

# TALES OF A TROUBLED DIASPORA; VOICES OF THE SILENCED SEX

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of*

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This is to certify that the dissertation titled “**Tales of a Troubled Diaspora; Voices of the Silenced Sex.**” is bonafide work carried out by **Dorjee Uden** under our supervision and guidance for partial fulfilment of the requirement for M Phil in Women's Studies during the academic session of 2019.

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This foregoing thesis is hereby approved as a credible study of a social science/humanities subject carried out and presented in a manner satisfactorily to warrant its acceptance as a pre-requisite to the degree for which it has been submitted. It is understood that by this approval the undersigned do not endorse or approve any statement made or opinion expressed or conclusion drawn therein but approve the thesis only for purpose for which it has been submitted.

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I hereby declare that this thesis contains literature survey and original research work by the undersigned candidate, as a part of my M Phil in Women's Studies degree during academic session 2019.

All information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct.

I also declare that, as required by this rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referred all material and results that are not original to this work.

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# PREFACE

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The motivation behind this dissertation is a personal one, In my thesis i talk about two subjects that are very close to my heart. I talk about the Tibetan issue and about the marginalisation of Women. I shall be talking about Tibetan women refugees who are, as we know, quadruply disadvantaged because they are 'women', who live in under-developed settlements and are also considered to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy ladder because they are accounted as backward tribal refugees.

As we know, women have always been marginalised, their voices have always been left at the edge of history and their struggles and achievements have always been seen second to man, therefore the aim of this thesis is to bring together the voices of the silenced sex, talk about the difficulties women refugees face because of displacement and the resilience they show and to highlight the cultural genocide that took place in 1950's which resulted in a troubled diaspora that still hasn't met a resolution.

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# Introduction

In my thesis, I would like to engage in a diasporic storytelling of the Tibetan refugees and their long call for their free homeland. As we are all aware, there are various accounts of brave men who went to war and fought against the atrocities and resisted the torture and turmoil brought upon by the People's Liberation Army. It's also often seen that the struggle, albeit, unsuccessful was a pretty masculine one. As it's seen, historically too, women have always been left out from all fields and their struggles and achievements have always been seen being second to man. I would like to argue that Tibetan women refugees who live in India are quadruply disadvantaged; they are women, who live in underdeveloped settlements, are also a part of the lowest ladder in the social hierarchy because they are also accounted as backward refugees. My hope with the dissertation is that it reaches a tropical audience and people who aren't aware of Tibet's history can learn about it and be made aware of the cultural genocide and the full-scale mass ethnic cleansing that took place in Tibet. I had initially decided to make



my thesis fully women-centric and only focus on the Tibetan women refugees and their struggles but during the process of my research, I realised that most people weren't even aware about Tibet's history. They weren't aware of the fact that Tibet used to actually be an independent nation on its own. Tibet and China's history is inseparable and is crucial to any discourse and cannot be taken out of context if we want to talk about the issue surrounding Tibetan women's development. It was also interesting to note that most people actually thought that His Holiness the Dalai Lama was a motivational speaker advocating for world peace and writing messages for world peace and making up inspirational quotes. They didn't even have an iota of idea that he was a leader living in exile along with thousands of other tibetan refugees and that is when i decided to change the approach of my thesis. I came to the understanding that people wouldn't be able to empathise with tibetan women and their struggles if they do not have an idea about the general background of the tibetan issue. I am beginning my thesis by giving a general background in attempts of providing a glimpse of Tibet and what it was like in the 20th century. I have proceeded by providing an insight of their lives before the invasion that took place in 1950 which began in Kham, which is the northeastern province. I have also attempted to

highlight the terror that the People's Liberation Army or more popularly known as PLA brought about. It was the beginning of a deathly catastrophe when 40,000 of them marched into Lhasa and bombed the city which left lakhs of people dead, homeless and made them victims of war. They were forced to flee and were scattered all over the world in an exilic state. The ordeal Tibetans were subjected to signals a massive violation of human rights abuse. China's attempt to regulate a full-scale ethnic and cultural cleansing was partially successful. Tibetans who remain in China today are stripped off their Tibetaness and any trace of the Tibetan culture or identity is banned. Tibetans who protest and call for a free homeland are jailed and people aren't allowed to keep photos or talk about His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan language is banned in schools and people are barred from practising Buddhism and celebrating tibetan festivals. If anybody dares to speak up against the government, they are punished. The Tibetans living in Tibet do not have a choice but to adapt to the government's dictatorial doctrines or risk becoming targets of their aggression and institutional systemic oppression. This is the primary reason Tibetans living in Tibet have become compliant and are submissive to the Chinese authorities. The modern Tibetans living in Tibet are now mostly married to the Chinese

and are mixed. They have no option but to adapt to the laws and doctrines or risk getting imprisoned or tortured. The Tibetans who are deferent to the Chinese rule and norms are flourishing and there is no doubt that the metropolitan cities have been modernised and the Tibetans living in Tibet are prosperous and living comfortable lives. Tibet has become a booming and bustling city under the Chinese government. His Holiness the Dalai Lama also feels like Tibet will do well under the Chinese because at the end of the day, China is a superpower and remaining in the Chinese terrain and functioning under the Chinese government is more beneficial to poor Tibetans. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's dream for Tibet to remain as an autonomous region under the Chinese government where they can freely practice their own culture and religion.

# Chapter 1

## The transition from 'rooftop of the world' to a 'troubled diaspora'

I would like to provide both a precolonial and postcolonial storytelling of the 'rooftop of the world' or 'the land of snow' which was actually an independent and peaceful Buddhist nation surrounded by forests that remained medieval, by choice, even in the 20th century. I have attempted to provide a glimpse of what life was like in Tibet before the Chinese invasion and how it changed after the invasion.

The Tibetans were lackadaisical, simple and peace loving. They were extremely religious and god-fearing and their priorities were preserving their culture and ensuring that they remain frozen and cut off from the rest of the world and that is perhaps one of the primary reasons that Tibet remained fairly medieval and backward even during the boom of the civilisation when the rest of the world was getting introduced to a new wave and were embracing the upcoming era of globalisation and modernisation.

As we are all aware, history has always been whitewashed or edited by the ones with prerogative and the ones who held power. It comes as no

shock that a medieval and small country like Tibet has met the same evil and colonised fate as well. History books have always made it a point to portray the Chinese invasion of Tibet as 'saving Tibet' or 'liberating Tibet' from what they describe, 'the reigns of a dictatorial authoritarian figure' that they accused His Holiness the Dalai Lama of being. They also maintain that Tibet was at the risk of being invaded by the British and that is why they saved Tibetans by helping them escape the shackles of British imperialism. The Chinese population continues to accuse His Holiness the Dalai Lama of being a separatist and a splitist. They staunchly believe that the annexation of Tibet was, in fact, the right choice and till date do not show even a modicum of remorse for the massive human rights abuse that has taken place in Tibet over the last 69 years. Also what history books have very favorably left out is how thousands and thousands of Tibetans were massacred, everything that had a trace of the Tibetan or the Buddhist way of life was destroyed, the Tibetan language was banned in schools, people were forbidden from keeping portraits of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. If they were found guilty they could be imprisoned for years at a stretch merely for possessing his portraits or photographs. The Chinese always felt that Tibet belonged to China and they took it as their prerogative to invade Tibet in the name of liberation. Its a universally acknowledged and known fact that Tibet was a poor country and the Tibetans were living like they were in the medieval era

even though it was the 20th century. The point though was it was exactly what they wanted, to be kept away from the rest of the world because they didn't want to be tempted by modernisation and materialism which is at the core of Buddhist texts and teachings. It has been established that the Tibetans were staunch believers in practicing the Buddhist way of life therefore they wanted to execute and practise what is at the core and heart of buddhist teachings; that is— to practice non-attachment and to assimilate the concept of impermanence.

Norbu Thondup who was 78 years old at the time of the interview and living in Bylakuppe states <sup>1</sup>“I was happy when I was a nomad, the hills were full of flowers, and we didn't have to feed the animals. We milked, churned the milk and made butter.” The statement by Norbu Thondup in itself is evident of the kind of lifestyle tibetans had and how they were environmentally rich and also signals at how they were content with the slow pace of lives and weren't actively looking for a change.

The normal pace of life in Tibet changed and turned chaotic when the Chinese decided to intervene and dictate how Tibetans should live. <sup>2</sup>“For many Tibetans, material life was hard but they were not the victims of

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<sup>1</sup> Thondup, Norbu. Tibet Oral History Project. June 27th.2007.Digital

<sup>2</sup> His Holiness, Dalai Lama. My Tibet. California: University of California Press. 1995. Print

desire; and in simplicity and poverty among our mountains, perhaps there was more peace of mind than in most cities of the world.” Buddhism had a profound impact on Tibet and its inhabitants. Tibet was ruled by a dual system of aristocratic families and Buddhist monks. The primary objective and motive of the government was to ensure that Tibet remain a religious state therefore the people made all efforts and attempts to resist modernisation and were wary of unfamiliar encroachers who tried to make their way into Tibet. The population of Tibet was mostly made up of monks, It was a customary ritual to send the youngest son to the monastery. There were almost 6000 monasteries in Tibet, these monasteries were equivalent to schools because it was the only place one could receive institutional education. These monasteries were all destroyed after the invasion. The Tibetans had very rigid and austere food habits which was a direct result of the climate and how it was impossible to grow vegetables.

Tsampa, is the staple diet of the Tibetan monks and Tibetan people in general, it is flour milled from roasted Barley and resembles and tastes like Sattu. It is mixed with tea and butter and is the staple form of breakfast for all monks. They also generally have thukpas, bhalep, momos for lunch and dinner. The Tibetan cuisine back then was known for using noodles, goat, yak, mutton and cheese.

After the invasion, all 6000 monasteries were destroyed, monks were not allowed to pray or practice under the Chinese government, possession of His Holiness's photos was and is still considered a heinous crime which could imprison you for years at a stretch.

<sup>3</sup>Shopkeepers in Drango county in Kardze in Eastern Tibet were given a deadline of two days on the 4th of January 2016, to turn in photographs of the Dalai Lama or face severe punishments. The police was promoted as part of illegal publications, including pornography and images of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. According to a report, a Chinese scholar said that "Chinese people displaying photos of His Holiness the Dalai Lama was like Americans showing photos of Saddam Hussain."

