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The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives: Diaspora, Memory, and Movement

The Moment of Exile

In the most profoundly moving final two paragraphs of the last chapter, *Revolt and Exile*, of her book, *Tenzin Gyatso: The Early Life of the Dalai Lama*, Claude B. Levenson writes:

“He paused at the landing for a moment, and visualized his arrival in India and his return to Tibet. Then he stepped down to where two soldiers awaited him. They led him to the doorway in the outside wall, where his bodyguard commander took over. No noise, no words, not a murmur troubled the deep silence and darkness which surrounded them.

A few years ago, the Nechung oracle had enigmatically declared that “The light of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel will shine one day upon the West.” During this night of the sixteenth and seventeenth of March, 1959, the Dalai Lama, fourteenth of his lineage and not yet twenty-four years old in his present incarnation, keeper of the timeless wisdom and hope of his people, left his palace and his people for exile, threatened by the invaders of his country. He set out to seek advice and help from the outside world, little realizing that one day the world would come to seek advice and help from him.”¹

It was this ‘moment of exile’ in 1959 that founds the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA), Dharamsala. The inspiration to build a foundation for what has been lost, but what has now come to be acknowledged as a redoubtable site of culture and knowledge, can be traced to that decision to leave Tibet. Chronologically, eleven years later, in India, in 1970 the LTWA was set up. The Dalai Lama, and the people who accompanied him, and the thousands who followed him into exile, can be considered as, in Pramod K. Nayar’s term, “embodied” memories.² Their identity and the signifying practices of the everyday – their culture – were at stake, and they had a mission – to reclaim or rather, claim what was rightfully theirs. Thus, they came not simply to save their lives but their ‘way of life’ – the culture of their land – and survival was indispensable to preserve, protect, and perpetuate their

memories and practices of identity. Therefore, the exile was a choice.

When the People’s Liberation Army of the People’s Republic of China overcame the Tibetan army in 1949, and followed it up in 1951 by setting up troops in Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet, and the ‘17-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet’ as also unpopular land reform attempts, it was met with a growing resistance by the Tibetans which ultimately came to a Tibetan-Chinese confrontation in 1959.³ This violent uprising was severely crushed by the Chinese which also included the massive destruction of life and property, especially with the intention to annihilate their religious beliefs and cultural moorings. R. P. Mitra in his study, points out that the “ideological and economic reasons for the Chinese invasion of Tibet” consisted in the Chinese belief in self-determination and usurping the thinly populated Tibetan plateau for natural resources and systematic rehabilitation of the Chinese from the “overpopulated” mainland.⁴

The Chinese knew only their ‘material’ ambitions in the name of modernity. For the Tibetans in Chinese-invaded Tibet, it was more than that as it is now in the Tibetan diaspora. Gyaltzen Gyaltag, who had fled from Lhasa to India in 1956, narrates:

“In 1959, undaunted by the uncertainty of the future, thousands of Tibetans followed their religious and political leader, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, into exile. Suffering from frostbite, hunger and exhaustion, about 85,000 Tibetan refugees from all regions and social backgrounds eventually arrived in India, Nepal and Bhutan. Today the number of Tibetan refugees has reached 130,000 worldwide.”⁵

He adds: “At a time of suffering and misery the Tibetans looked to the Dalai Lama for hope and assurance” and their leader “encouraged his desolate countrymen and prepared them for their new life in exile.”⁶

Such an overview of the flight, the exile, and the Tibetan people’s faith in their religion, culture, and leader is

necessary to understand the significance of the socio-cultural context of the LTWA, its connection to the habitation of tens of thousands of Tibetans in the diaspora and why these countrymen hold a significant place among the responsibilities and priorities of the Dalai Lama.⁷ A visionary to the core, the fourteenth Dalai Lama's preparation to recoup, to reinvigorate, and to reclaim, was not for the 'possibility' of an immediate return to Tibet in the then foreseeable future, but an elaborate project which continues to date.

Diaspora, memory, and movement are the three strands weaving this vision together, enabling the Tibetans to evolve as one of the most successful refugee communities in the world.⁸ Such is also the predicament of the Tibetans in exile. Being beyond the reach of the Chinese invaders, and relatively 'safe' and 'free' in India, in a strategic move to comprehend and gather together the sudden turbulence of the Tibetan predicament, the Dalai Lama set up the Tibetan Government-in-Exile with the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in 1959, with its later headquarters at Dharamsala. Gyaltsen Gyaltag explains: "The problem of the Tibetan diaspora is not only a matter of material integration, but also of spiritual and cultural rehabilitation."⁹ Therefore, among the various departments of this official-endorsing of authority in the Dalai Lama over the Tibetan refugee community, was the Department of Religion and Culture to "preserve and promote Tibet's spiritual and cultural heritage, which is being annihilated by the occupying Chinese authorities in Tibet."¹⁰ Under the aegis of this department were included such cultural institutions like the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts in Dharamsala, Tibet House in New Delhi, the Central University of Tibetan Studies at Sarnath in Varanasi, the Norbulingka Institute for Tibetan Culture at Sidhpur near Dharamsala, and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA) at Dharamsala.

