

Organizing for Exile! “Self-Help” among Tibetan Refugees in an Indian Town

By

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Darjeeling town is host to one of the oldest refugee centres in the Tibetan Diaspora. Established in October 2nd 1959, the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre (TRSHC) has become one of the most powerful symbols of resilience of the Tibetan community in exile. Unlike the rehabilitation strategy for the permanent agricultural settlements in Southern India which were built at the behest of Tibetan Government-in-exile in Dharamsala and the Government of India, the TRSHC emerged spontaneously with the idea that no refugee could ever be rehabilitated in the fullest sense of the word without “Self-Help”, a realization that this “vital element could only come from within the community from within one’s selves”. Guided by the ethic of “Self-Help”, the self-settled Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling town could achieve better integration into a multi-ethnic host society despite the perils of living in protracted exile.

What began as a steady flow of Tibetan refugees into India since April 1959, following the flight of the Dalai Lama into exile, soon turned into a mass exodus. For those Tibetans who fled, the decision followed upon a personal conviction that life in Tibet had become unendurable. While some refugees managed to bring their families, many had to flee alone, leaving their families behind. When they arrived in India, most of the refugees were starving or wounded, ill from the low altitude and stunned by the profound cultural shock of descending on an alien world (Phuntso 2004: 134). Initially, two large transit camps had been established to handle the influx of refugees in consultation with the Government of India: one at Missamari, located ten miles from Tezpur in Arunachal Pradesh; the other at Buxa Duar, a former British prisoner-of-war camp situated near the Bhutanese border in West Bengal. “The camps represented an effort not

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only of the Indian government but also of the opposition parties...united to create a Central Relief Committee that was instrumental in obtaining food, medical supplies and international aid” (Avedon 1984: 73). Within a few weeks after the setting up of the camps, 6000 refugees arrived at Missamari and 1000 at Buxa Duar. As the camps could accommodate not more than 9000 persons, in them, simultaneous efforts were made to engage the refugees in road building works in the cooler regions of North India to prevent fatalities due to intense heat, overcrowding and an epidemic of amoebic dysentery. The first batch of 3394 people was sent for roadwork in Sikkim in September 1959 in several groups and another batch of 400 to Kalimpong and Darjeeling and some to Bhutan. Later in early 1960 more people were sent for roadwork in the North Indian states of Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. Soon Darjeeling town host to pre-exilic Tibetans (Bhutias), again emerged as the Tibetan community’s home in exile since 1959.

Situated at “Hill-side” Lebung West in the area locally known as “Hermitage”, the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre¹(TRSHC) which came into existence on October 2nd 1959 in Darjeeling town, initially provided base for distribution of emergency relief to Tibetan refugees who had brought nothing with them apart from the clothes they wore and the little provisions they managed to bring along during their hazardous trek over the Himalayas into India. The “Hill-side”, a small estate comprising 3.44 acres was originally leased and eventually bought from St Joseph’s College. There was space to build and develop a small community outside the town but easily approachable by motor road. The Hill-side had a special significance for Tibetans, for it was here that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had spent his exile in India from 1910 to 1912 following the Chinese invasion of Tibet at that time.²

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

Such surveys are rarely taken very seriously by the members of the Tibetan refugee community in Darjeeling town. Given below is the population data of TRSHC gathered from local sources.

Table 1: Total Population by Sex

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

Source: Official Records, Welfare Office, Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre, Darjeeling

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

Table 2: Age-wise Distribution of Population at TRSHC

Age	Total Population	Males	Females
Above 85	1	-	1
60-84	83	42	41
25-59	99	23	76
14-25	48	23	25
8-13	32	18	14
Below 6	19	8	11

Source: Official Records 2005, Welfare Office, Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre, Darjeeling

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

We Animate the Spirit of Self-Help!

Driven out of their homeland and into a different environment and without any knowledge of the language, customs and social institutions of the countries where they had sought refuge, the long term rehabilitation of

the refugees posed innumerable difficulties. Unlike the rehabilitation strategy for the permanent agricultural settlements like in the South of India which were built at the behest of Tibetan Government-in-exile, the TRSHC began with an altogether different approach to rehabilitation. The comparison with other settlements with regard to the approach is apparent from the statement revealed to me in the initial stages of my research by the Secretary of the Centre who said, “Darjeeling refugee centre does not seek help from Dharamsala. It is independent. Only in need, does it seek assistance. It is not like the refugee centres in the south of India (*rgya gar*)⁴.”