The women led very simple lives but were very flamboyant with their choice in clothing and fashion. They wore bright-coloured chubas, i.e the traditional dress and wore heavy jewels. Tea parties and social gatherings were organised by women where they played games and made merry.

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<sup>3</sup> "Severe punishments for Dalai Lama photos." [freetibet.org](http://freetibet.org). 3rd Jan. 2016



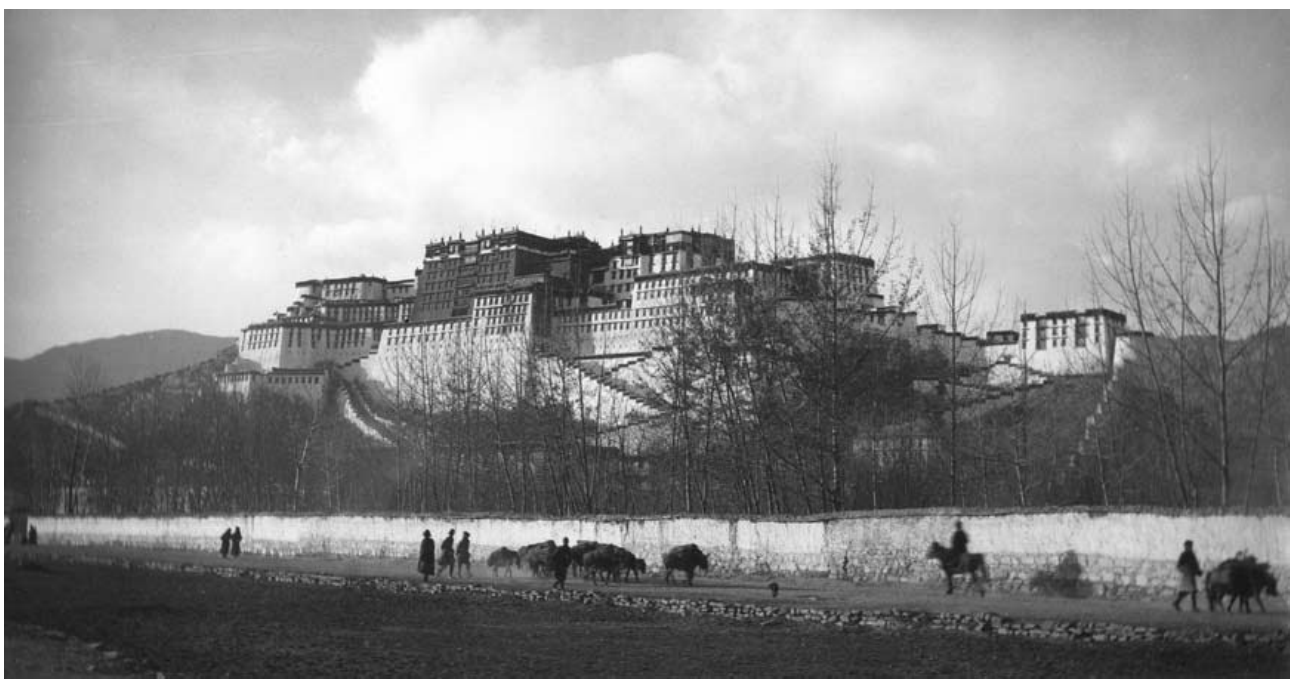


<sup>4</sup>Fig 1 shows a Tibetan lady in traditional costume and ornaments in 19th century Tibet.

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<sup>4</sup> Davis, Anthony. Tibetan lady in traditional costume and ornaments. [19c.photo.com](http://19c.photo.com)

If it is to be believed, the tibetans who lived in Tibet insist that Tibet wasn't patriarchal in nature and structure at all. They conclude that it is because there were no schools, the only education they could receive was from the monasteries and availing education in fact depended on your financial status. The people who were affluent and could afford to receive formal education went to the neighbouring country of India to receive education. Many scholars use this point to argue that since there was no accessible means of education both men and women were sent to work in farms and were expected to engage in household chores. There argue that the domestic chores were not just limited to women. They maintain that the monasteries accepted both male and female monks and therefore the monastic system was also not sexist unlike the other religions where only a man is allowed to be a pandit or enter religious premises.



<sup>5</sup>Above is a photo of Tibet before the invasion took place.

When the Chinese came to Tibet, The Tibetans were anxious that the Chinese would not be tolerant of their religion and culture so they politely asked the Chinese to leave. In 1949, the People's Republic of China was under Mao Ze Dong and their very first objective was to take Tibet under them. Almost 40,000 Chinese soldiers invaded Tibet and naturally took over Lhasa. The Tibetans appealed to the United Nations for help but it was to no avail. Simultaneously almost 100 other countries had received independence at the same time Tibet was captured. They couldn't do much and were left to talk it out with the Chinese. The Seventeen Point Agreement was forced upon them and that made them a part of China. The Seventeen Point Agreement, also called the Agreement of the Central People's Government was forced upon them. The agreement ensured China's sovereignty over Tibet.

<sup>6</sup>"The Central Tibetan Administration that was formed after 1960 and international law expert Eckart consider it invalid and as having been signed under duress." There has been a lot of controversy surrounding the agreement, the Chinese consider it as an agreement or a document that was mutually welcomed by both parties. According to the Chinese government ,

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<sup>5</sup> Photo of Tibet. Digital image. Tibet a functioning state.<http://independent-tibet.blogspot.com/2010/06/functioning-state.html>

<sup>6</sup> Powers 2004, pp.116-7

Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme, who was responsible for signing the agreement said that there was no sort of duress. It is a precarious subject and there are different opinions in regards to it. They primarily blame the superpowers for using it as a ploy for fouling political propaganda or for twisting the specifics according to their own advantage. <sup>7</sup>“Its also been said that the United States informed the Dalai Lama in 1951 that in order to receive support from the United States, he must depart from Tibet and disavow the government.” The Dalai Lama, who was only sixteen years old at that time was made the spiritual leader of Tibet and was tasked with the critical decision that would decide the future of the entire Tibetan community that was at stake. The Dalai Lama did go to visit Mao and was initially impressed with his wit and aura but it was Mao’s parting words that actually made him wary of his real intentions. Mao had declared that religion was poison. On the other hand, the Tibetans were intensely religious. It was a crucial altering point and it was obvious that their ideologies would clash.

The problems began thereafter, The Chinese authorities started confiscating lands in the east that belonged to monasteries and soon started dividing it among themselves. There was chaos and people were panic-ridden and started moving to Lhasa out of fear. In the meantime, His Holiness was preparing for his monastic exams to procure his doctorate on

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<sup>7</sup> Melvyn C. Goldstein (August 2007) *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2: The Calm Before the Storm: 1951-1955*. University of California Press. pp. 232.

his fourteen years of study on Buddhist philosophy. The main focus of the exams were public debates and he was answerable to highly qualified abbots in three different monasteries where more than 30,000 aristocrats would come to watch. His final exam in Ganden was successful but a tumultuous air of tension was brewing in the horizon and was making its way closer.

Thousands of Tibetans had already fled from the East and had begun camping in the outskirts of Lhasa. The Chinese had already been in Tibet for a long time by then and the atmosphere was already tense. There were reports on food shortages, massacres were rumoured and the destruction of monasteries had begun. It was rumoured that the Chinese threatened to bomb the Potala Palace if the Dalai Lama didn't comply to the authorities' invitation to watch a performance in the military barracks. This incident in itself is enough to give us an acumen of the dogmatic nature of the Chinese forces under Mao's rule. This incident in particular triggered an uprising and brought about chaos due to which the Dalai Lama was forced to flee to India in 1959. On March 10th, 1959, the Tibetans launched a massive uprising but was met with overwhelming force and brutality, almost 90,000 people were killed only in the winter of 1959. Tibet was then sealed from the rest of the world. Since then, March 10th has been marked as the 'Tibetan Uprising Day.' It is celebrated every year by the tibetans living in Tibet and in exile to commemorate the sacrifices that people made and the uprising that took

place on March 10th, 1959. It is observed by Tibetans, friends and supporters of Tibet, and organisations that work for Tibet.

It is insisted that in Tibet, freedom of religion, press and speech is a thing of the past. It has so happened that Tibetans have become a minority in their own land. The tibetan language has been banned in Tibet and China, its also banned from being taught at educational institutions. It has also been affirmed by many scholars that the Chinese have made it a point to keep the Tibetans illiterate. The chosen ones who are given education are brainwashed in favour of the Chinese history, forces in order to turn them into pro-chinese supporters. The Chinese claim that Tibet has always been a part of China but that has been contradicted in the popular book, *Seven Years of Tibet*, which shows us the last years of Tibet and we do not see even a single Chinese person in sight. It is a known reality that ethnic cleansing is going on in full swing in China. Tibetan has been replaced by Mandarin as the national language of Tibet. Tibet is one of the most repressed places on earth and it is ruled by one of the biggest superpowers that claim to be a communistic democracy whereas in reality it is actually an oligarchy that promotes Chinese supremacy and are not tolerant of other cultures and religion. The massive human rights abuse that was and is still subjected to Tibetans isn't a clandestine affair and has been carried out for decades.

The human rights abuse that the Uighurs Muslims are facing in China and the ethnic cleansing and conversion they are facing is also a stark example



of the xenophobic Chinese supremacists that have no respect for other religions and cultures. <sup>8</sup>The image above shows us Tibet and the Potala Palace after the annexation by the People's Liberation Army.

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<sup>8</sup> PLA marching in Lhasa. Digital image. Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1950's. <http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat6/sub32/item228.html>.

The case of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima or “Tibet’s stolen child” who was recognised as the reincarnation of the 11th Panchen Lama of Tibet who is a spiritual leader for Buddhists is also a case of concern and a mystery that remains unsolved even to this day. His Holiness the Dalai Lama recognised him as the Panchen Lama when he was only six years old.

<sup>9</sup>“Just after Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his family were taken into custody, He has not been seen ever since.” A few days later, the Chinese appointed Gyansen Norbu as their representative for the 11th Panchen Lama and till date he fulfills all the duties that is undertaken by the Panchen Lama. The real Panchen Lama that is recognised by the Tibetans has been missing for over 25 years. He would’ve been 30 years old today.

The Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 and now lives among many other refugees and their government in exile. Almost 150,000 Tibetan refugees have fled to India during the last few decades. The issue of Tibet is awfully important because Tibetans are scattered and live in over 30 different countries around the world. It was India that saw the largest influx of Tibetan refugees and by so doing, India has practically walked a tightrope with China. The relationship between China and India has always been fragile and the

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<sup>9</sup> “Free Panchen Lama.” [freepanchenlama.org](http://freepanchenlama.org). March 8th, 2016.



political discrepancy between them isn't unfamiliar or new. We've witnessed that any decision that involves the Dalai Lama always has the Chinese irked. The Indian government opened its boundaries for the homeless refugees along with their spiritual leader the Dalai Lama. India's generosity towards the Tibetans is highly talked about and even met with accolades. It is not widely known, though, that the Tibetans didn't seek help from India, the help that came their way was unsolicited. The Tibetans didn't make their way to India without any strings attached or without expectations and certainly not empty-handed. India had also just escaped from the shackles of years of colonial rule from the British and had also witnessed a partition; therefore the Indian economy was also poor and the country was in ruins. It isn't widely acknowledged that Tibet was a wealthy abode to precious stones, jewels and gold and because the Tibetans weren't interested in material joys, it is believed that jewels and precious stones were found in bountiful and copious amounts. The Dalai Lama, when he decided to take refuge in India presented the Indian government with stacks and stacks of gold and precious jewels. It is believed that the Dalai Lama presented the Indian government with bountiful amounts of gold and precious jewels which was enough for the Indian government to get by the depression and economic regression for a long time. It's not just the economic wealth that the Tibetans brought in but also the manual labour that the Tibetans provided that went unnoticed and was not

acknowledged in the public eye. The Tibetans were forced to join the army and safeguard the borders from possibility of attacks. There is a separate contingent of Tibetan origin soldiers known as the 'Special Frontier Force' and they are a highly motivated contingent with advanced equipments and skills. Ratuk Ngawang who commanded the Tibetan secret regiment after the 1962 Sino-Indian war recently attested in an interview. <sup>10</sup>"The ethnic Tibetans have been a part of the army since as long as they can recall. And one of the aspects of the 1971 war which has never been publicised is the participation of Tibetan troops in operations. The official history of the war mentions all the victorious battles but the Tibetan regiment's role is never mentioned." They were expected to fight at the frontier and to risk their lives for government-called wars but weren't paid as much as the Indian soldiers nor were they accredited with the recognition and the lives they lost were not bemoaned. The Indian government merely used the Tibetans and took full advantage of their susceptibility and exploited them. The Tibetan government in exile is maintained and functions from Dharamsala. In 1959, Nehru wrote to the governments of Indian states, requesting them to make land available for the settlement of Tibetan refugees. The government of India had introduced settlements for the Tibetans in exchange of labour. The government of India gave the Tibetan refugees huge acres of undeveloped lands and the

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<sup>10</sup> The Tibetans who fought the 1971 war. <https://m.reddiff.com/news/slideshow/war-which-was-not-theirs/20120110.htm>. 10th Jan, 2012.

responsibility was vested upon the Tibetans to make them habitable and sustainable. The government of Mysore was the first to send a positive reply to Nehru's request and, in particular allotted nearly 3000 acres of land at Bylakuppe in Mysore district in Karnataka. The first ever Tibetan settlement was established in 1961 followed by seven more settlements making it the state with the largest Tibetan refugee population. The Bir Tibetan colony was established in Himachal Pradesh. Majnu ka Tilla was established in Delhi. Mundgod was established in Dharasmsala. The Tibetan refugees were overworked by the Indian government because the government used their labour to build roads and introduce connectivity. It was upon the Tibetans to clear the jungle and lay the infrastructure to make it sustainable. It is said that children as young as eight years old were put into work in the labour forces in remote and dangerous locations where they were responsible for building roads. It is interesting because the Tibetans can be seen as classic examples of the refugee crisis and the exploitation that comes along with it. The Tibetans starting anew in a foreign land without an identity, money or shelter and the problems that they had to encounter can be seen as a microscopic view of the problems most victims of war and political tension have to adhere.



<sup>11</sup>Fig.3 shows a correspondence between Nehru and Dalai Lama(1960)

What the Tibetans faced was inconceivable, they were victims of war who were kicked out of their own country. They were expected to start afresh in a new land where they didn't even speak the language, weren't acclimatised to the new environment nor were they comfortable with the food habits of the said unfamiliar terrain. Its extremely interesting because the pace at which the Tibetan community has prospered in India and the rest of

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<sup>11</sup> "interesting correspondence between Nehru and Dalai Lama." [phayul.com](http://phayul.com) . September 1st, 2015.

the world has similarities to the Jews and how they got back up as a powerful community. The Tibetans continue to uphold their culture and harmony which is nothing short of commendable. It is believed that Tibetan women in particular can be attributed to the connectivity and the roads in most parts of north east india, north bengal and various parts of south india as well. The Tibetan refugees reside in India with a special stay permit which is processed through a document called R.C which has to be renewed every year without fail. The government also provides Yellow Books which serves as identity certificates if the refugees decide or wish to travel abroad, which most of them do since the employment opportunities are better abroad. The various problems faced by RC holders are numerous because of the absence of the legal, socio-economic or political benefits attached to the RC status. The tibetans face harassment from legal authorities, institutions and the police as well. The Tibetans aren't original paper-holders and cannot be seen as legal Indians because of the RC status and therefore they are victims of serious identity crisis. People who've been born and brought up in India and have only heard about Tibet have serious identity and cultural crisis because of the intersectional crossroads they are at. The Tibetans living in the settlements in India grow up dreaming of going to America or Europe or Toronto which is actually not possible for everyone and isn't as dreamy or easy as they make it seem. The Tibetans feel like a ticket to America , Europe or Canada is a sure

shot way of success but they do not know about the gruesome fate that they still have to encounter as immigrants. They aren't aware of the number of people who are duped and ripped off of money and the numerous lives that are lost while setting about on illegal journeys. The Tibetans living in exiles in india and abroad are at crossroads and are victims of crisis because even though they support the dream of acquiring a free tibet, they've grown up in a particularly indian-tibetan household with a lot of influence from the indian front. Many women i interviewed as a part of my thesis were married to people of indian descent in order to get the citizenship quickly and by so doing, the child was usually in a puzzled state of mind. There was confusion because India is practically a patriarchal society wherein the wife and offsprings are expected to take up the father's name and are expected to amass to his culture. That has also led to a loss of tibetan culture and more and more modern tibetans are not familiar with the tibetan language, rituals and practices. I also feel that more tibetans who've been brought up in exile are sympathetic and supportive of the issue of Tibet only because they've been brainwashed into sympathising with Tibet by their older generations and are expected to remember the various problems that their older generation had to go through to give them a better livelihood. If given a choice they wouldn't migrate to Tibet and leave for Tibet to settle down there if Tibet ever became free. This idea or notion makes sense and can be justified as well

because, for the tibetans born in exile, India or their place of birth is their home and even if they want to patriotically feel for the issue of Tibet, its not entirely possible to feel for something that you've only heard of but not visited or experienced or have no emotional yearning or recollection of. The journey that the refugees have to undertake whilst fleeing from Tibet is a turbulent one, and they are lucky if they can even make out of it alive, most people make their children flee because they believe that it will help them acquire better livelihood, education and are promised of a better future. They usually walk for a period that ranges from days to months at a stretch. The children are usually separated from their parents without any promises or hopes of a reunion. An account about a Tibetan refugee whose name was withheld to protect his parents who were still in Tibet is about a young boy who wanted to escape in order to meet His Holiness the Dalai Lama and to learn the english language so that he could tell the world about what was happening in his motherland in order to highlight the abuse that was going on. It took him almost six months to reach Kathmandu. His turbulent journey is one filled with a lot of hardships, he had to spend nights at a stretch in a cave, climb mountains, he was mugged and was also frost-bitten. He was then arrested by the police in Nepal and was deported back to Tibet where he was mercilessly beaten by the officials. He finally got lucky around the second

time and succeeded in escaping with a group of Chinese men who wanted to leave to hunt for jobs abroad. While describing his journey he recalls

<sup>12</sup>“When the food ran out, We were scared but We had to go on whether we died or not and i need to go home to Tibet after learning English. If i go somewhere else, I may feel strange. Tibet is my home.”

Another account is about Kyizom who fled from Tibet. She says, <sup>13</sup>“After my father's beating was over, fearing that I, too, would be be killed, I fled into the mountain pass. Crossing over the pass, I had no possession, no sheep, no yaks. Normally it took only two days to cross the mountain pass. However dreading that the Chinese would kill us, it took us fifteen days. We struggled for fifteen days. We scooped muddy water and drank. Naturally there were difficulties when one did not have food to eat and only a set of clothes to wear. Despite the difficulties we hoped to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama, We hoped that once we reached the country of Bhutan, We would survive somehow, as people were being killed and beaten back in my motherland. The good thing is that when I reached India and His Holiness, I felt happy. When We first reached Bhutan, many Bhutanese fed us good food and that made me happy but the pain is always there.” The stories of people fleeing from a war-struck land is heart wrenching and it isn't possible for us, the