Preservation and Performance – the LTWA

The structure of the LTWA states its identity (compare fig. 1). As R. P. Mitra describes, it is "a classic Tibetan architectural masterpiece, ornately painted and based on the traditional Tibetan aristocratic houses."¹¹ With "a broad base" and whitewashed walls which taper

inwards as the building rises, it is distinct in its "floral designs and bright red painted pillars."¹² It has "broad"¹³ deep-set black bordered windows, adding a characteristic touch to a magnificent building (compare fig. 2).



Fig. 1 The main building of the LTWA



Fig. 2 Characteristic window decoration of the LTWA

In its foundation-laying ceremony on 11 June, 1971, the Dalai Lama emphasised upon the main characteristics of Tibetan culture as founded on Buddhism and declared that for the "preservation, dissemination and continuation of this unique culture and philosophy of Tibet," which is in conjunction with the spiritual uplift of all humankind and good of "all sentient beings," the LTWA would perform a major role.¹⁴ Dagmar Bernstorff in her article *Vibrant Arts* observes:

"The Library is at the core of all efforts to preserve Tibetan culture. The colourful building, a replica of a palace in Lhasa, is a good example of traditional Tibetan architecture. It stands on the square next to the kashag (the Government-in-Exile), the departments

and the Parliament. A stupa in the centre is meant to ward off evil influences."¹⁵

Thus, in the diaspora, the library has become the repertoire of knowledge from which Tibetan religion and philosophy continues to be in dialogue with the roots of its wisdom. The library reinforces, in Pierre Nora's words, the "will to remember," a distinct criterion of what he termed "sites of memory."¹⁶ This paper thus explores the LTWA as a site, conduit, and performative of memory, drawing from Erll's insights on the relation between culture and memory as expounded in her book, *Memory in Culture*. The paper is also a critical reading of the LTWA from the perspectives of "Cultures of Memory" as explicated by Pramod K. Nayar in his *Introduction to Cultural Studies*.

The two defining characteristics of the relation of memory and culture, according to Erll, are the 'intentional act of remembering' in the socio-cultural context of the present, and the 'constructedness' of memory. No two individuals or communities remember in the same way as memories are "subjective, highly selective reconstructions, dependent on the situation in which they are recalled."¹⁷ The LTWA not only accommodates individual memories but is also a collective remembering site. Erll refers to the work of memory theorist, Ann Rigney, to explain this strategic aspect of the collective resolve to not only preserve but restore and perpetuate the past:

*"As the performative aspect of the term 'remembrance' suggests, collective memory is constantly 'in the works' and, like a swimmer, has to keep moving even just to stay afloat. To bring remembrance to a conclusion is de facto already to forget."*¹⁸

The LTWA has kept up this momentum of memory in its ever-increasing and diverse activities to have become a vibrant educational and cultural centre today. A foresight of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, the LTWA has become successful in carving itself out as a Centre for Tibetan Studies as recognised by the Himachal Pradesh University, India, in 1991. The Tibetan Government-in-Exile has given it the privilege of a 'national' library, museum, and archive of the Tibetan people. It is also one of the National Manuscripts Resource Centres as accorded to it in 2006 by the

Government of India's National Manuscripts Mission. The LTWA houses books, manuscripts, photographs, paintings, oral history recordings, research studies, and a museum with unique artefacts reflecting the precious religious and cultural heritage of the Tibetans. The museum and the archives together add a mystical and sublime touch to the library, perhaps rarely found in the world. In the short video tour on the library's website, one gets a momentary but rare glimpse of the Tibetan refugees plunging through difficult terrains on their exilic journey carrying whatever rarities they could get hold of, and then offering these to their spiritual leader for safekeeping. This is the humble base on which the LTWA stands.

