

SURIVIVAL AND REVIVAL OF TIBETAN ETHNIC IDENTITY IN INDIA

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Abstract

Ethnic identity is a complex multifaceted phenomenon that is constructed or negotiated to form a nation-state. Once formed, it occupies an intrinsic part of the development of an individual. Multiple circumstances have led to the creation and recreation of Tibetan ethnic identity in exile, and such creation happens at both collective and individual levels. In this thesis, Tibetan ethnic identity in exile is examined at the individual level as part of Diasporic identity and statelessness. Also, the construction at the collective level is examined both among the Tibetan community in exile in India and the community in China. Community in China is studied in comparison so as to give a better understanding of the mentality of the exiles as opposed to ones in the homeland. Moreover, it analyzes the sustainability of Tibetan ethnic identity among the Diaspora and its significant role in the national movement. Tibetan Diaspora remains an understudied and under-theorized field despite the plight of Tibetans commanding international attention. Therefore, it is extremely crucial to study the survival and revival of Tibetan ethnic identity.

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List of Abbreviations

CTA – The Central Tibetan Administration

PRC – People’s Republic of China

CCP – Chinese Communist Party

SFT – Students’ for a Free Tibet

TGiE – Tibetan Government in Exile

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Introduction

In this age of information, a great deal of information is available at the click of a button. We live in an inter-connected world like never before, and the measurement of power of the world is connectedness. In this highly networked world, we have built global connections; it is not even about a country anymore rather it is about the cities, regions and the world. Similarly, Diaspora is all about connectedness and networking. Diaspora or scattered communities of people forced to leave their homelands due to unfortunate reasons, are seen increasing in numbers. Today Diaspora communities world over account for an approximate figure of 240 million.¹

According to Sheffer the definition of the term broadens with two characterizations of Diaspora namely, “ethnic-national” Diaspora and “modern Diaspora.”² This thesis deals with ethnic-national Diaspora in the context of Tibetan Diaspora in exile in India and explores their struggle for survival and maintenance of ethno-national sentiments. Diaspora studies are widely associated with ethnic politics and multiculturalism. Gabriel Sheffer, a well-known scholar in the field of Diaspora studies, explains the concept of Diaspora, more specifically ethno-national Diaspora, in his book titled “Diaspora Politics; At Home Abroad.”³ Therefore, I am using his theory of ethno-national Diaspora to study the elusive concept of ethnic-genesis in regard to exile Tibetans and the related issues of Tibetan Diaspora’s survival and revival in India. Interestingly, Sheffer argues that when integrated into a host community smoothly, a Diaspora finds it difficult to retain its original identity and more often than not, acquires the identity of the host community. A potential contribution of this thesis is to prove that this argument of Sheffer does not hold true at least in the case of the Tibetan community

¹‘Migration Policy Institute’, *Migrationpolicy.org*, accessed 10 June 2016, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/home>

²Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14.

³ *ibid.*, 17.

in exile. Tibetans, despite their relatively smooth integration into the Indian society, continue to uphold their Tibetan identity as the primary defining character trait of the community.

This thesis examines the question of which approaches of ethnic-identity is most suitable in the case of exile Tibetans and investigates the structures and characteristics of Tibetan Diaspora in India that have maintained Tibetan ethnic identity for more than fifty years. More importantly, this study also explores the contributions of Tibetan Diaspora in their national movement and preservation of culture. These contributions are generally considered as a form of soft power.⁴ Finally, it also investigates the making and remaking of Tibetan ethnic identity in exile by analyzing concepts such as homeland, nostalgia and loyalties.

Tibetan ethnic identity in Diaspora is chosen as the topic since no substantial amount of work is done regarding this small yet controversial Diaspora community. Tibetans in exile is therefore, a poorly researched area. Tibet has a complex history and political status of a nation. Despite western interest and familiarity with their culture, particularly Tibetan Buddhism, in the academic arena, there is only very limited scholarly literature and research concerning Tibetan Diaspora in India. Most of the studies thus far were more interested in the politics of India and China by using Tibet as a tool of national interest. Therefore, it is extremely important to study Tibetan ethnic identity in India, especially maintenance and sustainability of their ethnic identity in the land of diversity (India). Along with it, it is also important to examine Tibetan ethnic identity in exile that is still in a process of - making and remaking.

Personally, being a Tibetan born and raised in exile, the ethnic identity has always been an intriguing question to me. Am I a foreigner, a refugee or a citizen of India/Tibet? My ethnic identity is fragile and constantly mutates, resulting in so-called *national identity crisis*.

⁴Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Public Affairs, 2004).

It is not only a dilemma to me but also for many Tibetan youth in exile.⁵ The dilemma of ethnic identity grows when abroad especially due to the fact that you develop dual loyalties to the host country and the homeland. Since it is a descriptive thesis, drawing from my own experiences, biases are unavoidable. However, since it is an academic endeavor, attempts are made to keep the biases at a minimum. With regards to the scholarship carried out by Western scholars', the thesis is somewhat skeptical, since they lack the personal experiences of exile Tibetans and therefore, scholarship thus produced inherently misses the nuances associated with the Tibetan ethnic experience.

Although the research methodology consists of both discourse and textual analysis, discourse analysis is the primary methodology. Discourse analysis is the “study of language in use”, and there are “different approaches to discourse analysis, including the analysis of content of the language being used and themes or issues being discussed in a conversation or a newspaper articles.”⁶ The thesis uses articles, journals, and newspapers as the primary sources to study the discourse. Moreover, the most common approaches to discourse analysis are descriptive and critical discourse analysis. This thesis employs both those forms. Descriptive analysis attempts to answer the questions by describing “how language works in order to understand it.”⁷ Critical Discourse Analysis does not stop at the mere description level. It probes deeper and offers “deep explanations” by intervening in “social, political and institutional issues.”⁸ Knowledge thus produced, therefore, has more practical relevance.

Since the thesis is more into sociology and cultural studies, textual analysis is an alternative methodology. It is a study of “narrative and employs textual analysis more generally to study stability, conflict and changes in cultural, economic, political and social

⁵It is a well established fact that Tibetan youth in exile experience national identity dilemma especially when studying in college and/or university with non-Tibetan students. They are more likely to go through a so called national identity crisis when travelling or studying abroad.

⁶James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (Psychology Press, 1999), 8.

⁷Ibid., 10. For more see J. Potter and D. Edwards, ‘Discourse Analysis’, in *Introducing Psychological Research* (Macmillan Education UK, 1996), 419–25, http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-24483-6_63.

⁸ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Routledge, 2013), 24.

institutions.”⁹ I will interpret texts (magazines, journals, television programs, advertisements and so on) in an attempt to obtain a sense of the ways in which Tibetan Diaspora in exile maintain their ethnic identity. At the same time, I have conducted personal interviews and email interviews with a selected group of Tibetans in exile to probe deeper into two issues; their attitude towards the homeland and ethnic-identity and the idea of returning to Tibet. The objective of doing the interviews is to identify the generational gap or attitude differences which might reshape Tibetan ethnic identity in exile.

The thesis has four chapters; the first chapter discusses the theoretical framework by introducing and describing the theory that explains why the Tibetan Diaspora in exile exists under ethno-national Diaspora and the relationship between the survival of Tibetan ethnic identity and its revival based on ethnic-genesis approaches. This chapter will also explore the types within ethno-national Diaspora and focus on the particular kind that is most suitable in the case of Tibetan Diaspora in India. It also discusses the importance of the specific selection of ethno-national Diaspora within the theoretical framework and argues the relevance of theory to the case study.

The second chapter examines Tibetan ethnic identity through history, culture, language, religion and more importantly the formation and characteristics of the Tibetan Diaspora in India. In this chapter, I will explore Tibet in depth as a nation, a history and a culture to understand the nature and formation of the nation. Moreover, it will delve more in to the emergence of Tibetan Diaspora in exile and its unique characteristics. The chapter focuses primarily on Tibetan exiles and their struggle to maintain the ethnic identity in their multicultural host country India.

⁹ Allen Shaw, Deborah Schiffrin, and et al *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008, 759. For more see Alan McKee, *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* (SAGE, 2003)

In the third chapter, I investigate the perspectives of Indian and Chinese governments on Tibetans in exile. The different narratives of the two countries will identify the construction of new identity within the Diaspora and the making and remaking of Tibetan ethnic identity. In addition, it will inspect the complex issue of Tibetan exiles in regard to the Indian government policy at both national and individual levels. It will also touch on the everyday issues that the people are facing in the host country. On the other hand, the politics of Tibet's sovereignty and Sinicization in Tibet raises the question of reshaping Tibetan national identity in the homeland. The outlook of both countries is exceptionally important not only because of the geo-politics, but also in inventing two different versions of Tibetan identity

The fourth chapter emphasizes the imagining of nation in Tibetan Diaspora and their elusive idea about the homeland. Furthermore, it will also discover nostalgia – a home far away from home among Tibetans in exile. It is interesting that in the case of Tibetan exiles, the second-generation possesses a romanticized version of the homeland and has experienced “Diaspora blues.”¹⁰ The feeling of being too foreign in the homeland as well as the host country resulted in dual loyalties. In short, the last chapter will connect the survival and revival of Tibetan ethnic-identity in exile with factors such as loyalty, nostalgia, myth of returning to their homeland and ideas about ethnic homeland.

¹⁰ Diaspora blues in this paper refers to the definition given by Ijeoma Umebinyuo in her famous poem *Diaspora Blues*- “So, here you are too foreign for home too foreign for here never enough for both.”

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework - Ethno-national Diaspora

In the opening chapter of the thesis, I mainly focus on the theories and concepts that will be elaborated on and frequently used in the thesis. It therefore, introduces Diaspora from a theoretical lens developed by Gabriel Sheffer in order to better understand the nuances of the term. The analysis will first introduce and discuss the idea of ethno-national Diaspora in relation to the stateless and incipient categories of it. Both these categories are of crucial importance when discussing the Tibetan case study since the Tibetan Diaspora qualifies under both categories. In its final section, it introduces approaches to the study of ethno-genesis and ethnic-identity, all of which will be helpful in understanding the Tibetan phenomenon.

1.1 Classifying ethno-national Diaspora

The term Diaspora originates from the Greek word *diaspeirō*. *Dia* means over, *speiro* means to sow or scatter.¹¹ Greeks and Jews are the classic examples of Diaspora. The word Diaspora is defined, in its simplest form, as the “dispersal of a people from its original homeland.”¹² Gabriel Sheffer, broadens the definition of the term with two characterizations of Diaspora - ethno-national Diaspora and modern Diaspora. As mentioned earlier, the thesis deals only with ethno-national Diaspora in the context of Tibetans in India. To clarify the meaning of the term further, Gabriel Sheffer defined it in the following manner:

An ethno-national Diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries.¹³

¹¹‘Diaspora - Definition of Diaspora in English from the Oxford Dictionary’, accessed 11 June 2016, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/diaspora>.

