CHAPTER-V

TIBETAN YOUTH: EDUCATION, IDENTITIES, ASPIRATIONS
AND OPPORTUNITIES IN EXILE

Tibetanness
Thirty-nine years in exile.
Yet no nation supports us.
Not a single bloody nation!

We are refugees here.
People of a lost country
Citizen to no nation

Tibetans: the world’s sympathy stock.
Serene monks and bubbly traditionalists;
one lakh and several thousand odd,
nicely missed, steeped
in various assimilating cultural hegemonies.

At every check-post and office,
I am an “Indian-Tibetan”.
My Registration Certificate,
I renew every year, with a salaam.
A foreigner born in India.

I am more of an Indian.
Except for my Chinky Tibetan face.
“Nepali?” “Thai?” “Manipuri?”
but never the question—“Tibetan?”

I am Tibetan.
But I am not from Tibet.
Never been there.
Yet I dream
of dying there.

-Tenzin Tsundue
(http://www.friendsoftibet.org/tenzin/).

This chapter looks at meanings and perceptions of Tibetan identity, of ‘being
Tibetan’ and ‘Tibetanness’ in context of Tibetan refugees. It explores perceptions of
Tibetan identity in secondary literature, of the Tibetan Government in Exile and of young
Tibetans. The Tibetan youth’s perceptions of their identities and notions of what ‘being
Tibetan’ means to them, is looked at, through in-depth interviews with thirty educated Tibetan youth in Delhi. The chapter also explores sites of identity-construction of educated Tibetan youth with a focus on Tibetan and non-Tibetan schools and the Tibetan Youth Hostel, Delhi. Other sites like family, community (Tibetan and host) and organizations like the Tibetan Youth Congress have also been looked at. Educational and economic aspirations of young Tibetans and opportunities available to them for realizing these aspirations have also been dwelt upon.

**Being Tibetan and ‘Tibetanness’**

‘Tibetan identity’ in exile is seen to be constituted by values and attitudes among Tibetan refugees, which stem from their ethnic, socio-cultural heritage. Tibetanness is projected as “homogenous and uniform” and is seen as a construction of the Tibetan Government in Exile. Tibetan ethnicity and past history (seen as a ‘golden age’ when it was free from Chinese rule) is regarded as important in defining Tibetanness (Anand 2000:274). This construction of Tibetanness by the refugee government is said to partly also “fulfil the expectations of foreign donor agencies and political organizations” to gain access to financial and political help (Proust 2003; Anand 2000; Korom 1997; Gelleck 2001).

**Cultural uniqueness and national identity:** There seem to have been conscious attempts of the Tibetan leadership in exile to deliberately create a pan Tibetan identity in exile, by reviving the “pure Tibetan tradition” based upon recognition of a sense of cultural uniqueness and importance of preserving Tibetan culture, language and identity. The Tibetan Government in Exile has tried to project a “homogeneous, traditional and self-contained culture” by means of “faith in Buddhism and the Dalai Lama; establishment of centers and schools for traditional language, arts, crafts in Tibetan settlements worldwide” (Korom 1997).

The Tibetan Government in Exile has made specific policies that serve to define the distinctness of the Tibetan national identity. Liang refers to Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya and his contention that, “Today, among the Tibetan émigré community, in the Indian sub-continent, they have achieved some measure of uniformity of identity. This was done through deliberately inventing traditions. Most Tibetans are now socialized to
think of themselves as a homogeneous group through schooling and group celebrations such as the celebration of the 10th March uprising or the Dalai Lama’s birthday, which are recent additions to the calendar. Both celebrations are primarily designed to raise consciousness. The 10th March identifies ‘us’, the Tibetans, and the ‘other’, the Chinese, and the celebration of the Dalai Lama’s birthday provides the focus on a single leader” (Shakya cited in Liang 1999: 22).

The Tibetan flag, for instance, designed by the predecessor of the present Dalai Lama prior to the invasion, is banned and seldom seen in Tibet, while in exile, it has been promoted as “one of the nation’s strongest symbols” (Liang 1999:22). It is raised in schools every morning and at public meetings. It can be found in most Tibetan people’s shops, restaurants and houses. Alongwith other symbols of Tibetan nationalism, it is also available as souvenir for foreign tourists and visitors in the form of t-shirts, stickers, badges, kerchiefs etc. in McLeodganj, Dharamsala and other Tibetan settlements and youngsters can be seen proudly sporting the same. According to Liang’s study, in contrast to the situation in exile, “only 38% of the newly arrived Tibetans recognized the flag. Most of them had only seen it once in the 1988 uprisings and on tourist badges”. This contrasts with the India-born Tibetans “all of who recognized the flag, and most of whom had one in their home”. Also, “very few (14%) of the newly arrived Tibetans knew the national anthem in Tibet as compared to 95% of the Indian-born Tibetans”. In exile, the former are also said to be “soon taught” the same “as a way of fostering a feeling of nationhood”. Two months after their arrival, the number who knew the anthem, it seems, “increased to 67%”. The role of Tibetan schools in minimizing differences amongst new arrivals from Tibet and refugee children born in India has also been referred to. It is observed that these schools create a distinct Tibetan national identity with a curriculum that includes the Lhasa dialect, customs and traditions (Liang 1999: 22).

The leadership of the Dalai Lama and the re-creation of traditional institutions in exile also seem to have provided access to western concepts of human rights and democracy through “direct forms of patronage and contact”. Westerners traveling to Nepal, India, and even Bhutan, often seek out the “authentic Tibetan”, hoping “to recreate their cherished image of an untainted personal form of Shangri-la”. Tibetans in exile are thus, seen as caught in a “precarious balance between tradition and modernity,
where the influence of foreign definitions of authenticity loom heavily on the construction of their identity” (Gellek 2001:13). The “nostalgic longing for the traditional Tibetan past juxtaposed against the strangely modern backdrop of China’s occupation” (Gelleck, 2001), is said to represent the two most powerful contrasting images of Tibetan life. The latter image, however, more real than the former is invoked primarily in political discussions. The image of “traditional Tibet” for most Tibetans is said to be that of a “vast, untouched, spiritual and mystical world that represents the core of their nation and the source of their profound motivation to preserve their culture” (Gellek 2001:13).

The role of the host country in maintaining the refugee community’s cultural heritage by establishing various Tibetan socio-religious and cultural institutions for “maintenance of Tibetan identity and saving it from getting lost in exile” is also seen as important (Saklani 1984:347).

Studies refer to the “limited acculturation” being successful as opposed to “assimilation” of the Tibetan refugee community in exile with the host community, based upon the policy of the leadership that has largely avoided the process of ‘sanskritisation’ (Anand 2000:276). Christiaan Klieger’s analyses of Tibetan nationalism as a modern manifestation of ‘patron-client dyad’, as mentioned in the Introduction, is also of importance, as it argues that refugees have been able to retain their status by converting the whole exile community as belonging to ‘client’ category which has helped Tibetans to avoid assimilation into the local community (Anand 2000: 276).

With regard to livelihood strategies and adaptive experience of refugees in their host countries, the Tibetan refugees have been considered as a “model refugee community” that has been able to achieve not only economic prosperity but also cultural preservation in exile. The preservation of their cultural identity and religious institutions is seen as a success, even referred to as “renaissance of Tibetan civilization in exile” (Haimendorf cited in Norbu 2001:207).

**Tibetan Buddhism and The Dalai Lama:** Tibetan Buddhism is seen as an important aspect of Tibetan refugee identity in exile. Several scholars regard Tibetan Buddhism, as the “only source” of Tibetan identity and culture (Nowak 1978; Saklani 1984; Anand 2000; Gellek 2001; Thargyal cited in Korom, 1997) etc.
The Dalai Lama is considered as a powerful, unifying symbol of Tibetan identity, uniting the Tibetan refugees in exile. Tenzin Tsundue observes, “Deep down we are Tibetan. Every mention of Tibet and the Dalai Lama in a newspaper, TV, radio, pulls the strings in us. It’s something very personal. Tibetans strayed to foreign countries with or without papers tell me of this heartstring. It’s just magical. This, I believe, is Tibetanness and I know this is there in all Tibetans” (Tsundue 2004:19).

