixed one-to-one

38 Elderly Nepalis living in the neighbouring Hermitage area who have witnessed the progress of Darjeeling refugees spoke of their ‘hardworking spirit’ as the singular reason for their success.
39 Being a refugee demanded certain kinds of social conduct while closing off others. It was not merely a label or legality; it was a moral condition bearing its own consequences. The two Tibetan youths interviewed in a restaurant in Darjeeling town on 4/10/06 were well aware of the violent incident that had erupted in Dharamsala between Tibetan refugees and Gaddis in 1994. For more on the Dharamsala incident see Penny-Dinri 1994: 280-93.
40 Obtaining Indian citizenship has never been an easy decision for a Tibetan in exile for reasons which would be elaborated later.
correspondence with particular degrees of commitment to place among the refugees-turned-Indian citizens. Citizenship documents were only a technique of invisibility or means for commerce. It was something more than a simple matter of have or have-not for Tibetans at TRSHC. In a situation of protracted exile, the citizenship question is a controversial one confronting Tibetans in the diaspora. Other problems or complications were raised in its wake and had its distinctive resonance in Darjeeling town in particular. These were the perspectives on the problem of “return”; to questions of identity as an effect of diasporic (multiple) attachments to several places at one time; in the framework of the Central Tibetan Administration’s policy which officially discourages Tibetans from taking up Indian citizenship consistent with the cultural preservation thesis which it espouses.

Tibetan youths working in the wood carving section at the Centre interpreted the problem of citizenship. They said, “Black se to hum Indian citizen ho sakte hain (Illegally we can become Indian citizens). They were times when Nepalis would come along to our houses and ask us to make ration cards and voter’s identity cards. But Darjeeling people know that there is a refugee centre here and we have our address of this place. They can easily make out. They would recognize us. Getting Indian citizenship would not help. But we should not forget our culture.”

Successfully claiming to be a Bhutia, producing the ration cards at the food ration shops, voter’s identity card at the time of Municipal elections provided sufficient proof of naturalization for many town refugees. Although it was possible for Tibetans to garner Indian citizenship through use of these identity signs, they could not hide their identity as refugees from locals. The effectiveness of these identity signs depended upon the general acceptance of and tacit support from sections of the local population. The fact that immigrant agents and officers at the Foreigner’s Registration Office (who were recruited from the local Bhutia and Nepali Buddhist community) were reluctant to disclose information about the size of Tibetan refugee population in Darjeeling town to an outsider is sufficient proof of the prevalence of a tacit approval from sections of the local

41 Excerpt from an interview with several Tibetan youths working in the Wood Carving section at TRSHC on 25/09/06.
community of the workings of this “naturalization” or de facto citizenship of town refugees. Yet nearly all Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling town fulfilled the requirements of the Foreigners Registration Act by obtaining the Registration Certificate (RC)\(^{42}\). Several Tibetans reiterated that the procedure of renewing the Registration Certificate every year was problematic, cumbersome and indicative of their changeable and precarious status. Further, it is incumbent upon Tibetan refugees having the Registration Certificate to report his/her presence to the district registration officer within 7 days of his/her arrival, every time one moves out of the district of registration and residential address for more than 7 days. In practice, few Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling who are RC holders take the trouble to report. As residents of India they move around freely from place to place unlike foreign visitors to the country. The RC document does not entitle them to travel abroad. In fact this was another reason why some Tibetan refugees decided to apply for Indian citizenship.

### 7b.4.1 Citizenship versus Tibetan Patriotism

Closely connected with the situation of protracted exile besetting the Tibetan community in India are the controversies regarding citizenship and patriotism. The paradox can be summed up thus – are citizenship and patriotism two distinct variants or are they expressions of one and the same mood. A Tibetan respondent made clear the paradox in the following words, “Becoming an Indian becomes important, we get opportunity. With Holiness there, we feel proud we are Tibetans. I do not mind becoming an Indian but I want to keep my status as refugee. It is important that we believe that we will get our freedom. We can always convert to Tibetan, when Tibet is free. I am a Tibetan but since I am born in India I am an Indian.”\(^{43}\) The need to seek opportunity is acutely felt among Tibetan refugee students who are deprived of both higher education and government jobs. The exile government operates few institutions and training centres but these are inadequate to accommodate the hundreds of high school graduates. Hence their only

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\(^{42}\) Both Tibetan refugees and Tibetan-turned Indian citizens possessed the Registration Certificate (RC). RC was an emphatic proof of their Tibetan nationality; their adherence to the movement for the independence of Tibet and an affirmation of their ethnic identity as Tibetan.

