

**RECONSTRUCTING THE FIGURE OF TIBET THROUGH THE LENS OF TIBETAN  
MUSLIMS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE.**

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SUBMITTED TO SCHOOL OF HUMAN STUDIES, AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY DELHI IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE **DEGREE OF MASTERS  
OF ARTS IN PSYCHOLOGY (PSYCHOSOCIAL CLINICAL STUDIES).**

SCHOOL OF HUMAN STUDIES  
AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY DELHI  
KASHMERE GATE,  
NEW DELHI  
2018



अम्बेडकर विश्वविद्यालय दिल्ली

Ambedkar University Delhi

2018

## Declaration

This is to certify that this thesis titled 'Reconstructing The Figure Of Tibet Through The Lens Of Tibetan Muslims: Past, Present And Future.'

submitted for the award of the degree of Masters of Arts in Psychology to Ambedkar University Delhi is a bonafide work carried out by Sumaiya Baba under my supervision.

The work embodied in this dissertation is original and has not been submitted in part or full for the award of any other degree of any other university.

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2018

*“The history of anything does not exist—  
it is instead an illusion, a fiction, or a fallacy because there can be no one definitive  
telling of any story, history or otherwise. History, like any other story, is subject to  
amendment, development, alteration, expansion and change—forever re-written  
as new insights, stories, perspectives, contexts or understandings are uncovered.  
And history, like any other story, depends on who is doing the telling.”*

*~Kitrina Douglas*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my genuine gratitude towards the following people in my life:

Abala, Ammi and Ela, none of this would have been possible without you three. Abala, for teaching me how to dream Tibet. Ammi, for keeping Tibet alive in the little things you do. Ela, for being a companion in this mess.

Momola, for trusting me with your stories. In your eyes, I get a glimpse of Lhasa, love, nostalgia and faith.

Professor Honey Oberoi, for being a guide, inspiration and support from the time I entered Ambedkar University. It has been an honour to start this journey with you from the first interview to the dissertation.

Professor Anup Dhar, for teaching me to question everything. Your classes have changed the way I know myself and the world. I will always carry a piece of you everywhere I go, and in everything I do.

Anshu, for mirroring me. You helped me find parts of myself I didn't know existed.

Ashis, for your supportive presence and sense of humour.

Anushka and Aastha, for understanding and encouraging me and for the lifelong bond we have created.

Srimanta, for your persistent presence.

And finally,

My community, for showing me how to find happiness even in the toughest of times. For teaching me the value of togetherness, laughter, resilience and faith.

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There's confusion on every ones faces when they see my grandmother  
Wearing a maroon *chuba* with a matching coloured *hijab*  
Looking as though we could be from Iran or Indonesia  
Sometimes people guess correctly  
We are from Tibet. Yes. But we are not Buddhist.  
We were from Kashmir. Yes. But we are Tibetan.  
We are Muslims. Yes. But we cook thukpa on Eid morning, not biryani.

We're used to not being understood at first glance  
We're used to making long introductions every time  
Used to being received with excitement and curiosity  
But it's a tiring process.

I wonder what it feels like to be able to introduce yourself in the same breath.  
To not having to justify your identity by evoking history.  
I would be lying if I said it isn't fun when people think you're 'exotic'  
But each time you also hope someone will say "Oh. Welcome home."

Because on paper this is my home, but it doesn't feel so  
I grew up in India, but I can't particularly say I'm from Delhi  
Or Kolkata  
Or Darjeeling  
Or Kashmir

Sure, my permanent address is some sector in Gurgaon  
But is that home?  
I'm a citizen of India but never have I introduced myself as Indian  
I fear my Indian passport will cancel out my identity of being Tibetan.  
You ask what it means to be Tibetan when I've linked my Aadhar to my phone number?  
To be Indian, yet know that your mother tongue is a 'foreign language'?  
Some may be suspicious of my claim that I don't feel like I belong here  
But please know  
That home isn't a city, state or nation  
I don't know if Tibet is that for me.  
But it is the birthplace of my community.

So it could have been home.

I'm a Tibetan Muslim

I am a citizen of India

And through this dissertation

I make a humble attempt to negotiate these two identities.



His Holiness The Dalai Lama's playful humour bringing a smile on Tibetan Muslim ladies faces.  
Srinagar, 2012.



## INTRODUCTION

What comes to your mind when you think Tibet?

It's alright. You're not the only one.

'Tibetan Muslim' is not only an unheard identity but an absurd one for most people. Fortunately when I introduce myself people are astounded which makes for a good conversation starter. But those introductions are neither easy nor enough. Hence, this dissertation.

I have always lived away from the rest of my community because of my father's transferable job. And even though both my parents speak Tibetan at home, my hold over the language is absolutely pathetic. I can understand but can never say it in words to a Tibetan that I understand. It'll take some time and a lot of work. But not knowing how to speak the language did not imply the absence of curiosity. I grew up listening to my maternal grandmothers stories about her childhood back in Tibet, the abundance of delicious meat and fruits, the beautiful gardens or 'lingkas' where picnics were frequent. One such memory has stayed with me even today about how after school she would go ice skating on the lake with her friends. As a child of ten I was fascinated by the idea of snow and would often imagine my momola as a young girl slipping and sliding on the ice, barely managing to keep her chuba from getting wet.

My father had found his junior researcher and fellow dreamer in me at a young age. We would sit and talk for hours about Tibet, imagining what life would be like had the Chinese never arrived and we never left. He would tell me about our community's history, narrating memories of his parents struggling to reorganize life in India, the different jobs they had to take up, and on one occasion his own eyes filled up when he narrated the story of his mother breaking an entire glass window as she panicked seeing the unfamiliar locks on the room door.

Abala used to show me old photographs of Tibet and I remember asking him very naively "*Abba, is Tibet still black and white?*". He would also draw what felt to be never ending family trees to explain my relations with several hundred members of the community I had barely ever met. He made me memorize their names, which were all Arabic but with a Tibetan twist. So Faizullah Baba became "Bai Fuzula" and Salima became "Acha Samla". Tibetan Muslims had a tough time pronouncing their own names which sounded so different from the dialect that the tongue could



My paternal grandmother with some of her children in Lhasa.



My maternal grandmother, *Momola*, with her brother in Kalimpong, sometime in the late 60s.

never get around it. Today this has remained as a tradition and I think, it is one of the ways we have kept Tibet alive.

Broadly speaking, this work is an exploration of the ways in which Tibetan Muslims have maintained their link to Tibet and what this link means in the context of Hijarat on one hand, and Indian citizenship on the other. I attempt to do this by first (re)presenting the pre 1959 Tibet in order to rethink our perception of Tibet as a country and its social, cultural and political history through the lens of Islam. It is an attempt to collect lost traditions, ways of life and also explore how Islam as practiced in Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism had similarities and overlaps which manifested in the social and cultural life of the country. I argue that Sufism as practiced by Tibetan Muslims in the past came close to Buddhism and how the similarities could have laid the strong foundation for the assimilation of Kashmiri's into Tibetan society in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The attempt is to document a diminishing history from the perspective of those who are directly affected by it.

I also argue the need to understand the Islamic meaning of Hijarat in order to come closer to the experience of Tibetan Muslims, their present and possibly future. How undertaking the process of Hijarat is still recalled by the community members with immense pride and continues to instil meaning to their everyday life in India. Before we can explore their sense of exile and displacement, we first need to understand the underlying belief system and values of the community to prevent the error of interpreting their experience only in terms of loss. Because in their eyes, there was a bigger, more meaningful victory achieved post 1960. Finally, I attempt to understand the political categories of 'citizen' and 'refugee' and how the position of Tibetan Muslims today subverts this binary.

This work is personally significant to me not only because I am attempting to bring to surface the story of a community which continues to remain at the margins and understudied. It is also a way for me to come closer to and connect with my community, something I've longed for since childhood. Because although there was physical distance between us, I wished to go to the hills of Kalimpong, drink butter tea with my aunts, wear chuba with my cousins, discuss politics with the 'bai las' and just be able to initiate a short conversation with the beautiful Tibetan lady who sits outside her shop in the Haat Bazaar.

This longing coupled with a curiosity about Tibet encouraged me to initiate this dissertation, and hopefully, pursue it as lifelong work. The present work will serve as a rough blueprint, guiding my

sense of direction when I start the more in depth, extensive work. The different chapters here will be separate areas of research which I hope to explore. Therefore, in the current project I wanted to focus primarily on the history of Tibetan Muslims and invariably, Tibet, partly because this version of history has been rarely studied. But more so because this is the history of my community, and indirectly, the history of me. Preserving cultural history is not just for its value in the past but the sense of continuity it provides in the present for those who identify with it. It becomes particularly crucial in the case of Tibetan Muslims whose social, political and cultural position in India is ambiguous, fluid, unstable and largely unknown. Writing history then is to keep alive a stable source of reference that gives meaning to this constantly shifting present.

As a Tibetan Muslim myself, I empathize with the everyday challenge of articulating why these two otherwise contradictory seeming identities co-exist, to a point where you begin to lose any sense of coherence with regard to your own identity. However, turning to history can save us from the very real possibility of losing any sense of continuity.

Therefore, through writing about the community's past, I am presenting a piece of my *self* which was largely missing before I began this journey.

*“The very act of narrating one’s history is an intrinsic part of negotiating with one’s own experiences and even life itself.”*

## METHODOLOGY

I wondered a lot about this section of my dissertation, whether I wanted to do narrative analysis, thematic analysis or interpretive phenomenological analysis. But when I did start writing this piece, I realized neither of the two methodologies were really what I had in mind after all. It didn't qualify for a narrative analysis because when I started taking 'interviews' of my grandmother and another relative, Somola, who has lived a significant portion of her life in Tibet, the atmosphere in the room didn't seem like we were all gathered for the purpose of my dissertation and by the time we ended there were over 5 women in the room. It felt to me like the occasion was much more than an interview. It was a group of women, including me, from different generations with the same heritage, coming together to reminisce the life that was back in a distant land we called home, some who had lived it and others who live it through the stories of family elders.

I was the quietest in the room which is usually the case in other family gatherings as well because I'm very conscious of my Tibetan, and usually have little to contribute to such discussions. Or so I think. What started off as a possible semi structured interview, ended up becoming an intimate space shared between relatives who were engaging in a conversation about their past, present and future. I would, therefore, like to present conversations as a method, an invitation into someone's life story. Someone who is family or a fellow member of the community, with whom your relationship goes beyond interviewer and interviewee and contact does not begin nor end by occupying those roles. Conversations have an emotional undertone, which is not to say interviews lack affective quality, but in this context, the former involves a mutual exchange of affect, of sentiments, not necessarily independent of the relationship shared between the two people. These emotions are not only evoked in response to what the other has said, but who the other is and means to us. So when my grandmother would tell me about her experience of being racially discriminated as a young girl in Kashmir or when Somola talked about the extent of economic disparity between her family and the Kashmiri neighbours back in 1960 and how it made her feel, I was not listening from the point of view of an observer, or even an 'empathic, post modernist researcher' but as a granddaughter who felt a strong sense of sadness coupled with anger and at moments could identify with such experiences, all these decades later. Moreover, conversations are not time bound as it has the potential of being taken up again, some other day, or a few years later without compromising on the affective quality. Just like Adam Phillips describes relationships as not having an end, I think, conversations as manifestations of a relationship can never really end, just temporarily abandoned.

For example, my conversations with my father at the age of ten around the question of Tibetan Muslims found its way back at different stages, phases in our lives, with different themes each time, finally culminating into my decision to write this paper, which in itself, is an initiation into a life long conversation of wider scope.

Conversations, like Ogden writes do not only take place at the level of consciousness, but at the frontier of dreaming, between the unconscious and preconscious, of two individuals. Some conversations that took place as unconscious communication between a father and daughter resulted in the last chapter of this work- *Indian citizen, Tibetan Refugee: Challenging the binary between 'citizen' and 'other'*. My father despite being an Indian bureaucrat always seemed to me to be terribly scared of his children falling on the wrong side of the law, or even getting into an argument with someone who's more 'of a delhiite (read Punjabi) than us' hence always asked us to remain quiet, not raise our voice outside the house, or grab any attention. As a teenager I found such behaviour from my father so absurd because it was different from others. But over the past few years I started realizing that holding a strong position in the Indian Government doesn't automatically create in you a sense of being an 'insider', a powerful one that too when all your life you were identified as a refugee. Your citizenship allowed you to become an IAS, but that position had little space to accommodate your identity of being Tibetan Muslim and all that it means. Last year I confronted my father about this to which he said "*You are not from here like the rest which is why I get worried.*" I thought to myself "*I have lived 'here' meaning Delhi since I was 7. If I'm not from here, then where the hell?!*" And if my father who serves the Indian government, hasn't been able to feel like he belongs 'here', then it was important for me to understand what it means to be citizen(insider) and what it means to feel like a refugee(outsider seen to be living on borrowed time) despite citizenship( formal recognition of being an insider which bestows upon you the rights to behave like one)? Throughout the process of working on the dissertation, I was finding, through the life story of my family members, parts of myself that until recently were incoherent, ambiguous and silent. My own tendency to introduce myself as Tibetan Muslim when someone asks me where I'm from, instead of being able to pin point on the map my 'home', started to unravel slowly. These self- confrontations resulting from the experience of listening to and conversing with my family about their life story, can be said to have laid down the foundations of the present work and future endeavours.

