

Research Question

- How do Tibetan youth refugee negotiate their access to education and employment, and public services in an Indian city like Delhi?
- What has been their intergenerational experience with negotiating access to education, employment, and public services?

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1959 occupation of Tibet by China, more than 100,000 Tibetan refugees were displaced into exile following the Dalai Lama, with most never returning to their homeland. The Tibetan diaspora now lives globally across countries including India, Bhutan, Nepal, USA, Europe, and Australia, etc.

The exile community in India lives across 39 formal settlements and several informal settlements in states like Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Delhi, etc. One such 'spontaneous' informal settlement is the Majnu Ka Tilla, or the New Aruna Nagar Colony in Delhi, which grew to accommodate the refugee influx from Tibet. Unlike some other designated refugee settlements providing livelihood via handicrafts or agriculture, Majnu Ka Tilla refugees have depended on their entrepreneurial spirit for survival, thus leading to the creation of the settlement as a commercial capital for the Tibetan community in exile, as well as serving as a transit point for Tibetan travelers within India.

The government of India has funded special Tibetan schools for provision of free education for Tibetan children, as well as reserved seats in engineering and medical colleges. However, without access to citizenship rights, their freedom of movement outside and within India as well as access to Indian government jobs is limited. Although the exile community has arguably resettled and rehabilitated quite successfully, new challenges for the youth have emerged. These challenges pertain to educated and qualified yet unemployed refugee youth, as well as obstacles in travelling abroad for education or other purposes. Their identity as stateless non-citizens disqualifies them from many job opportunities in India, such as employment in state and central government, although the Special Frontier Force (SFF) is an exception. As jobs under the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) are saturated, majority of the Tibetan youth workforce is unable to get absorbed in it. Unemployed Tibetan youth numbers have risen over the years due to the absence of gainful employment leading to several youth succumbing to drug addiction problems.

On one hand, as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), or the Tibetan government in exile, has maintained a neutral stance on Tibetans opting for Indian citizenship, they haven't encouraged the choice either, usually out of fear of the people's movement out of settlements leading to the dilution of the community's struggle for freedom. On the other hand, second and third generation of Tibetan youth have expressed the advantage of holding legal citizenship in these times when gainful employment opportunities are hard to come by. However, youth born after 1st July 1987 are not eligible for citizenship if their parents (or at least one of their parents) aren't legal citizens either. This deems several

Tibetan youth in India, especially those who had migrated from Tibet and separated from their parents, ineligible for citizenship.

In light of this information and more (further covered under Literature Review), this dissertation proposes to research on the experience of Tibetan youth in India in negotiating access to employment and education in an alien country, with focus on refugee youth in a metropolis like New Delhi. The aspect of intergenerational experience of the youth and their families pertaining to social mobility, in the light of negotiating access to education, employment opportunities and public services, will also be explored.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Majnu Ka Tilla Colony: Land Tenure and Informal Settlement

The New Aruna Nagar Colony, popularly known as Majnu Ka Tilla (MKT) is an informal settlement in North Delhi, which was originally developed to accommodate the exiled refugee community fleeing from Arunachal Pradesh after the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Since MKT was not a planned settlement for Tibetan refugees, kinship and other affective networks played a role in its gradual development. Although the MKT residents were able to access Tibetan rehabilitation welfare benefits like food supplies, land for forming residential space was not officially provided to them. The informal urban settlement of MKT has thus grown over the years like other unauthorized Delhi colonies.

Uptil the 1970s, the exile community believed their stay in India would be temporary and they would soon return to their homeland. Thus, people continued living in makeshift housing

and didn't build permanent structures. However, once the chances of returning looked bleak, people sought to claim the land and build more concrete structures. Despite the lack of formal titles on land, residents of MKT have access to essential services like electricity, water, and sanitation from local authorities. While the colony had limited access to these services since the 1960s, the RWA (Resident Welfare Association) worked towards improving this access throughout the settlement in the 1980s. In the 1990s, while the Ministry of External Affairs did not grant legal land title to MKT residents, it was assured that the existing settlement will not be disturbed by eviction or demolition drives, as it opined that Tibetan refugees should not be displaced yet again.

The settlement was issued a provisional certificate by the Delhi government in 2008 for regularization. Since then the regularization process completion has been awaited by MKT. If the colony is granted regularization status, it could provide leeway to the residents to build structures within the colony and individually claim permanent ownership over land. However, the residents would likely have to forgo their stateless status and attain Indian citizenship in order to gain individual ownership rights.

In Majnu ka Tilla's case, the government made refugees settle there, unlike the cases of other unauthorized colonies in Delhi where people occupied land. As the early refugee settlers were forced to restart their lives from scratch on the banks of the Yamuna, they didn't possess any written documents, thus it was considered an unauthorized settlement. According to Majnu ka Tilla's RWA president Karma Dorjee, the colony became authorized in 2019 under the Pradhan Mantri Unauthorized Colonies in Delhi Awas Adhikar Yojana (PM-UDAY) (Gogoi, 2023).

MKT's unique status as a refugee colony has oftentimes saved it from eviction threats as opposed to other informal settlements in Delhi. The Delhi government acknowledged that the demolition of a refugee colony like MKT is a sensitive issue and could hinder India's long-term commitment to rehabilitation of Tibetans.

With the emergence of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy (2014), officials from the CTA have argued that the prescription to stateless status of the policy's benefits is the best way to prevent any future eviction threats to MKT. Meanwhile, MKT residents contend that the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy (TRP) is not applicable to them due to MKT not being a designated settlement formed on government-leased land. According to a local MKT community leader, the settlement is administered under the Delhi government's jurisdiction and hence not a part of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy process. The community leader further emphasized that MKT had already got the recognition of a to-be-regularized colony on par with other informal colonies by the Delhi government, and hence could no longer be considered a stateless people's settlement. Further provocation of the TRP could potentially downgrade the people's individual claims for permanent ownership to a collective and temporary lease arrangement (*Balasubramaniam, 2020*).

This difference of opinion between the RWA and CTA has created a dilemma where on one hand the RWA prefers MKT to be an exception to the Tibetan rehabilitation process with regard to land, while on the other hand the CTA argues MKT's interests with regard to land tenure issues are best protected under the TRP by retention of their stateless status.

Education

The Central Tibetan Administration's (CTA) Department of Education oversees 73 schools for Tibetans in Nepal and India under different administrative bodies. Tibetan schools are either run under the Central Tibetan Schools Administration (CTSA) under the India government's Ministry of Human Resource Development, or managed by the CTA or charitable organisations such as Tibetan Children's Village (TCV), Sambhota Tibetan Schools Society (STSS), and the Tibetan Homes Foundation (THF). The Central School for Tibetans (CST), formerly administered by the CTSA, are now administered under the STSS.

The CTSA was created in 1961 under the government of India, with the medium of instruction in Tibetan till the primary level, and English at the senior levels. Children arriving from occupied Tibet were not received in Indian government run schools for Tibetans, which were only for Tibetan children born in India. These refugee children are, thus, distributed across CTA-run schools, like the TCVs. The CSTs were handed over to the CTA by 2014.

The Tibetan Children's Village schools (TCVs) are established across seven places, including TCV Lower and Upper Dharamshala, TCV Suja, TCV Bylakuppe, TCV Gopalpur, TCV Patlikuhl, and TCV Ladakh. TCVs welcome Tibetan children from age 0-14 years and are fully residential, free of cost schools with medical and career counselling facilities, and allotting wardens or 'mothers' for younger children to assist them with their early schooling years. CBSE¹ curriculum is followed with NCERT² textbooks, and special Tibetan history and culture textbooks printed by the CTA.

¹ Central Board for Secondary Education

² National Council of Educational Research and Training

The Tibetan Homes Foundation (THF) was established in Mussoorie in 1962, to care for highly vulnerable Tibetan refugee children, most of whom had got orphaned or separated from their parents. The Sambhota Tibetan Schools Society administers 12 schools wherein children even above age 18 can be admitted for learning language skills or vocational courses. These students are usually the ones who had migrated from Tibet at relatively older ages and were not able to attend school.

Employment

Tibetans are engaged in various economic activities including agriculture, health services, education, sweater selling, etc. Lack of citizenship disqualifies them from a number of employment opportunities in India, and the inability of the CTA to absorb majority of educated youth into its administrative functioning renders several educated Tibetan youth unemployed. According to the CTA Planning Commission's Demographic Survey of Tibetans in Exile (2009), more than 17% of Tibetans are underemployed or unemployed in India. According to the CTA survey, a significantly higher number of Tibetan women tend to work in agriculture, health and sweater selling business, while men are more likely than women to be employed in the CTA or charitable organisations (*Bern-Wabern, 2013*).

Tibetans holding a valid Registration Certificate (RC) can retrieve permit from the Reserve Bank of India to acquire property for carrying out economic activities. However, due to this process being cumbersome, Tibetans more often resort to striking informal deals with Indian citizens who pay for the property in their own name and with the understanding of its usage

by the Tibetan. This method, however, does not give the Tibetans any legal protection. Most of the land economically used by Tibetans in Dharamshala has been obtained in this manner.

At times the local level economic prosperity of Tibetans can become a conflict source with the local Indian population. For instance, Anne-Sophie Bentz (2012) writes how Tibetan refugee local business prosperity can upset their local Indian business competitors. In Dharamshala, being the exile home of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tibetan-based tourism tends to widen the inequalities between the two groups of Tibetans and local Indians.

Generational Gap and the Youth

Among the major challenges faced by the Tibetan diasporic community in India is the generational gap within three generations of Tibetans. The first generation were the ones who fled from Tibet to settle in various 'temporary' informal settlements, retain the aspirations of returning to their homeland, and maintain their traditional identity as Tibetan Buddhists. The second generation consists of those who were born and raised in India, are educated with a modern outlook, as well as politically active in the freedom struggle for Tibet. This generation is working hard to stay afloat in the competitive educational and economic environments in their host nations. Finally, the third generation is being raised in a different economic and socio-cultural setting compared to the previous generations. They too hold the nostalgia and collective memory of the Tibetan community's past as passed down by their grandparents, and have grown up on stories of their homeland as heard from

community elders. However, their views on the issue of Tibet vary from that of the previous generations due to the disconnect from living in the past.

One of the major issues plaguing the youth of the community is that of unemployment. The Tibetan exile community has remarkably transformed itself from largely illiterate to a fully literate society. With the increase in the number of graduate degree holders within the community, the CTA has been unable to employ them within their various institutions due to saturation of occupied job posts. The youth have increasing aspirations of occupations suitable to their level of educational qualification and skills, and do not wish to continue running small shops in Tibetan seasonal markets like their parents or grandparents (*Choedon, 2018*).

