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Interrogating Identities with Respect to Home in Vikram Seth's From Heaven Lake

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Abstract

This paper attempts to examine migration in context of globalization and the twenty-first century dynamics between the global and the local and/or vice-versa. Apart from economic migrations, a huge section of migrated individuals travel across national boundaries for the purpose of education. Migration, in turn, has often been studied in close reference to labour, economy, and diaspora literatures, which looks back with nostalgia toward one's land of origin. My paper, on the contrary, would like to study migration through the lens of travel with regard to Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake*, wherein he physically returns back India via China, Tibet, and Nepal.

In the process, he acknowledges his journey as a phenomenon that redefines the concept of home altogether. Through the experiences of being physically absent from the country of origin, followed by revisiting the same, he imbibes socio-political, cultural experiences that are constantly examined and compared against the memories that he have had. In doing so, it narrates a cosmopolitan understanding of home and homeland that migration enables. Additionally, Vikram Seth, who is Indian by birth, interrogates his identity from his own respective associations. However, it is essential to note that his associations are not merely associated with a nation; it is at times more specific and localized. The purpose of my essay is to explore the importance of the experiences of being geographically situated and the relationship that the notion of familiarity shares with the concept of home and the country of origin.

Key Words - Vikram Seth, Indian diaspora, diaspora writers, Heaven Lake, migration

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R.C. Dutt on his maiden voyage to Europe apprehended the unfamiliar, questioning:

“... shall we come back to our country, impoverished, socially cut off from our countrymen, and disappointed in hopes, to face the reproaches of advisers and the regrets of our friends?” (2)

The pithy interrogation by Dutt subtly highlights the expectations that a traveler or a travel narrative is supposed to perform. Simultaneously, in repeating the personal pronoun thrice, in questioning the transformations that travel experiences bring about, he makes a clear distinction. The “our”-ness appears to be a deliberate attempt of unifying the vast section of Indian population against the backdrop of a European society. Such a clear distinction unravels a notion of familiarity that is attached to one's place of origin against that of an unfamiliar society and/or country. Dutt in seeking acceptance back into the space that he had left claims the impossibility to remain the same individual that he had been before his experience in a foreign land. Consequently, most travel narratives in this context seek to explicate national, socio-cultural evolution of identities. In the process, travel narratives shed light upon the concept of home by comparing and contrasting the travellers' understanding of the known space against that of the unfamiliar. Vikram Seth's travelogue *From Heaven Lake* juxtaposes the familiar against unfamiliar, thereby exploring the narrator's identity and outlining his perception of home. In seeking to assess one's identity somewhere between the known and the unknown paradigms, the text poses a challenge to such clear distinctions between home and abroad, as had been espoused in Dutt's narrative, and which find reflections in numerous exile and diaspora writings. *From Heaven Lake*

is composed of Seth's hitch hiking experiences across China to Tibet via Nepal to India, during the course of a summer vacation.

My choice of the text stems from the fact that the narrator, who is Indian by birth, seem to interrogate spaces from his own respective associations to home and his country of origin. Enrolled at Stanford University, Seth visits China on a student exchange programme and was on a homeward trip, as he mentions in the text, after a period of three years. Though Seth was an international migrant during the travels and had later come back to India, albeit not permanently, his narrative territorializes the grey zone between exile literature, return narratives and diaspora writings. Seth's introduction, “I am an Indian, and lived in China as a student. . . I returned home to Delhi via Tibet and Nepal” though uses India and home interchangeably, his narrative interrogates the same and layers them with multiple nuances.

For Seth, nationality and the notion of familiarity are hardly coterminous. However, the case becomes problematic when the shift across national boundaries represents a shift in socio-cultural ethos. On the one hand, Seth's *From Heaven Lake* is a piece of travel narrative, which, apart from positing the latter's experiences in China, Tibet and Nepal, constantly reviews his experiences against those that he grew up in, that of India. On the other, Seth's repetitive use of the word home, throughout the text in context to his experiences in varied nation states, brings to light the dissonance between nation and home. My essay interrogates the notion of familiarity, and more specifically that of home, that travel writers have constantly associated with their country of origin, through the lens of Seth's text. Is home always equable with a singular familiar space, the country of one's origin? Or, are all familiar spaces homes? The purpose of my essay is to explore the relationship between the notion of familiarity and belongingness that

is attached with the concept of home and homeland.