The role of the Dalai Lama in exhorting Tibetans to retain their racial and cultural identities is also important. The Tibetan leadership in exile, it seems, did not favour Indian citizenship. Tibetan refugees were motivated to live in separated, isolated Tibetan settlements or localities. This policy of aloofness helped in a way to save their “race, religion and culture” and to maintain their “in-group solidarity” (Saklani 1984:347). Referring to the Dalai Lama as the “supreme unifying symbol” of Tibetan identity, Tibetan refugees, it seems, comprehend that “they should remain as Tibetan nationals devoted to Lamaistic Buddhism and follow The Dalai Lama”. It is said that, unlike other refugee groups, Tibetans, do not manifest any problem of disintegration, because they are a highly structured group under the leadership of the Dalai Lama (Saklani 1984:427).

Perceptions of Tibetan Officials: Interviews with Tibetan officials in the Tibetan Government in Exile also throw light on their perceptions of ‘being Tibetan’ and Tibetan identity. The official Tibetan discourse has constructed “one-way of being truly Tibetan”. ‘Being Tibetan’ is equated with the maintenance of Tibetan Buddhist culture, religion and language alongwith universal values in exile (Saklani 1984; Proust 2003; Gellek 2001; Anand 2000) etc. This emphasis on the ‘traditional’ against the ‘modern’ has also influenced policy formation in education (as explained in the third chapter).

Major educational policies like ‘Tibetanization of Education’ (1984) and the latest ‘New Basic Policy on Education for Tibetans in Exile (2004) are the result of deeply felt apprehensions of the Government in Exile as well as Tibetologists that the new generation of Tibetan youth have ‘minimum awareness’ of their language, history and religion. There has been a strong concern to review the language policy and explore avenues for a system of education that will place Tibetan language as the medium of instruction in the schools and ensure that the content is ‘relevant’ for the children (TCV report, 1999:3; Gyatso 1993:15). These educational policies are meant to have a “lasting
imprint on the future generations of Tibetans in Tibet and outside” and when they would “return to Tibet” to shape their “own destiny as a people” (TCV report 1999:32).

Officials interviewed in the study highlighted the importance of passing on the importance of preserving Tibetanness to the younger generations in exile by keeping alive the “inner Tibet” in their hearts. A senior official in the Tibetan Administration said, “If we keep alive this inner Tibet, we will always have time for the outer, political Tibet. If we lose this inner Tibet, everything will be lost; it will be all valueless” (TO1, DOE, CTA, H.P, 2006).

Other officials said that Tibetanness means “to have a firm understanding of culture and philosophy in life as a Tibetan Buddhist”. Some officials also talked about ‘Tibetanness’ in context of having “universal values-honesty, care, compassion to become good human beings, not being mechanical animals” and “being true to ourselves and being proud of ourselves” (TO2, DOE, CTA, H.P, 2006).

Officials also expressed concern with Tibetan youngsters ‘losing’ their Tibetan Buddhist identity. There seemed to be a view amongst sections of Tibetan government officials that compared to the older generations in exile, the Tibetan youth in India are getting swept away by other cultures and loosing their Tibetan Buddhist perspective in life – identified as a major element of ‘being Tibetan’.

Indian officials interviewed at CTSA, Delhi highlighted the fact that, ‘being Tibetan’ means different things to the Tibetan Government in Exile and to parents and children in the Tibetan community. These officials felt that while the former is more interested in preservation of traditional Tibetan language, culture and identity, the latter is more concerned with survival and growth in exile.

**Becoming Tibetan-Identities as ‘Mobile’ and ‘Processual’: the above literature looks as Tibetan identity as being part of past remnants of the Tibetan’s ethno-historical heritage as well as being consciously revived in exile by the Tibetan leadership. There are other studies, at the same time, that highlight the fact that forty-eight long years of exile and the influence of globalization, have led to definitive socio-economic and cultural changes in the exile community, with changes in perceptions and behaviour of the Tibetan refugees. These studies regard Tibetan identity as consisting of processual, fluid entities.**

157
Some of the above scholars, have also stressed upon the need to look at Tibetan identity, "not as an outcome or artefact", but as a "construction, a process never completed". Identities are seen as socially and politically constructed, "always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others" (Malkki cited by Anand 1992:37).

Identities are increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. Tibetan identity is seen as constituted by particular processes and practices of history, language and culture in the process of 'becoming' (rather than 'being') a Tibetan and "not as some universal, timeless fixed thing" (Anand 2000:275). A unified, homogeneous Tibetan identity in exile, is seen as "more of a rhetorical device" and imaginary construct than an existing reality. The notion of Tibetanness, is also seen as "highly contested and a pluralistic" with it being articulated, in theory and in praxis, at several "hierarchical and overlapping levels" (Anand 2000:275). It has been regarded as a "discursive product of many complementary and contestory dynamics such as: the policy pronouncements of Dharamsala, the politics of more radical elements, representational, gendered and generational practices, strategies of the ‘Tibet movement’" (Anand 2000:275). The modern concept of Tibetanness is also said to be a "product of negotiation and mutual influence"(Korom 1997:5).

Changes taking place in exile amongst the younger generation have been viewed with apprehension as their “losing their Tibetan identity”. The youth who grew up in India are regarded as “mentally and spiritually different” in terms of adhering to the “ritual aspects of religion” and “norms of social behavior” from those of the past who were born and brought up in the midst of Tibetan culture back home. The youth are seen as allowing themselves to be “easily overwhelmed by the forces of change in spite of their strongly professed attachment to the pristine Tibetan culture”(Saklani 1984:349).

Refugees of the older generations are said to be greatly apprehensive about the ‘westernization’ or attraction to the ‘European or American life-style and modes of behavior’ of the youth. Like their Indian counterparts, the "western influence in dress-styles, music, language and way of life is said to have led the youth towards “forgetting their national language” and experiencing “emotional alienation” from their kith and kin
and to the cherished cause of their elders i.e. “restoration of the political integrity and cultural glory of Tibet” (Saklani 1984:327).

Younger generations of Tibetans born and brought up in India are said to have tastes, outlook, and lifestyles “influenced” from the Indian community that are different from that of the older generation. A majority of them, it seems, love Hindi film songs and dances. They are also said to be “very competitive, ambitious and worldly” and “in favor of education, modernization, aspiring to be doctors, engineers, lawyers and key players in Tibetan politics” (Erapeni 2004:75). Direct personal interaction, better education, easier travel, satellite television, movies and the Internet, are being seen as having an impact on traditional Tibetan norms, values, and customs. Many of the youngsters, particularly those studying in Indian schools and colleges, are seen as preferring to “blend with the crowd”, rather than stand out by wearing the traditional dress, for instance, which is considered as “un-cool” (Erapeni 2004:75).

The Tibetan youth’s “emotional rejection of their traditional social identity” (Saklani 1984) is said to be primarily due to their education and surroundings in which they are growing up in exile. The educational experience through which the Tibetan youth are passing has been regarded as one of the “most important factors in interpreting the mutations taking place in the Tibetan youth scene” (Saklani 1984). In their urge for ‘modern’ education, the Tibetan community is said to be riding on the horns of a dilemma. It is observed that a “majority of the up and coming Tibetan youth who exhibit a pronounced western influence” have been educated at public schools in hill stations like Mussoorie, Darjeeling etc which have a “stronger anglicized tradition” than interior cities and towns. Older refugees are said to be apprehensive of Tibetan youth being “completely weaned away from their national culture, becoming nondescripts without cultural moorings anywhere” (Saklani 1984:327).

**Tibetan Youth Identities:** There have also been studies that refer to the changes in the perceptions of ‘Tibetanness’ and ways of living in the Tibetan exile community. The younger generation is seen as specifically expressing and exhibiting diverse and multiple ways of ‘being Tibetan’ as against upholding a single strand of Tibetanness. The younger generation has been described as a generation that “refuses to be typecast into the Shangri-la stereotype” of being “charmingly passive, intriguingly religious and
politically helpless”, a brand of Tibetanness seemingly espoused by their Government in Exile and by sections of the west. It is seen as a generation that “resents the idea of only one way of being truly “Tibetan” and wants to be “taken seriously” as “educated, rational, global world citizens- who are also Tibetan”(Sither 2004:25).

