

Prisoners of Shangri-La

Late on March 17, 1959, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama changed out of his customary maroon robes into khaki pants and a long black coat. Knowing he could carry little, he hastily rolled up a favorite *thangka* of the Second Dalai Lama and slid it into a small bag. With this in hand, he slipped out the main gates of the Norbulinka Palace under the cover of darkness. Several trusted officials whisked him through the crowds, which had gathered there in an attempt to protect their revered leader, and down to the banks of the Kyichu River where several small coracles awaited to row him and his small group across the river. Early the next morning, having reached the 16,000-foot Che-la Pass overlooking the Lhasa valley, he paused, turned, and cast a long last glance over the Tibetan capital. Implored to hurry by his small guard unit, he quickly began the descent and his march south to the Indian border.¹ It would be the last time he would see his city.

Two weeks later, on March 31, having traversed some of Asia's most treacherous terrain and protected by an escort that at times was more than several hundred strong, the Dalai Lama arrived at the Indian border.² With the details of the March Uprising still largely unknown and with the Dalai Lama's arrival along with the tens of thousands of Tibetans who eventually followed him, Sino-Indian relations entered a new era.

After working for more than a decade to establish a constructive relationship with China, Prime Minister Nehru was forced to make a choice he had long hoped to avoid. Nehru, facing extreme domestic hostility to his policy of promoting engagement with China, remained skeptical of calls to alter his strategy. A mainstay of his Tibet policy was his conviction that only by maintaining friendly relations with China could India preserve its deep "sympathy for the people of Tibet."³ Wary

of taking any step that might create an atmosphere of “unfriendliness with China,” he initially “rejected the suggestion that India should open her doors to all those Tibetans who might like to seek refuge in India.”⁴ His restrained stance stemmed primarily from his initial belief that the Chinese military presence in Tibet would prevent a mass exodus of Tibetans, and he was convinced that “it is not easy to move about from one place to another . . . and the few passes to India will probably be guarded by [Chinese soldiers].”⁵ By the end of April, China intensified its rhetoric. As Tibetan refugees, first in the hundreds, then in the thousands, began to pour into India, Nehru finally realized his decade-long formulation of peaceful coexistence had become untenable.

Nehru’s initial reluctance to modify his China policy lay in the dearth of solid information available regarding the 1959 March Uprising in Lhasa. Even weeks after the event, the outside world’s understanding remained largely limited to what S. L. Chhibber, India’s consul general in Lhasa, could glean from rumors, observable troop movements, and other basic information, all garnered while he was restricted to the consulate just outside the city. Many in India’s press, and Nehru himself, were quick to compare the situation to Alfred Hitchcock’s thriller *Rear Window*. When asked about Chinese reports admonishing India to “take an objective view on the Tibetan situation,” Nehru, in a press conference, obliquely likened Chhibber to Jimmy Stewart’s character in the film who is confined to his apartment and believes he has witnessed a murder. He said amidst laughter, “He takes an objective view. He sits near a window and looks at Lhasa. I think all these days he has been sitting there and taking this objective view.”⁶ India’s most famous political satirist, R. K. Laxman, captured the powerful allusion, lost in the actual transcription of Nehru’s comment, and also amplified it by placing Nehru himself in the window.

Few would have missed Laxman’s and Nehru’s broader point in comparing *Rear Window* to the situation in Tibet since the film’s denouement turned on the fact that people initially dismissed his claims only to discover that a murder had actually occurred. Although Chhibber, like the film’s star, Jimmy Stewart, finally succeeded in relaying the details of the uprising to India and the world, Nehru’s position remained tentative, as the details emerged slowly to paint a fuller picture of life in Tibet.

By early May 1959, it became clear that the Chinese could not stem the tide of refugees, nor would they passively accept that India was offering sanctuary to the Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetan refugees. It was then that Nehru, for the first time as prime minister, candidly asserted that India had to adhere to its basic values and beliefs “even though the Chinese do not like it.”⁷ With this assertion, and in the face of China’s virulent anti-Indian rhetoric, Nehru assented to providing accommodation and material relief to the Tibetan refugees who had begun to find their way into India. Within the month, the Indian government had begun to issue “Indian Registration Certificates” to the more than 15,000 Tibetans who had

entered the country. By the end of 1962, when the Chinese had effectively sealed the Indo-Tibetan border, no fewer than 80,000 Tibetans had traveled by foot from Tibet, with most of them settling as resident refugees in India.⁸ China regarded India's actions in providing asylum for the Dalai Lama and the multitude of refugees who flowed into India in the months and years following the March Uprising as *prima facie* evidence of India promoting Tibetan independence.

Nehru's support of the refugees swiftly completed China's turn away from India diplomatically. In the early 1950s, India had been a key non-Communist ally, but now in its internal propaganda China began to cast it as a pawn of Western imperialist powers. This about-face in attitude left Nehru few avenues to explore the international relations he had so desperately sought to achieve by diplomacy through his Panchsheel Five Principles, the Bandung Conference, and the 1954 treaty between China and India.

The Dalai Lama remained appreciative of the steps Nehru took to welcome him and was fully aware that the position of the Tibetan refugees would be untenable without the Government of India's help.⁹ In the Dalai Lama's later writings about those first weeks in India, he recalled that Nehru initially "made it quite clear that the Government of India still could not contemplate taking issue with the Chinese over the question of Tibetan rights," even reprimanding him, "You say you want independence and in the same breath you say you do not want bloodshed. Impossible!"¹⁰ The Dalai Lama's early meetings with the prime minister produced a "profound feeling of disappointment."¹¹ He realized Nehru's position offered little room for negotiation as he faced intense domestic opposition on the handling of the Tibet question in the Indian Parliament, as well as daily criticism by the press of his allowing China to seize control of Tibet. However, despite Nehru's attitude, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan leadership emerged from those first few weeks in India with an even deeper resolve to shape their own future.¹²

Central to this vision was the determination among Tibetans to form a functioning Government in Exile, a decision that both eased and challenged the Indian government's efforts to accommodate them. The exiled government, ultimately centered in Dharamsala and officially known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), offered an organizational framework that gave coherence to the refugee community. More specifically, it established "a government-like structure that is able to negotiate with the Indian government."¹³ Despite India's initially tepid response (going as far as to issue a communiqué stating it did not officially recognize the Government in Exile), India did nothing to prevent the political activism of the Tibetans and continued to provide considerable material support to the Tibetan refugees. The fact that India had neither ratified the United Nation's 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees nor enacted domestic legislation regarding the status of refugees meant that "Tibetans in India do not enjoy the official status of refugees under either international or India law."¹⁴ The Dalai Lama, the CTA, and the Tibetan refugee population realized that all

protections and agreements operated at the pleasure and consent of the Indian government.

The Dalai Lama and the Tibetan refugees' primary objective remained the pursuit of an independent Tibet. In part, the lack of security with respect to their status in India mattered little because their main goal remained "to ensure the preservation of Tibetan identity and culture, and give a proper education to our younger generation."¹⁵ Instead of seeking to bolster and stabilize their status as Indian citizens, they sought to embrace their status as refugees. By remaining refugees, they defined themselves as displaced persons whose homeland remained Tibet. Their time in India was, they asserted, temporary. To suggest otherwise would be to propose that they intended to permanently abandon Tibet. Within weeks, the exiled Tibetans had quickly fused the definition of being Tibetan with that of being a refugee. The question few asked was if it was possible to be Tibetan and not be a refugee—until, that is, there emerged in fall 1960 a group of Tibetans who were not refugees.

FROM TIBETAN MUSLIMS TO INDIAN CITIZENS

In September 1960, when the Chinese government abruptly consented to the Barkor Khaches' request for Indian citizenship, Faizullah Chisti, president of the Indian Tibetan Muslim Evacuees Welfare Association (IKMWA) immediately set in motion the work needed to welcome the dozens of—on some days, over a hundred—Khache refugees traveling over Nathula Pass through Sikkim and, ultimately, into Kalimpong, India. Unlike the thousands of refugees who had fled Tibet in the wake of the March Uprising, the Khaches who crossed over into India did so with the direct cooperation of the Chinese and Indian governments. Unlike many of their Tibetan Buddhist compatriots who faced a violent Chinese backlash to the March Uprising, many Khaches had chosen to remain in Tibet and to challenge the Chinese government. In this way they achieved a rare direct victory over the increasingly intransigent Chinese central government. The Khaches argued that, based on their Indian ancestry, they should be allowed to return to India. In the language of the time, the Khaches had not fled as refugees struggling across the Himalayas but as "evacuees."

The Khache journey to India was an arduous one. On prescribed dates, the Chinese provided transportation for each group from Lhasa to Yatung before they made the slow climb in military trucks to the Sikkim-Chinese border at the top of Nathula Pass (14,000 ft.). At the border, Indian vehicles met them, and they were immediately transferred the thirty-five miles down to Gangtok. There they were quickly processed and allowed to proceed to Kalimpong. In Lhasa, Indian consul general P.N. Kaul had registered and issued each family an exit document with their photograph, certified with the consulate seal and Kaul's signature. To prevent them from being unduly delayed at the border, Kaul also provided detailed lists

of their luggage, including contents, to be presented at the border check post.¹⁶ The Khaches from Lhasa arrived in groups varying in size from several dozen to nearly a hundred at the height of their departures from Tibet. In the first week of October 1960, more than 500 Khaches arrived in Kalimpong.¹⁷ In early 1961, the last remaining Khache trickled in. When these were added to the hundred or so Khache boarding school students already in India for several years, the total number of those who had permanently left Tibet exceeded 1,500 men, women, and children.¹⁸

It is hard to imagine their thoughts as they were driven into Kalimpong, a city familiar to most of them, at least by reputation. As Tina Harris explains in her study of the Tibetan wool trade, "The economic connections between Kalimpong and Tibet were so important to the local geographical imagination that many Tibetans would use the word 'Kalimpong' to refer to India as a whole."¹⁹ For more than a century Kalimpong, the last commercial center before the major pass into Tibet, had emerged as the primary trading center for Indian-Tibet trade. Traditionally, the town's populace of 10,000 or 20,000 had long been composed of Tibetans, Nepalis, lowlander Indians, and a diverse mix of other Himalayan peoples.²⁰ But with the influx first of Tibetans in the immediate aftermath of the March Uprising and now the Khaches, the trading town had been utterly transformed.