Re-interrogating the Other

Travel narratives have often been categorized as a colonial tool to depict the Other which later stands appropriated by postcolonial writings. Carl Thompson articulates, “[t]he ideological dimensions of travel writing, and the larger rhetorical purposes served by the frequent tendency of travel writers to depict other groups and cultures in a hostile or condescending way, are topics that have been much addressed in the recent wave of travel writing studies” (134). Thompson’s ideological dimensions, within the rubric of colonial discourse, are reflective of political hierarchy that the narratives once contributed toward a colonial discourse. In describing the Other what the discourses aimed at was the attempt to de-familiarize the colonial territories. The postcolonial counter-narratives engage in re-fashioning the genre “by exploring viewpoints, histories and cross-cultural connections that have often been overlooked or suppressed” (Thompson 165). My argument, herein, with reference to *From Heaven Lake*, is that the text intentionally intervenes in the process of Othering by ceasing to de-familiarize spaces. In accommodating numerous spaces within the term home, Seth contextualizes his text as a cosmopolitan triumph over several earlier texts in the genre. However, Seth’s cosmopolitanism is not a defiance of national, local or social specificities. It rather operates as a lens to understand the differences of the varied societies and nations he embarks upon along with a happy embracing of similarities. In the process, he exposes the multiple layers of treatment, formal, social and cultural, meted out to him at the places he visited. Interestingly, the text almost begins with the strict imposition of Han regulations upon the populace and the visitors in China: as Seth observes, one of the most frequently used phrase in China is “[g]uiding shi guiding” (78), which translates as “regulations are regulations” (78). Yet again, paradoxically, the Chinese locals play humble guests inviting foreigners at their residence even at the risk of official penalty. A particular incident herein stands to be quite relevant. While hitch-hiking to Lhasa, Seth happened to halt at Germu, a place not mentioned in his travel pass, and his explanation of crossing through the place fell flat upon the Chinese official. However, a chance popping out of his family photo from his wallet, when asked to produce his passport, drew an amicable smile from the former. Seth in describing the change

quotes, “[h]is whole attitude changes. ‘It’s a very nice photograph. You’re going home for the holidays?’” (79). On the part of the Chinese official the fact that Mr. Xie (Seth’s Chinese name in which he had been asked to introduce himself), like himself, is part of a family and has been away from it engenders familiarity. Such obvious shift in attitude, something that Seth often came across in China, reveal the multiplicity of roles that individuals perform. On a sudden, fortunate prompting, the officer sheds his mask of a strict national representative and reveals to Seth his familial self, who shares similar sentiments about family and in turn homeward return. In wishing Mr. Xie “a good journey” (79) he reveals his personal longing for home, being put at a distance from the same owing to his official duty and thus sharing with the narrator a similar notion of home; where home is informed with one’s attachment to the family. Moreover, it could have had been the official’s penchant for returning to his family that stuck an immediate cause with the traveller or his assessment of one who despite their differences over national affairs share a similar sentiment that prioritizes the familial over national. Whichever the case maybe, to the official, home is clearly prioritized at the time when he had to exercise a choice. This reciprocally considers the question of identity in relationship to the discourse on the other within the broader postcolonial context of the emergence of nation states. In mitigating between the national and the familial identities, the text intervenes into the discourse of the Other, the unfamiliar and emphasizes upon the fluidity of identity.

Among the Other Homes

Significantly, Seth makes a poignant remark about one’s outlook upon a place, claiming that it is “only partly determined by the greatness of its history, or the magnificence of its scenery. When I think of China, I think first of my friends and only then of Qin Shi Huang’s tomb” (36). Quite expectedly, Seth’s relationship with spaces has much to do with his intra- personal relationships with people around; which is why it is so important to focus upon the inter- personal relationships he forges in the course of his travel. Not only will such a reading of the text help us analyze the levels of intimacy he forms in China, through Sinking and Tibet, but also such a study would explore upon his understanding of home, since for him home stands to represent a deep level of bonding rather than