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<sup>12</sup> “Walking on the Sky: A young Tibetan refugee’s escape. [yowangdu.com](http://yowangdu.com) November 16th. 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Kyizom, “Escaping from Tibet to India.” Tibet Oral History Project. March 25th.2013. Digital



privileged lot, to even begin to try and empathize with the ordeal that they went through. We should all realise that wars aren't heroic and should not be applauded or espoused. Wars mean deaths, destruction and usually means that an entire civilisation is destroyed or worse will cease to exist. Wars will harm not only the valiant soldiers that will go in the frontline and fight, it will also harm everyone else left behind. Wars will not bring any effectual positive resolution and will only create victims of conflict and displacement. Wars are generally preceded by a call for state emergency where everything will come to a standstill and the middle class, independent small business owners and daily wagers will suffer major losses. There will be a standstill in the functioning of daily life and many civilians will suffer major casualties as well. But the ones who will suffer the most are usually victims of war, the people who will go on to survive a war and will have to live on with the unpleasant and haunting memories of war, memories of losing their loved ones, their homes and their motherland. The children of war grow up with a scarred childhood and it will be next to impossible for them to live normal lives. Wars are usually looked upon with great awe and gloriousness because of the movie culture that celebrate war, espouse patriotism and glorify strength and valour but in reality wars aren't like what they seem in movies or video games. Wars mean bloody streets, death and gore. There is an account of a

man who was left behind in Tibet after the war and he recounts <sup>14</sup>“They took all the youngest children and sent them to China. The men from the region were all forced to join the Chinese army. They took all the women from their homes and forced them to be sterilized.” This account is a classic example of the fate that awaits most victims of war. The children are usually separated from their parents, the men are physically abused and are usually sent to join the army against their will and the women are sexually exploited, their bodies and reproduction rights are monitored and often revoked. Geshe Gyatso recalls <sup>15</sup>“I have been a monk since I was eleven years old. At eighteen years I went to exile because of the invasion. My journey mates and i had great troubles. We had just managed to escape the guns of the Chinese army. From day to day the Chinese were behind us. I was the youngest so i had to carry a lot of necessary commodities including tsampa. In 1969, when i was shifted to India, It was covered with dense forests and we had to cut and clear the forest and build the settlement on our own.” The only option these Tibetans could do was start off as construction workers and work for the government and provide manual labour. Their leader was too young and they

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<sup>14</sup> *Life in Exile: Resisting the Chinese Occupation: Personal Accounts of Tibetans*. Dir. Ken Fiengold.2013. Documentary

<sup>15</sup> Gyatso, Geshe. “Escaping Tibet.” Uatextprogram. April 5th. 2013. Online

were all nomads in the truest sense. Dhondup says <sup>16</sup>“ I thought that His Holiness the Dalai Lama was in India and then We would gain independence in a year or two and then We would all return back to Tibet. I never felt that We would permanently live in India. From Bhutan, We came to Buxa in India and then from Buxa we went to Missamari. We stayed in Missamari for sometime and then we were sent to Bomdila for construction work. There was a conflict in Bomdila sometime in the 1960's between China and India and we had to flee from there too. In Missamari many people including many Tibetans died. They died from the heat, over-exhaustion and the poor quality of drinking water. I was very sad. Because of the heat, We went to Bomdila for construction work, Bomdila wasn't as hot compared to Missamari but it was difficult in the land of Monpas. It rained a lot in that place and we were engaged in the construction of roads everyday and it was extremely difficult.”

The issue of Tibet is critical to India as well because states like Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, North Bengal and most states that share boundaries with China live in constant fear of being attacked or being invaded by the Chinese which is conveniently ignored by mainland Indians or Hindus because of the step motherly treatment that has always been vetted towards

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<sup>16</sup> Dhondup, “Difficulties as a Tibetan exile in India.” Tibet Oral History Project. April 1st. 2013. Digital

the north eastern states and also non-hindu states in general. For e.g; the recent Doklam face-off that instilled in numerous Sikkimese the fear of being attacked by the Chinese army or the the incident in Tawang that escalated into a matter of state emergency when the Dalai Lama paid a visit have been left out by mainland news channels that are usually propaganda funded and only focus on sensational news in order to cater to the TRPS. The issue of Tibet has always been and is still a problematic one and because it has managed to garner interest from superpowers, the Tibetans are actually left with no say or contribution about talks that would decide their future that was at stake. Dalai Lama's brother, Gyalo Thondup, said in his book <sup>17</sup>"I still believe that if the Tibetan government had responded earlier from the overtures from Nehru, the United States and even the communists, our situation today would be different- at least a little bit different. We never asked the Indians or Americans for help. Those offers were unsolicited. We desperately needed help- but those people running Tibet were incompetent. They were a national tragedy, so weak and divided that they made the job of Mao Ze Dong's invasion easy. The communists could march just right in and take us over." Gyalo Thondup takes a stern stance in his book where he points at factual impromptu wrong decisions that were taken; their shortcomings and the consequences that followed. He recollects the past

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Gyalo, Thondup. *The Noodle Maker of Kalimpong*, (PublicAffairs, April, 2015.)

without taking a side or without being partial. He also talks about how the Tibetan army was used and how they were formed with the promise of only being Dalai Lama's army that would remain on standby but were manipulated and forced to fight for the Indian army. The issue of Tibet has also been romanticised to an extent and the figure of the Dalai Lama has also been exoticised by the white supremacists. The issue of Tibet has been reduced to just another paper to be presented in the seminar halls by the intelligentsia or has been a case of elite charity by social workers from all over the world and most importantly has also been brought up time and again according to convenience to be used as a ploy by political parties all over the world to wire foul play against countries.

Even though His Holiness the Dalai Lama has always laid emphasis on peace, patience, tolerance and compassion, many tibetans especially the youth today do not agree with the middle path because they feel its too slow-paced and they're getting frustrated after years and years of waiting that many tibetans living in Tibet and in exile have resorted to self-immolations as a sign and form of protest. <sup>18</sup>“155 people have self-immolated inside Tibet and China since February 27,2009.” Reports on the self-immolation hardly make it to the popular news channels and the military and financial superpower that China is and the control it has on the other nations

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<sup>18</sup> “Self-immolations by Tibetans.” [savetibet.org](http://savetibet.org). December 10th. 2018

has barred the other nations intervening. The self-immolations in particular have not had any sort of effect, instead the protestors who survive self-immolations are branded as terrorists and charged on those accounts and are deemed guilty and then further punished. Even though I would like to argue that I am not supportive of self-immolation, per se, but it seems that the Tibetans have their own logic and fundamentals when it comes to the concept of self-immolation. Many Tibetans say that associating self-immolation with melancholy is indeed wrong. Yangdon Dhondup, a Tibetan scholar justifies self-immolation by saying <sup>19</sup>“It is a conscious political act. It cannot be compared to suicide, which is not a Buddhist way of ending one’s life.” It feels like the Tibetans feel that setting themselves ablaze on fire is a sureshot guaranteed way of creating international buzz and stir so that they can keep the issue of Tibet relevant in the worldly affairs because they are terrified of being forgotten or worry about the issue dissipating into thin air. Another reason that the Buddhists do not condemn self-immolations is because Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism, in particular teaches and even condones giving up your body for the greater good of the world or mankind. They argue that the body is an impermanent entity and it is your soul that is actually important and that is why people carry out self-immolations without any worry or doubt that they may be sinning; if any thing they condone it and

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<sup>19</sup> Riveria, G.S. (2012) *The Ultimate Protest: Women self-immolate in Tibet*. 175. 69-74

think its actually a glorified way of garnering karmic points. It's also known that sacrificing yourself for the greater good has been celebrated and even exalted in many religions including zen practices. Many Tibetans even associate self-immolation with great joy and a form of allegiance and sacrificial offering to their religion. They associate Buddha sacrificing his body for hungry animals and point out that there are plenty of historical evidences of self-immolation as a form or a branch of a good deed.

Also the problem of Tibet is going to or rather has already affected the environment, China's boom of economy and luxurious standard of living comes at the cost of the environment. The unscrupulous greed and the desire for materialistic luxury has also in turn tortured the environment therefore it comes as no surprise that China is one of the most polluted countries in the world. The metropolitan cities in China struggle with severe air pollution which kills in alarming numbers- mostly due to the industrial pollution. The biggest rivers in Asia comes or flows from the Tibetan plateau. Michael Buckley, who is a Canadian author and documentary maker who has travelled extensively in Tibet and has seen the degradation of the environment has dedicated his efforts to the environmental crisis taking place in Tibet. He said in an interview <sup>20</sup>"Tibetan plateau is the highest plateau on earth, all the major rivers are coming from the plateau. Ganges, Brahmaputra,

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<sup>20</sup> Buckley, Michael. "Meltdown in Tibet: On Chinese damn and mining in Tibet." July 17th.2015. online

Mekong, Karnali, Indus, Yangste, Salween, Sutlej etc are all coming from Tibet because that is the high ground so that puts Tibet in a very unusual situation parallel to anywhere on this planet where it's the provider of all the water for Asia. So that puts it in a bracket of being extremely important because over 2 billion people depend on that water." Nuclear dumping also takes place extensively and construction of unwanted dams and rigorous and uncontrolled mining has started taking a toll on the once pristine environment of Tibet. Buckley went on to further say <sup>21</sup>"What is happening in Lhasa is an acceleration of plans to develop, there is big program called 'Develop the West.' The development isn't going to benefit the locals. It's in two faces basically ; damming and mining. Those two go together and the dams that have been on the lower edges of the Tibetan plateau have started moving towards the top of the plateau. The train is an economical means to exploit the mineral resources which is carried back to China. None of this benefits tibetans at all, It's all exported. Tibet has huge resources of lithium, copper and all kinds of minerals . The estimate of it by the Chinese is 125 million USD but the actual estimate could be 900 million USD or probably even more. These things are happening since the railways accelerated, it has been going on since a long time but now they have acceleration. The only system of consultation with the locals are firing guns at Tibetans - that's their system

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<sup>21</sup> Buckley, Michael. "Meltdown in Tibet: On Chinese dams and mining in Tibet." Voice of America, January 14th. 2015. Television.



of consultation. There is no involvement of locals , they're just treated as spectators.”

The disappearance of wildlife and the degradation of the environment in Tibet has been observed by both western travellers who have scoured Tibet and the locals living in Tibet as well. Tibet has been well-known and praised for its expansive and varied wildlife. The wild yak, the snow leopard, the tibetan antelope, the tibetan gazelle etc were always admired by the rest of the world and because Tibet was a religious country, the tibetans ensured that they would not harm the wildlife which is the buddhist way of life.