Initially a small trading town, Kalimpong was ill equipped to handle such an inundation of new residents. As the weeks of their stay in Kalimpong turned to months, the Khaches' concerns over their dwindling resources and no viable source of income led many to consider selling their valuable Tibetan jewelry or other sacred objects they had brought with them. Unfortunately, the Tibetan refugees who had arrived in Darjeeling and Kalimpong months earlier had already saturated the market for such goods. The result was that only the most desperate sold their valuables, and only then at predatorily low prices.²¹ Added to this, at least 10 percent of the Khaches arrived widowed or destitute.²² Finally, despite the Indian consul's repeated requests to the Chinese government for compensation "for all property left behind by Indian nationals in Tibet due to causes beyond their control," the Chinese adamantly refused, suggesting that it was a "completely unwarranted demand."²³

At the end of 1960, the local newspaper, citing a recently completed census, estimated that the population of Kalimpong included over 4,000 Tibetans as well as "nearly seven hundred [Khache] and four hundred Chinese nationals."²⁴ Another report described "3,390 refugees queued up" to receive free powdered milk, and in the neighboring town of Darjeeling, though the Dalai Lama's representative in charge of relief reported that only "1,200 destitute people came regularly for the twice-weekly distribution of powdered milk and a little rice."²⁵ The indeterminate status of the Khaches as "evacuees" did little to mitigate their situation.

As incursions along the Chinese-India border increased in frequency and as Cold War fears heightened tensions, the situation in the towns of Darjeeling and Kalimpong remained politically tense. Still fearful that the Chinese government would use refugees as cover for infiltrating India, the accusations of Chinese spies coming across the border were common.²⁶ In the progressive weekly *Thought*, an editorial reflected ongoing concern with the possibility of continued Chinese territorial expansion in the Himalayas. Dismissing as irrelevant China's protests over India's offer of sanctuary for the Dalai Lama and refugees, the opinion piece warned that China would be unsatisfied with simply occupying Tibet:

The Chinese obviously have their eyes fixed elsewhere. . . . Their dream of a so-called federation of Himalayan States will ever remain unrealized unless Nepal has first been bagged. The rare promptitude they have shown in ratifying their so-called border and aid agreements with Kathmandu is an eloquent testimony of their resolve to push ahead in the Himalayan Kingdom, with or without an understanding with India. In truth they have in Nepal a wide field for practicing mock-generosity, whether it be the quantum of economic aid or concession on Mount Everest. To be wise, India cannot afford to trust either chance or the Chinese. Sedulous flirtation is not the same as genuine friendship.²⁷

As Nepalese, Chinese, and Tibetans had all commonly called Kalimpong home for centuries, it is not surprising that accusations of collaboration with the Chinese soon began to appear.

Perched on the edge of Tibet and India, the city, since the founding of the People's Republic of China, had attracted a wide array of those agents interested in "listening-in to the echoes from Communist-occupied Tibet."²⁸ Nehru famously described the small community as a "nest of spies," like a "detective story unraveling itself there," with individuals of "every variety and every shade of color."²⁹ The Sino-Indian tensions and the near-constant stream of Tibetan refugees had completed the transformation of Kalimpong from a sleepy backwater to a cosmopolitan town bursting at the seams with people with a hundred different political agendas. George Patterson, the former Scottish missionary in eastern Tibet who had made Kalimpong his home, described how "within a few months of the Chinese Communist attack on Tibet I had as my immediate neighbors in Kalimpong one of the Shapës, or Cabinet Ministers of Tibet, the Finance Minister, the Dalai Lama's mother, sister, brother and brother-in-law and several other leading members of the Tibetan Government."³⁰

The Chinese government even accused India of allowing pro-Tibet agents to transform Kalimpong into a command center of the Tibet revolt.³¹ The Chinese protested repeatedly that pro-Tibet demonstrations were occurring there (and elsewhere in India) with the Indian government doing nothing to stop them. The Chinese government took India's inaction as tantamount to encouraging them.

The Indian government patiently explained that in India free speech and demonstrations were protected rights, and if carried out in a legal and legitimate manner, the Indian government could not intervene or prohibit them. The Indian government, for its part, ultimately arrested and deported the Chinese headmaster of the local Chinese school and his wife for unidentified “undesirable activities.”³² It was into this toxic mix that the Tibetan Muslim evacuees arrived.

HELLO INDIA! GOOD-BYE TIBET?

In late November 1960, amid the business of greeting the arriving Khaches, registering their presence, and sorting out their next steps, the president of the Tibetan Welfare Association, Faizullah Chisti, received a letter, addressed with only his name and marked “SECRET.” Chisti, who had corresponded with many high officials, must have been slightly astonished upon opening the envelope to see the Dalai Lama’s red seal. Written in an elegant Tibetan script, the letter began by addressing “all the Khache and their leaders who came recently to India from Tibet.” Like others who had followed the tribulations of the Khaches over the previous year, the Dalai Lama expressed his distress over “how the Khache were subjected to the Chinese’s inhuman behavior, maltreatment, unlawful occupation of Tibet and their intolerable suppression and endless torture and had to evacuate to India.” The Dalai Lama’s letter then exhorted them to join the Tibetans in India to free Tibet from China and “to make other peace-loving countries of the world better understand our case.” Given the still tenuous situation of Tibetans in India, the Dalai Lama counseled Chisti, “[If] in recognizing the difference between a friend and an enemy you could support our case, it would be a great help and useful for better understanding our case by the other peace loving countries of the world.” The Dalai Lama concluded by urging the Khaches to remain in touch and to “write me without hesitation.”³³

While the letter underscores what would later become the Dalai Lama’s hallmark trait of initiating interfaith dialogue in order to achieve common goals, his open and intimate manner also demonstrates just how close and familiar the two communities had become over the preceding centuries. Both parties understood the Khache to be Tibetan. Yet the letter appears to have unnerved Chisti with its open references to the Khache as his subjects, demonstrating just how quickly the experiences of the Tibetan Buddhists and the Khache had diverged in crossing from Tibet to India. Not daring to transgress an issue of Indian political sensitivity so soon after the Khache had arrived, Chisti immediately wrote to the Indian political officer in Gangtok asking for counsel.³⁴ After two months, the office finally responded, simply instructing them that any correspondence to “H.H. the Dalai Lama is entirely a matter between you and H.H. The Dalai Lama and we are unable to give any advice on the matter.” The two-month response

time to compose two sentences suggests Chisti's initial concern about India's stance was well founded.³⁵

In early February 1961, Chisti's eventual reply to the Dalai Lama, sent on behalf of the Khaches in Kalimpong, was equally careful. Certainly, Chisti's response matches the Dalai Lama's original missive in its affection and respect. He begins by assuring him that "we are sure that these difficulties are only temporary and one day the time will come that your Majesty's holy steps will land on the sacred soil of Tibet and once again the peace-loving Tibetan people will inspire under the honest leadership of your Majesty."³⁶ Remarkable also is Chisti's conviction of the Dalai Lama's ecumenical tolerance when he adds that the Khache "earnestly pray that the Almighty Allah may fulfill the aspiration of thousands of peace loving Tibetan people."³⁷

The letter is filled with polite compliments, thanking the Dalai Lama for remembering the "few humble Khache (Kashmiri Muslims) amidst[t] your Majesty's countless other problems" and expressing gratitude to the "kind-hearted Nehru" for saving them from the "hands of tyrant Red China." And yet Chisti seems far more cautious about how to negotiate the Khaches' newfound status as citizens of India.

The letter concluded with what might at first glance seem innocuous, yet in fact it broaches what weighs most on Chisti's mind. Namely, he seeks to remind the Dalai Lama of both communities' reliance on the good offices of the Indian government for their present circumstances:

We with all our abilities are with your Majesty and your Majesty's fellow Tibetan people in the task of li[b]eration of Tibet from the Red Chinese's unlawful occupation or their tyrant hands. And we are pleasure [*sic*] to inform your Majesty that every member of our community are very thankful for the facilities and hospitalities given by your Majesty's Government in the past in Tibet to us as honest guests of your Majesty's Government.³⁸

Chisti's closing comments hint at the uncomfortable balancing act the Khache had to maintain after their escape from Tibet.

It was not just the manner of their arrival—traveling in government-assigned trucks instead of stealing across the Himalayan passes on foot—that separated them from their Tibetan Buddhist compatriots. Certainly, both groups shared a desire to extricate themselves from their desperate situation in Tibet, but the manner in which they were received in India quickly divided them. The Tibetan Muslims, by asserting and receiving formal acknowledgment of their Indian ancestry, arrived in India effectively as Indians, not Tibetan refugees. The consequences of this differentiation began to be manifested almost instantly, as they crossed over the mountainous pass into India. Greeted as Indians, not Tibetans, as citizens, not refugees, as Muslims, not Buddhists, the Khache faced a very different set of circumstances,

choices, and reception in post-Partition India than did the Buddhist followers of the Dalai Lama.

On the one hand, the very criteria by which they exited China was that they were *not* Tibetan. On the other hand, by almost every measure—language, culture, centuries of intermarriage, and their recognition of the Dalai Lama as their ruler—they were Tibetan. The Dalai Lama's tone in his letter to the Khaches was to fellow Tibetans. This was not a letter that could have been sent to others who might have witnessed the excesses of the Chinese, such as the Nepalese, Ladakhis, or Bhutanese. The Dalai Lama approached the Khaches as Tibetans, as the Tibetan government had for centuries. Yet it is the seeming immutability of such a relationship that made Chisti most uneasy. Chisti desperately wanted to reciprocate the Dalai Lama's deep affection. However, he felt compelled to send the Dalai Lama a signal of the Khaches' present status by adopting a new narrative denoting the Khache as outsiders or "guests" of the Dalai Lama's government. Their status had changed. Chisti's language confirms the awkward struggle of the Khaches as they sought to make sense of the new world in which they found themselves.