a mere geographic entity. In this context it is rather interesting to note that his interactions with the Tibetan populace and the Uighurs are explicitly elaborated, while the only sustained interaction that he engages with the Chinese, specifically the Han Chinese, is with the police official who signs his permit to visit Lhasa. Moreover, the travelogue in explicating the Uighur community prevails upon the implication of language and linguistic policies adopted by the nation-state as far as a feeling of attachment or alienation is concerned. The Chinese policy of exchanging the Arabic script for Latin followed by reversal of the same after a generation's gap, poses some very pertinent questions. Should not the fact that successive generations fail to communicate in written hinders cultural growth? If homeland and home are correlated, is it essential to communicate in a shared language since language is often an important marker of a nation? Does the Chinese policy of interrupting written communication between generations of a particular community create a sense of inter-racial and intra-racial alienation? Seth's constant criticism of Chinese policies, especially those meant for foreigners, already highlights to an extent a personal bias that he holds against the political stand point. However, his descriptions of personal interactions with the population readily imply the distinct difference in the attitudes of common people against that of the official policies towards foreigners. Through the course of the narrative there seems to be a relaxation of the official regulations as Seth familiarizes himself with the Chinese officials, though the rules towards foreigners have hardly been modified for a very long period of time.

In a similar vein, Seth's description of his interactions with another Chinese official, who surprisingly signed his permit to hitch-hike, making the former's almost impossible dream come true, arguably too stands on biased ground. His bias stems from a cultural familiarity that he shares with Seth as is revealed in their discussion of a Bollywood movie. "... We take a lot of interest in Lita and Laz. (Raj Kapoor, the director and leading actor.) Laz, it said in the magazine, is a big capitalist in real life, and has his own film company.' He says this with evident approval. Everyone I have ever talked to in China approves of Raj Kapoor" (14). The independence of political thought seems quite permissible in the evolving society that find reflection in such official encounters and understandably resonate with

Seth's notion of political familiarity. Interestingly, such a shift apart from the existence of friends and acquaintances that this paper has previously alluded, puts him at ease in many situations. Further, his performance of the theme song of *Awara* (translated as *The Wanderer*) unexpectedly kindles cultural familiarity with the Chinese populace. Such a curious association breaks the ice between Seth and the Chinese officials, enabling him to obtain permits for hitch-hiking to Lhasa and other places on the way, despite the fact that foreigners are hardly permitted to do so. Yet, it is this disjunction between the reality of obtaining pass and the previously held understanding that he would surely be rejected that a notion of defamiliarization emerges. Seth was sure to return from the police station without his papers signed but for a coincidental turning up of a friend of the officer who was present in the musical gathering at the guest house he put up at. The instance led to an animated conversation with the young Chinese official at length, "its artistic merits and social significance" (14). *Awara*, a 1951 Bollywood release, is based upon the story of a tramp, in the fashion of Chaplin, who seeks his socio-political identity. The cultural association can be traced to the fact that Chinese youth in the wake of a period post-Cultural Revolution experienced a similar search for socio-political identity, and it was an undergoing process that was once quite strictly limited by Maoism. This intervention into the approach of distinct notions of identity; social, cultural, political, is the familiar space that binds Seth and his Chinese counterparts. No wonder, such an extent of socio-cultural, political familiarity against the backdrop of the unfriendly national policies, "comes as a shock" (11) to him, as he claims that the Chinese streets kept him "transported back to both India and childhood", on hearing the song being "hummed on the streets of Nanjing" (11).

With an ironical turn of phrase Seth performs his musical outpourings, "No family, no world have I/ And nobody's love..." curtly followed by his own exhilaration, "I sing happily" (11). In revisiting the very ideas of family, a space where similar-minded people co-exist, share common childhood experiences, or, a space where differences are respectably accepted, Seth finds for himself a niche, a home, in China among whom he shares the sense of sharing a familiar space and feels comprehended and thereby familiar. Yet, the dire possibility of coming across such a situation against the