¹²Butler, ‘*Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse*,’ 189.

¹³ Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics*, 9.

This definition of ethno-national Diaspora perfectly fits the Tibetan Diaspora in exile due to the fact that they escaped from the Chinese repression in Tibet and sought exile in India since 1959.¹⁴ Sheffer comments “The ethno-national Diaspora concept has been extremely valuable in so far as it has brought sophistication and nuances to the discourse.”¹⁵ Therefore, to elaborate the theory, I will explore in depth, the classifications of the theory and approaches to ethnic identity.

According to Gabriel Sheffer, there are two meaningful criteria for distinguishing between the various existing ethno-national Diaspora: first, the status of their respective homelands and second, their age.¹⁶ He argues that these two factors substantially influence the “structures, strategies and behavior of these entities.”¹⁷

1.1.1 Homeland Status and Diaspora

It is crucial to differentiate between stateless Diaspora and state-linked Diaspora. The stateless Diaspora is those “dispersed segments of nations that have been unable to establish their own independent states.”¹⁸ They are the smaller category of ethnic Diaspora, currently including ethnic groups or nations such as the Palestinian, Kurds, Tibetans and Sikhs. Those Diaspora survive to establish or reestablish independent national states. State-linked Diaspora is those groups that are in “host countries but are connected to societies of their own ethnic origin that constitute a majority in established states.”¹⁹ This category includes the Gypsies and the black Diaspora in Europe, South America and North America (African American community). While their homeland cannot be surely defined due to them being a group that

¹⁴ It was not a forced exile rather a voluntary exile for the fear of increasing Chinese repression against Tibetans in Tibet.

¹⁵ Gabriel Sheffer, ‘The Emergence of New Ethno-National Diasporas’, *Migration: A European Journal of International Migration and Ethnic Relations* 28, no. 2 (1995): 24.

¹⁶ Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics*.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 73.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 148, For more see Khachig Tölölyan, ‘Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment’, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 3–36, doi:10.1353/dsp.1996.0000.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 151, For more see Daniele Conversi, ‘Irresponsible Radicalisation: Diasporas, Globalisation and Long-Distance Nationalism in the Digital Age’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 9 (1 November 2012): 1357–79, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2012.698204.

has evolved to what they are today over centuries, these state-linked Diaspora groups by and large include all other “existing ethno-national Diasporas” irrespective of their demographics.²⁰

1.1.2 The Age Factor

Similar to the homeland status, here a distinction must be made between historical or classical Diasporas and modern or incipient Diasporas (i.e. Diasporas in the making). Apart from the homeland status, the age factor also plays a significant role in determining the characteristics of Diaspora. The age factor is extremely important to the study of the Diasporic process and its link to the homeland. Jews and Greeks fall under classical Diaspora while immigrants from Asia/Africa who later got citizenship of Western countries form the modern Diaspora category. Tibetans in India too are part of the modern Diaspora since their immigration in massive numbers occurred as late as the 20th century and thus the age factor concerning them is relatively new. The chapter focuses only on the nature and status of the stateless Diaspora and modern/incipient Diaspora in the context of Tibetan Diaspora in India. At the same time, it is critical to examine how Tibetans in exile have maintained their ethnic identity as one of the smallest Diasporas in the world.

1.2 Stateless Diaspora

Commenting on stateless Diaspora Sheffer states:

Stateless Diaspora does not only refer to ethnic groups whose homeland has been occupied and dominated by another state such as the Palestinians and Tibetans (incipient Diaspora) ... It also defines ethnic groups who were not connected to sovereign states during certain periods in their histories, so at certain times those were stateless Diaspora.²¹

²⁰ibid, 153, For more see Conversi, ‘Irresponsible Radicalisation.’

²¹Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics*, 155. For more on stateless Diaspora see Tölölyan, ‘Rethinking Diaspora(s).’

Take for example the case of the Diaspora groups mentioned earlier. These groups (including Greeks, Armenians and African-Americans) for quite long periods did not have a sovereign state to call their own. Importantly some groups, continued to maintain ties with their fellow group members who continued to be in their homeland while others despite not essentially been able to do that came into possession of memories regarding their respective homelands which were mostly based on nostalgic imagination.

The establishment of modern nation-states after the First World War in the 20th Century had a great impact on the historical stateless Diaspora. This phenomenon mobilized them to fight for their homelands. Homelands thus became not only a tool used in defining an identity of a group but also as a tool instrumental in setting political agendas for the said group. A classic example of this would be the creation of Israel where the state went on to become not only a symbol of Jewish identity but also the main vehicle of Jewish political aspirations. Interestingly, the quest for a homeland on the part of the traditional Diaspora i.e. them transitioning from stateless Diaspora to state-linked Diaspora also resulted in the creation of new stateless Diasporas. In this case it was the Palestinians.

Roots and history are important concepts in the study of Diaspora. Especially in the case of stateless Diaspora, there prevails a constant need to keep their roots intact and history clearly recorded in the minds of their members so as not to lose the connection with their homeland. For any meaningful struggle concerning independence, these memories and ideas regarding homeland are important, for these are what bind a group together to fight for a particular cause. If all members cherish memories about their homeland equally, the struggle for independence invariably will be fought with zest. In the case of stateless Diaspora, where a struggle for independence is unfolding in their respective homelands, they are torn between, supporting this cause and complying with rules and regulations of their host country. A classic example would be the case of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora who largely flew the

country due to communal tensions and subsequently was seen supporting the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which according to them was fighting for a separate Tamil homeland within the sovereign boundaries of Sri Lanka. However, the LTTE was proscribed as a terrorist front by many Western countries and so the Tamil Diaspora was caught in a dilemma between supporting the LTTE and being law abiding citizens of their host countries. In order to strike a balance between their political aspirations and respecting the host environment, many Diaspora organizations are seen engaged in political advocacy especially targeted at the young Diaspora community that has no memory of their homeland in order to inculcate feelings of nostalgia and yearning towards the homeland so as to ensure that no defection from the group membership will be made by these young Diaspora groups.

1.3 Incipient Diasporas

According to Sheffer, incipient Diaspora is the opposite of historical Diaspora; they are modern Diaspora and thus are in the making. This could mean two things; 1) They are a relatively new group in Diaspora studies, or 2) They are still evolving as a Diaspora group and are characterized by the inherent uncertainties and apprehensions of settling in a new foreign community and even more than aspiring political goals, their primary concern at the moment is *survival*. The former concerns groups such as the Tibetans who are now a relatively established group of Diaspora and are politically quite active for independence. The latter is more about groups that are in the formative years as a Diaspora and which could either evolve as one or perhaps if political conditions of their respective states change return to their homeland. Depending on how the future of the crisis will unfold, the Syrian refugees might qualify as the second group. They are technically speaking a Diaspora since they are away from their home country and have plans to return.

After settling for a while, the incipient Diaspora develops dual loyalties if the host countries have provided them with preferable conditions of abode. Dual loyalties in this scenario are that they both feel loyal towards their considerate host country and at the same time have hopes of returning to their homeland. The Tibetan Diaspora provides a more recent example: despite the fact that China has firm control over Tibet, many members of the Tibetan Diaspora are instilled with a very strong sense of being in a transitory period. Many truly believe that they are on the verge of returning to their homeland. Despite this hope of returning to their homeland, they are also very fond of their host, India and thus both at once, have loyalties towards Tibet and India.

Commenting on the preservation of a homeland's culture, Sheffer states "some groups of migrants and members of incipient Diaspora maintain close ties with their homelands because they arrive in host countries accompanied by their spiritual and social leaders. Those leaders serve to import and consolidate homeland cultural, organizational and behavioral patterns in the host countries."²² Turks in Germany and Sweden and Tibetans in India are few such groups accompanied by their spiritual leaders. These religious leaders play a significant role in maintaining contacts both among and between migrants who are members of the incipient Diaspora and the migrants and their homelands respectively. Tibetan monks have been instrumental in keeping alive ethno-national feelings among Tibetans in exile thereby assuring the endurance of love for their homeland.

Sheffer, Cohen and Van Hear further present the use of the *vernacular, new media* and *non-governmental Diaspora organizations*²³ as important factors in binding a Diaspora emotionally with their homeland. It is a notable point among incipient Diasporas to communicate in their native languages. This could either be because it is easier to

²² Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics*, 133.

²³ *ibid.* and Robin Cohen and Nicholas Van Hear, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, 2 edition (London: Routledge, 2008).

communicate in the vernacular or to keep nationalist feelings alive or both. The use of the vernacular in a new host country has resulted in a tendency among the Diaspora to remain bilingual i.e. by preserving their own language in addition to learning the language of the host. Preservation of the vernacular is also a preferable choice since most members of these Diaspora groups live and work among themselves and thus the need to learn another language is minimal. The native language is seen used in the private sphere in conversations among family members and friends while the host language is used in public especially in schools, workplaces and government offices etc. New media is especially important in forging links between the host country and the Diaspora through the dissemination of movies, news and mails. At the individual level, this is of crucial importance for maintaining contact with family left behind in the homeland and at the public level to maintain a politico-cultural identity.

Non-governmental Diaspora organizations are formed and maintained primarily for political goals where apart from been in touch with the homeland, political goals are advanced. Take for example the case of Students for a Free Tibet, a student organization formed by Tibetan youth that not only mobilizes the Tibetan youth Diaspora but also challenges the Chinese occupation of Tibet through political activism.²⁴

1.4 Approaches to ethno-genesis and ethnic-identity

Like most other social constructions, ethnic-identity too is a socially constructed category that has far reaching political implications. There are various approaches to the construction of ethnic identity, but in this chapter we are examining the applicability of the four main approaches to ethno-genesis and ethnic identity in light of the Tibetan Diaspora.

The first approach is the *primordialist* approach. Primordialist approach is discussed by scholars such as Clifford Geertz in his book *The Interpretations of Culture*. This discusses the

²⁴Ann Frechette, 'Constructing the State in the Tibetan Diaspora', in *State Making in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2012), 127–49, accessed 10 June 2016, <http://tinyurl.com/jmgcfffw>.

importance of primordial characteristics, specifically the roots, in the formation of a Diaspora. Persistence of any form of identity that recognizes a group as a specific collective is essentially based on roots and the group's allegiance to its roots. So is the case with ethnic Diasporas. In any discussion concerning ethnic nations, this primordialist approach is widely used. Tibetans in exile too constitute an ethnic nation based on common ancestry, history, culture and language. They have strong attachments towards their nation and ethnic communities.