\(^{43}\) Excerpt from the interview with a Tibetan respondent who does garment business at Mahakal market, Darjeeling town on 24/05/05.
option is to apply to an Indian college or centre. However admission to a state college or institution requires a domicile certificate that confirms that the applicant is a legal resident of the state. The inability of Tibetan refugees to provide the necessary documentation makes it next to impossible to get admission. To be eligible for domicile certificate, one must be an Indian citizen. The use of adoptive labels by Tibetan exiles—of an Indian citizen, did not suggest that they sought assimilation into Darjeeling society or had assumed “detransffialized” cosmopolitan identity. Some of the Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling town who have assumed adoptive labels are the ones who have taken active interest in organizing demonstrations and protests and in expressing their loyalty to the Tibetan freedom struggle by paying the “patriotic fund” to the exile government. Popularly called “Green Book” this is a receipt book of the monetary pledge to support the expenses of the exile government. The book reads “As per article no. 7 of the resolution passed in a meeting convened by the committee for the movement of freedom of Tibet, held on 30th July 1972, it has been pledged voluntarily that each Tibetan would pay one rupee a month and extra if possible and the salaried person shall pay 2% of one’s salary with effect from August 1972 to the Tibetan government in exile for it was felt that the government in exile needed to be strengthened mainly by supporting the expenses of the government for both short-term and long-term benefits of the Tibetan people. This book is a receipt of the acknowledgment of the monetary pledge.” A Tibetan refugee having garment business in town replied, “Any special occasion, we shut down all our business. We go for the procession march, whatever it is like. I stick to my business, if it is not like this. We are brought up this way. We have to respect the community leader. There are some who do not go. That particular person is not pointed at. Our religion does not allow this.”

44 Dharamsala’s pressure and expectations regarding patriotism and citizenship is nuanced. The chairperson of the Tibetan Cabinet, Samdhong Rinpoche’s statement conveys the sentiment of the exile administration. “Tibetans living in the diaspora are free to go

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44 Excerpt from an interview with a Tibetan respondent who does garment business at Mahakal market, Darjeeling town on 24/05/05. The marginality of Tibetan refugees, as de Voe (1987: 57) states also gives “leeway to forge their own community around their leader and religion, with little diversion from the original purpose of flight – to defend the faith and in the end, to rescue the people left behind in Tibet.”
where they want. We do not try to control them. Rather, we try to facilitate whatever they want to do. I am not in favour of sending Tibetans on a large scale to emigrate from India, Nepal or Bhutan. Therefore, the Tibetan government-in-exile does not look for, nor does it try to have large emigration programs. If governments offer, we do not turn them down. Tibetans living in the Diaspora are making travel documents. We don't stop that. On the contrary, we try to make it easy for them because it is their right. But our government does not encourage them to emigrate. The reason is very simple. Once Tibetans emigrate to the West, they cannot preserve the Tibetan identity for the second generation."  

From the above statement, it is clear that the exile administration sees these Tibetans in the West as their ambassadors. The fact that they cannot be depended upon to preserve Tibetan culture is equally conveyed.

While “preserving Tibetan culture” in exile includes inheriting and reproducing the marginal political status of the older generation in India (Diehl 2002: 117), acquiring citizenship in the West serves an explicit political agenda for those Tibetans in the West who have close affinity with the cause and Dharamsala. Geographical differences, produced by displacement therefore have a strong impact on life-chances and access to resources of refugees which can be utilized for dealing with protracted refugee situations. This position is conveyed by a Tibetan refugee youth now living in America over the internet, “Although the Tibetans have adapted very well with American society but it is too early to say if we would be able to preserve our culture in this big country where many minorities have lost their identities. For us right now, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is one of the biggest reasons most of the Tibetans have maintained unification and are thriving well. The Tibetans who have migrated to the United States from India and Nepal are helping their relatives and family back home in India and Nepal. Many Tibetans have very strong ties with the people in India. Since most of the young Tibetans grew up in India and Nepal. I especially go to India twice a year for the last eighteen years. Also I as a photographer regularly document our diaspora and ever changing situation of the

