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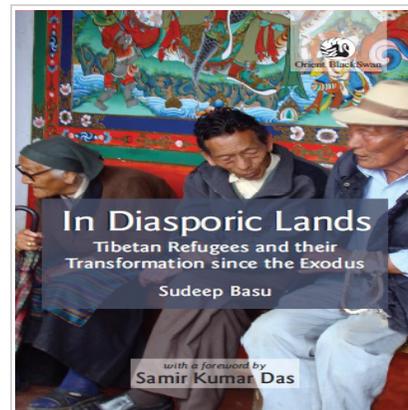
Exodus: Immigration and Multiculturalism in 21st century

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In Diasporic Lands: Tibetan Refugees and their Transformation since the Exodus



Author: Basu, Sudeep
Publisher: Orient Black Swan
Reviewer: Monika Bisht
Designation:

Basu, Sudeep (2018). In Diasporic Lands: Tibetan Refugees and their Transformation since the Exodus, Orient Black Swan, © Orient Black Swan Private Limited 2018. ISBN: 978-93-52870-85-1.

Refugees are considered as one of the resilient communities in the host-land as they try to survive against all odds. The problems of refugees are very critical and challenging worldwide. They are uprooted from their original land and forced to go another land. There are several socio-economic and political factors behind such forceful migration. Historically, the exile and refugees' communities have faced forcible movement, struggle for living and challenges to search safe and secure place for survival. In today's scenario, the refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, South Sudan are facing challenges to search destination for survival. Tibetan refugees in India are considered as distinct refugee communities owing to

Book Review: European Identity and Culture: Narratives of Transnational Belonging

The Diasporic Imaginary and the Indian Diaspora

Dreams take flight across oceans, Book Review

Working Paper: Gamlen, A. (2011) 'WP31 Creating and Destroying Diaspora Strategies.pdf', IMI Working Paper 31, University of Oxford

Working Paper: Safran, W. (2012) 'Israel

their culture and social organization. They are scattered largely in different south Asian countries such as in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan. Some even resettled in Canada and Switzerland afterwards. Though smaller in number Tibetans have a formidable transnational network today. There are still very few serious academic works on Tibetan refugees.

The title of the book is 'In Diasporic Lands: Tibetan Refugees and their Transformation since the Exodus' is written by Sudeep Basu in the year 2018. He has been familiar with the field as he has been working and studying on the Tibetan refugees since his graduation days. Based on his ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Darjeeling town, West Bengal, the book tries to explore the changing dynamics of identity its redefinition and transformation over a period of time.

The book encompasses seven interconnected chapters dealing with the theoretical and empirical evidences of Tibetan refugees in India and their lived experiences in Darjeeling. The book has mainly discussed that the identity of Tibetan refugees in India has been changing socio-economic and cultural terms in negotiating their 'belonging' to an alien country over the time. It also studied that how the concept of refugee, host-dynamics and plural identities plays out in the case of Tibetan refugees in India. However, it moved away from the stereotypes of creating plural identities by Tibetans in host-country, India. The ethnographic analysis of the study reflects the past and 'exile present' in India and articulated to understand the 'lived meanings' that Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling attach to their life in exile and to the spaces they live and work in. It also provides insights on how this 'sense of place' adds meaning and purpose to refugees lives.

The first chapter titled *Tibetans as 'Refugee Diasporas'* deals with introduction of the Tibetans' exile and status of Diaspora community. It provides an outline of the research problem in relation to the identity and community consciousness of the Tibetan refugees. It also discusses the rationale of the study focusing with the reflexive notions of Tibetan refugee identity and culture as part of diasporic world. The Tibetan exiles are increasingly represented themselves through socio-economic and cultural dimensions in host-country. It further provides the plan of the book in detail discussion.

The second chapter titled *Methodology and Imperatives in Refugee Research* deals with the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the Tibetan refugees. The term 'refugees' and 'exile' has been used interchangeably to denote the Tibetan community because of their political status of exile before the time they benefitted from 'refugee' status since India is not a signatory of the UN Refugee Convention. Secondly, they commonly refer to themselves as both. It gives analytical usages and dimensions of the concept of 'refugee' and 'exile'. This chapter gives analytical usage and dimensions of the concept of 'refugee' and 'diaspora'. The chapter discusses the detailed methodology of fieldwork and data collection process. Various tools and strategies adopted in the field are discussed such as access, key informants, role of researcher in the field, interview-schedule, trust and sampling strategy primarily to gather field visit data from Darjeeling town.

The third chapter titled *The Tibetan Exilic Paradigm* discussed the Tibet and Tibetan refugees in exile and brings out innovative ideas of various socio-cultural dimensions broadly. It represents the identity issues of Tibetan refugees and their rich socio-cultural heritage in exile. Theoretically, the chapter focuses on the past and present of the Tibetans' exile with empirical description and the aftermath of the political intrusion by

China. It also analyses the role and organization of Tibetan institutional structure in exile in India and how it functions regular and systematic ways. It also highlights the governance of Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), the government in exile and their interaction with exile communities formally and informally with various means and processes. It further argues for the significance of monastic institutions in exile and their religious orientations required for integrating them together and strengthening their will to take their original homeland.