These explorations bring my work closer to autoethnography, which has been defined as a method combining tenets of both autobiography and ethnography. When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by,

being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. These "epiphanies" have been defined as 'remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life, times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyze lived experience, and events after which life does not seem quite the same.' (Bochner & Ellis, 1992)

However, in addition to writing about experiences, autoethnographers of the social sciences background are required to analyze these experiences. As Mitch Allen says, an autoethnographer must

*"look at experience analytically. Otherwise [you're] telling [your] story—and that's nice—but people do that on Oprah [a U.S.-based television program] every day. Why is your story more valid than anyone else's? What makes your story more valid is that you are a researcher. You have a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature to use. That's your advantage. If you can't frame it around these tools and literature and just frame it as 'my story,' then why or how should I privilege your story over anyone else's I see 25 times a day on TV?" (personal interview, May 4, 2006)"*

Moreover, as mentioned above, in resemblances and resonances with the others, I found words to articulate parts of the self which were previously difficult to locate or weave together. Davis (1999) defined the field similarly,

*"ethnographers use their experience among and knowledge of others to expand their knowledge of self and this is likely to be much more the case for autoethnography by virtue of the ethnographer's unique positioning as a member of the group under study."*

The interface of psyche and culture finds voice in autoethnographic methods which have immense political potential.

*"auto-ethnography invites writers to see themselves and everyone else as human subjects constructed in a tangle of cultural, social and historical situations and relations in contact zones." (Brodkey, 1996)*

Political potential because it is a two way process of learning about the cultural, social, and historical through an exploration of the personal but also a representation of that subjectivity which was missed by the dominant method, narrative, or history. Numerous autoethnographic texts present a self who contravenes (in some important way) dominant representations of a particular experience or identity.

Therefore, personal experience is used to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, “characteristics of a culture are made familiar for insiders and outsiders”. To accomplish this might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research (Ronai, 1995, 1996), interviewing cultural members (Foster, 2006; Marvasti, 2006; Tillmann-Healy, 2001), and/or examining relevant cultural artefacts (Boylorn, 2008; Denzin, 2006). For this dissertation, I explored conversations with family members, both conscious and unconscious, spread over the years; thoroughly read the limited amount of books and researches available on the topic and had a conversation with each work as well; and during one unexpected situation, relied on what Ogden and others have proposed as a crucial component of psychoanalysis-reverie.

*“Reverie may take almost any form, but most often, in my experience, it presents itself obliquely to awareness in the most unobtrusive, quotidian of forms :as ruminations, day dreams, sexual fantasies, snippets of films, audible musical phrases or lines of poetry, bodily sensations and so on.”*

I am not completely confident whether what I experienced could be termed as reverie because I’m aware that the possibility of its occurrence is directly proportional to the years of experience as a psychoanalyst. But since this happened outside the analytic relationship, I will take the leeway to say that it came close to the experience of what we understand as reverie. I was wrapping up the second chapter of my dissertation by describing the final events which took place in 1960 before Tibetan Muslims left as Indian citizens, and I suddenly felt tears rolling down my face. I thought it is only natural to feel emotional considering I’m writing about my community, but before I could even finish thinking this, I started wailing uncontrollably. In that moment, I felt the urge to write poetry, which is unusual of me. And so I wrote ‘Beautiful Home’ which was interesting because I hadn’t consciously thought of those things before this moment but it was spontaneously writing itself, like I had known it all along. After reading what I had written, I came to realize something I would have otherwise not emphasized much- Tibet is still alive amongst us, we have created little spaces in our lives today for it to live peacefully, like before. Hijarat which necessitates dissociation from the past, in this case, did not result in disavowing Tibet. Even though today families rarely discuss it, if you look closely, you’ll find Lhasa, living amongst us unchanged, in the way a 10 year



old child born in Srinagar will speak to you in the purest, most beautiful form of Tibetan possible, how even during intermarriage weddings, the bride will wear a chuba for the walima, how despite being fluent in Urdu and Arabic the way names are pronounced will hold traces of Tibet, like Faizullah becomes 'Bai Fuzula' and just how in some small corner of every house you will find a photo of the Potala Palace.

*“Reverie experience serves as an emotional compass that I rely on heavily in my effort to gain my bearings about what is going on unconsciously in the analytic relationship.”*

## TIBET'S FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH ISLAM

### AND THE ARAB WORLD

Tibet in the popular imagination has always been seen as a remote, isolated, almost eremitic Buddhist country, cut off from global historical currents until the advent of assertive Chinese policy. In recent years, however, some historians of Tibet have challenged this interpretation, implying ways in which particularly before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city of Lhasa, along with Tibet at large, participated fully in the political, religious and economic life of their geopolitical milieu, situated as they were at the fraught crossroads of Chinese, Indian, Persian and Mongol powers. Consequently, the misinterpreted image of Tibetan culture as being entirely homogenous in terms of ethnicity, language and religion persists till date. Even Tibetan scholars have unintentionally mostly portrayed the country in this light. Jose Ignacio Cabezon writes

*“Tibetologists like myself are not unaware of the fact that Muslims exist and that they play an important function in Tibetan society, but being concerned primarily with Buddhism (and to a lesser extent with Tibet’s native religion, Bon) we unconsciously, I think, work under the presupposition that Tibet culture is monolithically Buddhist.”<sup>1</sup>*

My attempt therefore, in this dissertation and particularly in this chapter, is to re-present Islam as a particular lens through which to question the assumption surrounding the figure of Tibet.

Muslims have existed in Tibet from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and are as much Tibetan as any Tibetan Buddhist would appear to be. However, a lesser known fact is that even before Muslims actually settled in Tibet proper and became an intrinsic part of the society, there were strong trade relations between the Arab world and Tibet. Moreover, Muslim preachers who went to China (A.D 651 onwards), Chinese Turkestan, Kashghar, Bukhara, Baltistan and Ladakh reached Tibet also.

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in the book *Islam In Tibet: And Tibetan Caravans* by Abdul Wahid Radhu, published in the year 1997.

Only Arab historians and geographers have mentioned in detail the preaching of Islam in Tibet. Dr Abu Bakr Nadwi has written extensively on the undermined and unexamined version of Tibet's history as provided by non western scholars.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries when the Tibetan empire posed a formidable threat to its neighbours because of its drastic expansions, some medieval writers refer to *bahr-al-Tubbat* "a sea of Tibet" somewhere between India and China in vicinity of Ganges delta.<sup>2</sup> The origin of the name Tibet was itself a common topic for some. Arabic historical accounts of the time when the Tubba dynasty ruled over Yemen contain references to Tibet-Arab relations and geographers frequently explained that Tibet was founded by an ancient Yemeni King named Tubbat-ul-Agran who entered the country on his way to invading China. Several Arabic historians and even poets have argued for the same.<sup>3</sup>

*"It is said that Tubba-ul-Agran started from Yemen, crossed the Jihun river and marched up to Samarkand. After a month's journey he reached a fertile land with abundance of water. Here he founded another city and thirty thousand of his men, who were not fit to travel outwards to China, were left behind to establish the place. He named this place 'Tibet'."*<sup>4</sup>

According to Abu Bakr Amir-uddin Nadwi, the author of *Tibet and Tibetan Muslims*, the Tibetan name Boe(Bod) itself means 'run away' and corroborates the theory that the early settlers were people who had migrated from another place. He further writes that ancient Tibetan kings wore the title "Tubba" with their names. While there are other theories about the origins of the name "Tibet", including associations with the place "Turfan" and "Tuoba" or Tabghach people of Mongolia, the aforementioned speculations are hints of a broader linguistic relationship between Tibetan and Arabic.

### **Islam and Tibet: The interface of Empires.**

Dr. Nadwi in his book quotes Abu Jafar Mohamed-bin-Jaridul-tabri, a famous Arab historian, who wrote "*During the reign of the Caliph Umr-bin-Abdul-Aziz(717-772), a delegation from Tibet came to the court of Al-Jarah bin Abdullah Al-Hukmi, the ruler of Khorasan, with the request that an*

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<sup>2</sup> Akasoy, "*Tibet in Islamic Geography and Cartography*",40.

<sup>3</sup> People like Dible-bin-Ali-Al Kharai, the Arabic poet, refers to this event in A.D 860; Abu Mohamed Abdul Malik bin Hushan, in his work *Al-tijan Fi Maluk-e-Hamir*; Ibn Khaldun. These sources were found in Abu Bakr Amir-Uddin Nadwi's book, *Tibet and Tibetan Muslims(1979)*, trans from Urdu by Parmanada Sharma.

<sup>4</sup> Yaqut Hamir, *Maajam-al-baldan*( quoted in *Tibet and Tibetan Muslims*).

*Islamic preacher be sent to their country.*” According to the book, during the concluding years of Caliph Harun-Rasheed’s reign(A.D. 786-809), the rebel chieftain Rafah-bin Lais was aided by the Tibetans during the Samarkand Revolt. He mentions that Chinese accounts usually speak of Tibet and Arabia as each other’s close allies.

He quotes Eduard Chavannes who was a French sinologist and expert on Chinese history and religion, as saying “*The Arabs helped the Tibetans in Kashgaria just as the Tibetans had helped Arabs in the Sihoon valley.*”<sup>5</sup>

During the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, Persians, Uighurs, Turks and Tibetans were rivals fighting for control of portions of Central Asia. One particularly interesting episode documented is that of the ruler of Kabul, originally a vassal of the Tibetan king, who converted from Buddhism to Islam (sometime between 812 and 814 A.D) and submitted to the Arabian ruler Al Ma’mun. As a token of his sincerity he is said to have presented what, from the descriptions, appears to have been a gold Buddha statue to Al-Ma’mun, who sent it to Mecca, where it was melted down to make coins.<sup>6</sup>The period of Arab conquest of Central Asia coincided with the age of supremacy of Tibetan power that had established strong influence over portions of the same, even though for centuries has been outside the sphere of Tibetan influence. Furthermore, Dr. Nadwi writes that Chinese accounts usually speak of Tibet and Arabia as each other’s close allies. He quotes Eduard Chavannes who was a French sinologist and expert on Chinese history and religion, as saying “*The Arabs helped the Tibetans in Kashgaria just as the Tibetans had helped Arabs in the Sihoon valley.*”<sup>7</sup>

Some accounts also mention that Tibet came into close contacts with the Muslims rulers in India, the first being Bakhtiar Khilji, the Sultan of Bengal ( A.D. 1243) who was the commander of Sultan Qutubuddin Aibak. After conquering Bihar, Khilji wanted to march to Tibet. “*He advanced from Lakhnanti, the capital of Bengal, at the head of 10,000 troops. Between Lakhnanti and Tibet were the settlements of three tribes, Koch, Mech and Tharu.*” They were racially Turkish in origin and spoke different dialects which were a mixture of the languages of Tibet and India. Dr. Nadwi talks of one Ali Mech who was the chief of Koch and Mech and was converted to Islam by Bakhtiar Khilji. He acted as Khilji’s guide towards Tibet. Khilji was unsuccessful in passing through northern Tibet where winter is very severe, owing to which several of his soldiers perished

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<sup>5</sup> The book/source by Chavannes from which this information was taken is not mentioned in Dr. Nadwi’s book. Some of his famous works include- Memoir Written in the Grand Tang Dynasty by I-Tsing on the Religious Men Who Went to Search for the Law in the Western Lands, Ten Chinese Inscriptions From Central Asia, Documents on Western Turks and Tai Shan: Monographic Essay on a Chinese Cult.

<sup>6</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, Islam in Tibet, pp. 15-16.

and very few along with him managed to reach the other bank, Devkot where he fell terribly ill and eventually died.

Dr. Nadwi has mentioned a very interesting incident which along with historical accounts provide evidence to this journey made by Khilji.

*“A grand festival called Yosar after the twenty day rule of the monks in Lhasa is held where the Tibetan soldiers on horse back appear in their best shields and armour and steel helmets. We children would plead with the soldiers to allow us to kiss the helmet. During these celebrations, a large flag, along with others, was also brought wrapped in silk clothes on which were also written hymns (ayat) in gold. Elderly Tibetans used to point out that all those articles were once discovered from under the snow in the northern Tibetan region of Dam. The Tibetan soldiers were known to pay great respect to this flag.”*

Finally, the spread of Islam in Kashmir (around A.D 1374 or 1381) is also believed to have had impact on Tibet. As trade caravans from Ladakh and Kashmir used to visit Tibet, it could be speculated that those Islamic preachers who came to Kashmir with Sayyad Ali Hamdani<sup>8</sup> and who propagated in Ladakh and Baltistan, also entered Tibet through the same routes. The presence of high rise graves in Lhasa and other monuments which the Tibetan Muslims regarded as the graves of ancient sages who visited Tibet points to this fact.