A ten-member committee⁵ was formed in Darjeeling to organize a rehabilitation centre which came to be known as the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre. The current members of the committee include Khedroop Thondup⁶ – President, General Secretary and Treasurer – Chimay Rinchen, Mr. T. Lawang, Ms. N.L. Ladenla, Dr. T. Wangdi, Mr. Dawa Tsering, Mr. Dorjee Tsetan, Mr. Sonam D. Pasang, Mr. Jampa Tenzing, Mr. Dorjee Thokme and Mr. Palden. Over time, the TRSHC has acquired a simple administrative structure consistent with its ethos of self-help, unlike the administrative structure seen in the Tibetan settlements in south India. Besides the President, there is a Secretary and an Assistant Secretary of the Centre. The Workshops has a Manager and an Assistant Manager. The school has a Headmistress. The Hospital has a Doctor-in-charge. There is also a post of an Accountant. The Welfare Officer, who is the representative of the Central Tibetan Administration does not look after the everyday affairs of the Centre but has under his jurisdiction the Darjeeling Municipal Area and its adjoining areas.

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

Given below is an excerpt (in the form of few articulated statements) from the Report which the Secretary of TRSHC showed me during my conversation with him which was centred around the history of TRSHC and of Tibetans in exile. “But right from the start, we realized that what was needed was the determination to stand on our feet and rely first and foremost on our own effort – in short, the spirit of Self-Help (*rang tsho*). It is no exaggeration, in fact, to say that without self-help there can be no rehabilitation, be it economics, social, psychological, cultural or spiritual.

Outside assistance is, of course, necessary. But no matter how generous others prove to be, no refugee could ever be rehabilitated in the fullest sense of the word without ‘Self-Help’. And this vital element could only come from within our own community (*mi sde*) from within our own selves.” This sums up in categorical terms not only the orientation of the inhabitants of TRSHC to life in exile as a whole but also provides a glimpse of the form and the limits to the relationship which they intend to forge with their hosts; other diasporic members of their ethnic group, Non-Governmental Organizations and the State. “Refugee relief programmes because of their self-evident humanitarian derivation are particularly prone to the neutralizing conformity which the label conveys about refugees’ status and their situation” (Zetter 1991:45). What began as the labeling⁷ of target groups – in this case the Tibetan as ‘refugees’ who are recipients of aid led on the one hand to client conformity and loyalty with the institutionally imposed stereotype and on the other to a gradual transformation of the identity expressed through the adoption of Goffman-like metaphors to describe alienating feelings like “we are foreigners here”; by asserting individuality and by not remaining acquiescent⁸.

Self-Help through Handicrafts

In 1961, the Centre was fully registered as a Charitable Organization under Indian Law. It has also received exemption from income tax on all gifts and donations made to it. The Centre has undertaken multifarious activities ranging from the production of handicrafts and training of artisans and craftsmen to the Homes for the elderly, care for the sick and the orphaned. The production of handicrafts continues to be cornerstone of the Centre’s economy. Besides traditional items such as Tibetan carpets, wood carvings, metal and leather works, the emphasis is also on testing new production lines incorporating traditional Tibetan motifs which would find a ready market in Darjeeling and elsewhere.⁹ During the financial year for the period April 1998 to March 1999, sales reached a total of Rs. 53,45,538. More than half of which represented foreign exchange earnings from export sales. The Centre had been exporting to 36 countries all over the world (Report TRSHC 1999).

The report brought out by TRSHC emphasized that “in traditional Tibet, market for fine handicrafts was limited and master craftsmen who had to undergo long periods of apprenticeship were few. Fewer managed to escape from Tibet and hence it was of the utmost importance for the future of handicrafts that skill and expert knowledge of these masters be passed to a new generation of workers.” This was conveyed by the Manager of the Workshop who pointed to some of the objectives for the promotion of handicrafts. “We impart useful and marketable skills to refugees who would otherwise have to earn a precarious livelihood living as coolies or unskilled workers¹⁰. Without skilled craftsmen, the centre would not be able to produce and sell handicrafts (*lag shes*) which provide the main source of

income. Training programmes ensure survival and growth of traditional Tibetan arts and crafts.”¹¹ As exiles who feel that their culture and very identity as Tibetans under siege in their homeland, the replication of Tibetan “tradition” through promotion of art and crafts in the diaspora becomes a self-conscious and strategic undertaking. The Manager of TRSHC, aware of the threat of assimilation in the context of living in a host society stated, “Even in India, Tibetans face other more subtle forms of assimilation. We must preserve our culture (*rig gzhung*), our religion (*chos*), our Tibetan language (*bod skad*): otherwise we would mix into the local population.”¹²