The CTA initially sought ways to keep the youth within the settlements as leaving in search of jobs was viewed as a disconnection from Tibetan culture and their goal of freedom. However, with the rise of unemployed youth with many of them falling into disarray and succumbing to drug addiction, it was soon realized that there was no option but to move out of the settlements for gainful employment. Tibetan Career Centres have been established by the CTA across India to train young Tibetans in search for employment. However, their stateless status has become a hurdle.

Tibetan youth are disqualified from state and central government jobs in India owing to their stateless status as mentioned before. Furthermore, economic activities carried outside of the Tibetan settlements are faced with insecurity and uncertainty as Tibetans don't hold the rights to own businesses or engage in licensed business activities, nor are they allowed to

buy or own land (*Choedon, 2018*). Due to the ambiguity around their entitlements as refugees, many banks often refuse small loans based on their Registration Certificates (*USAID, 2016*). Opting for Indian citizenship can give them easier access to loans and property ownership, however the community chooses not to give up on their refugee status. Tibetans are unable to get large formal loans due to lack of collateral, and although illegal ‘*benami*’ transactions or power of attorney can be used to own property in India, such instances are rare (*USAID, 2016*).

Issue with Citizenship and Travel

As India is not signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, and also lacks an overarching refugee policy, the Tibetans in the formal sense are not ‘refugees’ and hold no rights as refugees as enshrined in the UN Convention. They are legally handled under the Indian Foreigners Act (1946) and have the legal status of ‘foreigners’ who could be repatriated. Tibetans are however issued with a Registration Certificate (RC) which should be renewed every year in order to prevent refoulement.

India-born Tibetans are eligible to attain RCs after high school graduation. Certain fundamental rights are guaranteed to valid RC holders, such as right to primary education, right to land leasing through the Central Tibetan Relief Committee for 20 years, right to get benefits such as driving licenses and bank loans, right to live in designated Tibetan settlements, preserve and promote Tibetan culture, travel to certain areas and work in certain types of employment (*Seetharaman, 2018*). However, as foreigners they cannot

enjoy certain privileges brought by citizenship, such as travelling without restrictions (internationally or domestically), voting, protesting, deriving benefit from the limited social safety net of India, and engaging in various forms of employment and activities (Seetharaman, 2018).

The Indian government issues an Identity Certificate (IC) instead of a passport to the Tibetans for travelling abroad. They need to apply for an exit permit before leaving the country and apply for a re-entry permit as well to return. However, due to immigration officials at various airports being unfamiliar with such a travel document, many Tibetans have encountered problems including visa rejections.

Due to the practical nature of such problems in getting employment to earn a livelihood and hurdles in travelling abroad on Identity Certificates, the issue of taking up Indian citizenship has gained prominence in recent years within the community, especially among the second and third generation. The Amendment in the Indian Citizenship Act (1986) states that anyone born within Indian territory between January 26th, 1950 and July 1st, 1987 qualifies to be an Indian citizen by birth. Tibetan children born after 1st July 1987, whose either one of the parents have opted for Indian citizenship, are also eligible for the same. This development made a large number of second and third generation refugees born in India eligible for citizenship.

The Indian government listed four main conditions in June 2017 for citizenship-seeking Tibetans:

- 1) Tibetans have to get their RC and IC cancelled

- 2) They will have to leave the designated refugee settlement areas
- 3) Submit an undertaking stating that henceforth they no longer enjoy the benefits provided by CTA
- 4) Submit a declaration of no longer enjoying any privileges or subsidies in virtue of being RC holders.

Crisis of Identity

Although the CTA hasn't formally restricted Tibetans from applying for legal citizenship, a strong sentiment within the Tibetan diaspora is against applying for Indian citizenship for the fear of it weakening the Tibetan struggle for freedom. Thus, many Tibetans willingly choose to remain as de facto refugees and forgo the practical benefits entailed by Indian citizenship. The CTA also unofficially encourages this choice.

On the official front however, the CTA has adopted a neutral stance stating that opting for Indian citizenship is any eligible Tibetan individual's personal choice, and that the CTA will not interfere in this process. This official neutral stance of the CTA, alongwith the Indian government's condition of Tibetans having to leave the refugee settlement area on adoption of citizenship, has put Tibetans in a dilemma. Leaving the settlement area amounts to uncertainty and getting displaced from 'home' again. As refugee settlement areas form the core of political activities for Tibetan freedom, leaving the area would amount to the core getting diluted with time, alongwith the fear of backlash from within the community. Some Tibetans seeking Indian citizenship have, however, argued that the need for giving up refugee status stems from practical and instrumental purposes for ease of earning livelihood

and ease of travel abroad, and not because they have lost affection for their Tibetan identity or loyalty towards their struggle for freedom.

According to some Tibetan refugees interviewed by Yeshi Choedon (2018), the CTA shows the double standard of encouraging Tibetan diaspora in other host countries to take up their citizenship and labels them as 'Tibetan Ambassadors' to those countries. However, a similar stance is not proactively encouraged for eligible Tibetans residing in India for taking up Indian citizenship. This double standard is thus leading to divided opinion and disquiet within the exile community (Choedon, 2018). However, the Tibetans in favour of applying for Indian citizenship are outnumbered by people in their community holding anti-citizenship stance.

Outmigration

Arising from lack of stability in livelihood and residential precarities, several Tibetans have migrated to other countries and cities in India in search of better opportunities in the last few decades. Outmigration to other countries has become more prevalent which the CTA views as a political challenge, as they prioritize refugee residence within India. This phenomenon along with low birth rate among the Tibetan refugees in India creates a credible likelihood of eventual refugee population reduction within settlements in the foreseeable future.

The Tibetan and Indian administrators, since the mid-1980s, have discussed potential interventions through policy to stem this outmigration, such as setting up the Tibetan Handicraft Development Board, microcredit systems, microenterprise, and computer

resource centres, etc. to incentivize residence within settlements and to create more employment. However, despite these measures, the generated livelihood options have not been able to keep up with the rising socio-economic aspirations of the educated and increasingly literate youth of the exile community (*Balasubramaniam, 2022*).

LIMITATIONS IN LITERATURE

The refugee literature referred to above touches upon varied themes related to issues of land tenure, administration, access to benefits provided by the CTA or Indian government, hurdles faced due to lack of citizenship and ideas of identity and nationalism associated with the Tibetan exile community in India. However, a systematic study focused on the youth and their aspirations, experiences and challenges is limited.

The literature referred to doesn't cover the everyday experiences of the Tibetan refugee youth in negotiating access to gainful employment opportunities, education, and public services in a country they have lived all their lives in, yet deemed as 'foreigners'. A systematic study focusing on the challenges faced by the refugee youth based in an Indian metropolis is limited. There is also limited study on the aspect of intergenerational experience of refugee families or family histories, and the role it has played in shaping the experiences of the second and third generation Tibetan refugee youth today, as well as how the Tibetan youth, if at all, desire to further contribute towards this process of familial social mobility through accessing gainful employment and education.

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation has adhered to qualitative research methodology, carried out mainly through field interviews with participants at the Majnu ka Tilla settlement area, as well as other areas in New Delhi, including the India Tibetan Coordination Office (ITCO) in Lajpat Nagar, and the office of the think tank Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives (FNVA). The offices of the presidents of the Regional Tibetan Women's Association (RTWA) Delhi chapter, and the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress (RTYC) Delhi chapter, both based within the Majnu ka Tilla settlement, were also visited.

Snowball sampling was predominantly followed to gain the trust of participants and gather further contacts of potential participants, as well as a few instances of convenience sampling. More respondent contacts were gathered through a common initial contact based in the Majnu ka Tilla settlement, including the settlement officer Mr. Tsering Dorjee.

Interview questions followed a semi-structured topic guide with open-ended questions and candid conversations covering various themes including family background, living conditions, educational qualification, employment, etc. The interviews were audio-recorded, as consented to by the participants, and the instructions under the participant information sheet were verbally explained to them before starting with the interviews.

Several participants under snowball sampling were first approached via phone calls, text messages or emails to gather consent, and then subsequently interviewed either face-to-face, or through online meetings carried out via Google meet, as per their convenience and availability. Audio-recordings and signed consent forms will be kept safely by the primary researcher, and be accessible only to the researcher and supervisors.

The primary age-group of targeted respondents is 18-35 years, however, a few participants above the age of 35 years were also interviewed to get diverse perspectives. Total 21 participants of Tibetan descent were interviewed, including Delhi University students, café managers at Majnu ka Tilla, Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) officials at ITCO³, as well as other private sector workers. Most of the interview conversations were carried out in English, with a few exceptions of Hindi responses. The average duration of interviews per respondent lasted for around 1 hour depending on the responses, with the shortest duration recorded around 30 minutes and the longest for 2 hours.

The main body of research is hereafter thematically divided into various chapters, according to the table of contents.

Chapter 1: Scan of Respondents

Categorization of Sample

Based on Age Group

Age Group of Participants	Born in Tibet	Born in India	Grand Total
Youth (18-35 years)	9	5	14

³ ITCO – India Tibet Coordination Office

Others (above age 35)	1	6	7
Total	10	11	21

Out of the total interviewed 21 participants, 10 were born in occupied Tibet and 11 were born in exile in India. At the time of data collection (March 2023), 14 participants fell under the youth category of 18-35 years age, comprising of various occupations including café managers at Majnu ka Tilla, former Special Frontier Force (SFF)⁴ soldiers, students, employees at private university, research associate at think tank, NGOs, freelance product designer, Program Officer at ITCO, student president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress (RTYC) Rohini chapter, etc.

7 participants were above the age of 35, engaged in occupations like the Deputy Coordinator at ITCO, nurse at private hospital, export manager at a private firm, bus ticket seller, sweater selling business, volunteering as elected Presidents of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress (RTYC) Delhi chapter and the Regional Tibetan Women's Association (RTWA) Delhi chapter. Also, 4 participants in this age group had children (both adult and minor children).

Based on Gender

⁴ SFF or the Special Frontier Force created in November 1962 is a special military operations unit comprising of Tibetan refugees, for carrying out covert operations along Chinese lines.

Gender of Participants	Born in Tibet	Born in India	Grand Total
Women	4	4	8
Men	6	7	13
Total	10	11	21

Total 8 female participants and 13 male participants were interviewed, comprising of all age groups and occupations stated above. Out of the 10 participants born in Tibet, 4 are women and 6 are men. Similarly, out of the 11 participants born in India, 4 are women and 7 are men.