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<sup>8</sup> The spread of Islam in Kashmir is attributed to Hazrat Sayyad Ali Hamdani. His first visit to Kashmir was during the time of Sultan Shahabuddin( A.D 130-1375) and then in A.D 1379 during Sultan Qutub-uddin in the company of seven hundred ‘sadats’ who undertook proselytisation in and around Kashmir.

## **History Untold**

The history of Islam in Tibet as documented by renowned Arab geographers and historians would come as a surprise to most readers, layman or scholars, owing to the fact that Tibet's history is considered synonymous to the advent of Tibetan Buddhism. I too, for that matter never anticipated to come across such rich yet underrated historical accounts. After all, we as readers, thinkers, intellectuals continue to be absorbed by the Western conceptualizations and portrayals of history. This applies more so to the widespread following of European Tibetologists who dominate our imagination of the "Land of Snows". Contrary to this, the Arabic accounts of history are not only underestimated but not considered as legitimate or 'objective' sources of information to begin with. The history of the world seen through "Islamic eyes" is deemed unreliable and 'mythical'. Unfortunately, Dr. Nadwi's work, the only book translated into English which has a detailed account of Tibet's eclectic history, was also subjected to such remarks by James A. Millward who has written the introduction to the book. "In his book, Dr. Nadwi discusses the mythological connections between Tibet and Southwest Asia.." What lies outside the familiarity of the West, is rendered mythical. At no place in the book has the author used the word 'myth' to explain history. Why is it that such documents are rendered inauthentic and biased religious descriptions of the world that we claim to know so well, when early Western historians and scholars were themselves largely a product of Christian missionaries? In the context of Tibet, Jesuits Antonio de Andrade (1580–1634) from Portugal, Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733) from Italy and Hungarian Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (1784–1842) are considered pioneers in capturing the Tibetan culture and society and are credited to having laid the foundations of Tibetology.

Some arguments can be made along the lines of Arabic being an inaccessible language, and that is understandable, but it simultaneously alerts us to how the very tool of language which we are so familiar with now, almost our second skin, which makes philosophy, history and other disciplines available to us world over, is both the consequence and mechanism of the strong grip of the Western traditions on us. It proves how the dominant production of knowledge and knowingness has always been centred around one location, rather than being seen as prevalent across the globe. This is not to absolutely reject or discredit work done in the past, but a humble attempt to complete, uncover or foreground that which was, intentionally or unintentionally, erased by the superimposition of one history over the Other.

## UNDENIABLY MUSLIM, INDISPUTABLY TIBETAN

It is commonly believed that to be Tibetan is to be Buddhist, and to be Muslim precludes one from being Tibetan. However, to be culturally Tibetan and religiously Muslim compels us to unlearn and rethink our ideas of Tibet's social, cultural and religious past, present and possibly, future. Some of the questions I'm frequently asked and I'm sure other community members would be familiar with include- *'How did Muslims find their way to Tibet?'* *'Where are they originally from?'* *'What were the relations like between Muslims and Buddhists back in Tibet?'* *'Were they an oppressed minority there too?'* *'Which identity is more important to you, Tibetan or Muslim?'*

This section of my work is personally significant to me as it is through writing I attempt to keep my community's past alive for myself. Having lived away since childhood, I often experienced a gap in my sense of continuity with regard to my ethnic identity that forms the basis upon which individuals continue to develop other self meanings throughout life. I knew who Tibetan Muslims were in India but not who they were back in Tibet. Understanding this history and preserving it through the scope of my dissertation is less about fulfilling the requirements of the MA program, and more about rediscovering a past that many from the older generations fear will fade away and cease to remain the collective heritage we take pride in. It is an attempt more than anything, to reduce the distance between me and my community, the one in India and that which we left behind in Tibet. In this chapter I attempt to outline, describe and explain the community's past from 12<sup>th</sup> century when Muslims first settled in Tibet till the Chinese occupation and the crisis of 1959. The Hijarat will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 1 provided a brief glimpse of the early relations between Tibetans and Arabs, however, Muslims began settling in the region of Western and Central Tibet consistently only in the twelfth century when economic interests led them there via various trade routes.

In his article "Islam in the Tibetan Cultural Sphere," José Cabezón charts two general directions through which Islam likely entered Central Tibet. One is via eastern trade networks, as Islam spread from Arabia through Persia and Afghanistan and arrived in China via the silk routes in Central Asia. From various points in China, Islam spread into Eastern Tibet. Chinese Muslims, the Gya-Khachees, after having settled in eastern Tibet, carried on trade with central Tibetan areas and eventually moved into Lhasa. The other is a possible western route, whereby Islam moved into the

regions of Turkistan, Baltistan, and Ladakh. Arriving from this particular trajectory, according to Cabezón, Islam entered Lhasa primarily from Ladakh.

Islamic studies scholar Marc Gaborieau traces another course by which Kashmiri Muslims travelled into Tibet from South Asia via a larger network of Kashmiri merchants settled in the cities of Lahore, Delhi, Banaras, Patna, Dhaka, and Calcutta.<sup>9</sup> They journeyed directly into Tibet primarily through Kathmandu. Kashmiri Muslims merchants, who first came to the region for commerce, then gradually settled in the major cities of central Tibet, such as Lhasa, Shigatse, Gyantse, Kuti, and Tsetang. The settlement of Muslims in Tibetan cities is believed to be during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682). I would like to mention that being a Lhasa Khachee of Kashmiri descent, I will focus primarily on this subgroup owing to my knowledge and personal experience of the community.

The Fifth Dalai Lama Nawang Lozang Gyatso (1617–1682) established the Ganden Palace government in 1642 and worked towards developing a system where by religious and secular branches were to work in tandem (*chos srid gnyis ldan*). Lhasa was to be transformed into a wealthy cosmopolitan, an international hub in which travellers throughout Asia and the Middle East would come for pilgrimage, religious education, trade, and commerce. To develop domestic infrastructure, as well as to facilitate diplomacy and trade abroad, the Ganden Palace welcomed various minority groups to central Tibet such as Armenians, Newaris<sup>10</sup>, Mongols, Chinese, Indians, and Kashmiris.<sup>11</sup>

The significance attributed to him by the Lhasa Khachees can be known through the various oral traditions which have been cherished by the community across generations. I first heard of them as a child through my grandmother. It is believed that a certain Pir living in Lhasa in the 17<sup>th</sup> century used to do his prayers on an isolated hill at the edge of the city. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, the “Great Fifth Conqueror” spotted the man doing “prostrations”(phyag ‘tshal) everyday on the hill and asked that he be brought to him. The Pir explained that he was worshipping according to the precepts of his religion, and that he did so on the hill because no mosque existed in the area. The Dalai Lama then sent a representative to a site near the hill and had him fire arrows in each of

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<sup>9</sup> Gaborieau, Marc. (1995). “Power and Authority of Sufis among the Kashmiri Muslims in Tibet.” *Tibet Journal*20(3): 21–30.

<sup>10</sup> Newar are the historical inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley and its surrounding areas in Nepal

<sup>11</sup> Kurtis R. Schaeffer, “Ritual, Festivity, and Authority under the Fifth Dalai Lama” in *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition: Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. Bryan J Cuevas and Kurtis R Schaeffer (Boston: Brill, 2006), 187–202.



the different directions. A house was built at the place from which the arrows were shot. The plot of land within the confines of the arrows was then given to the Muslims and the area came to be known as 'rGyang mda'khang- The House of the Far Reaching Arrows and this became the site of the first mosque and cemetery. Before this cemetery, the dead were buried in a jungle behind the Potala Palace.

While researching I came across other versions of this story like in Dr. Nadwi's account, the saint whose name is given as Pir Puraula, impresses the Dalai Lama by miraculously appearing in his path. In the travel diary of Khwajah Ghulam Muhammad, a Kashmiri Muslim merchant who lived in Kathmandu and travelled to Lhasa in 1882–1883, a saint named Khair-ud-din had rejected invitations to meet with the Dalai Lama, who observed the saint worshipping on a mountain facing the Potala Palace and attempted to confront him. As he saw the Dalai Lama approaching, Khair-ud-din transformed into a dove and flew off to his homeland of Patna. But after he did this, the Dalai Lama guised as a hawk chased him all the way. As soon the saint entered India, he informed the Dalai Lama, "You have reached your limit. Go back! Otherwise your strength will disappear."

The Dalai Lama immediately returned to Tibet. After Khair-ud-din arrived in Patna, he was reproached by his guru who said "*a great error has been committed. If you had met the Dalai Lama and not fled, the whole country would have become Muslim. But God's will prevailed.*"<sup>12</sup>

Prince Peter's "Moslems of Central Tibet" also mentions variations of this legend

*"The first theory (on the origins of the Muslim community in Lhasa) is that the Great 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama applied to the Mingol emperor of Delhi for advisers, and in reply received a certain number of Muselmans who set themselves up at his Court. A second theory is that the same 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, desirous of showing that he was the ruler of the Universe and that people from the whole world attended his tem-del(leaves), caused Moslems to come to Lhasa in a purely representative capacity; a Persian is supposed to have come first, others from India following afterwards. A fresco in the Potala palace is said to represent this attendance of turbaned outsiders on ceremonious occasion."*<sup>13</sup>

History has not documented the reason for which Kashmiri Muslims first migrated to Tibet but some elders of the community often say it was due to severe famine in Kashmir that several people

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<sup>12</sup> Marc Gaborieau, *Powers and Authority of Sufis Among the Kashmiri Muslims in Tibet*, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> H.R.H., Prince Peter Of Greece and Denmark, "The Moslems of Central Tibet," *Journal of the Royal Central Asiatic Society*, vol.39, p. 238 (1952).

migrated to neighbouring countries, including Tibet. Dr. Nadwi explaining why Tibet could have been a desired choice for Muslims in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, writes

*“Tibet had always remained free from state politicking and a life cut off from worldly stress and materialism, and there was no caste or communal differences. They married local Tibetan women who converted to Islam. Gradually, Tibetan became their language too.”*

Another reason for migration often cited in the community is that during the Dogra rule severe atrocities were committed on the Kashmiri's who were compelled to take refuge in neighbouring lands.

At this point, I find it important to clarify that even within the larger Tibetan Muslim community, the first settlement in Tibet was of those from Kashmir. This is reflected in the Tibetan word 'Khachee' which means a person of Kashmiri origin. Earlier only Muslims from Kashmir who were travellers and residents of Lhasa and Shigatse were referred to as Khachees but with the second wave of Muslims coming from China, the geographical link to the term slowly dissolved to include all Muslims living in the country.

Broadly speaking, Tibetan Muslims can be divided into the following subgroups :

**(i) Those of Kashmiri origin**

'Khachee' has its origins from the word 'Khachad', the Ladakhi word for Kashmiri Muslims. This group was the largest majority among Muslims. No one has been able to trace back the ancestry to Kashmir officially, but according to my father, the State Archives Repository, Jammu has a bronze plate in which a Ferman, both in Farsi and Tibetan is inscribed. The Ferman dated 1724 A.D., was issued by the then King of Kashmir explicitly states the number of shawls allowed to be exported by Kashmiri traders making the journey to Tibet. It also advised the traders to continue paying the zakat <sup>14</sup>even while away. From this copper patta, it is abundantly clear that not only was there a flourishing trade with Tibet but this relationship was of high value, both socially and economically. Most of the Tibetan Muslims till 1959 were traders. The women mostly owned large shops in Lhasa and other major cities. They were in charge of making financial decisions in the family and were well known for being smart businesswoman. The men of the community frequently travelled to India and brought with them Tibetan wool, musk, silajeet and turquoise stones and carried back cloth, sugar, shoes, leather goods and grocery items. The journey on horse back or on mule back from Lhasa via Gyantse, Ngari, Thumo and across the Nathu la to Sikkim took approximately

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<sup>14</sup> As one of the Five Pillars of Islam, zakat is a religious obligation for all Muslims who meet the necessary criteria of wealth. It is not a charitable contribution and is considered to be a tax, or obligatory alms.

eighteen days. During our conversation, my grandmother recalled fondly how the men dressed in traditional Tibetan attire carried guns and swords to defend themselves against possible threat on the journey. *“They were very handsome and smart and were known to be light on their feet with a mind constantly working. They kept their guns on display by hanging it to their clothes.”* When French missionary Évariste Régis Huc traveled to Lhasa in 1846, he observed that the Tibetan Muslims were the richest merchants in Lhasa and so influential in money matters that one could almost always find a Persian character on Tibetan coins.<sup>15</sup> In addition to trade, some Muslims owned tailoring shops as well.

### **(ii) Chinese Muslims**

Next in strength to the Kashmir Muslims were the Chinese and they were migrants from Soothern and Silien. The city of Soothern was considered agriculturally important and hence all those Muslims who had come from there and settled in Tibet were mainly agriculturalists by profession. They lived in Lhasa’s southeastern corner.

