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Narratives of Displacement in Nepali-Speaking Bhutanese Refugees' Poems

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Abstract

This article examines the historical displacement and enduring homelessness of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees through a critical analysis of their poems in exile and post-settlement contexts. The introduction of Bhutan's "One Nation, One People" policy in the 1980s resulted in the relocation of approximately one hundred thousand Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people. Analyzing poems by Nepali-speaking Bhutanese poets in the light of pertinent historical records and secondary sources, the article investigates how concept of home, belonging, and identity are articulated under the condition of forced migration. This qualitative article employs textual and thematic inquiry into exile, desire for home, liminality and existential uncertainty. The theoretical framework is grounded in Nira Yuval-Davis's belonging, Avtar Brah's concept of homing desire, and Homi K. Bhabha's idea of liminality and third space. One of the key findings is that the Bhutanese Nepali writings consistently represent home as a fractured, relational, and contested construct. It argues that these painful narratives expose a persistent transnational liminal sphere, where political inclusion fails to protect emotional and cultural belonging. This article contributes to refugees and diaspora studies by foregrounding literary expression as a critical site for understanding forced migration, memory, and the politics of belonging beyond the territorial framework.

Keywords: Culture, displacement, exile, home, refugee

Introduction

The history of Nepali migration to Bhutan reveals a prolonged and complex trajectory of movement, settlement, and displacement that culminates in the contemporary experience of homelessness and uncertain belonging among Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees. Folkloric narratives suggest that the earliest Nepali presence in Bhutan dates back to the time of Guru Rimpoche, "who had gone to Bhutan with Nepali followers in the eighth century" (Dhakal and Subedi 246). The Buddhist Drukpas, Ngalung Mongoloid group, ruled for years and a small number of

Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people in the south practiced Hindu culture and coexisted. Evans Rosalind observes, “Despite these differences, in Bhutan we were all stuck together and we called ourselves Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people. . .” (27). However, the systematic migration began in the seventeenth century when King Nawang Namgyal (1616–1652) invited Nepali people, and “Ram Shah, had dispatched Nepalese artisan/agriculturalist families under the leadership of Bishnu Thapa Magar” (Rijal 5) to settle in southern Bhutan. Similarly, the official tracing of Nepali-speaking people to Bhutan began during the time of the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo. In this regard, a press release by the Bhutanese Nepalese Development Party makes the following observation:

Ethnic Nepali immigration to Bhutan dates back to the seventh century AD when the 33rd King of Tibet, Tshongtshen Gampo took a team of Nepali/Newari artisans from the Kathmandu valley for the construction of 108 monasteries, including the Paro Kyichu and Bumthang Lamphel Lhakhangs at the initiation of his queen, the Nepali Princess Vrikuti Devi, for the spread of Buddhism in the Himalayan region. These artisans are believed to have settled in the fertile valleys of western and central Bhutan. (1)

The expertise of Nepali people in sculpture and agriculture impressed the Bhutanese rulers, and thus they allowed the continued migration and settlement of the Nepali people in Bhutan. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Nepali-speaking communities expanded in Bhutan, particularly after the Anglo-Bhutan War (1863–64), when Nepali settlers were encouraged to settle in southern Bhutan for economic and security purposes. They migrated to escape the oppressive taxation of the Rana regime in Nepal or the rigid caste hierarchy, seeking agricultural opportunities and social mobility. Ernest Gellner views, “Nepal fuses Hindu migrants (culturally India, but politically opposed to India) with tribes, populations, and a Tibetan minority along the north the Bhutanese cocktail is different: a culturally Tibetan but politically anti-Tibetan majority dominates small residual tribal groups” (609). An extensive migration of Nepali-speaking people persisted for decades, alarming the British, who viewed it as uncontrolled and threatening the shrinking Drukpa population; in 1928, Sikkim’s Political Officer Bailey warned of its growing danger.