46 This is contrary to the general opinion among Tibetan refugees in India that the exile administration is partial towards Tibetans in the West, especially with regard to the citizenship issue. It becomes also difficult to ignore the fact that the Tibetan refugee-turned-Indian citizens do not make a case of this partiality since they do not want to jeopardize their new found citizenship status.
Tibetans inside and outside of Tibet. Every year, many Tibetans visit India and Nepal to see their families and relatives. Some of them send their children to Tibetan schools in India and also in some private Indian schools. The Tibetans in the States get most of the latest news from Internet such as phayul.com and other Tibetan sites. Also many Tibetans regularly talk with their friends and families in India on regular basis. Thus far, I think the Tibetans have done very well inspite of all the distractions and hard working schedules. In New York, the Tibetans regularly get together at various functions, concerts, cultural events, demonstrations and religious events. So I think the Tibetans have not melted into the melting pot.47 The underlying assumption at work here is that a refugee who has been away for some considerable time and continued to interact with individuals who were still living in his or her home country or country of first asylum do relate to the world in a substantially different way from those who never migrated.

“Resettlement” significantly alters the position refugees occupy in their social networks. The above passage suggests that Tibetan exile youth now living in the United States who have links with co-ethnics in India have a strong sense of national identity that is not linked to physical occupation of their homeland (their emphasis is on the ever changing situation inside Tibet rather than an image of an unchanging Tibet). Rather it is linked to a patriotic desire to someday regain their independence (which remains the avowed goal of the Tibetan Youth Congress also operating in the United States) or autonomy for Tibet. Since only small minorities of refugees are actually resettled, the resettlement process does split up refugees’ social networks; even those who are resettled may end up in different locations or even on different continents. The last sentence of the above passage “So I think the Tibetans have not melted into the melting pot” points to how the dominant importance of separation in the construction of meanings, identity, family and community, influences the relationships refugees finally create and develop with their

47 In the Tibetan case, though it is difficult to get an exact estimate of the number of internet users, the use of the internet is fairly widespread among young people of all backgrounds, being as it is cheap and readily available in most areas both in Darjeeling, India and abroad. A Darjeeling-based journalist who owns an Internet café near Mahakal market assessed this aspect, “my cyber café remains full for most part of the day. Many Tibetans come over to the café and write to their sponsors for financial and non-monetary assistance. I sometimes do help them out with the correspondence (interviewed on 28/09/06 at the internet café).”
societies of residence. This was conveyed by a Tibetan refugee living in the United States on being asked whether they take the help of lamas in the United States for performing various rituals or is there lack of these functionaries, “There are Tibetan Associations in almost all the cities in the US, Canada, Europe and so on. In most cases here, it is the case of one organization serving all functions - be it cultural, social, political, religious and so on. Regarding your question about monks and pujas, on account of the relatively more hectic lifestyle here in the west compared to India and Nepal, and also largely due to the virtually nonexistent members of the sangha (in our communities here) - many of them give up their vows once they are in the west - most pujas are ordered to be done in India and Nepal where our families and relatives are still residing and have the time and resources to host these day long and week long pujas. Interesting, isn't it?”

7b.5 Home and Place is Where You Make It!

What is foremost in the minds of refugees when they arrive in the resettlement country is the overwhelming transnational obligation that they have to cater to from the moment of their arrival into the resettlement country. Recently-arrived refugees who are not in a position to meet transnational obligations have feelings of guilt and rationalize about this newly acquired status in a new society of residence. One Tibetan refugee made clear his stand on the issue of extending help to his co-ethnics in India. “Since I came to the US as a student, I have not been able to send remittances home to my parents in India as often and as much as I would have liked to. However, every Tibetan in the US I would venture to state has relatives in India and Nepal and Tibet in some cases to whom they send $$ understanding that it is their responsibility now that they are in the west to help out those back home.”

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49 Excerpt from the conversation over the Internet with a Tibetan exile in the United States on Jun 15, 2007 9:56 AM. The desire and ability to engage in transnational practices does ebb and flow at different phases of the lifecycle and in different contexts.
50 Excerpt from the conversation over the Internet with the Tibetan exile in the United States on Jun 14, 2007 9:57 PM.
Sporadic remittances of money represent the beginnings of transnational activities and relations for recent refugees who are struggling to establish themselves in the host society. Once they establish themselves in the host society, they are obliged to assist members of the refugee community cope with exile life. A Tibetan refugee who works as an administrative assistant to the athletic director of a private school on the east side of Manhattan wrote about the predicament of a Tibetan refugee child when they arrive in United States and the steps taken by them to alleviate their lot, “Once the children come here it is overwhelming for them, because in India they’re used to living within Tibetan communities and settlements, and they’re always in touch with other Tibetan families. Suddenly when they arrive in New York City it’s very difficult, because there are not that many Tibetan families. Then when they go and attend the public schools, there are cases where some of them are the only Tibetans in their school. So of course they pick up a lot of things from other cultures, and at the same time they’re not able to speak or read or write in Tibetan—and it becomes a problem. I feel it’s very important within the family for the parents to try and keep this in mind as much as possible, when the kids are at home, and to try to give them as much exposure to the Tibetan culture and the Tibetan religion as possible—also to speak in Tibetan and try to teach them the language.”