A survey of its website will inform the online visitor its well laid-out aims and objectives – to not only "preserve and promote" Tibetan culture and studies but to disseminate it in the form of documentation.¹⁹ The chief patron is none other than His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and its governing body is constituted in consultation with him, barring two representatives from the Indian Government. As stated on the website, the LTWA has contracted Memorandums of Understanding with reputed international academic institutions. Its Foreign Language Reference Section possesses around seventeen thousand "volumes predominantly dealing with language, philosophy, arts and culture, medicine, geography, travel, history and the politics of Tibet and the Himalayan region," while the "Tibetan books and manuscript collection holds more than 100,000 titles in the form of manuscripts, books, xylographs, documents and illuminated scriptures."²⁰ Further, it has an impressive archive of audio-visual recordings "of the contemporary Tibetan culture as witnessed or recalled by important figures, scholars, professionals and refugees."²¹ A look at the Cultural Research and Publication Department will show that it has published and distributed books, with the LTWA logo, on "history, literature, philosophy, traditional science" and other aspects of Tibetan culture.²² The Oral History section which began in 1976 has recordings of "elders, Lamas and other religious figures, craftspeople, doctors and astrologers, story-tellers, traders and pilgrims" to document their experiences and memories of the Tibetan land and culture.²³ It also has "thousands of hours of teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama."²⁴

Moreover, the “department has embarked on developing a computerised catalogue of its recordings, as well as the production of printed transcripts and English translations of selected interviews.”²⁵ The library’s museum opened for public access in 1974, and was guided by the National Museum of India in its arrangement of artefacts. To quote from the library’s website again:

*“The Museum has expanded steadily since those early days and now exhibits one of the most important collections of Tibetan art in the world. Major exhibits include a three-dimensional carved wooden mandala of Avalokiteshvara and a thread-cross mandala of Arya Tara, both commissioned by the LTWA; a bronze statue of Avalokiteshvara commissioned by the 13th Dalai Lama, said to stand as tall as he did; and a contemporary life-size statue of Je Tsongkhapa.”*²⁶

However, plans are underway, as detailed on its website, in renovating the museum with contextual specifics and to showcase the Buddhist lineage of Tibet right up to its continuation in exile.

The Research and Translation is yet another department of the library which focuses on serious scholastic studies in Tibetan, and translation into English and Hindi. It is still conducting the Buddhist philosophy and Tibetan language classes that were started in 1971. The incorporation of the Science Department was only in 1999 with the special initiative taken by the Dalai Lama to spread the scientific temperament among the religious or monastic practitioners. There is also a Green Club of the library which stresses on the ecological balance that healthy living requires, and to urge the sustenance of a “clean and green” environment.

Thus, the LTWA professes to be more than a library, an archive, and a museum. It is almost an all-comprehensive institute acting as a viable platform for “a living memory”²⁷ as well as a structure for memorialising for future generations beyond any possible access to the living. The LTWA has become a symbol of defiance in refuge, a mainstay of Tibetan culture in a hostland. Now, well over four decades since its inception, the library has proven a witness to the commitment of a community rooted to its core cultural beliefs and Buddhist philosophy. However, the LTWA

does not simply ‘house’ memory.

Mediated Narratives of Memory and the LTWA

The LTWA mediates memorialisation because it enables cultural remembering and practices. Circumambulating the library, and chanting their prayers, the Tibetans find meaningful worship in the idols the library museum houses. The materiality of these objects is worth touching upon here. As explicated in *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (2017) edited by Munteán, Plate, and Smelik, “objects and things are endowed with meaning, affect, and agency through the various memory practices that are centered on them.”²⁸ These material shapers of memory are simply not facilitators of remembrance but by themselves constitute intrinsic memorial attributes. As a corollary to this, materiality becomes an extension of memory, and is an interface between physical, concrete reality, and the human faculty of presenting the past in the here and now. This then begs the question as to how the agency of memory and forgetting of the exile Tibetans interact with the agency of the material and social life of the objects in the museum or the whole of the LTWA. Visibility and erasure of memories are intrinsic mnemonic qualities of these select objects of memory. As a result, the museum along with the LTWA becomes the space for dialogues, conversations, compromises, and politics. They become the terrain of power play. Since memory is an integral aspect of diaspora, these representational metonyms of larger realities of the Tibetan community are symbolic of their entire struggle for the right to profess their own religion and culture in their homeland. The LTWA, therefore, enforces the creation of a new geographical, social, cultural and political context when there was none before the Tibetan exile to India. New matrices of meaning have thus been formed, and the LTWA becomes a significant prism constructed for viewing of the Tibetan predicament. The viewership, in short, also becomes a construct. Thus, the LTWA ‘co-produces’²⁹ the Tibetan citizens in exile and in turn sustains from the socio-cultural milieu around it, and invests in materiality to enact the performance of memory many times over and for all times to come.

