

# UNRAVELING THE TIBETAN CULTURAL IDENTITY COMPLEX IN DIASPORA: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

*Complexes have established an essential place in an individual's struggle. It manifests in our becoming and construction of the self and identity. Complexes form the inner landscape that man strives to come to terms with. It is an exciting moment to witness the traditional Buddhist community face modernity from outside and demands for reforms from inside. This paper is an attempt to understand the cultural complex of identity from the perspective of the Tibetan refugees who live with the dream of freedom.*

**Keywords:** Complexes, Identity, Community and Freedom

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## INTRODUCTION

I have chosen a poem written by a Tibetan poet, who beautifully narrates the notion of being far away from one's homeland. Banishment is a short poem, which captivates the reader, and the listener to read and to listen beyond what has been written and what has been said. There is a deeper underlying message relayed to the audience about the collective experience of being a refugee in a foreign land.

Identity forms a crucial axis, which engulfs the gestalt feeling of belonging. For the Tibetans and many other refugees this axis becomes the very source of one's complex. Identity in this case is a complex, which becomes the core experience with which one would then interact and relate to the rest of the world. With this complex it definitely is a struggle that the community as a whole experience this collective dilemma of the self. The self who has no home to return to forms the basis of the existential crisis that the Tibetan community experience.

## BANISHMENT: BY BHUCHUNG D SONAM

1. Away from home
2. I live in my thirty-sixth rented room
3. With a trapped bee and a three-legged spider
4. Spider crawls on the wall and I on the floor
5. Bee bangs at the window and I on the table
6. Often we stare at each other
7. Sharing our pool of loneliness
8. They paint the wall with droppings and web
9. I give them isolated words
10. net, maze, tangle
11. wings, buzz, flutter
  
12. Away from home

13. My minutes are hours
14. Spider travels from the window to the ceiling
15. Bee flies from the window to the bin
16. I stare out of the window
17. Neither speaks each other's tongue
  
18. I wish you would go deaf
19. Before my silence

### **HYPOTHETICAL INTERPRETATION**

The poem is taken from the book, 'Under the blue skies. It is a collection of stories and wisdom experiences of the Tibetan poets and storytellers in exile. I am a third generation Tibetan myself and my experience of reading the book has been more of a journey which has taken me deep within. The poems and the stories in the book gravely point towards the notion of complexes that Carl Jung emphasized on. One cannot be free of the territories of the complexes. The psyche is on a constant path in the struggle towards living and surviving.

According to James Hollis, "we have complexes because we have a history". If I were to reflect and deconstruct the history of my people, it definitely brings out the sequence of historical events, which have lead to instilling the complex that we as a nation in exile experience unanimously. This paper is an attempt to uncover and understand the complex that the Tibetans experience related to the struggle for identity. Not just the identity of belonging to a physical nation but the identity, which a home provides to the inner self.

The poet begins with the notion of being "far away" (1). Far away is an indication of not being home, not being connected with ones inner self. Home in essence is the space of self-expression, of warmth, comfort and safety. Being far away from home provides us with the sense of disconnection not just with the physical space but also with the inner self. The poet has lived at many places and the present house is his "thirty-sixth rented room" (2). The notion of the room being rented gives us the picture of temporariness. The gypsy life that he has been living gives us the picture of the Tibetans in exile. Home is far and Tibet is where home is. However in far off foreign lands one has to struggle to form one's identity. The history of Tibet and its annexation has reformed the way Tibetans in diaspora view their identity. It has developed into a complex because of the multiple identities and different tongues that Tibetans have to associate themselves with. I view it as a boon, however the complex of not having a motherland and being associated as a refuge is not an easy struggle.

Identity complex gives rise to psychological triggers, which when activated under various life situations it leaves the individual incapable to cope with life's demands. The bee and the spider in the poem symbolize the life of the refugees. The bees are one of the most industrious insects, which represent the Great Mother. This feminine symbol, represent healing and alchemy, transforming nectar into golden honey. They are extremely busy and constantly at work building their hives and creating their monarchical structure of governance, ruled by their queen. The governance of kingly figures ruled Tibet for the longest time until the Dalai Lama lineage began. The entire Tibetan population in diaspora holds the office and teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama as the central locus of authority.

The bees represent order. The poet places the bee in the poem from the perspective of the Tibetans as the lost bee, wherein the bee keeps banging on the window and him on the table (5). This line reflects inner feelings of frustration. The bee that is trying to come inside his home through the window seems lost. The poet is narrating his own inner dynamics through the actions of the bee, wherein he is not able to create his own structure, his order, and his home.

'Spider crawls on the wall and I on the floor', this line of the poem expresses the drastic differentiation and also the similarity the poet sees between him and the spider. The spider is also symbolic of the Great mother. She in her terrible aspect is the weaver of destiny. She is the weaver of fate and the creator who spins the thread of life from its own substance. She weaves the pattern of her world. The Tibetans in exile far away from their homeland have to weave their own pattern of their world, webbing their home wherever they go.

The need to belong to a place is intrinsic in our psyche. This is also an attachment that we build towards a place to solidify the notion of our identity. However for the exiled this very absence of attachment to a physical land is the root of the identity complex. Buddhism expounds on the concept of detachment. The teachings of the Buddha when looked into it deeper does address to the rectification of the very complex that the exiled Tibetans experience. However much of what we identify as complex remains deeply seated in our unconscious, the reason for which to address the rectification becomes even more tedious a task. I believe it is not impossible, it just requires our time and effort to delve deeper to understand our inner dynamics of our complexes.

Tibetans in diaspora speak more than two languages and are identified with more than just being a Tibetan. The feeling of just belonging completely to one land remains a dream.

According to Gabore Mate there is no healthy identification. Identity comes from the Latin word *identitas* or 'sameness'. Identification therefore, comes from the Latin word *Idem* which means 'same' and *facere* 'to make'. The moment we identify ourselves with a state or a nation we are limiting ourselves outside our individuality because we are narrowing down to the same identity that we have in common. This is sameness and what we make of it is the very complex that we as the exiled community experience. Today we have a number of Tibetans who are expressing their complex need to belong through art and literature. Their voices represent the many Tibetans lives and dreams of living in their dream motherland. This poem is just one of the many voices which express the identity complex of the exiled Tibetans living far away.

## CONCLUSION

Identity as a complex has always been an intense topic to indulge into. It not only has psychological affects and implications but also other aspects of the Bio-psycho-socio model. The Tibetans all over the world who have been living in diaspora live with the hope of reuniting with their motherland. This unification and the notion of "going back home", has psychological implications which the poet has exemplified beautifully in his poem. Identity forms the basic psychological unit of existence, just as Abraham Maslow describes in his hierarchy of needs. The need to belong and the need to feel safe and secure are existential needs, which define our very root of our complexes. Carl Jung also emphasizes on the notion of identity as the core understanding to the archetype of the self.

## REFERENCES

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