Chapter 2.

Contextualising Tibet

The one basic difference between the present chapter and the previous chapter is the distinction between their contextual settings. The previous chapter provides a general introduction to the concept of nation and national identity tracing its theoretical underpinnings. Further, it discusses how these concepts are embodied cultural artefacts in their theoretical assumptions that can better be understood using the social psychological perspective (especially social identity theory) particularly when addressing the case of 'nations without states'. Further, the chapter introduces the historical, social and political background of one such case, Tibet. Thus, all the discussions are framed to establish the context of the present thesis work. Differing from such discursive content, the present chapter elaborates on the previously introduced concepts but in an implicative form to define the social and political affairs of the Tibetan refugees in exile. The chapter used the theoretical aspects of the previous chapter to explain the case of Tibetan nationalism in exile and the factors that fuel such sentiments. Even though these two chapters hold their separate significance, it is important for readers to treat them in an interconnected manner to develop a holistic understanding of the orientation of the present research work.

An Analytical Account of Existing Pieces of Literature on Tibet and Tibetans

Due to its distinctive landscape (called the 'roof of the world'), religious orientation (non-violence as the central aspect) and mythological narratives (such as the mystical stories of Shangri-La), Tibet has always been a compulsive attraction for the rest of the world including the neighbouring countries and western world. However, modern scholarly attention on Tibet

became explicitly prominent over the last century. In modern times, years of intellectual interest and expedition of core Tibet, particularly by the Westerners, produced an extensive amount of Tibet being understood from multiple academic dimensions, evolving and ranging from geographical landscape including an early romanticised description of Tibet's mystical parts, history including the complicated situation of priest-patronage claims, traditional society including nomadic lifestyle and death customs, religion including the downfall of Bon religion and rise of the era of Buddhism, and environmental factors such as being a source of water body to many neighbouring countries or rich natural resources and plenty more (e.g., Das, 1902; Bell, 1924; Harrer, 1953; Richardson, 1984; Lamb, 1989; McKay, 1997; Goldstein, 1997, Goldstein 2007). The beginning of Westerners' interest in Tibet in the modern era can be traced back to the late 19th century when Western travellers and missionaries started exploring Tibet and casting it as a 'spiritual heaven' or 'land of mystery'. Later, scholars from the western part began studying Tibet with great attention. For instance, Tibetologists like David Snellgrove (1966) and Hugh Richardson (1951) produced a series of works on Tibetan Buddhism, tradition and culture, establishing the foundation for religious and anthropological research oriented to understanding the exotic aspects of Tibet. However, in most earlier studies, Tibet was portrayed as an isolated mystical land of a religiously elevated society filled with spiritual energies. Such scholarly and literary writing on Tibet reinforced its image among the Western consciousness as the 'Shangri-La' of Asia.

Emergence of Broader Scholarly Interest

The second era of scholarly floodings on Tibet started with the geopolitical conflict of the mid-20th century when China started its annexation attempts from 1950 onwards. Such

upheavals in national order in contemporary times ignited debate among international bodies, including the academic society, which began to study Tibet from a geopolitical position and scrutinising the legitimacy of PRC's annexation of Tibet and its repercussions on Tibetan society as well as international politics (Shi & Chen, 2013). As a result, by the 1970s, the Tibet issue was explored by diverse academic disciplines, including history, law, sociology, political science, and economics, examining Tibet's situation with China and the wider impact on its autonomous governance structure (Goldstein, 1997; Sloane, 2002; Fischer, 2013; Sperling, 2004; Sautman & Dreyer, 2006; Norbu, 2017). The in-depth works of scholars like Shakabpa (1984) and Goldstein & Rimpoche (1989) are fitting examples who produced seminal accounts on Tibet's history, tracing Tibet's complex relationship with China back to the Mongol Empire and through its periods of de facto independence during the early 20th century.

In recent times, most of the scholarly attention on Tibet is focused on event-based interests. It intends to understand Tibet in response to critical events like the Tibetan Uprising that happened in 1959, the exodus of Dalai Lama with his followers, the self-immolation cases (Woeser, 2016), or the ongoing discussion on the status of Tibet within China and human rights in international forums (Rabgey & Sharlho, 2004). Similarly, the spiked increase in the visibility of the Dalai Lama after the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize and his intense advocacy for Tibetan rights during the 1990s further intensified the scholarly research on Tibet's geopolitical dispute, human rights situation, and struggle to keep cultural and religious aspects of Tibet alive under PRC's governance. In such direction, scholars like Sperling (1988) and Barnett (2010) produced seminal works on Tibet's status, arguing that the struggle for autonomy against China reflects

broader postcolonial dynamics, where traditional societies grapple with external control, cultural preservation and global visibility.

Themes in Tibetan Studies

Even though scholars have explored Tibet from diverse interdisciplinary approaches, Tibetan Buddhism has remained one of the most studied areas. For instance, the works of Kapstein (2006) have made us understand how the religious aspect of Tibet (such as spiritual practices and its involvement in structuring social as well as cultural systems) shaped Tibetan identity, thus strengthening cultural unity and acting as a means of resistance against external influences. Similarly, Goldstein (2010) argued that the monastic hierarchies - including monasteries, spiritual leaders and teaching lineages - have traditionally worked as a governance body for both religious and political institutions in Tibet. Thus, after the forceful invasion of China, the same monastic institutions became the most visible symbol of resistance against foreign forces, advocating for Tibet's sovereignty and proposing peace and non-violence as the two most potent methods of their political struggle (Barnett, 1994; Kolas, 1996). Thus, Buddhism has functioned as an integral part of the Tibetan cultural setup and strategically mobilised to develop a political dissent, as explicitly visible in the discussions involving the approach for peaceful resistance and cultural preservations proposed by prominent spiritual leaders, including the Dalai Lama.

Similarly, historians have produced an excellent account of studies analysing the political history of Tibet, the sociopolitical structure of the Tibetan empire, the establishment of a theocratic order under the Fifth Dalai Lama around the 17th century, and periods of relative independence when Tibet functioned with a significant autonomy particularly in the early 20th century (Shakabpa,

1984). The central theme of such studies is generally to elaborate on the nature of power relationships and the shifting power dynamics between Tibet and neighbouring dynasties. Such works are seminal and contribute significantly to contemporary discussions on Tibet's claim to ancestral sovereignty. Additionally, scholars from disciplines like political science have examined Tibet's present autonomous status within China, with some arguing that it represents a unique model of 'autonomy under authoritarianism, allowing nominal cultural rights but imposing stringent political and social control (Smith, 1996; Crowe, 2013).