The speed with which their experiences diverged from those of the Tibetan Buddhists who had fled Tibet only months ahead of their exodus underscores the pull of factors beyond their control. The Khaches left Tibet by virtue of being Kashmiri. By claiming Kashmiri ancestry, they arrived as Indian citizens; by accepting Indian citizenship, they forfeited any claim as Tibetan refugees (or exiles); and finally, they left behind a life as a beloved and respected minority and entered the post-Partition landscape of India. Each of these changes occurred inadvertently. The repercussions were swift and largely unanticipated. The clearest and most agonizing consequence took somewhat longer to become manifest: in the eyes of most of the world, the Khaches were no longer Tibetan.

To suggest it was only external circumstances that both the Tibetan Buddhists and the Khaches wrestled with upon their arrival in India does not fully articulate the complexity of the challenges that faced both communities. Internally both groups retained strong and visible ties to each other, ties that were evident even a half century after their desperate flights from Tibet. Carole McGranahan's nuanced study of the impact of exile on Tibetan identity deftly articulates a central element of this dynamic when she suggests that "in exile Tibet, a nationalist identity both flourishes and flattens. The perceived need for internal cohesion, given the current political state of Tibet, resulted in the devaluing of diversity in the exile community."³⁹ While McGranahan's comment refers specifically to the Tibetan Buddhist exile community, the perception that their circumstances demanded uniformity at the expense of diversity is indisputably true for the Tibetan Muslims as well. The road to such a flattening and narrowing of identity can be seen by choices that began with their departure from Tibet in 1960.

NEW BEGINNINGS, OLD LESSONS

Minor political setbacks aside, Faizullah Chisti and the other local Khache leaders quickly set about to establish the IKMWA in order to work through decisions about their futures. In its first weeks, the association faced not only the difficult task of finding accommodation for the displaced Khaches but also helping with the psychological stress they felt from the strain of the previous two years. In the days and weeks after their departure from Lhasa, the Khaches began to realize that in the eyes of the Indian government, and increasingly the Tibetan Buddhists, they had ceased to be considered Tibetan. They could not openly declare their intention to return to Tibet one day in the indeterminate future as the Dalai Lama and his followers were doing. The Khaches' dilemma was an entirely different one. United in their desire to leave Lhasa, they were soon divided as to how to begin their new lives as Kashmiri Muslims in India. The stark and unanticipated choices now facing the Khaches served as a reminder of how their abrupt departure from Tibet had altered both their circumstances and their identity.

This sudden imposition of Indian citizenship was manifested in bewildering but consequential ways. Immediately following the 1959 March Uprising, as detailed in the previous chapter, the Khaches successfully asserted that as Kashmiri they should be allowed to declare themselves Indian. Yet when interviewed several decades later, many Khaches admitted this was far less an expression of a long-held belief in their "Kashmiri" identity than a maneuver to extricate themselves from China. In the months before the Chinese finally acceded to their claims, many among them (under considerable pressure from the Chinese) did renounce their claim to be Kashmiri Indian, and others, even as they exited Tibet, became confused about their nationality. Prior to their departure, the Chinese government had insisted that the Khaches be issued Chinese passports. But when numerous Khaches crossing the border into India were asked about their nationality, they replied they were Indian, believing that this was the answer they had worked for the past eighteen months to achieve. As a result, they were given the wrong forms, and their efforts to apply for Indian citizenship were made much more complicated.⁴⁰ Others, who had family members who were Khatsara or Nepalese, responded to the immigration officials honestly by stating they were Nepalese.⁴¹ This blend of externally confusing but internally legible Tibetan labels, Khache, Koko, and Khatsara, did not neatly fit into any of the available nation-state divisions now being imposed by India.

The choices facing the Khache once they arrived were even more bewildering. Despite their claim to be Indian Kashmiri, most of them continued to identify themselves as Tibetan. In documents from the period and in talking with elder members of the community today, a profound apprehension had gripped the Khaches, much like that which Chisti expressed in his letter to the Dalai Lama.

They felt that they had to conform to the identity that had allowed them to escape Tibet. The problem was that few, including most Tibetans, treated them as "Tibetan refugees." More pressing, although rarely stated explicitly at the time, the Khache did not want to appear deceptive or ungrateful to the nation that had championed their harrowing escape from Tibet.

The scars of their last months in Lhasa did not diminish quickly, and daily concerns weighed on them, causing the community to question just how to begin to rebuild their lives. Within weeks after the first group's arrival in Kalimpong, three general schools of thought on how best to push forward emerged. Each envisioned a starkly different vision of the Khaches' future, correlating directly with the three major ways the Khaches began to perceive of themselves. The first group, headed by Chisti and others who had deep experience in India, implored the group to remain in the Himalayan hill towns of Darjeeling and Kalimpong, where they would have commercial opportunities and could remain geographically and culturally close to Tibet. Others, caught up in the notion of their Kashmiri heritage and having safely preserved their community, exhorted their brethren to "return" to Kashmir (their ostensible homeland). The third group, embracing their identity as Muslims, urged settlement in Saudi Arabia (the birthplace of Islam).

The question of what the Khache should do was taken up in a spirited two-day meeting at the end of November 1960 with all the heads of the refugee families in attendance. A vote was taken, and the majority (roughly 600) decided to move to Srinagar in Kashmir. The motion and vote summarized the choice in this manner: "This meeting conveys to the Government of India that [a] majority of the members Indian Muslims of Kashmiri-Ladakhi origin prefer the soil, climate, weather and scope of trade in Kashmir within the Indian Union, to be quite suitable for their health, habit, hygiene."⁴² The vote was not binding on the group as a whole, and many of the elders, in particular, had been convinced by several Ladakhi Khaches of the merits of settling in Kashmir, even though they had visited but never lived in Srinagar. Still, more than a third of the Khaches, typically those who were younger and more cosmopolitan, stood firm and decided to remain in Kalimpong and Darjeeling.⁴³ The remaining members hoped to emigrate to the Middle East.⁴⁴ The final motion of the meeting voted Faizullah Chisti the "leader of the delegation" and "President-cum-secretary," despite his personal opposition to settling in Kashmir.

Chisti's job was not easy, though his selection was inspired given his intimate knowledge of Indian bureaucracy and his tireless work ethic, even when it meant pursuing ends with which he personally disagreed. Chisti displayed an amazing degree of administrative acumen by keeping highly detailed lists of people, organized and enumerated by individual and by family. The day after the vote, Chisti contacted government officials asking that arrangements for the first groups be set in place so that their travel could be completed in time for

them to celebrate Ramadan in Srinagar. However, the bureaucratic wheels of India turned very slowly, with each administrative office referring the request to another, until the delay was so great that the departure had to be postponed until after Ramadan.⁴⁵

Within weeks, Chisti began the complicated process of moving the six hundred Khache, of varying financial means, to Kashmir from Kalimpong across northern India to Srinagar. He separated those who were going to Srinagar into three groups, and between March 28 and April 4 he personally oversaw each group board the bus in Kalimpong early on their appointed morning so as to ensure each of them made the journey down the steep twisting road to Siliguri. In Siliguri each person in the group was issued a third-class railway ticket, boarded the first of three train journeys, and only at the end of the third day make the final stage of their trip to Srinagar by bus.⁴⁶ While the bulk of the Khaches who desired to move to Kashmir had left Kalimpong by April, other groups continued to be organized for several more months. It was not until August 1961 that the very last group, which Chisti described as “quite ignorant, illiterate, and helpless,” departed. Chisti requested special attention from the government to help the group join those who had gone on ahead.⁴⁷

Those Khaches who remained in Kalimpong and Darjeeling began to realize firsthand how precarious their documented status was. Despite the considerable and sustained involvement of the Indian government in facilitating their move from Tibet to India, it was at this moment that the Indian government almost instantaneously turned its attention elsewhere. The Tibetan Muslims did not receive any of the high-level, prolonged attention given to the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhists, and they encountered sustained and widespread resistance from Indian and Kashmiri officials, who hindered their efforts to process their applications for full Indian citizenship.

As they sought to begin the process of buying property and setting up shops, “the authorities concerned ask[ed] such persons to produce proof of Indian Citizenship.”⁴⁸ Nearly two years later, in 1962, local officials had still not taken action on the Khaches’ applications for citizenship.⁴⁹ Chisti, courteous until the end, wrote to the deputy commissioner of Darjeeling District, “I regret to point out that so far nothing has been done. . . . [Khaches] are being subjected to unnecessary harassment and embarrassments at check posts and elsewhere.”⁵⁰ In August 1963, P. N. Kaul, now serving in the central government, wrote to Chisti indicating that he had reached out to “concerned authorities” and “presume[d] they will investigate it through the West Bengal Government.”⁵¹ Only then, nearly three years after their arrival, did the three hundred Khaches who had stayed behind in Kalimpong and Darjeeling begin to be properly registered and to receive their Indian Citizenship Certificates. All except Faizullah Chisti, whose application the deputy commissioner purposely delayed for another year, peeved at being made to look bad by going over his head.⁵²

Even after the departure of nearly two-thirds of the Khaches, Chisti continued to press for the Indian government's support of those who remained behind.⁵³ He appealed for government intervention regarding Sanaullah Shahkuli, an eighteen-year-old Khache student in Beijing who was unable to return to Lhasa in time to join his family and was being detained in Lhasa despite promises that he would be allowed to join his family in India. Chisti kept in nearly continuous contact with the two Indian consul generals, Kaul and Chhibber, even after they moved on from their posts in Tibet. In addition, he organized classes for the Khache children at the Anjuman Islamia School in Kalimpong and then, with government assistance, placed them in nearly a dozen schools. The degree to which he set aside his personal needs for the greater good of the community appears in his correspondence for one small, heartbreaking moment. In a letter to an Indian official, seeking assistance yet again for the Khache prisoners held in Lhasa, he apologizes for the delay of his response, due to the "sad demise of my beloved wife."⁵⁴ In the very next sentence he returns to the matter at hand, not letting the death of his wife diminish his pursuit of government assistance. Perhaps feeling the need to continue for the greater good of the community, he remained in the position of president of the association and was the community's foremost advocate until near the very end of his life.