Based on Area of Current Residence⁵

Area of Current Residence	Born in Tibet	Born in India	Grand Total
Majnu ka Tilla	6	5	11
Other areas in Delhi/NCR	4	6	10
Total	10	11	21

⁵ Current residence as denoted by the place of residence at the time of primary data collection (March 2023)

Out of the total interviewed 21 participants, 11 were residing in the Majnu ka Tilla colony as flat owner or on rented/shared accommodation. The other 10 participants were living in other areas in New Delhi such as rented flats or paying guest accommodations in Lajpat Nagar, East of Kailash and Green Park, the Tibetan Youth Hostel in Rohini for university students, CTA allotted residence for Tibetan government officials in Lajpat Nagar, etc.

Family Background & Stories of Migration

Born in India

Participants who were born in India are usually second or third generation Tibetans whose parents or grandparents migrated to India for various reasons. The families of India-born participants were originally settled in various Tibetan refugee settlements across India, such as Kollegal, Kuligod and Bylakuppe in Karnataka, Norgyeling (at Bandhara, in Nagpur rural district) in Maharashtra, Miao and Tezu in Arunachal Pradesh, Ooty, Shimla, Dharamshala, Dehradun, Darjeeling, Shillong, Gangtok, and Delhi to name a few, as well as few other scattered settlements in the Himalayan region.

As it was their parents or grandparents who were forced to migrate and restart their lives in an alien land, they usually took to the more viable options of earning their livelihood, such as working under road construction projects in the Himalayan states, sweater and food selling businesses, or joining the Special Frontier Force (SFF) for male refugees. One participant's father had even worked for the Indian government's Intelligence Bureau owing to his fluency in Mandarin, which was a much sought after skill for intelligence networks.

The first generation, often less educated, had to toil hard restarting their lives in order to provide the base for future generations to eventually move into better paying occupations like nurses, teachers, or corporate workers, etc. The first-generation migrant parents or grandparents of the interviewed participants were recorded to have migrated to India in the early 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, or the late 1990s.

The most common initial difficulties faced by the first generation pertained to altitude and climate adaptation, and language. The Government of Mysore (Karnataka) was the first state after Himachal Pradesh to allot land to Tibetan refugees in 1960, leading to the formation of the first Tibetan refugee settlement of Lugsung Samdupling at Bylakuppe in 1961. However, Tibetans being used to the harsh cold climate of the high-altitude Tibetan plateau and mountains for generations, found it extremely hard to initially adapt to the hot climatic conditions of southern India. On the Dalai Lama's request, more Tibetan settlements were formed in the mountainous Himalayan states of India.

The reasons for the first generation's migration to India ranged from escaping Chinese repression of their Tibetan Buddhist culture, search for better livelihood opportunities, to being able to practice their faith freely, etc. Their livelihood in Tibet (before escaping to India) mainly within the rural setting involved farming, animal grazing, *thangka*⁶ painting, or running small businesses. Many escaped to India with the hopes of meeting and seeking the blessings of their most important spiritual leader, His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

⁶ Paintings that depict the teachings and imagery of Buddha as well as the Bodhisattvas

Several India-born participants still have distant relatives living in Tibet (from paternal or maternal side), having no contact with them for years. Most of them also have relatives, siblings and cousins based outside India in countries like the USA, UK, France, Canada, Switzerland, etc. who out-migrated in search of better job opportunities. The relatives living abroad are usually engaged in working class occupations like cooking, waitering, bartender, security guard, etc. as well as other occupations like nursing, trade, or entrepreneurship. This social support system and network abroad works as a springboard for younger Tibetans to consider livelihood earning opportunities outside India with fewer restrictions.

Born in Tibet

The participants born in Tibet were born in Lhasa, or small towns within the Utsang, Kham and Amdo provinces, such as Chamdo, Sharto and Tingri. The ages of the Tibet-born participants at the time of their escape to India ranged from 4 years to 11 years, with most of them migrating around the average age of 6 or 7. The earliest year of escape among the interviewed participants was recorded to be 1987, with the most frequent years being post-1995 and the early 2000s, and the most recent years being 2007 and 2011.

The main reasons for parents to send their young children across the border were usually search for better education opportunities in India, with the scope of retaining their cultural identity, something which was repressed under Chinese rule. Many parents wanted to send their children to the land of the Dalai Lama as a sign of auspiciousness, weighing on religious beliefs. For some poor parents, sending their children to India escorted by adult relatives was a better option for the sake of their upbringing, compared to raising their children in the

rural areas of Tibet under repressive rule and lack of resources. These parents were usually engaged in occupations like artisanal work, manual labour, agriculture, animal grazing or running small businesses. With the assistance of distant family networks already based in India or Nepal, small children from poor Tibetan rural families were able to cross over into Indian territory.

A participant who migrated to India at the age of 11 in 2011 exclaimed how she and her younger brother (aged 9 at the time of migration) were already studying in a school in Lhasa. However, it was known to her parents that options for Tibetan ethnic minority in China were limited when it came to rising towards higher professional posts. It was well known that the government would discriminate against ethnicities who were not the majority Han Chinese settlers in the Tibet Autonomous Region, and hence gainful employment would be difficult to attain on growing up. As an anecdote, she narrated how one of her older cousins was rejected from a top government post under the CPC⁷, and promptly replaced by a Han Chinese, despite having excellent credentials. According to her, the CPC is wary of giving ethnic minorities influential positions of power in the country, for any professional field.

Many Tibet-born participants who escaped to India at very young ages, narrated their earliest memories of the escape or collective memories as passed down by their parents or relatives. Some of them escaped with one of their parents travelling with a caravan of few other Tibetans going to India. These caravans of travelers differed in size; some were groups of 20 guided by a monk, yet some others were groups of 5 or 6 charting out their escape route by themselves. Some participants were usually escorted by their uncles or older

⁷ Communist Party of China (CPC)

cousins who left them at the Tibetan refugee reception centre in Kathmandu, Nepal, and returned to Tibet. Some children were handed over to another set of relatives at the Tibet-Nepal border who escorted them till Dharamshala in India. Sometimes well-off parents even hired experienced guides with efficient networks who would take their children till Nepal or Indian border.

Due to various such reasons, many young children were often separated from their parents and siblings who continued living in Tibet. At times, parents chose to send only one or two of their children at a time to India and retain their other children in Tibet who were either already too old to restart their lives or too young to travel.

These journeys were arduous, dangerous, and constantly under the risk of getting shot by the Chinese patrol guards for defecting. These journeys were through rough territories of mountain passes and jungles and lasted several days. One participant narrated how his father carried him on his shoulders all throughout the journey, as he was merely 4 years old at the time. Another participant narrated his earliest memory of his journey (with a caravan of unrelated Tibetan travelers at the age of 7) as they traveled mainly during the night, and at times even during the day. Whenever the group of travelers would come across a Stupa, they would take a break from walking to take 3 rounds (*parikrama*) of the Stupa during daytime. Another participant narrated an emotional memory aged 10 at the time, when he was escaping Lhasa with his mother in 2004. He remembers how the travelling caravan momentarily stopped by the Potala Palace⁸ in Lhasa, and being overwhelmed with emotion,

⁸ Potala Palace – Fortress in Lhasa, Tibet. Royal residence and winter palace of the Dalai Lamas (from 1649-1959).

he started crying, knowing in his heart that it was possibly the last time ever he could see it in person.

Sometimes parents and siblings also travelled to India in small batches, but not together at the same time in separate groups to avoid suspicion. Post-2008, Tibetan defectors to India have drastically reduced due to China's increased patrolling along the Tibet-Nepal border. As a result, some families won't be able to reunite with their relatives or children who had already escaped to India. China continues to control the Tibet Autonomous Region with an iron grip, implementing assimilationist policies of enforcing Mandarin in schools, uprooting commoners who are caught keeping the Dalai Lama's portrait in their homes, repressing the free practicing of Tibetan-Buddhism for government jobs, and resettling the Han Chinese population in Tibet, thus reducing the Tibetan ethnic population into minority.

Most Tibet-born participants who had come to India alone, still have their parents and few of their siblings living and working in Tibet. Many participants have exclaimed how it has been years since they last physically met or contacted their parents. One participant remembers how his uncle based in Nepal arranged for his brief meeting with his parents at the Tibet-Nepal border around 2015 when he was in 9th or 10th grade. The meeting lasted for only an hour or so, and he hasn't had the chance to meet his parents ever since.

The most common form of communication for the participants to contact their parents or families in Tibet has been through WeChat⁹. However, after the Indian government banned the Chinese messaging app in 2021, Tibetan refugees in India have found it increasingly

⁹ Instant messaging Chinese app

difficult to contact their families. The usage of VPN (virtual private network) to contact through WeChat has become common, although there are certain risks attached to it. WeChat is heavily under the surveillance of the CPC, and any inkling of contact with a defector living in India is faced with repercussions for the family in Tibet. The language to be used for texting or calling is Mandarin or English, and usage of Tibetan is usually restricted. Any mentions related to political freedom, or the Dalai Lama are treated as treason, and communications are heavily scrutinized especially in the months of late February or March, due to the Tibetan Uprising Day being celebrated every year on 10th March. As a result, participants avoid texting their parents during those crucial months. Other time periods when contact is usually avoided are during the Dalai Lama's birthday (6th July) or the Panchen Lama's¹⁰ birthday (25th April). The frequency of contacting families is thus reduced to barely once a month or thrice a year at best.

Recently it was reported how a Tibetan woman was arrested by the Chinese police for contacting a family member living across the border, which also unfortunately happened to be during the same week as the Tibetan Uprising Day, in the first week of March (*Kunchok, RFA Tibetan, 2023*). Although no evidence of any ulterior motive was proved, her arrest and present missing status did work as a warning signal for Tibetans living in both Tibet and India.

Chapter 2: Negotiating Access to Education

¹⁰ Panchen Lama is the second in command to the Dalai Lama within Tibetan Buddhism hierarchy. The 11th Panchen Lama (Gedhun Choekyi Nyima) has been missing since 1995 when he was a 6-year-old child, allegedly abducted by the Chinese government.

School Education

Participants migrating from Tibet as children, often separated from parents, were first received at the Tibetan refugee reception centre in Kathmandu, Nepal, wherein they were dispatched to Dharamshala in allocated groups with 30 people. At the Dharamshala Tibetan Reception Centre under the CTA, they underwent health checkups, and after staying at the centre for a few weeks, they were distributed to various Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) schools depending on their ages and proximity.

The TCV school system works as foster care for orphans and destitutes, and accommodates the hostel system for education. Primary school level children are allocated under 'mothers' or hostel wardens/nurses who assist them with getting ready or washing laundry. Children in TCVs are educated free of cost, given medical care, and provided with career counselling sessions. CBSE board is followed for academic curriculum with NCERT textbooks, while textbooks covering Tibetan history and culture are printed separately by the CTA. The interviewed participants had studied in various schools under the TCVs, STSS (Sambhota Tibetan School Society) or the CSTs (Central School for Tibetans), and schools run by the Tibetan Homes Foundation. CSTs were initially administered under the Central Tibetan School Administration (CTSA) under the Indian government's Ministry of Human Resource Development, and were later taken over by the STSS under the CTA's Department of Education.