At the break of dawn, at sunset, or as per convenience, the laity, the religious seekers, the maroon-saffron-clad, children, scholars, students, tourists, or general observers – are all at or around the library, some making their deeply-felt connections to their Tibetan roots. An aura of reverence surrounds the library even while juxtaposing the secular. It is at the heart of a throbbing, pulsating Tibetan community. Friendly gatherings, guttural laughter, children playing, groups chatting, the hungry snacking, the tourist posing for photographs, and the wanderer gazing at its peaceful often cloud-hidden altitude against the towering Dhauladhar mountain range, are common sights there.³⁰

The LTWA also mediates different narratives of the past of the Tibetans. It conditions, what Nayar identifies as the “production and consumption of memory,” and aptly termed by Radstone and Hodgkin as “regimes of memory.”³¹ The LTWA’s highlights are not the fractures of the Tibetan society – the troubled past of the Tibetan homeland, the history of conflicts among religious sects, the ramifications of feudalism, violence and challenges to a unifying authority, and the isolation, alienation or the lack of sufficient knowledge of the wider world of realpolitik and diplomacy of the pre-exile Tibet. As R. P. Mitra points out, “the democratic system is an anathema to the traditional Tibetan polity, the cornerstone of which was the role of the Dalai Lama as the religious and political leader of the Tibetans.”³² Besides, the three different regions in Tibet had their own histories and ethnic diversities as well as climates and political structures. In exile too, “a person may be born in India but he still carries the tag of his place of family origin” as well as the familiar stereotypical connotations of the geographical areas.³³ More importantly, in pre-exile Tibet, there were no national symbols like the national flag or the national anthem to express one Tibetan nationality, although the symbol of the Dalai Lama as one national binding authority had come to sustain over all.³⁴ As far as education was concerned, Mallica Mishra points out, in pre-1951/ 1959 Tibet, education was “the monopoly of monasteries, which provided training for the elite to lead the country and for ecclesiastical careers. Secular education was largely non-existent as indicated in earlier works by Sir

Charles Bell”.³⁵ But with the Chinese occupation and the exile, most Tibetans have come to believe that it was their “ignorance and lack of ‘modern’ education”³⁶ that have been their undoing. Thus, the value of modernity’s beneficial advantages has taken a priority with utmost urgency among the Tibetans in exile.

The LTWA, as a flagship institution of the Tibetan diaspora, has had a primary role in mediating these alternative narratives. Here in exile is a reversal of the pre-exile – from a rigid feudal structure to a democratic openness, from education of the privileged to a mission for education for all, from a non-scientific outlook on life to a vigorous debate on the interconnections of science, the mind, and religion. Gender equality to nuns, education for all, and introduction of philosophy, science and modern subjects in the monasteries are new. The LTWA is a forerunner in establishing the importance of education and educational exchanges with the Western world. Further, the publication of books like *The Struggle for Modern Tibet: The Autobiography of Tashi Tsering* by the LTWA³⁷ – making an extremely absorbing reading and showing a wide panorama of pre-modern Tibet – delineating the intensely difficult life of a member of the dance troupe of the Dalai Lama, the ambiguous venture of the role of a ‘drombo’ – a passive homosexual partner for a well-placed monk, a political prisoner and a man on a mission to establish schools in rural Tibet – all roles intricately packed into one life, is evidence of the changed outlook of the Tibetans in acknowledging the weaknesses and gaps in their society. Therefore, the LTWA is a reparation in hindsight, and a representation of the aspirations of a ‘new order’ for Tibet. Strategic steps have been taken to usher in democracy and the scientific spirit in the Tibetans in exile. As the Dalai Lama relates in his *Foreword to Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora*:

“Within the Tibetan community in exile, we have taken significant steps towards introducing democracy and a modern administration. This culminated in the direct election of our political leadership in 2001. We are committed to continue taking vigorous actions to further promote democratic values among ordinary Tibetans.”³⁸

The community divisions found in Tibet are not formed in exile. Such differences have been glossed over and identity is structured by one affiliation, “belonging to a common country, i.e. *rgyal khab*,” says Ashok Rinpoche, the head of the LTWA once.³⁹ Ethnic differences have been subsumed under a Tibetanness marked by dress, food habits, architecture, paintings, carpet design and weaving, and chief of all, Buddhist motifs and practices.⁴⁰ Religion remains the pivot on which the whole Tibetan community revolves and so it reflects in the position of many religious figures with many high designations, be it in the Tibet House in Delhi or the LTWA.⁴¹ Therefore, it is well in place in the Tibetan hierarchy that the Dalai Lama, till 2015, was the chairperson of the most important repertoire of their identity, the LTWA, and is currently its chief patron.