Photo 1: Tibetan Refugees Self Help Centre at Present



Photo 2: Carpet Making



There are thirteen workshops at the Centre namely, wool sorting; wool washing; wool spinning; wool dyeing; carpet weaving; old workers – ball making; carpet trimming; leather work; tailoring; wool knitting; painting; wood carving; shawl and apron making¹³. Over the past four decades, the Centre has been able to train 1600 persons in various crafts. The objective of training individuals in the various crafts is to make persons able or self-supporting. About 1000 to 1200 persons have left the Centre on their own discretion to set up enterprises over the four decades (Report TRSHC 1999). Work is allotted based on skill and ability. The old and the weak are given lighter work. They mainly perform simple chores such as winding thread into balls and caring for the toddlers in the centre's nursery. The familiar sight at the Centre is that of elderly men gathering bundles of wool to be sent to the spinning factory. A homemade wooden ladder with crooked rungs leans against one of the buildings. On top of the building, wool is kept for drying in readiness for the next stage of production. In the spinning room, rows of elderly women feed rolls of wool into a rotating bicycle wheel. In the carpet-weaving hall, young women work in pairs creating Tibetan carpets. Thick white threads are attached vertically between horizontal wooden poles. The weavers painstakingly tie multicoloured threads around each white strand to produce colourful knots and these are then packed tightly together using a heavy bronze comb. The centre's handicraft shop has a large range of items such as placemats, silk wall-hangings and woodcarvings. Handmade carpets are the shop's most popular item and are exported overseas. The waiting period to obtain one of these labour-intensive works of art is six months.

The wage rate is fixed at Rs 300 per month regardless of whether an individual is in a position to actually do the work. This provision provides relief to those who are unable to work and battered due to the long years of toil and the mental anguish caused by the conflicting demands of exile life. The day's work begins at 7 in the morning and ends at 5 in the evening punctuated by lunch and tea break (for an hour from 11 to 12 in the afternoon followed by a tea break at 2). This work schedule is ritualistically followed by the Centre's inhabitants. The community bell can be heard ringing from even the remotest corner of the Centre which reminds the inhabitants of the time to resume and close work.

Housing and the Refugee Label

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

temporariness with respect to their attitude towards settlement and resettlement in host societies.

The form and the location of housing at the TRSHC set within the context of rehabilitation have given a distinctive physical identity to the label-refugee. This has accentuated the development of a “refugee consciousness” among the inhabitants of TRSHC. The refugees who fled the invasion of Tibet could not come to Darjeeling in groups but came as individuals leaving their family members, spouses, children, fathers and mothers behind. It was difficult for them to retain their pre-exilic identities drawn upon past norms – community, village, notions of extended family in the housing programme. Exile for the Tibetans has prevented village re-formation. The architectural style of the houses at the TRSHC has faint resemblance with the houses in Old Tibet¹⁴. In 1970, there were wooden sheet houses. By 1990, four buildings with 200 rooms made of brick came up in the area. Tibetans show great interest in indoor decoration. Most families have auspicious patterns on the indoor walls. In the sitting room, the inner wall is painted with blue, green and red stripes respectively representing the sky, the earth and the sea. There are also houses which have altars for worshipping Buddha or images of the Great Kings of Tibet or pictures of the Dalai Lama, the Potala Palace or the Norbulingka. Doors and windows are highlighted with red, blue and white cloth screens, with a canopy (consisting of red, white, blue, yellow and green cloth pieces) around the parapet of the roof and its corners. While the appearance of houses from the outside is unostentatious and reminiscent of dwellings found in Old Tibet (in regions such as southern Tibet and around Lhasa and Shigatse), the furnishings in the inside of some houses (particularly the interior of the house of one of my respondents who worked in the woodcarving section to which I had access) are strikingly modern with television sets, high-tech radio cassette recorders, digital cameras and piles of expensive looking western clothes that are either gifted to them by their patrons in foreign countries or sent to them by their kinfolk in the diaspora.