Foremost in the minds of most Tibetan Muslims were the five Khaches who had been arrested and tried in June 1960 and who remained imprisoned in Lhasa. (Diplomatic records sometimes include a sixth, Abdul Ahat, whose father, an Indian, was the cook at the Indian consulate in Lhasa.) Their families had waited until the very last moment to leave Lhasa, but in the end they had been convinced there was little they could accomplish by remaining behind. Survivor's guilt and witnessing, on a daily basis, the grief of those families prompted Chisti to continue to appeal and to actively seek ways to tangibly extend assistance to them. In a petition to the Ministry of External Affairs, he stated that the "wives and relatives . . . at the present moment steeped in deep worries and anxieties constantly brooding over the conditions of their men at Lhasa in Tibet and such worries and anxieties have seriously told upon their health."⁵⁵ Chisti organized a package of items to be sent to the prisoners, everything from shirts, trousers, and caps to items such as tea, biscuits, and cigarettes—items that allowed them a modicum of comfort they would otherwise have been denied.⁵⁶

As relations deteriorated between China and India and as numerous small incidents of ill treatment of Chinese in India came to the fore, the issue of the five remaining prisoners slipped from view. At the end of 1962, India closed its Lhasa consulate, citing constant "restrictions of various kinds which were intensified after Chinese forces launched massive attacks on Indian territory. . . . Food was difficult to obtain, communications were cut off and the personnel were harassed."⁵⁷ In this atmosphere, Chinese responses to all queries about the remaining Khaches became tediously repetitive. Chinese officials repeatedly circled back

to their original September 23, 1960, communication in which they had stated that the “Chinese Government had always considered the [Khache] to be Chinese.”⁵⁸ In October 1963, the Indian officials seemed at their wit’s end after finding “patently illogical” the Chinese government’s response indicating it had investigated the matter and “found there were no Indians in Tibet.”⁵⁹

The following year, the Indian government again attempted to reason with the Chinese, stating that their stance on the Khache prisoners was “at variance with their own policy on the question of nationality of overseas Chinese” and noting that the only crime they committed was that they insisted they were Indian nationals and desired to emigrate India.⁶⁰ Chisti continued to plead for government intervention as late as 1967 but to no avail.⁶¹ A month after that, he received a reply explaining that although the Indian government had made repeated claims for their release, the Chinese government had now “refused to enter into further correspondence with the Government of India” on the matter and that no communication had been received since China’s last reply on December 5, 1964.⁶²

If the road to Indian citizenship had been an uneven and difficult one for those Khaches who remained in Kalimpong and Darjeeling, their lives by 1964 had begun to assume a sense of normalcy. Their children were attending quality local schools. Many of the Khaches had become leading citizens in the two cities. Realizing that the Indo-Tibetan trade, from which many of them had made their livelihood, was not likely to return any time soon, given the 1962 Sino-Indian border conflict, they invested their capital in opening shops and hotels or becoming tailors and hat-makers—skills that had served them well in Lhasa. Their success and general contentment contrasted sharply with those who chose to leave for Srinagar in 1961.⁶³

HARD LESSONS: KASHMIR

For those Khaches who chose to settle in Kashmir, arrival in Srinagar in the late spring and summer of 1961 was far from idyllic. While awaiting construction of forty two-bedroom apartments, intended to house roughly eighty to a hundred families, the Khache endured their first Srinagar winter in a tent city on the Numaishi Exhibition Grounds.⁶⁴ Their expectation that Kashmir would bring a return to a life as peaceful as they had once had in Tibet was quickly dashed. They were unable to speak the Kashmiri language, unfamiliar with local customs, and completely unaware of the complex political situation into which they suddenly found themselves. Claimed by both Pakistan and India, after the Partition in 1947, Srinagar’s political status remained a controversial and unsettled question when the Khaches arrived in 1960, as it remains today.

When British governance ended in 1947, Kashmir had, in a complicated set of still disputed steps, attempted to remain independent of both Pakistan and

India. Like many other princely states under British rule, Kashmir had remained officially autonomous but had largely adhered to British colonial leadership. Its position along the Indian-Pakistan border, with its complex Hindu-Muslim history, reflects the highly amalgamated past of many Himalayan states, their distinctive legacies shaped by multiple influences and rulers. In the nineteenth century, Kashmir was ruled by Punjabi Sikhs before coming under the rule of a Hindu Dogra king. By the early twentieth century, Kashmir, along with Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal, served as strategic Himalayan buffer states among the more powerful regional political forces. Their status, however, remained elusive and debatable. As a result, Kashmir never fit neatly into the religio-political categories of the lowlands; rather it reflected the typically diverse hybrid status found of other Himalayan states.

In 1947, under the British formula of partition, which viewed the future success of their former colony through an almost exclusively Hindu-Muslim lens, Kashmir was offered the choice of joining either a Muslim-majority Pakistan or a Hindu-majority India. Such a choice made little sense for a Kashmir that was a Muslim-majority state with a still vibrant Buddhist historical tradition ruled by a Hindu ruler. The Kashmiris resisted being forced into a choice along religious lines, given that neither option reflected their culture or their political values. Thus Kashmir's initial choice was to remain independent. This did not sit well with either India or Pakistan, both of which sought to claim the territory as their own.

Faced with the choice of military occupation by Pakistan or signing an "instrument of accession" with India (in exchange for military protection), Kashmir chose to join the India Union under a strict set of conditions set out under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution.⁶⁵ This constitutional provision created a special status for Kashmir by placing it directly under the control of India's president and by restricting the central Indian government's powers to three areas: foreign affairs, defense, and communications. All other rights were retained by the state of Jammu and Kashmir. To further clarify and institute an unambiguous and asymmetric federalist relationship with India, the Jammu and Kashmir government, on January 26, 1957, promulgated the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir. The constitution, among other things, declared that "permanent residents" were defined as those individuals who were resident in the state prior to May 14, 1954. This provision explicitly sought to maintain the precarious Hindu-Muslim demographic balance and to prevent in-migration that might swing the state in one direction or the other. The Khache who arrived in Kashmir had little understanding of the legal hurdles, religious complexities, and almost insurmountable identity politics that awaited them.

The consequences of this lack of understanding for the Khache were immediate and absolute. Many of those who decided to settle in Kashmir had based their decisions on the claims of just a few Khaches about weather, topography, and the

belief that they were fulfilling the Indian government's claim to their Kashmiri ancestry. Almost every positive assumption the Khache held when they chose to settle in Kashmir was dashed on their arrival in Srinagar. Perhaps most dispiriting was the realization that in the eyes of the Kashmiri government, and under local laws, they were not welcomed as long-lost brethren but were forcefully and definitively designated as non-Kashmiri Muslim immigrants.

From the moment of their arrival, Kashmiri officials, through small measures and large, made the Khaches' efforts to settle permanently in Kashmir difficult, unpleasant, and stressful. It was the Kashmiri's sense at the time that to offer the Khache permanent residency might set a precedent that would flood the state with other non-Kashmiri Muslims. It is an irony rarely touched on that the Khache, though technically retaining a pathway to Indian citizenship, would, if they settled in Kashmir, remain non-state subjects. And in the eyes of most Kashmiri, they would be treated as Tibetan refugees.⁶⁶ This conundrum of being Indian citizens but not a state subject of Kashmir is a critical facet of the Khache experience in India that, if disregarded, renders their more recent past incomprehensible.

Initially, it was local Kashmiri officials who resisted allowing them to register as Indian citizens.⁶⁷ In part, this resistance was a legacy of those immigrants who had preceded them. The Khaches' arrival a decade after thousands of Uyghur and Kazak refugees from Xinjiang had descended on Kashmir complicated their reception. Many Kashmiri officials erroneously equated the Khaches' status with the Xinjiang and Tibetan stateless peoples who had preceded them to Srinagar.⁶⁸ After nearly a year, desperate for resolution, Khache representatives contacted Nehru, who had been vacationing in Kashmir, asking him to personally intervene, to no avail.⁶⁹ To the many Khache it appeared that the Indian government, after working diligently on their behalf to secure their release from China, had become indifferent to their situation now that they had arrived in India.

The situation became far more serious on July 1, 1962, when local police notified the Khache that failure to "get all the Tibetan Muslim refugees" registered (as foreigners) within two weeks' time would lead to the state taking "legal action against them under the Foreigners' Act and Rules."⁷⁰ Attempts to approach the superintendent of police to apprise him of the fact that as repatriated "Indian Kashmiri Muslims" the Foreigners' Act and Rules did not apply to them were fruitless. Faced with immediate arrest, the Khaches in Srinagar were forcibly registered as foreigners and classified as Tibetans. Only at this point did the Khache leaders in Srinagar reach out to contact Faizullah Chisti in Kalimpong. He told them of the July 7 memo from Kaul advising them to "approach local Registering Authority for the grant of Indian Citizenship."⁷¹ Even with his aid, it took until late 1963 and only with the forceful intervention of the central Indian authorities for the Khache to be properly registered as Indian citizens, like the Khache in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. While they had achieved Indian citizenship, the fact remained that as

long as they stayed in the state of Kashmir and Jammu, they would be “non-state subjects.”

Without state subjects’ status, the Khache continued to be ineligible for key documents, such as identity cards for Kashmiri elections and ration cards, the lack of which accentuated their outsider status. Being denied state citizenship also had broader implications. As non-state subjects in Kashmir, the Khache could not gain access to the many other privileges: they could not acquire immovable property, were deemed ineligible for government employment, and were disqualified from applying to receive bank loans. Khache youth were denied access to state-run Kashmiri higher technical and professional education.