In the Cultural Studies framework, the LTWA has harnessed enough agency to make visible the message it wants to convey to the world, not least to China and that constitutes another and perhaps the most important narrative of assertion by the Tibetans – freedom, homeland, self-rule, and autonomy. It is a re-doing of a new Tibetan nation from the distant but ‘solid’ ground of exile – perhaps, a material reality in spiritual intangibility. To all Indians it is the story of a gracious guest, and perhaps, in some ways a benefactor even while ‘in refuge’. To the refugee communities of the world, it is an example and inspiration. To the international community, by opening its doors to anybody interested in the Tibetan culture, and by seeking to know the richness of other cultures, the LTWA has put in place the principle of exchange not isolation. The hosting of dignitaries from all over the world and scholars of repute by the library is another mark of the community’s openness to global, cosmopolitan, transcultural involvement. Here, it has to be mentioned that the Tibetan exile is an instructive lesson for all nationalities, communities, and ethnicities in the plausibility of the mainstream becoming the marginal. Citizenship cannot always be a given, it has to be continuously nourished. Otherwise, as naively as for the Tibetans, other vested forces can take over both territorial space and cultural identities. A vibrant democracy giving equal participatory space to all its citizens and amicable resolution of internal state

matters within the national stakeholders is always a need of every hour.

Among the LTWA’s policies and priorities, the diasporic intentions of ‘going back home’ stand high. To the Tibetan Movement for its lost homeland, the LTWA is the backdrop narrative of direction and reconstruction. With the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People that was presented to the Chinese Government in 2008, the Tibetans in exile are clear about their demands.⁴² In exile and the diaspora, the LTWA has facilitated a platform for knowledge and ‘return’ home.⁴³

Running through all of the preceding points, is the thread of memory and its narrative through which the LTWA has negotiated its place of pride. The conduit of memory is the LTWA’s heritage. The specifics of memory are these milestones as socio-cultural constructs. By archiving in the digital, the LTWA has transcended the constraints of space and time setting new milestones on newer parameters. The military might of China encroaching upon the naive army of Tibet many decades ago is now set against an intangible territory of the internet, the World Wide Web, the social network, the digital terrain. Reiterating the importance of the digital domain, Erl remarks, “digital archives, such as YouTube and Google Books, and social networks, such as Facebook, are participatory, communicative and inclusive.”⁴⁴ The LTWA has succeeded immensely in this effort of showcasing Tibet which had otherwise been much obscured by mystery, mysticism, and geography. The LTWA, therefore, is not simply reposed with what the Tibetans had but also with what they ‘have’. It is the interception of the loss of a civilisation.

Subversion in Memory Citizenship

In choosing to have one common leader of their community, the Tibetans have subverted their memory of pre-exile Tibet into a political tool. It would, perhaps, be not wrong to argue that the LTWA can equally be perceived as a political mouthpiece because the LTWA reflects the choices of remembering, and, therefore, the politics of memory. It has ‘shaped’ the visitor or the tourist – the outsider – in “shaping the way people

around the world think about [Tibet's] past."⁴⁵ John Urry, the noted British sociologist, in theorising the "tourist gaze," contends that this gaze is 'different' from that of the everyday.⁴⁶ Behind the witnessed items of "interest and curiosity" is a "socially organised and systematised"⁴⁷ construction of the gaze which negotiates meaning-making. The tourist or the visitor to the LTWA gazes upon such a manifestation of memorialisation and reality of the Tibetans. The LTWA is a central place for information about the Tibetans in exile, and its sales section enables the tourist to carry a souvenir home, to the corners of the world, perpetuating in mind, memory, and matter the Tibetan culture and history. By the visit, the tourist is equally a participant in the enactment of cultural memory, and perhaps, in some forms of commodification and consumerism. As Pramod K. Nayar explains in his *Reading Culture: Theory, Praxis, Politics*,⁴⁸ the physical structure, the display techniques, the organisation, the modes of viewing, the discursive setting of the museum, all build into the viewing of the visitor and the experience. Therefore, this discursive narrative constitutes the inherent power over the visitor, and so its politics.