The Lhotshampas—Nepali-speaking people, developed their own cultural and social identity in the southern plains of Bhutan. Laxmi Narayan Dhakal asserts that “the Nepali community in Bhutan was kept like the cattle. They were deprived of education, communication, fair political participation, economic share and freedom of expression” (13). Their collective existence was one of survival under structural subjugation, forming the foundation of their later exile. From the 1950s, their dual consciousness of Bhutan as the birthplace and Nepal as the cultural root disrupted in the 1980s when Bhutan implemented the “One Nation, One People” (Bird 23) policy, mandated Drukpa cultural uniformity. By the early 1990s, it led to the expulsion of more than 100,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese, “ethnically cleanse” (Rijal 26), leaving generations of Bhutanese Nepali to confront the sudden reality that their belonging in the nation had been fundamentally denied. Birendra Girinotes that the coerced accommodation effort failed, the fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck projected some policies to reduce the population of Lhotshampas through revoking their legal citizenship and via “mass eviction” (348). It transformed the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese into perceived outsiders within their own homeland.

The term ‘Bhutani’ or ‘Bhutanese’ in history is a metaphor that aptly “captures the violent rupture that transformed a settled community into a scattered diaspora” (Dahal, Gautam and Ghimire 41). The official practice of Drukpa culture as the sole national identity and “New citizenship Acts, introduced in 1977 and 1985” (Hutt 46) constricted the path to enjoy civil rights. Their deep attachment to traditional culture, language, and dress (such as women’s long braids and sari-*cholo*, and men’s *daura-suruwal*) caused refugees to expel from their birthplace and forcefully come to Nepal seeking support and settlement. Bhim Nath Regmi claims, “The refugee crisis exacerbated the ethnic divisions between the Drukpa and Nepali-speaking communities, making any potential accommodation more difficult” (61). Their statelessness—rejected by Bhutanese government for being Nepali-speaking Bhutanese—epitomized their uprooting from the country of origin. After the 1990s, followed by the resettlement of most of the refugees from 2008-16, they experienced the pain

of being homeless and the sorrow of being unaccepted by the land they belonged to, and they began to create literature. In their writings, the feeling of home reflected both personal intimacy and shared social connection. Marco Antonsich explains that “belonging should be analyzed both as a personal, intimate, feeling of being ‘at home’ in a place (place-belongingness) and as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)” (1). Belonging emerges through evolving social relationships and shapes how people live together.

This article explores the meaning of home at the housing scale and examines psychological and socio-cultural perspectives that offer diverse interpretations of factors shaping Bhutanese refugees’ sense of home. The primary texts include poems by Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees. However, references from other literary writings have been used to enrich the analysis. Their journey—from ancient migration to modern displacement—illustrates how borders, policies, and identity politics turn communities into transnational subjects who remain perpetually between birthplace and elsewhere. Their literary narratives reveal that their search for home is not merely geographic but existential, shaped by memory, loss, and the enduring quest for belonging. They connect the circumstances with the pain of displacement and fractured identity. Thus, this article highlights the condition of Bhutanese refugees after being banished from their previous home and focuses on their excruciating narratives of displacement and dislocation, and examines how they later recognize psychological tension between exile and home.

The expulsion of Lhotshampas to Nepal was due to cultural and political reasons. Lok Raj Baral observes, “As of 1988, thousands of Nepali also returned from Bhutan owing to more stringent policies of the Bhutanese government towards foreign nationals” (64-5). The state’s oppression converted them into stateless human beings and created a new crisis in their lives. Peter Collister explains Bailey’s concern in this way: “Bailey considered that the major problem facing Bhutan was no longer the succession of the hereditary King but was the settlement or so many lowland Nepalese in the lower valleys to which the Bhutanese, who still disliked living at any height lower than 5,000 feet, avoided going if they could help it. There were now estimated to be about 50,000 Nepalese in these areas” (179).

By the 1970s, southern Bhutan resembled a mini-Nepal, characterized by Nepali-style architecture, festivals, and language. They maintained deep cultural and emotional ties with Nepal, and revered Nepali deities, celebrated Nepali festivals, and often considered Nepal their ancestral homeland.

