

## Preface

The Tibetan independence movement often emphasises strategies for preserving national identity in exile, yet less attention is given to the interplay between refugee identity and national aspirations. This thesis explores how Tibetan refugees in India navigate these dual identities to promote a collective movement for Tibet's freedom grounded in imagination and narratives. Drawing on 35 in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in Tibetan settlements in Mandi (Himachal Pradesh), Bylakuppe (Karnataka), and Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh), the study examines the dynamic processes of identity formation, lived experiences, and mobilisation strategies. Through the lens of social identity theory and mobilisation theories, the research highlights how Tibetan refugees construct their national identity by comparing their current realities with the past, perceived adversaries, and future uncertainties. An acute sense of belonging exclusively to Tibet, coupled with challenges in exile and faith in political strategies, drives “everyday mobilisation”—a phenomenon reflected in their rationalised life choices and cultural practices aimed at Tibet's liberation. Additionally, their motivation to struggle for Tibet's cause is also shaped by the exiled realities of living a marginalised refugee life marked with a sense of instability and legal uncertainties. Hence, this thesis contributes to a broader debate on the mobilisation process for the continuity of a social movement amid statelessness.

## **Extended Abstract**

The present thesis explains threefold objectives in its orientation. Firstly, it explores the elements of national features and traits that remain core to the imaginations of Tibetan refugees of India to develop their national identity and build a strong sense of attachment toward their identity. The research approaches the first objective from the perspective of social identity theory. It provides an in-depth understanding of the mechanism of identity-building activities and the identification process among Tibetan refugees from the state of exile. Secondly, it attempts to understand the refugee crisis among Tibetans living in India. The section mainly focuses on showing the deprivation state that Tibetans suffer from due to their refugee identity in India and its impact on their torn consciousness when it comes to the feeling of belonging and non-belonging. Lastly, it intends to understand how Tibetan refugees' feelings of nationalism and refugeehood are transformed into a collective purpose of freeing Tibet from the unjustified annexation of PRC rule. Further, the main focus of the third objective is to show how they exercise their nationalist intention in everyday life and the perceived rationale behind such actions. To conceptualise the third objective, we analyse the Tibetan refugees' narratives under mobilisation theories and finally propose the concept of 'everyday mobilisation' to better understand the mobilisation process of Tibetan refugees amid statelessness.

To address the objectives, the thesis adopted a qualitative research design that primarily relies on 35 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Tibetan refugees from the Bylakuppe settlement, Karnataka, the Pandoh Settlement, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh and the Tibetan refugees living in Sarnath, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Our entire methodological approach is divided into these two methods. The ethnographic approach allows us to understand the contexts of sense-making and

practices and the cultural rules (Daly, 2007) that our participants must depend on to make meaning of their social life and political movement in a state of exile. Incorporating thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) helped us observe the patterns of meaning in our initial codes, organise the data into basic themes, and finalise the defining themes. The subsequent pages provide a brief chapter of the present thesis and end with a discussion of the findings in concluding remarks.

**Chapter 1.** This chapter traces the theoretical and conceptual development of the nation, nationalism and national identity to understand its open-interpretative nature. It then discusses the cognitive and imaginative elements of the nation by using the social-psychological approach. These discussions highlight the nation's cognitive aspects that rely on the individuals' belief systems and can be exercised without state boundaries. It further progresses to validate these conceptions by discussing the social and psychological mechanism of 'nations without states' and how it sustains its existence through the process of identity construction. It shows that the construction of national identity is crucial for surviving cases in which nationalism is exercised on exiled lands or in statelessness. The key elements of such national identity often depend on the ethnic attributes of their traditional past. Through these arguments, the chapter explains the social identity theory and its relevance in the survival of the concept of nation, as well as the psychological transformation that it can inflict among the identifiers. Then, the chapter establishes the relationship between identity and mobilisation, which is essential for motivating individuals to come together and participate collectively in social or political movements. The discussion in such a particular direction led to the introduction of the case study of the present thesis, Tibet. The chapter also introduces the history of Tibet's political conflict, including the historical events that led the Dalai Lama and many others to the Tibetan diaspora. The following

two sections provide a brief account of how Tibet's situation has reshaped the politics of India and China, as well as the background of Tibetan refugees in India. The final section of this chapter introduces the intentions of the present work, which included understanding the everyday aspects of a mobilisation process among exiled Tibetan refugees by interpreting their voices using the key concepts in social identity theory and social psychological aspects of nationalism in diasporic situations.