### **(iii) Ladakhi and Nepali Muslims**

These two groups were the only ones who still retained their ties to the region of origin and were very successful traders. In fact, some Nepalese Muslims have continued their trade jaunts between Tibet and Nepal as before. Talking about Ladakhi Muslims in Tibet, Dr. Nadwi mentioned that they had vast properties inherited from their forefathers and a large number of relatives back in Ladakh. *“They were the most prosperous in terms of money and education and their relations with Tibetan nobility and aristocracy were intimate”*. Tracing their origin to the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the King of Ladakh and the Lhasa government regularized trade, the Ladakhi khachee comprised just a few extended families whose main livelihood derived from the triennial caravan trade and official diplomatic presence was accorded to them by the treaty in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, because of their more or less constant ties to Ladakh and highly differentiated political status, they successfully maintained a distinct identity through the promotion of Ladakhi clothing, language and culture and extended familial ties.

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<sup>15</sup> Evariste Régis Huc, *Huc and Gabet: Travels in Tartary, Thibet and China, 1844–1846*: Vol. 2, trans. William Hazlitt. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928), 184. Most likely the coins spotted by Huc originated from Nepal and were brought in by the Khache during their trade expeditions.

<sup>16</sup> See Abdul Wahid Radhu, *Tibetan Caravans* trans. Jane Casewit, in *Islam in Tibet and the Illustrative Narrative “Tibetan Caravans”*, ed. Henry Gray (1997).

Apart from these groups, there were also a large host of non-resident migrant Muslim population who often were traders residing for extended periods during winters and trading season in Lhasa. This group included people selling luxury goods from India, those trading Mules and horses from Central Asia and those carrying tea from China. In general, the diversity of Muslims in Tibet whether permanent residents or non resident migrants, was recognized and acknowledged by the Tibetan society. An interesting story often narrated with pride by the members of the community is that when Lhasa's British Commission held a gathering in 1944, the foreigners 'injee' were baffled seeing Muslims who were from Gansu ( northwest China), Kazakhstan, Turkey, Ladakh and some who had never been outside Lhasa.

Not only was this diversity known throughout Lhasa, but also respected by the larger Tibetan Buddhist community. While the potential for Khachee to refer to any Muslim always existed in the pre 1959 period, it was most often referred to those Muslims who had adopted Tibetan customs, spoke Tibetan and often had married non-muslim Tibetans. Moreover, Tibetans often affixed geographic prefixes to indicate the communities orientation or ancestry. For example, Chinese Muslims were referred to as rgya Khachee and Ladakhi Khachee became la dwags Khachee.

This distinction gets more complex as those who were born in Tibet, forming the overwhelming majority referred to themselves by the Persian word 'Zaidah' meaning native born.

Among Lhasa residents, the Khachees were referred to depending on the neighbourhood in which they resided. Those who traced their origins back to Kashmir were the 'Barkor Khachee'( in the centre of Lhasa) and who traced it to China were the Wabaling Khachee( in the southeast corner of the city).

I often use this acknowledged and active practice of elaborate differentiation between the Muslims living in Tibet as a response to the question of their status being a minority in the country, to explain the Buddhist majority's attitude towards them. It shows that 'local' Tibetans were well aware of their Muslim neighbours, and instead of categorizing them into a homogenous group of 'non Buddhist outsiders', they were sensitive to the intricate and otherwise easily overlooked differences between the Muslims in Tibet. Fast forward to 21<sup>st</sup> century India, I've seen that Muslims are often misunderstood as being identical and this could be because of the assumption that one's religious identity, (especially if you're Muslim) has a homogenizing capacity over any cultural difference. A personal anecdote here could explain this argument. Ever since I can remember, I've introduced myself as being a Tibetan Muslim to avoid the set of questions which usually follow- "Oh! My other Muslim friend's mother makes really good biryani. When are you inviting me over?" "Do you refer to men as 'bhai jaan'?" "So why didn't your family decide to go

to Pakistan? What was the Partition like for you?” Yes. These used to be the frequently asked questions in school. I have memories of spending hours trying to explain to my friends why I could invite them over for momo and thukpa, not biryani. That I didn’t refer to men as ‘bhai jaan’, but ‘ela’ (Tibetan term for older brother). That my family was not affected during the Partition because they were not even in British India to begin with!

There are several other facts which throw light on the position of the Muslims (particularly those of Kashmiri origin who were completely assimilated in the Tibetan cultural sphere) with regard to the Buddhist majority. The Fifth Dalai Lama had granted special concessions to the Tibetan Muslims which were followed up until Chinese occupation of Tibet. According to Dr. Nadwi, Dalai Lama had also given Muslims a written document under his own seal and signature in which he had clearly stated that they were outsiders who had come to his dominions and that in addition to granting them the privilege of settlement in the land they would also be allowed immunity from certain laws which were applicable to Buddhist subjects.<sup>17</sup>

The Ganden Palace, therefore, bestowed distinct privileges, including the right of political autonomy. The Khachee had their own self-governance unit, the Panch, which monitored the administrative affairs of the community. This group consisted of five officials elected to serve for three years after the final election results were approved by the Tibetan government through the Kashag Office. One of these elected persons was nominated by the Tibetan government to be the leader of the committee and he was addressed as ‘Mian’ by all Muslims and Khachee Gopa (Muslims headman) among non Muslims.

Once in office, members worked without pay, governing civic affairs and acting as intermediaries to the Lhasa government on behalf of local Tibetan Muslims. The Panch mediated internal disputes by enforcing a legal system based on local interpretations of Islamic law. Being prestigious members of Lhasa’s elite they received invitations to major public events at the Dalai Lama’s Potala Palace, where they were seated among the aristocracy. Describing one of the events, Dr. Nadwi writes,

*“White turbans on their heads and robed in costly shawls, these Muslims attended the celebrations, and enjoyed great respect. Moreover, Tibetan nobles and aristocrats called Kudrag greatly loved Muslims and invariably invited their Muslim friends to marriage and other festivities and looked after them well.”*

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<sup>17</sup> Abu Bakr Amir-uddin Nadwi, *Tibet and Tibetan Muslims*, p.54-60, (2004).



A rare photo of Tibetan Muslim leaders, the Panch Committee along with other elders, during their meeting in Lhasa, circa 1953.

Tibetan Muslims were not expected to bow before lamas or other dignitaries, nor were they required to remove their head coverings in front of such figures,<sup>18</sup> and they were excused from restrictions on eating meat during the Buddhist holy month of Saga Dawa. The Tibetan government provided land on which the community built a mosque, park, madrasa, and cemetery.

Muslims had four mosques in Lhasa, two in Shigatse and one in Tsethang. These mosques symbolized Tibetan architecture and did not have any minar or dome. Two of the four mosques in Lhasa were particularly famous- The Little mosque and the Big Mosque. The former was situated near Lingkhör-Lingka and it was mainly the Lhasa Khachees who prayed there. These mosques were maintained well and were the centres of Muslim social life back in Tibet. The Big Mosque was situated in the Thal-bung-gang locality of the Chinese Muslim settlement. In recent years, the Little Mosque has been renovated with Tibetan Muslims from India sending religious inscriptions to it for use.

On one side of each mosque was a madrasa where children were taught the Quran. Urdu was also part of the curriculum. After finishing their studies in the madrasa, some students were sent to join Islamic institutions of higher learning such as Darul-uloom in Deoband, Nadwatul-Ulema in Lucknow and Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. The annual report of Darul-uloom for the year 1875 mentions the presence of two foreign students there- a Burmese and a Tibetan. Jamia received its first batch of Tibetan students in 1945. These students were sent along with the Muslim merchants making their annual trip to India. Since the journey back and forth was tedious, the students only returned home after completing their studies.

The education that Tibetan Muslim men received from India was greatly appreciated by the government and therefore, their involvement and contribution to matters of diplomacy and international relations were highly sought as they were well versed in languages other than Tibetan. Some even served as emissaries for the Buddhist polity in its dealings with foreign powers, thereby facilitating international business relations, as well as diplomacy between central Tibet and neighbouring countries. For example, in the aftermath of the Tibet–Ladakh–Mughal War of 1679–1684, relations between Lhasa and Leh were normalized by the 1684 Treaty of Temisgang (*Gting mo sgang*), and the Ladakhi king had to send a triennial tribute of saffron, shawls, and other goods to the Dalai Lama as part of caravan called the Lopchag (*Lo phyag*).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> During the twenty day lama rule in Lhasa every year, it was incumbent on the lay people to take off their hats as mark of respect for them whenever the lamas went round on their inspection of the city. The Muslims were free from this restriction.

<sup>19</sup> Abdul Wahid Radhu, *Tibetan Caravans*, 1997.



A group of young Tibetan Muslim boys studying in Jamia, Delhi.



Tibetan Muslim Football Club, 1930.



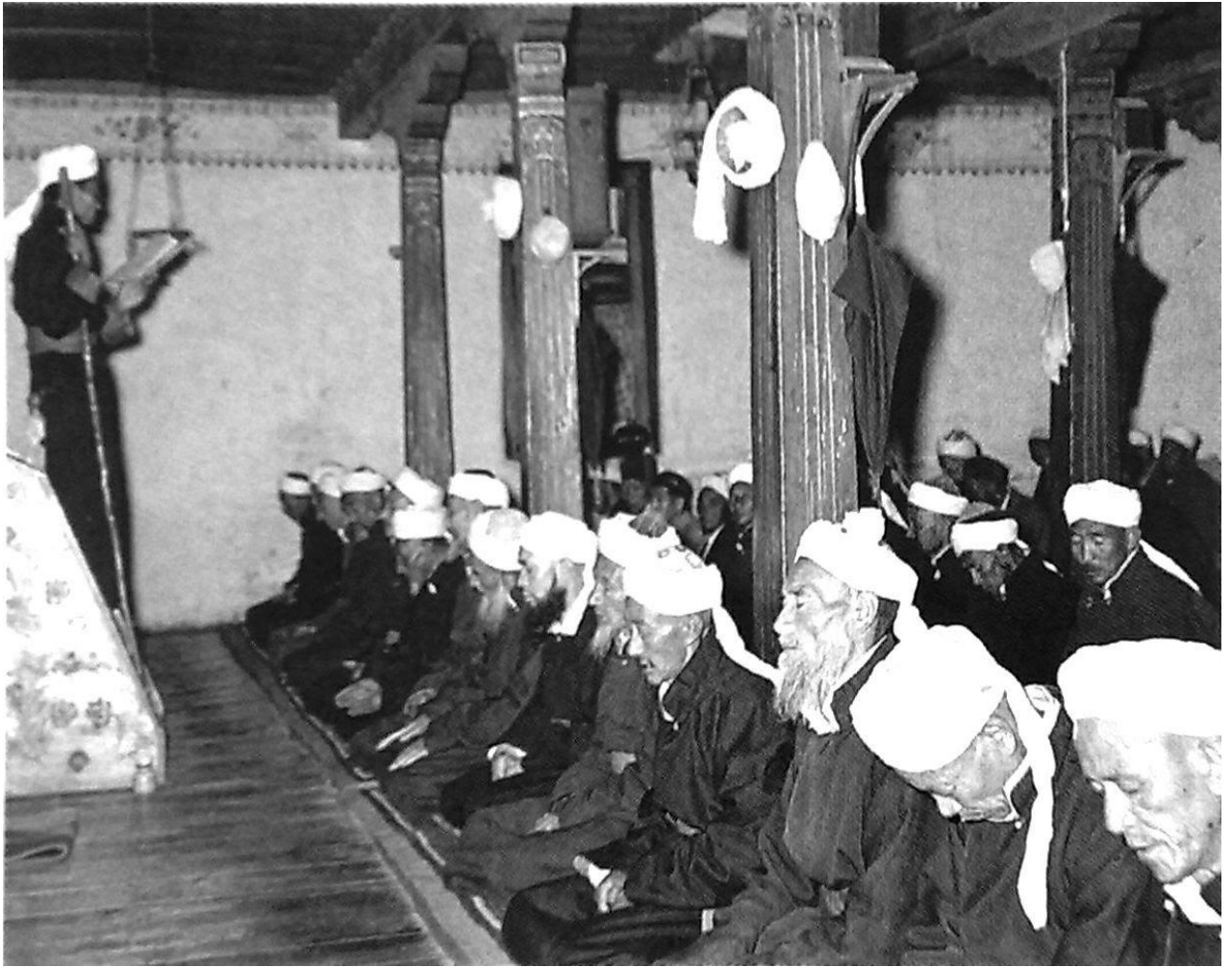
The Khwaja, a prominent Khachee family in Lhasa, managed and organized these exchanges.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, regarding neighbouring China, Lhasa Khachee leaders were called in 1909 to arbitrate disputes with the Qing Dynasty.<sup>21</sup> When Tibetan leaders required diplomacy with the British Raj, they often asked Tibetan Muslims to serve as mediators. Sometime around 1774–1775, the Khachee met the first British trade mission to Tibet and pledged to George Bogel (1746–1781), the leader of the envoy, that Lhasa would work with them to develop trade between Bengal and Tibet. Shortly before the Gorkha invasion of Tibet in 1788, the Panchen Lama sent two Tibetan Muslims as envoys to Calcutta to request aid from the governor general against the Gorkha Raja. Thus, one can note from the aforementioned accounts that the Lhasa Khachees role with regard to economy and diplomacy in Tibet was immense. Even now when I hear my relatives talk about life in Tibet, they recall this glorious past with a lot of pride and one can also notice a sense of indebtedness they feel towards the Tibetan government in their time. It is true that the Lhasa Khachee community and the Ganden Palace formed an interdependent relationship. The community relied on support and patronage from the central Tibetan government to successfully conduct their commercial activities as well to preserve and practice Islam within an overwhelmingly Buddhist state. The Ganden Palace in turn relied on these Tibetan Muslims to enhance the secular legitimacy of the state through trade, commerce, and diplomacy.