The literature of Nepali-speaking writers reflects counter-hegemonic awareness for empowering voices and fostering autonomous and inclusive spaces. The life of Bhutanese nationals as refugees fostered vibrant literary activities and publications, which attracted both Nepali and foreign writers to the Bhutanese issue. Religious texts flourished more than original creations. However, after resettlement in the West, Nepali literature declined as younger generations lost interest in learning the language. Despite this, literature enthusiasts reorganized the ‘Literature Council of Bhutan’ in a foreign land. The blog *bhutanese literature.com*, launched in 2009, gained popularity among emerging writers, “archiving 3,220 articles by 338 writers”, and by 2022, “the number of writings exceeded 4,000” (Shrestha 50). Ramesh Gautam, Shiva Lal Dahal and, Khem Raj Gautam claim, “the anthology is the most extensive poetry” (27). They expressed their feelings about exile and home, and their search for home in a new land. In the editorial part of *Post-Resettlement Bhutanese Nepali Poetry*, Dahal, Gautam, and Ghimire argue, “Though all the poems have been written and published in the post-resettlement period, but they revisit the history, geography, culture . . . of our Bhutan and Nepal . . .”¹ (16). They further note, “The Nepali language speaking Bhutanese communities have their distinct historical, social and politico-cultural background” (17), and emphasize Bhutan’s monarchical hegemony and contrasting greater secular aesthetics in refugee-camp writings than post-resettlement works. They argue: “After 1990 poems, eulogizing of kings, monarchy, and a narrowed situation in

¹ All the texts from Nepali to English used in this article are my translation.

the absence of royal censorships ended. . . . In exile Bhutanese enjoyed freedom and openness. That political awakening and openness gave them opportunities to exchange experiences with Nepalese and Indian intellectuals. The caste, class, gender and identity and inclusion-based movements touched them” (23). The post-1990 exile empowered them to discard sycophancy towards the monarchy, and embrace liberty, and justice. The editors offer extensive remarks in the anthology, yet completely ignore the concept of displacement and dislocation. Though their detailed editorial effort is commendable, their attempt to detach literature from prevailing politico-cultural forces of exile appears artificial. They still attempt to represent Bhutanese Nepali diversity, where painful narratives subtly resonate through their expressions. Dahal, Gautam and Ghimire articulate, “Once in history, our ancestors reached Bhutan. There was an outlandish culture, place, and people, but our ancestors did not negotiate our identity and culture. In exile, our passion for language, literature and culture was augmented further. In the third resettled countries in the last decade, we are continuously struggling to preserve our identity” (15).

Their history was magnificent and their ancestors had enjoyed a strong sense of identity and self. Many Bhutanese Nepali people in the West face religious rigidities that hinder counter-hegemonic action, making them appear helpless in embracing identity and secular aesthetics within unfamiliar cultural settings. Carole Després explains, “The meaning of home has dominantly been explored in relationship to housing but also as larger scale environments such as neighborhood, geographical” (97). Home symbolizes safety, belonging, self-expression, emotional security, and acceptance. About half a dozen features of home are common as “home as security and control, home as reflection of one's ideas and values, home as acting upon and modifying one’s dwelling, home as permanence and continuity, home as relationships with family and friends, and home as center of activities” (Després 97-8). However, the concept of home becomes deeply complicated in the context of forced migration, and explores the idea of separation. The stability of home life during rituals preserves socio-cultural order. The rite of separation involves detachment from a previous social or cultural state, and remains unknown. This separation can be physical, and it allows individuals or groups to experience safety, transformation, and reconfigure their identities. Aviezer Tucker emphasizes that home extends beyond a physical structure—it may represent emotional, cultural, geographical, political, or historical dimensions, or “even a blend of all” (15). Home also signifies physical and mental existence, as Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein* suggests being “at home” (Polt 46) in the world. These circumstances of the home reflect transience and ephemerality to express liminal states. Home is associated with a place of origin or homeland. Home is often “defined by other people” (Taylor 216). According to Mastoureh Fathi, home refers to a “situated experience” (980). The literature on defining home divulges its multifaceted nature, encompassing physical, emotional, relational, social, and cultural dimensions.