Here India enters the imaginative map of the Tibetan exile in the United States, the expression of the need to replicate the diasporic practices of these India-born Tibetans, contributes to the creation of settlement that occurs within a context that simultaneously connects refugees to multiple nation-states.

The evolving complexity of networks and transnational practices increasingly challenge the idea of a society firmly perched upon the nation-state. It opens up new ways of conceptualizing “home”, of territorial identities and the notion of “return” to one’s homeland or to one’s “country of first asylum”\textsuperscript{52}. As one Tibetan exile ruminated upon the shaping of his identity in the diaspora over the internet, “As a Tibetan who has lived in India and now living in the US, I believe I have assimilated influences consciously and unconsciously that have shaped my current identity as a stateless person in another

\textsuperscript{51} For more on Tibetan exiles in New York see www.newstrolls.com/news/dev/wmeyers/index.html.

\textsuperscript{52} The notion of ‘return’ here denotes not only the greater or lesser likelihood of a person eventually returning, that is, the ‘when’ of return but also the ‘where’ of return and the very real possibility that one cannot return home either.
country. In today’s globalization era where few are immune to outside influences leading to a homogenized kind of identity, I believe Tibetans are no exception and I personally feel that the fact that we are refugees and somewhat rootless and nowhere to call home, we are more apt adopt outside influences - in addition, our Indian experience allows us in the west and specifically in the US to relate well and blend in with our Indian friends - we find we have enough in common and make many Indian friends in college and at work - personally when I was school, I had many international student friends from India and regaled them with Hindi songs and my knowledge of Bollywood and so on.”

On each Sunday, the Tibetan Association of New York and New Jersey takes over the building where the Office of Tibet, the Tibet Fund, and the US-Tibet Committee are housed, and turns it into a Sunday school. There is a staff of volunteer teachers who devote that one day of the week to teaching the children of the local Tibetan families to read and write Tibetan. They also teach them to perform traditional Tibetan music and dance—while speaking, as much as possible, in Tibetan. The emergence of transnational activities of refugees and refugee groups is affected by conditions within both the host and the sending country and does vary over time and space depending on the attitudes of home states, differences in current status and differences in conditions in home society. Here the traditional naming and meaning of diasporas can be expanded to include several communities that express new identities and practices as a result of displacement and transnationality.

7b.5.1 Creating a Home in Exile

A Tibetan refugee, an inhabitant of the TRSHC expressed how he related to the hostland – Darjeeling, while recounting his childhood period. “This is their land (sa thog). It is not ours. This is all that we are getting. We have tolerance as a Tibetan refugee. If someone says no you are not supposed to play in this ground, we won’t fight. Otherwise we have

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53 Excerpt from the conversation over the Internet with a Tibetan exile in the United States on Jun 10, 2007 8:03 PM.
54 The distinction between diaspora and transnational is not always clear in social science literature. While recognizing that diasporas can eventually evolve into powerful transnational communities, it is sufficient to say that multiple and simultaneous ways of belonging and multiple ways of incorporation in the host societies is the one key theme that is common for both.
the right to fight. The local people will not say you are a refugee. If they say let them have it, then we will have it. We cannot say this is mine. My land is there.”