The fourth chapter titled *Tibetan Question: A Reappraisal* examines a set of claims about Tibetan identity and the character of pre-exilic Tibetan society and culture. Drawing from the historic evidences and texts, the chapter examines the identity of Tibetans and their pre-exilic society and culture and questions of who the Tibetans are as a people, nature of their claims to their homeland. It highlighted the controversies move around the status of Tibetans since early 1960s during the time of their exile and how the world considers their socio-cultural and political issues at global platform. The chapter tries to discuss the historic evidences of Tibet, China and territorial confusions with China. It also discusses the rise of the Han and the Mongols and the cultural and social restructuring in Tibet.

The fifth chapter titled *Organising for Exile* discussed the description of Tibetan settlements in India with a view to provide a comparative assessment of the Tibetans lives in Dharamsala-administered centers and other spontaneously settled refugee settlements in India. Drawing from the fieldwork data analysis, the author has analyzed the socio-economic and occupational categories of the Tibetan refugees in India. Based on the Darjeeling as the primary field site, the chapter thoroughly deals with the socio-economic conditions and livelihoods opportunities of Tibetans. It provided the organizational structure of the refugee settlements namely; Bylakuppe Settlement, Mundgod Settlement. It gave comparative framework of Tibetan refugees through their diasporic modes of identification in India.

The sixth titled *Preservation, Integration and Pragmatics of Diasporic Identity* focuses on the lived meanings that exile can have for Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling town. It draws attention to the differences in the construction of their categorical identities like 'refugeeness' and 'Tibetannes' and their ties with specific settings in the town, such as the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre (TRSHC) and the neighborhoods where Tibetans work and reside. In this chapter, the author has demonstrated the detailed discussion on the field area, Darjeeling town with its geographical, political, social and cultural distinctiveness. The chapter elaborates the role and importance of self help groups for the formation of occupational and livelihood opportunities in Darjeeling for Tibetans.

A range of occupations such as agricultural activities, farms, handicrafts, woolen making, and all other art and craft activities of Tibetans ensures economic means as refugee community in India. With the pictorial demonstration, the author has provided their living and housing conditions. In Darjeeling, they are provided with medical care and education facilities with well-furnished hospitals and schools facilitated by Centre Tibetan Administration (CTA). It also discusses the involvement of the Tibetan women in handicrafts, woolen-making and agricultural activities. It does not delve into the issues and challenges of the Tibetan women being exilic identity. This chapter has discusses about the inter-generational change among Tibetans in India. The young Tibetans are more adaptive towards socio-cultural values, customs and language than their parents.

The children are enrolled in English-medium education from CTA funded schools in Darjeeling. Unlike their parents and ancestors, they are more assimilated to culture, society and people. They speak and understand Hindi language and participates in various activities such as sports, hiking and cultural festivals etc.

The author has discussed the issue of identity crisis and problems of assimilation of Tibetans with natives and local people. They are labeled as *Bhutias*, *Nepalis* by locals because of their look alike features. The author has raised the issue of citizenship and their emotional and patriotic feelings towards Tibet as motherland. This chapter debates on the identity of the Diasporic community under refugee status and its association and belongingness with the place of residence.

The seventh chapter titled *Dwelling and Movement in Exile* dealt with the survival of the Tibetan refugees and their experiences of displacement and refugeehood in the host land. It gives insight into the lived meanings of the place where they live and work in and how they see themselves and are seen by others as part of the wider Tibetan Diaspora in India. The chapter attempts to analyse that how identities become ally to the places where the diasporic communities live in and work in. It further highlighted the role of host-country and the responses received from the place of residence. This chapter discusses on how the acceptance of diasporic land as their own 'home' by ethnic communities while living away from their original homeland since long decades. It also discusses the re-orientation of their cultural and traditional rituals, religious practices and festivals in the place of residence.

The book is a detailed and insightful reading to understand the existence of ethnic community being a refugee identity and their transformation of their identities in an alien land. It enriches the knowledge on sociology of ethnic communities, refugee rights and identities and challenges of diasporic community in context of Tibetan refugees in India. This book adds value to the area of refugee and exile communities in India and contributed into the Diaspora studies. Based on the field work in Darjeeling town, the book provides the contour and dynamics of Tibetan exile, occupational profile, cultural and traditional heritage and the redefining identities. The book, however, should have a brief comparison between Tibetans in Darjeeling and in other parts of India, with special focus on the identity transformation and livelihood opportunities. Further it should also have some insights on refugee policy special attention to Tibetans in India as these are the much needed issues at the national and global level.

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