Lhotshampas recognize that the instability for a deeper exploration of the profound sense of loss and displacement in exile portrays psychological tension. Govinda Raj Bhattarai’s novel *Muglan* powerfully documents the plight of Nepali people in Bhutan—a foreign land imagined as a site of opportunity. The narrator observes that the youth “fancied descending down towards Muglan and were swayed by the imagination of being recruited in the army” (2). The mass expulsion of the 1990s confirmed the exile of Lhotshampas was marked by harsh landscapes, grueling labor, illness, and separation from home. Even after years, they were sent elsewhere, forced to accept the settlement in the West, fearing their future work would be problematic. They were aware of their condition and the ugliness of present life, even amid misfortune or destitution. For them, suffering became a source of creativity, with ideas forged in extreme conditions. Bhabha notes that those experiencing displacement and marginality teach enduring lessons and transform critical perspectives. His cultural contrast between difference and diversity emerges in the Third Space. Displaced individuals often experience emotional tension between past and present places, people, and belongings. Their sense of belonging shifts between loss and nostalgia. A struggle for recognition always involves constructive elements, and it makes a crucial study how positionalities, identities, and political values interrelate

with the writings. “Identities are narratives” and “people tell themselves and others about who they are” (Yuval-Davis 202) in the new relocated land.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This article critically reviews diverse scholarship to propose an analytical framework for studying the concept of belonging. Historicity is a central element to interpreting literature, and no text exists in isolation. This theoretical framework deals with cause-and-effect relationship. This article is grounded in theories of belonging, home, displacement, and transnationalism. It primarily draws on Nira Yuval-Davis’s framework of the politics of belonging. It is examined across three interrelated levels: social locations, emotional attachments, and political values. She argues, “The discourse on social locations, complex as it is, cannot be conflated with the belonging discourse on identifications and emotional attachments, and any attempt to do so is essentialist and often racialized” (202). These are complemented by Avtar Brah’s concept of homing desire and Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of liminality and the Third Space. Brah takes “home as a site of everyday experiences” (3). Meanwhile, Bhabha suggests that “subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking” (172). He points out how the experience of social marginality “transforms our critical strategies” (172). It emerges where cultures meet to generate new meanings, conflicts, and possibilities for power or resistance.

These theoretical concepts illuminate the formation of identity under displacement. Together, these theories conceptualize home not as a fixed territory but as a contested, relational, and historically mediated construct shaped by power, exclusion, and mobility. Tea Golob argues that home is both home-making through social practices in migrant spaces. He argues, for diasporic subjects, home functions as a “component of national identity” (158), and intertwines with the question of belonging. Dorothy Wong conceives of home as an “ontological mediation of a new bonding” (151)—a site where personal identity intersects with place and memory. This article critically examines selected poems by Nepali-speaking Bhutanese poets like Ajit Rupabung’s “How are you Living?,” Jaya Narayan Dahal’s “Closed Door”, Mausami Dhungana’s “The Country Nepal is Dear to me,” Purna Giri’s “What is ours, and what is not?,” Charan Bajgain’s “My *Dhaka Topi*,” and Thutten Dorji Drukpa’s “The Pain of being Stateless.” The social and historical references from literary works of Ramesh Diyali’s *HutNo.55* and Y. N. Chaulagain’s *The Witness* bolster the analysis. Moreover, the secondary sources include historical records and scholarly works to contextualize displacement. The study applies thematic analysis to identify recurring motifs of home, exile, identity, and belonging.

Results and Discussion

The migration of people across borders has been a consistent phenomenon throughout history. In the case of the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people, their displacement to Nepal was largely influenced by political and cultural factors. The Bhutanese government, under various pretexts, forcibly expelled Nepali-speaking people and created a state of crisis in their lives. The expulsion of individuals with a longstanding connection to Nepali culture and language was a direct consequence of state-sponsored operations and displacement. The current debate raises an important question about whether a ‘community of belonging’ can exist beyond a ‘community of identity.’ This is especially relevant in increasingly diverse societies, which call for exploring post-identity socio-spatial arrangements. This article reveals that Bhutanese Nepali literature articulates a fractured sense of home. Displacement, resettlement and repeated migration construct home. These texts depict exile is a prolonged liminal condition, where belonging differed across Bhutan, Nepal and the West. Home in Nepal represent cultural land, and fails to secure political home. Identity in new geographical reality reconstructed through memory, nostalgia and resistance rather than territorial stability. Literature becomes a crucial cite for negotiating loss, preserving culture and expressing counter-hegemonic consciousness. Ultimately home is an existential pursuit rather than a geographical reality. Yuval-

Davis “outlines an analytical framework for the study of belonging and the politics of [dislocation]” (197). Her article “explores the notion of ‘belonging’ and the different analytical levels on which it needs to be studied: social locations; identifications and emotional attachments; and ethical and political values” (197). It deals with multiple overlapping forms of belonging and dislocation.