The younger generation is seen as having “more modern, and diversified tastes, interests and values” having a liking for “good living, fashionable dresses and modern gadgets” (Thinley 2004:3). Globalization is said to have provided opportunities to enable them to afford ‘good living’ alongwith sponsorship remittances from Tibetans and the west. Youngsters are said to be keen to provide “service to the community and work for the cause of Tibet” but also as wanting to see this “combined with comparable modern standards of living and career opportunities” (Thinley 2004:3).

The refugees’ enthusiasm for songs from blockbuster Hindi films, the popularity of western rock and roll among Tibetan youth, and the emergence of a new genre of modern Tibetan music is seen as a site where different notions of Tibetanness are being “imagined, performed and debated” despite concerns about “ethnic purity” (Diehl cited in http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages9499.html).

Poet-Activist for Free Tibet, Tenzin Tsundue, in a discussion for the study, on the identity of Tibetan refugee youth said that he felt “extremely sorry” for them. He referred to the “numerous demands placed upon their identities and expectations for them to conform” to the “one single, true definition of Tibetan identity”. He referred to the “stereotypes and the mindsets” that bind people when they think of Tibetan youth and their identities. It is because of these mindsets, he said, that it becomes hard for people to understand that youngsters who seem to be “westernized in their choice of clothes, music etc can also be Tibetan enough”. Tsundue spoke about the difficulties that people have in understanding that despite differences amongst them, they can still be “very much Tibetan” (Tsundue, 2005, Delhi).

There is a need to therefore, look at refugeism and how Tibetan refugee youth negotiate and define their identities and Tibetanness in different ways in exile.
Tibetan Youth - Identities in Exile

Being Patriotic: There seem to have been apprehensions amongst the Tibetan Government in Exile that the Tibetan youth would “choose to forget the sufferings and sacrifices made by their elders for saving their cultural and religious heritage” (Saklani 1984). Most of the youth respondents in the study, however, asserted that they wished to contribute and “fight for the cause of Tibet”. Feelings of ‘intense nationalism’, one of the elements of Tibetan identity, was seen as existing amongst the youth in exile, though in varying degrees, depending upon individual socialization and life experiences.

All the respondents spoke about the importance of “being patriotic”, saying that as Tibetans they “want autonomy (if not freedom)” for Tibet-their “homeland”. Most of the respondents were also ready to “return to Tibet, if it becomes free” alongwith their parents. A respondent stated, “I am a Tibetan born in exile, I am a Tibetan but not from Tibet, though not born there, I want to die there” (Yangzom, T.S, 2006). Respondents believed that this is the time to fight for the cause of Tibet and for them to be “careful, responsible and to preserve tradition, culture and religion”. They also realized that it is their “responsibility as youngsters to do this” or they will “lose it”. Respondents also noted that the Tibetan youth in India “desire to do something for Tibet” but are lacking in “unity” and “hope”. One of the respondents felt that Tibetans ought to take the Jewish community as their “model” as with “sheer hard work, determination, hope and belief they have got their promised land”. “We have to take them as models- have faith, iron-willed determination to fight China”, he added (Yeshi, N.T.S, 2006).

Some respondents, however, also acknowledged that very few youngsters, especially those born in India, are highly patriotic. A respondent observed, “We need more of Tenzin Tsundue’s, born in India but patriotic” (T.J, T.S, 2006). Respondents who were born in Tibet but came to India for their education, regarded themselves as “more patriotic” than others born and brought up in India. They were regarded as “more patriotic” also by other respondents born in India. A respondent born in Tibet but educated in India said that those who have been born in India except for a few, have “got things easily and are therefore aimless, modernized”. To them, he said, “Tibet is just a “legend”, they don’t know the real situation-the truth”. Those who have “seen Tibet”, he
believed, are “more active in India” (in terms of fighting for the cause of Tibet) (T.J, T.S, 2006).

The common connecting point for all Tibetan youth in the study was the idea of an imagined homeland of a "Free Tibet". The most important component of this "imagined homeland" was regarded as autonomy (as ‘rangzen’ i.e. freedom, though a much preferable alternative, was seen as an 'impractical demand'). They visualized this homeland as a single, unified country with The Dalai Lama as their supreme spiritual leader. Most of the respondents (twenty-eight out of thirty) said that they “felt for Tibet”, a place many of them have never even seen with their naked eyes. Tsundue also threw light on the patriotism that young Tibetans feel towards Tibet. He added, “While the younger generation may have their share of problems in terms of language and traditional customs, however they dress or drink or drive, they are “more patriotic, for their future is Tibet” (Tsundue, 2005, Delhi).

‘Contributing’ to Tibet’s cause: Tibetanness was also seen by respondents as about having an inner desire to fight for Tibet’s freedom. It was seen as ‘contributing’ to Tibet’s cause by: working and providing services to the Tibetan Government in Exile and to Tibetan schools or contributing as journalists and scholars etc by raising Tibetan issues and support for its cause. One respondent said that she planned to become a journalist after graduation as she feels that this is a “critical moment” when she can “raise Tibetan issues and make a Tibetan identity in this world” (TY2, T.S, 2006). Another respondent wanted to clear the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) examination after graduation (his parents being naturalized citizens of India) because he believed that as an “Indian bureaucrat” he can actually “help Tibetans in the diaspora by influencing India’s policy towards the Tibetan refugee community” (Yeshi, N.T.S, 2006).

Respondents felt that contributing to Tibet’s cause by participating in Regional Tibetan Youth Congress (regional wing of TYC) organized protest marches also denotes Tibetanness. They said that it is their “responsibility as Tibetans” to participate in processions. Being Tibetan was said to be “about having a basic spirit of doing something for our country- of at least being a part of and participating in RTYC demonstrations”. It was said to involve “inner strength” with students “getting arrested and going to Tihar jail or missing classes, even exams” for the cause of Tibet (T.Y2, T.S, 2006). This was also
believed to have an important effect on the movement. As observed by a respondent, “when students protest, they (Chinese government) is affected and they “lessen torture” of political prisoners” (Tsechu, N.T.S, 2006).

Eleven (out of thirty) of the respondents supported both The Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC). They felt that the “means” used by both, may be different, but their “ends” are the same as “both are fighting for Tibet”. Only three respondents, however, supported the TYC and its mandate of ‘rangzen’ or ‘complete independence’ for Tibet as they believed that The Dalai Lama’s approach of non-violence has ‘failed’ to achieve Tibet’s independence and should be replaced by TYC’s approach.

Way of Life: all the thirty respondents had non-Tibetan, westernized life-styles in terms of preferences of clothing (western wear), spoken languages (Hindi and English along with Tibetan), music (Hindi, English and sometimes Tibetan), food (Indian, Tibetan, western fast-food etc), movies (Hindi, English) etc (see details in annexure: 12.1). When viewed against the Tibetan identity of the older generations of Tibetans, they said that it does not mean that they have ‘weaker’ Tibetan identities.

The influence of the mass media on Tibetan youth identity emerged as another major area of influence in the study, which throws light on its globalizing presence. All the twenty-one youth interviewed in the Tibetan Youth Hostel, Delhi said that they enjoyed watching Hollywood movies on TV. Two respondents said that they also liked watching BBC News “to get news about China and Tibet”. The boys who were interviewed said that they were interested in watching India-Pakistan cricket matches in which they ‘obviously’ support India. Another interesting fact that emerged was that the girls in the hostel seemed to be interested in watching Indian soaps. They claimed to be watching these soaps, “just like that” as the stories were “romantic” and “interesting even though unrealistic”. Some even admitted to skipping Wednesday prayers in the hostel to catch a particular serial, if the time would clash with its telecast.

All the thirty respondents said that they liked watching both Hollywood and Bollywood movies in movie theaters or multiplexes in the city. Hollywood movies based on Tibet were a popular favorite of all the students, for example ‘Seven Years in Tibet’, ‘Kundan’ etc. A majority of the youth (twenty-one out of thirty) said that they liked a mix of Hindi, English and Tibetan music. Songs from mainstream Hindi movies seemed to be
popular along with ghazals, western music (rock, pop and latest being hip-hop) and Tibetan music composed, sung and performed by Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) in India, in Tibet and even in America. While four of the respondents said that they did not like Hindi music, six of the respondents also said that they did not like Tibetan music.