Housing which becomes the obviously recognizable symbol of their refugee status creates a distinction between refugees and non-refugees, between “the Tibetan refugee” and their “categorical other”. The label becomes through institutional processes, a potent tool of differentiation far removed from the initial premise that refugees need shelter. That the type of housing as seen from the outside clearly does not serve as a clear cut objective indicator of the levels of prosperity or deprivation of the Tibetan residents of TRSHC, is revealed by two Nepali youths in their late 20s belonging to the Brahmin caste – Chhetris who live in the neighbouring Hermitage area. On having made a point to the Nepali youths in a deliberately provocative manner in the form of “how poor the Tibetans appear from the look of the houses in which they live,” they immediately replied with the intention to correct, in their judgment, my somewhat touristic perception or lack of knowledge about the actual status of the Tibetans living in TRSHC. “What others (they were referring to the tourists)

see in the refugee camp is eyewash. *Yeb sab dikbava bai* (this is only a show). *Wob bare amir bai* (Most of them are well off) and are in government (*gzhung*) jobs, have with them ration cards, doing good business (*tshong las byas*) in town area. This is how it is”¹⁵. This sense of relative deprivation of the Nepalis is something which they have learnt to live with now. The older Nepalis are reconciled to the fact that the Tibetans are characteristically more hardworking than they are which is the reason for their economic success in the Darjeeling area. Numerically in an absolute majority, Nepalis know, albeit to their cost, that they can afford not to be hardworking, indolent and yet survive, an option unavailable for Tibetans. The Nepali unemployed or under-employed youths who are in large numbers, are of the opinion that it is the external assistance from foreigners in the form of donations and gifts that have given the Tibetans an edge over their neighbours in the competition over resources. The claim by Nepali youths that the refugees at the Centre are not poor (a kind of perceptual data) had to be corroborated by collecting further data in the form of statements made by other ethnic hosts in the area. Till then the perception of the Nepali youths had to be taken on face value but it did serve as an important pointer to the unfolding refugee-host dynamic in the Darjeeling Municipal Area.

We are also a Welfare Institution!

Since its inception, the Centre has undertaken the task of helping orphans, the aged, the infirm and the needy among the refugees. The Centre has 89 old and infirm persons as well as 42 orphans¹⁶ who have no means of their own. It provides free housing, food, medical care, education for children, pocket money for children, uniform and stationeries. The provision of these services consists of the bulk of the Centre’s expenses.

“Although the production of handicrafts forms the main activity and is the primary source of income, the Centre was not planned to be and has never been solely a business concern” (Report TRSHC 1999). This statement is echoed by my key informant, a resident of the Centre and who works for a travel agency in Darjeeling town. He emphatically said, “The Refugee Centre is like a cooperative (*myam las*). Anyone wanting to join is welcome. We know that we are good in doing business. See how we attract customers. It is seen in the display of the items in our shop. If I enjoy with the money earned, what about my brothers and sisters in Tibet. Running after money will not give us anything. One life as a beggar is not bad, if it is led sincerely and honestly¹⁷.”

The statement – “If I enjoy with the money earned, what about my brothers and sisters in Tibet” is consistent with the currently emergent consensus that diasporas are deeply implicated both ideologically and materially in the nationalist projects of their homelands (Werbner 2002: 120). Something more is at work than merely the nationalist agenda served by Tibetan diasporic groups. What is evident is the moral trajectory of Tibetan exile subjects and the projection of an “ideal Tibetan refugee” to “significant others”. It is indicative of the development of a Tibetan cultural

self-consciousness in exile which according to Ekvall (1960: 376) focuses on the concept of oneness which has religion as its most important attribute among others such as folkways, race and land, that gives assurance of belonging, provides guidance for mutual recognition and differentiates and excludes those who do not belong. In ethics, it sets up compassion and the creation of merit as the ultimate ideal governing motivation consistent with the Tibetan notion of “karma”. It also conditions the Tibetan’s intellectual life by furnishing a purpose of existence.