Between Exile and Home

It is very difficult to define home due to its subjective and individualized experience. As Brah expresses that home requires exploring both its role in shaping nationalistic discourses and its meaning within everyday lived experiences. In the poem “How are you Living?” Ajit Rupabung encapsulates the fractured identity of the Bhutanese Nepali diaspora through the lines:

I've lived like this here
I've to be fearful of my own identity
My skin, language, religion, costume, nationality and identity in totality
I've lived like this here. (39-42)

The persona's reflection reveals the transgenerational displacement of a community perpetually caught between exile and home. Born in Bhutan to ancestors who had settled there centuries ago, he inherited a Nepali cultural identity and felt stateless when his community was expelled. Yuval-Davis proclaims, “Belonging, [is] about the ways these are valued and judged” (203). As a refugee poet, Rupabung embodies the existential confusion of belonging. The title “How are you Living?” articulates the central dilemma of the Bhutanese refugees, the indeterminate boundaries of exile and home. He experiences fear and insecurity in the so-called liberal Global North, which contrasts with the lived realities of discrimination against his subjective identity, language, culture, religion, and skin color.

The notion of home occupies a critical role in shaping identity. In Globe's observation, “[new identity] refers to home-making regarding external images and social practices” (157). Their existence across Bhutan, Nepal, and the West destabilizes the coherence of identity categories, and this uncertainty epitomizes the homelessness of displacement and the perpetual search for belonging. Chaulagain remembers, “My parents had left everything in Bhutan. They broke down in tears. . . . That night, at the house of Basnet in Dadaghari, crying and wailing continued late into the night” (233). As he notes, citing Ruth Maxey, South Asian writers in the West view “home as an important synecdoche for wider social and national concerns” (28), and affirm the permanence of settlement. Home functions as both “origin and destination” (Fortier 2), serving a vital space of comfort, belonging and familiarity. Yet, as Dorothy Wong elaborates, home transcends physical architecture, representing the “relationship between the occupant and the space,” a dynamic index of identity and belonging (148). In the 1980s, the Bhutanese government claimed they overstayed their permits, which led to their eventual expulsion from the country. The Bhutanese Nepali experience further complicates this relationship. According to Alex Weingrod and André Levy, “immigration from the diaspora to the homeland results in becoming part of a new diaspora” (705). The Bhutanese Nepali people were expelled from Bhutan in the early 1990s and entered Nepal as part of another diaspora. Their later resettlement in the West marked yet another diasporic condition. They describe Nepal as their “old-new state and nation” (709), while the new homelands in the West initiated fresh attachments and identities. They suggest, “[Home] is not the end of the story, but another beginning that develops new contents and new directions” (710), and it proves certain complexities.

Home is thus both imagined and a lived experience. The concept of literature on displacement and dislocation implies a “homing desire” (Brah 180) to feel comfortable at home. Steve Taylor describes it as a site of “ontological security” (5), simultaneously familiar and elusive. The foundational concepts of homeland and community are deconstructed, and more complex and abstract notions of belonging. After 1990, many Bhutanese people imagined Nepal as a complete source of aspiring sphere for those of Nepali origin living for generations outside Nepal. This distinction aptly characterizes the Bhutanese Nepali, for whom Nepal represents ancestry rather than belongings, and

Bhutan symbolizes a lost home they cannot return to. The following lines from Jaya Narayan Dahal's poem "Closed Door" convey the sense of loss:

On a full-moon night
He stands by the veranda in front of her house
Gazing at the midnight moon in the sky, and says—
A door in the east has closed forever
Perhaps it will never open again. (1-5)

Even today, their condition epitomizes the liminality of exile, suspended between nostalgia and displacement. In Yuval-Davis's words, it is the politics of belonging. It explores how identity and belonging are shaped by social, political, and cultural forces. In the broader context, the refugee literature illustrates the struggle of a community that has crossed multiple countries yet continues to inhabit a metaphorical homelessness—forever caught endlessly between exile and home, between memory and belonging.