odds that he experienced as a foreigner, in all the sense of the term, sheds a light of disbelief, and hence, unfamiliar simultaneously; and thus the shock. The very notion of homeliness for Seth is thereby provisioned by a media-introduced rupture of cultural experiences as much as, for the Chinese, since their homely experiences stand equally intervened by media. Recounting upon the modern concept of an evolving society and home, David Morley in his text *Home Territories: Media Mobility and Identity* writes, “[t]he modern home can be said to be a phantasmagoric place, to the extent that electronic media of various kinds allow the radical intrusion of distant events into the space of domesticity” (9). Home, as Morley defines, is not simply an orthodox setup of value-systems or a domestic space distinctly bound by interpersonal relationships among family members. It goes beyond that to reconstitute itself in the image of thousands of scattered signals that modern day media ushers us in. Home for Morley is more a mental association to an image rather than a strict physical entity. Seth’s imaginary revisiting of his home, as he sympathizes with the dislocated Chinese official at Germu, is often a shared nostalgia for a domestic space. Quite in contrary to Morley’s definition wherein home constitutes of one’s domestic circle apart from the external virtual interventions, Seth’s perception of home as a shared nostalgia within any society translates the virtual into real. The narrator in the process embraces a cosmopolitanism, which can be understood in terms of one’s fluidity of identity. Thereby, though returning to Nanjing had for him “the flavor of a minor homecoming: my room, my friends, familiar sights” (32), his final curt expression at the customs checkout at Delhi airport reveals a sense of completion, “I am home in half an hour” (178). Nostalgia and the attached familiarization recreated a home space in the image of his past and likewise his memories and the present experiences interweave to accommodate familiarity or homeliness.

Understanding the Local within the Global in Accommodating a National Identity

The narrative as a homebound journey, through unexpected twists and turns, opens up varied perspectives on nations and its impact upon domestic spaces. While doing so, Seth distinguishes between national and local identity. If the close-knit communities as described by Seth can be earmarked as local, the transitions of the society as a larger space can broadly be understood to be

intertwined with the nation. Such multiplicities of identity go further in redefining home altogether. Moreover, the narrator’s experience of past travels already problematizes his socio-cultural identity. Seth’s two years stay at Stanford, for his education before being enrolled in Nanjing University as a researcher, followed by a year’s stay therein add to his experiences. Thus though his friend wonders on his choice of a Californian red wine on the last supper at Nanjing, he finds it worthwhile enough as it produces a nostalgia for “the Golden State” (34). Continuing the thread of thought, he writes: “Increasingly of late, and particularly when I drink, I find my thoughts drawn into past rather than impelled into the future. I recall drinking sherry in California and dreaming of my earlier student days in England, where I ate dalmoth and dreamed of Delhi” (35).

As often observed, nostalgia is a persistent experience that dominates diaspora and migration writings. With reference to home and nostalgia, Svetlana Boym speaks of two categories; Restorative and Reflective nostalgia. However, Seth in his text creates a separate definition for the term with reference to home. Through the narrative, Seth comprehends nostalgia as being an extremely personal space of interaction with the global community in an era of globalization that both acknowledges and revels in differences. This paper thus examines the differences in terms of the idea of associating home with particular experiences, mostly physical in nature like familiar sights, sounds; which defines the uniqueness of home, thereby defining home as a personal space and in comparison to other local and/or global communities. As ubiquitous experience, nostalgia relates to the shared commonalities experienced in the present and is inevitably related to past experiences of any local, social and national being, in the process, constantly rupturing the temporal and the spatial frames like local/global boundaries. Therefore, his Californian self identifies with his earlier phase of education in England where he once wished to revisit his Delhi days. It is interesting to note that his recollections are aligned around food, a specific physical experience, and though they might be essentially different in nature evoke similar longings. Further, Seth accommodates the concept of nostalgia as a palliative force that co-relates present to past since all his nostalgic recollections have a bittersweet effect. Nostalgia then is a force that interlinks communities. C. Sedikides writes, “Wildschut et al. (2006) showed that nostalgia is a self-relevant and social emotion: The

self almost invariably figured as the protagonist in the narratives and was almost always surrounded by close others. In all, the canvas of nostalgia is rich, reflecting themes of selfhood, sociality, loss, redemption, and ambivalent, yet mostly positive, affectivity” (305). Consequently, the narrative adopts a cosmopolitan perspective with a strong sense of attachment to what the narrator considers as own, the land of his origin.