Their choice of apparel seemed to be based on reasons like ‘comfort’, ‘convenience’ as well as ‘fitting in with the crowd’. All the respondents said that these were reasons for their preference for western clothes over traditional Tibetan wear. Respondents said that they did now prefer wearing Tibetan clothes as it would be “impractical”, “uncomfortable” and would also “look strange” (Monlam, T.S, 2006 etc). A respondent said, “When in Rome, act like the Romans do”. Tibetan identity, he observed, “is language, religion, way of thinking, philosophy and not forgetting one’s culture—it does not mean wearing chubba, as it does not make any sense” (T.W, T.S, 2006). Respondents stressed upon the fact that Tibetan identity lies ‘within’ them and is more about having the desire to fight for Tibet’s cause than about ‘external appearances’. They said that because they wear western clothes and fashion accessories “for fashion”, this does not mean that they have become “less of a Tibetan” (Monlam, T.S, 2006). A respondent observed, “I may be a bit modernized, a bit multicultural but I am really a Tibetan, I can’t hide it. I’m a pure Tibetan, though my thoughts and living are more modernized, I have everything that a Tibetan should have” (Gatop, T.S, 2006).

The narratives of respondents throws light on the fact that living in the city and merging with the rest of the young, urban crowd has given rise to a certain ‘common youth culture’ amongst them. Wearing similar western and even Indian outfits, eating the similar kind of food, watching a similar array of Hollywood and Bollywood movies and satellite TV, listening to Hindi film songs, internet-browsing etc seems to have enabled Tibetan youth to become part of this globalized, urban youth culture. Their accounts throw light on the fact that the context of globalization, the physical movement, transplantation and adaptation of people and the electronic distribution of culture influences Tibetan youth identities in exile. Feelings of ‘being Tibetan’, despite these influences on their identities, also seem to continue to exist and need to be recognized. As observed by the respondents, they are “not losing their identity” but are getting
“influenced by the environment, by globalization”, particularly their habits and traditions (through western and Indian movies, languages and dress etc).

At the same time also, the concerns amongst some respondents (five out of thirty) who felt that their identity is “not collapsing though a loss is happening gradually” and that there is a need to prevent it as some “signs are already there”, also needs to be recognized. These respondents called for steps to be taken to prevent the “loss of identity” amongst the youth to prevent their “getting swept away by westernization” (Dechen, T.S, 2006).

As discussed earlier, there have been concerns that the younger generation is “loosing its identity” as well as a sense of appreciation for their unique cultural and religious heritage and their responsibility to preserve it, due to the influence of ‘westernization’. Tibetan youth respondents in the study, however, said that they were equally ‘concerned about the loss of Tibetan language’. While they may have largely westernized lifestyles, they emphasized that, they had “knowledge of” and “were proud of their cultural and religious heritage”. For them, being Tibetan, and having a Tibetan identity could be defined in terms that seem to be, therefore, different from that of their elders.

For some respondents (twenty-one out of thirty) in the study, Tibetanness was defined as “natural”, “an inner feeling”, “something within- that every Tibetan is born with” and something that a Tibetan can “never lose”. As observed by a respondent, “It is within you, Isko koi nehi le ja sakta hain” (“no one can take it away”) (Dolkar, N.T.S, 2006). These respondents said that their “blood is and will always Tibetan”, that they are “Tibetan at heart” and that “Tibetanness comes from within” (Monlam, T.S, 2006). Thus, as the poet-activist Tsundue says (see box), their imagination, education and stories they hear from their elders seem to make them feel that Tibetanness is a ‘natural’ entity within them.

“Tibet is created by their imagination, their education, stories they heard from elders and tourists and what they inherited in their blood. There is no citizenship to claim; the Dalai Lama is their passport. They are born refugee” (Tsundue 2004:19).
All the respondents also upheld the importance of ‘universal values’ in being Tibetan, including being ‘patriotic, compassionate towards all living beings, respectful towards elders, being humble, less materialistic, having honour, dignity and basic good qualities of any human being’.

The importance of celebrating festivals, as an aspect of Tibetanness was also emphasized, “It is important to have knowledge about our culture, identity and to also celebrate our festivals” (Tamdin, T.S, 2006). It was felt that in Tibet, people do not have the right to express their culture. India, however, “is open”, and therefore they ought to “learn, develop and re-construct what they have lost, or are getting lost in Tibet” (L.T, T.S, 2006).

Some twenty-three (out of thirty) of the respondents felt that the core of Tibetan identity is Tibetan language and as Tibetans they “should be able to speak, read and write in Tibetan”. Respondents also spoke about the “loss” of Tibetan language that takes place after school with them moving to English medium, Indian colleges and felt the necessity of “preserving it”.

Tibetan Buddhism was also regarded as an important element in defining Tibetanness. Respondents said that Tibetan Buddhism is the “core of Tibetan identity” and that ‘being Tibetan’ is about being ‘Tibetan Buddhist’. It is also ‘to know mantras and scriptures’, ‘to pray and to practice Buddhism in daily life’. A respondent noted, “Even as a child, one learns and knows ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’. Like the Jews have Sabbath every Friday it’s the same with us. It is a part of our culture and identity, we should never lose it” (Monlam, T.S, 2006). The importance of religion in the lives of Tibetan youth is evident from the fact that more than half (16/30) of Tibetan students in the study regarded religion as ‘important’ to them, while 7/30 regarded religion as ‘very important’ to them. An equal number i.e.7/30, however, also felt that religion is ‘not really important’ to them.

Belief in the Dalai Lama, to follow him and to apply his teachings in daily life was also said to be an important component of ‘being Tibetan’ by respondents. When asked about their role model in life, as many as 26/30 of the respondents said that they regarded The Dalai Lama as their foremost spiritual role model. 16/30 of respondents said that they supported The Dalai Lama and his ‘Middle-Way’ approach of ‘real
autonomy’ for Tibet as they agreed with his non-violence approach and regarded it as a ‘practical’, ‘ethical’, ‘rational’ and ‘achievable’ way of fighting for Tibet. (11 respondents supported his approach alongwith TYC’s more radical approach, only 3 felt that the TYC’s approach was more ‘practical’ as compared to The Dalai Lama’s approach). Respondents said that they respected him because he is their ‘spiritual leader’, also because he is an “ocean of wisdom” and talks of “good things, like, basic human nature and spirituality in the modern world”. He is supposed to be “very cool about everything”, “compassionate” and “a blending of practicality-modern and ancient”. Respondents also expressed gratitude towards him for “caring for Tibetans”. A respondent, however, added that their generation’s faith in the Dalai Lama is “different from their parents’. The reason given for this was education and their “not being guided by blind beliefs”. “We have complete faith in the Dalai Lama but, unlike elders, we do not think that he is a god or a fortune-teller”, he added (T.W, T.S, 2006).

Though religion mattered to a majority of them (23/30), the respondents acknowledged that recruits to the Lamaist order have “definitely declined” as the youth are drawn more towards modern education and dreams of economic mobility. They also admitted that for the elder generations, the ritualistic aspects of religion seems to hold a much more important place than for the younger generations. They admitted that the importance of religion (in terms of observance of ‘rituals’, ‘daily prayers’ and ‘prostrations’) has diminished with their having shifted to the city for pursuing college. Many of the students admitted that they are “more religious” when they are at home and are ‘scolded’ by their parents to pray.

Getting married to “only Tibetans” was also seen as a way to preserve Tibetan ethnic identity. A majority of the respondents (24/30) said that marriage within the Tibetan community is necessary to ‘preserve their identity’. Other reasons given were that it is ‘desired by their parents’ and as it is ‘easier to relate to people from one’s own culture, religion, language’. Marrying outside the community is generally avoided, they said, as such marriages are “looked down upon” and those who marry outside, it seems, sometimes seem to face “discrimination” within the community. A respondent observed that, “Marrying outside the community is not considered good. Such people are seen as
traitors, though this is a much stronger word”. Though “not mentioned openly, they are treated as if they have done something bad” (Dechen, T.S, 2006).

Regional identities were also seen as important by a few youth. Two of the respondents (whose ancestors were from Kham, Tibet) particularly spoke about their regional identities as an important part of their Tibetanness. ‘National’ Tibetan identity was however, seen to be more important than regional identities to present a “united front for Tibet’s cause”. Stressing upon his regional identity, a respondent asserted, “I will certainly say that I am Tibetan. But I am also a Khampa with a Nangchen identity” (Monlam, T.S, 2006). Another added, “The feeling of -I am a Khampa- comes sometimes in daily interactions with friends” (T. J, T.S, 2006).