While Tibetan is taught throughout the schooling years, emphasized more at the primary level, English medium is given higher preference at the middle and senior school levels to

prepare students for class 10th and 12th Board exams. Hindi is offered as an optional language from classes 6th to 8th in some schools. This could be a reason why most of the participants were more comfortable conversing in English, and stated that their fluency in Hindi was merely passable for written and verbal. Most participants stated their highest fluency in written language was in English, although verbal fluency was the highest in Tibetan. This could be due to them relying heavily on English for education and employment over the years, and considerably losing touch with writing in Tibetan.

Many participants changed their school after completing primary or middle school, mainly for choosing streams (Science, Commerce, Humanities) after class 10th. TCV Selakui in Dehradun specializes for the Science stream, and only 80 students from TCVs all over India are selected to study at TCV Selakui based on their class 10th performance, which also boasts of a good student-teacher ratio. TCV Bylakuppe in Karnataka offers both Science and Commerce, while TCV Suja and TCV Gopalpur in Himachal Pradesh were for the Humanities stream. Some of the interviewed participants had studied at these TCVs, especially at their senior secondary level, while some others, especially the India-born participants, had also studied at CSTs near their Tibetan settlements in the states where their families had settled in. The teachers in TCVs were both Tibetan and Indian, although Indian teachers became more prominent in senior secondary classes, especially for the Science stream.

A participant who had studied in Lhasa, Tibet, till 6th grade before escaping to India narrated how Tibetan children had no idea their land was occupied by Chinese, and were educated about their history only after starting school in India. Schools in Tibet, although following the

bilingual education policy of teaching in both Tibetan and Mandarin, unironically prioritized and emphasized teaching in Mandarin-medium, while English wasn't taught. A report published by the Human Rights Watch in 2020 states how the Tibetan-medium of schooling in China-occupied Tibet is under threat, as more and more Chinese teachers and students are inducted into schools located in Tibetan regions. Even the parents of Tibetan students are compelled to learn and pass written exams in Mandarin and attend Mandarin-learning workshops to be able to teach the language to their children at home (*Tibet Watch, 2022*).

As the participant narrated, her school's principal was ethnically Tibetan, yet he partook in exclaiming how the Chinese government is doing a commendable job in educating children, and that Tibetan students should be grateful to the CPC. The "One China" policy's efforts were echoed in the participant's school as well when students were propagated the importance of assimilation into a common national identity, whilst discouraging unique ethno-cultural identities. There were instances of Tibetan protests outside her school which were suppressed by the police. Routine checks by the police were carried out in her school to enforce the teaching medium in Mandarin.

Some of the participants who had escaped to India after doing some amount of schooling in Tibet, narrated how it was hard to initially adjust into their new schools in India. Since schools in Tibet did not teach English, children coming from Tibet had to undergo 2 years of Opportunity Classes to teach them basic English, as English-medium education is an integral part of TCVs and colleges in India. After completing these Opportunity Classes, the children were then required to clear entrance exams to get admitted into regular classes, appropriate to their age and academic performance levels. One of the participants who had

left Tibet in the middle of her 6th grade had to undergo 2 years of Opportunity Classes to get admitted into the same grade in India, and continue with her education. This led to a 2 years gap in her schooling, however, such instances were common for children coming from Tibet.

Children coming from Tibet often lagged behind in classes due to poor proficiency in English. One participant exclaimed how already knowing some amount of English was advantageous for Tibet-born students in her class. She also stated how Tibet-born students had to face various challenges as they often had no parents or close social networks to rely on, and during vacations when the India-born Tibetan students went back to their families, the Tibet-born students were often left alone or learned to travel by themselves or with friends. The classes contained a healthy mix of both India-born and Tibet-born students, although the Tibet-born students were often over-aged compared to the average age for a particular grade, mainly due to starting their schooling late or due to the created gap in schooling after Opportunity Classes. Tibet-born students were hardworking but had to put double the effort in their early years of schooling to feel accommodated in classes. Some schools have even kept Mandarin journals and books in their libraries to help students coming from Tibet feel accommodated (*Dhamdul, 2023*).

Another difference between India-born and Tibet-born students observed by a participant was their affinity towards different entertainment mediums. The students from Tibet usually preferred watching Chinese movies or dramas as they had better exposure towards Chinese culture. India-born Tibetan students on the other hand preferred watching Hindi or English movies, as they had better exposure towards Indian culture and people.

The participant also stated how India-born Tibetan students were more vocally and physically active in Tibetan protests, while the Tibet-born students usually refrained from participating in physical protests owing to the fear of getting recognized in photos which could potentially put their families back in Tibet in jeopardy. The Tibet-born students, however, did practice softer ways such as spreading awareness about the cause on their social media, planning Tibetan cultural events, or simply preserving and preaching about their culture and cause through print media.

Higher Education

Some of the interviewed participants had completed one or two college/diploma degrees, with many of them at least having done their Bachelors. Notable degree courses of some participants included political science and international relations, fashion and design studies, journalism, nursing, mechanical engineering, environmental sciences, business studies, Buddhist studies, etc. to name a few. There were also some participants who dropped out of college or never joined any college after school.

The CTA's Department of Education offers scholarships to meritorious Tibetan students to pursue their Bachelors or Masters, wherein they can apply once to complete one degree. Students get scholarship allowance in two installments for two semesters on a yearly basis. As stated by a participant who availed the scholarship during her Bachelors, the scholarship allowance for a Bachelors degree is determined by the student's academic performance in class 12th. Students scoring above 95% are eligible to get around 1 lakh allowance to complete the degree, scoring between 70-80% gives Rs. 60,000-70,000 allowance,

between 60-70% gives Rs. 45,000-55,000 allowance, and no scholarship is offered below 60% scoring.

Availing these scholarships has proven to be of great help, especially for the Tibet-born students who didn't have their parents or close relatives to sponsor their college education. The scholarship amount could easily cover for their fees in government colleges like the Delhi University. To avail for scholarship at the Masters level, the student would have to freshly apply again, and would get rewarded based on his/her final academic grade in Bachelors.

Another participant had availed the Tibetan Girls Scholarship offered by the New York based non-profit organization The Tibet Fund. This scholarship offered her an allowance of Rs. 50,000 for one year, which was sufficient to cover her college and rented accommodation expenses.

Due to Tibetan students officially being refugees, they take admission in Delhi University colleges under the 'foreign' category quota. Although the fees paid are on par with general category Indian students, they are not eligible to join the college hostels due to being 'foreigners'. Few years ago the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) fee hike for 'foreign' quota students did lead to a drop in Tibetan students applying to JNU for a few batches, however the issue has been resolved last year and the fees for Tibetan students were exempted from the hike.

Some of the participants stayed at the Tibetan Youth Hostel in Rohini, New Delhi, for Bachelors at Delhi University. The hostel accommodates over 300 Tibetan students, who get to retain their seats based on their yearly academic performance. Students failing to maintain their semester exam scores at 45-50% at least would be asked to vacate the hostel. One participant who had failed to retain his seat at the Tibetan Youth Hostel after his first year narrated how he had to find rented accommodation at Majnu ka Tilla through his friends and work part-time at a café after college hours to pay for his transportation, rent and tuition fees. This often left him too exhausted to focus on his academics or socialize with other classmates. Another participant narrated how she deliberately chose to live away from the youth hostel at a paying guest accommodation near her college, despite being eligible for a hostel seat, as she wanted to socialize more with the Indian community. Her scholarship expenses and occasional monetary assistance from her uncle were sufficient to pay for her rent and tuition fees.

Student participants stated how they aspire to further pursue higher studies in the same course, start their own business of selling clothes and accessories, or migrate abroad to study or work. The internships engaged in their Bachelors involved media houses like Tibet TV or NGOs, and were all mostly unpaid.

Some participants were involved in student political activities during their college, such as representing Tibet at the International Students Association or elected spokesperson at the Tibet Forum in Jawaharlal Nehru University. Few others were also involved in Tibetan youth driven non-profit organizations like the Students for a Free Tibet wherein they partook in organizing cultural events, protests, publishing articles, spreading awareness, etc.

According to one participant, she was actively involved with a Tibetan youth organization consisting of Tibetan students from all over DU, however the organization eventually went defunct as students found it increasingly difficult to coordinate with everyone and got busy with studies. The Regional Tibetan Youth Congress (RTYC) is another non-profit organization whose Rohini chapter oversees the welfare of the Tibetan Youth Hostel, Rohini students. The elected student president, elected from among the senior students within the hostel based on their active involvement with student affairs, serves for a term of 1 year. For other RTYCs based all over India and abroad, the elected president's term is upto 3 years.

When asked about social relations with fellow Indian classmates or professors, many participants responded how they were usually shy and preferred interacting more with other fellow Tibetans. All the participants who attended college responded that they had cordial relations with their Indian classmates, who were often helpful. However, initially all the participants had to explain or clarify their identity as Tibetan to their classmates or Indian friends, else they were often ignorantly stereotyped or clubbed as North-East Indian. Individual DU colleges usually have around 40 Tibetan students spread across different departments, however, there are often just 1 or 2 Tibetan students in a particular class or course at a time, as a result of which shyer Tibetan students could face initial hindrances in making new friends or socializing with Indian students who are usually ignorant about their Tibetan identity, thus leading to isolation in college. However, this doesn't ring true in all cases and usually depends on the outgoing personality of the individual.

Instances of racism faced were next to negligible within campus spaces, however, some of the participants faced offensive name-calling at a couple of instances in the metro or while

walking down the street, especially during the peak of COVID-19 in the city. One participant remembers how racist slurs like “chinki” or “Chinese go back to China” were hurled at her unprovoked in a public area, however she brushes it off as a one-off incident.

For students who come to live for the first time in a metropolis like Delhi for their college, it's usually difficult to navigate through a new city for the first time. These students are mostly faced with challenges like adapting to the heat, pollution and extreme weather, confusion of navigating through the Delhi metro for the initial few times, bargaining with autorickshaw drivers over the nearest destination, etc. According to one participant, she felt an initial cultural shock by living in Delhi as people ate with their hands and it was crowded everywhere. Although all the participants had visited Delhi few times before they started living in the city, as Delhi (and Majnu ka Tilla) was a common transit point for a lot of Tibetan travelers, the experience of living in the city differed from merely visiting it a couple of times. To help such students adapt to the city, some Tibetan youth organizations and student bodies assisted fresher students with metro routes and navigating key parts of the city.