The second approach is the *instrumentalist* approach where group formation is essentially viewed in terms of gains and thus is considered as an important step in furthering one's or a group's goals be it social, political or economic. Drawing inspiration from the Rational Choice tradition, this approach argues that the decision to join a collective is essentially informed by cost-benefit calculations. Scholars such as Fredrik Barth have espoused this view. This approach is appropriate in the case of the Tibetan Diaspora in India since their common quest to gain independence is the glue that binds them together as a Diaspora group.

The *Psychological approach* stands in between the instrumentalist and primordialist approaches.²⁵ John A. Armstrong is one prominent proponent of this approach. This approach explains Diasporas not only in terms of gains and roots but also touches on a more emotional aspect in that Diasporas are viewed as collectives with strong attachment to symbols and myths they share in common. While this is partially applicable in the Tibetan context since Tibetan myths and symbols have contributed to the creation of ethnic-identity, it is important to bear in mind that by and large, it is the primordial sentiments concerning religion and language that keeps the Tibetan Diaspora together.

²⁵Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (University of California Press, 1985).

Finally, the *constructivist approach*, an approach advanced by scholars such as Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, explains Diasporas along the same lines of nation in that Diasporas too are viewed as social constructs created for organizing people into systems or communities. We can argue that like every nation or ethnic community, Tibetan ethnic identity is also a construction. It is the Tibetan language and Tibetan Buddhism that construct Tibetan ethnic communities. Among the constructionist viewpoints, that of Benedict Anderson has become widely known and highly influential. His well-known definition of a nation as an “imagined political community” rests on the claim that “members of a nation never get to know, meet, or even hear of most of their fellows, and yet all share a common image of the community and a desire to maintain it.”²⁶

These descriptions make clear that the best way to study Tibetan ethnic identity would be a combination of the primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist approaches. However, these approaches might differ when applying to Tibetan Diaspora in India. The instrumentalist and constructivist approaches are most applicable to the exile Tibetan community in India. Tibetans in India as a stateless Diaspora, considers territorial sovereignty to be extremely important in defining their ethnic identity and the national movement too lies at the heart of bonding among this Diaspora group. Primordial approach will be elaborated in more detail in the subsequent chapter when discussing the role of language, religion and culture in relation to the Tibetan Diaspora.

The discussion makes it clear that any one criterion alone does not suffice to aptly capture the complex phenomenon of Diaspora. Similarly, in the case of Tibetan Diaspora in India, it cannot be explained via the use of a single criterion. There is no particular approach to define their ethnic-identity. It is because the academic study of ethno-national Diasporas does not essentially capture the complexities that are part of the actual Diaspora.

²⁶Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1991), 64

In conclusion it should be noted that despite the inherent difficulty in classifying reasons behind the creation of a Diaspora, a Diaspora is a unique group of people who have a desire to return to their homeland unlike migrants who have left their homelands by choice. For the Diaspora it was never a choice but rather the circumstances were such that they had to flee their homelands. Diasporas are also perfect examples of soft power or rather the power to get things done not using coercion. If tapped tactfully, state-linked Diaspora could be a great resource to generate revenue and Diaspora capital to their respective homelands which is more often than not the case. However, the national movement and preservation of culture in exile is the greatest contribution of a stateless Diaspora to their homeland as a form of soft power. Therefore, it can be argued that being a stateless Diaspora plays a significant role in maintaining and reshaping Tibetan ethnic identity in exile. I will support this argument by exploring more deeply the Tibetan Diaspora in India, its formation and characteristics in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Creation of Tibet Nation and Diaspora in Exile

In Chapter Two, I will discuss Tibetan ethnic-identity by considering Tibet as a nation that is based on a mythical history and cultural homogeneity in the spheres of language and religion. With the invention of the Tibetan nation, Tibetan ethnic-identity was created. However, the identity does not remain the same under the invasion of China and fleeing of Tibetans to India. Hence, this chapter discusses the formation and characteristics of the Tibetan Diaspora and analyses the sustainability of their ethnic-identity in a foreign country.

2.1 Tibet as a nation: history, culture and religion

This chapter is divided into three main sub-sections that explain the genesis of the Tibetan nation in detail so as to give the reader a basic understanding of the main unit of analysis of this thesis. The first sub-section explains the nature and formation of Tibet as a nation, the second sub-section is dedicated to the emergence of Tibetan Diaspora and the final sub-section focuses on its unique characteristics.

2.1.1 History- the nation story

In this section, I explore the history, collective characteristics or identification, myths and symbols that invented Tibet as a nation. The first part is dedicated to the nation's history including language and religion. Tibetan civilization is over two millennia old. It is widely believed that Tibetan race originated from the mating of Bodhisattva monkey (*Pha Trelgen Changchup Sempa*) and an ogress (*Ma Drag Sinmo*) at the Tsethang in the Yarlung Valley of Central Tibet, the cradle of civilization.²⁷ This divine origination theory of Tibetan race is based on Buddhist narratives. This myth is strongly associated in constructing Tibetan identity, especially because they are considered as emanation of *Chenrezig* (Buddha of

²⁷It is commonly believed among the Tibetan community that the source of this myth lies in Tibetan Buddhist texts. It will lose its meaning if I attempt to translate it. For more on this see Tsepon Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Delhi: Paljor Publication, 2010).

compassion) and *Dolma* (Arya Tara - a female Buddha).²⁸ It is arguably true that Buddhism has strongly influenced the presentation of Tibetan history. The three greatest kings of Tibet are also known for their spiritual leadership and promoting Buddhism in Tibet with the help of many great Indian Buddhist philosophers and scholars. Tibetans construct their cultural identity, primarily through Buddhist narratives of their land, origin of their race, leadership, literature, language, architecture and ritual practices. Hence, Tibet is invented as a nation based on this cultural homogeneity. However, in this sub-section I will discuss the most fundamental and important dimension of nation i.e. language and religion.

2.1.2 Cultural homogeneity; Language

Language is not only a medium of speech but also signifies identity in a multi-cultural world. Like many other national and ethnic groups, all Tibetans share a valued language identity called *Bod-Kad*. Linguistically, all Tibetans write and speak one language but with a wide range of dialects including the central (U-Kad), the eastern (Kham-Kad) and the north-eastern (Am-Kad) varieties, which can create miscommunication.²⁹ However, U-Kad is the commonly used dialect to communicate across regional dialects. Officially, Tibetans claim that there was no written script before the 7th century, when Thonmi Sambhota invented a script. *Bod-Yik* is the script adapted from the Brahmin and Gupta scripts of early India (around CE 350), and used in all geographical regions of Tibet.³⁰ In light of this, it has no similarities with Chinese pictographic language. Moreover, this uniformity of language is usually missing in South-Asian contexts and Tibetan language is also spoken throughout the Himalayan region such as Ladakh, Bhutan and Sikkim.

²⁸Shakabpa, *Tibet*.

²⁹ The origin of Tibetan spoken language is unknown until the invention of Tibetan script. With the same script, Tibetans widely used Bod-Kad in all regions with different accents. However, the written script is common in every region and also used in the Himalayas.

³⁰Shakabpa, *Tibet*, 111.

However, linguistic family status of Tibetan is not without disagreement. Despite, disagreement, it is commonly believed that Tibetan belongs to the language families of Tibeto-Burman or Sino-Tibetan. Beyer, a prominent Tibetan linguistic researcher, in his 10 year study indicates that Tibetan is more distantly related to Burmese than more distantly still to Chinese.³¹ For Tibetans, Tibetan and Chinese are two totally different languages. They see themselves neither as Chinese nor as a part of China.

2.1.3 Religion - Tibetan Buddhism

Introduced in the 7th Century, Buddhism continues to inform the Tibetan style of life up to date. One cannot talk about Tibet without talking about Buddhism. Buddhist traditions and literature continue to shape and reshape the Tibetan identity. Important Buddhist scripts have been influential resources for the spiritual and cultural education of generations of Tibetans, especially the four major traditions of Tibetan Buddhism- Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug; each has a distinct history and lineage of teachers. Tibetan language is widely considered as a sacred language because it possesses one of the richest Buddhist historical literatures in the world. Tibetan literature has always attracted scholars as they have been driven by reason far wider in scope: to study and expound.

Even though most of the Tibetans are Buddhist, there are Tibetan Muslims and Christians. Historically, Tibetan Muslims as a minority peacefully co-existed with the Buddhist majority and have contributed to the development of Tibetan culture and literature especially in the sphere of music. Their contribution in the preservation of the Lhasa dialect in its purest form too is commendable. Even after their escape from Tibet, Tibetan Muslim communities in Kashmir, Kalimpong and Darjeeling continue to retain the common dialect in its purest form. Before the Chinese occupation, Tibetans enjoyed religious freedom and liberty. Language and religion contributed immensely to the early formation of Tibetan

³¹ Stephan V. Beyer, *The Classical Tibetan Language* (SUNY Press, 1992).

national identity, socio-communication systems and societal cohesion. Even for Tibetans in exile, these remain the most important instruments of national unity.

Until the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the country existed as an independent kingdom and subsequently a state. Ernest Gellner, one of the prominent scholars in the study of nations and nationalism, argues that cultural homogeneity invents nations and produces nationalism.³² Therefore, it is not surprising that Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan language are the two most fundamental dimensions in the formation of Tibet as a nation, since these result in a homogenous identity that binds the Tibetans together. Likewise, common language and religion among Tibetans in exile resulted in ethno-national Diaspora. Furthermore, these linguistic and especially religious identities pose great challenges to the Communist China with respect to its predominant Han Chinese culture and its national minority program.

2.2 The formation of Tibetan Diaspora in India

Tibetan presence in India is not a recent phenomenon. McConell notes “The history of the Tibetan presence in India is long and complex, including fluid territorial borders, historic religious exchanges and seasonal trading.”³³ The 1959 Tibetan uprising against the presence of the People’s Republic of China in Tibet and the failure of the armed rebellion ultimately resulted in a violent crackdown on Tibetan independence movements and the fleeing of the 14th Dalai Lama into exile with hundred thousand followers. Since then the largest Tibetan Diaspora or the communities of Tibetan people living outside their homeland, was formed in India. The density of Tibetan population in total is around six million. The population figure is highly questionable since the census that published the figure i.e. The Sixth National Census of Tibetans in Tibet conducted by China in 2011 is arbitrary. According to the 2009 Demographic survey of Tibetans in exile conducted by the Planning Commission of Central

³² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

³³ Fiona McConell, ‘A State within a State? Exploring Relations between the Indian State and the Tibetan Community and Government-in-Exile’, *Contemporary South Asia* 19, no. 3 (1 September 2011): doi:10.1080/09584935.2011.594160, 223

Tibetan Administration, the population of Tibetan Diaspora is approximately 1, 28,016. The rest of Tibetans live as national minorities “whose historic homeland has been incorporated into a larger state through colonization”.³⁴ However, as mentioned before, the largest Tibetan Diaspora community is in India with a total number of 94, 203. According to the 2010 census, most of them were born and brought up in India.