Modern Environmental and Sociocultural Studies

The recent decades have witnessed a new shift in Tibetan studies with the entry of new perspectives exploring environmental and sociocultural changes affecting Tibet, which is also regarded as the 'third Pole' (Madsen, 2016) because of its great glacial reserves. Environmental researchers have highlighted the degrading condition of the Tibetan plateau's glaciers, which are the source of many of the major Rivers of Asia. These scholars have shown that the Tibetan glaciers are retreating at alarming rates, affecting downstream populations across South and Southeast Asia (Yao et al., 2012). Similarly, environmental researchers have explored significantly the adverse impact on Tibet's climatic condition due to accelerating infrastructure developments such as dam construction and over-mining under PRC rule (Byg & Salick, 2009). Such development attitudes are creating serious threats to the ecosystem and stability of local communities, who face displacement and are forced to shift their traditional livelihood methods (Fischer, 2005; Fischer, 2013).

Other often overlooked aspects were studied by sociologists and anthropologists who explored the impact of the modernisation process in Tibet under the PRC governance. These scholars highlighted that the sudden increase in the process of urbanising Tibetan suburbs, along with prompted tourism and migration, has provided Tibetans with better economic opportunities (Hasmath & Hsu, 2007), but at the same time, it has resulted in heightened cultural conflicts and identity struggles among Tibetan youths (Gautam, 2010; Yeh, 2002). For instance, linguistic studies indicate the decline in the use of the indigenous Tibetan language in urban areas, and due to the biased policies of the PRC, Mandarin Chinese has increasingly become dominant, building a gap for the transition of Tibetan cultural values to future generations (Roche, 2019).

Political Perspectives: The Present Conflict over the Claim

Scholars worldwide have explored the political perspective on Tibet in great depth. Their approach is divided into understating the contrast between its historical governance as a religiously governed ethnographic boundary and its present status as an autonomous region under the occupation of the PRC governance (Barnett, Weiner & Robin, 2020). Such views are again divided into scrutinising two-sided narratives: one is China's justification for annexation, and the other is Tibet's claim that such invasion is unfair. While the Chinese government claims that Tibet has always been an integral part of China, many Tibetologists argue that Tibet enjoyed considerable independence, particularly during the Qing Dynasty's decline and during the Republican era (Goldstein & Rimpoche, 1989; Sperling, 2004). Recent studies in Tibet-China politics have explored the implications of this version of history for Tibet's autonomy claims, with scholars such as Sperling (1998) suggesting that Tibet's political incorporation has been marked by a 'colonial relationship' and characterised by economic dependency and cultural

suppression. Moreover, such scholarly claims are often complimented by human rights researchers, such as Goldstein (2013) and Norbu (1997), who have documented in their works the restrictions on religious and cultural freedom inside Tibet and highlight unjustifiable acts of invasive surveillance, prohibition on religious gatherings, and the Chinese government's portrayal of Tibetan culture as a folkloric element of a unified Chinese identity. This everlasting tension between autonomy and control remains central to scholarly and international discussions about Tibet's future.

Since extensive literature is available regarding Tibet and the above section has briefly discussed the diversity of studies conducted on Tibet, the following sections focus on literature fitting to the topic of the present thesis. Thus, this chapter focuses on three specific aspects of Tibetan refugees who are mainly settled in India, namely - their identity aspect, their nationalistic aspects and their mobilisation strategies. Thus, the chapter limited its content to discuss the diasporic identity of Tibetan refugees in exile, their social, political and educational setup in India, and how different scholars have fitted theories of nation and national identity to define the situation of Tibetan refugees in exile and how the case of these refugees's social movement fit as well as differ to the scholars' understanding of mobilisation as a process.

The purpose of the literature review was to refer to primary sources like books, research articles, government reports, and verified websites. The initial review was performed with a broader mindset to explore the present topic from diverse academic perspectives. However, after the initial phase of the literature review, several literatures were shortlisted as per their fitting criteria. These shortlisted pieces of literature are clubbed into themes and were further

categorised according to the present chapter's objective. As the literature in the succeeding sections suggests, abundant work has been done on Tibet, but the literature lacks a social-psychological perspective. Employing a social identity lens to highlight the identity development process of Tibetan refugees in exile and using the concept of mobilisation to understand the Tibetan social movement in exile, we explore opportunities in the literature that served as the basis for undertaking this research.

Escape to Exile: Tibetans in India

Tibetan refugees settled in India represent a distinct case in many ways, including their resilience approach in exile land, clutching to their traditional characteristics and the adaptation of their indigenous philosophical values to organise their movement to achieve sociopolitical goals. Tibetan refugees in India have established self-sustaining communities since their migration in the early 1960s, with profound success in religious and cultural preservation, education and governance-in-exile (Houston & Wright, 2003; Basu, 2018; Sachdeva & Surjyajeevan, 2021; Coelho, 2024). Government-in-exile government institutions in India, such as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), have developed a sense of ethnicity-based belongingness, national identity, and the ability to run on autonomy among the refugee group. Establishments of educational institutes by the CTA that prioritise learning the Tibetan language and culture played a central role in the success of Tibetan society in exile (Mishra, 2014). Even though Tibetans emerged as one of the most effectively functioning refugee groups, they still face acute challenges in an exiled state, including economic dependency, sustenance threats and legal vulnerabilities. Barriers like citizenship ambiguity (Brox, 2012; Brox, 2016), unrecognised government-in-exile (McConnell, 2013; McConnell, 2016), limited access to resources, and

inter-group discontent hinder their full integration into Indian society. Also, the preceding geopolitical conflict between India and China further problematises the Tibetan situation in India, creating uncertainties regarding the future of the Tibetan diaspora. In conclusion, Tibetans have achieved remarkable success as a refugee group, but they still are refugees and have yet to live up to their national identity in their own nation. The present section discusses the case of Tibetans after they escaped to India in the early 1960s, including the challenges faced at the initial phase and the functions and executions of the government-in-exile supported by the Indian government for their development as an exiled society.

