

IN DIASPORIC LANDS: Tibetan Refugees and their Transformation Since the Exodus by Sudeep Basu (with a foreword by Samir Kumar Das). Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2018.

Sudeep Basu's book *In Diasporic Lands: Tibetan Refugees and their Transformation Since the Exodus* sets out to examine and present the multilayered dynamics in the lives of people in exile, and how they individually and as a collective engage in 'wayfinding' in alien urban lands and make meaning out of their lives anew. The study contributes to showing new perspectives in the almost banal, forced migration studies. Basu's book shows rays of possibilities in engaging and injecting intelligent conversations between theory and the field, and in doing so he unearths a rich socio-ethnohistorical account of communities in the trans-Himalayas, who over the decades due to multiple factors have been compelled to move beyond their traditional settings and engage with vexed notions of 'home', 'place', 'lives', and 'being themselves' ('being Tibetans'/'Tibetanness'). The book in this sense injects fresh vigour into the dry documentation exercise of 'forced migration studies' in India, South Asia. The book comprises seven chapters and a postscript that has been previously published in various journals and as a chapter in edited volumes.

Chapter 1, Tibetans as Refugee Diasporas and Chapter 3, The Tibetan Exilic Paradigm opens up a panoramic encapsulative reading of the Tibetan people in exile in Darjeeling, India. These chapters bring to the fore the contested nature of the host territory (*vis-a-vis* the protracted Gorkhaland imbroglio in the state of West Bengal) and the heterogeneity of the hegemonic resident identity, namely the Gorkha identity.

Chapter 4, The Tibetan Question: A Reappraisal, in various ways question policy postures and policy overtures, projected imageries relating to the Tibetan refugee in India, Nepal and elsewhere. The chapter dabbles with a highly contentious gaze of the westerner *vis-a-vis* the Chinese gaze on issues like the representational issue of the Dalai Lama (pp. 80-82), or the image of the Tibetans as 'intrinsically non-violent people' (p. 77), or 'what constitutes 'Tibet' (pp. 82-90), contested histories, conflicting histories of the region from Trison Detsen to the 1959 Revolt (pp. 92-106). This chapter is the strongest part of the study in terms of spanning the historical kaleidoscope and vexed ethnicities that it engages with to revisit and contextualize the contemporary exilic Tibetan people living and torn between global and local callings. The chapter augments the notion of 'ethnosymbolism' in exile and how a multiversal and seeming polarized notions of 'being Tibetan' in diaspora and contested frames of Tibetanness, becomes a meaningful engagement for those 'far from home' and trying to find a home in themselves, or in other words 'taking their home with and within themselves'.

The fifth chapter, Organising for Exile; chapter 6, Preservation, Integration and the Pragmatics of Diasporic Identity and chapter 7, Dwelling and Movement in Exile follows the preceding chapter and provides a description of the 'home making' and multiversal 'organizing exercise' as a lived experience of the Tibetans in India. The ingenious negotiations of 'wayfinding' and circumventing the perplexed state of 'being homeless', 'refugeeness', possible 'repatriations' and 'homing practices' are documented in these chapters through Basu's discussions of the pre-exilic Tibetan hosts, the Bhutias in Darjeeling town (pp. 201-213). The three chapters contribute

effectively to a sociological understanding of ‘home and the outside’ in the context of refugees or those in the diaspora.

The Postscript: A Mediatising Tibetan Diaspora and Beyond genders the unsettledness of identities and the predicament of belonging and detachment among the Tibetans in Darjeeling and by way of extension to all Tibetans in the diaspora. The unsettledness of identity formation and evolution unleashes exasperations and insatiable aspirations of becoming at multiversal spaces from real to virtual. The virtualization of the diaspora Tibetan (pp. 216-219) provides a space for the disparate Tibetan communities to reconnect, reinvent and reconfigure their indelible yearning and nostalgia for the ‘lost home’ (i.e., Lasha, Tibet) and create ‘newer homes’ (i.e., ‘Little Tibets’) in unusual geographies from Nepal, India, America to elsewhere. As Samir Kumar Das notes in the Foreword: ‘The Tibetans are not global nomads... Tibetan refugees of Darjeeling or elsewhere are at home in Darjeeling. Theirs is not a celebration of homelessness, but rather the celebration of making the outside their home. But to the extent they develop relationships with multiple homes, the singularity of home back in Tibet disappears, making room for movements across many homes’ (p. xvii).

The book unsettles our notions of fixities of identities and reaffirms the understanding that ‘we endlessly choose to become something new’ and in doing so skilfully put the rhythm of connectivities into motion among the disparate Tibetans in diaspora.

The methodological improvisations/innovations (chapter 2, Methodology and Imperatives in Refugee Research) creatively crafted by the author in the field and the bibliography is undoubtedly a treasure trove for future academic engagements. The innovative seaming of multiple methods gives flesh to the dry study of refugees as mere digits and brings to the reader a picture of the refugee as a vibrant subject, one oozing with the colourful radiance of ‘live worlds’ (for instance, chapter 7, Dwelling and Movement in Exile, pp. 200-203, 205). A sectional discussion dedicated to Tibetan Muslims and their ways of enduring ‘Muslimness’ and Islam while being ‘Tibetan’ could have augmented the work further. This collection should interest students, research scholars, policy makers and implementers, activists, lawyers and those interested in the trans-Himalayas.

Anup Shekhar Chakraborty
Assistant Professor, Netaji Institute for Asian Studies, Kolkata