It could be said that the Tibetan Diaspora was formed in three distinct waves. The first wave occurred between 1959 and 1960 along with the exile of the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama. The group consisted of about roughly 80000³⁵ Tibetans who crossed through the Himalayas into India. This wave continued up until 1960s with adding more numbers to the exiled group. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1723 (XVI) of 20 December 1961 is an important document with regard to the plight of the Tibetan Diaspora and it says among other things that the increasing numbers of Tibetan refugees in neighboring India bears testimony to the fact that right abuses were occurring on Tibetan soil.

Next wave took place in the 1980s with the opening up of the Tibetan economy for trade and tourism with the introduction of the open door policy under Deng Xiao Ping. Tibetans made this an opportunity to flee the Chinese repression. Their leaving Tibet added to the already large numbers of Tibetans in exile in India by increasing the figure by 18%.³⁶ In early 2000s, the third wave occurred with as many as 3500-4000 Tibetans arriving in India every year until 2008³⁷ However, since the Tibetan uprising in 2008, China has restricted the flow of Tibetan refugees to India. The numbers of new arrivals decreased drastically since

³⁴Dibyesh Anand, ‘(Re)imagining Nationalism: Identity and Representation in the Tibetan Diaspora of South Asia’, *Contemporary South Asia* 9, no. 3 (1 November 2000): doi:10.1080/713658756, 274.

³⁵The figure is very ambiguous and at that time there were no proper census to study the flow of Tibetan refugees in India. But it is estimated around 80,000. For more on Tibetan refugees see Roemer, *The Tibetan Government in Exile, Politics at Large*.

³⁶The CTA reported in 1994, the number of newly arriving Tibetans was steadily increasing. It reached the highest figure between 2000 and 2002. CTA classification of these new arrivals shows that they belong to different walks of life including political prisoners, monks and nuns, young children, youth, pilgrims and family seekers.

³⁷The increased in percentage of Tibetan refugees during that period of time is also vague due to lack of data collection. However, it is assumed that that period has the heaviest flow of Tibetan refugees in the Sub-Continent. For more on this information see Roemer, *The Tibetan Government in Exile, Politics at Large*.

border security was tightened with many travel restrictions, particularly to India, imposed on Tibetans by the Chinese administration as an authoritative gesture of disapproval to the widespread protests Tibetan Diaspora had organized across the world, against the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games

The second and third waves do contain an interesting aspect since these waves brought with them mostly, Tibetan youth. These youth then attended schools specially setup for Tibetans in exile and they took great risks to come see the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala (the palace of the Dalai Lama and headquarter of Tibetan government in exile).

It is not only the people who form the Diaspora. Institutions and organizations play a significant role in the creation of a Diaspora. The main organization of the Tibetan Diaspora in India and elsewhere is the Central Tibetan Administration- the democratic and popularly elected government in exile. It is a de-facto institution, aiming at the stated goals of “rehabilitating Tibetan refugees and restoring freedom and happiness in Tibet.”³⁸ This legally unrecognized yet popularly recognized government operates within the sovereign boundaries of neighboring India. It is made up of a legislature (Tibetan Parliament in Exile), judiciary (Tibetan Supreme Justice Commission), and executive (Kashag) with seven governmental departments performing a number of state-like functions for its Diaspora. These include provisions for health, educational and welfare services for Tibetans in India and Nepal; propaganda and information services aimed at international communities; the organization of parliamentary elections; a voluntary taxation system and the establishment of quasi-embassies abroad.³⁹ Established by the Dalai Lama in 1960, this administration is the sole institution in exile bringing Tibetan Diaspora under one umbrella. Today, the Tibetan

³⁸ ‘Tibet in Exile | Central Tibetan Administration’, accessed 11 June 2016, <http://tibet.net/about-cta/tibet-in-exile/>.

³⁹ ‘Central Tibetan Administration’, accessed 09 May 2016, <http://tibet.net/>.

Diaspora numbers approximate 128,000 with 74 percent residing in self-contained settlements and scattered communities across India.⁴⁰

2.3 The Unique characteristics of Tibetan Diaspora

Diasporas are very often viewed as the antithesis of nation states. Diaspora is thus seen in inimical terms where they are considered a challenge that has the potential to crack the foundations of a nation-state. The situation that has given rise to this phenomenon, as explained before, lies in the very creation of a Diaspora; they were forced to leave home. Home therefore, fears their wrath. Also subsequent attachments they develop towards their host countries, too are viewed as incompatible with their loyalty towards the nation-state they were originally from.

Tibetan nationalism is by and large a product of Diaspora activism. Until the Chinese occupation of Tibet, nationalism did not mean much for any Tibetan. Their forced exile in turn gave rise to nationalist feelings. Anand aptly capturing the situation states “Tibet as a nation and Tibetan as a national identity is to a large extent a post-exilic phenomenon.”⁴¹ Therefore, it is quite obvious that the most eloquent expression of Tibetan national identity comes from the more radical and nationalist sections of the Tibetan Diaspora. Interestingly, Tibetan identity as espoused by the Diaspora is not only concerned about political issues but also touches upon spiritual and environmental aspects. These ideals are largely informed by Buddhism, their principal way of life and the natural beauty of their homeland, which is of crucial importance to all Tibetans including those in the Diaspora.⁴² In this section, we are going to look at the unique characteristics that have maintained Tibetan ethnic identity in

⁴⁰‘Planning Commission | Central Tibetan Administration’, accessed 12 June 2016, <http://tibet.net/about-cta/planning-commission/>.

⁴¹Dibyesh Anand, ‘A Contemporary Story of Diaspora: The Tibetan Version’, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 12, no. 3 (2003): 211–29. For more see Chowdhry Geeta and Nair Sheila. *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class*. Routledge, 2013, 219

⁴² Note that Tibetan is a haven for many rare species of flora and fauna and also home to major rivers that cut across China, India and Pakistan. This resource rich nature of Tibet is the primary reason behind Chinese designs for Tibet.

India.

2.3.1 Forced exile/emigration

Diaspora study is seen emerging both as a distinct discourse and discipline of study. However, despite this new found popularity, the discourse is seen plagued with negative connotations. Large generalizations that do not capture the Diaspora in its entirety are partially responsible for this situation. More importantly, the issue lies with an utter neglect the discourse has towards the suffering and disempowerment of Diasporas and it's over indulgence in attributing agency character traits to Diaspora. To begin with, the very creation of the Diaspora is a painful one for they were forced to flee their homelands. Such a phenomenon is essentially colored by pain and suffering and such delicate human experience is not widely discussed in the discourse.⁴³ The Tibetan Diaspora is a reminder of that painful aspect which is much neglected by the popular discourse.

Even though the Chinese did not force the Dalai Lama to leave Tibet, the root cause of his exile was coercive Chinese state policies toward the Tibetan populace in general. As mentioned before, his exile was followed by an influx of many thousands of Tibetans into South Asia as a result of the Chinese state repression in Tibet. The rigid unaccommodative nature of the Chinese establishment especially concerning religion was a main factor that drove these Tibetans into exile. For Tibetans religion and culture is of utmost importance whereas more the Chinese Communist regime, these are of no significance. Unyielding nature of the Chinese government that shows no signs of accommodation specifically related to Tibetan aspirations has resulted in an extended stay of these Diaspora groups on foreign soil. A majority of Tibetan Diaspora unlike many other Diaspora groups genuinely aspires to return to their homeland and this desire is quite strong among them. As Anand correctly points out "... the Tibetan case highlights the need to keep in mind that the term "Diaspora"

⁴³Dibyesh Anand, 'A Contemporary Story of Diaspora: The Tibetan Version', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 12, no. 3 (2003): 211–29.

denotes, in addition to several other themes, processes of flight, enforced migration, identity fragmentation and reconstruction; transnationalism ... the goal of returning to the homeland”.⁴⁴

2.3.2 Assimilation and integration in exile

Tibetan Diaspora stands as an exception in the Indian society having being able to avoid assimilation in to the greater fabric of India which most other minorities in India have failed to do. Commenting on this phenomenon Anand states:

This relative success in resisting assimilation into the host society has been possible mostly because of the internal dynamics of the Diaspora community. Retaining refugee status rather than taking up of the citizenship of the host country is seen as a highly patriotic act.⁴⁵

However, this is not without negativities. Such retention of refugee status has severely affected the Tibetan community’s upward mobility by restricting their access to property and jobs. He further comments “It is also a costly one, especially because refugee status severely restricts Tibetans’ right to own immovable property in South Asia.”⁴⁶ In his analysis of Tibetan nationalism as a modern manifestation of the “patron-client dyad,” P. Christian Klieger argues that the refugees have been able to retain their status by shifting the whole exile community over to the “client” category.⁴⁷ He contends that ‘Tibetanness’ is maintained through an ‘oppositional process; of negotiating this identity vis-a-vis outsiders/benefactors, i.e. the patron-client relationship.

2.3.3 Central Tibetan Administration: A de-facto government in exile

The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) is an organization based in India with the

⁴⁴ibid, 2003, 222 For more on Tibetan Diaspora see Anand, ‘(Re)imagining Nationalism,’

⁴⁵ Dibyesh Anand, ‘A Contemporary Story of Diaspora: The Tibetan Version’, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 12, no. 3 (2003): 225. For more on assimilation and integration of Tibetans in exile see Amalendu Misra, ‘A Nation in Exile: Tibetan Diaspora and the Dynamics of Long Distance Nationalism 1’, *Asian Ethnicity* 4, no. 2 (1 June 2003): 189–206, doi:10.1080/14631360301659.

⁴⁶ibid, 2003,225.

⁴⁷P. Christiaan Klieger, *Tibetan Nationalism: The Role of Patronage in the Accomplishment of National Identity* (Archana Publications, 1992), 84-120.

stated goals of “rehabilitating Tibetan refugees and restoring freedom and happiness in Tibet.”⁴⁸ With the core aim of attaining justice for their homeland, this establishment also seeks to preserve the Tibetan ethnic identity in all of its manifestations including language, religion, literature and culture. It is also known as Tibetan government in exile and function on the basis of democratic principles. Of the CTA’s seven departments dealing with critical issues concerning both Tibetans inside Tibet and Tibetans in exile, three most important ones concerning the Tibetan Diaspora are described in the following paragraphs.