Thinking and feeling about one’s country of first asylum through socialization does not always translate into a wish to return “home” to Tibet. Leaving Darjeeling does not automatically involve returning. It can mean the possibility of moving to another country, in order to escape the drudgeries of localized existence. This possibility is conveyed by Tibetans who are firmly entrenched in Darjeeling arising as a result of inter-marriage. Inter-marriages, although not an everyday occurrence are not uncommon. Recent trend is that more number of Tibetan women are getting married outside their community, that is, into Bhutia, Nepali community and even foreigners. Whereas Tibetan men more often get married within their community (Welfare Officer). A Tibetan refugee woman married to a Bhutia described how her life changed with marriage, “In the refugee centre, it is not liked if we speak in Nepali or have friends from the Nepali community. There was a lot of strictness. I can now enjoy some freedom. In my in-laws family, they do respect me for teaching them Tibetan customs and culture. I do remember Tibet but I have strong feelings for India which is my home now. I do not want to go back to Tibet, if Tibet gets free. I am keener to go to United States where my sister is living.” She hastened to add that, “in America, Tibetans are expected to show that they are Tibetan. In India you need not show that.”

Home is usually seen in terms of a “boundary” it encloses people. It also represents a place where one can live more or less unselfconsciously. As the above passage suggests there is also the comparison made by individuals of life in other places or sites, (which was once one’s home, especially in the case of Tibetan refugee women) which evokes different sentiments. It goes to show that the refugees in the TRSHC had some of their family members among the town refugees and vice-versa. It is also not unreasonable to assume that the symbiotic and reciprocal economic and social interactions exist between

55 Excerpt from a conversation with Tibetan refugees at the TRSHC on 27/09/06.
56 Reliable statistical information on the frequency of mixed marriages among the town refugees was unavailable. However it is possible to say that neither town refugee nor the Welfare Officer with whom the scope for intermarriage was discussed expressed moral or political criticisms about those who had intermarried.
57 Excerpt from a conversation with a Tibetan woman at the Mall, Darjeeling town on 24/05/05.
the two groups. According to a refugee living in Darjeeling town, “TRSHC is part of everyone. It is a home (nang). It is about looking after others. Camp (sgar) should be there to take care.”

Creating a home in exile can be experienced by some as reconstructing a culture in a host-land that is truer to the ‘original’ than the culture that now dominates in the homeland itself. In case of the refugee women, triumph lies in spreading Tibetan culture among affines who are in this case “hosts” to Tibetan refugees. The presence of Tibet in prints, music, television programmes, Tibet sites, the arts and crafts which dominate home decoration, clothing and food does not signify an alienation from the present problems or concerns nor does it indicate a straightforward longing to “return”. This is reflected in the way a Tibetan refugee perceives the problem of creating a home in exile inter-generationally. In one instance, a Tibetan refugee reflected upon this problem stating that, “My son would not be so patriotic (rgyal gces) because the environment is different now. Young ones have a deep feeling for the Dalai Lama but their knowledge about Tibet is less. It is only through books. Because of hectic school schedules, parents do not get time to interact and talk about Tibet like before. Children are sent to different schools.”

A tension between the self-conscious honor/burden of being bearers of their heritage and the seemingly unlimited opportunities for innovation and interaction in exile informs the socialization of Tibetan refugee youths from the moment they are born and has been institutionalized in the structure of their schools. Most Tibetan youths spoke of the marked difference in the level of exposure while studying in Convent schools like Mount Hermon or Loreto Convent than in the Central School for Tibetans in Darjeeling or in Tibetan Children’s Village in Dehradun. “Ask me where I’m from and I won’t have an answer. I feel I never really belonged anywhere never really had a home. I was born in Manali but my parents live in Karnataka. My sisters are in Varanasi but my brothers are in Dharamsala. My Registration Certificate states that I am a foreigner residing in India

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58 Excerpt from a conversation with a Tibetan refugee in Darjeeling town on 25/05/05.
59 With regard to clothing of children and the youths in Darjeeling, there is no difference between the Tibetan refugees and the local people. The common styles of cloths, hairdo and mannerisms are as far as possible, faithful reproductions of the latest trend prevailing among film stars of Bollywood, if not Hollywood. With regard to food, many Tibetans now eat rice. Meat like before is always there in the daily menu.
60 Excerpt from an interview with a Tibetan refugee at TRSHC on 22/05/05.
and my citizenship is Tibetan. I like to speak in Tibetan but prefer to write in English, I like to sing in Hindi but my tune and accent are all wrong.”