Lhasa Khachees influence was felt not in the political and economic realms, but also artistic, scientific and literary spheres. Nang ma a popular style of classical operatic song is said to have been brought by Muslims. In fact, the very term is believed to be a corruption of the Urdu word Nagma meaning song. The high pitched songs were a craze in Lhasa with musical hits by ‘Acha’ Izzat, Bai Akbar-la and Oulam Mehdi. They’re also known to have made contributions to Tibetan medicine, one of the more famous practitioners of this science being Khachee pan chen zLa ba mngon dga, the author of several well known medical treatises in Tibetan.

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<sup>20</sup> see Abdul Ghani Sheikh, “Tibetan Muslims,” *Tibet Journal* 16, no 4 (1991): 86–89.

<sup>21</sup> See K. Dhondup, *The Water-Bird and Other Years: A History of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and After* (New Delhi: Rangwang Publishers, 1986), 33.



Tibetan Muslim men praying in the Little Mosque of Lhasa.

In fact, Tibet's most famous literary classic, *The Autobiography of Khachee Phalu* is particularly interesting for its synthesis of Muslim and Buddhist ideas into a harmonious whole. The Khache Phalu is of the genre known as Legshé, which literally translates to elegant sayings or "well said".

*"It is not uncommon to find a vendor in Lhasa flipping through it when business is slow or to spot a copy sitting on the table of a Tibetan home in New York City. Young Tibetans all over the world read it as part of their education in Tibetan literature."* Nicolas Bommarito<sup>22</sup>

From the very beginning of the text, one can observe that *The Khache Phalu* has a strong Buddhist orientation. When, in the introduction, Khache Phalu sets out the themes and topics of the text, they are set as deeds and teachings of the Buddha as a child. The text opens with a Sanskrit salutation *Om Svasti* and throughout India is cast as a sacred place, a source of wisdom. But Khache Phalu's writing at several instances can be interpreted as reflecting both Islamic and Buddhist beliefs. For example, the verse "*Godhar is the highest, and parents are just below. There is nothing more important than these three.*", has been attributed by some writers as referring to Allah<sup>23</sup> and the three includes Allah and ones parents, but to Buddhist readers this can be understood as symbolic of the Three Jewels<sup>24</sup>.

Finally, references have also been made to the 'Master of the Cosmos' or the owner or lord of the stars (*skar-ma'i-bdag-po*). It is interesting to note that there are many passages in the *Qur'an* that refer to Allah as the Master of Cosmos.

Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne. He covers the night with the day, [another night] chasing it rapidly; and [He created] the sun, the moon, and the stars, subjected by His command. Unquestionably, His is the creation and the command; blessed is Allah, Lord of the worlds. (7:54)

And of His signs are the night and day and the sun and moon. Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostrate to Allah, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship. (41:37)

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<sup>22</sup> Nicolas Bommarito, —*The Khache Phalu: A Translation and Interpretation*, *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 39, April 2016, pp. 60–132.

<sup>23</sup> See Bommarito, pp.69-73; Dawa Norbu. (1986). *Khache Phalu's Advice on the Art of Living*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

<sup>24</sup> A central concept in Buddhism referring to the Buddha, his teachings, and the community of Buddhist practitioners.

The widespread popularity of Khache Phalu amongst Muslims and Buddhists in Tibet can be seen as being testimony to the harmonious relations shared between the two religious groups. This relationship wasn't only of acknowledging and respecting differences, but of emphasizing the cultural similarities which governed the everyday lives of both Lhasa khachees and Buddhists. They largely shared the same traditions with regard to food, clothing, and language with some distinct identity markers, like- Khachee men used to cover their head with a Turkish(Fez) cap or a white turban or even a conical Kashmiri cap, while some women wore the hijab.

### **The Pir and the Monk : Exploring Sufism in Tibet**

Apart from the cultural similarities, the role of Sufism which was practiced by the Lhasa Khachees, can be regarded as laying the foundations of their close relationship with Tibetan Buddhists. The variety of Sufism which was practiced in India and Central Asia took shape around the 9<sup>th</sup> century in Khorasan, a province now shared between Afghanistan and Iran where Indian civilization particularly Buddhism was present. So it is not completely absurd to assume the presence of Buddhist influence on this brand of Sufism.

The Lhasa Khachees who were of Kashmiri origin,<sup>25</sup> while strongly believed that Allah is the point from where everything comes and to which everything eventually returns, also believed that He does not administrate the universe directly. He has chosen walis, which is an Arabic word for friend or governor, for that purpose. An equivalent of wali is the Persian word Pir which was widely used in India, Nepal and eventually, Tibet.

The Lhasa Khachees religious practices back in Tibet and the oral traditions mentioned in the previous section indicate the belief in Pirs as being the 'governors of Allah'. For example, the burial ground served as a particularly important sacred space because it contained the tombs of Sufi saints where Tibetan Muslims would gather to worship the saint's spirit for protection and material aid. Dr. Nadwi writes,

*"On the occasions of Id... From morning onwards, people would be visiting the cemeteries to recite 'Fateha,' and visitors were provided food there on behalf of the Muslim Committee. Such events were called Urs".*

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<sup>25</sup> Kashmir continues to have a strong Sufi influence in the religious practices of local Muslims. Islam entered Kashmir first through a saint named Hazrat Sayyad Ali Hamdani. For more information on Sufism in Kashmir, see Ishfaq Ahmed Dar, *Kashmir Ages on Pages*,

In the context of Sufism, *urs* are death anniversaries for Sufi *pīrs*, which for centuries have been held in many parts of South Asia at a given saint's *dārgah* (shrine). During these festivals feasts are prepared and special prayers are recited. Lhasa had many such dargahs and people would bring from there yellow rice as holy 'prasad'. One such dargah was that of Pir Puruala and Muslims would go on pilgrimage to this spot where on the stone slab they would bow and say their prayers. Many oral traditions (some versions mentioned above) exist around Pir Puruala's miraculous powers which brought both Muslims and Buddhists to his dargah. This emphasis on miracles which is central to Sufism is present also in Tibetan tantric practices. Therefore, it can be speculated that the foundational although implicit basis for the Buddhist-Muslim relations in Tibet was the mutual recognition of the place of spiritual adepts and more importantly, the right of those spiritual adepts to hold political power. The *pir* and the monk could be said to have analogous roles in their respective societies.

The task of reimagining the Tibet's religious landscape does not only end at seeing the historical presence of Islam in the country but to unpack the less visible points of convergence between the two religions which was fundamental in giving birth to the community of Lhasa Khachees and on a larger scale, shaping the socio cultural life of Tibet as we know it today.

Therefore, when I introduce myself as Tibetan Muslim and not simply 'Tibetan' or 'Muslim' in response to the question "Which identity is more important to you?", it is because being Tibetan as we have seen above, is intricately linked to our experience of being Muslim. This particular identity does not only represent a mix of culture and religion, but itself is a product of the historical coming together of two cultures- Tibetan and Kashmiri and two religions- Islam and Buddhism. Being Tibetan Muslim, therefore, is not about balancing being Tibetan and being Muslim, as in this context, they are not distinct identities which can be divorced from one another. Rather, it points to an undividable whole, both as an identity and invariably, in experience, which can lose all meaning if separated from each other.

### **The period between 1951-59**

After the Battle of Chamdo, Tibet witnessed the influx of the Peoples Liberation Army into the major cities marking the beginning of Chinese occupation. These soldiers were given strict instructions to not create unrest in the society, rather work in a fashion that impresses and convinces Tibetans of their noble intentions. They were to make a place for themselves in the lives of the locals and they did so especially in the market spaces of central Lhasa where Khachees had

their shops. According to my father, the Chinese soldiers were particularly keen on developing relations with the Muslim merchants because of their strong hold on Lhasa's economy.

In order to do this, they frequented the major shops and would pay triple the amount required to purchase an item. The very fact that some Tibetan Muslim businesswomen learnt fluent Mandarin goes to show the undeniable presence of these soldiers in the heart of the city.

'Somola' a 90 year old female relative of mine is one of the very few first generation Tibetan Muslims who are still alive. Back in Tibet, she was revered as one of the smartest business women who successfully handled two major shops in Lhasa. She was one of the first in the community to pick up mandarin, which she described as a 'businesswoman's necessity' in order to be able "to communicate with the apparently wealthy soldiers who spent more than asked". The Chinese men did not seem out rightly threatening although the Tibetans were still suspicious of their persistent presence. During this time, some Tibetan Muslim boys were also sent to China for further studies on a fully funded scholarship. They studied what was then regarded as 'secular education'.

The situation, however, changed drastically in 1959 where the Tibetans witnessed extreme bloodshed and violence at the hands of the Chinese.<sup>26</sup> Both Buddhists and Muslims were subjected to cruelty, any resistance was met with death and Tibet had suddenly become the site of the worst violations of human rights. Everyday-life was being monitored and controlled, basic rights denied, monasteries and mosques destroyed, and the freedom to practice ones religion absolutely curtailed. Somola recounts how day and night the Chinese would shout the slogan "Religion is the opium of the masses" and for them it soon became the most dreaded words to have ever been uttered by man. Along with demolishing worship sites, the Chinese arrested anyone they suspected as potential threat. The members of the Panch committee of the Lhasa Khachees were also put behind bars, and their families never heard of them again. Below are the names and details of such men:

1. Haji Habibullah Shami. He was the chairman of the Panch committee, and this was the only reason behind his imprisonment.
  2. 'Bai' Abdulghani La was a well educated man who was accused of inciting the people during the Revolt by issuing posters against the Chinese.
  3. Rapse Hamidullah had close ties with Tibetan nobles and aristocrats and was accused of attending all their meetings and mobilizing resistance.
  4. Abdul Ahad was also charged with active resistance.
  5. Haji Abdul Qadir Jami.
  6. Haji Abdul Ghani Thapchi Shawa-le.
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With Dalai Lama leaving and the incarceration of their Muslim leaders, Lhasa Khachees mobilised themselves and came upon the decision to leave Tibet without risking their lives. The only way to do this was to declare themselves as Indian patriots who have been living in Tibet for business purposes solely. They approached the local authorities but the Chinese rejected their claims to Indian citizenship as the community did not have any real evidence to support them. However, after much research and deliberation they realized that even amongst the different sections of the Muslims residing in Tibet and China, their surnames were unique (Eg Baba, Butt, Naik, Wani) to this region, but not in Kashmir. Regardless of their prolonged domicile in Tibet, their paternal bloodline still linked them to Kashmir. Moreover, the Khachees also pointed to their special privileges such as tax exemptions and their self-governance through the Panch as additional proof of being a politically independent minority. With no formal documents to submit, however, the Chinese authorities did not agree; its position was that the Muslims were Tibetans and therefore belonged among the Chinese National Minorities subject to PRC jurisdiction.

As a last resort, the Khachees approached the Indian Embassy in Tibet and sought help from the then Indian Consul General, PN Kaul who contacted the Indian Government. The first response of the government was disappointing as it declared only those who had permanent domicile in Jammu and Kashmir and whose parents or grandparents were born in “undivided India” as potential citizens of the nation. However, India soon changed its stance and acknowledged that the Tibetan Muslims originated from Kashmir, making them eligible for Indian citizenship. This new policy is outlined in an important document titled “Note Given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 24 September 1959,” which is part of the White Paper series of exchanges between the governments of India and China between 1954 and 1959.

The letter opens by expressing disappointment to the Chinese government for rejecting the efforts by “Indian nationals in Tibet” to return to India:

“The Government of India cannot but express their surprise and regret at the unhelpful attitude by the Chinese Government. They wish to clarify the position in the following paragraphs and trust that the Chinese Government will after reconsideration permit persons of Indian origin entitled to Indian citizenship to contact the Consulate General of India and return to India, should they wish.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ministry of External Affairs Government of India, “Note Given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to Embassy of China in India, 24 September 1959,” in *Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged and Agreements Signed*

The White Paper identifies three distinct groups “residing in Tibet at the time of the 1959” who were qualified for Indian nationality under Articles V or VIII of the Indian constitution: registered Indian nationals, Ladakhi Lamas, and Muslims of Kashmir origin. Within this last group, the government recognized at least 129 Khachee families in the areas of Lhasa and Shigatse with a population of 600 who were eligible for repatriation. However, the Chinese vehemently denied all such justifications and amidst such diplomatic quarrels, they increased their pressure upon the community to denounce claims of Indian citizenship.

Chinese authorities duped Tibetan Muslims into selling their property to them in return for the freedom to leave for India. Seeing this as a possible way of saving their religion, many Tibetan Muslims willingly parted with their property. My grandmother and Somola described how the Chinese had threatened every Muslim family in submitting their guns and swords which were used for trading purposes to the local office overnight. The entire house was checked properly by the family out of fear that if the Chinese during inspections retrieved a prohibited item, death would be the only punishment. At 3 am all the families gathered inside the mosque while some of the men went to submit the items. My grandmother recalls the enormous bundles of expensive guns and swords that got accumulated in the Chinese office.