The Department of Religion (later changed to Department of Religion and Culture) was established in 1960 and has been one of the most powerful institutions within the CTA structure. According to department of religion and culture, their main functions are “...the responsibility of supervising works aimed at reviving, preserving and promotion of Tibetan religious and cultural heritages, which they believe are on the verge of extinction in Tibet.”⁴⁹ Their primary focus in this regard is the preservation and promotion of Tibetan Buddhism and language with almost 300 monasteries and nunneries in India, Nepal and Bhutan being registered under this department. Apart from monasteries, the department has also shouldered the responsibility of playing guard to many other non-monastic institutions that work in the spheres of Tibetan Buddhism, language and cultural heritage. Department of Religion has thus been set up to preserve and sustain Tibetan ethnic identity by upholding their religious and linguistic traditions. However, the authenticity of the form of religion practiced in these non-monastic establishments is questionable. The use of written and spoken Tibetan is on the decline especially among these groups in exile and they have resorted to the use of a mixture of Tibetan, Hindi and English, an unavoidable consequence of exile living. Along with this, is the phenomenon of commercialization of Tibetan Buddhism which has far reaching adverse

⁴⁸‘Central Tibetan Administration’, accessed 09 May 2016, <http://tibet.net/>. For an analysis on CTA see Stephanie Roemer, *The Tibetan Government in Exile, Politics at Large* (Routledge Advances in South Asians Studies), accessed 10 June 2016, http://samples.sainsburysebooks.co.uk/9781134057238_sample_514267.pdf.

⁴⁹‘Central Tibetan Administration’, accessed 09 May 2016, <http://tibet.net/religion>

consequences for the preservation of the Tibetan ethnic identity. The Department of Religion considers all these grave threats to Tibetan forms of life and is committed to combat these to the furthest possible extent via reaching out to places that are committed to upholding authentic Tibetan traditions and practices.

Department of Education does not merely educate Tibetan children in exile, rather their concentration is on the retention of the ethnic Tibetan identity via the preservation of Tibetan language and culture. The focus on preserving tradition does not prevent them from the employment of modernity in their work. Therefore, they provide both modern and traditional forms of education with an aim to achieve perfection in both these forms of education. Termed “the twin-object”, the department believes this kind of an education system to better suit Tibetan children in exile so that they are exposed at once to both their traditional and modern knowledge essential for the survival in a globalized world. Unfortunately, Tibetan education policy failed in achieving the twin-objects despite the substantial increase in the literacy rate. Many of the students are neither good in traditional learning nor in modern education. They acquired many skills and knowledge that make them more of a generalist than a specialist. Nevertheless, the Tibetan education policy in exile is hotly debated nowadays and is one of the most critical issues facing the community.

The main functions of the Department of Home are to oversee the settlements of Tibetan refugees in India and to ensure they are provided with decent livelihoods. The success of the Home department is shown by the fact that despite being a scattered community dispersed across India, Tibetans overall are committed to the nationalist movement and maintenance of their identity primarily because they are happy with the role performed by the CTA in taking care of them as a community. The main objectives of the department are to create “self-sufficient and vibrant communities which are capable of

preserving and practicing their distinctive cultural ethos and values.’’⁵⁰

The highest position of the de-facto exile government is Sikyong (Political Leader), the head of the cabinet (as Prime Minister), and is elected by Tibetans across the world. The CTA is located in Dharamsala, India and attends to the welfare of the Tibetan exile community in India and elsewhere including overseeing education, settlements and needs of the elderly community through elderly care policies. The social welfare system is quite good, particularly the education system, as the literacy rate of Tibetans in India, Nepal and Bhutan is 82.4%,⁵¹ the livelihoods of people are comparatively good, and elderly care is provided to aged people with no children or abandoned ones.

Moreover, it is interesting to learn that they maintain their national identity as Tibetan by acquiring a personal document issued by CTA.⁵² This document is commonly known as the Green Book. Apart from reflecting the will of the Tibetans in exile to be together as a community aspiring political recognition (Tibetans pay a voluntary membership fee to retain the document), it also serves the function of being the future passport to Tibet or in other words once Tibet gains freedom, this will be important in claiming Tibetan citizenship. The document is not simply symbolic of Tibetan citizenship but also of national unity and identity. I would argue that the ability to prescribe and validate the Green Book (Tibetan identity) is therefore a key legitimizing strategy for the Tibetan government in exile.

2.3.4 The Dalai Lama

Finally, the most unique character of the Tibetan Diaspora is the Dalai Lama or the spiritual leader of Tibetans. The crucial role played by this popular personality and dominant symbol of Tenzin Gyatso or the fourteenth Dalai Lama is widely recognized by Tibetans in exile and in the homeland. His popularity as a spiritual figure has soared to great heights and

⁵⁰Roemer, *The Tibetan Government in Exile, Politics at Large*, 57

⁵¹ ‘Central Tibetan Administration.’ accessed 09 May 2016, <http://tibet.net/home>

⁵² See ‘Central Tibetan Administration.’ The green book symbolizes Tibetan citizenship. The Tibetan Government in exile accepts dual citizenship. This document is testimony to the legitimacy of the Central Tibetan Administration.

today, is one of the most respected spiritual leaders in the world. He, as the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, primarily emphasizes on spirituality and universalistic human values. However, he has also been successful in the depiction of the Tibetan cause as a morally justifiable one within this universalistic framework, a factor that has made some criticize him. While on a superficial level this could be seen as linking of religion with politics, a deeper probing reveals that for any agency that functions within a moral framework, that the Tibetan cause is just and humanistic. For instance, Tibetans unlike many other Diasporas have not resorted to violent means to achieve freedom but rather functions within a moral and compassionate framework as preached by the spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama's role in inculcating 'Tibetanness' in the minds of Tibetan people can never be overemphasized. He acts as the unifier of religion and politics espousing a non-violent compassionate strategy. Personal loyalty to the Dalai Lama plays a key role in the government-in-exile's efforts to strengthen a sense of unity within the Tibetan populace in exile. Nowak comments "... the Dalai Lama acts as a "summarizing symbol" for the Tibetan Diaspora, where he is now revered as "neither wholly transcendent (and thereby out of this world) nor wholly immanent (enmeshed in temporalities like the rest of us), but an ambiguous symbol imbued with the qualities of both."⁵³ While this dependence of the Tibetan Diaspora on one figure provides a much-needed cohesiveness, it also raises questions about the changes that may become necessary after the demise of the present Dalai Lama.

As a Buddhist religious figure, the Dalai Lama is also linked to Tibetan Buddhist narratives in which Tibet is depicted along extraordinary lines i.e. Tibet is not just any ordinary land but a highly divine environment of Buddha of Great Compassion also known as *Chenrezig*. He is the patron deity of Tibet and the line of the Dalai lamas (including the

⁵³Margaret Nowak, *Tibetan Refugees: Youth and the New Generation of Meaning* (Rutgers University Press, 1984), 55, For more on Dalai Lama as a unifying symbol of Tibetan identity see Dibyesh Anand, *Geopolitical Exotica: Tibet in Western Imagination*, NED - New edition, vol. 30 (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsd9x>.

fourteenth Dalai Lama) is seen as his human manifestations. For Tibetans, both the Dalai Lama and his Potala Palace in Lhasa symbolize their salient socio-political identity. The Dalai Lama won the Noble Peace Prize in 1989 and this has provided world recognition for his non-violent struggle for Tibetan freedom, particularly in preserving their religion and language- fundamental dimensions of Tibetan identity.

The only remaining problem in exile is Tibetans are heavily dependent on the Dalai Lama for his vision, compassion and charisma. China is aware of the fact that the Dalai Lama is the unifying symbol for Tibetans across the world and is thus seen engaged in a propaganda war which claims that the Dalai Lama not only has a right to reincarnate but also even if he reincarnates, after his death the Communist party can control his reincarnation and subsequent manifestation. While for many devoted Buddhists this claim by an atheist party does not make intuitive sense, this is indicative of the fact that the atheist Communist party can go to any extent to defame the Tibetan culture. As Dalai Lama mentioned in his response to this claim made by the Communist party, the ultimate decision regarding his reincarnation rests with the Tibetan population. If they need him further, then he will be reincarnated. If not the institution will end with him as the last Dalai Lama. This statement by the Dalai Lama is a reflection of the centrality of his role as a unifying force of Tibetan culture.

To sum up this chapter, we can argue that unifying factors such as unifying leadership, the de-facto government, separate schools and settlements make Tibetan Diaspora in India very unique. As a stateless Diaspora, these key factors are extremely important in connecting them to their homeland and sustaining their ethnic identity. At the same time, these characteristics are impermanent, particularly the question of what will happen if the government in exile and the Dalai Lama remain no longer. There are plenty of speculations regarding this matter and personally I am very skeptical on this matter. In this regard, there are higher chances of remaking Tibetan ethnic identity by the host country and the Mainland

China. We will discuss about reconstruction of Tibetan ethnic identity in the next chapter by studying these two countries and their attitude towards the exile Tibetan community.

Chapter 3: The Outlook of India and China on Tibetans in exile

India and China, the two most powerful countries in Asia have different perspectives about Tibetans in exile. The narratives of the two countries influence the construction of new identities within the Diaspora. This chapter investigates the complex issue of Tibetans in exile with regard to Indian government policy at both national and regional levels. It will also touch on the everyday issues Tibetan people face in the host country. Politics of Chinese sovereignty and Sinicization in Tibet are also important and raise the question of reshaping Tibetan national identity in the homeland. The outlook of both countries is exceptionally important not only because of geo-politics, but also in inventing two different versions of Tibetan identity. I will discuss Tibetan exiles in relation to India first and China next.

3.1 India and Tibet

India and Tibet have been closely connected since two millennia in terms of history, culture and religion. These countries share both sweet and bitter relations that impact the construction of Tibetan ethnic identity in India. In this sub-section, I will explore the fashioning of Tibetan ethnic identity both at national and individual levels in India.

3.1.1 National Level: Historical Relations and Geo-politics

India is the largest democracy in the world and is home to a diverse range of linguistic, religious and ethnic groups. India also plays host to numerous Diaspora groups from across Asia, Africa and Europe. Tibetans in exile are one such group. However, India's stance on territorial, political and legal status of Tibet remains controversial since India does not want to invite the powerful PRC's wrath by taking a stance on issues concerning Tibet. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, during the initial years of India's independence from the British, continued to follow the British government policy of the time

i.e. treating Tibet as a de facto independent state and deploring China's invasion.⁵⁴ However, subsequent amicable changes in the diplomatic landscape in the 1950s witnessed the signing of the Panchsheel Agreement⁵⁵ between China and India, which in turn resulted in a change of stance in the Indian policy towards Tibet; India considered Tibet to be a region of China. India's change of stance was heavily informed by both growing Chinese might in world politics and China been the most powerful neighbor of India. These amicable relations were however, short lived. In 1962, China violated the Panchsheel Agreement and displayed territorial aggression with designs for North-Eastern and Northern parts of India which ultimately resulted in the 1962 Sino-Indian war that concluded with China acquiring parts of Indian territories. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 plays a significant role in Sino-Indian relations. This creation witnessed overt rivalry between the two countries with China supporting Pakistan and India supporting Bangladesh. China's support to Pakistan was perhaps a move to make India violate her non-alignment policy by intervening in territorial issues of other countries. If this was the Chinese intention, China by all means succeeded for India fell in the trap. Ganguly comments on strained relations between the two countries: "... the border conflict in Askai-Chin region of Ladakh and construction of dams in Arunachal state are very critical issues and are also a threat to the nation's security."⁵⁶ However, the Indian government's concerns are largely centered on internal party politics and the issue of Pakistan which has gradually led to a neglect of these border regions. It is a noteworthy point that despite relations turning somewhat hostile between India and China, India's policy towards Tibet did not witness any significant change in that India neither interferes with nor assists the Tibetan Government in Exile in its dialogue with Beijing.