Cultural Displacement of Bhutanese Refugees

Writings of the Bhutanese Nepali community exemplify the painful narratives of dislocation. The collective existence of Nepali-speaking people in Bhutan was one of survival under structural subjugation, forming the foundation of their later exile. The possessions they left behind in Bhutan—land, orchards, livestock—became symbols of a lost paradise. Mausami Dhungana in "The Country Nepal is dear to me" expresses a bitter reality:

I never wanted to leave Nepal.
Even while living in a refugee camp
That land still felt dear to me.
Small homes, big dreams,
I was left without citizenship.
The faith and hope I held on to
Ultimately faded into uncertainty. (1-7)

Identity is always political and fluid. Bhutan, once a paradise, turned into hell. This extract explores displacement from home into homelessness, and it reshapes identity in unfamiliar settings. It argues the displacement creates near-permanent liminality, rarely leading to normality's return. Yet, such dislocation fosters unique insight and suggests that homelessness itself can become a source of innovation, creativity, and profound self-awareness. The once beautiful hills, dry fields, and mountains that had recently seemed so enchanting now appeared threatening, as if ready to consume them. Their departure from Nepal was filled with grief, leaving behind generations of hope, honor, faith, prestige, and love for their ancestral land. This forced migration occurred because the community was unprepared for such a crisis, and its inexperienced leadership collapsed under military pressure that sought to remove them from their homeland.

The Bhutanese Nepali thus suffered not only physical displacement but also the erasure of their historical legitimacy. Their century-old community endured immense hardship and fought to preserve its cultural identity and heritage with remarkable resilience. Yet, their struggle did not lead to restoration; instead, it concluded in exile, scattered across refugee camps in Nepal and, later, throughout the Western world. Beginning in the late 2000s, the third-country resettlement programs relocated most refugees to the United States, Australia, Canada, and various European states. They remained homeless and eventually felt the loss of 'real' cultural identity, which creates abysmal inner damage and leaves individuals rootless and without belonging. This experience reshapes how they understand belonging—it is not a fixed or eternal essence beyond history or culture. Instead, it evolves, constantly reconstructed through memory, imagination, and narrative. The past influences people, but never as an unchanging truth; it is always mediated through the present consciousness. Cultural identity is not a stable origin but a dynamic position. It is formed within historical and cultural contexts—where meaning, belonging, and power are continually negotiated. Bhutan, their

land of birth, rejected them; Nepal, their land of ancestry, rendered them refugees; and the Western nations that resettled them provide economic stability but not cultural wholeness. Their lived reality is one of homelessness within multiplicity—a perpetual oscillation between memory and displacement. In literature, their voices echo the pain of being between exile and home, where the search for belonging becomes not a geographical quest but an existential journey—a longing for a home that exists only in memory and imagination.

Homelessness and the Search for Home

To the Bhutanese national 'home' is the condition of having one's own land, house, and other belongings. Their despair was intensified by hunger, and their voices remained psychologically and socially outside of it. Jennifer Ann Fawcett's idea of home conveys a sense of homelessness, and reflects, "If we then try to construct an idea of home within this liminal situation" (62). The Bhutanese people in Nepal compared their condition to that of the barren. Their displacement was unplanned and absolute. Purna Giri remembers:

We all keep saying 'ours, ours,'
But we don't have much that's truly ours!
Except for our language, our style, and such—
We have nothing else that's our own! (1-4)

The poet paints a visual picture of their environment. Even within Nepal, they were marked as outsiders. The black dirt and a dark-roofed house, bamboo-framed every side—letting light in, rain flow through, and moonlight guide nightly studies portray their settings. It explores the creative potential of liminality through the experiences of exiled individuals, and examines how displacement from home leads to homelessness, identity transformation, and enduring liminality. Fawcett observes, "This will encompass the dislocation of the individual from a 'home' space into a situation of homelessness, the reworking of the individual's identity in the unfamiliar environment and the resulting consequences of this shift" (61). He argues that such dislocation fosters unique perspectives and that the state of homelessness, rather than limiting, often inspires innovation, imagination, and creative redefinition.