To explore the processes of identity construction for Tibetan refugee youth in India, one needs to look at their definitions of being Tibetan as well as life experiences as processes of becoming Tibetan in exile. The elements of Tibetanness, given above, along with the varied life experiences of Tibetan youth seem to constitute their perspectives of being Tibetan and Tibetanness in exile. All the thirty respondents in the study said that they had certain common elements of Tibetanness, namely a sense of realization of the uniqueness of their culture, language and importance of its preservation; a sense of importance of universal values; influence of Tibetan Buddhist religion; reverence for The Dalai Lama and contributing towards Tibet’s cause in various ways (marriage within the community, participating in protest marches etc). There were also certain elements of Tibetanness that were present only in some respondents, namely, the importance of regional identity.

There were also a section of respondents (eight out of thirty who were not residents of the Tibetan Youth Hostel), who did not agree with all the above-identified elements of being Tibetan or Tibetanness. These respondents seemed to regard themselves as having ‘mixed’ and/or ‘global’ identities and said that there could also be other ways of ‘being Tibetan’. These respondents said that they were aware of differences amongst them and questioned as to ‘why there has to be just one way of being Tibetan’. They also asked to be judged by different sets of standards of ‘being Tibetan’.

‘Mixed’ identities: These respondents in the study said that they had ‘mixed’, ‘hybrid’ or ‘multicultural’ identities and that they were a “mixture of Tibetan and
Indian”. Seven of these respondents had parents (settled in the north-east of India who came before 1959 and are not regarded as refugees) and have opted for Indian citizenship. One of these respondents said that his identity is a “mix of everything” and he “doesn’t exactly know what being a Tibetan is all about”. He regarded himself as being a “product of a multicultural environment” and believed that it is “good to be a bit of everything rather than just one”. He also felt that he is a “global citizen” (Phungkhang, N.T.S, 2006). Another respondent said, “I am an Indian first and then a Tibetan”. “I don’t feel like a refugee” (Chime, N.T.S, 2006). One of the respondents also said “I am a Tibetan at heart, an Indian citizen by circumstances...sort of choice too, sometimes” (Thupten, N.T.S, 2006). Another said, “I am an Indian citizen by name” and a “Tibetan under religion and culture” (Bhutia C, N.T.S, 2006).

For these respondents, the feeling of patriotism or recognition of the need for preservation of Tibetan culture, language and identity, despite being there to a limited extent, did not seem to be as strong as compared to other Tibetan youth. An example here can be given of a respondent who pointed out the differences between siblings in her own family. She and her other sisters, it seems, are very different from one sister in that they “want Tibet to be free but they are not that much, not that deep into a Tibetan identity”. This other sister, she stated, is however, “very devoted about these things”. “We never had that feeling”, she observed (Bhutia D, N.T.S, 2006).

The desire to return to Tibet was also not necessarily seen in their case as a precondition to being Tibetan, as these respondents acknowledged their ties to the host country and felt it “difficult to go back” as they have “everything here”. These respondents either wanted to stay back in India or even to go aboard in search of a better career.

All these respondents said that they supported The Dalai Lama, as he was “better” (than RTYC) and that he “will always be right”. They, however, said that they cannot or do not want to participate in RTYC marches. They felt that ‘being Tibetan’ cannot be evaluated simply on the basis of having participated in Tibetan protest marches organized by the RTYC. Reasons cited by these respondents who were staying in rented accommodation and in college hostels (in colleges like Hansraj, Miranda House, LSR) for not participating in the marches ranged from: feeling scared of the consequences (fear
of being 'arrested', 'problems with college hostel authorities', 'studies being disturbed' etc), 'lack of knowledge and information', 'lack of company' (with whom they could go), 'lack of interest and motivation' and disagreement with 'militant, dangerous, 'illegal' methods employed by RTYC. They said that RTYC's “peaceful demonstrations are fine" but they "do not agree with their extremist acts, like attacking the Chinese embassy" etc. These respondents seemed to have "heard of" but had "never been to an RTYC meeting or participated in a protest march" while in school. They preferred to stay away as they were "not interested and wanted to concentrate on their studies, career, friends". A respondent observed, "I have nothing for it (RTYC) or against it. It is not relevant to me and is a subsidiary concept. I never studied about it nor am I interested" (Bhutia C, N.T.S, 2006).

A respondent (only one from a Tibetan school) staying at the Miranda House Hostel said that there were other ways of 'contributing' to the cause of Tibet. "I am here representing my culture", she stated, adding that she tries to "inform and discuss the situation of Tibet" with Indian and other friends in the college (N.D, T.S, 2006). She observed that not participating in RTYC marches does not indicate having a 'weaker' Tibetan identity (N.D, T.S, 2006).

Four of these respondents (alongwith two respondents from Tibetan schools) also felt that marriage to a Tibetan life partner was not the all-important criteria for them. What was important for them was a 'meeting of minds' and 'ideologies' that could happen with someone outside the community also.

These eight students seemed to represent a group who are in some respects similar to the first group and also different from them in other respects. Their definition of being Tibetan is a little different from the first group, however, despite these differences, they also emerge as Tibetans with Tibetan identities, which needs to be recognized.

**Youth Identities – Sites of Construction**

This section focuses on the factors, or sites of construction of Tibetan youth identities in exile. It focuses on the role of schools (Tibetan and non-Tibetan) and the place of residence (Tibetan Youth Hostel, Delhi). It also looks at the role of organizations
like Tibetan Youth Congress, Tibetan parents and the community (Tibetan and host) in this regard.

**A) Schools and Tibetan identity:** scholars have emphasized the role of Tibetan schools in the construction of Tibetan identity amongst Tibetan children in exile. Goldstein-Kyaga observes, “To foster a feeling of solidarity necessary for the cohesion of the nation, common myths, memories and symbols were essential. These had to be communicated in a standard language through educational institutions”. Thus, “mass education” was introduced in exile, with the aim of achieving “cultural homogeneity” and transferring culture of the “dominant ethnic category”. Goldstein-Kyaga also refers to the “role of education in cultural reproduction i.e. the transmission of knowledge and values from one generation to another”, which also plays an “important role in forming ethnic identity and maintaining ethnic boundaries” (Goldstein-Kyaga 1993:24).

Differences between new arrivals and refugee children born in India are also said to be resolved by an institutionalized life within Tibetan residential schools. It has been observed that the new arrivals (from Tibet) are “assimilated into the proto-national Tibetan identity at school” (Liang 1999) when they come to India. Since there is “a very conscious attempt at creating and building a Tibetan identity in the curriculum”, most of them, it seems, “start speaking the Lhasa dialect within a year or so of their arrival and start observing all the traditions and customs in the same manner as the Tibetans born in India do” (Liang 1999:18). Thus, the role of Tibetan schools in the construction of meanings of being Tibetan needs to be recognized.

Interviews with respondents also suggest that the Tibetan schools provide a certain degree of commonality of life experiences to all students within its fold. This has been discussed in the fourth chapter where the role of the residential Tibetan schools in India in constructing identities of the Tibetan children through the school culture is explored in detail. To children in these schools, it is through observance of ‘rituals’ (like morning assembly etc) and ‘ceremonies’ in the school that a picture of Tibet as a pure, unchanged, sacred, paradise-like *Shangri-la* emerges and takes shape in their imagination, along with personal experiences if they were born in Tibet. For those who were born and brought up in India, stories told by their elders based on their memories and imagination of Tibet in the pre-1959 period, also contributes towards this idea.
Accounts of respondents as well as school-visits to the Upper TCV School, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh and Samyeling School, Delhi show that the physical environment of Tibetan schools, are also enthused with religious symbols and meanings. Usually the schools have a Tibetan Buddhist temple on campus and there are brightly colored Buddhist prayer flags fluttering from school rooftops. The singing and chanting of Tibetan Buddhist prayers dedicated to Buddhist gods and prayer ceremonies in temples on campus attended by students, teachers, house-parents etc. strengthens their identity as Tibetan Buddhists (regarded as one of the “most important component of their identity as Tibetan”, as mentioned before). To the children who live with their parents as well as the ones who live in the residential schools, a mantra that is well-known is ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’, an invocation of the Boddhisatva Avalokiteshwara. The physical environment alongwith structured textbooks on history and culture, with a strong emphasis on spirituality, combine to communicate to children the importance of religion in life. The teachings on Tibetan Buddhism also lay emphasis upon universal values. This is reflected in the mission for TCV schools, “Others Before Self”. It is also pointed out, as mentioned in the forth chapter, that the aim of Tibetan Children’s Village (TCV) schools is to teach their children the “virtues of honesty, compassion and sacrifice as taught by Lord Buddha” (Education Code for TCV Schools 1999:1).