As a heritage site, the LTWA also does not seem to escape the manipulations of consumption. "In today's practice of cultural memory, heritage and (restorative) nostalgia tend to be performed through tourism."⁴⁹ Tourists constitute a considerable number of visitors to the LTWA and they witness a culture which has been set into relief by the narrative of being on the brink of extinction and, therefore, endangered or exotic. Therefore, it is an appeal to the world for attention. Calling the Memory Studies approach to culture an "excellent strategy," Erll quotes memory theorist Aleida Assmann who points out that it "make[s] visible new connections where previously only disparate elements could be seen."⁵⁰ This is precisely why a cultural memory approach is required to understand the role of LTWA in the entire Tibetan issue and contemporary geopolitics. The LTWA has its targeted responses to achieve in the wider politics vis-à-vis the reclamation of its identity and homeland.

The LTWA is, therefore, a 'construct' and in being so, it has to be wary of one single process in this solemn

responsibility of protecting, preserving, perpetuating Tibet, its people, and the diaspora. Ironically, this is as inextricable as the two sides of the same coin. No memory is possible without mediation. Erll aptly refers to Marshall McLuhan's well-known phrase, "the medium is the message."⁵¹ The LTWA has taken of necessity recourse to the media of the written, the audio, and the visual with their accompanying tools and technologies. Comparing media to memory, Erll points out in what happens to be an eye-opener, a caution, a reflection: *"[...] just like memory, media do not simply reflect reality, but instead offer constructions of the past. Media are not simply neutral carriers of information about the past. What they appear to encode – versions of past events and persons, cultural values and norms, concepts of collective identity – they are in fact first creating. In addition, specific modes of remembering are closely linked to available media technologies."*⁵²

Further, "memories can be hegemonic where some experiences of the past are less remembered (or not at all) and others constantly remembered".⁵³ A structured but nuanced power dynamics will not pave the way for an egalitarian society. If there is a certain hegemony of ideologies, then that needs self-reflection. The secular and the religious order – each has equal claims over the Tibetan culture and memory. Each has equal responsibilities.

What must not be lost sight of is that it is the socio-cultural construct of the exile that has brought about the existence of the LTWA. Therefore, the apparently peripheral issues of 'necessity' and 'invention' are not to be ignored, while appreciating the heritage of the LTWA. What may be necessary must be integral to the source and root. The implications of assimilation in the hostland culture may not be apparent but the fact of being in a hostland has definitely its ramifications on a migrant culture. The LTWA has travelled many thousand miles of space and time, metaphorically speaking, and has re-established on very firm ground the long-ago made connections with India, its hostland for another significant reason – it was from India that Buddhism had 'travelled' to Tibet. For the decades to come, in author Dzogchen Ponlop's contention, there may be a message to the LTWA. In his classic contemporary presentation of the Buddha's teachings,

Rebel Buddha: A Guide to a Revolution of Mind, Ponlop Rinpoche speaks about how the “message and power” of newness loses its novelty and becomes a platitude when the “heart connection to anything” is lost. He maintains:

*“[...] throughout the ages, Buddhism has had a history of revolution and renewal, of testing and challenging itself. If the tradition is not bringing awakening and freedom to those who practice it, then it is not being true to its philosophy or living up to its potential. There is no inherent awakening power in cultural forms that have become dissociated from the wisdom and practicality that gave birth to them.”*⁵⁴

Perhaps, here is another narrative that can be read of Tibet, its people, and culture. The LTWA should always keep ‘the heart connection’ in sight – and not get lost in the ever-increasing memorialising technologies of the media and postmodernity. The Tibetan community’s meditation on Buddhist philosophy has often been a path to many a seeker towards enlightenment. This is possibly their ‘heart connection’ buttressed by the faith of the Tibetans in their culture. The LTWA should not waver in this at any point in time, whoever heads it – the religious orders or the Tibetan laity.

To this day, the LTWA has been as much about Tibet as it has been about the vision and choices of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, who was for long their political leader and who still prevails as the religious head. But there is, to return to that video tour of the library’s website, another momentary glimpse of those who came following him – the ordinary Tibetans who put in their shovels of labour in building a masonry work of art of memory from their embodied memories. Culture is also in the intricately small trinket of the everyday and the ordinary. Remembering it or not, memorialising it or not is the domain of the politics of memory. The politics of memory is in the ‘naturalisation’ of a constructed narrative, with the structures of its own ‘visibilities’ and ‘erasures’,⁵⁵ remembering and forgetting. It is in the decision of placing the authority on who should remember, and who should do the interpretation of these acts of remembrance. Realpolitik cannot be without, what Nayar terms the “cultures of memory.”⁵⁶ As Nayar avers, “when we participate in the cultural