A growing refugee literature about cross-disciplinary approaches reflects efforts to diversify the meanings of 'home' and its inextricable link with homelessness. The literal and symbolic material of their existence is fragile, temporary, and perishable. It intensifies this symbolism of hunger and frustration. Ramesh Diyali's novel *Hut No. 55* portrays the refugee hut as "a nest of a dreadfully poor bird" (10). His characters, unable to access medicine, "had to think water as the best medicine for them" (19). He reveals that a sage inflicted suffering and even imposed a fine on Devaki *Aama*: "This low woman touched the water I used for my morning worship... Because she belonged to a lower caste, Devaki *Aama* was beaten today. She herself had to apologize and even pay the purification fine" (68). Inside the camp, the hospital was so dirty that "the patient-waiters would fall themselves sick" (101), and death itself became burdensome. The protagonist's final plea represents the collective agony of a displaced nation.

The psychological and emotional homelessness persisted, and within Nepal, they were marked as outsiders. Transnationalism, though largely absent from migrants' vocabularies, remains central in research as a new language for immigration studies. The postcolonial transnationalism redefines identity through global socio-political shifts, emphasizing movements of ideas about self, other, culture, and identity amid disjuncture between economy, culture, and politics. The challenge of defining transnational identity lies in its connection to multiple places rather than a single homeland. Unlike traditional identities rooted in one culture or location, transnationalism constructs a shared social space through relationships that cross borders, forming dynamic personal networks extending beyond geographic boundaries. Diyali, as a speaker, accepts in *Hut No. 55*, "I, however, sat alone in the midst of the crowd. My thoughts did not align with anyone, I could not converse with anyone, and I did not feel like speaking to anyone. I was searching for the definition of life in this solitude within the crowd" (116). The Bhutanese Nepali continue to live in a state of 'in-betweenness'—Bhutan

rejecting them, Nepal alienating them, and the West providing only partial acceptance. Charan Bajgain, resettling in America, expressed not to take off his *Topi* -symbol of cultural identity:

I bought an expensive Nepali *Dhaka Topi*
 A symbol of my ancestors' sacrifice.
 Please do not say "take off the Nepali cap,"
 Do not disregard my language and culture. (1-4)

It recounts their humiliation at having to remove the Nepali cap during the U.S. citizenship ceremony. For refugees 'Nepali cap is the Nepali identity marker,' and they express similar ambivalence: after twenty-six years of statelessness, receiving U.S. citizenship brought neither happiness nor relief. They experienced problems even in the West, which caused much trouble. The terms homelessness and search for home for dislocated groups include identity, and coexistence—frameworks where communities live together respectfully, without forced assimilation or conflict. After 1990, this narrative is one of perpetual exile, where home remains an unfulfilled dream and belonging, an unattainable horizon.

Exile with Loss of Hope

The resettlement in Western countries represents another part of 'home' in their continuous history of displacement and identity crisis. After living for two decades in refugee camps in eastern Nepal, tens of thousands of Bhutanese Nepali were resettled across North America, Europe, and Oceania under the United Nations'. Although this program was celebrated as a humanitarian success, for many Bhutanese Nepali, it merely transformed the form of their homelessness. They achieved citizenship, security, and economic stability but lost the emotional and cultural sense of belonging that defines a home. Dhakal describes their relocation to the West as "the mass sale of the people to the land where their language, culture, civilization, religion, tradition, food and atmosphere do not match" (14). This description captures the disjunction between material security and existential alienation. Ramesh Gautam echoes this sentiment, saying that he was "thrown from a warm geography to an unknown land," where life feels like "a funeral pyre where the time itself is singing of the dreadful life" (26). He compares their migration from the refugee camps in Nepal to the West to "the transfer of a corpse from a rented tomb to a luxurious modern tomb" (28). The poet then asks a haunting question, "What is the difference for a corpse whether it is in a simple tomb or in a luxurious one?" His reflection—"I never thought- life would be so uncertain/ life would be so dreadful" (42)—captures the core of diasporic discontent: the pain of cultural and emotional dislocation.