Initial Days

The forced annexation of the PRC forced the 14th Dalai Lama, along with his 80,000 followers, to escape to India through the perilous routes of the Himalayan range. The initial escapes during and after the 1959 Uprising Day mainly represented Tibetans who were members of the monastic society, upper-class people, rebellions who participated in the Uprising Day, and wealthy farmers and traders. However, people from the lowest stratum generally did not participate in fleeing Tibet (Saklani, 1978). Later, the scholars argued that the initial significant migration may not entirely represent the traditional Tibetan society's essentiality but reflects the traditional structure of power and hierarchy (Saklani, 1978; Saikia, 2022a). To date, the Tibetans continue to migrate to take refuge in India and its neighbours like Nepal and Bhutan, risking their lives. The most crucial factors stated by these migrants for their flee are to escape from Chinese atrocities and freedom to exercise their customs and religion (Frilund, 2018).

Multiple factors lead to the forced migration of Tibetan refugees to foreign lands. It must better be understood as an escape from the unjust rule of a dominant foreign nation. Even though the negotiation between the Tibetan diplomats and the leaders of the communist party of China for a peaceful settlement of the Sino-Tibet dispute and a 17th-point agreement was signed on 23rd May 1951, promising peaceful liberation of Tibet from the feudal system, these attempts failed miserably (Shakya, 2003). The gradual attempts of the communist party to invade Tibet were accelerated to their peak on 10th March 1959 (Known as the Uprising Day) when China attacked Tibet with its total capacity and surrounded the Capital City of Lahasa.

From then, the Tibetans continued to flee Tibet primarily because of uncertainties about the future of their religious and cultural identity under PRC's rule. Many refugees have stated discriminatory prosecution, anticipated abuse from the authorities for not accepting the communist ideologies and identity insecurity (Topgyal, 2013). Other factors also include - fear of collectivisation of herds, fear of unaccountable arrest and torture in prisons, forced exogamy with the Chinese individuals for diluting Tibetan ethnicity and eradication of the Tibetan race, political arrest of family members or property destruction and forced sterilisation - were reasoned by the Tibetan refugees for their escape (Woodcock, 1970; Norbu, 2001a).

The initial days of Tibetans in India were marked with profound difficulty and survival challenges, including the challenge of adapting to drastically different climatic and ecological conditions. Many Tibetans lost their lives or experienced chronic psychological trauma during their journey through the Himalayan ranges (Dolma et al., 2006; Sachs et al., 2008). Plenty of others fell sick and died, succumbing to dire conditions such as inability to Indian climatic

conditions, overcrowdedness and unhygienic conditions of their refugee camps, food scarcity and a lack of medical care (Saklani, 1978; Gyatso, 1990). Dowa Norbu (2001b) categorised such dire experiences into two groups - first, psychological fear and physical exhaustion and second, language barrier and environmental incapability. The Indian government was also unprepared for such a massive influx of refugees, and while providing asylum, they faced the limitation of infrastructure to accommodate migrants comfortably. It forced many refugees into makeshift settlements with food shortages and unhygienic conditions.

Economic challenges made the situation worse as most refugees were unable to earn their livelihoods due to abrupt transition to a foreign land, cultural and language barriers and legal vulnerabilities. Studies suggest that during the initial stage, almost the majority of Tibetan migrants remained unemployed or underemployed, struggling to meet their basic needs (Kharat, 2003a; Kharat, 2003b). Even though the Karnataka Government of South India established the first settlement (Bylakuppe settlement) for them, most refugees were employed as daily wagers in road construction sites at minimum pay. Many of these labourers died due to physical exhaustion from working tirelessly in adverse climatic conditions. Their children suffered, too, as the labourers were unable to earn much, even to meet basic needs, and their children suffered from malnourishment (Vahali, 2020). However, the establishment of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) proved crucial for Tibetans as it focuses on resolving these limitations, developing self-sustain Tibetan societies across India with their own educational and medical setups and organising cultural programmes aimed at preserving the traditional Tibetan identity (Phuntso, 2004; Roemer, 2008). The initial phase was also marked by social and political hindrances that included difficulty in reviewing their Refugee Certificate (RC), the mobility

issue, and the stigma of refugee status that prevented their accommodation and integration within Indian society (Michael, 1985; Choedup, 2015).

Strengthening Community Foundations: The Joint Effort of India and the Exiled Tibet

After the mass exodus of Tibetan refugees to India, it became the joint responsibility of the Dalai Lama and the Indian government to work on their rehabilitation. Many state governments took the initiative to provide refugee camps to migrants, such as the Assam and the West Bengal governments set up camps for those refugees who entered India via the North-East Frontier Agency (Kharat, 2003b). These refugees received basic amenities like food, clothes and healthcare facilities in such camps. However, despite such care, the health of most refugees continued to deteriorate due to unfavourable climatic conditions. The Dalai Lama requested the Indian government to resettle these refugees to a higher altitude with cooler weather. Thus, the Tibetan refugees were gradually relocated to a cooler region of the Himalayan ranges, where they mainly worked as labourers at road construction sites (Norbu, 2001b). However, most of these Tibetan refugees lived in scattered communities needing a sense of proximity. This worried the Tibetan authorities, who also envisioned preserving their religious and cultural elements (Michael, 1985). Thus, a series of discussions were carried out between the Dalai Lama and then Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru on the same issue, and the Indian government agreed on building new settlements for Tibetan refugees in different states where they can live united as a close community (Gooch, 1969). Therefore, the Karnataka government helped Tibetans build their first settlement in exile in an earlier forest land called Bylakkupe, inhabited by 3000 refugees who primarily depended on agricultural and road construction activities for their livelihood (Prakash, 2011; Balasubramaniam & Gupta, 2021). Gradually, with the aid of

other Indian states, the Indian central government and international sponsorships (Prost, 2006), the Tibetan community started developing stronger on Indian soil and soon, many settlements were built in various parts of India, including Karnataka, Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and New Delhi. These settlements started developing their own ecological system and growing self-sufficient by building monasteries, farming their own foods, manufacturing woollen goods, handcrafting Tibetan artefacts, and opening restaurants. Also, the monks gave services to the locals in exchange for monetary benefits (Conway, 1975). These initiatives facilitated Tibetans to emerge as a self-reliant exiled community.