Tibetans have always remained grateful and indebted to India for playing a generous

⁵⁴LakhanLal Mehrotra, *India's Tibet Policy: An Appraisal and Options* (New Delhi: Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 1997).

⁵⁵ Swaran Singh, 'Three Agreements and Five Principles between India and China', *Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts*, 1998, http://ignca.nic.in/ks_41062.htm.

⁵⁶Sumit Ganguly, *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 92.

and tolerant host. India has given the Tibetans space to exercise their identity to the fullest despite been an exile community in a foreign land. The Indian government has given Tibetans the space to set up their own schools, settlements, monasteries and to have their own government (despite not recognizing it as mentioned earlier) so that providing them with enough space to preserve their culture and identity. As Felcone and Wangchuk note for many Tibetans, India is a “home away from home.”⁵⁷

As mentioned before, the relationship between India and Tibet is ancient and can be traced back into history, with long-standing spiritual and cultural connections between the two countries. For Tibetans, India has always been a great center of learning; perhaps the greatest. Buddhism has played a very important role in this relationship. Buddhism significantly influenced the development of Tibetan linguistic and cultural heritage and Buddhism is a gift from India. The Dalai Lama describes “Indians as guru (teacher) and Tibetans as their chelas (disciple).”⁵⁸ Interestingly, the Tibetan Government in Exile has patterned their model of governance and structure based on the Indian example. Their election system, the parliamentary form of government and its constitution, all draw from Indian practices. The formation of the Tibetan Diaspora in India has also instigated a cultural and religious revival of Buddhism in India’s Buddhist Himalayan regions. For instance monastic institutions and education institutes for Buddhism became more popular in these regions. In short, these relations are in many ways mutually beneficial. As Grunfeld notes, “in spite of such closeness, India has never afforded the Central Tibetan Administration a formal legal or political recognition as a government.”⁵⁹ The Government of India’s role concerning Tibetans in exile is dual; as a generous host country and as an ignorant neighbor. We can argue that such a contradictory position should be seen through the lens of geo-political

⁵⁷Jessica Falcone and Tsering Wangchuk, “‘We’re Not Home’: Tibetan Refugees in India in the Twenty-First Century’, *Taylor and Francis Group* 7 (2008): 167–99, doi:10.1080/14736480802261459.

⁵⁸‘News The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’, accessed 11 June 2016, <http://www.dalailama.com/news/post/650-i-describe-indians-as-guru-we-chelas-learn-from-you-dalai-lama>.

⁵⁹A. Tom Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, 2 edition (Armonk, N.Y.: Routledge, 1996), 23.

strategizing and the pursuit of national interests. Mehrotra captures changing Indo-Tibetan relations within a historical and strategic framework and states that the historic buffer state of Tibet between India and China in fact became a security concern for India after the Chinese invasion of Tibet mainly due to heavy militarization of Tibet by the Chinese administration.⁶⁰ It is perhaps proper to conclude that at the national level India is using the Central Tibetan Administration as a “bargaining chip to regulate its relations with Beijing.”⁶¹ The relations of the Indian state with Tibetan government in exile should not only be studied at the national level but also at the individual level i.e. regarding everyday interactions.

3.1.2 Individual Level: Refugees/ Foreigners/Citizens

The political and legal identities of Tibetans in India are very ambiguous in nature. Most of them have experienced so-called national identity crisis in everyday life due to the mere fact that they find it hard to situate themselves within one frame i.e. whether they are Tibetan or Indian.⁶² Tibetans came into exile as foreigners and became refugees over time due to the continued occupation of China in Tibet. Despite not being a signatory to the International Refugee Convention,⁶³ India grants asylum to a large number of refugees from neighboring countries and respects United Nations High Commission for Refugees’ (UNHCR) mandate for other nationals. India however, has different strategies when it comes to dealing with different refugee groups. Nonetheless, in general, India respects the principle of non-refoulement for the holder of UNHCR documentation.⁶⁴

In the case of Tibetan refugees, India provides a Registration Certificate (RC) as a

⁶⁰Mehrotra, *India’s Tibet Policy: An Appraisal and Options*, 31.

⁶¹Dawa Norbu, ‘Tibet in Sino-Indian Relations: The Centrality of Marginality’, *Asian Survey* 37, no. 11 (1997): 1078, doi:10.2307/2645742, 1084.

⁶²I have interviewed few Tibetan youth regarding their political and legal identity. Moreover, I observed many Tibetan students going through national identity crisis when integrating into a non-Tibetan community.

⁶³United Nations, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1951, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsII.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=V-2&chapter=5&Temp=mtdsg2&lang=en.

⁶⁴Non-refoulement is the practice of not forcing refugees or asylum seekers to return to a country in which they are liable to be subjected to persecution. See ‘Advisory Opinion on the Extraterritorial Application of Non-Refoulement Obligations under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and Its 1967 Protocol’ (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), accessed 11 June 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/4d9486929.pdf>.

residence permit which have to be renewed after every six months or one year at the nearest foreign registration office. RC is required for Tibetan refugees over the age of 17. Depending on the regional foreign office that issues a RC, the period of its validity ranges from twelve months to five years. The Central Tibetan Administration states “RC is a legal document issued by the Indian authorities that allows Tibetan refugees the right to enjoy all the privileges enjoyed by any Indian citizen except the right to vote and work in Indian government offices.”⁶⁵ The properties and lands in the Tibetan settlements are not possessed or purchased by them, but are on lease. Employment and national travel i.e. travel within India for these exiles largely depend on this document. If we are to explain the functions of this document in detail, it allows Tibetans in exile to legally work (only in the private sector) and travel within India and also serves as an identity document which acts as a pre-requisite for obtaining a travel document called Identity Certificate (IC). IC is necessary to travel abroad and acts as a passport. Although, Tibetans do not enjoy equal privileges as fellow Indians, they value this document immensely and are appreciative of the Indian government’s efforts towards issuing this.⁶⁶

However, despite acting as a passport, the Identity Certificate does not provide the Tibetans with ease of travel i.e. Tibetans in India cannot travel abroad easily like Indians do despite having this document. When it comes to IC (also called the Yellow Book because of its yellow cover), Tibetans in exile are treated as foreigners in India.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India, IC is normally issued to Tibetan refugees residing in India, from the Regional Passport Office, Delhi on recommendation by the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, New Delhi. At the

⁶⁵‘Central Tibetan Administration.’

⁶⁶ This observation is very personal, generalized, and subjective. However, on the whole, the Tibetan exile community has positive feelings towards India mainly because India provided them with refuge and also has granted them with many facilities related to religious freedom, education and preservation of culture as mentioned throughout the thesis.

same time, the processes of acquiring IC is time consuming and have extra-legal work including clearance by the respective State government (Department of Home Affairs/Police) or Foreign Regional Registration office (FRRO) is also required for issuance of No Objection to Return to India (NORI) and Exit Permit Certificate.⁶⁷ However, this travel document is considered invalid in many countries due to Chinese pressure. For instance even the Dalai Lama's entry was refused by many countries despite carrying this document. One notable instance occurred in 2014 during the scheduled World Peace Summit in South Africa. However, South African government denied visa to the Dalai Lama which resulted in a complete boycott of the Summit by other noble laureates. This was mainly due to the Chinese influence. In the face of the growing influence of China, this document is seen losing its value in terms of clearing travel restrictions.

Acquiring Indian citizenship is another difficult task for the Tibetan Diaspora. According to the Indian Constitution, Indian citizenship can be acquired by birth, descent, registration and naturalization. Under the sections 3 and 6 of the Citizenship Act of 1955, Tibetans who were born in India, are qualified to acquire Indian citizenship. However, this is not without restrictions. This restriction will be further elaborated in Chapter 4.

Acquiring citizenship of a particular country is essentially an individual choice. Tibetans generally consider not acquiring Indian citizenship and possessing only the Tibetan citizenship to be a very patriotic act. However, there are Tibetans in North America and western Europe with both the citizenship of the respective host country and the Tibetan Citizenship i.e. the Green Book issued by the Central Tibetan Administration. The Citizenship Act of 1955 of India states, an Indian citizen is not allowed to have dual citizenship in that either he/she has to terminate Indian citizenship or the alternative

⁶⁷See 'Identity Certificate | Passport Seva Identity Certificate Information' (Government of India), accessed 11 June 2016, <http://www.passportindia.gov.in/AppOnlineProject/online/identityCertificate>.

citizenship. Therefore, in my opinion terminating Tibetan citizenship not only signifies losing hope to return to homeland but also is indicative of losing one's national identity.

Furthermore, the Charter of the Central Tibetan Administration has a provision for “dual citizens”, that is, Tibetan refugees can take citizenship from a foreign country and still retain their status as a Tibetan citizen/national as long as they sustain their affiliation with the CTA by maintaining the validity of their Green book.⁶⁸ It could be stated that there is no issue in attaining citizenship outside of South Asia. Rather it can be regarded as a step forward to preserve Tibetan culture at the international level. There are many success stories of Tibetan Diaspora residing outside of the Sub-continent with citizenship, providing massive support inside Tibet to build schools and providing scholarships to study abroad. Thus, we can summarize that the relation between the CTA, the Government of India and exile Tibetans is very complex in nature and is often ambiguous. However, the central theme underlying these relationships is the issue of rights in which the boundaries between citizens, refugees and foreigners are vague.

3.2 China and Tibet

China and Tibet had good relations in history, especially during the Tang dynasty but gradually the relations turned bitter with the Chinese invasion of Tibet in the 1950s. Since then, People's Republic of China has exercised sovereignty over Tibet. China and Tibet relations are very complex and ambiguous to study but in this sub-section, I will explain Chinese perspective on the Tibetan Diaspora in exile.