As Seth mulls over Chinese society, its economic system, socio-cultural evolutions as a nation-state, he makes it a point to compare them with that of India: “When I first went to China I was far more blindly enthusiastic about its achievements than I am now. I now see China’s achievements as solid but have serious drawbacks: and that is about all that can be said about India’s, too” (106). Seth herein simply ventures to analyze the economic and national reforms and is yet vaguely suggestive, “[b]ut the Indian achievement of the last thirty years has been in a different, more nebulous, and in a sense more difficult direction” (105). However, his reinstatement of his national identity herein clearly bifurcates with his cosmopolitan self since the latter invests in recreating homes unlike the former, which the narrator claims to be an accepted idea of unity: “a whole generation of Indians has grown up accepting that an independent and united India is the normal state of affairs” (105). Again, in Nepal, while procuring a ticket for the next day’s flight for Delhi, Seth comes across a flute-seller and meditates upon the various cultural variations of the instrument, simultaneously with the universality that music performs, the “commonality of all mankind”. He further adds:

“That I can be so affected by a few familiar phrases on the bansuri, or by a piece of indigo paper surprises me at first, for on the previous occasions that I have returned home after a long absence abroad, I have hardly noticed such details. . . I think it is the gradualness of my journey that has caused this. With air travel the shock of arrival is more immediate: the family, the country, the climate all strike with simultaneous impact” (177). Home, herein, is hardly a singular geographical entity or can be equated with the land/country of origin. However, for Seth, it is a dislocation from the socio-political, cultural norms, which he comes across, that posits the foreignness of the spaces he visited. Simultaneously, the constant flux of cultural familiarity and dislocation that the narrator experiences, engages him on a conscious cosmopolitan socio-cultural performance of

identities throughout the course of journey which at times seem to be at odds with a fixed national identity. Again, borrowing Morley’s expression again, “. . . it would be a fatal error to conclude that cosmopolitan empathy is replacing national empathy. . . cosmopolitan should be understood as the summation of the national and the local” (6). Looking closer into the case, I would like to argue that cosmopolitanism shares an inherent dichotomy of being at home in the world and a triumphal celebration of the event and yet not quite. Being so, cosmopolitanism can be perceived through a comparative study of diaspora writings since both find associations with nostalgia. Again, Morley’s statement holds true in case of the narrative in as much as it explicitly describes the comfort of homecoming and yet being at ease at several points during the course of his entire journey.

The Socio-Cultural and the Nation-State

Contrarily, the simultaneous unease as a foreigner at the prospect of being under constant vigilance is an apparent contradiction that runs deeper in Seth’s text. It is quite evident in the text that the national, socio-cultural identities are constantly interrogated, via juxtaposition of reality they witness, against the ones they presuppose. While writing of the difficulties of finding a transport from Liuyuan to Lhasa, Seth mentions the help he received from a Tibetan-Chinese official Quzha, who in the process of examining his papers and photograph remarked that he had “grown thinner since [he] came to China” (49). Seth immediately responds with, “I feel I’m among friends” (49). The instance comically reveals the notion of familiarity, which has more to do with certain re-iterated remarks that are specific to certain situations; the conversation transports Seth culturally to his homeland. Further, as Quzha speaks of his experiences as a border soldier in the Sino-Indian war he expresses upon the temporality of national boundaries, “You couldn’t tell where the border was. One day it was here, another day there. We retreated, they occupied, and vice versa. We just did what we were told. I’m glad things have improved in our relations” (50). Quzha’s remark upon the national borders, the fact that his contribution as a soldier being ordered actions against his approval of a better international relations clearly highlight the fact that nation-states stand as systems of power which has hardly anything to do with personal/individual subjects. Yet, strangely, there seems to be numerous instances in the text, including this, wherein

people seem to be particularly interested in Seth due to the fact that he is an Indian. Interestingly, at times, cultural values seem to be attached to the national identity that in turn affects such attitudes. The episode with the cap seller seems to be quite relevant herein. On Seth revealing his identity as an Indian, the cap-seller and his companion were overwhelmed with excitement. He is so moved at Seth being an Indian, “Yindu. Hindustan” (27), that on being offered the price for the cap, he not only declines it but offers to “make the stitching firmer. . . because [he] will be travelling a long way” (28). The events that follow reveal a curious cultural familiarity that is implicit in both their attitudes:

“With a restrained smile, and a faint snort of satisfaction, he stands up to put it back on my head, gently, and adjusts it to the correct angle. He says a few more words, but I am too moved by his kindness to think of asking Hussain for a translation. . . I turn to say ‘salaam aleikum’, knowing that he will understand this” (28).