This was in stark contrast to the benefits granted to the Khache children who remained in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. There the Khache successfully registered as Bhotia, a scheduled tribe eligible for local postgraduate education benefits, such as lower admissions requirements. Any Khache youth who settled in Srinagar who was interested in pursuing a university education had to do so by incurring the high costs associated with going to other Indian states, an expense beyond the means of most Khache families. In the face of these obstacles, the Kashmir Khache established their own school and maintained their cohesive identity over the next several decades. Yet as the Tibetan Muslim Masood Butt would write in a fiftieth-anniversary retrospective, for those Khache in Kashmir, the “lack of proper guidance and leadership proved to be an obstacle in their development.”⁷² Without ways to earn their livelihood, the increasingly desperate community began to look for alternative solutions.⁷³

Their harsh reception in Kashmir unsettled the many Khaches who had come to believe a myth of their own making, that as Khache they were Kashmiri. The contradiction between the case the Indian government made for their departure from Tibet, based explicitly on their Kashmiri heritage, and what they encountered when Kashmir refused to accept them as Kashmiri deeply disoriented the entire Khache community.

PURSUING MUSLIM ROOTS

By 1969, the Khache in Srinagar, Kalimpong, and Darjeeling became increasingly disenchanted with the lack of opportunities available to them in Kashmir, and more broadly in India. Many younger Khache were striking out in search of work and education in Nepal and elsewhere. Deep disillusionment over their inability to re-create or build on the previous lives they had had in Tibet was manifest. Unlike the difference of opinion between various Khache groups over where to settle that had occurred in November 1960, now, almost a decade later, an overwhelming majority were of a single mind: to make a move to Saudi Arabia. Much of the impetus for this move came about because several groups of Tibetan Muslims and

Chinese Muslims had successfully established numerous small communities in Saudi Arabia and in the Middle East.

The Khache based their wish to move on information from those who had already migrated to the Middle East. The Barkor Khache leaders in 1961 had noted Nehru's assistance to a large group of Khaches who had become stranded in Bombay two years earlier. Even more influential in the Khaches' resolve to move was the example of a second group of a hundred or so Khaches, led by Ghulam Muhammad, who decided in 1960 not to move with the bulk of the Khaches to Kashmir but instead to emigrate directly, or so they believed, to Saudi Arabia.⁷⁴ This group joined but soon outnumbered other Muslims who had immigrated to Saudi Arabia from China.

In a little known fact, many Muslims from China, Xinjiang, and Tibet had chosen to settle in Saudi Arabia, often out of political expediency, and appeared to be prospering. According to a Republic of China 1961 survey of Chinese living in Saudi Arabia, only the Muslims from Qinghai and Gansu outnumbered those from Tibet.⁷⁵ Though different from the Khache, many Uyghur, Kazakh, and Hui Muslims from northwest China fled China and settled in Saudi Arabia after the fall of the Nationalist Chinese government in 1949. Of the some 400 surveyed, nearly 300 had become Saudi citizens or permanent residents. The immigration to Saudi Arabia was largely accomplished through the assistance of Ma Bufang, a Qinghai Muslim who served as the Republic of China's ambassador to Saudi Arabia from 1957 until 1961 and who would himself ultimately obtain Saudi citizenship.⁷⁶ The welcome they received and the commercial success they achieved there remained well known because many of those who fled had traveled through India (often specifically Kashmir).⁷⁷

Contrary to the beliefs of those Khaches who promoted the move to Saudi Arabia, these early groups had not had an entirely easy path to settlement. Both the Qinghai group and the group led by Ghulam Muhammad had arrived on Hajj visas that allowed them to stay only for one year. As their pilgrimage ended, these groups approached Saudi officials asking to be allowed to settle permanently. As the Saudi government had done with most such requests, it denied their appeal. The timing of their appeal proved fortuitous, though, since the inroads made by the People's Republic of China in the Middle East had caused representatives of the Republic of China to redouble their efforts in the region, particularly in 1957 after the PRC had persuaded Egypt to sever relations with Taiwan and recognize the PRC. The rising prominence of the PRC in the Middle East intersected with the Tibetan Muslims fleeing Tibet. The Nationalist government saw an opportunity in supporting the Tibetans: a means to foment broader internal dissent within Tibet and, in their calculus, aid their long-term plan to retake the Chinese mainland.⁷⁸

In an effort to encourage the uprising in Tibet, U.S. State Department officials in 1959 urged Chiang to offer recognition of "Tibet as an independent state" to

solidify anti-Communist activities in Tibet.⁷⁹ While Chiang did not in the end agree to this, the Nationalists did offer the roughly one hundred Khaches ROC citizenship and passports (they had left India prior to being granted Indian citizenship).⁸⁰ While this resolved the Khaches' immediate dilemma of being stateless persons, it did not alter the fact that the Saudi government still refused to grant them permanent residency. In the end, after being granted residency by other neighboring states, it was the initiative of several Tibetan Muslim students who were enrolled at Medina University that convinced the Pakistani Islamic scholar, Imam Maulana Abu Ala Maududi, to assist them in writing and delivering a petition to the Saudi king.⁸¹

Adopting a compelling religious strategy, Maududi advised them to contrast their situation with that of the increasing global visibility of Tibetan Buddhists. At the heart of the appeal was the portrayal of the Tibetans' flight from "Chinese-occupied Tibet" as consisting of two peoples: the Buddhists who had successfully founded a new community and government in Dharamsala; and the Khache Muslims who remained stateless. Maududi personally took the appeal to the king, and two months later, thirty Tibetan Muslim families received an invitation from the king to move to Saudi Arabia. The community quickly decided to settle in the Jabal Bazim area of Taif. Located in the Sarawat Mountains about 62 miles southeast of Mecca, it was the city that served as the unofficial summer capital of the Saudi government. There the Tibetan Muslims quickly established themselves as proficient tailors and hat makers. Although allowed to reside there permanently, their status as foreigners deprived them of many rights given to Saudi citizens. Several years later, after the discovery of oil, the requirements for obtaining citizenship, even for those Tibetan Muslims born in Saudi Arabia, became ever more circumscribed.

It is likely that at least some of the Khaches back in India knew some of these facts, though most deemed their options in the Middle East no worse than the situation they faced in Srinagar. The Khache leader Muhammad Ramzan Butt arranged a meeting with the Indian government to broach the idea of their assisting the Tibetan Muslims to emigrate to Saudi Arabia. Realizing they were unhappy and that perhaps such a move would make things easier for the Indian government, an Indian official advised Butt to collect a list of those individuals wishing to leave India and to once again approach Kaul for his guidance and assistance. In their appeal to Kaul, the hardships of the Khache became apparent. The 1969 letter first explained that the "main reason of our desire to migrate in Saudi Arabia is for easy earning of our livelihood" and then went on to explain that "because most of our community members are tailors and it is reliably learnt that the tailoring business particularly cap making, etc. (which is easy for us) is one of the best means of earning in Saudi Arabia, and also our old aged men desires are this, that ending of the life be in that holy place."⁸² The letter described how the Khache, with limited but not insubstantial capital, had "started business[es]

of shoes, caps and many other items” while others “opened restaurants, hotels, etc.”⁸³ According to the letter, within the first five years most Khaches in India had run through the bulk of their capital assets. Over 120 of the original families who arrived in India in 1960 included their names on the petition asking to be allowed to leave India to resettle in Saudi Arabia.⁸⁴

With no objection from the Indian government, the Khache communities appealed directly to the king of Saudi Arabia through the offices of the Saudi embassy in India. Playing to Saudi Arabia’s anti-PRC stance, the letter began, “With due deference we the helpless Muslim Tibetans who have migrated to India from Tibet, forcibly occupied by the Red China, beseech your Majesty kindly grant us permission to migrate from India to Saudi Arabia and settle down there permanently.”⁸⁵ The letter stressed that due to their faith, the Chinese in Tibet had “plundered and tortured” them, that their honor had been “robbed,” and “the irreligious Chinese threatened us with dire consequences if we did not give up our faith in God and the Holy Prophet.”⁸⁶ The Dalai Lama’s representative, Thupten Ninje, also wrote a three-sentence note to the Saudi embassy on their behalf asking the Saudi government to permit them to settle in Saudi Arabia. The exact response from the Saudi government was not recorded, but the gist was clear: the Khache would not be welcome. With their final appeal to leave India dashed, the Khache, by and large, turned to making the best of a life there.

THE GIFT OF CITIZENSHIP AND THE PRICE OF BEING TIBETAN

Leaving Tibet in 1960 and accepting Indian citizenship affected the Khache in ways that they could never have anticipated. The most unexpected consequence of that choice was how quickly they ceased to be Tibetan in the eyes of other Tibetans, Indians, and the international community. As McGranahan has compellingly explored, citizenship for refugees is often conceived of as a “gift” bestowed by the host countries.⁸⁷ Often the host nations, focusing on the presumed benefits, rarely consider the consequences that citizenship may bestow. So while Indian citizenship played a key role in the Khaches’ ability to leave Tibet, the Tibetan Buddhist refugees had long refused citizenship. For the Khache, the acquisition of Indian citizenship had indeed been a gift. It was the means by which to escape the untenable circumstances they had found in Tibet after the March Uprising. Rarely addressed is the fact that for the Khache, the gift of citizenship was not presented in a manner that could be refused, and it came with the immediate consequences of losing the Tibetan identity held by many of their fellow Tibetans.

While the Khaches regarded their Indian citizenship as a political means to a desired end, the Tibetan Buddhists saw their refusal of Indian citizenship as evidence of their commitment to an independent Tibet. Their defiant rejection of citizenship served as a means by which their loyalty to Tibet was authenticated. Not

surprisingly, then, to be a refugee was, by definition for the Tibetan Buddhists (and their supporters), to be a Tibetan. The exiled Tibetan community's emphatic rejection of citizenship is overshadowed by the fact that India never publicly offered them citizenship. As McGranahan pointedly concludes, "One cannot receive a gift that is not offered."⁸⁸ In this formulation, then, it might be correct to suggest that Tibetan Buddhists who flowed into India "refused and were refused citizenship in South Asia."⁸⁹ The Khache, by accepting the "gift" of Indian citizenship that was offered to them, were thus perceived as rejecting the privileged label of refugee, and subsequently they were refused the right to be Tibetan, at least among the Tibetans in exile community.