<sup>22</sup>“In keeping with Buddhist tradition, little of Tibet’s wildlife population was exploited by wildlife hunters. Over the last forty years, however, Chinese soldiers and settlers as well as economically-derived Tibetans have intensely hunted much of Tibet’s wildlife to supply China’s extensive market with meat and animal products. The hunters target the more exotic species for export—the blue sheep for the German meat market and the Tibetan antelope for their wool. China continues to offer Tibet’s more spectacular wildlife, such as the argali sheep, to foreign trophy hunters, inspite of international attempts to protect these species.” Like the rest of the world, human beings in China too, have become so obsessed with the desire for materialistic gain and their

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<sup>22</sup> “The Scorched Earth: China’s assault on Tibet’s environment.” [multinationalmonitor.org](http://multinationalmonitor.org). March 16th. 2019.

greed to achieve and experience more is insatiable. The consumeristic culture has grappled on and made human beings so mechanically monstrous that they can go to any degree to achieve their personal goals in order to engage in newer advancements that they do not have even a modicum of worry or care about the environment or the future generations. Our's is a generation of selfish exploiters who do not have any compassion for sentient beings or for the earth or for the generations to come and it is definitely our generation that has exploited the earth and it's natural resources so extensively that we are now at an irreversible risk of climate change.

Kalzang Dolma who fled from Tibet and currently resides in India says <sup>23</sup>“The forests in our environment are being denuded, the Chinese cut all the trees, I saw for myself when I was there, The mountains were denuded of trees, except at the very top where the Chinese could not ascend, roads were constructed, and truckloads of wood were carted away. I never thought much about it when i lived there, about the consequences of deforestation. Now when I think about it, a huge number of trees were being cut in Tibet and if it rains too much in Tibet , the region is in danger of being washed away because it has been laid bare. There used to be a lot of snow in the early and initial days when i was in Tibet, now the snow is melting. I

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<sup>23</sup> Dolma, Kalsang. “Deforestation of Tibetan Mountains.” Tibet Oral History Project. 25th March. 2013. digital.

think it is due to deforestation that the region has become hotter. Later there will be water problems for the environment, that is my opinion.”

For refugees in exile, it becomes difficult to preserve age-old traditions and cultural practices and celebrations which were usually widely celebrated in Tibet. The older generations pass away and it is what they pass on to the younger generation that remains and ensues and it is upto the younger generation to ensure that they keep up with the traditions and customs so as to prevent a cultural genocide from occurring. They make it a point to pray and offer hyenjup and recite Buddhist prayers. Tibetans and Friends of Tibet make it a point to donate lavishly to monasteries for the welfare of the culture and religion, and for the well-being of the numerous monks that take refuge in monasteries where they study about Buddhism whilst practising it. The monasteries also work as shelter homes where they take in old people who have absolutely no place to call home. There are many courses that teach you about Buddhism and Tibet which are specifically designed for people who want a better understanding of Buddhism. It is also helpful for children of refugees born in exile who have little to no knowledge about Tibet and Buddhism. The Tibetan government in exile has started a chain of schools under ‘Central School for Tibetans’ and ‘TCV’ schools. There are monks who teach in these institutions with the help of teachers and the main medium of instruction is Tibetan. The chains of schools have

been extremely useful in preserving the Tibetan culture and there are many fine produce from these schools who have been sent to study abroad on scholarships. The Central Tibet Administration or Exile Tibetan People's Association is based in Dharamsala, India with goals of helping Tibetan refugees with rehabilitation. It is led by the Sikyong who is the head of the cabinet. The current Sikyong is Lobsang Sangey who passed out from Delhi University and went on to complete his LLM from Harvard University on full funding. He supports His Holiness the Dalai Lama's call for a middle path and has emphasised on the importance of seeking a peaceful, non-violent resolution to the Tibetan issue. Another popular and effective way of preserving the culture is 'thangka painting' or 'thangka art' and many people devote their entire lives at finessing every stroke and line perfectly. The paradigm has shifted from thangka painters to contemporary tibetan artists who have chosen to highlight and talk about the Tibet issue through their artworks. There are also various organisations that work for the cultural preservation and restoration of the Tibetan culture. Some of the more notable ones are —

The Cultural India Foundation : It is an organisation with its membership spread throughout India. It works with the purpose of preserving and helping the two cultures to work side by side so that both Indians and Tibetans can value the spirit and culture of the two ancient civilizations.

The Manjushree Centre of Tibetan Culture : It was founded in the year 1988 by a group of people. It focuses on the preservation and promotion of Tibetan heritage, language, culture and tradition. It is a purely non-political organization.

The Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts : It is a premier exilic institute dedicated and entrusted with the responsibility of preserving and promoting Tibet's unique tradition of performing arts. The institute has members including artists, instructors and craftsmen and they all live in the premises of the institute.

Norbulingka : It is dedicated to keeping old Tibetan traditions alive by providing apprenticeships in traditional Tibetan art forms and for making the Tibetan experience accessible for the contemporary lifestyle. It primarily focuses on design, quality and meaning and is about care and tradition.

The issue of Tibet is grave, problematic and has still not met with a consensus or a resolution. Tibet has been a bone of contention since its invasion. The efforts taken by Tibetans living in exile in order to preserve their culture and continually flourish as a community is commendable and a lot of credit goes to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He is the main reason Tibetans are loved and accepted everywhere with warm and open arms. This is an important time for the Tibetans that are at a crucial juncture because they aren't really sure about how the next Dalai Lama is going to be chosen and the socio-political chaos it is going to embroil and whether that is going to either negatively or positively affect the current situation of the numerous Tibetans living in Tibet and in exile.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Tibetan Women on the edge of history**

When people remember what happened in the dawn of 1959, they remember the war and the atrocities vetted out against the Tibetans when 40,000 members of the PLA marched into the city of Lhasa and bombed the entire city and carried out a full-scale invasion on Mao's orders. When the Tibetans look back and recall the doom of 1959, We see that there are various accounts of brave men who went to war, there are vast narratives and memoirs dedicated to men who fought hard and lost their lives, they remember the soldiers in the frontline who sacrificed their families and risked their lives to honour Tibet. There is no doubt about the destruction that 1959 brought about and even though the Tibetans put up a strong fight they

were obviously outnumbered by the PLA troops. It is safe to say that the struggle and recollection of the incident of 1959 is a purely masculine one. As it has been established throughout time and history, Women's voices, their roles and their struggles have never been seen equal to man's and it comes as no surprise that Lhasa which had a predominantly higher female to male ratio has no mention or recollection of the war atrocities that women too had to undergo. The women and their role in the resistance movement is conveniently forgotten. The thousands of women who organised a non-violent protest in front of Dalai Lama's home against what the Tibetan Women's Association describes as "the illegal and forcible occupation of their country" by the People's Republic of China is long forgotten. <sup>24</sup>"The Tibetan Women's Association (TWA) is a women's association based in McLeodganj, Dharamshala, India. The group was officially formed on 10th September, 1984 in India by Rinchen Khando Choegyal, a former youth congress tibetan activist, although the group itself claims the precursor was created in Tibet during the 1959 Tibetan Rebellion. It can be actually traced back to the Lhasa Patriotic Woman's Association, founded in 1953 by the People's Liberation Army, which introduced the idea of women participating in politics, which was radical to Tibet." Since then the Tibetan Women's Association has marked March 12th as 'Women's Uprising Day' to remember the various women who

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<sup>24</sup> [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan\\_Women's\\_Association](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan_Women's_Association). wikipedia.org. 2008.



were imprisoned, tortured or executed after the protest. It is ironic because it is celebrated just two days after the national Tibetan Uprising Day but is not as widely known or celebrated.<sup>25</sup> “The goals of the Tibetan Women Association are twofold : to promote the perpetuation of Tibetans and Tibetan culture in exile, to bring international fora alleged human rights abuses of Tibetan women in Tibet. In India, The TWA has also created the Tibetans Nuns Project to educate nuns and sponsors various cultural events like folk dances. Today the group has 58 branches worldwide and 17,000 members.”

It is a noted fact that most of Tibet’s political prisoners were monks and nuns. Jetsun Ma Rinpoche who was a valiant woman and was a woman of profound knowledge in the religious sphere was killed by the Chinese for opposing their rule. Like her, there were numerous other nuns who met the same fate. Till today multiple nuns are arrested every year for crying out against the tyranny implemented by the Chinese, the arrests peaks during religious festivals and important dates when they stage protests. Ani Choying Kunzang is an amicable example of a brave nun who had to undergo torture for demonstrating in the city of Lhasa. She was charged on grounds of sedition and was imprisoned. When Ani Choying Kunzang expressed her political views in prison, She was stripped naked, beaten mercilessly by groups of chinese guards and shocked with an electric cattle prod that was

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<sup>25</sup> [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan\\_women'sassociation](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan_women'sassociation). [wikipedia.org](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan_women'sassociation). 2008.

inserted inside her vagina. The methods of torture they used on Tibetan women were unbelievably horrifying. Electric cattle prods were a popular means of punishment and were perhaps the most feared as well. The electric cattle prods were used on their hands, their faces and was also inserted inside their vaginas. Another popular method of punishment was the 'gagging method' wherein monks and nuns were tied up and gagged and then the guards proceeded to defecate and urinate on their faces. The methods of torture that the Chinese inflicted on the political prisoners were horrifying and vindictive and also hints at the skewed mindset that these torturers possessed. The methods of punishment vetted out by the Chinese signals at a skewed sense of power play between victim and perpetrator. The methods of punishment almost has patterns of dominant aggressor behaviour wherein they are trying to attest their power over the Tibetans by perpetrating such vile and derogatory techniques of torture. Pamo Kusang is another name that has been forgotten because of her biological sex. Pamo Kusang was one among many women who were imprisoned in 1959. She was responsible for organising a peaceful protest from behind prison walls. She was caught and seized by the guards and was then transferred to a notoriously violent prison. Under interrogation, She refused to take names and insisted that she was solely responsible for organising every single protest that she had ever been a part of. For her defiance, she was sentenced to public execution along with

a group of other women. They were lined up in front of a pit and shot by firing squad at the back only for organising protests.

Or how can We forget the famous five nuns of Drapchi prison?

On June, 1998, five nuns from Drapchi Prison died because of weeks of maltreatment. The five nuns committed suicide together by hanging or choking themselves in a storeroom within their cellblock. All the nuns were close comrades and their age group ranged from 19 to 25. They had all been imprisoned for peaceful protests and resistance. The Drapchi Nuns were known for their solidarity and comradeship and were famous for risking their own lives in order to protect their friends and their cell mates. The death of the five nuns can be seen as a culmination of the harsh treatment and torture administered towards them over the past decade. The nuns of Drapchi Prison provides the most comprehensive documentation so far of a pattern of resistance and repression over a period of eight long years from Unit 3 of Drapchi Prison where all the prisoners were women.