The economic sustainability in exile depends on diverse occupations and production activities, including agriculture, small-scale trading, and handicrafts, often regarded as traditional Tibetan practices (Subba, 1992). Even though the studies suggest that initially, Tibetans were employed in farming activities on the lands provided by the state government and worked as construction labourers, over time, a significant Tibetan population moved to cities where they engaged in sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and commerce specifically in regions with a high flow of tourists attracted to Tibetan culture and Buddhism (Mahmoudi, 1992). For instance, McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala, and Himachal Pradesh have become tourist attractions for those interested in exploring the exotic aspects of Tibetan culture and customs (Bloch, 2018; Bisht, 2022). Thus, many Tibetans established businesses such as guesthouses, hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, and tour services. Audrey Prost (2006) has seen such activities as Tibetans have monetised their ethnicity by advertising their exotic-ness and selling ethnicity through offering Tibetan cuisine to international tourists, thus making Tibet both a symbol of identity and a reliable economic source in areas of opportunities.

Additionally, the production and distribution of traditional handicrafts, mainly carpets and winter clothes, has become an economic staple for the exiled Tibetan communities (Bisht, 2022). The CTA strongly supports and promotes these initiatives and helps them facilitate better trader opportunities and community cooperatives. The educated refugees mainly worked in offices, educational institutions, and healthcare centres, especially those the Tibetan government ran in exile (Subba, 1992; Bisht, 2022). Thus, many scholars labelled them as one of the most successful refugee communities in the world (Norbu, 2004; Hussain & Bhusan, 2010; Lin, 2022).

As of 2014 reports, 45 Tibetan settlements in India are spreading across 10 Indian states, including North India, East India, South India and Central India (Ministry of Home Affairs-Government of India, 2014). Today, all these settlements are self-sustainable with their own economic and administrative structures and host facilities like primary schooling, healthcare, monasteries and nunneries. These settlements are administered by the settlement officers, also known as (*sku-tsab*), appointed by the CTA. Further, the big settlements are divided into camps or villages, administered by a camp leader called *chimie*. These camp leaders are assisted by four spokespersons called *Coupon* (Saikia, 2022b). One of the most crucial responsibilities of these settlement officers is to maintain effective communication and functional cooperation between the Tibetan community they are charged with, the CTA, and the local Indian authorities and take care of the legal formalities of the settlements according to the legal framework of the host nation.

Along with these responsibilities, the settlement officers also oversee the education and health facilities, religious and cultural preservation and economic development within the settlement (McConnell, 2011). After arriving in India, the Dalai Lama realised that rehabilitating Tibetans is just a half-finished job and that struggling for their nation requires building a replica of the traditional Tibetan society in the exile community unified where the traditional values remain intact. Thus, all Tibetan societies in India are working persistently under the supervision of CTA to preserve their religious and cultural identity.

Tibet's journey from the 1959 mass exodus to emerging as one of the most successful refugee communities in the world has been thoroughly explored by many scholars and Tibetlogists from different academic perspectives. For instance, Michael (1985) conducted ethnographic studies in Tibetan settlements, exploring their survival process in exile. Michael finds faith and compassion to be the two crucial aspects that made Tibetans rehabilitate in India in a way that helped them achieve their political will. He further elaborated on the role of the Dalai Lama's visionary leadership, supported and promoted by the Indian government to not only provide shelter to the Tibetan refugees but to create a space to preserve their cultural identity. A similar observation was found in a twenty-five years later study conducted by McConnell in 2011, who observed that the Tibetan communities in India act as 'cultural spaces' where traditional practices such as festivals, dietary habits, religious determination, monastic education, handicraft practices and culture-specific education support in-group homogeneity, sense of togetherness and cultural continuity. Further, McConnell highlights that these are survival strategies and form resistance, as they reinforce an ethnic Tibetan identity that opposes assimilation pressures from the out-group members and dilution pressure from the Chinese diplomats. Misra (2003) sees such

activities as a form of 'long-distance nationalism' as cultural and religious preservation activities promote collective memory in keeping Tibetan identity intact.

Another interesting study was conducted in 1978 by Palakshappa and Bettison. They provided an in-depth understanding of the strategies the Tibetan community in Mundgod, Karnataka, India, has employed for their resilience process. The study also highlights the key characteristics of these Tibetan refugees, such as their practice of polyandry and polygyny. The study notes that the practice of polyandry and polygyny are not merely cultural customs for the Mundgod refugees but are adaptive responses to the challenges faced by them in exile. For insurance, polyandry as a martial structure of their society helps retain family assets (such as land and other resources) within the family lineage, thereby preventing the fragmentation of agricultural land. Since the refugee states require a community to survive with limited resources, thus the practice proves helpful in developing a sustainable society. These practices also reinforce family unity and social cohesion under challenging times (Grent, 2002). Besides agricultural practices, the Mundgod settlements were also engaged in small-scale businesses and entered craft industries for their economic resilience. Another interesting observation by Palakshappa and Bettison (1978) was the difference in mindset between the older generations who migrated from Tibet and the young ones born and brought up in India or were very small when they came to India. The older generations struggled to adapt to the new environment and showed intense resistance towards the outside culture. At the same time, the young generations were more open to changes and had more access to the outside culture and education. The difference in their approaches to the out-group community created a rift in their agreement on Tibetan identity; in other words, the old

generation struggled to prevent the Tibetan identity they transported from their own nation while the young ones strived more for a secular Tibetan identity.

Another fieldwork study conducted in the urban Tibetan settlement of McLeod Ganj by Audrey Prost in 2006 analysed the changing norms among Tibetan youths. The study highlights that exposure to outside culture is inevitable in terms of survival in exile. Thus, these exposures have significant Indian and global influences, especially among the young Tibetan refugees. These changes have created a generational divide, with younger Tibetans often open to secular Tibetan identities that blend Tibetan, Indian, and global cultural elements (Condrolli, 2024). The study is crucial in understanding how Tibetan youths navigate identity in exile, balancing traditional values with modern influences.