work of memory making we are also drawn into the structures of recall and hence of belonging,” and the “cultural work of recall” – a very complex contested performance – “individually and collectively generates a memory citizenship.”⁵⁷ This is a very perceptive and powerful insight, not to mention the political connotations that it bears for any memorialising project. The ethics of memory too constitutes in this visibility to all participants and participatory acts. Apparently, the LTWA already has this in place. In enabling the participation of the religious and the secular in memorialising Tibet, the LTWA has made the Tibetan community in exile as well as in Tibet transcend the confinements of a territorial citizenship and have made of them members of a global modern cosmopolitan world. It has linked together the exile, the homeland Tibet, the culture, the diaspora, and the memory of Tibet. For the Tibetan public, the LTWA is a reflection of their reality, their traumatic experiences of Chinese repression, their exile, their loss, their rehabilitation, their dreams, their sorrow, their stocktaking, their fulfilment, and their future. As a result, these stakeholders of a common predicament become the members of a common citizenship. Referring to and explaining the concept of ‘memory citizenship’ as advocated by Michael Rothberg and Yasmin Yildiz, Nayar elucidates: “Performances of memory are also acts of citizenship, acts that are beyond the norms of citizenship and regardless of formal citizenship status.”⁵⁸ The LTWA facilitates a process of ‘the sense of belonging’ for even those Tibetans who have not been able to ‘see’ Tibet or will not be able to be there in their lifetime – and both these inadequacies do not deprive them from claiming their right to the memory and culture of Tibet. The LTWA seems to be performing a memorialisation by being at the helm of a ‘Tibetan memory project,’ just like the Indian Memory Project (IMP),⁵⁹ making the Tibetan diasporic community “migrants to the memories” of a ‘homeland’,⁶⁰ very far away spatially and temporally, and difficult, though not impossible, to ‘access’ for various political consequences. The conception of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives was, thus, a vision of veritable statecraft. It has enabled the transcendence from the circumscription of embodied memories to the more accessible memory citizenship.