This is not to say that the two groups avoided each other. In Darjeeling and Kalimpong there were individuals, like Faizullah Chisti, who spoke all three key languages of the Himalayan front range, Nepali, Tibetan, and English, and who aided both the Khaches and the Tibetan Buddhists in their daily commercial, political, and social interactions. Yet the swiftness with which the Khache pursued the Kashmiri/Indian and Muslim dimensions of their identities and the response of the Tibetan Buddhists in distancing themselves from fellow Tibetan Khaches was, while perhaps predictable, startling. Predictable because the rationale by which they exited Tibet was based on their Indian, not Tibetan, ancestry. Startling because they remained culturally Tibetan and highly integrated with other Tibetans and the Tibetan government up to the moment of their departure.

While the Indian government undeniably championed the Khaches' exit from central Tibet, it was Tibetan Buddhists, not the Khache, who received the bulk of the Indian government's attention and resources, largely as a result of the swift international repercussions that accepting them into their country had for India. In the face of an ever-increasing number of refugees, the Indian government grew concerned over the very real need for housing, disease prevention, and infrastructure in the refugee camps. With few options, the Indian government coordinated a response with the Dalai Lama, a response that resulted in the creation of permanent Tibetan Buddhist settlements.⁹⁰ By 1969, more than twenty agricultural, industrial, and handicraft settlements involving more than 30,000 refugees were established in India, Nepal, and Bhutan.⁹¹ India took other actions that indicated their strong pro-Tibetan stance, such as choosing in 1962 not to renew the Sino-Indian 1954 Agreement in which India acknowledged China's sovereignty over Tibet, thus intimating, but never formally stating, that the nation had changed its position on Tibetan independence.

The benefits of being Tibetan in India initially appeared to be advantageous but slowly became a point of contention within the exiled Tibetan community. Their refugee status often limited their ability to purchase property, to vote, and to travel internationally. In the eyes of many exiled Tibetans, however, keeping their refugee status became a litmus test for remaining politically committed to a "Free Tibet" and/or being committed to an eventual return to their homeland.

To be labeled “refugee” made a political statement, one that would be greatly diminished by acquiring citizenship. Since the 1970s the issue of accepting Indian citizenship has been a highly contentious one. The question of the status of the Tibetan refugees has been a charged topic full of conflicting realities. On a very basic level, refugee status represented one’s personal views on Tibetan politics, that is, one’s commitment to a free Tibet. More broadly, there was the Dalai Lama’s “Middle Way” and the political meanings it held for the Central Tibetan Administration. Finally, there were the myriad legal ramifications that, in India at least, restricted one’s movements and limited one’s legal rights. As one Tibetan refugee put it, “We aren’t Indians. We don’t get benefits. We can’t buy land. There is no Indian citizenship for us. There is only a residential certificate that we have to renew once a year. We can’t take loans, no buying land, and we can’t get good jobs.”⁹²

To be a refugee was to be a Tibetan patriot, yet it rarely translated into an easy life. And regardless of the spectrum of beliefs among the Tibetan refugee community, most Tibetan refugees perceived the Khaches’ acceptance of Indian citizenship as a sign of their disloyalty to Tibet. What is overlooked with such a perspective is how similar the Khaches’ non-state status in Kashmir was to that of the Tibetans-in-exile refugee status in India.

The clearest indication of the Khaches’ new status as non-Tibetan seems to be the decision by the newly established Tibetan government in exile not to actively include them in their early elections, thus limiting their ability to acquire representation in that governmental body. Many have noted that the exile government was dominated by Gelug followers but that the other branches of Tibetan Buddhism (e.g., Sakya, Nyingma, Kagyu) were only given a small amount of representation. Little or no representation, however, was given to the non-Buddhist Bon, the Christian, or the Muslim Tibetans.⁹³ The exclusion of the Khache, even if it was a result of expediency rather than doctrinal purity, runs counter to the more secular position in which they were held by the Dalai Lama, the ruler of Tibet for non-Buddhist Tibetans.

Why the Khache, as a group, never approached the Dalai Lama and why the CTA never officially invited the Khache to participate in their Tibetan governance in exile were, in the end, not so much conscious decisions as a series of misunderstandings. From the Tibetan perspective, the Khache seemed to repeatedly show little loyalty to Tibet and Tibetans, first by declaring themselves Indian and then by seeking to immigrate to the Middle East. From the Khache perspective, many older Khache point to the fact that when the national assembly was formed, the “body gave equal representation to each of Tibet’s three regions and four Buddhist sects” but not to Muslims.⁹⁴ This is not to suggest that Tibetan Muslims were uniformly excluded, for several Khaches were recruited to work in the CTA.⁹⁵ Trine Brox’s research on the exile government has demonstrated that the bottom line is that although Tibetan Muslims have been allowed to hold

offices in the Dharamsala administration, “they are otherwise excluded from receiving special treatment or representation in the [Tibetan Government-in-Exile] parliament.”⁹⁶

When Khaches were asked about the Dalai Lama in interviews carried out in the past decade, they were uniformly positive, yet they often expressed confusion over the reluctance by the CTA to issue Green Books (Tib. *lag deb ljang khu*) to the Khache. Also commonly referred to as “Freedom Books” (Tib. *rang btsan lag deb*), the Green Books serve as the primary marker of the exiled Tibetans’ affiliation with the government in exile and are sometimes referred to as a pseudo-passport. A primary requirement of the Green Book is that the holder pay an annual contribution to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, and those Tibetans who have income are expected to make an extra contribution equivalent to 2 percent of their salary.

The Green Books are far more than a simple indication of support for the CTA, for they also serve as a condition of admission to Tibetan schools and of access to scholarships.⁹⁷ Limiting voting to Green Book holders runs counter to the broader definition of Tibetan “citizenship” often touted by the CTA. In its 1991 Charter, the CTA defines being Tibetan as follows: “All Tibetans born within the territory of Tibet and those born in other countries . . . [w]hose biological mother or biological father is of Tibetan descent has the right to become a citizen of Tibet.”⁹⁸ As many have noted, the Tibetans-in-exile have created a Tibetan identity that projects itself outwardly as a singular entity, but internally it is limited to those who embrace the collective goal of returning to a “future self-ruled and democratic Tibet.”⁹⁹

The fact that the Khaches resisted association with any of the other Tibetans living in India is striking, as it contrasts with the deep respect that the Khaches hold for the Dalai Lama. In his 1960 reply to the Dalai Lama, Chisti wrote on behalf of the entire community, “We, with all our abilities are with your Majesty and your Majesty’s fellow Tibetan people in the task of li[ber]ation of Tibet from Red Chinese’s unlawful occupation or their tyrant hands.”¹⁰⁰ If there is one constant across the twentieth century, it would be the Khaches’ clear and ardent regard for both the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Dalai Lamas. Yet it is clear that the Khache leaders did not see their reverence for the Fourteenth Dalai Lama as affecting their status in the eyes of the CTA. They seemed to abstain rather than to engage, not out of disdain for their fellow Tibetans, but because of a harsh pragmatism and recognition that the two communities faced starkly different challenges.

By 1970, the Dalai Lama began to reach out to the Khaches in Srinagar in an overt attempt to rekindle and repair their relationship. In his first visit to a Tibetan Muslim community since his arrival in India in 1959, the Dalai Lama visited the Khache settlements and donated 10,000 rupees to the “refugee camp” at Idgah. The following year, the *Tibetan Review* published its first full-length article on the Khache in India. Adopting an openly supportive tone, the article highlighted

the harsh Khache experience in terms that must have deeply resonated with the Tibetan Buddhist readership, quoting extensively from an unnamed Khache:

Sixteen years have now lapsed and these years speak a story of adaptation, re-structuring and of conditioning to new social mores and a language distinct from our own. The road has not lacked its trials, but it would have been rougher had it not been for the Indian government's initial assistance to us on our arrival in India, and to them we issue our grateful thanks. Through these years, we Tibetan Muslims have invested every energy in trying to salvage what would otherwise seem wrecked lives, and have attempted to rebuild and reorganize an integrated life. But even superhuman powers would not have helped us tide over financial and educational crisis.¹⁰¹

Clearly seeking to break down the refugee-citizen division, the article consistently referred to the Khaches as "refugees." While the term was not totally inappropriate for the Khaches living in Srinagar, it was technically incorrect given that legally they remained Indian citizens. The reference by a Tibetan Buddhist author for a Tibetan audience appears to be a deliberate attempt to link the Tibetan Muslim experience with that of the Tibetan refugees. In the article's conclusion the author finally comes out and makes the connection explicit:

The Tibetan Muslims were not very different from the rest of the Tibetan refugees who sought shelter in India since 1959. But quite unlike their refugee counterparts the Tibetan Muslims entered India as Indian citizens. . . . Though the Tibetan Muslims were genuine refugees, yet their status designating Indian citizenship pre-empted them from being included in rehabilitation schemes, organized for the host of other Tibetan refugees, as they did not fall within the category of Tibetan refugees.¹⁰²

By making being a refugee a virtue, the Dalai Lama not only invoked compassion, but sought to bridge the divide between the two communities.