Even though the Tibetans successfully rehabilitated in India with the support of the Indian government and foreign sponsorship, the land rights issue has persisted to date. Tibetans had to face major challenges due to the vulnerability of land rights as they lived on occupied land based on temporary permits without formal ownership (Balasubramaniam & Gupta, 2021; Choedon, 2020). Such limitations hindered their economic stability and growth opportunities in exile. They needed legal ownership to secure loans or invest securely in housing, small-scale businesses, and agricultural activities, keeping them economically dependent on local government. Administrative restrictions, too, injected insecurities into their daily lives as, without secure land tenure, the refugees were entirely dependent on the local government's permits, even for basic work like house repair (Falcone & Wangchuck, 2008).

Further seeking permits from the local government required getting through much paperwork and fulfilling other bureaucratic criteria. Thus, with the intention of resolving the land rights issue, the CTA approached the Indian government to address long-standing issues of land rights and the legal status of Tibetan refugees in exile. After a series of official discussions between both parties, the Indian government introduced the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy (TRP) in 2014. The five major features of this policy are - i) land lease and tenure security, under which the Tibetans are provided with the liberty to renewable land leases that allow them to stay on designated with greater security and assurances with lease interferences from the local authorities - ii) livelihood opportunities; it provided the Tibetans right to work in various sectors and practice self-employment. The policy granted Tibetans the liberty to start their own business, engage in agricultural activities and pursue income-generating careers from both within and outside the settlements with greater economic autonomy - iii) access to Indian government schemes; the policy granted Tibetans the rights to access various Indian government-run schemes in sectors like health, education and rural development - iv) education and skill training; the policy encouraged Tibetans especially the youth population to participate in the provision of vocational and professional training opportunities aimed at teaching skills relevant to the contemporary trends at the job markets - v) rights to documentation; the policy provided greater access to basic legal documentations such as identity cards and travel permits.

However, many scholars were critical of the TRP's structure by pointing out the practical limitations of the policy in detail. For instance, Choedon (2020) argues that the policy does not fully address the diasporic struggles of Tibetans and their longer-term needs. She further notes that the schemes included in the policy lacked clarity and were written in such ambiguous

language that allows the states to grant conditional benefits to refugees in uncertain ways as different states differ in terms of social, political and economic structures. Also, in a disappointment to the CTA's expectations, only Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim incorporated the TRP and out of which Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh are to frame proper implementation guidelines. Regarding the legality issues, Choedon (2017) points out that the TRP has failed to grant full legal status or pathways to citizenship or to ease the process for accessing mobility permits, keeping Tibetans in a perpetual state of legal vulnerability. Additionally, the policy's land lease provisions do not amount to outright ownership, limiting Tibet's economic growth in exile or securing their risk aspects in exile, as their residency is still subject to renewal and administrative monitoring.

Like Choedon (2020), other scholars disagree with the TRP's framework, which limits Tibetan socio-political opportunities in exile. They note that the policy does not appropriately address the community's political and cultural autonomy and leaves Tibetan government structures in exile without formal recognition, weakening their efforts within and outside the settlement for cultural and social cohesion (McConnell, 2011; Brox, 2012; McConnell, 2013). The scholarly debates on the TRP issue conclude that the TRP played a crucial role in the improvement of the rights and welfare of Tibetan governance as well as refugee status; however, it eventually functions as a temporary arrangement, reflecting India's hesitation to commit to permanent, integrative solutions for Tibetan refugees.

Even though the exiled Tibetans are trying hard to achieve greater autonomy and a more secure stay on Indian soil, they still share a primary hope as well as a motive to ultimately regain

agency in their nation Tibet by winning back their autonomy power from China. However, their pursuit in exile appears divided, in which the exiled Tibetans engaged themselves in multiple fights. On the one hand, they are still struggling to achieve international recognition of their status both as a citizen of a nation and a refugee who once lived in a nation of their own. Their purpose is not only to achieve independence but to save Tibet from the unjust actions of an authoritarian communist party. Lafitte (1999) explained this approach as an attempt by Tibetans to shift the ground of debate from past to future, from being reactive to China's overwhelming hegemony to becoming proactive.

On the other hand, they are fighting an alternative war in India to preserve their religious and cultural aspects so that they remain united in their social and political orientations in exile. Another war in their way is surviving a refugee status in exile that comes with resource and legality limitations. Thus, they are in constant negotiation with the Indian government, putting significant resources and energy into this task. As mentioned earlier, the Tibetans mainly adhere to the path shown by the Dalai Lama, which centres around a Buddhist approach of non-violence and cosmic compassion. However, Lafitte (1999) perceives it as a space allowing Tibetans to experiment with alternative futures (such as the Middle-Way Approach) to be lived up to. Lafitte conceptualises their non-violent approach as a situation-fitted political strategy, as the Tibet movement involves struggling against ending the reign of oppression on ethical grounds. Also, the exiled state requires Tibetans to work under the limitations of the host nation, where their priorities must include preserving their past and uniting their scattered population with a distinct national identity. Thus, it is essential for Tibetans to continuously work on making their political and institutional structures, such as CTA, educational institutes, monasteries, and nunneries,

more organised and effective. Therefore, after the exile, the Tibetan leaders prioritised establishing these organisations in exile.

Socio-Psychological Dynamics of Identity Formation among Tibetan Refugees

Social psychological theories have consistently recognised the need for belongingness as one of the fundamental human needs, which is inextricably associated with national identity. For instance, Baumeister and Leary (1995) state that belongingness is a basic psychological need central to emotional well-being. Individuals who identify with the ethnic attributes of a nation satisfy this need by connecting to a larger, collective entity. National identity, derived from ethnic identification, provides a sense of continuity and emotional security, offering individuals a place of belonging within a broader social, political and historical context.