Endnotes

1. Claude B. Levenson, *Tenzin Gyatso: The Early Life of the Dalai Lama*, California 2002, p. 135.
2. Pramod K. Nayar, *An Introduction to Cultural Studies*, New Delhi 2016.
3. See for details about the Tibetan need for exile in R. P. Mitra, *Tibetans of Dharamsala in Exile: Negotiations and Survival*, Delhi 2017; Mallica Mishra, *Tibetan Refugees in India: Education, Culture and Growing Up in Exile*, New Delhi 2014; *Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora*, eds. Dagmar Bernstorff and Hubertus von Welck, New Delhi 2004; *Middle Way Policy and All Recent Related Documents*, The Department of Information & International Relations [DIIR], Central Tibetan Administration [CTA], Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamsala 2012.
4. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 6.
5. Gyaltzen Gyaltag, *Exiled Tibetans in Europe and North America*, in: *Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora*, eds. Dagmar Bernstorff and Hubertus von Welck, New Delhi 2004, p.244-265.
6. Gyaltag 2004, *Exiled Tibetans*, p. 244.
7. Extensive description of the exile and its consequences can be found in Bernstorff and von Welck 2004, *Exile as Challenge*.
8. Bernstorff and von Welck 2004, *Exile as Challenge*, Introduction.
9. Gyaltag 2004, *Exiled Tibetans*, p. 244.
10. *Introduction to Central Tibetan Administration*, Department of Information and International Relations [DIIR], Dharamsala 2015, p. 10-11.
11. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 51.
12. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 51.
13. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 51.
14. For the full text, <http://tibetanlibrary.org/>, 13-10-2018.
15. Dagmar Bernstorff, *Vibrant Arts*, in: *Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora*, eds. Dagmar Bernstorff and Hubertus von Welck, New Delhi 2004, p. 295-311.
16. Qtd. in Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, London 2011, Kindle edition, p. 24.
17. Erll 2011, *Memory in Culture*, p. 8.
18. Qtd. in Erll 2011, *Memory in Culture*, p. 26.
19. <http://tibetanlibrary.org/>, 13-10-2018.
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27. Erll 2011, *Memory in Culture*, p. 17.
28. *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, eds. László Munteán, Liedeke Plate, and Anneke Smelik, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies, New York and London 2017, Kindle edition, p. 15.
29. *Materializing Memory*, eds. Munteán et al., 2017, p. 6.
30. Here, I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to – Mr Hari Kumar, GeoHazards Society, India for his letter of introduction to the Director, LTWA, to facilitate my visit to the LTWA; Ven. Geshe Lhakdor, Director, LTWA for permitting me to visit the LTWA; Mr Tenzin Lhawang, Deputy Director, LTWA, for enabling my stay on campus; Mr Phurbu Tsering, Mr Choedar, and Mr Yeshe Tashi – all staff of the LTWA and who helped me in getting some initial but invaluable foothold in understanding the Tibetan culture, identity, and its people.
31. Nayar 2016, *Introduction*, p. 178.
32. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 39.
33. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 76.
34. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 100.
35. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 51.
36. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 60.
37. Melvyn Goldstein, William Siebenschuh, and Tashi Tsering, *The Struggle for Modern Tibet: The Autobiography of Tashi Tsering*, Dharamsala 2011.
38. *Exile as Challenge*, eds. Bernstorff and von Welck, 2004, Foreword.
39. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 79.
40. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 103-104.
41. Mitra 2017, *Tibetans of Dharamsala*, p. 131.
42. It says "that the genuine autonomy sought by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the CTA for the Tibetan people is based on the framework of the Chinese constitution and the LRNA [Law on Regional National Autonomy]" (*Tibet was not Part of China but Middle Way Remains a Viable Solution: Central Tibetan Administration's Response to China's White Paper on Tibet*, DIIR 2015, p.16).
43. The Middle Way does not seek independent rule for Tibet but also does not accept the current exploitation and usurpation by the People's Republic of China of Tibet's cultural and natural resources. It seeks a coming together of the entire Tibetan nationality under one autonomous administration, and the protection and preservation of their identity and cultural heritage in their delicate and unique environment on the Tibetan plateau. For this, eleven basic needs of the Tibetans have been listed which are well within the framework of the LRNA – language, culture, religion, education, environmental protection, utilisation of natural resources, economic development and trade, public health, public security, regulation on population migration, and cultural, educational and religious exchanges with other countries (*Middle Way Policy and All Recent Documents*, DIIR 2012). These can only be safeguarded by meaningful autonomy in the Tibetan autonomous areas, as designated currently by the People's Republic of China.
44. Erll 2011, *Memory in Culture*, p. 44.
45. Erll 2011, *Memory in Culture*, p. 5.
46. John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, London 2011.
47. Urry and Larsen 2011, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 2.
48. Pramod K. Nayar, *Reading Culture: Theory, Praxis, Politics*, New Delhi 2006.
49. Erll 2011, *Memory in Culture*, p. 52.
50. Erll 2011, *Memory in Culture*, p. 6.
51. Erll 2011, *Memory in Culture*, p. 115.
52. Erll 2011, *Memory in Culture*, p. 114.
53. Nayar 2016, *Introduction*, p. 180.
54. Dzogchen Ponlop, *Rebel Buddha: A Guide to a Revolution of Mind*, Boston 2011, p. 7.
55. Nayar 2016, *Introduction*, p. 199-201.
56. Nayar 2016, *Introduction*, p. 177.
57. Nayar 2016, *Introduction*, p. 194.
58. Nayar 2016, *Introduction*, p. 193.
59. Nayar 2016, *Introduction*, p. 180-204.
60. Nayar 2016, *Introduction*, p. 191.

Picture Credits

Fig. 1 LTWA Photo-Archive

Fig. 2 Author, LTWA 06-26 July 2016

Summary

This study proposes to examine the politics of memory, diaspora, and the Tibetan Movement as articulated in

the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA), Dharamsala (India) – a symbol of defiance in refuge. Investigating the diasporic reclamation of identity of the Tibetans in exile, a Cultural Memory Studies framework unveils a nuanced yet structured power dynamics in the institution of a library archiving the history, language and culture of a homeland now usurped by imperial dominance. The LTWA is a performative actor of cultural memory. In its valorisation of primarily the religious, it invites participation of the secular as visitor, witness and ritual practice, overlapping boundaries of ideology, hegemony, culture, and consumption. It becomes an agency to sustain the cause of the Tibetan Movement for a lost homeland, becoming a collecting entity of the literary, socio-cultural, and political.

The imposing structure and design of LTWA set against the towering mountains that separate India from Tibet, and its distinct array of colours, resembling that found commonly in Tibet, call for attention to the message it evokes – a presence which cannot be overlooked. Its material reality is at once surpassed by its ambivalent intangibility – an assertion as well as a resistance. It beckons not to an unproblematic past and sends a cautionary warning to the outsider – cultural identity is not alienation but a process of exchange. Citizenship is not always a given; it is susceptible to the vicissitudes of circumstances. What seems like an apolitical archive and display is a fraught space very much a cynosure of the geopolitics of today. Alternative narratives are set into relief in the construct of the LTWA. Tourism, consumerism, commodification, and exoticisation are integral parts of the LTWA even as it stands testimony to the preservation of a culture unique to the world.

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