During COVID-19 lockdown, a few of the participants were either giving their class 12th exams or were in their first year of college. Only the class 12th students were asked to stay back at TCVs for their pen-and-paper exams. Students attended classes online from their parents' homes for a year, and those college students without parents rented accommodation in Delhi (usually in the Majnu ka Tilla) and resided there for a year before moving into either the nearest PG¹¹ or shared flat to their college or the Tibetan Youth Hostel once colleges physically reopened. One participant stated how the pandemic affected her

¹¹ Paying guest accommodation

mental health as she was staying alone without her parents, didn't have much online interactions with her classmates, and mostly had no one close to her to talk to on a regular basis. The hot weather of Delhi made it worse for her, both physically and mentally, as she was used to the cold hill station weather throughout her childhood and school life. Her mental health got better once the lockdown was lifted and colleges reopened.

Chapter 3: Negotiating Access to Employment

Most of the interviewed participants had changed jobs frequently in the past in search of better paying alternatives, for job satisfaction, or merely out of circumstantial compulsion. Majority of them have been employed in the services sector as sweater sellers, handbags seller, café managers, cashiers, waiter, freelance product designer, model, tour guide, exports manager, bus ticket seller, freelance articleship, private hospital nurse, cancer medicines broker, etc. Some participants were employed under government jobs as CTA officials working as the Coordinator and Program Officer at ITCO, and the stationed settlement officer at Majnu ka Tilla. Some male participants had also served for a few years as soldiers in the Special Frontier Force (SFF). Some participants were also employed in think tanks or NGOs like Empowering the Vision Project NGO based in Majnu ka Tilla, or as a Research Associate at the Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives (FNVA) in Delhi. Two participants were also engaged in voluntary work as the elected presidents of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress (RTYC) Delhi chapter, and the Regional Tibetan Women's Association (RTWA) Delhi chapter.

The unique and similar experiences of the participants in negotiating access to employment as well as the various personal challenges faced by them in doing so have been covered

below, divided into the following four broad employment categories. Personal life stories of the participants constitute a significant element of this chapter.

Government Service (CTA)

Three of the interviewed participants were employed as the Tibetan government-in-exile or the CTA's officials, either stationed as the settlement officer at Majnu ka Tilla, or the stationed Program Officer and Coordinator at the ITCO in Delhi.

One participant narrated her personal experience with navigating her career path after school, with her parents relying on the Tibetan divination system of 'Mo'¹² to decide her potential career path. Thus, although she had interest in pursuing geography, she decided to prepare for nursing school as suggested by the 'Mo' system. However, things took an unexpected turn in her life when she conceived at the age of 18, putting a halt on her future plans. After the birth of her son at the age of 19, she decided to prepare for the Public Service Commission exam for recruitment in the CTA to combat her indolence. After weeks of preparation in Dharamshala, staying away from her newborn son and going through mental and physical turmoil, the participant was able to successfully crack the recruitment exam for the Department of Security where she started her career with the CTA. Over the years, she has served under different departments including the Department of Finance,

¹² 'Mo' is the Tibetan divination system followed by Tibetans as a part of their religious beliefs, to determine important decisions in life pertaining to health, career direction, travel, etc.

Public Service Commission as an induction training officer for new recruits, as well as various Tibet-India support groups including the ITCO. Her nature of work over the years has entailed coordinating Tibet-India solidarity events, coordinating with Indian government officials over administrative work and meetings, training new CTA recruits for their respective departments, etc.

This participant recalls the major hurdle faced by her at times was the harassment she often had to face at the hands of Indian officials or clerks whenever she entered offices to set up appointments or coordinate meetings with the Indian administrators. She recalls how once she had to face rude comments, red-tapism and inappropriate touching on her shoulder in an Indian office. The Indian official threw her file on the floor deeming it unimportant for the head administrator to go through. All these instances indicate racist treatment.

For recruitment in the CTA, different hierarchical posts have their own entrance exams differing in the degree of difficulty and the post's criteria. Promotion within the ranks is then possible based on the person's quality of work, dedication, and contribution. Another participant started off as an Office Assistant and rose to the position of Office Superintendent and stationed Program Officer at ITCO, working in different departments over the years, including the Department of Information and International Relations. This participant's nature of work over the years has entailed archiving historical imagery at the Tibetan Museum in Dharamshala, coordinating events and meetings with Tibet support groups and voluntary organizations based all over India, organizing meetings with Indian MPs for dialogue, etc. He has noted one major challenge to his nature of work is setting up appointments with Indian MPs as they are usually short on time.

The salaries of the participants ranged between Rs. 30,000-35,000, having a minimal difference despite having a hierarchical difference in official positions. When inquired upon the participants' opinion on this, one replied how they have to take into consideration that they are working for an exile government, and thus their contribution should not be weighed in monetary value. The CTA also provides subsidies on water and electricity to its officials living in officially allotted accommodations.

Voluntary tax is usually encouraged from among Tibetan refugees, which is usually a small amount of Rs. 80-200 to be paid by common people every year to the CTA, purely on voluntary basis. Some commoners even pay upto Rs. 500 or more every year voluntarily. For CTA officials, however, Rs. 2000-3000 worth of voluntary tax is deducted from their salaries every month.

Special Frontier Force (SFF)

Some male participants had served as paratrooper soldiers for the Special Frontier Force (SFF), a special operations unit established in 1962 consisting of Tibetan refugees. Two male participants had served in the SFF for upto 5 years and 15 years, and changed odd jobs frequently after retirement, to both of them now finally working as café general managers at two different cafes in Majnu ka Tilla. The fathers of many participants had served for the SFF, ranging from 15 to 25 years of service. In some cases, they took voluntary retirement for a stable livelihood selling sweaters or food, or in other cases had to take early retirement due to injuries or health problems. Another participant's 20-year-old son was undergoing training to join the SFF at the time of data collection.

According to one participant's personal insight, Tibetan men in the earlier decades used to join the SFF due to lack of viable livelihood options. However, in recent years the young Tibetan boys joining the SFF are usually those who had poor academic record in class 12th, often being the ones scoring below 40%. They are often made to join the SFF due to their insufficient grades that blur any possibility of getting college admission or scholarship. However, this doesn't ring true in every case, and there are several young Tibetan boys who voluntarily join the SFF out of personal aspiration or interest. The final recruitment, however, depends on fitness tests and training. The salaries of the two participants during their service for the SFF ranged between Rs. 20,000-29,000 per month. According to the SFF's terms of engagement, as of 2017, pension is provided to retired individuals after 15 years of regular service on par with the Indian Army standards. Thus, only one of the two male participants gets pension from the SFF.

Another participant who had migrated from Tibet at the age of 10 stated his insight on how joining the SFF wasn't an option for him due to the suspicion of Chinese spies crossing over into Indian territory disguised as Tibetan refugees. This could be a possible indication that Tibetan refugees born in India are preferred over those born in Tibet for the SFF, especially over those Tibet-born refugees who migrated at considerably older ages.

Private/Services Sector

Majority of the participants were employed in the private/services sector at some point, such as café managers, cashiers, waiter, model, tour guide, exports manager, private hospital

nurse, cancer medicines broker, etc. or self-employed as a freelance product designer, handbags, snacks or sweater sellers, or bus ticket intermediary for tourists.

An India-born participant, hailing from Kuligod in Karnataka, and working as a senior nurse at a private hospital in Delhi for 8 years, narrated how it was difficult for her to initially find a job on graduating nursing school. She couldn't work at government hospitals due to lacking Indian citizenship at the time, and all the private hospitals she applied to asked for prior experience which she lacked as a fresher. Finally, after much search she landed her first job at Apollo hospital in Delhi which took in freshers. Her nature of work over the 8 years of her career has included handling pain management and training junior trainee nurses. During COVID, her work stress was intensified due to looking after several patients at one time and oftentimes getting scolded by her superiors at the hospital for not seeing patients at night. Work shifts during COVID lasted 12 hours a day on average daily, as opposed to the regular 8 hours, that too with no provision of taking leave at the time. Her income has since increased from her starting salary of Rs. 8000 to now Rs. 58,000 as a senior nurse. She states how several Tibetan women often go into the nursing field as it is one of the easier fields for getting a practicing license or job in, without having to rely on taking Indian citizenship, as well as the considerably good amount of income received along with the respectability attached to it.

Another India-born participant who has been residing in Majnu ka Tilla for over 20 years narrates how her mother-in-law started off with a Tibetan street-food selling business within the settlement way back in the early 2000s. However, often due to facing rude customer remarks and borderline racism, the participant preferred to quit the business to start her own

sweater-selling business near the Red Fort area in Delhi, out of self-respect. By continuing with the same seasonal sweater-selling business for over two decades, and working as the RTWA Delhi president during the summers for the last 3 years, the participant earns over Rs. 20,000 per month during the winters. Her older son continues to work under her sweater-selling business, whilst her younger son was training to join the SFF. Family members of some other participants hailing from Kuligod settlement in Karnataka, travelled to Ahmedabad during winters for seasonal sweater-selling.

A few participants were also engaged in occupations like selling handbags or bus tickets. One participant had taken up odd jobs before coming to Delhi, such as running a roadside food stall in Mcleodganj for tourists, however due to lack of profitability and saturated competition in the area, he was compelled to close it and migrate to Delhi in search of better job opportunities. He saw an opportunity to make easy money through Delhi tourists travelling to hill stations by bus, and started working as a middleman for buying and selling bus tickets. Another participant who had migrated to India from a Nepal-Tibetan border village at the age of 5 with her cousin sister, now runs a handbags selling business in Majnu ka Tilla along with her sister, with a team of 30 employees working under them, and an average income of Rs. 16,000 per month. She aspires to start her own fashion and accessories selling business someday with her sister, and expand her current business.

A Tibet-born participant, who migrated to India at the age of 10, worked at different jobs after graduating with a Masters degree in Buddhist Studies. Having studied in Tibet in his early years, he used his fluency in Mandarin as an advantage to work as a tour guide for Chinese tourists in Delhi. It is interesting to note that this participant had also served as the President

of the Delhi Tibetan Student Union for 1 year during his Masters, and worked for organizing protest marches and political events. However, to make ends meet after graduating college and with no close relatives in India to rely on, he had to take up whatever opportunity that came up his way to survive, even if it meant earning money through working for the Chinese.