Medical Care and School

Another field of welfare work undertaken by the Centre is the medical programme which benefits not only the refugees of the Centre but also the locals. A hospital was established in 1961 with the support of American Relief Services. From a small infirmary, it has grown into a 20 bedded hospital staffed with a well qualified and experienced doctor, 2 nurses and some helpers. Apart from normal consultation and treatment, the Centre’s medical unit carries blood test, screening for T.B., vaccinations, pre-and post-natal care. The overwhelming majority of those who avail of the medical facilities themselves are poor. A further extension of the medical services offered by the Centre’s hospital is the establishment of an X’Ray Clinic and a Pathological Laboratory in Darjeeling town. The X’Ray Clinic consisting of a small unit along with the requisite generator was set up by a grant given by the Government of West Bengal through the Hill Affairs Branch Secretariat, Darjeeling. The clinic is entirely staffed by trained boys and girls of the Refugee Centre.

In June 1960 the Centre started a small nursery school. Within a short span of time, the school became a full-fledged primary school. The primary school follows the syllabus of the Central Tibetan School Administration and caters up to KG II.¹⁸ The present enrolment in the Primary school is 45, which includes children from the nearby Tibetan settlements. Shortage of funds has forced the Centre to severely limit the admission. The junior and senior students attend the different schools and colleges in and out of Darjeeling town. The children are not only provided with free education up to class XII but also free clothing, meals and textbooks (Report TRSHC 1999). However those students who continue to receive financial assistance from TRSHC for their college education are required to work for the TRSHC for three to five years (for which they are given remuneration) once they complete their education. If they get a better employment offer during this period, they have to pay back the amount received for their college education to the TRSHC. At present there are 7 Tibetan students employed by TRSHC under this scheme (Office Records, Welfare Office, TRSHC, Darjeeling).

The Central School for Tibetans Administration was set up as an autonomous organization by a resolution of the Government of India, Ministry of Education and Youth services (New Ministry of Human

Resource Development) in 1961 and was registered under the Societies Registration Act (XXI of 1860). The Central School for Tibetans, Darjeeling was set up in 1961. Initially the school was in the N.B.M.R. building which belonged to Ministry of Defence and other rented buildings ‘Digpatia’, ‘Ray Villa’ and ‘Kailash’. The N.B.M.R. building had been taken over by the Tibetan School Society which was also set up in 1961. By 1966, N.B.M.R. had been demolished and the new block with ten class rooms and a multi purpose hall was constructed. Later the Administration constructed a three storied building which today houses a girls dormitory, dispensary, senior class rooms, science laboratory, dispensary, music and dance room. Later, next to the ten class rooms another building had come up which was meant for primary classrooms and class VIII and IX. The first principal, Lhawang Paljor started the school with 30 students and five teachers in 1961. At present there are 518 students and 42 staff. Affiliated to C.B.S.E. the school offers course in Humanities and Commerce. Special emphasis is laid on preservation and promotion of Tibetan culture, protection of environment and inculcation of human values. Career Counseling too receives equal importance with trained staff with frequent visit of Department of Education, Dharamsala counselor.¹⁹

Concluding Remarks

The visible success in charting out a life-in-exile became a source of worry for the Tibetan refugees. They knew that their achievement did create what they often say, feelings of *“jealousy, envy and deprivation”* among locals. For Tibetan refugees, sensitivity to potentially hostile feelings of locals in Darjeeling town is deemed crucial in order to maintain order and security. A Tibetan refugee living outside the camp once remarked, “TRSHC is part of everyone. It is a home (*nang*). It is about looking after others. Camp (*sgar*) should be there to take care.”²⁰ The TRSHC symbolizes overcoming of the state of poverty and stigmata arising out of exile and the cultivation of an ethic-in-exile. “Self-Help” among the Tibetans offered the means for improving despite the refugee label.

Notes

¹ The address of the Registered Office of the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre is: 65, Gandhi Road, Darjeeling – 734101, West Bengal, India. TRSHC is situated in Ward number 25 of the Darjeeling Municipal Area. The field study in Darjeeling town was spread over a period of two years (2004-2006), totaling six months: October-November 2004 in Darjeeling; May 2005 in Darjeeling; April 2006 in Dharamsala; October-November 2006 in Darjeeling.

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

³ However, the extent of net under-enumeration was lower in the Tibetan Demographic Survey 1998 exercise due to two reasons: (a) the field enumerators

went from house-to-house and recorded the data; (b) a fair presence and excellent participation by the “immobile” population of the enumeration day (Tibetan Demographic Survey 1998, Planning Council, Central Tibetan Administration 2000: 40).