For a certain period of time, Female Tibetan protests were, by and large, peaceful events focused on bearing witness and were targeted to provoke thought and change retrospective. But as the Tibetan struggle entered a new phase entirely, things began changing for the tibetan women's struggle as well. Tibetan women have now begun setting themselves on fire

in order to be heard. <sup>26</sup>“On October 17th, 2011 for the very first time in Tibet’s history, a twenty year old female Buddhist nun named Tenzing Wangmo died after setting herself on fire outside the Dechen Chokorling monastery in Ngaba.” The first woman’s self-immolation in the struggle for a Free Tibet brought about a lot of interest and created a buzz which stirred up the entire community as she was the first woman to set herself on fire. <sup>27</sup>“She reportedly told her fellow nuns on her last morning that she had something of great importance to do. After she set herself on fire, She is said to have walked forward slowly, until she collapsed.” The two women who followed and self-immolated were both nuns as well and both self-immolated inside Tibet.

The fact that the first women who resorted to self-immolation were nuns comes as no big surprise because it is indeed a massive truth that most of the ‘tsonbas’ or ‘political prisoners’ were all nuns and monks. This makes sense because Tibet’s population is mostly comprised of nuns and monks. When we take into account the Drapchi Nuns or the self-immolations— We see a pattern, which makes it safe to conclude that the nuns are at the forefront of the Tibetan women’s movement. But when we say that nuns are at the forefront, that does not mean that laywomen were not a part of the struggle, there were as many laywomen involved in the resistance movement

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<sup>26</sup> Riveria, Gloria, S. “THE ULTIMATE PROTEST: Women self-immolate in Tibet.” *World Affairs*, vol. 175, no. 3, 2012, pp. 69-74. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/41639021](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41639021).

<sup>27</sup> Riveria, S, Gloria. “THE ULTIMATE PROTEST: Women self-immolate in Tibet.” *World Affairs*, vol. 175, no 3, 2012, pp-69-74. *JSTOR*. [www.jstor.org/stable/416390](http://www.jstor.org/stable/416390).

but most of their stories were undocumented. The Tibetan women's resistance and struggle had always been peaceful, non-violent and they've shown absolute patience in the face of adversity, so for things to take such a violent turn and for them to approach more extremist ways signals at how desperate they must be feeling and how badly they want their voices to be heard.

The massive human rights abuse that was inflicted on Tibetan women in general were horrendous to state the least. Tibetan women have been at the receiving end of a spectrum of a wide array of abuse ever since the annexation. They were victims of rape, murders, and cruel inhumane practices of torture. Tibetan women's bodies have been forcefully monitored by the authorities which is a massive violation of reproductive rights. The women were forced to marry Chinese men and were forced to undergo unsafe sterilisation so that they would not breed without the knowledge of the government. The government was in full control of Tibetan women's bodies and if they were pregnant without the knowledge of the government then they were forced to undergo abortions or risk getting their husbands arrested. The people in Tibet are not educated about safe practices to prevent pregnancy but the laws lean more towards unsafe means of prevention of conception. It signals at how Tibetan women are also victims of a massive violation of Reproductive Rights wherein they have no say or control over

their own bodies. <sup>28</sup>“Methods like co-erced sterilisation, forced abortions, eugenics etc are just a few that can named. Women tend to face these brutal acts against their will due to the severe economic and social sanctions, launched by People’s Republic of China for having a child out of plan. Due to lack of money and the inability to afford contraceptives for these women, China practices heavily brutal abortions and sterilisations. Several sanctions have been introduced by the People’s Republic of China that include a huge amount of fines which often exceeds the entire annual income of the family.” Like is the case with women in the rest of the world who are treated as secondhand citizens, Tibetan women’s bodies are also controlled by the government and it is usually male-dominated decrees and laws that decide the fate of women’s reproductive rights and choices. The rules of the family planning policy are targeted only towards women in general so it is indeed a very sexist approach wherein the burden lies only on the women and their bodies. The violation of women’s bodies is a direct arbitrary attempt at Ethnic Cleansing with the sole motive of wiping out the entire Tibetan race.

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<sup>28</sup> Chadha, Neelima, and Adfer Rashid Shah. “On Reproductive Rights of Tibetan Women: A Sociological Commentary.” *The Tibet Journal*, vol, no, 1, 2015, pp. 68-79. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/tibetjournal.40.1.68](http://www.jstor.org/stable/tibetjournal.40.1.68)

There are many notable Tibetan women who've had huge influences and had major roles in the entire movement in the past as well.

Mrs Tarring was born to an aristocratic family and therefore had the privilege of attending school and getting education in India. Back in those days, in Tibet, schooling meant the monastic way of education and people from rich families who wanted to get their kids schooled sent them to India. She is a notable figure in the Tibetan movement because she was the first Tibetan woman to get education and was the first woman who could speak in English which actually played a pivotal role and proved to be advantageous for the Tibetans who were all mostly illiterate. "At the time of the invasion, Tibet had no Chinese residents except for a few traders and butchers and only six westerners. Because Mrs Tarring spoke English, She socialized with the few Westerners. Moreover when the Chinese government invited Dalai Lama to to China in the 1950's on three separate trips , each several months to a year in length- Mrs Tarring was a part of his entourage. Her ease in moving between different societies served her well later in life when the Tibetan government called her into service to develop the TIBETAN HOMES FOUNDATION. She became in her own words, a kind of a bridge." Mrs Tarring's works in India was inspired by the exploitation that Tibetan refugees were subjected to. She noticed how the refugees who came to India were exhausted, traumatised and were having a hard time trying to fit in and the

indian government back then was taking advantage of the situation by exploiting them by putting kids as young as 8 in the crews to work.

According to their website <sup>29</sup>“Tibetan Homes foundation (THF) is a charitable institute dedicated to working for the care of orphans, semi orphans and destitute refugee children... The foundation initially set up by Mrs Rinchen Dolma Tarring, the first general secretary of THF, with three homes and seventy five orphaned and destitute children living in 58 homes and three hostels and receiving education in the main residential school at Mussoorie and two branches at Rajpur and Rishikesh. Alongside, THF also runs two Homes for caring for destitute elderly persons by providing food, residence and medication to those who have no family to support them.” Mrs Tarring was an important figure in providing refuge, education and comfort for the refugees who came to India without their parents and because she had mastered the English language, it was helpful for her to communicate. When I emphasise on her knowledge of the English Language, I do not condone english supremacy and i do not think that english as a language can be seen as a barometer for intelligence but the very fact that most of the Tibetans and even those who received education in Tibet were not fluent in english which was a major hurdle when they fled to India and the neighbouring countries as

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<sup>29</sup> Tibetan Homes Foundation. [www.tibhomes.org/history.html](http://www.tibhomes.org/history.html). 2016



they could not communicate with the locals and therein came the importance of Mrs Tarring's fluency over the language.

Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche is another famous person who holds an important position in the Buddhist world. She is one of the most influential women teachers who travels all over the world and is one of the few fully trained female Rinpoches. <sup>30</sup>“With her unparalleled training, She has built a reputation as a sharp-witted and unconventional teacher who is never afraid to rock the boat as she continues to question the responsibility and role of women in the Buddhist society. Educating and Empowering is at the core of her work. She says “Maybe I can be a medium through which more women become confident, dynamic leaders.” These are only a few important women that I've mentioned but there are numerous other Tibetan women who've contributed to the Tibetan movement and have been important figures. These women and their roles should not be sidelined and invalidated. It is true that nuns were at the forefront of the struggle but that does not mean that there weren't laywomen who participated in the movement. There were various laywomen whose contribution to the movement haven't been documented.

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<sup>30</sup> Haas, Michaela. 10 Tibetan Buddhist Women You need to Know. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-tibetan-buddhist-women-you-need-to-know\\_b\\_2863247](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-tibetan-buddhist-women-you-need-to-know_b_2863247). Dec 6th, 2017

The ordeal Tibetan Women in general had to undergo under the Chinese imperialism is dreadful, the issues faced by Tibetan women who are vehemently more backward cannot be put into words. What is also forgotten about 1959 when the men went to war was that it was Tibetan women who were left behind to defend their homes and their culture. The burden was upon them to rebuild their homes and their broken families. It was expected of them to stabilise the future of the families left behind. I shall be dedicating this chapter to the women who were brave enough to carry ghastly expeditions for the sake of their children. I shall be talking about the brave women who decided to flee to India and set up a new life here. I would like to argue that Tibetan women refugees living in India are quadruply disadvantaged. They are women, who live in under-developed settlements and are also at the lowest ladder in the societal structure as they are accounted as backward refugees. The Tibetan women who came to India were attributed to building roads and for setting up connectivity for the government. The women who fled to India were naive, simple and were often victims of exploitation. For a long time, Tibetan women who made carpets,

clothing and handlooms did not receive any monetary funds in return and the items that they made were sold for profit instead. They offered their labour for free.

The next section contains the narratives and struggles of the wonderful Tibetan women I had the good fortune and privilege of interviewing.