Despite the relationship with the Dalai Lama and these seemingly genuine overtures, the two communities remained estranged. Over the next decade the Dalai Lama made several more visits to Srinagar and used the leverage of his growing international prestige even more explicitly in pressuring the government of India "to sanction [additional] land for settlement somewhere in Srinagar."¹⁰³ There were periodic attempts at inclusion, such as the admission of a small number of Tibetan Muslims to schools run by the CTA and an invitation to Tibetan Muslims to visit Dharamsala.¹⁰⁴ Yet it would not be until 1995 that the CTA invited thirty Khache leaders and scholars to Dharamsala in an attempt to delve into the various reasons such a division between the communities still existed. When queried as to why more Khache had not become active in the Tibetan community, the invited Khache leaders, clearly embarrassed, "agreed that the main reason [was] their inability to pay the monthly voluntary contribution" required by Green Book holders. The meeting concluded with an agreement to hold conferences every two years "to review progress and exchange ideas." No meeting of Tibetan Muslims by the CTA was ever reconvened.¹⁰⁵

In 2012, after an absence of nearly twenty-five years, the Dalai Lama again returned to Srinagar, a visit that marked a true renaissance in Tibetan and Tibetan Muslim relations. In his speech he “recalled that in the past there had been Tibetan Muslims working in the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala. . . . As this arrangement has lapsed, . . . it would be very good if any among them would like to come and work in Dharamsala again.”¹⁰⁶ Two years later he returned and in a warm speech reminded the community, “In the small village where I was born near Kumbum Monastery there were Muslim families so I have long been familiar with people of Islam. When I reached Lhasa at the age of five, about 1,000 Muslims lived there and whenever there were government functions Muslim representatives took part.” He continued by saying that for many years he had been unable to visit them and had “renewed his acquaintance” with them two years earlier. He “spoke of being surprised and touched to discover that their young children spoke good Tibetan with a Lhasa dialect, an indication that they still use Tibetan within their families.”¹⁰⁷

The Fourteenth Dalai Lama has always had a close relationship with Tibetan Muslims. Equally, Tibetan Muslims continue to accord him a high level of respect. When asked, during the Dalai Lama’s latest visit to Kashmir in 2012, why Tibetan Muslims supported his visit, one Tibetan Muslim replied, “His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, is our king, our leader. We all love him. That is why we are here.”¹⁰⁸ The Khaches’ continued reverence for the Dalai Lama accentuates his traditional secular role as a leader for all Tibetans, regardless of religious orientation. However, his high-profile visits aside, the communities remain distant. In the spring of 2016 when a four-day conference titled “Freedom, Justice and Equality” was being organized, a conference expressly focused on dissidents from China’s ethnic and religious minorities, Tibetan Muslims were again left off the initial invitation list. This led Masood Bhat, one of the few Tibetan Muslims to have worked in Dharamsala, to remark that while they were aware of the conference, “none of us have received any invitation.”¹⁰⁹

If relations between the Muslim and Buddhist Tibetan communities have improved after nearly half a century, the improvement most likely comes from realizing that their experiences, up to the present day, were along two different but parallel paths. As Alfiani Fadzakir noted in his study of one Tibetan Muslim family that had first gone to Kashmir, then to Saudi Arabia, before finally settling in Kathmandu, their experiences “in two ‘homelands’—Kashmir and Mecca—taught them that they could not deny or abandon their Tibetan identity.”¹¹⁰

The Tibetan Muslims who greeted the Dalai Lama in Srinagar are still facing many of the same obstacles they found on their arrival. A recent survey of Tibetan Muslim housing in Srinagar noted that “about one-fifth of the houses were in a dilapidated condition.” The population has grown roughly threefold since their arrival, from about 600 persons in 1960 to some 1,600 in 2000 and to 2,000 in 2011. A new settlement of 125 apartments, located in the Hawal (Sangeen Darwaza)

area of Srinagar, has considerably relieved the pressure for housing within Tibetan Muslim settlements.¹¹¹

On one level, this reawakening of the relationship between the refugees in India and the Khaches in Srinagar is related to the fact that the Srinagar Tibetan Muslims have, through their status in Kashmir as “non-state subjects,” come as close as one can to being refugees. Despite having lived in Srinagar for over six decades, the Khache still remain outsiders, owing to the political constraints that have made their acceptance by the Kashmiri community difficult. While always citizens of India, they are refused “citizenship” in Kashmir. Their status as citizens of India but refugees in Kashmir has caused many Kashmiri to confuse the Khaches’ situation with that of the Uyghurs and Kazaks who had arrived as refugees in the early 1950s, suggesting it was the Kashmiri government in 1959 that granted the Khache citizenship and settled them in Srinagar.¹¹² There is great irony in noting that it was in Lhasa that foreigners often cast the Khache as Kashmiri and now, having settled in their ancestral homeland of Kashmir, they are treated as Tibetan.

Today, most Khaches in Srinagar prefer to be called “Kashmiri,” and they bristle at any implication that they are Tibetan. As one Tibetan Muslim explained, “In Tibet we are called Kashmiris and in Kashmir we are being called Tibetan.”¹¹³ When asked to comment further by a Kashmiri newspaper reporter, one elder Khache explained, “We are basically Kashmiri, but people still call us Tibetans, which hurts us.”¹¹⁴ Another puts an even a sharper edge to his response, “Don’t call us Tibetans. We are not refugees. We are Kashmiris.”¹¹⁵ One could perhaps dismiss these responses as a reflection of lingering fears from a bygone era if such distinctions did not remain of consequence. When asked, many younger Kashmiris expressed disbelief and even exasperation about their parents’ or grandparents’ decision to settle in Kashmir, a place where they were unwelcome, even as other Khaches lead relatively more prosperous lives in Kathmandu, Kalimpong, and Darjeeling. Like many second-generation immigrants, this younger generation feels only a distant tie to their grandparents’ homeland. “Even if tomorrow Tibet might be liberated from China, we will stay here only,” said twenty-year-old Irfan Trumboo.¹¹⁶

The paths of the Tibetan refugees in India and the Tibetan Muslims in Kashmir seem to have come full circle. In both communities they are separate, and they are both often contentious in their pursuit of full rights in India and Kashmir. Indian courts had long ruled that they were unable to intervene in the rights of non-state subjects because Article 370 of the Indian Constitution dictates that the state of Jammu and Kashmir govern all matters except those surrendered to the Union of India. Recently, however, in a case challenging the limitations of Indian federal guidelines as they relate to federal finance laws, the court asserted broadly (and against decades of legal precedent) that the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir did not supersede that of India:

It is rather disturbing to note that various parts of the judgment speak of the absolute sovereign power of the State of Jammu & Kashmir. It is necessary to reiterate that Section 3 of the Constitution of Jammu & Kashmir, which was framed by a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise, makes a ringing declaration that the State of Jammu & Kashmir is and shall be an integral part of the Union of India.¹¹⁷

The judgment went on to assert that Jammu and Kashmir residents are “first and foremost citizens of India” and that “there is no dual citizenship as is contemplated by some other federal Constitutions in other parts of the world.”¹¹⁸

Faced with the choice of clinging to a Tibetan past or a future in Kashmir, the Khaches who have lived most of their lives in Kashmir have chosen to marry Kashmiris to ease the lives of their children, and they have pressed to be accepted by Kashmiris. But as the Dalai Lama noted on one of his recent visits, the Tibetan Muslims of Srinagar, to a far greater degree than the Tibetan refugees spread across South Asia, Europe, and the United States, have managed to stave off acculturation and maintained Tibetan as their language of communication. If the litmus test of citizenship lay at the heart of differences between the two communities, the dilemma facing Tibetan Buddhists over the ideological benefits of retaining their refugee status has also worn thin.

It is not that this renewed affinity between the two groups can be attributed to any political shift as much as that both groups have seemingly arrived at a common position by two totally different routes. After more than a half century of living in India, there is an increasing difference of opinion among Tibetan refugees over whether the refusal of citizenship comes at too high a price.

India has remained undeniably generous to the Tibetans who reside in exile in India, though they remain only by the grace of executive policy. As a recent report by the Tibet Justice Center on Tibetan refugees in India concluded, “In India, most undocumented Tibetans and their children remain stateless: India does not recognize them, legally speaking, as refugees under either international law or its own national laws, which do not provide for the adjudication of refugee status.”¹¹⁹ Under a special arrangement known as the Gentleman’s Agreement, Tibetans, once they are in India, are recognized as “foreigners” and are required to hold a valid Registration Certificate that must be renewed every six months for a period of up to five years. The status of Registration Certificate holders is inherently precarious. It is by its very nature temporary, and it legally provides the holder with only an informal status that exists largely at the discretion of local officials (and varies by state). The certificate is also a prerequisite for acquiring an Identity Certificate that allows its holder to travel internationally to those countries that accept it as a legitimate travel document (currently the United States and Switzerland and several other states in Europe).

It is often suggested that the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, in an implicit accord with the government of India, has promoted a policy of Tibetans retaining

their position as “stateless” refugees. More complicated is the fact that as holders of Green Cards, they are registered “nationals” of the government in exile and its formal CTA government. Karma Yeshe, a member of the Tibetan parliament-in-exile, stated that the CTA would not prevent Tibetans from seeking Indian citizenship but acknowledged, “Our aim is not to settle in India, but eventually go back to Tibet.”¹²⁰ And yet as the decades have passed, many Tibetan refugees have grown weary of the uncertain nature of living in the stateless netherworld the exiled community demands. As Tenzin Pelky pointed out, it is with few clear-cut legal protections for Tibetan refugees that the “harsh penalties, including incidents of arrest for the mere failure to renew these documents have further heightened fears over the tenuous nature of exile in the settlements.”¹²¹

Beginning in 2010, several younger Tibetans (most born in India to Tibetan refugee parents) began to challenge the ostensible legal barriers preventing them from their theoretical birthright citizenship under Indian laws. Similar to the Tibetan Muslims’ dilemma in Kashmir, many within the Tibetan community still sensed the pursuit of Indian citizenship as being irreconcilable with retaining one’s support of the government in exile’s claim to Tibet. For decades, the unspoken agreement between the government in exile and India was the notion that pursuing citizenship was a sacrilege for Tibetans. But in a series of legal challenges brought by young Tibetans, cracks began to appear in that belief. In 2010, Namgyal Dolkar, born in India, denied citizenship, and officially “stateless,” wondered how “according to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 1986, any person born in India on or after January 26, 1950 but prior to the commencement of the 1986 Act on July 1, 1987, is a citizen of India by birth.”¹²² In the verdict in favor of her application, the court noted that Dolkar’s description of herself as “a Tibetan ‘national’ is really of no legal consequence as far as the CA [Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003]¹²³ is concerned, or for that matter from the point of view of the policy of the Ministry of External Affairs.”¹²⁴

India’s Ministry of Home Affairs remained opposed to giving voting rights to Tibetan refugees, and in 2014 it asked the Ministry of External Affairs to express an opinion on the impact such a decision would have on India-China relations.¹²⁵ Although Dolkar won her case, the Indian government continued to resist. In 2016, three Tibetans, all born in India prior to 1987 (or born to parents born in India), were denied Indian passports and again took their case to trial. The court’s verdict decided definitively in favor of the Tibetans. Its opinion explicitly cited the Dolkar verdict, brushed aside internal ministerial objections, and directed the Ministry of External Affairs to “issue the India passports to the petitioners, who have been declared to be Indian citizens, within a period of four weeks.”¹²⁶ The question of citizenship being a “gift” remains awkward, however, among the Tibetans, with the verdict eliciting considerable consternation among many exile Tibetan leaders. By and large, those who are against Indian citizenship cling to the notion that accepting it would “dilute the struggle” for a free Tibet. The Tibetan activist Tenzin Tsundue suggested that those who accepted citizenship in

another country would “continue to be culturally Tibetan, but now they can be supporters not claimants for Tibet.”¹²⁷ Yet such ideological differences aside, the tribulations of living as stateless persons in India seem to be winning the day, as many younger Tibetans seek to decouple their ideological beliefs in a free Tibet from the security of having Indian citizenship. Perhaps as more Tibetans in exile accept Indian citizenship, the relationship between the Tibetan Buddhists and the Khaches will again grow strong.