⁴ As told by the Manager of Workshops at TRSHC on 20/05/2005

⁵ The founding members of the committee include: Ms. Gyalo Thondup – President, Mr. T. Lawang, Mr. G. Tesur, Mr. Tenzing Norgay, Mr. & Mrs. Joksari, Mr. T. Tethong, Monsignor Benjamin, Mr. Chumbay Tsering and Ms. Tesur.

⁶ Khedroob Thondup is the nephew of the 14th Dalai Lama. He was born in Calcutta in 1952 and educated at the Jesuit school in Darjeeling, India, and later at the University of San Francisco. After returning to India, he served as special assistant to the Dalai Lama and traveled with him extensively. In 1986, he was appointed to run the Tibetan Refugee Self-Help Centre in Darjeeling.

⁷ In the context of refugee studies, labeling is a “process of stereotyping which involves disaggregation, standardization and the formulation of clear cut categories. In the institutional setting these characteristics assume considerable power for labeling simultaneously defines a client group and prescribes an assumed set of needs (food, shelter and protection) together with appropriate distributional apparatus” (Zetter 1991: 44).

⁸ The expression “We are foreigners here” is an affirmation of their Tibetan self vis-à-vis hosts and donors, which works like what Goffman (calls as the “front stage”. The Tibetan self is therefore foregrounded through acts of “impression management” using Goffman’s phrase.

⁹ Among the successful items is footwear and coats which while keeping the traditional Tibetan styles are modified for suitable wear with European clothes. “The immense popularity of these items as well as the several letters that TRSHC receives from all over the world have proved the success of this venture” (Report TRSHC 1999).

¹⁰ The coolies or unskilled workers who form the backbone of the Darjeeling economy belong to the Nepali community of Darjeeling. Contrasting the occupations and occupational skills which Tibetans can develop and preserve vis-à-vis the “hazardous occupations” of the Nepalis, signifies for the Tibetans a certain self-attestation of a perceived sign of progress; of creativity and continuity in exile. It does not however point to the making of categorical or essentializing judgments about the “locals-Nepalis” or “citizens”.

¹¹ Excerpt from an interview with the Manager, TRSHC held on date at the TRSHC. “Our wool is from 100-per-cent Tibetan sheep from Ladakh,” says the Manager of TRSHC, where the threatened culture is proving to be resilient (in “Spirit of Tibet” by Carleton Cole, published in World Tibet Network News, Canada Tibet Committee, downloaded on 24/05.2007). The Centre had been able to train 1600 persons in various crafts, of which 1000 to 1200 persons have left the Centre to set up their own enterprises (Report TRSHC 1999).

¹² The extent of “mixing” with the local population which the Manager pointed out would be discussed while taking up the case of Tibetans living in the main town. It is important to recognize that the threat of assimilation is particularly acute for the refugees since if the assimilation were to be successful, the label-refugee would be blurred and pressure for repatriation would be lost.

¹³ As told by the Manager of Workshops at TRSHC on 20/05/2005.

¹⁴ Houses in TRSHC have small windows like the blockhouses which were the most common type of civilian housing in Old Tibet. Blockhouses had flat roofs and small

windows. These houses were usually of two storeys – the wall base is laid with stone and the upper part is earth-piled solid.

¹⁵ Interview of two Nepali youths at the Hermitage on 22/05/05

¹⁶ “Most of the orphans have been sent to various schools across India and several have been sponsored for study abroad. These orphans have no known relatives or any to care for them and thus are entirely dependent on the Centre. With the generous help of several individuals scattered all over the world, the Centre has been ...able to lay the foundation for their future” (Report TRSHC).

¹⁷ Excerpt from a conversation with my key informant - a Tibetan man of 40 years at the TRSHC on 20/05/05. He introduced me to his father who arrived in Darjeeling from Amdo province of Tibet after the Chinese invasion of Tibet. He had visited India on a pilgrimage several times before 1959.

¹⁸ The teaching and curriculum in Tibetan schools is similar to schools of the host country, India. One major difference is that Tibetan language and culture is an integral part of the curriculum of most Tibetan schools. In the secondary schools, Tibetan children follow the syllabus established by India’s Central Board of Secondary Education and take their national examination to be eligible to enter higher education. It is only at the primary level that an intensive Tibetan culture and language curriculum is implemented.

¹⁹ For more on the Central School for Tibetans in Darjeeling see <http://www.cstdalumni.org/on> on 15/06/07

²⁰ Excerpt from a conversation with a Tibetan refugee in Darjeeling town on 25/05/05.

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