The observance of ‘ceremonies’ in schools, for instance, the commemoration of March 10th Tibetan Uprising Day, also assumes special importance as they are important mechanisms for reaffirming the refugee status and of reminding Tibetan students of their responsibility, as ‘future seeds of Tibet’. It is through the observance of such ceremonies that the idea of ‘return’ is propagated which serves to solidify ethnic consciousness and build a pan-Tibetan national identity amongst the children.

The singing of the Tibetan national anthem as well as the Indian national anthem every morning serves to instill values and attitudes in the children of respecting their own national identity and that of the host country. The observance of holidays on Independence Day and Gandhi Jayanti etc are important as they help develop feelings of respect and gratitude towards the host country, India and its national leaders. They also give the message of the importance of a non-violent campaign, as also espoused by the Dalai Lama, to achieve victory in the goal of ‘return to Tibet’.
Interviews with officials at CTA also throw light on the fact that the above ‘rituals’ and ‘ceremonies’, are important in the school as they seem to combine to create a school culture which is distinctly ‘Tibetan’ in nature and which helps to “form identities of the children with a strong sense of universal values, who can contribute to the world at large” (TO2, DOE, CTA, H.P, 2006).

As an official at CTA, Dharamsala observed, “To retain a sense of Tibetanness, we have been taking steps to help preserve our identity. One part of it is the physical manifestation in the school culture with things like the morning assembly and singing of national anthem etc. The core, however, of the culture are values of honesty, trustworthiness which will enable the children to become good human beings. Our culture and our curriculum are geared towards that” (TO2, DOE, CTA, H.P, 2006).

Students are taught to regard themselves as the “proud inheritors of future Tibet” and as the “heirs of a unique cultural and religious heritage in exile”. A strong sense of national identity is therefore created amongst the younger generations of Tibetan youth in exile that has often been referred to as a “militant type of nationalism” (Nowak 1978; Anand 2000; Iyer, 2005).

According to respondents, all of the above, in varying degrees, created certain values and attitudes, which has contributed to their sense of identity. A respondent observed that he is “strongly aware” of “his identity as Tibetan” as they “were taught in school that we are Tibetan” (Tamdin, T.S, 2006). A respondent, born in Tibet, who has studied in a Tibetan residential school, said that in Tibet he “never knew that Tibet has its own national anthem, flag and emblem”. He came to know of this only in India, which, he feels, is very important, “for all Tibetans” (L.T, T.S, 2006).

**Non-Tibetan schools and Mixed Identity:** the study throws light on the fact that the Tibetans students who attend non-Tibetan, Indian public schools or Christian missionary schools in the country have a school culture that is entirely different from that of Tibetan schools. These students do not have the specific ‘Tibetan’ culture, language and identity fostered and taught to them in their schools.

The idea of a ‘homeland’ also seemed to have different meanings to different groups of Tibetan students depending upon their lived experiences. To respondents, who have been brought up in Tibetan residential schools like TCV or THF schools with foster
parents to take care of them and who have spent a major portion of their lives with them (after crossing over into India from Tibet at a very young age), home means the Tibetan residential school ‘homes’. To those, who have been born and brought up by their parents in Tibetan settlements and schools in India, ‘home’ is the former. To Tibetan youth, who have been brought up by their parents or have stayed in non-Tibetan school hostels in Christian missionary convent schools and Indian Public schools, the idea of ‘home’ seems to differ.

Thirteen respondents in the study, from such schools, said that their experience in these schools were largely “multicultural” in nature, as these schools do not teach and foster ‘Tibetan’ culture, language and identity. These students had acquired language skills and higher levels of acculturation with the host society, its culture and ways of life. Chashar, for instance, recalls her moments of “utter shame and envy” when watching other Tibetan classmates “play the flute dance and sing so effortlessly to Tibetan music” and also when “keeping mum the whole time while others chanted their prayers from memory” due to having limited Tibetan language skills. She said that she feels “robbed” of the above (Chashar 2005:15).

These respondents spoke about the “difference in outlook and identities” that they have as compared to Tibetans from Tibetan school backgrounds. They criticized the latter for “thinking of themselves as different and setting themselves apart”. A respondent, for instance, said that he is “metropolitan-partly Tibetan, partly modern”, while students from Tibetan schools are “communal, choosy” and “socialize only with Tibetans”. He admitted that though the latter are “rich; as far as Tibetan language, culture and identity is concerned”, they “do not have a good education based on reasoning”, like students from non-Tibetan schools. In TCV schools, he said, “they are taught that China is bad-this is bad, no?” “We were taught computers, music. TCV students learn only Tibetan songs, freedom songs. I listen to all kinds of songs…it’s a whole mindset, the education they have is completely different”. “TCV guys are not taught to respect other people, they are not taught about the outside world, socializing with other people, sharing thoughts”, he added. “What is not good is looking down upon other people, being introvert and staying

---

1 This does not include 2 students who had studied in Tibetan schools up til 10\textsuperscript{th} grade but had shifted to non-Tibetan schools for their Plus-Two.
inside a box. The only dream they have is going to the US and becoming hip-hop. However, not all of them are like that”, he admitted (Dakpa, N.T.S, 2006). Another respondent, as mentioned in the 4th chapter, felt that due to their lack of knowledge of Tibetan language, culture, religion, students from Tibetan schools treated them with “soft discrimination” (Thupten, N.T.S, 2006).

However, despite the above differences that they have with students from Tibetan schools, there were also certain common symbols of Tibetanness that they have acquired and are comfortable with, alongwith the first group of respondents. These was a common feeling of attachment or affinity for Tibet; feelings of importance of conservation of Tibetan culture, religion and a sense of Tibetan nationalism; celebrating Tibetan festivals; allegiance to the leadership of the Dalai Lama; upholding ‘universal values’, like compassion for all sentient beings etc. Their parents, peer-group and community­members and others appeared to foster these elements of Tibetan identity amongst them.

As a respondent from a non-Tibetan school observed, “The “core element” of Tibetanness that every Tibetan should have, is the “belief that Tibetans are like every other human being and should have basic good qualities of any human being” (Phungkhang, N.T.S, 2006). Another respondent said, “Being Tibetan is not about going to Tibetan background schools” but a “way of life…if you follow principles of honour, dignity, integrity, compassion- it makes you a Tibetan” (Yeshi, N.T.S, 2006).

These respondents referred to celebrating Tibetan festivals with their families or in boarding schools with Tibetan friends and wanting to ‘contribute’ towards the service of the Tibetan community by “excelling in their career” (Dolkar; Phungkhang, N.T.S, 2006).

As Chashar observes, “schooling has given her little knowledge about matters or events of her own culture, language, religion” but has managed to instill in herself and other such Tibetan classmates, “something far deeper and an understanding of her roots and about her desire to hold onto it”. “Little things mattered to us at that time. For instance, wearing our ‘tangha’ all the time was something we considered more than just a passing fad; putting up a framed picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the topmost shelf of our cupboards was something that no one forced us or taught us to do; celebrating Losar by collecting our own pocket money was not just fun, celebrations and
eating good food, it also meant bonding with your fellow Tibetans and restating your 'Tibetanness'. Its amazing how it is only through the many years at a non-Tibetan school, that I clearly understood how we Tibetans, as refugee community, have managed to hold on so steadfastly to our identity, to our 'Tibetanness', after all these years" (Chashar, 2005:15).

There are, however, differences amongst students from non-Tibetan schools in certain north-eastern parts of the country and those from other parts of the country. As mentioned in the fourth chapter, some of the schools in the north-east regions of India provide the option of Tibetan as second language. This is due to the presence of a large of Tibetans in this region. Respondents from this region (nine students) also seemed to have either participated in a protest march or, at least, witnessed it as these processions are common in north-east and other areas populated by the Tibetan community.