Further, the role of national identity in fulfilling the need for belongingness is particularly apparent in the case of marginalised or displaced groups. Research by Verkuyten (2006) on ethnic minorities shows that identification with national attributes can help individuals cope with feelings of alienation and marginalisation in diasporic states. He further argues that ethnic identification creates an emotional bond between the individual and the national community, enabling the person to feel an extended part of their community's shared history, lived culture, and group norms despite the challenges of displacement or forced migration. This sense of belonging is critical for psychological well-being, providing individuals with a sense of meaning and purpose (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Furthermore, socialisation processes within families, schools, and media reinforce belongingness through national identity. These institutions are seminally instrumental in transmitting ethnic attributes and national narratives, making it

inevitable that individuals understand and internalise the symbols and values associated with their nation. For example, national history taught in schools often emphasises past struggles, victories against common enemies, and cultural distinctiveness, which facilitate a collective sense of pride and belongingness to a nation that is great in its own ways (Cohen, 1985). In this way, national identity becomes an extended part of an individual's self-concept as well as a collective, intergenerational experience.

Social Identity Theory's (SIT) Perspective on Ethnic Identification

SIT bases its arguments on the three basic processes of social categorisation, identification, and comparison as central to identity construction. Social categorisation explains the grouping tendency of individuals on shared observable characteristics or social information, creating a cognitive framework for understanding social relationships and influencing intergroup behaviours. For members of the Tibetan diaspora, distinct group characteristics such as language, religion, and cultural practices serve as primary identifiers. Once categorised, individuals voluntarily adopt the norms, values, and behaviours of their identified group, which is called the process of social identification in SIT. For Tibetans in exile, adopting a way of life that confirms their group norms is an identification phenomenon that makes them feel like they are part of their community and have their own national identity. The social comparison then reinforces group identity by evaluating the in-group in relation to out-groups. Such steps often result in intergroup bias and assumed responsibility to maintain positive distinctiveness (Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983). Groups assess their relative status against others to maintain or enhance their self-esteem. Tibetan refugees, for example, may compare their social and ethnic attributes with other ethnic groups or host communities, facilitating either cohesion within the diaspora or resistance to assimilate with external groups (Brewer, 1999). Barth's (1998) seminal work on ethnic

boundaries discusses that the maintenance of ethnic identity is less about the specific cultural traits of a group and more about the boundaries that distinguish it from others. These boundaries are not given but socially constructed and maintained through respecting the in-group norms for inter-group interaction, bringing notice to the dynamic and negotiated nature of ethnic identity. Phinney (1998) notes that a well-defined construction of ethnic identity based on the narratives of cultural extraordinariness strengthens a sense of solidarity in group membership and self-esteem. This process is particularly pronounced in minority communities, where maintaining distinctiveness becomes a strategy for preserving cultural identity in the face of assimilation pressures.

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979b), provides a theoretical tool for understanding the role of ethnicity in group dynamics and national identity formation. Ethnic identity, as a subset of social identity, is equally important due to its association with ancestry, culture, and shared history. Empirical studies support the idea that ethnic identification contributes to a sense of belonging and solidarity within national communities. For example, research by Deaux et al. (1993) illustrates that individuals who identify more strongly with their national and ethnic groups report higher levels of national pride and greater emotional attachment to their nation. These attachments are deeply influenced by the shared symbols and narratives that determine their ethnic identity, which can transcend geographical boundaries and unite individuals across different regions or even countries and also in diasporic cases where the members of a national community are selected in a dispersed manner (Smith, 2010). This shared identification with ethnic attributes is critical for individuals to imagine their nation as a unified entity, as it constructs a common narrative of belonging and collective destiny.

Ethnicity and its Attributes

Ethnicity is typically marked by observable homogenous cultural traits such as language, religion, traditions, and physical appearance, which act as identifiable symbols of group membership. These labels not only facilitate group categorisation but also justify the necessity for ethnic identity, particularly in contexts of intergroup tension or resource competition among marginalised groups (Brewer, 1999). The salience of ethnic identity is context-dependent and tends to increase in situations of perceived threat or competition. For example, in multicultural societies where resources or political power are contested, ethnic identity often becomes an instrumental tool for mobilisation. Brewer's (1999) work on in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination highlights how these dynamics become more prevalent under circumstances of perceived scarcity or political unrest. Such cases not only strengthen in-group unity but also redefine the boundaries in a more impenetrable manner, dividing ethnic groups into potent threats to each other's existence.

As a social construct, ethnicity becomes a defining feature of group identity in diaspora settings. SIT's conceptualisation of in-group and out-group dynamics is particularly relevant to discuss here. Ethnic identities within diasporas are not static; they are negotiated in response to external social and political conditions, such as assimilation policies, discrimination, legal ambiguities and global immobility (Eriksen, 2002). For the Tibetan diaspora, the preservation of ethnic identity is intrinsically tied to political and historical narratives of past extraordinariness and underserved injustice. The Chinese occupation of Tibet and consequential displacement have transformed ethnic identity into a symbol of resistance and solidarity (Yeh, 2007). Further, ethnicity is more than a static label; it is a lived experience shaped by historical, cultural, and social contexts. Diasporic communities live many lives negotiating different identities at

different times and contexts. Tibetan refugees, for instance, balance their Tibetan ethnic identity with the cultural expectations of host countries such as India, Nepal, or Western nations (McGranahan, 2010). The need to maintain a positive social identity often drives diasporic communities to preserve cultural markers while simultaneously engaging in selective assimilation. For instance, Tibetan communities in India have established schools and universities that teach both modern curricula and Tibetan language and history, thereby developing strong inter-group relations with the host society without sacrificing their cultural heritage (Nayak, Salovaara, & Wade, 2018; Wangdu, 2021). Further, the Tibetan diaspora has established cultural institutions in host countries, such as the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts in India and the Tibetan Cultural Centre in the United States, which serve to preserve the Tibetan language, arts, and traditions while also maintaining social harmony with the host nation. These efforts ensure that distinctiveness is not only maintained but also transmitted to younger generations, reinforcing cultural pride and longevity of their social and political cause.