This suggests that the major problems confronting the Tibetans is the threat of alienation from self and other Tibetans; disillusionment over hopes and expectations and confused ethnic identity. Despite a well-articulated academic curriculum, what is taught is not passed on unchanged, since Tibetan refugee youth are living culturally hybrid lives. The self-consciousness of forging viable links between tradition and modernity is exhibited by a young Tibetan writer who recognizes the importance of speaking Tibetan with youngsters. He states, “As a Tibetan of the diaspora, I can attest to the fact that most young Tibetans at some point develop a strong desire to connect with their cultural heritage. One of the most precious gifts my parents have given my sister, brother, and me is the language. Through our native tongue, we have been empowered to choose how and when to explore Tibetan culture. Certainly, much can be understood through other languages. But much more of the culture can be felt by speaking face to face with knowledge bearers. Thus, the challenge lies ahead for current and future parents to somehow ensure that the future generations speak this ancient word.”

7b.5.2 Our Bond with Darjeeling and India!

New generation Tibetan refugees are those for whom the Tibetan government’s policies, the refugee community’s concern about the future of Tibetan culture and the identity challenging realities of life in the host society come together most complexly. What is observable is the emergence of concrete images of Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling of “having made it”, of having achieved material success in exile over the decades. As one Tibetan refugee having a garment business in Darjeeling town stated, “It is convenient to

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62 “The exile mix of Tibetan, Hindi, and English is something I like to call ‘Thinglish’ untraditional, but it works. This is a key to Tibetan survival beyond the land of snows—we approach what is around us and combine it with what we need and know to define a space uniquely ours” Rabgey 2002.
63 Tibetan Muslims in India who are Indian citizens have been more successful in preserving Tibetan language than Tibetans embracing Tibetan Buddhism. Their steadfastness in speaking the language is brought out in an interview with a Tibetan Muslim (on 4.10/2006 at Darjeeling town) who said, “In place like Darjeeling, Tibetans are loosing their linguistic capacity because of the mix with locals. If you start speaking local language, your children will forget Tibetan language. So you must speak Tibetan yourself at home. Our mother tongue is Tibetan. We must teach Tibetan at home.”
do business in India. But I know about Darjeeling best. It is difficult to go elsewhere when you have a child.” Most of the success stories deal in some measure with wealth that was not inherited but made in the course of one’s lifetime. Darjeeling became a productive place for Tibetans by providing a context for using their hybrid status as refugee/diasporics and citizens towards productive ends. In talking about one’s own work prospects and business growth in the present place, the starting point was the arrival in Darjeeling and not the reference to the “past”, that is, pre-occupation Tibet. The early exile was remembered as the period that had been overcome and lived through by the older generation. In narrating their struggle in exile, it emerged that the new generation expressed their indebtedness to their preceding generation (mostly their grandparents from whom they hear inspirational stories) who faced the hazards of early exile life in Darjeeling and not the people they had left behind in Tibet as a result of the Chinese occupation. Yet those Tibetans studying in college or simply vagabonding ruminated about Tibet in their own characteristic way. One Tibetan refugee studying in Loyola College in Chennai and having a home in TRSHC said, “I would live like a refugee. This is better for me. My parents suffered a lot. I would like to do something. We have a dream of a free Tibet. In everyday life, the dream sometimes vanishes. But it is in there. It cannot be erased or something. It is in there. Anytime it can come up. Even if it does not come up, it is in there.” 64 The significance of ‘dreaming’ about a place is brought out by Woeser in her essay, “Tibet does not exist, Tibet does exist” where she writes about the conversation she had with her friend (a Tibetan born in the diaspora) via the net about the film “Dreaming Lhasa” by Tenzing Sonam and Ritu Sarin, relaeased in 2005. Her friend wrote to her, “Everybody has their version of Lhasa. In particular, although most Tibetans in exile have not been to Lhasa, they have always talked about Lhasa from when they were little. But how can they know what kind of a place Lhasa is? So, it is just like a dream…though this movie is about Tibet, Tibet does not appear in it even once. There is no Tibet!” Woeser continues, “Tibet does not exist! But everybody knows that Tibet does exist. It is precisely because we feel that Tibet does not exist or that it does exist that we have become kindred spirits. We still have our dream” (Woeser 2008).

64 Excerpt from the interview with a Tibetan refugee at TRSHC on 24/05/05.
These refugees also talk about Darjeeling as a place which serves as a signpost to know more about other places; to compare life in Darjeeling and in the diaspora, India and abroad. Tibetan youths remarked, “Darjeeling being cold climate, makes it different from Bylakuppe. The way we dress up or diets are different. In South, Tibetans have sambar, dosas. Out here in Darjeeling we are into music, mostly rock music. In South they are more into Hindi film songs. In Delhi, they are more prosperous than we are. They mainly speak Hindi. We have become more Nepali.”