### **1. Passang Doma, 80 years old**



Fig5 shows Passang Doma striking a pose with her grandson in her restaurant in Lal Market, gangtok

Passang Doma (restaurant owner, living in Gangtok Sikkim) was born in a small hamlet called 'Lho Jhanswa' in Northern Tibet which is near Shingste. She told me that her village in Tibet was popularly known as 'Sheka Gompa.' and remarked with utmost pride how this monarchy was well-reputed for providing good education to monks and was a prosperous region . She says "We were a family of six people, my Pala, Amala and my siblings." She looks back and recalls that since she was the eldest of the siblings, She had a lot of responsibility on her shoulders. She was tasked with the usual chores of fetching firewood, weaving clothes and cooking and riding her horse who was named Sipchung. During harvesting season she reminisces riding her horse to far away fields to collect crops in order to take care of the farmers' necessities thus helping her father in looking after their fields. She made it pretty obvious during the interview that she was born to a wealthy household back in Tibet. She has a fond recollection of her mother and almost describes her with a regal air. She remembers her as a kind and spiritual woman who spent a lot of time in the altar chanting buddhist prayers. She also mentioned how her mother always drank buttermilk with utmost sophistication almost like

it was a regal drink meant only for the aristocrats. She remembers the trip her family took every six months , where they either went on a pilgrimage to 'Gong Rinpoche' , to Mansarovar or to famous hot springs , mineral springs wherein their horses and yaks were laden with eatables, tsampa, butter and warm blankets. She was married off to a nearby village's chief's eldest son named Dhingphon Tsawa. After a year of her marriage, the Chinese government attacked Tibet so they had to flee from Tibet. My father along with numerous other villagers were arrested and imprisoned. She says "My father was put in the prison of Kangpo and spent 25 years in the prison and finally died inside the cell itself." She says "Before We fled from Tibet, We hid all our precious jewels and documents under a dungeon. The Chinese seized our mansion and locked all the rooms and all our belongings were taken as well. We were succesful in escaping the military but our journey was tough and tiring and lasted for months." She finally reached a a place called Holung in Nepal where she gave birth to her first daughter. She stayed there for two years where she learnt how to cook good food and to knit. She finally settled down in Darjeeling. Her husband got a a job as a mountain porter. She used to knit socks, mittens, woollen mufflers, leg warmers and sold them for money. Unfortunately her husband died when he was only 33 years old and she was widowed at only 25 with four children and without a job to fend for them. It was very difficult to raise four children without a job. She says "My

neighbours were very kind to me. I couldn't understand the local language so we used to communicate in sign language.” It became difficult for her to make ends meet and she used to work very hard in order to feed her children. She used to only get three hours of sleep at most as she was working day and night making local liquor and millet drinks in order to sell them. During the heavy monsoons in Darjeeling, She used to get drenched because they lived in a shed as they were very poor and could not afford housing. “I worked really hard and it was difficult carrying the liquor barrels on my back and supplying it to the shops nearby while i had my youngest child tied to the bed. My eldest kids were in refugee school but it was difficult to even send them there. Their shoes, clothes and school bags were all torn and tattered.” The Tibetan welfare association finally came to their rescue and sent her children to school and gave her a job in the Tibetan Welfare Centre of Darjeeling where she weaved clothes, primarily pangden. “After struggling for decades, I finally decided to move to Gangtok, Sikkim and thereabouts my life changed completely for the better. We met a kind Tibetan family who rented us a small house for very little money where I started my own restaurant and served authentic tibetan food and also sold cheap liquor.” She runs a small restaurant in Lal Bazaar, Gangtok and lives in the restaurant itself with her son, her daughter and daughter in law and two grandkids. The invasion affected her and hit her quite hard. She was born to a wealthy family back in

Tibet and didn't know the struggles of being penniless or sleeping on an empty stomach. Life took a tumultuous turn and spiralled downwards for her because she wasn't accustomed to this new lifestyle and conditioning herself to it was extremely challenging. She points out that the most difficult part of it all was that she didn't know the local language and therefore it was impossible to communicate and this proved to be a deficit when it came to hunting for jobs. She understands how difficult it is to live such a hard life and over the years she has opened her home to many strangers in difficult situations and helped numerous people- refugees and otherwise even though she wasn't making enough for herself. She has even hosted refugees and kept them for months at a stretch in her tiny two-room wooden house which wasn't even spacious enough for her family. She has been known to feed numerous hungry people and has helped them with food or small amounts of money. This is perhaps why she is such a loved force in Lal Market and is widely known by everyone as 'Rinhangchenpo Amala' which translates to "The Precious Amala'

## **2. Yangchen Dolkar, 84 years old**

Yangchen Dolkar's fate was a little different compared to Passang Doma's. She came from the Tyobha district in Tibet which is a poor region in Tibet. Unlike Passang Doma's family who were well-off, Yangchen Dolkar's parents were manual labourers who worked for other families. She was the youngest and had two older brothers. When I asked her what her daily life was like back in Tibet she said "I spent the entire day working in the fields and doing domestic chores." She has a vivid recollection of her life there as she was only 15 years old when she fled from Tibet. She strongly insists with the dialogue that "There was no partiality between me and my brothers. We were asked to do the same chores and had the same duties and there was no difference in how we were treated." She insists that the village she was brought up in didn't differentiate between the sexes. She also points out that the women in Tibet enjoyed greater freedom because women practising polygamy was much more common than men practicing it. She states that most Tibetan women were married to upto 5 men, mostly from the same family and it was in India that she got a rude awakening when she saw how



women were treated. She recalls her daily routine back in Tibet and gets teary eyed. "I used to wake up in the morning and my mother served us tea and thukpa, we used to chant prayers and help our parents in the field with domestic chores and then I used to laze around the entire day playing with my siblings." She says "When the Chinese first came to Tibet, they were very nice to us, they gave us money and gifts, only later did we learn that it was but a tactic to later stab us in the back." She remembers how difficult the journey was and how it took them months to reach India. She tells us she had to flee with her mother in a heart-broken state because her father died in the war and they couldn't even mourn him properly. She reached Darjeeling with a group of other refugees and they were put into a refugee camp in Ghoom, Darjeeling. She recalls how she worked as a labourer building roads and how difficult it was to get used to this new lifestyle. She gets teary eyed again when she remembers the friends she had made back in the settlement camps and how they had gotten used to a set routine together, how they suffered and were hungry and sad but their company made cold nights seem warmer.



Fig.4 Yangchen Dolkar strikes a pose in the balcony of her rented house

She says she was lucky to survive because most of the people from the camps who were sent to work couldn't adapt well to the change in climate and working long hours took a toll on them and a lot of

them also died from overexhaustion. She says that the ones who died while working didn't even get a proper funeral. She gets teary-eyed again and says she wishes that she never had to leave Tibet and that even if she was poor in Tibet, at least she was more mentally stable there. She also says she was subjected to a lot of physical and mental abuse in India. She went on to live in Kurseong for two years where she worked as a construction worker and then finally moved to Oodlabari where she settled down. It wasn't easy settling down in a new locality and it is during her time in Oodlabari that she fell in love with a Bihari man who showed her false promises of marriage and a good life. He got her pregnant and fled. She says it was very easy to get exploited by men during those days because she had no family to support her and she lived in a very unsafe house. She says that she was branded as a woman of questionable character because she had an affair with a non-Tibetan who showed her big dreams only to get her pregnant and to never hear from again. The Tibetan community promoted endogamy and that was why she was ostracised by the Tibetan community in Oodlabari for marrying a non-tibetan. She was also subjected to humiliation and abuse for being a single mother and for bearing a kid without knowing the identity and the whereabouts of the kid's father. She says "The Tibetan community stopped inviting me for functions and did not allow me to be a part of the 'Tibetan Kyiduk.' They threw me out of the Kyiduk. People started avoiding me and

they stopped inviting me to their houses and before i knew it, I had become a social pariah. The people i had befriended, too, stopped socialising with me. I was devastated and very hurt. I had become a nomad once again. I didn't belong to either the Tibetan community nor the Hindu community. Things took a downward turn for me and it affected my business as well. I spent many days in my room crying and didn't leave my house in fear and humiliation. The most humiliated I felt was when a man of dignified stature called me 'Shyangzoma' which translates to 'Prostitute' in front of everybody. I felt like committing suicide multiple times."

This is when things hit the lowest point for her and her daughter. She had to work extra hard to support her daughter. She naturally garnered a lot of hate and they had become the talk of the small narrow-minded town. Things were extremely difficult for her and she had to do all kinds of odd jobs to make ends meet in order to sustain a bare minimum lifestyle. She usually went to people's houses and did odd jobs and chores for them in exchange for meagre amounts of money or in exchange for food. Yangchen Dolkar is the classic example of a tibetan woman who is at the lowest hierarchy in the societal ladder and a stark example of how a woman is judged and often bullied to the point of becoming suicidal only because her child did not have a male figure around. She is an example of how women are judged and held accountable for their choices and have no control over their bodies that are

monitored and often subject to condemnation. Yangchen Dolkar's struggles did not end there, She finally met a Muslim man and she instantly fell in love with him too. She says "I must have mistaken kindness for love. Because I was so vulnerable and was on the verge of giving up that back then, it felt like he was the only one who was good to me and talked to me kindly and i instantly swayed and before I knew it, i was already in love with him" This man, was a little different than the previous man. He stayed with her for almost 2 years and they had a daughter together. It was through him, she became an Indian citizen. But it wasn't long before He went away and was never heard of or from any more. Yangchen Dolkar was left with two children to tend to and had no job or money. Her children were subjected to harsh criticism and were bullied by the Tibetan people who had a superior air around themselves because both her children had two different fathers who were not around. She says "By then it didn't matter to me that they had treated me so harshly but I was really sad to see that the humiliation was extended to my daughters as well. They were called 'Bastards' and their childhood was traumatic because of me." She decided to sell liquor because she did not know any other way out. She sent her elder daughter to Central School for Tibetan and spent the entire day and night making local liquor. She had to go to the river and fetch water, cook food and feed her child and make liquor. The monetary gain she got out of selling liquor was little to none. She

didn't make enough money to make ends meet and she was growing old as well. She survived by doing odd jobs and lived a very poor life. She is 84 years old today and is the oldest Tibetan refugee in the Tibetan settlement of Oodlabari and the cycle has repeated itself because now her children look after her by doing odd jobs and chores and by receiving a little money from the tibetan government. The last question I asked her was if she thinks Tibet would ever be free, to which she replied "Tibet will definitely be free one day, i know i shall not live to see that day but it will definitely be free." When i asked her if she would return back to Tibet If she had the opportunity, She replied "I will definitely return back to Tibet if i have the choice, I miss everything back in Tibet. Life has been hard for me in India"