This participant had also signed up for a short-term 6 months contract to work with a Delhi-based modelling agency, alongside working as a tour guide. His payment as a model differed according to the frequency, duration, and number of shoots, with each photoshoot or advertisement shoot of 2 hours paying him around Rs. 5000, although the frequency of photoshoots and getting modelling gigs was very inconsistent. However, he had to leave both the jobs due to COVID lockdown, after which he started selling clothes online via Instagram. However, this business wasn't profitable enough and often amounted to meagre income. With hardships in getting a job during the pandemic, the lockdown was the hardest phase in his life, as noted by the participant, both financially and mentally. With the lockdown lifted, he networked through a few of his friends' contacts to land a job as a manager at his friend's café in Majnu ka Tilla, wherein he manages the bar and alcohol section. This job often requires him to stay awake for long hours at night as the bar opens only at night and customer footfall peaks at late night hours, often getting free only by early morning, and also at times having to break off fights between drunk customers.

Another Tibet-born participant, who migrated to India at age 6, also worked odd jobs after graduating with political science and mass communication degrees. This participant worked at a café in Majnu ka Tilla after his college hours as a side job to pay for his rent and tuition fees. However, due to pay cuts and eventual closing down of the café during COVID, the

participant was left unemployed for a few months and unable to find a new job to pay for rent, thus during this time he went to Nepal to stay over at a friends' place for few months, while attending classes online.

It was during his stay in Nepal that he was introduced to a Chinese broker who supplied cancer medicines from India to China at cheap rates. With his prior knowledge of Mandarin, having briefly studied in Tibet in his childhood, he started working under the Chinese broker as a middleman or delivery agent between the broker and Chinese clients in need of cancer medicines. This job paid him well, with each delivery paying him around Rs. 25,000 and frequent orders per month. With the experience gained from this job, he left it to independently start finding Chinese clients through his contacts to sell cancer medicines, with every order earning him around Rs. 15,000-20,000, and with a delivery agent hired under him earning Rs. 800 for delivering it to the airport. A downside to this, as he noted, was when a patient passed away due to the order not getting delivered on time. A major dark phase in this participant's life, as he narrated, was when his close friend of years stole all his money leaving him worse off. With no family in India to rely on, this was the phase when he developed suicidal tendencies, and was encouraged by his other friends to find a new job to keep himself occupied. Thus, he joined his friend's café in Majnu ka Tilla as a manager as his latest occupation.

It is, however, interesting to note in this participant's case as well that he too served as the Coordinator of the voluntary organization "Students for Free Tibet" at its Delhi chapter, organizing student political activities like protests, cultural events, etc. However, when asked if his brief occupation as a cancer medicines delivery middleman and earning money through

Chinese clients contradicted with his past as an anti-China student activist in his college days, the participant replied that he had left student politics on graduating from college and that to earn a livelihood living all alone in India, he had to optimize whatever opportunities that came his way.

According to Tashi Phuntsok as quoted in an article published by the Caravan Magazine in 2023, she notes that due to structural employment changes, Tibetans in India are greatly restricted by their capability. They are usually fluent in Mandarin due to childhood exposure, and in present day India when fluency in Mandarin is a highly sought after skill, many Tibetans opt to work for Chinese MNCs as several other employment opportunities for them as 'foreigners' in India are scarce (*Dhamdul, 2023*). They work due to systemic conditions and not out of choice, as their harsh upbringing makes them used to it. Being against Chinese policies in Tibet and holding political opinions over Tibet's occupation, whilst at the same time utilizing Mandarin-Chinese as a means of earning livelihood is not uncommon, as seen in the cases of the two participants previously mentioned. At the end of the day, making ends meet for their family's survival or for themselves holds precedence over their political ideals.

Another Tibet-born participant who migrated to India at the age of 7, initially worked at a travel agency for selling e-tickets, after which she worked at a foreign languages institute in Delhi where she taught German for a few years, earning Rs. 12,000-15,000 per month. She later joined a Tibetan handicrafts and garments export business based in Paharganj in Delhi as an exports manager for international clients, where she earns approximately Rs. 10 lakhs a year. She has also been volunteering as the General Secretary at the Tibetan Chamber

of Commerce since 5 years, wherein her nature of work entails meeting Tibetan entrepreneurs from abroad to understand and exchange business ideas. She states that Tibetan entrepreneurs often face hurdles and challenges of lengthy paperwork in acquiring licenses due to their legal status as ‘foreigners’.

She opined how the Tibetan youth, especially those who migrated from Tibet, have mostly been making major life decisions alone since young age, since many of them are without their parents in India or separated. According to her an individual is responsible for their own life choices, be it bad or good, and thus the biggest challenge faced by such Tibetan youth is lack of sincere adult guidance and lack of solid familial support network since young age, thus often resulting in negligible emotional or financial support while growing up. Although such children had teachers and foster care in boarding school to rely on early in their lives, they are essentially on their own during vulnerable young adulthood, with the only support network being their friends’ circle.

NGOs, Think Tanks, and Voluntary Organizations

One participant was engaged with the Tibetan exile NGO Empowering the Vision Project based in Majnu ka Tilla, with an income of around Rs. 47,000. Another was employed as a research associate at the Delhi-based think tank Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives (FNVA). The participants previously worked at exile social impact organizations like the Foundation for Universal Responsibility, or as freelance article writers during the pandemic. Their nature of work is driven by policy research and functioning as advocacy groups.

According to one participant, the pandemic gave him the much needed time to introspect over what he really desired to pursue, as he got the opportunity to volunteer for the exile community at his home settlement near Ooty, and got motivated to become a full-time writer and scholar after freelancing articleship to various forums during the lockdown. He also wishes for the Indian government to create an exemption for Tibetan students for being able to apply and qualify for the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) on par with marginalized or reserved categories, which would boost more exile scholars to pursue further research.

Some other participants were dedicated to working for voluntary organizations like the Regional Tibetan Women's Association (RTWA) Delhi chapter and the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress (RTYC) Delhi chapter, both offices based in Majnu ka Tilla. As the current elected presidents of these organizations, their tasks extended to organizing cultural and political events like protests, creating awareness posters and campaigns, reaching out to people via social media, or organizing special events like the Dalai Lama or Panchen Lama's birthday. Shops and restaurants in Majnu ka Tilla would be usually closed during special occasions like the Tibetan Uprising Day (10th March), the Dalai Lama's birthday (6th July) and the day Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Dalai Lama (10th December).

For the RTWA Delhi chapter, the elections for important posts happen at Majnu ka Tilla and only Tibetan women can participate in voting. For the RTYC Delhi chapter, only the committee members can partake in voting. The RTYC and the RTWA organizations are based all over India in all the Tibetan settlements, as well as abroad.

Transition from Education to Employment

Certain transitional differences from education to employment were observed between participants born in Tibet and India. While scholarships were the primary source of funding for Tibet-born participants, those who couldn't achieve such incentives had to resort to doing odd jobs after school to survive. The India-born participants, having parental support and sponsors for higher education, were the ones more likely to complete higher education and land well-paying jobs.

Social capital and social networking are the main resources to finding employment opportunities for both types of participants. It was a common observation among participants that the Tibetan community network within the city was utilized to find job vacancies in Tibetan-run businesses like garment and handicraft export, shops, cafes and restaurants. Most Tibet-born participants, especially the ones without higher education degrees or the ones who had struggled to complete their higher education degrees, had to resort to contacting friends for help in searching for jobs. For instance, a Tibet-born participant (with no family in India) who had lost his job as a tour guide during the pandemic, had to live with his friend in Nepal for a few months due to his inability to pay rent in Delhi. It was after the pandemic subsided that he came across a cancer/pharmaceutical drug supplier through his friend's contacts and started working under him for some time. Another participant who had lost his job as a waiter in a café had to search for odd job prospects through his friends and finally landed a job as a café manager at his friend's newly opened café.

The primary social capital for Tibetans without family in India is their friends and acquaintances they connected with while growing up. For the Tibetans having established

relatives or family network, is an additional advantage for finding employment opportunities in India or abroad.

The participants born in India were observed to have stable well-paying jobs such as nursing, family business, CTA officials, private university employee, etc. Those who had migrated from Tibet (without family) were observed to have gone through unstable livelihood/occupation changes such as small-scale street food stall owner, café waiter, cashier, etc. These participants too, much like their India-born counterparts, aspired to move abroad someday for better work, however, lack of familial network based abroad was a hindrance bringing up uncertainty. There was, however, also an exception of a Tibet-born woman without family in India who was engaged in a well-paying occupation as a garment exports manager. According to her the habit of not shying away from making connections within both the Tibetan and Indian community has paid her off well in the long run, even though she had no relatives to rely on for her higher education or employment. It is important to note that climbing up the socio-economic status ladder is especially difficult without hardwork and a strong social network to rely on, regardless of the participant's place of birth or family network's existence in India.

Chapter 4: Negotiating Daily Life & Access to Public Services

Adapting to City Life

Even though most of the participants had often been to Delhi as Majnu ka Tilla is an important transit point for Tibetans, especially traders, activists, and students, yet living in a new city was a new experience as opposed to merely travelling through it. Since most of the respondents were accustomed to the cool hill station weather for the majority of their childhood and school life, adapting to Delhi's extreme heat and pollution proved to be a challenge. According to one participant, Delhi's summer was particularly harsh on her, when she was living alone in the city during COVID lockdown and attending online college lectures. She would often switch on the cooler and fan and lie still on the floor for hours, as the heat was unbearable to her. However, she has now grown quite accustomed to the heat after living in the city for 3 years.

With difficulties in finding cheap rented accommodation, adapting to understanding and communicating with the Hindi dialects of the local population, initial adaptation was hard, especially for younger students. Since most of the participants, especially the Tibet-born, weren't as fluent or proficient in Hindi, they faced language communication problems in the initial days to a certain extent. However, many of them eventually learnt how to bargain with local shopkeepers and autorickshaw drivers to get used to the way of life. According to one Tibet-born participant, her two other India-born Tibetan friends were the ones doing most of the inquires with landlords and searching for a shared flat near their college, as they were more fluent in Hindi compared to her.

Navigating through the Delhi metro lines, local bus routes and popular marketplaces for the first time was hard for some of the participants, especially students, and thus special student led organizations assisted fresher students in navigating important parts of the city.

For some students, the crowded and fast pace of life in a metropolis like Delhi took some time, usually a month or so, to get adjusted to.

Rent, Accommodation, Water and Electricity

Among all the participants, only one was the owner of her 1 BHK in Majnu ka Tilla. The rest of the participants were all living in rented flats in Majnu ka Tilla, or on rent in other areas in Delhi such as Lajpat Nagar, Green Park or East of Kailash, depending on its proximity from their college or place of work. A few youth participants were residing at the Tibetan Youth Hostel in Rohini.