More restrictions were imposed and social boycott was declared. Nobody was allowed to sell food to Tibetan Muslims and with their trade routes closed and with no means to acquire food and other essential items, many of the older Khachee died of starvation. In response to the boycott, the Indian Consulate General in Lhasa provided emergency provisions to the Tibetan Muslims.—Some members of the community who desired to go to India were rounded up by Chinese soldiers and then placed in lines where bullets were fired near their feet and above their heads, and following each gunshot, death threats were issued to dissuade them from departing.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, the Chinese authorities had completely barred khachees from going anywhere near the Indian Consulate. The White Paper Series describes some of these measures

on 14th July[1959]... [Khache] persons sent a joint written representation to the Consul General of India drawing attention to... the pressure that was being put on them by the Chinese local authorities to

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*Between The Governments of India and China: White Paper* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs Government of India, 1959), 2. This document was given to me by leaders of the Tibetan Muslim community in Srinagar.

<sup>28</sup> Butt, Masood. (1994). “Muslims of Tibet.” *Tibetan Bulletin* (January–February): 8–9, 16



renounce their claim to Indian citizenship. The Chinese armed sentries at the gate of the Consulate General building having steadfastly barred entry to these persons... the local authorities have apparently threatened and intimidated these persons on account of their persistent demand to be treated distinct from Tibetan nationals. Registration forms... were confiscated by the Chinese local authorities... No facilities have been given to the Consulate General to meet members of the Indian community held in custody by Chinese authorities. Persons who have been anxious to seek assistance of the Indian Consulate General have been denied any facility whatsoever.

Despite all these external impositions, Tibetan Muslims did not deter away, instead started secretly organizing meetings with Mr. Kaul. My father narrates stories he had heard from his family about how my grandfather along with some other men would meet Mr. Kaul inside small storerooms of the shops in Lhasa. The Tibetan Muslims maintained their claims to Indian nationality and with concomitant diplomatic pressure from India, China accepted. In 1960 about 120 families were escorted out of Tibet by Chinese officials in army trucks and received by the government of India in the towns of Kalimpong and Gangtok. Somola recounts the sudden change in attitude of the Chinese officials who became extremely polite and even returned some of the belongings and money which they had earlier forcefully abducted.

The extent to which the Indian Consulate went to ensure our safety is recalled even now by the community. Almost every Tibetan Muslim today knows who Mr. Kaul was and what he did for us.

The Hijarat had been successful, they were leaving for a place which would allow them religious freedom, a place not all too unfamiliar, which was meant to be our ancestral land. There was a slight sense of relief at last, but not a word uttered throughout the journey. For many the realization came only then that they might never return home.

My beautiful home

Please don't feel betrayed by what I have done

As I leave your snow capped mountains,

I only long to run back to you

But I have no other choice

For if I stay, my grand children may never learn about you

For if I stay, I would be answerable to Him

My beautiful home

Please don't feel betrayed by me

I know they are hurting you

Trying to kill you slowly

But I promise

To never let you die

I will keep you alive inside my house

Where I will put your photograph on the wall

My children will sing your songs in the purest way

They may never meet you

But they'll always know how to greet you if they do

I promise to keep you alive

In the beautiful gardens of Kashmir

Where I will spread out a *dastakhan*

Like we did in Norbulingka

I know they're trying to hurt you

They want to destroy every trace of you

Of us

But while the Potala may look different today

It still looks the same on my wall

I promise to keep you alive.



From Norbulingka to the Mughal Gardens of Kashmir : Continuing the tradition of 'lingka' meaning picnic which Tibetan Muslims are very fond of. According to my grandmother, it was them who introduced the concept of day long picnics in Kashmir.

## THE HIJARAT OF 1960

With the wide scale atrocities being committed by the Chinese, Lhasa Khachees began to fear not only for their life but the freedom to practice Islam. Any expression of religious inclinations were condemned and had brutal consequences. Therefore, the community declared the need to leave Tibet in the name of Hijarat, their religious duty. It is important to emphasize, however, that for the Tibetan Muslims, Indian citizenship and accompanying rights and privileges were not the prime objectives. To attempt to understand the meaning attributed by the community to the events of 1960 and subsequently to life in India, we first need to closely examine the Islamic notion of Hijarat as described in the Quran and Hadith.

Hijarat can be defined as the religious migration undertaken on the premise that the present situation or geographical location is contaminated by anti-Islamic forces. The first Hijarat of 622 A.D done by Prophet Mohammad and his companions from Mecca to Medina marked the beginning of the Islamic calendar. In the Quran, the theme of righteous migration for the sake of upholding ones religious values and protecting the religion itself figures several times indicating its significance in Islam. The underlying theme in the various examples of Hijarat performed by different Prophets is that of valiant resistance to doctrinal and/or moral perversity. This migration is an ennobled one by its objective of keeping alive the flame of unitarian faith and upright conduct, then, by the willing acceptance of the sacrifices entailed and, finally, by the sublime confidence in God exhibited by those who undertook it. Therefore, the hijarat, as Islamic studies scholar Daoud Casewit points out, serves as a “landmark of eternal relevance,” and “accounts as a choice of the ‘Higher’ over ‘the lower’ and as a steadfast heroic refusal to compromise with evil.”<sup>29</sup> It is a consecrated migration in so far it is rooted in the realization that life hereafter is supreme while the ‘lower world’ is not. *“In its deepest sense, the hijra is a physical actualization of metaphysical discernment between the Absolute and the relative and thus an anticipation of death.”*

*“Verily, we belong to God and unto Him are we returning.”*

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<sup>29</sup> Daoud Casewit, “Hijra as History and Metaphor: A Survey of Qur’anic and Hadith Sources,” *The Muslim World* 88, no. 2 (1998): 106.

Casewit while describing the Hijarat of Abraham who went against his own father for the sake of Islam, writes

*“In reaction to his son’s perceived insubordination, Abraham’s father commands, “Dissociate [yourself from] me. . . ” ( uhjurni: the imperative form of the verb hajara which is derived hajar, to emigrate). Abraham’s response was, “And I will withdraw from [all of] you and all that ye invoke besides Allah.”*

This shows the social connotations of *hijir*, the separation from loved ones, which comes from having embraced the spiritual plane and hence the idea of hijarat.

*“Abraham obviously had an affection for his father but this was not allowed to stand in the way of his righteous separation from him and all he stood for. The hijra as an offering of one’s whole being to God requires constancy unswayed by sentimental considerations or attachments to worldly advantage.”*

Abraham’s separation from his people is believed to be neither softened by any nostalgia nor dulled by indifference. It is a principled severing of relations rooted in angry, God-fearing indignation. But the Quran states that this sacrifice must be absolute and without second thoughts because it guarantees both salvation in the afterlife and reward in the present. It is first the distancing from human persecutors and resettlement in a well provided land. Underlying this act of courage is the supreme trust that the sacrifices and trials of ‘pious émigrés’ will not be in vain as the ultimate triumph is theirs in both this world and the next. Therefore, in view of the courage and commitment involved in its undertaking, Hijarat is regarded as the door to great spiritual merit. Hence, the Prophet’s exclamation:

*“Be ye strongly urged to undertake the hijra for it is beyond compare!”*

It will be incorrect to think hijarat is a one-dimensional, standardised procedure, whose conditions are strictly defined in the religious text. Rather, the importance of socio-political context in which hijarat takes place is acknowledged while keeping some basic tenets the same. Quranic references of hijarat at times present it as a temporary withdrawal and abjuration of social interaction and verbal communication with a particular person or party.

This deliberate though not permanent withdrawal offers relative protection from further abuse. In another sura the same verb is employed with wider ramifications evoking permanent dissociation. *“And as for impurity, shun it!” (73:10).*

Furthermore, the Quran states that Hijarat is the preferred alternative to both passive martyrdom and suicidal resistance. The sacrifice expected of Muslims is more realistic. When confronted with irresistible *fitna*<sup>30</sup>, they have the right and at times even the duty to distance themselves from it geographically with all that this entails of renouncing worldly ties and goods.

To risk losing, possibly forever, titles to property and customary means of livelihood is not easy. Yet, giving up all these is counted as an acceptable price to pay for the freedom to openly profess and practice Islam. Therefore, hijirat is not merely a running away from an intolerable situation but a *defiant exteriorization of an inward choice of the hereafter over the herebelow, of spiritual companions over antagonistic kinsmen and family, of divine revelation over conventional customs and beliefs.* Moreover, according to the Qur’an, those who fail to flee when given the opportunity cannot then justify their eventual infidelity to Islam by claiming to have been oppressed:

*“Verily those whom the angels cause to die in [a state of] wrongdoing their own souls [are addressed by angels] saying:” In what [difficulty] were you?” And they respond, “We were made weak on earth.” [TO which the angels] say, ‘Was not Allah’s earth vast so that you might have emigrated therein?’ Hell is the resting place of these and what an evil destination it is!(4:97)”*

The hijirat is also considered a kind of spiritual rebirth since it offers the possibility of cutting oneself free of one’s baggage of past sin:

*“Verily, [embracing] Islam effaces [all sin] which preceded it and the hijra effaces [all sin] which preceded it.”*

Finally, the Quran states that once the Hijarat has been completed, the pious émigrés still have certain responsibilities to uphold their religious deeds. Jihad (literally struggle or effort) is presented as a continuation of hijarat. However the picture of *Jihad* particularly in the context of hijarat is not what the contemporary society and media picture it to be.

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<sup>30</sup> Fitna: major temporal upheaval. such as civil war or religious persecution, or source of spiritually corruptive disequilibrium.

Here waging of jihad need not be understood exclusively in the sense of outward military confrontation, for there is also a “greater holy war” to be fought with the unconverted elements we carry within ourselves. The following hadith lends itself to this interpretation:

*“The best of the believers in terms of soundness of submission is he from whose tongue and hand the Muslims are safe, and the best of the believers in terms of faith is the best of them in moral conduct, and the best of the muhajiriin is he who has renounced that which Allah, the Exalted, has forbidden, and the best fighter of jihad is he who strives against his lower self for the sake of Allah’s essence, be He magnified and glorified”<sup>31</sup>*

This conception of sincere effort, jihad, is particularly applicable in cases where a Muslim remains faithful to the pillars of faith in spite of difficult outward circumstances that resettlement brings and overcoming the sense of loss both material and emotional.

After reading about the Quranic implications on Hijarat, I decided to search for its literal translation in English. Contradictory to the Islamic explanation, the English dictionary defines the act as ‘flight’. And flight itself is defined as “an act or instance of fleeing or running away; hasty departure’. Even Casewit in his paper used the term ‘flight’ synonymously. This gross oversimplification erases not only the sentiments but the struggle intrinsic to Hijarat. This misinterpretation can lose the very foundation of such an act- the sense of pride in sacrificing for the sake of Islam.

In this light I will attempt to present the case of Tibetan Muslims who performed their Hijarat from Tibet to India in 1960. The persistent efforts of the community to prove their Kashmiri ancestry despite Chinese backlash challenges the misconception of Hijarat being a ‘quick escape’. The rigorous planning and relentless persuasion that made it possible for them to leave Tibet is still recalled with a lot of pride. In the emigration to India one can perceive the workings of divine inspiration, on the one hand, and the pragmatism and foresight on the other. Thus the departure from Lhasa placed Tibetan Muslims within a broad pan-Islamic narrative in which the 622 Hijarat of the Prophet Mohammad and his followers served as the divine paradigm for defining the community as they contended with the policies and practices of the Communist Party of China.

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<sup>31</sup> al-Tabarani. *Kahbir in al-Albani. Sahih*, no. 1129. This interpretation has been provided by Dauod Casewit.



For the Lhasa Khachees, Tibet under the PRC in 1959 had become their Mecca and India represented their Medina; thus inspired by their faith in Allah, they followed the *sunna* (example) of Prophet Mohammad as they embarked on their own Hijarat. Tibetan Muslims instil their own history with an aura of sacredness. Within this narrative framework, the Khachee's departure from Lhasa as "Repatriated Indians" constitutes a heroic triumph of a small Muslim enclave over a powerful communist regime—a victory that serves for them as historical evidence of the Khachee's commitment to Islam.

The 622 Hijarat of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers becomes the sacred model in reference to which the events of 1959 are remembered and retold. In fact, in 1986 the Tibetan Muslims constructed an enduring symbol of their journey from Tibet to Kashmir at the Hawal Tibetan settlement in Srinagar: the Hijra Masjid.

Moreover, the community does not interpret its hardships as conditions of exile but as the real test of their faith. How they made sense of adversities, how they gave meaning to their experience, cannot fully be justified by simply understanding it as exile or displacement, particularly if in their own eyes, they are not 'refugees' but Mujahirs. To absent this is to negate the significance of how a specific community gives and derives meaning from its 'trauma'. How trauma is interpreted in Hijarat is an important question we need to ask if we are to come close to the experience of Muslims from Tibet.