Tibetan Mobilisation Strategies in Exile

Politicisation of Ethnicity and Other Strategies

In political contexts, ethnic identity often serves as a basis for collective action and mobilisation strategies. Chandra (2013) demonstrates that ethnicity provides a clear and easily recognisable framework for political organisations, particularly in cases of stateless nationalism. Horowitz (1985) emphasises that ethnic characteristics are often strategically deployed in political power and economic resource disputes. In India, the mobilisation of Tibetans is also featured by incorporating their ethnic identity with broader issues of social justice and potential futures. Tibetans in exile, although generally accepted by the Indian government, often live with an

unsettling question, “What if India asks them to leave?”. They are a stateless community, without any legal position in India or recognition from the international community, deprived of basic fundamental rights. Thus, they must rely on the Indian state or foreign sponsorship for resources such as education, healthcare, and cultural preservation. The dependence on external aids highlights how ethnic identity becomes a tool to acquire administrative power and survive in world politics (Cornell & Hartmann, 2006). The Tibetan diaspora in India, particularly those in Dharamshala—home to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile—has long relied on their ethnic identity as a means of mobilising support for the cause of Tibetan independence or greater autonomy within China. Tibetan political leaders, including the Dalai Lama, have frequently invoked ethnic identity rooted in shared religious traditions, cultural practices, and historical narratives to garner international attention and economic sponsorship for their cause (Prost, 2005). However, there are dimensions of Tibetan politics in exile that need new directions in psychological intervention to understand the fine distinctions of the mobilisation process.

Apart from ethnic politics, other themes remain reoccurring in the Tibetan mobilisation process. In this case, the mobilisation theory of Jenkins (1983) and the social psychological expansion proposed by Klandermans (1984) provide a framework to understand the conditions under which social movements emerge, sustain, and expect social change. Key concepts from these theories, such as resource mobilisation, value expectancy, pooling of resources and rational behaviour, are particularly relevant to the Tibetan case. For example, Jenkins’s resource mobilisation theory draws attention to the relevancy of resource availability and organisational strategies in fueling longevity in social movements. Similarly, the Tibetan diaspora has effectively mobilised resources by gaining international support, community networks, and leadership structures. For instance, the commemoration of Uprising Day on March 10 (marking the 1959 Tibetan uprising

against Chinese rule) is a fitting example of resource mobilisation. This annual event, organised by organisations such as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), and Students for a Free Tibet (SFT), involves global protests, rallies, and online campaigns. These efforts are supported by funding from diaspora contributions and allied organisations, indicating Jenkins's emphasis on resource pooling and effective organisational strategies (Jenkins, 1983). Similarly, the celebration of Losar (Tibetan New Year) in exile underscores the role of cultural and ethnic identity as a mobilising resource. Through community gatherings, performances, and rituals, Losar becomes a platform for not only preserving Tibetan traditions but also for representing Tibetan causes with the hope of spreading awareness. Such initiatives have attracted large numbers of tourist visits, especially to Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh. However, the same three days event also became space for political rallies with slogans like 'Free Tibet, Save Tibet', '*Bhod Gyalo* (Victory to Tibet)', '*Tibet ki Azadi, Bharat ki Surakhsha*', which translates to Tibet's independence, India's Safety (Condrolli, 2024).

Similarly, the social-psychological expansion of Resource Mobilisation Theory adds a motivational dimension, mainly through expectation-value theory (Klandermans, 1984). Tibetan refugees' participation in events like Uprising Day is driven by their expectation that such actions will raise international awareness and pressure China on human rights issues. The Dalai Lama's messages, delivered during key occasions like Losar or his annual March 10 speeches, further reinforce psychological commitment. His emphasis on nonviolence, cultural preservation, and global solidarity motivates exiles to engage in both grassroots and international advocacy. Like him, the other political activists Tibetan activists also employ powerful frames to shape public opinion and garner support. These frames often emphasise themes of cultural preservation, human rights abuses, and the peaceful nature of their struggle. By framing their

cause in terms of universal values, they appeal to a broad range of audiences. Rational behaviour, central to Klandermans's theory, is evident in the diaspora's strategic choice to prioritise nonviolent methods, which validates the values tied to their attributes of ethnic identity (Klandermans, 1984). The mobilisation of the Tibetan diaspora also includes schemes for securing the benefits of global outreach initiatives. For example, during the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the exiled Tibetans and their supporters demonstrated worldwide protests to draw the attention of the international community to China's unfair policies in Tibet. Here, employing the expectation-value theory makes us understand that Tibetan refugees participate in these movements based on their perceived probability of success and the value they assign to cultural preservation and political autonomy (Klandermans, 1984).

Further, studies like Sokefeld's (2006) and Norbu's (2002) contextualised the Tibetan movement within broader frameworks of nationalism and diaspora mobilisation. McGranahan's (2020) work highlights the role of historical memory and international alliances in sustaining the Tibetan struggle, while Norbu explores how cultural identity becomes a resource for political advocacy.

The Exile's Response to What is Happening In Tibet

Since ancient times, Tibetan monarchical policy has strived for cultural, religious and spiritual supremacy to define their non-territorial autonomy as distinct. Such endeavours of distinctiveness made Tibetan rulers remain fixated on the traditional order of things and prevent the wind of change from international nation-state politics of the 19th century from reaching Tibet. That is one crucial reason why many scholars blame the leadership crisis for Tibet's fall (Choedon, 2002). Now, looking carefully at the political development strategies the Tibetan

government-in-exile has followed since the exodus. It reflects the attempts to correct the past passiveness approach of the monastic system concerning democratic nation-building activities. The exiled space allowed them to reconfigure their governance setup, leading Tibet into two divided bodies. One Tibet is under a Chinese maintenance project that aims at transforming Tibet into a modern state. The other Tibet is under the Tibetan government-in-exile, which uses exoticisation as a socio-political tool to survive in the diaspora and strengthen their independence movement (Anand, 2010). Also, it was for the Chinese (March 1959 uprising) that Tibet geared to a full-scale national uprising from a politico-cultural community. To date, the core of Tibetan nationalist discourse depends on China (Choedon, 2002; Tsepon, 1967). Thus, this makes it essential to consider what is happening in Tibet under Chinese rule to understand the nature and motive of the Tibetan social movement in exile - as the instrumentality of both these parties' social movements has somehow depended on the continuity of each other's political actions against each other's intentions. For instance, let us suppose that the Chinese structure their schooling system to prevent Tibetans in autonomous zones from learning about their past. In such a case, the Tibetan government-in-exile would attempt to achieve the opposite through education policies in exile.