The rental prices of the participants ranged from Rs. 7000-21,000, with those living in Majnu ka Tilla paying within the range of Rs. 7000-12,000. The maximum recorded rent was Rs. 21,000 for a participant staying in East of Kailash and working as a nurse. This rent had eventually started from Rs. 7000 and grew over the years as the landlord kept making renovations to the place. For participants living in Majnu ka Tilla, the rent of 1 BHK flat has either remained constant in some cases, or increased after COVID. For one participant, his rent increased from Rs. 8000 to Rs. 12,000 as he changed his place within Majnu ka Tilla. According to a few participants, the rent at Punjabi Basti, a nearby cluster settlement from Majnu ka Tilla, was initially on par with that in Majnu ka Tilla. However, after COVID, with Majnu ka Tilla declared a food hub by the Delhi government in 2022, and the rising footfall of visitors at the settlement throughout the year, the rent prices at Majnu ka Tilla have increased compared to those at Punjabi Basti.

One participant narrating the experience of her Tibetan friends in searching for rental places in Delhi said that they often had to go through certain restrictions imposed by the landlords, such as not cooking pungent smelling or non-vegetarian food. However, in other cases, the landlords have also been helpful to their Tibetan tenants, such as the case of 3 college students studying at Kamala Nehru College in Delhi University, wherein their landlord offered them rent at fairly discounted price compared to the original rent of the place. At times some participants were spared from imposition of increasing rent due to constantly requesting or having a good rapport with the landlord.

According to a participant living in Majnu ka Tilla for over two decades, her family used to live in makeshift tarpaulin housing during the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, the refugees started building more concrete structures from the 2000s onwards, on the advice of the Indian government. All home-owners in Majnu ka Tilla are Tibetan, as all settlement paperwork is carried out in the Tibetan language, and the flats are often rented out to other Tibetans or people from Himalayan regional descent, such as Nepalese, Bhutanese or North-East Indian origin. Some youth participants initially stayed on rent at Majnu ka Tilla, before finding a more suitable place near their college or place of work.

All the participants had access to resources or assets, usually belonging to the landlord or their own private assets, such as television, cooler/air-conditioner, and refrigerator. Most participant tenants living in Majnu ka Tilla did not possess washing machines or television at times, and the assets belonged to their landlords, as compared to some of those tenant participants living outside the settlement who in few cases also owned their assets.

Rent is often inclusive of water bill, but excluded electricity bill. Electricity bills usually increase during the summer season due to increased usage of coolers or air-conditioners. Water supply at Majnu ka Tilla is provided by the Delhi Jal Board and electricity by TATA services. For officially allotted accommodation of CTA officials, water and electricity subsidy is provided.

Travel and Documentation

Most of the participants have relatives based abroad, and some of the participants even expressed their desire to go abroad someday for higher learning or better job opportunities with lesser restrictions. All participants with the experience of travelling abroad reiterated how travelling with Identity Certificate (IC) document was a hassle and led to much longer waiting period for immigration compared to travelling on Indian passport.

Due to the Tibetan IC (or the 'yellow book') not being a much familiar document for immigration officials in India or abroad, Tibetan applicants often have to go through visa rejections, unnecessary scrutiny or at times even undignified treatment at airports. Many participants have expressed their desire for Indian government to train their airport immigration officials in understanding the validity of Identity Certificates. According to one participant, while travelling to the USA for an official visit under the Tibetan Chamber of Commerce, she had to wait in front of the immigration counter for much longer compared to other travelers, leading her to face silent humiliation and stares from other people around her. Another participant stated how once she was travelling to Bali with her friends, the immigration official inquired her about her identity and background for a long time to grant

her entry approval, whilst her Tibetan friend possessing an Indian passport moved on without facing any hassle. It was during this moment, as stated by the participant, that the idea of applying for Indian citizenship came up in her mind. She wanted to be able to travel freely anywhere without restrictions as an escape from her hectic work life as a nurse. Due to being born in India before 1st July 1987, she was eligible for Indian citizenship, and received her official approval within a month of filing her application.

According to several participant responses, applying for Indian citizenship was not uncommon among younger generation of working Tibetans who would frequently have to travel abroad. All participants, including CTA officials, view it as a matter of convenience for ease of travel and individual choice. For instance, a participant shared how his friend wanted to become an air hostess, thus applying for Indian passport for hassle-free travel was in her best interest.

A Tibet-born participant exclaimed about his uncertain yet positive plans to migrate to Australia sometime in the future with his mother to seek Australian citizenship, as Australia is signatory to the UN Refugee Convention. Under the Australian government's humanitarian migration program, political prisoners and their families can seek asylum in the country and seek citizenship. The participant's mother was imprisoned by China in 1986 during a pro-Tibet protest and released only much later, thus she fits the criteria of a political prisoner. Under the Australian government's criteria, former political prisoners directly applying for citizenship receive higher priority than their family members applying for it. As the participant's mother doesn't wish to move to another country at her old age, he has to either convince her or migrate alone. But as a family member and not a former political

prisoner himself, he would receive much lower priority for citizenship application. According to the Australian government's criteria for refugee visas as enlisted on the Department of Home Affairs website¹³, priority is given only to the most vulnerable applicants due to high demand of applicants every year and limited spaces for resettlement.

¹³ Immigration and Citizenship, Department of Home Affairs, Australian Government:
<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/what-we-do/refugee-and-humanitarian-program/refugee-visas>

Chapter 5: General Observations & Opinions

This chapter would basically cover participants' opinions and general observations mainly on the facets of upbringing, aspirational differences and generation gap over religious practice, language fluency and voicing to change the status quo. This chapter covers the participants' opinions and observations over these facets which haven't been covered so far in the previous chapters, or would be viewed here with a closer look. These observations, however, are based on subjective participant responses and cannot be used for generalization.

Aspirational differences & Upbringing

It has been observed after conversing with all the participants that there are certain nuanced differences between Tibet-born and India-born Tibetan youth in their approach and aspirations towards life. India-born participants, usually having families in India, have a social support network to fall back on. Although families don't pressurize their children in pursuing a certain line of occupation, some female participants have narrated personal anecdotes of parents encouraging them to study nursing. The profession of nursing is very common among Tibetan women, with one of the India-born participants having almost every female relative in her family being a nurse. This participant exclaimed how her family wanted her to follow the same profession, as it pays well and is one of the few available job options for Tibetan women to gain a practicing license for without much restrictions. The participant, although pursuing a journalism degree of her choice, was thinking of studying nursing in the future on moving abroad with her brother. Another India-born participant similarly narrated

how her initial interest was into geography, however she enrolled into nursing school on her parents' advice. While family's influence and supportive network in choosing potential career path is not true in every instance, it is not uncommon either. Most of the participants had relatives or friends settled abroad, or had plans for moving abroad sometime in the future for better work opportunities.

In the case of Tibet-born participants, their aspirations and career paths were influenced by their friends and social circle while growing up. Due to many of them often having no close relatives in India, they often had no proper adult guidance, financial support, or wider social network to rely upon while growing up. The biggest financial aid was provided through scholarships for college, after which they were on their own. It has been observed through my interactions with both India-born and Tibet-born participants that no fixed plan for the future on graduating and frequent changing of odd jobs was more common among the Tibet-born participants who were without families. Thus, having a good friends circle was of utmost importance in such cases as the youth tend to take life as it goes whilst having limited resources, as exclaimed by one youth participant.

In some instances, children of relatively well-off Tibetan parents settled in India are sent to attend private schools to enable better inter-mingling with the Indian community. For instance, one Tibet-born participant, who is a single mother, prefers to send her son to a nearby private school in Delhi instead of a TCV, as she feels her son would benefit much better in the long run by inter-mingling with Indian friends and staying close to her at young age. The participant herself had chosen to live in a PG during her college days instead of the Tibetan Youth Hostel, as she felt the necessity of inter-mingling with Indian people and

making long-term social connections. The participant recounted the hardships she had to face while growing up alone in India without her parents (who are still in Tibet), especially mentally, and thus does not want her son to go through the same hardships.

Tibetan youth growing up alone are often the products of a harsh upbringing and separation from parents, which can result in lack of support during hard times or reliance on an unsupportive social network. This brings to the fore the personal story of one Tibet-born youth participant who developed suicidal tendencies after going through rough times when his best friend of years stole his hard-earned money, and he felt he had no one else to rely on during those times. Fortunately, he had other friends who helped him during the peak of his depression. However, in-depth studies on the mental health of Tibet-born youth growing up alone are especially limited.

According to a study by Kiran Dolly Sapam and Parisha Jijina (2020), coping strategies used by Tibetan refugee youth while growing up without their family in India can pertain to their Buddhist beliefs and practices related to compassion and karma, and faith in the Dalai Lama which brings them peace of mind, as well as community support. The youth respondents in the study reported how they feel they wouldn't be as self-reliant or aware about their culture and religion had they not migrated to India.

Generation gap

According to one participant, generation gap between the older and younger generations of Tibetans can be observed in the aspects of being religious, writing fluency in Tibetan

language and approach to changing the status quo. According to one participant, the older generation is grateful towards the Indian government for providing asylum to refugees and are apprehensive in asking for anything more, whereas the younger generation wants to change the status quo. The participant mentioned how the younger generation feels the greater need to ask for improvement from the Indian government in aspects like removing restrictions for IC holders in airports or restrictions occurring due to their legal status as 'foreigners' in India while applying for jobs or licensing. They feel if their voice is not heard, there will not be any further improvement in their current status, as a result of which large number of Tibetans would end up migrating abroad.

When it comes to writing fluency in the Tibetan language, the younger generation is often weaker in terms of writing the language compared to the older generation, however, with regard to verbal or reading fluency both the older and younger generations are fluent. One reason for this could be the usage of mother tongue at home and among Tibetan friends, while most of the younger generation has lost touch with writing the language after leaving school and its lack of applicability in higher education or the job market.

When it comes to religious practice, the older generation is deeply religious, while the younger generation, as stated by one participant from the older age group, aren't as serious when it comes to practicing faith. According to the same participant, the younger generation is more straightforward when it comes to communication, which can sometimes come off as impolite. However, it is important to note that these instances described cannot be generalized to include the entirety of younger or older population of Tibetans, and are based on the participants' subjectivity.

Conclusion

It is imperative to note that young Tibetan children were sent to India by their parents for the sake of the Dalai Lama's blessings as well as in search of a better life with regard to preserving their faith and culture, away from Chinese repression. Most of these children come from rural families with parents engaged in occupations like artisanal work, farming, animal grazing, etc.

Families who had settled in India over the decades started off with the hard toil of the first generation of Tibetan refugees who had escaped Chinese repression, and had to adapt surviving in an alien land, often uneducated and without documents, and faced with major challenges like living amongst an alien local population with the problem of language, climate and cultural differences, as well as taking up livelihood options like working in road construction projects, sweater and street-food selling, farming, or joining the Special Frontier Force.