**Chapter 2.** This chapter dives deeper into exploring multiple interpretations of Tibet as a mythical land, ethnographic boundary, and nation proposed by scholars from various disciplines, such as historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists. Such diverse exploration led the study to search for the research gap, to highlight the identity development process of Tibetan refugees in exile and to use the concept of everyday mobilisation to understand the Tibetan social movement in exile. This chapter also explores the resilience efforts of the Tibetans and the Indian government to reestablish the exiled community successfully. Further, it focuses on political activism that has emerged within the Tibetan diaspora, especially around issues of autonomy, human rights, and the preservation of Tibetan culture. It also highlights the role of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, the efforts to gain international support for Tibet, and the influence of the uncontested national leader, the Dalai Lama. It then discusses the challenges and frustrations faced by the diaspora, particularly with regard to Tibet's political future and the relations between Tibetans and the Chinese government. Finally, the chapter examines the social-psychological mechanism of Tibetans' identity formation in exile. It uses social identity theory to provide a new perspective on the process of identity construction in cases of 'nations without states'. It illustrates the crucial role of ethnicity by taking examples from the Tibetan national identity development case. This chapter concludes by linking the ethnic identification

process with the politicisation of such identities, which is explicitly evident in the case of Tibetans' mobilisation strategies in exile to achieve Tibet's sovereignty.

**Chapter 3.** This chapter begins with introducing the three folded objectives of the present thesis, which include examining the imaginative identification features of Tibetan national identity, exploring the feelings of refugeeness among the diasporic Tibetans, including its impact on the collective consciousness, and defining ways in which Tibetan refugees exercise their nationalist sentiments in everyday life and their justification process for such behaviours. The chapter then discusses the present study's methodological framework in great detail. It justifies how constructivism as a paradigm is relevant in the present context to understand the collective construction of the diasporic Tibetan reality, a product of the active cooperative enterprise of persons in relationships. The chapter then introduces the ethnographic approach adopted in the present work, which is mainly for collecting data. It explains that understanding how Tibetans interact with their imagined and lived realities in everyday life requires an ethnographic approach that includes extensive fieldwork, observation notes, building rapport with key informants or gatekeepers, and searching for meaning in their cultural and religious way of life. However, the study also adopted thematic analysis for the constructive categorisation, coding, and structuring of data into meaningful themes. The chapter then discusses the techniques of qualitative research, including the epistemological positioning of the researcher, the process of rapport establishment, the exercise of reflexivity and reflection, and the balance of power relations. The present chapter then briefly introduces the features of data collection sites, including the Bylakuppae settlement, Pandoh settlement and Sarnath. It then discusses the present work's method, including the samples, interview schedule, analytical strategy and

procedure. The chapter concludes by explaining how it takes care of ethical considerations vital for maintaining the quality of qualitative research.

**Chapter 4.** This chapter acknowledges that qualitative researchers are not ‘tabula rasa’ but instead enter the field with their own preconceived notions and cultural conditionings. Then, the chapter provides an overview of how the researcher, during the present fieldwork, balanced his position as an outsider with different cultural assumptions and as a researcher who should not lead his cognitive bias, which influences the standard of the present qualitative study. The chapter includes an observational as well as reflective note of his experiences during the fieldwork conducted in the Pandoh settlement, Byalakuppae settlement, and Sarnath. It outlines characteristics of this fieldwork in a descriptive manner that involves describing challenges like finding a gatekeeper, gaining clearance from the settlement officers, managing language barriers, handling cultural differences, building rapport, and describing minute details that were present in every nook and corner of the visited Tibetan settlements. The chapter ends with concluding remarks on how the field experience remains potent for establishing the need for the upcoming chapter to understand the exiled Tibetan community through a relatively new approach. The fieldwork makes the researcher realise that apart from the challenges of exile, life in India has become customary for them. They live their exiled lives more driven by their national identity than their refugee identity. Further, protesting and struggling for Tibet’s cause has become integral to their life choices.