AMBIGUOUS, ANONYMOUS, AND OVERSHADOWED

For three centuries the Khache lived as Tibetans among Tibetans. Their place within Tibetan society was never disputed. The arrival of Chinese Communist forces, officials, and cadres in 1951 created, particularly in the traditional Chinese ethnic categorization and the narrower PRC framing of Hui, a semantic breach between being Tibetan and being Muslim. The Wapaling Khaches who remained in Tibet continued to be a vibrant community, but they faced a large influx of Hui in-migrants who altered the face of Islam in central Tibet. As a result, the definition of “Tibetan Muslim” became more “Muslim-in-Tibet” (or more recently “Hui-in-Tibet”), leading to the common but ambiguous term, Zang-Hui, being employed to designate all Muslims in Tibet. The conflation in the minds of many Chinese that being a Hui-in-Tibet and a Khache were one and the same creates new divisions between the Tibetans and Tibetan Muslims since the Hui are increasingly perceived as working alongside the Han and Chinese government to undermine and overwhelm traditional Tibetan culture. According to research carried out in the past decade, Hui migrants who arrived in Tibet, in comparison to their Han migrant counterparts, tended to stay longer than the Han. As a result, most Khache have adopted Tibetan (Ch. *zangzu*) as their official ethnicity, largely out of a growing hostility to the in-migration of Chinese from Central China.¹²⁸

Adding to this confusion, all Muslims tended to be uniformly referred to as Hui in the Chinese language, a linguistic twist that only furthered a conflation of the terms “Wapaling” with “Barkor Khache.” It also served to emphasize the assertion that the Barkor Khache were not Tibetan. In the wake of the Barkor Khaches’ departure for India, when the Wapaling moved from the Grand Mosque in the Wapaling neighborhood and began praying in and caring for both the Barkor Small Mosque and the Khache Lingka Mosque outside of Lhasa, the strong Barkor and Wapaling neighborhood subidentities among Lhasa Khache became distorted and increasingly forgotten. This move led many to believe that all Khaches were, in the absence of the original Barkor Khache, “Chinese” to some degree or another.

The dramatic shift in attitudes became clear in 2008, when Lhasa again erupted in anti-Chinese violence. Tibetan demonstrators attempted to once again burn down the Grand Mosque. Many articles in the mainstream press linked the



Positioned at the southern edge of the Barkor, the Small Mosque faced the sacred Linkor circumambulation route. After 1960, many of the Wapaling Muslims began to use it for their daily prayers. Hui from outside of Tibet had an increased presence in the Grand Mosque. Source: Kevin Bubriski.

violence to the 1959 March Uprising, when the Grand Mosque in the Wapaling neighborhood was first burned to the ground. These reports inferred the violence was long-standing anti-Muslim in nature without understanding how the circumstances had changed. In both cases, the violence was not anti-Muslim but anti-Chinese, or, perhaps more accurately, anti-collaborationist. For our purposes, the distinction that should be made is that the 2008 hostility was anti-Hui in its orientation, not anti-Khache.

Not only had the primary occupants changed, but the new, often semipermanent Chinese Muslim Hui residents of the Grand Mosque were perceived to be

handmaidens of the Chinese state. Since the Wapaling Khache had moved to the Small Mosque, the symbolism of the 1959 and 2008 attacks seemed similar, but the occupants were no longer the same and the circumstances were fundamentally different. As one Tibetan Muslim put it, in recent years there continues to be a division between “Tibetan Muslims whose families have lived in Tibet for generations” and “Hui and other Muslims who have migrated to Tibetan areas to work.”¹²⁹ If the Barkor Khache lost their Tibetan identity by leaving Tibet, those Khache who remained behind suffered the similar, if different, indignity of being forced to choose between being Tibetan or being Hui. For most Khache, the choice to be Tibetan was the more obvious one.

Since 1959, the Tibetan Muslims have remained frustratingly illusive in the historical treatments of Tibet and Tibetans because they fail to conform to the internal Chinese notions of what it means to be Tibetan or Hui, or because of the increasingly narrow external definition of a Tibetan-in-exile as only being a Buddhist refugee living in India. Although the Tibetan Buddhists who followed the Dalai Lama to India did face numerous hardships, their situation differed substantially from that of the Tibetan Muslims. Due to a variety of economic and political factors, the exiled Tibetan Buddhists became increasingly dependent on Indian and Western support, and they often found themselves compelled to play to romanticized Western ideas of Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Muslims escaped the fate of the Tibetans-in-exile community who successfully fled Tibet, only to become, in the words of Donald Lopez, “prisoners of Shangri-la.”¹³⁰ The fate of the Tibetan Muslims, on the other hand, was to quickly lose any claim to being Tibetan in the face of this newly popular globalized version of Tibet. It was through their participation in the Indian government’s political artifices as that government negotiated with China that the Tibetan Muslims earned Indian citizenship and lost, in the eyes of the Tibetan Buddhists, their claim to be Tibetan citizens.

India and China’s increasingly fraught relationship reached its nadir with the 1962 Sino-Indian Border Conflict. Scholars of this period tend to characterize Sino-Indian relations in terms of either security concerns or conflicting world-views. On the surface, it is tempting to see China and India as two regional powers battling for ideological and territorial supremacy: as in the Dalai Lama’s harrowing escape from Communist China to a democratic India or as in escalating clashes over a geopolitically significant boundary. Such explanations tend to be overly deterministic as a result of a narrow, selective, and even teleological ordering of events. Positioning the Lhasa Khaches’ claim for Indian citizenship and that claim’s importance to the Indian government and its Indian citizenry among these other events of the time—those that were creating front-page headlines in both China and India (and around the globe) for many months—suggests something different was at work.

This excision of the Tibetan Muslims from historical treatments of the period is more than an overly deterministic and selective ordering of events. In the Asian context, transnational histories are particularly prone to the nation-state's interpretation of its past as a result of systemic deficiencies, or alternatively, as an exploitation of the periphery by the center. The political scientist Manjari Chatterjee Miller has recently suggested an alternative reading of Chinese-Indian relations with an emphasis on "post-imperial ideology." As she describes it, "The goal of victimhood led both countries to emphasize their past suffering and anti-colonial credentials . . . [in order to] become a key player in the newly decolonized Third World community."³¹ Seen through this corrective lens, China and India perceived any major encounter, meeting, or incident as an opening for them to demonstrate to Asia and the broader world how one might hold a preeminent position over the other.

Miller's postimperial ideology creates a space that previous Cold War or conflict-centered analyses did not. The ascendancy of such interpretations of the period also explains, in part, the speed with which the Khache quickly dropped out of sight in scholarly analyses. The swiftness with which the Tibetan Muslims faded from general conversation among the public, the media, and governments is, in retrospect, striking. While victimhood might have been a potent strategy against former colonizers, it was less effective among the colonized. It was this dilemma on which China and India's relationship ran aground, as the Bandung Conference clearly demonstrated that both sought to be the dominant leader among the Asian nations.

Nehru's objective was to guide the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa, through an amorphous combination of the Panchsheel Five Principles, nonviolence, and ideological neutrality, in order to avoid serving as proxies in the larger Cold War. Mao chafed at the idea of Soviet and U.S. dominance of the global political dialogue. However, Mao sought to position China as an appealing alternative leader to these same nations in anticipation of, not in an effort to avoid, a coming global conflict. Both men realized that politics was a messy business, but the two diverged over the manner in which they sought, through their influence, to precipitate change. Nehru's influence was one founded on dialogue and compromise. Mao's interpretation viewed the world as a more zero-sum formula whereby were China to gain influence, another must lose it. In this light, the Sino-Indian solidarity of the 1950s, based as it was on the outward deployment of victimhood and influence, collapsed in the 1960s when such strategies proved incapable of resolving conflicts between themselves.

Similar to the ways in which the Bandung Conference is often dismissed as having largely achieved only symbolic outcomes, the 1960 Tibetan Muslim Incident, when it is remembered, is often cast as subsidiary to the more substantive 1962 Sino-Indian Border Conflict. Framed in this manner, the history of Tibetan

Muslims reveals how the ethnic, religious, and political categories of postcolonial Asian nationhood often conceal significant dimensions of Asia's past. The Khaches' experiences in the post-independence period bring into sharp relief those—often minority peoples—who reside in regions that fall outside both the former colonial regimes and the “new” Asian nations. Even the oddly oxymoronic sense of the ethnonym “Tibetan Muslims,” as applied in these more modern analyses, points to the tremendous pressures the Khache resisted in order to retain their identity, an identity that had prevailed for centuries within premodern Tibet. Inherently transnational, inter-Asian, and transcultural, the Khache, by simply stepping across the political border of Tibet into India, had their existing South Asian narrative of community rewritten in a manner that repositioned them primarily, not as Tibetans, but as Muslims. In this modern age of complex and highly politicized post-Partition ethnic, subnational, and religious identities, they found none that could accommodate the Tibetan dimension of their identity.¹³² Stripped of their hybrid Tibetan identity, excluded from any formal position in the government in exile that emerged in Dharamsala, and shunned in Kashmir, the Khache became exiles manqué—recognized neither by the land they had left nor by the “home-land” to which they had fled.