Two students from non-Tibetan schools who lived in boarding schools throughout their school lives in south India (Thupten and Bhutia C, N.T.S, 2006) and two students who stayed with their parents in Delhi and Nainital in areas with limited number of Tibetan families (Phungkhang and Dolkar, N.T.S, 2006), on the other hand, said that they have not had the opportunity to even witness such processions.

Thus, Tibetan schools emerge as an important site for the inculcation of values and attitudes amongst Tibetan children, which can be said to contribute to their sense of a 'Tibetan identity'. Those from non-Tibetan schools also have some of these common values and attitudes of Tibetanness, but some differences also exist, as shown above.

Despite these differences, however, what also needs to be recognized, are the common elements of Tibetanness existing amongst respondents from diverse educational backgrounds, as mentioned before in the chapter.

**B) Tibetan Youth Hostel:** The Tibetan Youth Hostel was set up in the late 1990's in Delhi, a place with the largest concentration of Tibetan students alongwith Chandigarh and Bangalore. The hostel has around 120 students residing in it. These students come from different parts of the country (like Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, West Bengal, Orissa, Karnataka etc). They are pursuing graduate and post-graduate level degrees in Delhi University alongwith professional courses from private or government
The hostel was set up to protect Tibetan youth identity in the city from erosion. The project proposal for the establishment of the hostel states “In order to preserve the Tibetan identity, the Tibetan children are diligently taught Tibetan language, religion, history and culture as part of their school curriculum. However in Indian colleges, Tibetan related education is not available. Hence during their 3 to 7 years in college, the Tibetan students are totally out of touch with Tibetan related studies. This puts a stop (to the former) and many forget what they had diligently learnt in school. Since preservation and promotion of Tibetan culture amongst the new generation of Tibetans is crucial for the survival of the Tibetan community as a whole, we need to address this problem” (Project proposal: Number A.37, DOE; CTA, undated).

The project proposal envisages the provision of “Tibetan related education” in the hostel, with classes in Tibetan language and history; organizing of Tibetan dance and music competition and discussions on latest political developments on Tibetan issues etc. It was believed that these activities would help Tibetan students “keep in touch with their language, religion, culture and Tibetan way of life while receiving a modern education in the colleges” (Project proposal: Number A.37, DOE, CTA, undated). The hostel was, therefore, constructed to enable Tibetan youth to stay together and to speak in their language, celebrate festivals/occasions together and to maintain a Tibetan identity.

The physical layout, architecture, character and ambience of the building of the Tibetan Youth Hostel in Delhi seek to integrate aspects of Tibetan culture and religion. The building is brightly painted in traditional colors of red, yellow, blue and green; a pole in the lawn has prayer-flags attached to it fluttering in the breeze; concrete urns are used for burning Tibetan incense during festivities like Losar, with ceremonial Tibetan scarves called Khartak or Khadar tied around them; framed photographs of The Dalai Lama can be seen in the mess-hall alongwith wooden boards with his quotations etc. There is a prayer-room inside the building where every Wednesday, prayers are held by the students union of the hostel “for the health and well being of the Dalai Lama”. The students union also organizes other religious activities like “releasing into the water live fish caught in fishermen’s net, with the prayer that these acts of compassion will enhance the health and
well-being of His Holiness” (Dolkar, N.T.S, 2006). Most of the residents have small
altars in their rooms with pictures of the Dalai Lama and a row of water-bowls placed as
an offering. There is a library that stocks books on Tibet issues. Film screenings are held
on Tibetan issues and trips to theatres outside, are also organized. Respondents referred
to the presence of the Director of the hostel who encourages them to participate in such
activities. Activists, like Tenzin Tsundue also visit the hostel encouraging them to ‘do
something for their country’.

Activities are organized within its environs, which inform the youth about
political events taking place in Tibet and in exile. Posters of movies (on Tibet related-
issues); of upcoming workshops by placement agencies, organizations working for the
cause of Tibet etc are also displayed. Circulars issued by the Regional Tibetan Youth
Congress (RTYC) about upcoming socio-cultural and political events are also displayed,
encouraging students to participate in them. On occasions such as March 10th (Tibetan
Uprising Day), buses organized by the RTYC take students for protest demonstrations at
Jantar-Mantar etc and bring them back. RTYC also encourages the students to volunteer
and participate in cultural programmes held in Tibetan settlements, for collection of funds
to aid the organization’s activities. All the respondents interviewed in the hostel said that
they had participated in such programmes and demonstrations as they saw it as “doing
their bit” for the cause of Tibet’s freedom. Residents said that students participate in
demonstrations, “because the bus comes and others go” and the feeling that “I should also
go, comes” A respondent admitted being “forced to go” on these occasions, “even if she
doesn’t want to, as everybody else is going” and it would “seem odd” if she doesn’t
(Bhutia D, N.T.S, 2006). Respondents also referred to a “common feeling of unity” that
exists, when they participate together.

The hostel also has an editorial board that brings out a monthly magazine called
‘The Month’. This journal has articles and poems written by Tibetan students and ex-
students and is an important forum that enables the students to voice their opinions on
issues of importance and concern to them. There is also information on Tibet, for
instance, ‘Tibet has a recorded history of 2000 years as an independent nation’ (The
Month, 2006: 4). The pride in being Tibetan and of belonging to a Tibetan nation in exile
(borne out of and strongly influenced by the leadership of The Dalai Lama and by the re-
creation of traditional institutions in exile) is also evident. Articles and poems, speak about the angst of being a refugee while at the same time expressing a sense of pride in having a refugee identity (see box below).

*I was born in Tibet*
*I was born in Tibet.
But I don't feel I was.
I have been deprived of my union with my country
But, I still call myself a Tibetan.
For I am a citizen of The Dalai Lama." (C.D, 2006:4)

Other articles and poems (for instance, poems titled, *Mysterious Gal* by Dikyi Wangmu and *What is love*? by Tsedor) also reveal that closely tied to this identity of Tibetanness, are also parts of their identity that are similar to youth all over the world.

The hostel magazine is yet another aspect of life in the hostel and sheds light on how different notions of Tibetan-ness are being defined, given meanings to, negotiated and lived out in everyday lives of the students of the hostel.

Respondents said that they were staying in the hostel due to feelings of “warmth”, “security”, “we-feeling” due to only Tibetans staying there and “similarity of ideologies of residents”. They said that they felt “comfortable staying with their own people” in Delhi. Living together in a group was preferred as most of the residents come from sheltered lives in isolated Tibetan settlements or Tibetan residential schools with interaction largely only with the Tibetan community and find it “difficult to adjust with others” in the city (Dechen, T.S, 2006). Other reasons given for staying in the hostel were: ‘reasonable fees’ (many of them were receiving scholarships from the Tibetan Government in Exile and/or their former TCV and THF schools), ‘distance from college’ (Delhi Metro enables easier commuting to DU colleges), availability of ‘Tibetan cooked food’ (as spicy Indian food is difficult for them to digest), ‘safety for girls’, ‘peaceful environment’ etc.

All the interviewed residents (twenty-one) said that living in the Tibetan Youth Hostel (as compared to staying outside) “increases awareness” and “strengthens Tibetan identity”. Respondents observed that, “Tibetanness is there only if you are in a like group” and that Tibetan identity is “better preserved” in the youth hostel as the “community stays together”. Respondents said that a ‘we-feeling’ and a “sense of
belonging to the same community” is a natural result of staying together and so is “preservation of language”, with all the students and staff conversing in Tibetan with each other. Respondents said that life within the building also seems to preserve their essential identity as Tibetan as they are informed and engaged in RTYC organized activities, seminars and workshops ‘for Tibet’ and ‘for His Holiness The Dalai Lama’. Respondents said that, “if we stay outside, we can loose our identity”. As an example, a respondent observed that he had stayed out for a year and during this time he had “no information about issues regarding Tibet—what was happening there and activities, festivals etc being celebrated” (Tamdin, T.S 2006). A respondent also referred to workshops in Pondicherry and Dharamsala that she could attend while in the hostel, getting “to meet people from the Government in Exile” and also “receive information about various departments” (Dechen, T.S, 2006).

Another resident observed that the identity of the students as Tibetan is “stronger in the hostel” because of “the way Losar celebrations etc are held in the hostel, with Tibetan flags being put up in the building, which is not possible outside”. Respondents added that students living outside might “forget to do their prayers” but in the hostel there are Lamas who come, with whom they have prayer sessions (apart from the Wednesday prayers). They also referred to buses being available to take them to the venue for protest marches, something not available for those staying outside.