A Tibetan refugee in Darjeeling town spoke about the place-Darjeeling in the following manner, “Darjeeling is there till we are here. It is not our country. It is our birthplace. Till we are here in India, it is our home.” Darjeeling becomes a place of rest, a place to return to for students and sweater-sellers who go to other parts of India for their education and business respectively. It also becomes a place that produces monotony and drudgery in the lives of Tibetan exiles, who mention that they “get fed up of living in Darjeeling and so move to other places for short and long retreats, like Gangtok, Kalimpong, Dharamsala, Gaya, Dehradun, Bylakuppe, New York or San Francisco among other places in order to refresh and gain knowledge.” Darjeeling stands, using Stuart Hall’s words, “for the endless ways in which the Tibetan people have been destined to ‘migrate’; it is the signifier of migration itself – of traveling, voyaging and return as fate, destiny” (Hall 1990).

Having achieved success, the point of consideration for the new generation in Darjeeling town was the prospect, desirability and extent of participation in the affairs of the homeland, besides pursuing business and work-related ventures. “To prove their identification with their homeland and other diasporic causes, members of the Tibetan diasporic community are seen to confront their local invisibility through public acts of mobilization and demonstration which often reach out beyond their present communities.” However, a Tibetan refugee in the garment business expressed the dilemma of refugee identity that emerges while engaging in commercial and other

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65 Excerpt from an interview with a Tibetan youth in Darjeeling town on 26/05/05.
66 This statement is similar to the manner in which Nepalis think of Darjeeling when they say, “Darjeeling will take care of me” (Golay 2006: 40).
worldly pursuits which necessitates naturalization and the adoption of the identity of an Indian citizen. “There is a risk of joining any organization for Tibetans, especially when you are in business and you have a Bhutia name. Others can point fingers at you. I have been part of U-Tsang association. I see that many of the young are interested in associations, movement and processions. Through associations (tshogs pa) we make them learn about the Tibetan movement for independence (rang bstan).”\(^{67}\)

People pointed to the expenditure of time and resources that would be swallowed up by the process of transforming oneself into a legally documented citizen. Those refugees who became very wealthy and began to own immovable property like houses or restaurants or valuable items like cars, taxis, lorries acknowledged the need to purchase nationality. It was considered that wealth made them more visible and liable to be questioned by immigration agents or strangers. So it suffices to call oneself a Bhutia, in other words, an Indian citizen. Legal naturalization of this sort was a pragmatic expediency for some and according to others it meant a better option for securing work and cash and utilizing that resource for use in free Tibet in the future. Those who think of the possibility and desirability of return to Tibet, also recognize the trouble that could break out when the repatriation occurs. They assert that, “we do not want to go back to pre-1959 Tibet which would appear according to them like (Gaon) – meaning village in the Hindi language. The above statement indicates that what matters for the Tibetan refugees is living without difficulties. Having Indian citizenship could not make life unproblematic for the Tibetan refugees. Interviews with some non-Tibetan shop owners next to the Tibetan-dominated Dragon market revealed the misgivings of Tibetan refugees about their relationships with non-Tibetans. Some of their comments are: “Tibetans bus naam ke hi refugees hai (Tibetans are refugees only in name). Sarkar unke liye suvidha kar diya hai (Government has made it easy for the Tibetan refugees). NASA dene mai kiya hai (There is nothing in shouting slogans for Tibet). Tibet free ho jata hai to bhi koi vapas nahi jayga (Even if Tibet gets freedom, nobody will go back to Tibet)”\(^{68}\). One Tibetan doing business in Darjeeling town said, “Inside the refugee

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\(^{67}\) Excerpt from an interview with a Tibetan refugee at the Dragon market in Darjeeling town on 28/09/06.

\(^{68}\) Excerpt from a conversation with non-Tibetan shop owners on 28/09/06 in Darjeeling town.
settlement you have to go by rules of the settlement. Once outside you have to pay from your pocket. We do exactly like other Indian businessmen but we are yet to get social recognition for our efforts. We pay sales tax, income tax and rent but it is not recognized." For the Tibetan refugees intending to put down roots in Darjeeling, this social recognition remains elusive and rather hard to come by. The town refugees tended to structure their lives and conversations in such a way as to leave both their immediate and more distantly perceived options open.

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69 Excerpt from a conversation with Tibetan shop owners on 28/09/06 in Darjeeling town.