Finally, just like the Quran depicts hijarat as a multifaceted phenomenon shaped in the socio-political context in which it is undertaken, I would like to explore how the case of Tibetan Muslims is different in so far as the act of dissociating from ones past social ties and ways of life is considered. Some of the Quranic references point to the necessary principled severing of relations and our past identities in order to achieve spiritual rebirth. In the present case, hijarat did not imply a complete dissociation with the Tibetan identity or a 'shunning' of all ties with their Buddhist neighbours. Here the 'evil' wasn't Tibet as a country or Tibetans as people, but an external intrusion who brought upon misery in the lives of both Muslims and Buddhists. The conflict wasn't between believers of two religions, but the violent inhuman enforcement of an ideology in the name of 'reform'. Although the khachees pushed for Indian citizenship, it was only a political move that would bring them protection from the Indian government against the Chinese. Hijarat here did not bring an erasure of Tibet and what it means to us in the present, but a necessary departure from a geographical space controlled by those antagonistic to our religious

beliefs. To understand the Hijarat first and then the specific case of Tibetan Muslims will help us make sense of the community's present life in India. So when I asked Somola what remains of her link to Tibet she said "*No link remains because the Chinese still control the land.*" I knew that this didn't imply a disavowal of the lost homeland because for her, Tibet today is not the same country in which she was born. It is controlled by the Chinese because of whom she had to leave. There is no link to this Tibet, but one can know that the life of her childhood is still close to her heart. This nostalgia is reflected in the beautiful way her granddaughters speak Tibetan, the old photo album which is kept under her bed, magazine cut outs of traditional Tibetan attire and just how her describing life back in Tibet evoked vivid imagination in me as though I had lived it myself.

## **RETURN TO THE UNFAMILIAR HOME**

The first step of the Hijarat had been successful- Lhasa Khachees were in a safe country without any immediate threat to their lives. They had left Tibet as Indian Repatriates, but in reality, India was still an unknown land. This section will describe how the Tibetan Muslims reorganized their life as citizens of India who had just left behind their home.

The community of around 300 families crossed over into India in the border towns of Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Gangtok in 1960. They were provided temporary accommodation by the government of India but between 1961 and 1964 over 200 families moved to Kashmir. Back in Tibet when PN Kaul enquired from the khachees where they would like to settle, they decided on Kashmir since it was the ancestral homeland. Despite his suggestions that it is not the most suitable place in the country to settle in at the moment owing to its own political climate, the khachees responded that their Hijarat will be meaningful only when they lead their lives in a Muslim dominated state from where their forefathers first imbibed Islam.

They were accommodated in three buildings at Idd-Gah in Srinagar by the Indian Government. Both the government and Dalai Lama's office contributed immensely to ensure the welfare of Lhasa Khachees. In some instances, the two worked together to eradicate the problems that the community was facing in India. For example, in 1975 when Dalai Lama first visited Kashmir to meet the khachees, he took up the matter with the then Chief Minister, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad. These problems centred around lack of adequate accommodation, education and healthcare. They worked towards reorganizing their lives nonetheless, took up different jobs to meet the basic necessities, and since majority of them had not received any formal education in Tibet found employment only as construction workers, taxi drivers, waiters, and the women started weaving and selling Tibetan woollen sweaters and gloves. Many of them suffered tuberculosis and other breathing ailments due to constant exposure in shedding the sheep wool. My grandmother told me that the women would fill an entire flask 'chadam' with tea which they would drink throughout the work hours leading some women to fall severely ill.

They continued working in those conditions till the Tibetan Government in Exile opened a carpet weaving centre for women which promised better pay and working conditions. Young Tibetan Muslims were given training in carpet making in Dharamshala. The men started the embroidery business on tshirts and ferans and this profession has continued till date. The popular tshirts found in Ladakh which have embroidery done on them are mostly sourced by Tibetan Muslims.

The Dalai Lama also encouraged the formation of the Tibetan Muslim Refugee Welfare Association which began to chalk out projects for the economic and educational upliftment of the community in Srinagar. With combined financial assistance from the TGiE, Indian Government and from the Tibet Fund, New York, a handicraft centre, a co-operative shop and the Tibetan Public School were established. With the help of Bai Ismatullah, a fellow Tibetan who had spent a considerable amount of time in Saudi Arabia, the TMFWA was able to acquire funds from there which helped build the Hijra Mosque along with annual donations to run the school. They also received funds from Saudi for constructing 144 houses in a new locality behind Hari Parbat which was provided by then Chief Minister, Sheikh Abdullah.

Being Indian citizens from Tibet and having connections with the larger Muslim community of the world, the Lhasa Khachees received sufficient funds to secure the basics of education, health and livelihood in Srinagar. The children were enrolled in the local school and my grandmother recalled how difficult the first few years were because of the different curriculum and in general, language proved to be a major hindrance. She also cited instances of racial discrimination by the local children who had to share their classroom space with unexpected ‘guests’. This however lasted only in the initial phases and soon Tibetan Muslim children like her befriended several of their classmates. She narrated an incident which continues to be retold as a humorous account in family gatherings, which I actually think accurately captures the reality of the community’s initial struggles in Kashmir. My grandmother and her Kashmiri friends from school had decided to celebrate Eid together but her family was concerned that as compared to her well off friends, my grandmother had nothing decent to wear on the occasion.

*“We only had the clothes we got from Tibet which were mostly chubas, so my options were either my blue school uniform or my grey chuba. But I decided not to let this stop me because I was celebrating Eid properly in a long time with actual friends.”*

Now as tradition goes in Kashmir, families and neighbours visit each other's houses not only on Eid but for a week after it as well. After spending time at her friend's house, Momola decided to bring them over to hers. Somola who was living in the same house opened the door and panicked upon seeing them as she was not expecting Kashmiri guests to come on this special occasion. This caused her to jumble up Tibetan, Mandarin and Koshur words in her head. In that moment of panic and confusion, she ended up screaming "Welcome to our house and Eid Mubarak" in Mandarin!

This account is a reflection of the difficulties of early social adjustments faced by the Lhasa Khachees in Kashmir. The economic gap between the Tibetan 'refugees' and the locals was greatly embarrassing for the former, particularly because this experience was different from Tibet where they were one of the wealthiest families. Language was a central issue which caused problems in every area, be it at work, school or even just day to day life. To suddenly realize that your mother tongue is without any value can cause unsettling silence within. Another account which captures this problem is that of a Tibetan lady who went to buy eggs at a local shop. Unable to verbally communicate to the shopkeeper what she wanted, she ended up acting like a hen producing eggs! Fortunately, this communication was successful. Such stories become the source of entertainment in close gatherings even today and I've always observed how they all laugh over their early days of awkward adjustments and end it with a 'ShukranAllah', meaning they are thankful to God that today they have reached a stage where such stories can be remembered only for their humorous content.

Some families who had the financial capacity realized that the situation in Kashmir is not conducive for establishing a permanent business. Around 25 families moved back to Darjeeling and Kalimpong and tried their hand at different enterprises. Somola and her husband first started a temporary taxi service in Kalimpong following which they opened a shoe shop called Shalimar. Today, their family owns the two most popular shops in town. Because North Bengal was the favourite tourist spot in summers, a few families leased out buildings to run as hotels. In Darjeeling one can still find Society Hotel which was started by a Tibetan Muslim family in the middle of mall road. Gradually, the women began using their business skills to open shops and their children took up the role of travelling to Kolkata and Delhi to buy wholesale goods.

The main shopping centre there called Mahakal and Dragon Market are dominated by Tibetan Muslims today. As a child I was so fascinated by the fact that my relatives own a shop full of beautiful clothes, I would request them to let me manage it for a while.

One such time when I was looking after the shop, two women from Delhi entered and thought I was a customer just like them. They picked out the items and stood in front of the cash counter waiting for the owner to arrive. I immediately went behind the table and told them the amount which really surprised them. They asked me in Hindi what I was doing here and I said it's my relatives shop. I still remember their response "*But you are clearly not from here! Have people from our city opened shops in Darjeeling too?!*"

### **From Barelvi To Deobandi : Changes in the community's religious practice post 1960**

The decision to settle in the towns of Kalimpong and Darjeeling did not only financially benefit the families, but also marked the beginning of a complete change of the entire community's religious beliefs and practices. As mentioned in the previous chapter, their religious orientation pre 1960 reflected heavy Sufi influence. Broadly speaking, the Sunni Muslims of South Asia are divided into two major sub-sects, i.e. Deobandi and Barelvi, named after their places of origin in India in the 19th century. The Deobandi group is strictly against any type of homage being paid to any saint, not even to Prophet Mohammad. The principal guiding philosophy is to get back to the roots, i.e. the days of Prophet Mohammad and the first three Caliphs whom they regard as 'rightly guided'. Whereas the Barelvi group associate with the Sufi order of Islam and trace their lineage back to Prophet Mohammad. They are normally the followers of various Islamic preachers that reached shores of India and propagated Islam with the masses. For the Barelvis, Prophet is a superhuman figure who is omnipresent; he is *hazir*, present; he is not *bashar*, material or flesh, but *nur*, light. The Deobandis, who also revere the Prophet, argue he was the *insan-i-kamil*, the perfect person, but still only a man, a mortal. Barelvis emphasise a love of Muhammad, a semi-divine figure with unique foreknowledge. The Deobandis reject this idea of Muhammad, emphasising Islam as a personal rather than a social religion. In India the Barelvi influence was felt in Kashmir and then taken over to Tibet by the Muslim merchants. Today the Deobandi sect is in majority in the country and the conflicts between the two have largely dissipated post the Partition.

Pakistan on the other hand has a significant majority of the Barelvi sect and the differences and conflicts are most visible in the country's political world.<sup>32</sup>

In the context of Tibetan Muslims, the Barelvi school of thought dominated the religious life of the community, which in the previous chapter has also been speculated as sharing similarities with Tibetan Buddhism in pre 1959 Tibet. Once they started settling down in Kalimpong, they realized that some of their Islamic practices needed 'reform' in conformity with the 'mainstream' Indian Muslims. When the local Imaam in Kalimpong heard about the new settlers from Tibet, he took up the responsibility of reaching out to them. He soon realized that there were strong traces of Sufism in their practice of Islam. For example, my father recalls chanting darood shariff in the mosque on Eid Milad un Nabi (Prophets birthday) and distributing sweets or prasad, a practice absolutely prohibited by the Deobandis. As a child he used to overhear his mother's conversations with other women of the community about how the Muslims in the area have been calling their way of Islam as deviant '*shirk*'. However, the Lhasa Khachees under the guidance of the Imaam and their other Muslim neighbours from Kolkata and Bihar, gradually did away with the old practices and embraced the Deobandi way of life.

I was completely unfamiliar with this history as I assumed the community had always had a strict puritan orientation. We were always told not to believe in dargah worship. As a child I had heard my non Muslim friends talk about their visits to famous Dufi shrines which made me curious as to why despite being Muslims my family doesn't encourage it.

It is only recently in my conversations with my father and grandmother that I came to know of the history of strong Barelvi association in the community. But I was unsure of the mechanisms behind this change which caused over 300 families spread across India and Nepal to drop their age old beliefs and practices. That is when I learnt about the role played by the Imaam in Kalimpong who was so invested in this process of educating the Tibetans and bringing them to the 'right path', that he began speaking Tibetan fluently.

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<sup>32</sup> For more information on the two sects and its impact on the Partition and present Pakistani politics, see AK Behuria, *Sects Within Sect: The Case of Deobandi-Barelvi Encounter in Pakistan*, 2008.

However, it wasn't just him who served as a religious guide to the new emigrates, but also a larger institution headed by the renowned Islamic scholar Ali Miya of Lucknow. As the Khachees were making this transition, they decided to seek help from the institution of Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama for social and religious guidance. As mentioned above, the community had felt the absence of a constant and immediate leader or guide in the first few decades of their life in India. Ali Miya proved to be one such figure who represented the community's grievances which needed state intervention, in a letter to a leading politician of the country.

Therefore, along with religious guidance, his political reach really benefited the community. They finally felt they had become a significant part of the Islamic Ummah. It restored their faith that the Hijarat of 1960 had been accepted by Allah as they came closer to the 'right path'.

The Tibetan Muslims life in India despite all the struggles and experience of loss was made reassuring by identification with the larger Muslim community, unlike the situation in pre 1959 Tibet. Not only were they free to practice Islam but a different kind which was in line with the Quran and Sunna. Therefore, the role of religion in facilitating the social and personal grounding of the Tibetans in a different country seemed to give meaning to the experience of loss. They felt nostalgic whenever the issue of Tibet came up. But being able to hear the 'aazaan' five times a day gave them the strength needed to heal the pain of the past and look forward to a better future.





Tibetan Muslims waiting to receive His Holiness Dalai Lama in Srinagar, 2012.