3.2.1 The Chinese View of Tibet

According to the People's Republic of China, Tibet has been and is an inalienable part of China's territory. On the other hand, Tibetans and their supporters assert that Tibet existed as an independent sovereign state prior to the Chinese occupation in 1959. The fact that Tibet

⁶⁸ See 'Central Tibetan Administration.'

has a distinct history, culture, language and religion bears testimony to the fact that she was an independent nation-state. However, China has its own version of Tibetan geography, politics, history and culture. Geographically, the territorial boundaries of Tibet show all three traditional Tibetan provinces chol-ka-sum - U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo – to be inside the country's boundaries.⁶⁹ On the other hand, China has a totally different interpretation in which Tibet refers only to the Tibet Autonomous Region rather than other ethnic Tibetan areas in the neighbouring provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan. Politically and historically the status of Tibet has been the core of dispute over the past century, and China maintains that Tibet is an inalienable part of China whereas Tibetans maintain that Tibet has been an independent country. These two narratives over Tibetan sovereignty are very complex in nature and have resulted in changes in the Tibetan national movement from full independence to the Middle Way Approach. The rigidity of both narratives has brought the two parties to an uncompromising situation where a workable solution cannot be seen in foreseeable future. Understanding the negative repercussions of the situation, the Dalai Lama advocated a middle path i.e. a path acceptable for both Tibetans and the Chinese establishment. According to this new path what Tibetans seek today is not independence but autonomy within China.

Sperling analyses the controversy of Tibet's status by reading works of Chinese scholars during the Republican era, and states that Chinese commonly considered "Tibet to have become a vassal state of China during the Qing dynasty and subsequently proclaimed China and Tibet to be essentially linked and the Tibetans, a vital part of the Chinese nation."⁷⁰ He, however, points out that there is no anthropological evidence to support the Chinese claims. With the vagueness of Tibet's historical status, the Chinese Communist Party

⁶⁹Shakabpa, *Tibet*.

⁷⁰Elliot Sperling, *The Tibet-China Conflict: History and Polemics* (East-West Center Washington, 2004), 7.

dominantly asserted its version of the narrative to be real and thus ultimately included Tibet in the Chinese political project as an intrinsic part of China.

3.2.2 The PRC White Paper⁷¹

The PRC's White Paper is a series of official documents that justify and support their claim over Tibet, and the on-going policies and developmental projects in Tibet. White Papers cover huge volumes of aspects concerning Chinese state policies towards Tibet. This thesis will only deal with one such white paper which contains issues related to the Chinese attitude towards the Tibetan Government in Exile and the PRC's views on the Dalai Lama. It is clear that China does not recognize the Tibetan Government in Exile. They rather view it as an illegitimate organization led by the Dalai Lama. The document states that the long established centralized control over all matters of governance including the selection of the Dalai Lama is in their hand. The Chinese Communist Party's view on Dalai Lama and Tibetans outside Tibet is naturally negative and they consider supporters of the Tibetan freedom movement, separatists. According to them these 'separatists' have "fabricated numerous lies to sow dissension and incite the Tibetans in Tibet to oppose the Central Government."⁷²

At the same time, they claim that the Dalai Lama is the latest in a line of "God King Dictators" – 'a politician in monk's clothing whose agenda is to secure an independent Tibet in which he can rule again.'⁷³ However, this claim does not reflect the Dalai Lama's agenda thus far, because he has devolved his century-old political authority to a democratic institution and constantly advocates friendship with the Chinese people and dialogue with the Chinese government. Moreover, as mentioned before, he does not seek an independent Tibet

⁷¹ See 'Govt. White Papers -China.org.cn' (Government of the People's Republic of China), accessed 11 June 2016, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/>.

⁷² 'The Dalai Clique's Separatist Activities and the Central Government's Policy' (Government of the People's Republic of China), accessed 11 June 2016, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/tibet/9-3.htm>.

⁷³ 'What Is China's Argument on Tibet? | Free Tibet', accessed 10 June 2016, <http://freetibet.org/about/china-argument>.

but genuine autonomy for Tibetans through his Middle Way Approach within the framework of the current PRC constitution.

The White Paper consistently asserted that the Central Tibetan Administration has failed in producing any visible results in the unification of Tibet and claimed it is more prudent for Tibetans to seek the assistance of the Central Government of China for the unification of their homeland.⁷⁴ They further state their willingness to hold talks with the Dalai Lama if he will give up his divisive stand and accept Tibet to be an inalienable part of China.⁷⁵ These diverse narratives, as mentioned before, make it problematic to analyze the reality. I would argue that national identity could be easily constructed in a communist regime and individuals have no choice to determine their identity. Tibetans in China have no right to decide whether they want to be an integral part of China which signifies the racialization and ethnicization, unequal relation, control over alien territory and presence of asymmetry power under the Chinese rule.

The construction of Tibetan ethnic identity can be evaluated not only at collective level, but also at individual level. The last chapter analyses the reshaping of Tibetan ethnic identity at the individual level.

⁷⁴ See 'Govt. White Papers -China.org.cn.'

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

Chapter 4 Analyzing Tibetan Ethnic identity in exile: the homeland, nostalgia and dual-loyalties

The final chapter is about making and remaking of Tibetan ethnic identity in exile by analyzing factors such as homeland, nostalgia and dual-loyalties. These factors contribute hugely in the shaping of Tibetan ethnic identity in the Diaspora. I will discuss how these factors engender Tibetan ethnic identity by analyzing interviews that I conducted via email and in person with different groups of people. I have done interviews with Tibetan nationalists in person in India and email interviews with Tibetan college students or youth regarding Tibetan ethnic identity in India. In my view, through interviews we can justify how these factors contribute to produce Tibetan ethnic identity in exile. These two groups are totally different from each other and very energetic and vibrant especially concerning this subject.

4.1 Ideas about ethnic homeland

The relationship between ethnic homelands and their dispersed populations is in many ways crucial in constructing ethnic identity. In the words of Skrbis, "... homelands are spatial representations, which are influenced by political and cultural factors, rather than a simple fact of geography."⁷⁶ Homeland is an emotional idea that gives rise to many intense feelings connected to memory and nostalgia. Diaspora's attachment with their homeland depends on numerous factors such as where they are currently positioned, in relation to their homeland and how long they have been away from their homeland. Skrbis and Tsuda term these as temporal and spatial aspects.⁷⁷ Temporal or the years they have spent away from home and spatial or the distance from home, are not merely that. It goes beyond years and distance and

⁷⁶Zlatko Skrbis, *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 38.

⁷⁷Skrbis, *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities* and Takeyuki Tsuda, ed., *Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009).

enters a more emotional and psychological realm of an individual. In the face of emotional attachment years and distance are not of any significance.

Thus, the idea of homeland has different meanings to different individuals. These meanings consist of a range of diverse yet inter-linked emotions. From romanticism towards a homeland they yearn to return, these range to a political project they pursue in the name of freedom and against oppression to at times a mere geographic point of reference. The emotional yearning for homeland often manifests in the future i.e. many Diasporic communities are hopeful to return and thus live in the future. This is well captured in common phrases they use. Phrases such as “one day when we return,” “one day when we are free,” “one day when this oppression all ends” and “one fine day when we finally get to go home” are testimony to this fact.

Similarly, both Tibetan nationalists and youth in exile have expressed this idea which is termed as a telogical concept.⁷⁸ When asked about their homeland, this yearning was clearly expressed. However, their understanding and interpretation of homeland differ from each other. On one hand, Tibetan nationalists firmly describe the notion of the homeland as the place where they really belong to and they should be. On the other hand, Tibetan youth understanding of homeland has been synonymous with the country of birth tied to the places where they resided during their childhood and youth period. Therefore, it could be said that generally speaking, the understanding of the youth seems to be tied to the host country rather than to the homeland mainly because they are familiar with the host country rather than the homeland. However, despite their strong relation with the country of birth, they have very strong attachments towards their homeland and always dream of going back to Tibet that they have never been or seen.

⁷⁸Skrbis, *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities*.

Of course, the homeland can also represent a constraint. It is a constraint in the sense that it is at times emotionally draining since this emotional yearning to return to a land that is politically in turmoil not only makes Diaspora communities nostalgic but also this much contested nature of their homeland deprives them of many benefits others enjoy in terms of citizenship, travel and political recognition. Whether it is the first generation or a later generation Diaspora member does not matter in the face of this emotional draining.

4.2 The Myth of Return to their homelands

The myth of returning to homeland is very much kept alive by the stateless Diaspora than a state-linked Diaspora. Stateless Diaspora also fall victim to whims of host governments in that these governments are free to deport, force their return, impose repatriation and expulse these groups. This fate of the stateless Diaspora can be the result of two reasons; 1) not having a strong established support system in their homeland which can come to their rescue in such emergencies, and 2) inherent controversies of political struggles provide host governments with enough reason to expulse them even with the slightest doubts.⁷⁹

In contrast to the above statement, there are members of the stateless Diaspora who voluntarily regard their homeland to be their host country. For them, their host country is not a place of exile, but rather a homeland because they feel a considerable degree of loyalty to their host countries. Therefore, the motivation for returning to their homeland can be minimal in such cases. Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada/Switzerland and certain Tibetans in India can be considered some such groups.

If one takes the case of second-generation Tibetans in exile, holding on to the myth of returning to Tibet one day varies among this group. They have experienced ‘long distance

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

nationalism' that is "only once home is far away that home manifests itself."⁸⁰ However, this strong attachment to the nation has been diminishing due to changes in political culture in both the domestic sphere and international politics. On one hand, in late nineties, the Chinese economic policy had a considerable impact on Tibetan nationalism especially in Tibet. As a result, the number of Tibetan refugees fled from Tibet to India decreased in the early 2000's as mentioned before in the thesis. At the same time, during that time Tibetan Diaspora in India started moving abroad in search of greener pastures. The second-generation Diaspora Tibetans in exile in India are heavily influenced by the Bollywood culture and those living in Western countries by the Western culture. Consequently, the myth of returning to the land of snow or Tibet remains just that; a myth. The standard of living of Tibetans in exile significantly improved in last decade and also the unresponsive nature of the Chinese communist party weakened Tibetan nationalism. The unequal treatment they suffer at the hands of the host governments and also the international community coupled with the resultant lack of freedom, has made most of these Diaspora youth lose hope both in their quest to establish a national identity and to gain freedom. The question about the significance of national identity and how it affects most of the Tibetans born and raised in India is still unanswered.

When a nation has territory, it guarantees both the national identity and citizenship. Citizenship is defined as "the status of a person recognized under the customs or law as being a member of a state."⁸¹ A person may have multiple citizenships and a person who does not have citizenship of any state is said to be stateless. According to the Indian constitution, Indian citizenship can be acquired by birth, descent, registration and naturalization. There are conditions and procedures for acquisition of Indian citizenship as per the Citizenship Act of

⁸⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 121.

⁸¹ Thomas Humphrey Marshall and T. B. Bottomore, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Pluto Press, 1992), 7.