The resettlement in the West was a critical stage. It underscored a moral and emotional rupture in seeking safety. They were forced to abandon their homeland, their belongings, and their historical identity. They imagine that if they had their birthplace, they would feel worldly pleasure, happiness and comfort. Watson Sophie and Helen Austerberry established an outline that stressed the relativity of homelessness. They observe, "...home-to-homelessness continuum" (21) was the first way to offer home and homelessness on the same circumstance. They expand the concept of homelessness, and link it to social and cultural ideas of appropriate housing and home rather than just administrative definitions. Linear continuums remain inadequate, as affected people experience shifting meanings of home and homelessness, and housing hierarchies can be disrupted by situations like domestic violence. As Shaul Magid observes, "Diaspora is exile ... though the 'new exile' ... does not share the features of the 'old exile' (persecution, exclusion, alienation), it is exile nonetheless" (199). The resettlement of Bhutanese Nepali exemplifies this new exile, where the pain of alienation persists beneath the surface of comfort. Cultural and psychological dissonance further deepens their insecurity. The poet Rupabung expresses:

I am living here
 With the fear
 From my own heart
 From my own skin color

From my own language
From my own religion
From my own dress
From my own nationality
And in total, from my own identity
I am living in such a place
Where I fear myself. (32-42)

This fear of one's own identity demonstrates how assimilation demands self-denial. The loss of homeland continues to haunt them. Awadhesh Chandra Sinha lists their unresolved questions: "What will happen to their culture? How will they communicate with others in the new situations? What will happen to their language? What about their religious performances? How will they cremate/bury their dead bodies, and where will they go for worship?" (230). He observes that many resettled Bhutanese Nepali feel bad in the host land because of their inability to adjust to the new land.

Transitioning from agrarian Bhutan to refugee camps in Nepal and technologically advanced Western societies, they felt lost and confused. Their new home in the West offered a framework of life which signified six constituents: shelter, hearth, heart (sentiment), privacy, roots, and abode. Even in such circumstances, their condition is summed up by Thutten Dorji Drukpa in a lamenting voice:

I am alone
I am lost, fearful
Painful in the heart
With the pang of being nationless
Searching for the relatives
Searching for my-ness
Hoping to return to my nation
Weaving the dreams to recreate Bhutanese Nepali community. (23-30)

Despite physical relocation and material comfort, the Bhutanese Nepali in the West remain emotionally and culturally homeless. Their story is not merely one of migration but of an unending exile where belonging remains perpetually deferred. The perspective of dislocation is universally significant—like ethnicity and class—shaping most people's lives. In the case of refugee status in the new place, it recognized inequalities focusing on limited emancipatory progress, socio-cultural power, and incomplete identity.

Conclusion

The historical trajectory of the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people—from their settlement in southern Bhutan to displacement in Nepal and eventual resettlement in the West—reveals an enduring condition of homelessness and uncertain belonging. The historical, cultural, and literary dimensions of displacement experienced by them foreground the tenacious tension between exile and home. Their persistent journey from 1990 to 2016 defines their collective dislocation and struggle for existence. During this prolonged period, home emerged not as a fixed geographical setting but as a splintered and argued idea shaped by power, memory, and desire. In Yuval-Davis's words, the ideology of searching for home examines how people fail to connect with communities and nations. In Bhutan, despite generations of residence, the 'One Nation, One People' policy converted Nepali-speaking Lhotshampas into second-class subjects. Drawing on the framework of the politics of belonging, Brah's notion of homing desire and Bhabha's impression of liminality. These notions reveal how two stages of life operate across social location, cultural attachment, and political values. The literary texts, including poems, novels, memoirs, and essays, articulate a profound sense of uncertainty and a renegotiated condition in exile. The Bhutanese Nepali community exemplifies one of the most painful narratives of displacement and dislocation. In the post-resettlement context, cultural alienation persists despite economic security and stability.

The findings advocate for Nepal, a culturally rich country, which failed to offer political belonging, and the Western host countries proffered formal inclusion without emotional and cultural rootedness. As a result, Nepali-speaking people from Bhutan inhabited a transnational liminal space shaped by overlapping forms of displacement. Painful narratives of their writings function as a critical site of resistance and communication. They preserve collective memory, cultural identity, and challenge hegemonic narratives that reduce displacement to humanitarian success anecdotes. Ultimately, home is best perceived as an existential pursuit rather than a territorial sphere. Their painful narratives remind us that displacement is not just a part of relocation; it leaves enduring psychological, cultural and emotional traces. By foregrounding these narratives, this article contributes a wider debate on forced migration, belonging and identity. It emphasizes the need to re-conceptualize home beyond borders and settlement to recognize exile as a condition in the contemporary world.

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