What is striking is the solemn understanding that a translation would actually fail to add meaning to the conversation. Probably, language falls short to express human compassion existent in all human cultures. It was an instance of familiarity, a deep understanding of a shared culture, which puts him at ease amid a conversation that hardly required any language, so much so, that when he takes leave he knows exactly what to convey and more importantly what would be conveyed to the old man. Seth’s lines from another piece of literature, “Departure Lounge”, a poem from Mappings, beautifully expresses the situation that perhaps rightly define the entire thread of conversation with its varied layers of familiarity, “[w]ell I was blind; but it was dark/ And both of us have moved/ Into a clearer sunlight. I, now/ Certain that I was loved. . .” (10).

Significantly, Seth also elucidates upon his experience when he was asked to perform in the courtyard of his guestroom. It is important to revisit the incident in the light of the dichotomy of the unique cosmopolitan space which Seth recreates and equates with the notion of home. While the Italians sing “revolutionary and feminist songs with their usual raucous aplomb” (11) John Moffet, an “eccentric Englishman. . . sing ‘Ye Banks and Braes of Bonny Doon’”, his choice of song emerges from the fact that the song belongs to “a sentimental Indian movie from 1950s that is astonishingly popular in China” (11). Singing the theme song of Awara is thereby explicitly a cultural enactment of

part Seth, akin to his Italian and English counterparts as foreigners, and yet it stands for something more. That his choice is a conscious act on his part to familiarize himself to that bit of India that is already recognized in China and at the same time reconsidering his claim upon the song, both because he can relate to it nationally, culturally, and via childhood memories imply a duality. He seems to be both at ease and yet is shocked at his unfamiliarity at the song being sung by Chinese. Perhaps, this duality that can be better comprehended with the Freudian turn of phrase of being both at ease and yet not quite, the Unheimlich. Freud in his essay, “The ‘Uncanny’” states that the “imaginative writer has his license among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases” (249). Freud states the connotations of unheimlich as something that signifies both homeliness, in that it is the opposite of heimlich (translates as homely), and yet bizarre and unfamiliar. Though Freud utilizes the concept as a psychological tool and is appropriated by writers for imaginative descriptions, Seth’s text can be interpreted via a similar lens and his travel experiences can be similarly explored. In traversing through spaces that both seem to be familiar, welcoming and thus homely, they also simultaneously exude their unfamiliarity in strange ways. Thus, Seth is shocked and confounded at times: The musical affair at the guest house, an incident with a cap-seller, his reactions to the music of a flute-seller, all bear relevance to the same. Such an interpretation contextualize the incidents under the broader concept of both re-creating imaginary homes at several spaces and in realizing exactly where they stand to be dissimilar from the image they enliven in his mind. For Seth though, with his constant childhood/nostalgic references and the iterations, it seems that India seems to figure as his homeland. Yet, his understanding of home is infused with varied associations that he accumulated over his period of travel and it is important to note that though his associations with India reflect his idea of home, it is not merely his familiarity with the nation state. In fact, it is local at times than national that mostly appeals him.

The thin distinction that separates the notions of home from homely is the difference that segregates the concepts of mere familiarity and the unheimlich; the second adds an understanding of defamiliarization

along with the familiar. Although the sense of being at home and familiarity to certain spaces can be defined as cosmopolitan experience shared across national, socio-cultural boundaries, the process of defamiliarization that the narrative intervenes with, reveal a hierarchy of significance. Seth argues that though one may find numerous places and situations homely, it is essential to feel at home and retain a rootedness for a particular space in order to define the rest. Seth's description of his intention of visit Tibet contrasted with that of India is then perfectly expressed thus:

"I have always wanted to go to Tibet, yet I know that this is largely due to the glamour surrounding the unknown. About Tibetan religion I know very little. . . I have no Tibetan friends. A picture of Potala, Tibetan dancers seen in Darjeeling, an article or two in newspapers about Dalai Lama, chance remarks made since my childhood: it is of scraps such as these that my idea of Tibet is composed. And in one sense my purpose is not to travel in Tibet, but merely to pass through it: 'coming home', as I write to my parents, 'by a more interesting route'" (33).