One of the initial assignments of the Tibetan government-in-exile included developing a Westernised definition of Tibet as a nation. The purpose was to overcome regional identity differences and eliminate the rituals that subdivide or weaken the Tibetan sects to make Tibetans feel more integrated, consolidated, and unified than ever (Houston & Wright, 2003). Further, it converted 'symbolic capital' (*Shangri-la*) into political and economic capital (Asfuroglu, 2012). Westerners became interested in saving authentic Tibet, which still substantiates the informal economy of Tibetans in exile known as *rogs ram* - sponsorship provided by foreigners to

Tibetans to maintain the exoticness of ancient Tibet. It also facilitates bridging networks with foreigners and increases social mobility beyond borders (Prost, 2006). Simultaneously, once accused of feudality and social corruption, the nation-building project in exile placed great importance on re-constructing their definition of Tibetan identity to incorporate the idea of social equality, democracy, and enhanced concept of non-violence, including environmental nurturing and vegetarianism. Their adoption of democracy and making Buddhism compatible with it secured international congratulations and encouragement from the Indian government on the one hand. On the other hand, it serves as an ideological weapon to question the undemocratic authoritarianism of the Communist Party in Tibet (Brox, 2012). However, such national discourse witnessed changes over time. For instance, the period from 1972-1989 emphasised the non-violent aspect of Tibetan identity; similarly, the rhetoric of green Tibetan identity began in the mid-1980s, and the mid-1990s witnessed the rise of gender equality discourse in defining Tibetan-ness (Asfuroglu, 2012).

In parallel, the government-in-exile recognised education's role in preserving Tibetan-ness and established the Department of Education in 1960. While following the Indian curriculum (proposed and mandated by the CBSE), the Tibetan education structure focuses primarily on preserving the mother language and cultural and religious virtues and promoting nationalism through re-interpreting Tibet's history, also maintaining 'diasporic consciousness' (Mishra, 2014; Liu, 2015). At the same time, the Chinese education policy intends to fabricate Tibet's history to serve their political projects by instilling feelings of love for China-ruled Tibet and forgetting past ethnicities, including the Dalai Lama and, for instance, using Chinese as the only language of instruction in the middle schools of Tibet (Mishra, 2022) and encouraging patriotism towards China by using visual and semiotic textual resources in textbooks to portray a stereotyped image

of Tibet's past as uncivilised (Bass, 2005; Zhang & Cuo, 2022). In contrast, the education curriculum in exile put extra effort into designing content for history and social studies textbooks to survive their nationalist movement by strengthening their ethno-national identity (Wangdu, 2021), for instance, prescribing Tibet as an independent country with socio-political and economic autonomy that modernly fulfils the nation-state's concept (Wangdu, 2020). More specifically, the Grade 5 textbook mentions how the Chinese invasion is responsible for killing 1.5 million innocent Tibetans, destroying 60000 monasteries and causing irreversible destruction to the geographical richness of Tibet (Wangdu, 2020), thus indicating China is an evil dominant, the most dangerous threat to Tibet's existence (Mishra, 2022). Such articulation becomes more instrumental when we consider that the teachers teaching refugee children firmly believe in developing nationalist feelings among their Tibetan students, too (Wangdu, 2021). Further, the most fundamental difference between the education policies of both countries, mainly to serve their political interest, is that China's primary schooling system focuses on modernity and social competition in the capitalist world, which they believe requires disowning religion and spiritual endeavours. While Tibetan primary schools still treat shaping authentic Tibetan character among students as their foremost responsibility.

Now, discussing Tibetan-in-exile nationalism, the approach appears divided into modern and traditional directions. To fulfil the modern criteria for qualifying as a nation-state, the Tibetan nationalists' approach is oriented toward strengthening their political position in front of the international community and progressing to a status where they can negotiate with China on equal terms. Such an approach requires political activism, self-organisation, and representing the struggles of Tibetans within Tibet and Tibetan refugees in exile to the outside world. Also, it represents a narrative of what Tibet as a nation and Tibetans as its citizens can offer to the world.

For example, as a geographical entity, Tibet could offer environmental benefits and narratives of environmental conservatism (Asfuroglu, 2012). Also, Tibet, as a cultural society, can still serve as the priest in the priest–patronage relationship (Sperling, 2004) with the outside world. However, to achieve this, the Tibetans' other aspects of nationalism include preserving and representing their religious and cultural aspects (Bloch, 2023). Similar multitudinous strategies at the political and social levels signify the fluidity embedded in the socio-historical construction of what Tibet is under China and what Tibet-in-exile symbolises. For instance, the management of Chinese state media categorises self-immolators as suffering from mental and personality disorders (Woeser, 2016) and suppresses the voices of rebels in Tibet to reach a wider audience (Kehoe, 2020; Shirk, 2011) to sustain the state's stability. In reaction, Tibetan refugees worldwide assumed the responsibility of spreading awareness about the suffering of Tibetans under Chinese rule through everyday life practices such as writing poems, stories, online blogs, and composing songs (Makely, 2015), observing the Lhakar movement (White Wednesday), and participating in political protests.

Summary

This chapter dives deeper into exploring multiple interpretations of Tibet as a mythical land, ethnographic boundary, and nation proposed by scholars from various disciplines, such as historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists. Such diverse exploration led the study to search for the research gap, to highlight the identity development process of Tibetan refugees in exile and to use the concept of everyday mobilisation to understand the Tibetan social movement in exile. This chapter also explores the resilience efforts of the Tibetans and the Indian government to reestablish the exiled community successfully. Further, it focuses on political activism that has emerged within the Tibetan diaspora, especially around issues of autonomy,

human rights, and the preservation of Tibetan culture. It also highlights the role of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, the efforts to gain international support for Tibet, and the influence of the uncontested national leader, the Dalai Lama. It then discusses the challenges and frustrations faced by the diaspora, particularly with regard to Tibet's political future and the relations between Tibetans and the Chinese government. Finally, the chapter examines the social-psychological mechanism of Tibetans' identity formation in exile. It uses social identity theory to provide a new perspective on the process of identity construction in cases of 'nations without states'. It illustrates the crucial role of ethnicity by taking examples from the Tibetan national identity development case. This chapter concludes by linking the ethnic identification process with the politicisation of such identities, which is explicitly evident in the case of Tibetans' mobilisation strategies in exile to achieve Tibet's sovereignty.