**Chapter 5.** This chapter discusses the three main themes central to the present thesis’s findings. Further, the chapter provides an analytical overview of the first defining theme, ‘ethnic distinctiveness’, which comprises three subthemes: ‘geographical distinctiveness’, ‘religious values’ and ‘cultural values’. This part discusses how identifying with the geographical richness,

doctrines of Buddhism, and cultural values that teach compassion is critical in maintaining their distinct group identity. The chapter then discusses the second theme, 'faith in the Dalai Lama' - another determining factor that shapes the ways Tibetan refugees think of themselves and their existence in exile, and derive strength from their ethnic identification process. The final theme of the present chapter is 'national traits', which discusses how identification with ethnic aspects of traditional Tibet constructs a national norm for defining the inclusion and exclusion criteria for group membership. Further, this theme shows that over time, it has become a national trait symbolic of what 'true Tibetans' are supposed to be. The chapter concludes that all the factors discussed together play a critical role in shaping the behavioural attitudes with which the Tibetan refugees negotiate their social and political realities.

**Chapter 6.** This chapter discusses the last three themes of the thesis, including the 'common enemy of the nation', 'exiled realities and national consciousness', and 'everyday mobilisation'. The first central theme of the present chapter - the common enemy of the nation - discusses what psychological relevance (such as coping mechanism and group cohesion) the categorisation of an enemy plays in the lives of Tibetan refugees and how they perceive their enemy through the value window of their ethnic identity. While discussing the second theme - exiled realities and national consciousness - the chapter outlines how the contrasting realities of the exiled Tibetans as belonging to Tibet and their experiences of refugees in India instigates a feeling of uncertainty and instability among them that further motivates to continue their struggle of returning back to Tibet. The final theme of this chapter and the thesis are both the end product of the findings and define the cyclic nature of the political life of Tibetan refugees. The last theme, 'everyday mobilisation', consists of three subthemes: 'through religious and cultural preservation', 'through education', and 'through political activism'. In its essence, the last theme illustrates how the

Tibetan social movement is part of a larger struggle strategy which is found to be deeply embedded in the cognitive and behavioural frames through which our participants perceive their status, negotiate between national and refugee identity, organise their way of life, and make mobilisation an everyday phenomenon.

**Conclusion.** There has always been a prescribed version of how a nation should be (Billing, 1995; Anderson, 1983) and when we consider the data from our research, we get an alternative version to add to this genre. The data set displays how a nation is formed without living on territory, not within boundaries but with the psyche, practising rituals, a hope of the return to the motherland, standing united in the odds and articulating national identity through various peaceful tactics. Most of the respondents incorporated history, their ancestors, language, culture, and religion to relate to their nation. The national identity is passed and preserved through generations, and efforts are continued. Since the time of initial displacement, the fruitless efforts for independence have not blocked the vision of Tibetan mobilisation for the nation. The religious and political leader who represents Tibet, the His Holiness Fourteenth Dalai Lama, has played a major role in keeping the national spirit alive and reorganising Tibetans in exile. Dalai Lama stands as a category prototype of the Tibetan community where people all over the world recognise this community based on their leader and their religion. Further, the study concludes that the Tibetan social movement is part of a larger struggle strategy which is found to be deeply embedded in the cognitive and behavioural frames through which our participants perceive their status, negotiate between national and refugee identity, organise their way of life, and make mobilisation an everyday phenomenon.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Understanding the nature of a nation and its dimensions requires a multifaceted approach. In order to present a holistic picture, the first two chapters of the present study must be read by clubbing together in an interconnected scheme to understand the broader aspect of the objectives the thesis entails. In these two chapters, multi-dimensional nature of the nation is highlighted, by discussing their historical journey, theoretical aspects, and challenges in contemporary claims and how the case of Tibetan refugees challenges our preconceived notion of nation and nationalism. The discussed concepts intend to portray an explicit understanding of how the ideas and implicative aspects of nations are developed, maintained, evolved, and transformed in the present time. In these chapters, the idea of nation and state, and its trajectories in interconnected world politics, is elaborated. Such explanations will create a bridge for discussing the idea of a nation without states, which is necessary to explain the research context, i.e. Tibetan refugees, and the various psychological factors that provide fluidity to its concept, such as experiencing and expressing nationalism and mobilisation beyond borders. Thus, it helps in exploring the various aspects of a nation (such as belief system, identification factors, political orientation etc.), and its related concept in the case of the refugee population. These sections highlight how the refugee populations live and exercise the idea of a nation to achieve their social and political goals. Also, particularly the present chapter introduces the research problem of the current study and the following chapter contextualises the research problem by discussing the case of Tibetan refugees in relation to nation, national identity and mobilisation. With a social psychological approach, the first two chapters add to the ongoing discourses on nation as a static entity versus nation as a fluid concept, the psychological factors such as identity and sentiments that make the