With the first generation of Tibetan refugees settling in India with their hard labour and expansion in the number of Tibetan refugee settlements, the newer generations of India-born Tibetans could have a relatively better life with education in Tibetan Children's Village schools, availability of financial aid or scholarships for higher education, and relatives settled abroad over the years forming a network of Tibetan diaspora. India-born Tibetan youth were

able to access good education and guidance from families to pursue better paying occupations like nursing, private/corporate jobs, teaching, etc. All participants had changed their place of work, changed odd jobs, or planned to move abroad in search of better alternatives. Such a pattern of intergenerational experience in negotiating access to education and employment is mainly seen in Tibetan families settled in India for a considerable amount of time.

The Tibet-born youth seeking refuge in India, whilst being separated from their families, either live scattered away from their distant relatives in India, or simply have no close relatives in India, and grow up alone. Their contact with their families in Tibet occurs a handful number of times in a year, with many not having any sort of contact with their families in Tibet for years. Growing up alone in the foster care system of the TCVs, they make major life decisions pertaining to higher education or jobs alone, usually influenced and helped through their friends' social network.

Tibet-born students in India, migrated at considerably older ages, are usually overaged for their classes in India, and have to work double hard in their initial schooling years in India to keep up with the crowd. Mandarin is incorporated to some extent in their initial schooling to make them feel accommodated. Higher education and rented accommodation for Tibetan students is covered by either scholarships or side jobs after college, if not sponsored by parents or relatives.

The major challenges faced by the Tibetan youth, especially Tibet-born youth, is lack of capital/financial support if they don't land scholarships or well-paying jobs, lack of parental

guidance and emotional support while growing up, and their legal status as ‘foreigners’ in India creating hindrance for certain job or entrepreneurship licensing through lengthy paperwork or bureaucratic red-tapism, as well as creating hindrance during travel and immigration at international airports or visa applications. To remove this barrier resulting from their legal status as ‘foreigners’, many Tibetan youth apply for an Indian passport, mainly for the ease of travel abroad, as several Tibetans are migrating abroad in search of better work opportunities, or through the support of their relatives based abroad. Applying for Indian citizenship is, thus, more commonly seen as the individual’s choice for their travel convenience, rather than seen as a sign of disloyalty or disinterest in the Tibetan cause for freedom.

Policy Implications

According to O.P. Tandon and R.C.B Dhar’s compiled India-Tibet policy document (2022), there is a scope for a number of policy measures to be undertaken to improve the lives of Tibetans living in India. Restrictions on owning land or businesses outside of designated settlements should be removed for those Tibetans who could prove their residency for at least the last 25 years or more in the country. The ones who could provide proof of bank accounts and regular employment should be allowed to own property legally, subject to normal tax provisions. This would reduce or eliminate instances of *benami* transactions, and the uncertainties encountered on doing economic activities outside the settlements. Those born and residing in India should be opened to employment opportunities in government services such as the Central Police Organisations like the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Defence Security Corps (DSC), or in Central Ministries for tourism and culture, tribal

welfare, education, health, forests and environment, etc., as well as within some state governments. The Indian government can also explore having some Army Cadet Core (ACC) position opportunities for Tibetans. Any remaining restrictions could be completely done away with after a few years.

The citizenship eligibility criteria for Tibetans in India should be expanded beyond 1st July 1987 to accommodate the refugees who escaped from Tibet or were born in India after this period. Many refugees who couldn't fit into this criteria sought political asylum in other countries or migrated abroad with the help from familial networks. The procedures for obtaining licenses, applying for Indian passport, or retrieving Tibetan identity papers like the Registration Certificate and the Identity Certificate should be eased further, cutting down on humiliating and time-consuming bureaucratic red tapism. The unnecessary procedures of Tibetans applying for exit and re-entry permits for international travel from India must also be done away with.

There is also a need to strengthen education and increase the number of scholarship opportunities for Tibetan students, in vocational and information technology institutes, schools and colleges, as well as improve alumni and people-to-people networks. Another consideration would be to allow Tibetan scholars to be eligible for the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF). These measures, highlighted in the context of responses from participants, would go a long way in improving the lives of common Tibetans at the ground level.

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Annexure

- 1) Participant Informed Consent Form**
- 2) Participant Information Sheet**
- 3) Topic Guide**



Participant Informed Consent Form



I hereby declare that

1. The contents of the participant information sheet have been explained to me in my own language and I have understood it.
2. I had the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarifications about the study and they have been satisfactorily answered.
3. I understand that I may withdraw from this interview without any penalty at any time by informing the researcher of this decision.
4. I understand that this study has been reviewed by and has received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Review Board (RERB) of O.P. Jindal Global University.
5. I understand that data provided by me will be suitably anonymised to remove all personal identifiers.
6. I understand that the results of this research will be written up as a thesis and submitted to the University as a partial requirement for the award of the degree.
7. I understand that the results of this study may be published in journals that might be available to every internet user.
8. I understand how to raise a concern, if I have any and how to make a complaint.

I hereby agree to participate in this research of my own free will.

Name of the Participant

Kunjai Gawas

Name of the Researcher

Signature/ left thumb print of the Participant

Signature of the researcher

Date

Date

Place

Place

Participant Information Sheet



Name of the Research: *Negotiating Everyday Life in a City of Refuge:
Experience of Tibetan Youth in New Delhi, India*

Name of the Researcher: *Kunjai Gawas*

Name of the master's programme: *MA Public Policy*

Contact details of the Researcher: *21jsgp-kgawas@jgu.edu.in*

The purpose of this research is to understand the experience of Tibetan youth in Delhi, with respect to negotiating access to gainful employment, education opportunities, and public services, as well as their familial intergenerational experience with social mobility.

Based on the findings of this research a thesis will be written up and submitted to the O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU) as a partial requirement for the award of the degree. The results of this research may also be published in suitable academic journals and in popular print media, which may be available to the public.

Your contribution to this research involves providing information about your education and employment, your experience with the move to the settlement, your opinions and inputs on the various facets of Tibetan youth's experiences in negotiating access to education, employment, public services, and safety concerns, within the Tibetan community residing in the Majnu ka Tilla settlement, New Delhi.

You can withdraw from this interview without any penalty at any time by informing the researcher of this decision. The information provided by you will be used solely for the purpose stated above and will be suitably anonymised by removing individual personal identifiers.

This research has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Review Board (RERB) of the O.P. Jindal Global University. If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, please speak

to the researcher and she will do her best to address that concern. Even after this if you still have concerns and wish to make a formal complaint, please contact The Member Secretary, Research and Ethics Review Board, O.P. Jindal Global University, at jgurerb@jgu.edu.in.

This interview will take approximately 40-50 minutes. I thank you in advance for your time and attention. Your contribution to this research is highly valued and greatly appreciated.

Best regards,

Kunjal Gawas
Researcher

Date: _____

Topic Guide

Negotiating Everyday Life in a City of Refuge: Experience of Tibetan Youth in New Delhi, India

(by Kunjal Gawas, MAPP 2021-2023)

Background

1. What is your age and place of origin/birth?
2. How many family members do you have, and where do they reside? Who do you currently reside with?
3. What is your educational qualification? Which school and college did you attend?
4. Where do you work? What is your monthly income? Since how long have you been engaged with your current occupation?
5. What other jobs you worked on before this? Work stability?
6. Where were your grandparents and parents born? When and why did they migrate to India?
7. When and why did you or your family migrate to Majnu ka Tilla? How long have you or your family been based in Majnu ka Tilla?
8. Which other places was your family based in over the past few decades?
9. What were your parents' occupation?
10. How much is your individual and family's monthly expenditure?
11. What assets do you or your family own (like smartphone, vehicle, household appliances, etc.)?
12. In your knowledge, how has the economic situation of your family evolved or grown over the past few decades?

Life history

13. How is your present living situation at Majnu ka Tilla? How was the situation of rent and accommodation at Majnu ka Tilla when you first moved in?
14. How is the situation with access to public services like water or electricity at Majnu ka Tilla? Which authority provides these services?

15. How has the situation with access to public services (like housing, rent, water, electricity, etc.) changed over time for the better or worse?
16. If rent prices rose, how did it affect your quality of life with respect to your income?
17. How are the relations of Majnu ka Tilla residents with the local police?
18. Have there been any past instances of conflict within the settlers or with Indian people? If yes, how were these conflicts settled?
19. Are you or any close associate of yours engaged in any political activities (presently or in the past)?
20. How is your social life or that of the youth at Majnu ka Tilla like? How do you engage yourself in your free time?
21. Do you have Aadhaar card? How has it aided the Tibetan community?
22. Do you pay taxes? Do you have driving license, where did you receive it?

Perceptions and Experiences

23. How do you define your identity as Tibetan? When did you first learn that India is not your native land?
24. Who are the storytellers of the Tibetan past in your family?
25. How do you assess your fluency in written and spoken Tibetan language vis-à-vis English and Hindi? How is it different or similar to that of your parents or grandparents?
26. What religion do you follow?
27. Is there any fear of a widening generation gap between the older and younger generations of Tibetans with regard to exposure towards culture or ethos?
28. How do you compare your perception of the CTA (Central Tibetan Administration) to that of the Indian government, with regard to providing educational and work opportunities?
29. How do you perceive your trust in these institutions?
30. What is the perception of gaining legal Indian citizenship within the Tibetan community?
31. Do you think getting Indian citizenship could potentially open more doors of opportunities for Tibetan youth with regard to employment in India or travel abroad for higher education or work?
32. Is there anyone that you know of who has applied for Indian citizenship?
33. Have you thought of going abroad for education or work? If yes, did you face any obstacles?

Opinions

34. How do you assess the quality of teaching and situation at TCV (Tibetan Children's Village) schools? How is their usual curriculum?
35. How is the situation of higher education among Tibetan youth in Indian colleges/universities, with regard to fees, placements, and relations with Indian professors and students? Do they prefer private or public Indian universities?
36. What are the prospects of employment opportunities for Tibetan students after graduation?
37. What is the biggest challenge faced by the Tibetan youth in finding jobs? Do they prefer working under the CTA or private sector jobs?
38. Do the Tibetan youth working under private sector jobs face any employer prejudices or issues related to wages?
39. How do unemployed Tibetan youth engage themselves? What do you think are the main reasons for unemployment?
40. What challenges do Tibetan entrepreneurs face in setting up their businesses in your opinion (with regard to land, licensing, acquiring bank loans, etc.)?

41. How do you assess Majnu ka Tilla's further potential as a space for employment opportunities (such as through small businesses, shops, hotels, etc.)?

Closing

42. What do you aspire to do ahead in future?