Fig.5 shows a happy mother-daughter duo posing in their one-bedroom house



### **3. Karma Doma, 70 years old**

Karma Doma is also an inhabitant of the Tibetan settlement in Oodlabari . She cannot even revive her journey of fleeing from Tibet because she was still very young and it was her mother who carried her in a basket and brought her to India. She was from the Kham district of Tibet. Her childhood in exile was still a little more comfortable compared to the predicament of the other refugees because she still had her mother's protection and was still under her wings. The most interesting bit that I could gather from my conversation with her is the difference in cultural nuances. She says that after coming to India, for a brief period of time she didn't receive any cultural education as she was only 2 years old when her mother brought her to India. She failed to evoke any idea or memory of what Tibetan culture and religion was like. She actually became very fond of the Indian tradition and found a particular liking for the saree as a form of attire. She fondly reminisces playing dress-up with her group of friends where they found sartorial pleasure in wearing sarees, applying sindoor and then they set forth to sing praises for Lord Ram. She says that they had nobody to teach them about their religion and culture hence they tried to supervene into the Hindu culture. It was only much later when the Tibetan settlements were formed and



Tibetans started finding ways and means of making people aware of their culture and religion that she learnt about the tibetan culture. She says when they first settled in Oodlabari, people were in a massive state of confusion. Karma Doma did her schooling in the Central School for Tibetans in Mundgod which she did not successfully complete. She then went on to join the Tibetan army that was known as 'The Tibetan Regiment. Karma Doma ended up marrying a Bengali man and they had a child name Yangzi Doma out of their wedlock. Karma Doma is the perfect apotheosis of what it feels like to be at cultural crossroads. She tried her best to master the Tibetan language lest people question her sense of Tibetaness as she had married outside the Tibetan community. Her husband died very young which drove her to becoming an alcoholic and a habitual gambler. Her questionable decisions and the inability to handle her husband's loss took a toll on her daughter as well. Her daughter never had enough food nor clothes. She spent all her money on drinks and on gambling. She says "I regret being an alcoholic. I regret not giving my daughter the love and the protection she deserved and needed. I was never a good mother but I am very grateful to her for growing up to be a better version of myself. I'm grateful to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, that She did not follow my footsteps. I am also grateful that she does not hold any resentment towards me"

Karma Doma swears that she is a changed woman now and accredits it to her daughter who runs a successful business, is married to a man with a government job and has kids. When I asked her if she thinks Tibet will be free, she said “Tibet will definitely be free, it will take a lot of time but it will be free and Tibetans can go back to Tibet which is where they belong.”

#### **4. Dechen Amdo, 79 years old.**

Dechen Amdo came to India when she was very young. She was originally from the Amdo region in Tibet. When she first arrived in India, she stayed in the refugee settlement camp in Ghoom, West Bengal. She was a practising nun when she was in Tibet and her life revolved around serving monks and learning about religion and Buddhist philosophy from them. She

was also tasked with the responsibility of taking care of monks and serving them food and ensuring their daily needs be met before she had to flee to India after the invasion. Her initial years in India was difficult and like all the other refugees, she was also involved in building roads and working as a labourer for the Indian government. Things turned around for the better when she met Jigme Amdo and they fell in love and got married. Things went upwards for the both of them after their marriage. They started off by opening a small tibetan restaurant in Darjeeling which served tibetan food and also served alcohol. They worked hard and sacrificed on a lot of comfort so that they could send their kids to good schools and give them good education and a comfortable upbringing. They both worked very hard and because they were both extremely business minded, things took a turn for the better when they moved to Kurseong with their children and eventually they went on to own a bigger restaurant and also ran a guest house in Kurseong which goes by the name 'Kanchan Restaurant and Guest House' She says "I have no regrets about spending my youth working hard and toiling, I feel a sense of achievement when i see my kids doing well and that for me makes it all worth it." They were successful in sending their kids to good schools and colleges and all their kids are doing respectfully well in their fields. Their eldest daughter runs a school in Darjeeling, Her sons are both successful and are happily settled abroad; one is a heart surgeon in New York and the other is a

banker in Canada. They have now grown to become important figures in the Tibetan community of Kurseong and are also responsible for hosting and organising many cultural festivals and events in the town of Kurseong. They are entrusted with the decision-making and are the ones who are asked for advice on the important issues with regards to the Tibetan community. When I asked her if she regrets fleeing Tibet and if she would go back to Tibet if she had the opportunity of going back , she took a deep pause and said “I don't think I would return back, Sure, I love Tibet and I have patriotic feelings for it but because I have spent majority of my life in India, I feel more attached to India and I feel more Indian. I have more attachment towards this place, Moreover my children were born and brought up here and I have watched them grow here and this is home for them.”

# CONCLUSION

Based on the narratives i gathered over the last few months. I feel blessed that I had the privilege of coming across such strong women with such strong backgrounds and stories. I cannot even begin to fathom or even express how horrendous it must have been to be victims of displacement and to go through what was nothing short of a nightmare. I was left in awe and in admiration at their resilience- how bravely they emerged and started over and are living such wonderful lives. They have lived through a war, were victims of displacement and had to start over in a completely alien land. These women, their stories and their roles are very essential in the Tibetan struggle movement and its only fair that these women get the recognition, the admiration and the acknowledgement they so rightfully deserve. These women are important agents through which we get a glimpse of the systemic oppression women face. We see a facet of the various kinds of discrimination they struggle with. The societal structures and cultural constructs are such that women are always seen as the 'second sex' . Women are seen as the flag bearers of cultural, traditional and religious norms therefore any deviation from what is considered to be the

heteronormative convention is seen as a threat, a defiance and an attack on the patriarchal structure, the religion and the culture. The world and phallogocentric societies at large vehemently agree that being born a woman means you're second to man- in all aspects, that you're the inferior sex and there is no way can you compete with a phallus or be it's equal. We, as women, have all been victims of sexism, misogyny and have also been shunned off because of our sex at some point in our lives. Oftentimes, the sexism and misogyny vetted out at us is so normalised and misogyny is so inherent and internalised that most women don't even understand that they are victims that they see nothing wrong with it. Misogyny is so internalised and normalised that women are products of patriarchal conditioning that it is mostly women who are guilty of enabling misogyny and ensuring patriarchy flourishes. Women are victims of sexism and misogyny, they are commodified and objectified but my entire point of this thesis is that it is usually the ones at the lowest end of the societal hierarchy- the minorities who are exploited even more and what they go through do not make news and they continue to remain at the bottom. Through these women, We can see how the government, laws, society and conventional norms are all harsher on women - especially the women at the bottom of the hierarchy. Yangchen Dolkar's choice of marrying a non-tibetan man which was met with severe criticism which resulted in mass ostracisation shows how Tibetan men

take the concept of endogamy very seriously. Her choice of marrying a non-Tibetan man was met with serious contempt because somehow women are expected to be the flag bearers of the community and her defiance made her the subject of ridicule and criticism. She was treated like a pariah for choosing to raise her daughter as a single mother which also signals at the importance men and father figures are given in family structures which pinpoints at the backlash single mothers receive from the conservatives. It is because women's bodies have been sites and spaces of control by the patriarchs and the ones enabling patriarchy. Single mothers are seen a symbol of shifting from the moral convention and are seen as a rebelling act of defiance against family law and political order. The abuse that she had to go through because she was a single mother is a bitter insight into the relationship society has with women and how it is mostly women who are judged and put into heteronormative roles and are put into the 'bad woman' and 'good woman' categories . Yangchen Dolkar was automatically branded as a woman of questionable character and the years of abuse and stigmatisation she faced and resisted shows us how it is always women who are blamed. She spent her entire life being ostracised and her children met the same fate as well. On the other hand, Dechen Amdo who is slightly an upper class Tibetan and in a sense 'A good woman' is treated with respect and is an important figure in the community who is responsible for organising important events. This

alarmingly distinguishing factor at how these two ladies, who are from two different social stratas are treated only further goes on to show that it is also money and social standing that decides the kind of misogyny that you are subjected to. Dechen Amdo also faces a lot of oppression and is subjected to normalised misogyny but society's treatment of Yangchen Dolkar who is at the grassroots and economically backward is a palpable example of how patriarchy aggrandizes the ones at the grassroots even more. These women should be seen with great admiration and their resilience and strength should be celebrated. They should be treated like human beings first instead of being branded as backward refugees.

The role of women in all fields should be highlighted and celebrated because it is women and their standpoints that will be responsible in bringing about a change and wiping away archaic patriarchal laws. I believe that we are lucky to be living in such interesting times when the world is at an intersection and discourses are happening in social media platforms because we are living in the Digital Age. We should also encourage and support women's studies, which is at a danger of being wiped out because Women Studies centres all over India have been cut off from UGC funding. The fact that Women's Studies as a discipline is facing a direct threat and may cease to exist puts all of us at risk and it is a direct attack on collective



women's voices in attempts to shut us up. We should not forget that even though women have gained a lot of rights but the societal structures and space we function in is predominantly still male centric and is still patriarchally conditioned and that is why it is so important to engage in discourses surrounding women and their development. I hope more people are intrigued and curious about the Tibetan movement and when they do take an interest on the Tibetan movement, I hope they do not devalue the role Tibetan women had in the Tibetan movement and struggle.

# QUESTIONNAIRES USED

1. What is your age, profession and marital status?
2. Which part of Tibet are you from?
3. When did you escape from Tibet?
4. What was life like for you in Tibet?
5. What are the memories and recollection you have of Tibet?
6. Was the societal structure patriarchal in Tibet? Were you ever discriminated because of your gender?
7. What was it like for you when the war broke out?
8. Did you have family members who were engaged in the war, if yes, what was their fate?
9. What prompted you to flee from Tibet?
10. What was your journey like? What were the difficulties you faced during the journey?
11. What did you feel like When you first came to India?

12. Where did you put up when you first arrived here? How difficult was it for you to adapt to a new place?
13. How did you earn money and What kind of jobs did you do when you first came to India?
14. How was life at the refugee camps? Were you comfortable? Did you feel uncomfortable staying together with men in the same camps?
15. How did you move out of the camps and what did you do to support yourself and your family?
16. Do you think Tibet will ever be free? If Tibet attains independence, Would you go back to Tibet if you had the chance?
17. How did you preserve your culture and traditions back then?
18. Do you regret fleeing from Tibet?
19. Are you happy in India?
20. What were the problems that you faced with the RC permit and what kind of limitations did it have?
21. Do you feel more Tibetan or more Indian?
22. What were the cultural difficulties you had to face in India?
23. How did the Tibetan organisations help you?
24. How were women treated back then? Were there differences in how men and women were treated?

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