Though Seth finds himself at home in California, China and even England as he tours the places he hardly finds Tibet homely, as it lacks the familiar experiences that he forges his identity with. Yet, though the previous spaces mentioned, fail to capture the solidarity that he shares with his home in India, they necessarily transform and are inextricably linked with his comprehension of home and constantly redefine the same. His experiences of travel evoke both the notions of familiarity and the unfamiliar simultaneously and in doing so the narrator re-engages with the perception of home almost interchangeably with the land of origin. Further, it is a sense of rootedness that informs Seth's familiarity with respect to his home in India. Viewed under similar light, his definition of homely while in other spaces is a curious juxtaposition of the familiar against the unheimlich and though they are homely, yet a little removed. Nevertheless, the homely and the home engage in a continuous performance and simultaneously interrogate the identities associated with the respective situations.

Endnotes

(i) Vikram Seth while introducing the text refers briefly

towards his travel plans during his summer tour of China via Tibet to India and introduces the text being based on the journals that he recorded during the course of his undertakings.

(ii) See Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and chap. 6, "Representing the Other" in Thompson's *Travel Writing*. Both discuss upon the process of creating a colonial discourse that the genre travel writing indulged in. Thompson further explores the later postcolonial trend of travel writing that seeks to free the genre of such ideological violence.

(iii) Maoism took a turning point in China with Deng Xiaoping introducing socialist market reforms post Mao's death in 1978, incidentally a year when literary theory celebrated the theory of Othering as mentioned in 1978 publication of *Orientalism* by Said.

(iv) Svetlana Boym identifies Restorative nostalgia as the longing to restore the past through national and religious revival. She argues that it is this tendency that apparently leads to intolerance, violence and conspiracies in the state. Reflective nostalgia, Boym defines, is the longing for home for the sake of longing in itself; it ironically delays physical homecoming.

(v) *Unheimlich* is the German word that is often used to refer to as uncanny. However, my essay uses the term in its literal translation, the unhomey.

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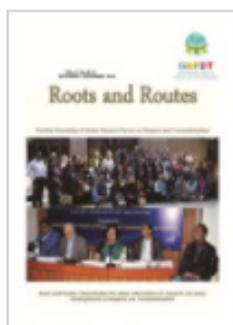
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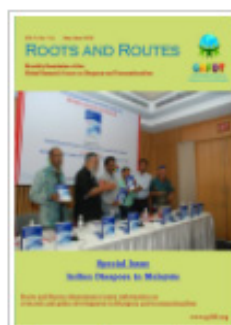
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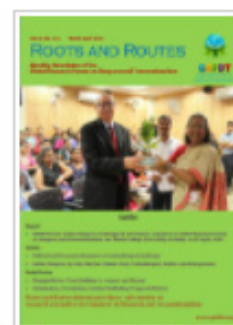
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July-August



May-June 2016



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Roots and Routes is a monthly newsletter of the Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT). It is inclusive of articles, book reviews and news analysis, which help in disseminating latest information on research and policy development in Diaspora and Transnationalism. The newsletter enjoys readership of academicians, policy experts, diaspora think tanks etc.

The regular columns of the newsletter are :

- 1. Article** : consisting of well researched articles of about 3000-4000 words on any aspect of diaspora, migration and transnationalism.
- 2. Short commentaries** : consisting of short write ups of about 1500-2000 words based on opinion, description or explanation of any event or situation related to the above mentioned themes.
- 3. News analysis** : consisting of analyzing current news in about 1000-1500 words
- 4. Book reviews** : 1000-1500 words.

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Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT) is a consortium of researchers and policy makers drawn from national and international universities, institutes and organizations. GRFDT is presently based in India and is shaping as the largest such group focusing specifically on the issues related to diaspora and transnationalism.

The GRFDT works as an academic and policy think tank by engaging national and international experts from academics, practitioners and policy makers in a broad range of areas such as migration policies, transnational linkages of development, human rights, culture, gender to mention a few. In the changing global environment of academic research and policy making, the role of GRFDT will be of immense help to the various stakeholders. Many developing countries cannot afford to miss the opportunity to harness the knowledge revolution of the present era. The engagement of diaspora with various platform need to be reassessed in the present context to engage them in the best possible manner for the development human societies by providing policy in-put at the national and global context.