## **INDIAN CITIZEN, TIBETAN REFUGEE : CHALLENGING THE BINARY BETWEEN ‘CITIZEN’ AND ‘OTHER’**

The crisis of 1959 resulted in the influx of thousands of Tibetan refugees in India but also over 300 families who were ‘returning’ from Tibet as Indian repatriates. As mentioned in the previous chapters, their direct link to Kashmir was dissolved in the 12<sup>th</sup> century itself in so far as they could not trace their ancestry back to any one region or maintain extended familial ties in the ancestral land. Their contact with India was limited to trade which required the men to stay in cities like Kolkata and Patna for short periods of time, as Tibetan traders, not Indians who had established business abroad. However, the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959 compelled the Lhasa Khachees to emphasize solely on their Kashmiri ancestry.

As mentioned in the chapter on Hijarat, the community in India had not dissociated from their Tibetan past. Their Tibetan identity was not disavowed for the sake of acquiring Indian citizenship since that was only a political move to safeguard their freedom to practice religion. The present scenario of the Tibetan Muslim settlements in North Bengal and Srinagar attest to that fact. So what does it mean to be an Indian citizen when you’re identified as Tibetan and therefore associated with the category ‘refugee’? What is it to be a legal citizen of a State which is also the host of other Tibetans recognized as ‘foreigners’? What is the relation that Lhasa Khachees share with the Government of India and what does that do to their relation with the new Tibetan Government in Exile or vice versa? What remains of the power of state issued legal documents that prove citizenship, when your cultural identity links you to Tibet and fellow Tibetans in exile? In this context, where does a Tibetan Muslim surface in the strict binary between ‘citizen’ and ‘refugee’ created by nation states?

Citizenship has traditionally been understood as a formal legal status, with the citizen defined as “*a member of a particular territorial state eligible for the rights attaching to the status*”(Axford, 2003). These rights are concretized by material identifications issued by the State which give rise to the norms of exclusion and inclusion, delineating the boundaries between ‘us’ and the ‘other’.

This binary therefore, is between the proper subject of political life and its archetypal “other”, the refugee.

Beck(2003) has defined citizenship as “*membership within a bordered territory, with belonging coinciding with the formal boundaries of the national state*”. In the present context, a Tibetan Muslim is situated in a state of in betweenness, challenging the categories of citizen and refugee simultaneously. Because going by Beck’s definition, membership to a bordered territory presupposes belongingness coinciding with the defined geographical boundaries. Despite entering India as citizens on paper, the first generation Tibetan Muslims did not particularly experience a sense of belongingness to the country.

In addition, Tibetan Muslims were not granted the status of state subject of Jammu and Kashmir, but have lived there since 1960 officially as citizens of India, in a locality now referred to as ‘Tibetan Refugee Colony’. The third generation of Tibetan Muslims who were raised in Kashmir identify it as their ‘hometown’ but are not officially recognized and registered as state subjects, which puts certain restrictions upon them. They are not allowed to buy land which means their residence will always be referred to as the ‘refugee colony’ in addition to not being allowed to pursue higher education in the state. In this context then, it becomes crucial to deconstruct the notion of ‘belongingness’ which in reality is contingent on how the State recognizes and categorizes its people.

How the situation of Tibetan Muslims refutes the differential categorization of citizen and refugee issued can also be gauged by considering the written documents or “technologies of power” (Foucault 1979) provided only to citizens of a nation state. As objects that form a key interface between the state and the individual, identity documents—such as passports, residency permits, and voting cards—control individuals’ legal rights, their access to resources, and their movement.

However, in the present context, some of these legal documents meant to be fixed and stable, were in fact questioned, rebuked, challenged and denied for Tibetan Muslims by local authorities. In 2000, the issuing of Indian passports to Tibetan Muslims were stopped because the local passport office in Srinagar associated them with the rest of the Tibetans in exile because of the obvious cultural similarities. The ministry of external affairs had to be convinced with whatever documents available to the community that they are citizens of India and their political status is at least, on paper, different from the Tibetan Buddhists. Only after a comprehensive household survey along with a year long process of deliberating over the authenticity of other documents submitted, was the ban lifted.



A group of Tibetan Muslim men with the Dalai Lama in Srinagar, 1988.



The Dalai Lama offering prayers in the Hijra Mosque, Srinagar, 2012.

This incident directly challenges the strict boundaries between citizen and refugee and the essentialized view of political identities, particularly when a community's political status is constantly unstable and also existing paradoxically with the cultural identity of being Tibetan. It indirectly exposes the 'bureaucratic messiness'( McConnell, 2011) which affects the status of the materiality of identification documents, thereby producing a constantly shifting, unstable and at threat political category of 'citizen'.

The bureaucratic messiness which invariably impacts our identity and everyday experience of being political subjects of a state is also visible in the widespread presence of informal, personal, under the table persuasions. There have been some instances where a Tibetan Muslim has managed to purchase land in Srinagar or some students have managed to get admission in the state medical college. In reality therefore, the laid down rules and norms that differentiate citizen and refugee, or state domicile subject and 'outsider resident' are unstable, easily manipulated categorizations which reside in the hands of political figures. Therefore, citizenship should not be understood in the traditional sense as being restricted to political identity and its manifestation, but as a social and actual construct( Benhabib, 2004). The case of Tibetan Muslims demonstrates the importance of studying citizenship experiences outside of Anglo American and European perspectives as well as the need to contextually ground our interpretation of practices and understandings of citizenship.

Finally, exploring the relationship between Tibetan Muslims and the Tibetan Government in Exile serves as a lens through which conventional understanding of citizenship can be rearticulated. The TGiE has recently laid down the notion of Tibetan citizenship which entails the definition, criteria, rights and duties enshrined in the Draft Constitution of 1963 and the Charter of Tibetans in Exile. Although the case of Tibetan Muslims has not been explicitly written down, the TGiE has repeatedly extended its help to the community and acted as their representative in dialogues with the Indian government. In a recent event, the Dalai Lama advised young Tibetan Muslims to work for the Tibetan administration in India, citing examples of two men from the community who hold significant positions in the international relations department. This position also then expands the political status of the community as Indian citizens to include the important historical relations that characterize their cultural identity. But the modern nation state and its apparatuses do not allow the co-existence of political identity separate from cultural identity, instead this 'contradiction' and ambiguity is lived out in the everyday lives of the members where one is constantly under the threat of being cancelled out by the other. In comparison to the contemporary situation, pre 1959 Tibet

had a different way to approach the situation of Khachees. The presence of Tibetan Muslims of Kashmiri origin was not seen as an aberration or an unfathomable political and social presence, owing largely to the nature of the Tibetan state. McConnel (2011) writes,

*“The relationship between the Tibetan state and its inhabitants was contingent on an individual’s landholding and position within the socioeconomic hierarchies, instead of on norms of exclusion and inclusion.”(McConnell, 2011).*

However, in the contemporary period, Tibetan Muslims are in fact an aberration of categories, as existing betwixt and between the identification classifications that dominate our understanding of the world. Their ambiguous status in reality exposes the socially constructed nature of these categories and the power relations inherent in the labelling process. To accurately comprehend the subject position of Tibetan Muslims in India, I realized we need to shift attention away from thinking in terms of close categories and binaries and instead towards ‘practices, processes and relationships through which seemingly universal and standard concepts can be examined’. McConell studied the status of Tibetans in India as not necessarily being stateless because of the Tibetan Government’s active efforts to promote the idea of ‘Tibetan citizenship’ despite existing in a host state. The case of Tibetan Muslims however is different, because they are citizens and refugees in the eyes of one nation state.

Agamben writes *“The status of the refugee is always considered a temporary condition that should lead either to naturalization or to repatriation”*. In the case of Tibetan Muslims who are recognized as citizens but sometimes identified with the larger Tibetan refugees in exile, exposes the temporary condition of the category ‘citizen’. It raises the question- Will the Tibetan Muslims citizenship status ever become permanently incontestable and unambiguous so it does not affect the everyday life of the members and future generations? And will it be at the cost of completely dissociating with our cultural identity of being Tibetan? Is it possible to imagine a future where citizenship as is practiced in the social and cultural spheres of life, can come to accommodate ‘contradictory’ identities?



My family and I were fortunate enough to meet The Dalai Lama at his office at Dharamshala, in the year 2000.

## CONCLUSION

Tibetan Muslims have largely remained an unknown community in India and their history understudied. Through this dissertation, I have attempted to present and in so doing, preserve for myself, a history feared to be slowly diminishing, of a community whose identities-Non Buddhist Tibetan and Indian citizen, can be thought of as breaking conventional perceptions of boundaries and categories. But this dissertation is not an exploration of identity per say, instead, a turn to history in order to understand how the identity of Tibetan Muslim even came to exist. I have emphasized on this history of events, practices, processes and relationships not only to re-present a different version of the figure of Tibet through the case of Lhasa Khachees, but also as a personal effort to return to the unintegrated, previously unarticulated parts of my own self. Cultural experience is indivisible from the development of an autonomous self in our inner world.<sup>33</sup> Having lived away all my life, I often felt the absence of a community. Writing this dissertation was a work of rewriting my script, by finally including the community. It did not just involve conversations with real figures in my life today, but also with those who have been long gone, having lived a life the rest of us might not be able to.

Working on this piece also made me unlearn certain notions that I had held about Tibetan Muslims. First would be the question of religious identity as overpowering cultural identity, which now I know is an oversimplification of not just our identity, but also the vast history behind it. A Tibetan Muslim's faith in Islam and pride of being a practicing believer, is not simply a consequence of living in India, particularly Srinagar, or being far cut off from Tibet in light of the present socio-political climate of the country which makes the Muslim minority more conscious of their identity. But as the previous chapters have mentioned, the community's religious faith which had always been central to their life, was exteriorized by undertaking Hijarat, but without having to actually disavow ties to Tibet. This is not only because it was an external force which turned violent, not their own neighbours, but because the category 'Tibetan Muslim' is in fact an inseparable whole. Our experience of being Tibetan is closely linked to our identity of being Muslim and vice versa. The imam of the hijra mosque in the Tibetan colony in Srinagar continues to give sermons in Tibetan, instead of Urdu or Koshur because it is still the mother tongue which they relate to the most. It is the language that evokes emotions, a sense of solidarity and belongingness which is experienced as a part of the self. And it is through this, one can notice how families have preserved

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<sup>33</sup> Donald Winnicott, *The Location of Cultural Experience*, *Playina and reality* (1971: 118)



their link to Tibet. In fact, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama in a recent visit to Los Angeles addressing a largely Tibetan audience, said that they should teach the language to their children how the Tibetan Muslims have.

*“When I recently visited Tibetan Muslims in Srinagar, I discovered their young children speak excellent Tibetan with a Lhasa accent. This is not the result of any instruction they receive at school, but of their parents and grandparents training.”*<sup>34</sup>

I realized I was unintentionally thinking of Tibetan and Non Buddhist as antithetical, but learning about the history of Tibetan Muslims and Tibet in general, showed how pre 1959 period did not foster such beliefs, how Muslims and Buddhists respected religious difference, beyond which they were all treated the same and most importantly, how the Tibetan Government in Exile along with common Tibetan’s living in India hold on to the belief that when Tibet is free, we will all leave together.

I had one such conversation with an old Tibetan lady who owns a small book store in Majnu Ka Tilla who said to me *“You are Lhasa Khachee, I know. But we are all Tibetans and we will go back together.”*

Being Muslim does not preclude one from being Tibetan and being Tibetan does not threaten an individual’s religious faith and practice. It is only when we begin to see the history of Tibet as not being synonymous to the advent of Buddhism, will we be able to think Tibetan Muslim, without pitting the two identities against each other. This dissertation allowed me to see the problem in thinking of Islam and Tibet as contradictions. And helped me acknowledge and see clearly how Tibet lives amongst us as more than just a trace. To the community, the struggle isn’t of internally negotiating these two, but of externally putting across to the world how to be Tibetan Muslim is not a deviation from either Tibet or Islam, but as symbolic of the unknown history of these two interacting, co-existing and eventually intermingling to create the script of our community.

The last chapter discusses the position of Tibetan Muslims in India, who despite being citizens on paper, are perceived as refugees. The struggle here is no longer about being Tibetan *and* Muslim, but about being Tibetan *and* citizen of a state which recognizes other Tibetan’s as ‘foreigners’. The ambiguous, unpredictable, unclear and constantly shifting political status of the community in India has deeply affected the everyday life of its members. From having your passport revoked, to being denied status of State Domicile Subject and the psychological impact of such chaos has possibly

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<sup>34</sup> “His Holiness The Dalai Lama meets with the Tibetan community at Los Angeles”, <http://Tibet.net/2014/02/28>

inhibited the development of a community that after all these decades is yet to be fully accepted and acknowledged as equal citizens of the country. Citizenship granted to Tibetan Muslims in 1959 has definitely proved advantageous in important areas like education and the right to vote. But it is important to investigate the idea of citizenship not only as a set of privileges guaranteed to those recognized by the government, but as a socially constructed 'practice', prone to manipulations by the agents of state, and therefore having wide ranging implications in everyday life.

Keeping all of these problems in mind, this dissertation is the basic foundation upon which a more in-depth, detailed work can be developed with the wider participation of the Tibetan Muslim community. The attempt will be to create a platform/source/space wherein history, identity negotiations, struggles, ambiguities can find a voice, and in doing so, find a home for ourselves in the world.

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