1955.⁸² Section 3 states “a person born in India on or after 26th January 1950 but before 1st July is a citizen of India by birth irrespective of the nationality of his parents.” Section 6 states “Citizenship of India by naturalization can be acquired by a foreigner (not illegal migrant) who is ordinarily resident in India for twelve years and other qualifications as specified in the Third Schedule to the Act.” An illegal immigrant as defined in Section 2 (1) (b) of the Act is a “foreigner who entered India without a valid passport or other prescribed travel documents or with a valid passport or other prescribed travel documents but remains in India beyond the permitted period of time.” Under these two clauses, Tibetans in exile in India are allowed to acquire Indian citizenship voluntarily.

The acquisition of Indian citizenship is entirely an individual choice but as per Indian laws must terminate his or her national identity of another country in order to become an Indian national. Terminating one’s nationality is not an easy task if you have a strong attachment to your nation. Few Tibetans acquire Indian citizenship in order to have a better life and enjoy equality and freedom. Under both clauses of the Citizenship Act of 1955, many Tibetans are qualified to acquire Indian citizenship but they do not do so because they cling on to the myth of returning to their homeland. This crisis of statelessness (citizenship) has both pros and cons in relation to Tibetan nationalism. This paradox poses a threat to Tibetan nationalism with the disintegration of Tibetan Diaspora around the world. On the one hand, the stateless (citizenship) status strengthens the Tibetan Diaspora community and encourages Tibetan nationalism. On the other hand, living in exile as a foreigner/refugee certainly poses an array of issues related to curtailed freedom, inequality and rightlessness. It is a universal fact that many Diaspora nations and non-territorial nations within an established state hold the status of stateless and have aspirations to ultimately become a state. Hence, nationalism is particularly prominent among groups that do not yet have a state.

⁸² See Government of India, *The Citizenship Act, 1955*, 1955, http://mha1.nic.in/pdfs/ic_act55.pdf.

4.3 Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a term often used in discussions regarding homelands. In its original use it referred to “a painful condition related to the homeland,” the word originates from Greek *nostos* meaning “to return home” and *algia* “a painful condition.”⁸³ It is often characterized as an inevitable feature of the migration process particularly related to narratives of tragic emigration and political exile. In the Tibetan context, the first generation exiles have memories that translate into nostalgia. However, the second generation in exile, born and brought up in India considered India, a home away from home. Nostalgia in its original meaning in this context is questionable.

Here nostalgia rather serves as a tool that creates a painful condition without being in possession of a particular memory. It is therefore correct to call this condition *nostalgia without memory*. Nostalgia without memory is remembering what one never knew. For these young Diaspora members, home is a constructed alternative where they are engaged in a process of romanticizing what they have never seen but only heard. Parents and elders play a significant role in the transmittance of such nostalgic feelings by assisting in the creation of ‘home’ in the mindsets of their children as per their own memory. This inter-generational transfer of nostalgic feelings is then kept alive through freedom struggles. The generational ideas about the ethnic homeland could be categorized into four major categories after analyzing the interviews; romanticism, parental romanticism through their children’s eyes, the second-generation’s critical attitudes towards the ethnic homeland and the myth of return.

4.4 Loyalty

Today Diaspora is playing an important role in the ongoing global and regional processes of cultural, social and economic change. Diaspora, be it historical or incipient,

⁸³ ‘Nostalgia Define Nostalgia at Dictionary.com’, accessed 12 May 2016, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/nostalgia>.

immensely contribute towards the development of a multi-ethnic fabric world over. Sheffer comments “loyalty has been neglected in Diaspora studies due to the social and political sensitivity of the issues and difficulty in obtaining detailed information and data.”⁸⁴ Ethno-national Diasporas have these loyalties rooted in their biological roots, a shared common ancestry, common traditions, all of which contribute in creating solidarity among the group. The relationship between people’s loyalties to an ethnic homeland, and their integration into the new host society, is not necessarily a mutually exclusive one. Rather, it is contingent on circumstances. Or put another way, it is possible to retain a rootedness in the past with successful integration into a new society.

4.4.1 Dual Loyalties in Exiled Tibetans

Generally, ethno-national Diaspora demonstrates ambiguous, dual or divided loyalties i.e. both to their host countries and homelands. Dual loyalties, consist of a “collective state of mind such that Diaspora feel they owe allegiance to both host country and homeland.”⁸⁵ In other words, they don’t see their loyalties as contradictions. Among second generation Tibetan exiles, these dual loyalties are very common. Born and brought up in India with a distinct Tibetan identity, these groups owe their allegiance to both India and Tibet. The reasons why dual loyalties are more common among Tibetan exiles are explained briefly in the following paragraphs.

Dual loyalties both at once display a Diaspora’s commitment to the homeland and host country. Likewise, Tibetan youths in exile regard India as a second home while maintaining a strong commitment to their Tibetan ethnic identity. Their inclination towards their host country thus results in dual loyalties. Given the Indian support they receive as exiles, even Tibetan nationalists have some degree of loyalty towards India.

⁸⁴ Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics*, 157.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 166.

The efficacy of one's own communal institutions too plays a role in the development of such dual loyalties. Take for instance the case of the Central Tibetan Administration. Their continued efforts to keep the community together via the implementation of difference mechanisms as explained before in this thesis, in fact inculcate strong feelings of nationalism among the recipient Tibetan exiles. The CTA is the core organization that produces and maintains Tibetan ethnic identity in exile and also maintains good relations with the Indian government. It is the most important factor influencing dual loyalties in exile. The rationale of that argument is that, generally, members of better organized and more active Diaspora communities maintain closer connections with their homelands. But they also feel more secure in their dealings with societal and political forces in their host countries, so they will also feel confident about either splitting or duplicating their loyalties.

Finally, the last factor that influences the choice of loyalties concerns the social and political environments, both domestic and international and how they affect Diaspora. Basically, the more open and the more tolerant the host country is towards a Diaspora community, incidence of dual loyalties rises. On the contrary, if a host country is not very welcoming with greater levels of intolerance and discrimination, the more these loyalties become ambiguous.

The patterns of loyalties shown by Diaspora toward their host countries and homelands will depend on the interplay among all the factors mentioned above. Because the number of possible combinations of such interacting factors is large, each case must be considered separately and a specific assessment of the loyalty pattern of each Diaspora must be assessed separately. Moreover, it is important to take into account the fact that these patterns are neither static nor immutable, that they can change with the passage of time, and they can vary among different Diaspora communities of the same origin residing in different

host countries. Therefore, we can argue that dual-loyalties within Tibetans in exile also contribute in shaping the Tibetan ethnic identity.

By analyzing all these factors, we can conclude that the first two factors (the concept of homeland and the myth of return to their homeland) resulted in maintaining the Tibetan ethnic identity in exile. On contrary, the last two factors (nostalgia and dual loyalties) reshape or reconstruct the Tibetan ethnic identity in India. These two broad aspects of Tibetan ethnic identity have endangered their national movement. Principle aim of the preservation of Tibetan ethnic identity is to fight against the Chinese claim of Tibet territory and liberate Tibet from the Chinese colonial rule. At the same time, Tibet as a nation with their distinctive culture, language, religion and history have every right to claim self-determination. The question arises, is it possible to seek self-determination under the Chinese communist rule? The reconstruction and remaking of Tibetan ethnic identity in India could be perilous not only to their national movement rather their ethnic identity might go extinct as well. Therefore, maintenance Tibetan ethnic identity in exile is an extremely important and critical issue to discuss.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this thesis by emphasizing the significance of maintaining Tibetan ethnic identity in exile. Being a stateless Diaspora, Tibetan communities in exile across time and space have sustained socio-political commitments to their homeland. The thesis explained that it is the leadership and the government in exile that uphold Tibetan ethnic identity in exile. It also tracked down the making and remaking of Tibetan ethnic identity at both individual and collective levels. It is very interesting to learn that the relationship between constructed and experienced statelessness among exile Tibetans produced nationalism and national identity. However, a tendency towards rejection of national identity due to growing inclination towards the host community as explained in the thesis has resulted in what can be termed as a “national identity crisis.” Nonetheless, overall the exile Tibetan community has been very successful in maintaining their identity despite the tremendous impact the host community has on absorbing them into the identity of the host. The Tibetan example as explained therefore, in a way rejects Sheffer’s claim that identity of a stateless Diaspora becomes extinct due to absorption by a host community.

Nevertheless, the core purpose of exclusivity of Tibetan ethnic identity is to challenge the idea of colonial rule by the Chinese government. In case of Tibet, the asymmetric power relations, forced territorial controls, alienation of Tibetans from their culture due to artificially imposed policies by the Chinese establishment, ethnicization, culture transportation or in other words enforced disappearance of certain cultural values, excessive economic dependence of the Chinese on Tibet and most importantly production of knowledge at the cost of sending traditional Tibetan knowledge to extinct are integral parts of Chinese colonialism in Tibet. Thus, retaining Tibetan ethnic identity is extremely crucial for the Diaspora that is committed to the preservation of the pristine culture of Tibet.

Importance of leadership in the mobilization and negotiation of the identity of exiles

is another major finding of the thesis. The role of Dalai Lama and the CTA is continuously reinforced to highlight this fact. Furthermore, as the thesis points out the Tibetan ethnic identity in exile is still an ongoing process where at times dual loyalties to both the homeland and the host community are displayed. The issue with dual loyalties is, in the long run it carries with itself the potential threat of sending nationalist sentiments to extinct unless mobilized properly by a charismatic leadership.

Added to this, the constructed and experienced nature of statelessness is continuously emphasized to show that there lies a difference between the two. This idea of statelessness is inherently characterized by difficulties related to the enjoyment of certain benefits that are important in everyday life. Due to such difficulties, statelessness pose in everyday life, there is also the threat of nationalistic feelings disappearing in time to come. Certain segments of Tibetan youth are a good example of this.

Due to the existence of such diverse notions regarding the Tibetan ethnic identity, finally there arises the issue of what Tibetaness is. Defining this is a complex phenomenon that requires further research.

Also, I would like to bring attention to the fact that the traditional classifications of Diasporas prove to be insufficient since they at times do not grasp the complexity of Diaspora in its entirety. More research is required in order to develop new classifications that can delve deeper into the Diaspora mentality.

Appendix: Interview Questions

What is a homeland to you and how attached are you to the homeland?

Do you have any memories of your homeland? Yes or No, Please elaborate.

Do you intend to go back to Tibet if it gets independence? Yes or No, Please elaborate.

Since you were born and raised in India, how important is India to you?

Do you love both India and Tibet?

If you love one over the other, is there any particular reason for that?

What's your view on Tibetans who acquired Indian citizenship?

Is citizenship in a Western country more preferable than Indian citizenship for Tibetans?

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