There were only a limited number of students (seven) from non-Tibetan schools staying in the hostel. These respondents referred to the desire of their parents/guardians for them to stay there. They said that their parents wanted them to stay “within the Tibetan community” and to “improve their skills and knowledge of Tibetan language, culture and identity” and “not get spoilt in the city”. For these respondents who have studied in convents and “have no idea about Tibetan culture”, staying in the hostel has been a learning experience of getting to “know their language and roots”. Five of these respondents said that they have improved Tibetan speaking skills and knowledge about their culture, religion (other two had attended Tibetan schools for some time and were familiar with Tibetan language etc). These respondents referred to the “emergence” of their feelings for Tibet and their “becoming more Tibetan” while staying in the hostel. One such respondent says that her “idea of Tibet and being Tibetan”, unlike all the other
Tibetan youth from Tibetan schools, has “emerged and strengthened” only with her stay in the Hostel. In the hostel, she had been nominated to the Student Council and had participated in many peace marches organized by the RTYC. As she puts it, “Tibet was never in my dictionary earlier. Yahan aane par (“It was only after coming here…”), I found out that I am more Tibetan than maybe students from Tibetan schools”, she adds (Dolkar, N.T.S, 2006).

Outside the Hostel: nine respondents in the study were living outside the Tibetan Youth Hostel: in college hostels, as paying guest, in rented flats etc. All of them, except one, were from non-Tibetan schools. Reasons given by them for staying outside were: ‘convenience’ (location near college), ‘affordability’ (parents could afford higher rents), ‘desire to live with or amongst non-Tibetans’.

These respondents from non-Tibetan school backgrounds said that they always had friends from “mixed groups” from school onwards. They, therefore, preferred to stay out in rented accommodation with Indian friends and friends from other nationalities as they felt “more comfortable in staying in mixed groups” as compared to only Tibetan groups. A respondent, observed, “If I stay in the Tibetan Youth Hostel, I will miss out on something in life. I can adjust there but will not prefer to, as I can now choose to stay elsewhere and my brother can also financially provide for me. I need to stay outside and mingle with Indian friends. I like to mingle with everybody” (Bhutia C, N.T.S, 2006). Respondents said that they preferred to stay outside the hostel due to “differences in attitudes and ideologies” with students from Tibetan schools. They said that while they were more open to mingling and interacting with the Indian community (due to the nature of their schooling and socialization at home), they found it “difficult to get along with students from Tibetan schools” who are “more shy, introverted and prefer to stay largely with Tibetan friends”.

The only respondent from a Tibetan school staying in the Miranda college hostel in the study said that she was staying here so as to “improve her English language skills” and “to study harder” as she felt residents of the hostel tend to “get spoilt easily”. She said “I chose to stay in the college hostel, so that I will be forced to speak in English all the time with non-Tibetan classmates and will improve my English (something that could not happen in her Tibetan school as “everyone would speak in Tibetan all the time” and
“all the subjects in school were taught with explanations in Tibetan”). Though she has friends in the hostel, she said that she is staying here, to study hard and not be influenced by the “flamboyant and materialistic” attitudes of the youth who stay in the TYH, “getting involved into relationships”. She believes that the Tibetans staying together there, are more likely to lag behind academically, and “if you are in that environment, even you will be influenced, or separated from the rest, if you do well”. The college hostel was also “more economical” and her scholarship from THF School was enough for her expenses (N.D, T.S, 2006).

All the respondents staying outside felt that their place of residence does not necessarily mean that they have a “weaker Tibetan identity”. They observed that they may be “equally, if not more, patriotic and nationalistic” than those staying inside the hostel and can “contribute to Tibet's cause” in their own ways. None of these respondents had participated in RTYC processions in Delhi (reasons mentioned earlier in the chapter). They said that their lack of participation did not denote weakness of their identity. The respondent from the Tibetan school, however, observed, “I am here representing my culture”. She added that she tries to “inform and discuss the situation of Tibet with Indian and other friends in the college” and also contributes by “writing poems” etc. (N.D, T.S, 2006).

C) Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC): The Tibetan Youth Congress was to set up to create a “sense of cultural solidarity and “group identification” by inducting the youth in community welfare and social service programmes (Saklani, 1984:330). It is regarded as the “most active NGO of Tibetans worldwide” having more than 30,000 members. Its mission is to fight for the “complete independence for the whole of Tibet” (www.tibetanyouthcongress.com).

Over the years the TYC has been seen as displaying a more “militant nationalism” and coming into conflict with the ideologies of forbearance of the Dalai Lama who has been advocating “real autonomy” of Tibet as against the TYC’s demand for “complete independence” of Tibet. The “growing frustration and restlessness” of the youth “dissatisfied with the current Tibetan campaign” have also been highlighted by scholars (Sither 2003:21) (Iyer 2005:77).
The importance of the TYC needs to be realized in terms of its influence over the youth of the community. According to Topden Tsering, President of San Fransisco Bay area, RTYC, “Tibetan Youth Congress is the must-read flyer that’s thrust in one’s hand as soon as he reaches certain maturity” and “one more souvenir to add to the images Tibetan on the mantelpiece of his exile identity”. He regards TYC as “less an organization than a way of life: the Identity Card, the occasional storming of the Chinese embassy gates...etc”(Tsering 2004 cited in www.timesoftibet.com).

As stated before, while all the respondents staying in the Tibetan Youth Hostel stated that they participated in its protest marches, those staying outside did not. Most of the respondents said that they support the ends (Tibet’s freedom) that the organization stands for. They, however, do not support the “violent means” advocated by the organization (such as storming of the Chinese embassy etc, suffering lathi-charge and arrest). As stated earlier, only three respondents advocated TYC’s militant approach. Sixteen respondents supported the Dalai Lama’s approach while eleven supported both him and TYC as they felt that both were fighting for the same ‘end’ i.e. Tibet’s freedom.

The influence of this youth organization on the identity of the youth, therefore, is important as though respondents largely did not agree with its methods, they participated in protest drives organized by it, identifying with the ‘cause’ for which it is fighting for.

**D) Tibetan Parents and Community:** The role of the Tibetan parents and the refugee and host community in socialization of children as Tibetans in exile also needs mention. As mentioned in the forth chapter, respondents who were brought up in Tibetan settlements or in places where there are substantial number of Tibetan families (like Herbertpur settlement, Dehradun, Bylakuppe and Mundgod in Karnataka etc) referred to the involvement of the entire community in celebrating Tibetan festivals like Losar, going for Tibetan processions etc. Influence of the Tibetan community on the lives of students can, therefore be felt, particularly at times of collective congregations. Respondents, however, who grew up far away from such Tibetan settlements/areas in residential non-Tibetan school hostels or with their parents in non-Tibetan localities did not have much interaction with the Tibetan community and only limited influence of the latter on their lives.
The role of parents emerges as particularly important in case of students from non-Tibetan schools, with the fifteen respondents from such schools referring to their parents’ efforts to teach them aspects of Tibetan language, culture and religion that was not taught in their schools to them. A respondent said that his parents sent him to the ‘Tibet House’ in Delhi to learn Tibetan language for 6-7 weeks after his 12th exams and told him “about books on Tibet that he should read” along with teaching him customs on Losar so that he “doesn’t forget” (Phungkhang, N.T.S, 2006). Another respondent said that his parents have been “teaching him to do prayers in the morning” (Thupten, N.T.S, 2006). One respondent observed that right from his childhood, despite going to a “western school”, his father has “passed knowledge of importance of religious rituals and ideas onto him”. He remembers being “bulldozed to read Sanskrit incantations and Tibetan scriptures called ‘kathang’, making visits to monasteries with his father to make butter-lamp offerings and praying at the family altar every day”. He still prays for one hour every night because of the “habit” inculcated by his father (Yeshi, N.T.S, 2006).

At the same time, respondents from non-Tibetan schools staying at the Tibetan Youth Hostel, as mentioned earlier, also said that they were sent by their parents/guardian to stay in the hostel, so that they could get the “opportunity to become well acquainted with Tibetan identity and culture” (Dolkar, N.T.S, 2006).

Families where parents sent most of their children to non-Tibetan schools but sent at least one child to a Tibetan school can also be noted. At the same time, respondents also referred to parents who preferred them going to a non-Tibetan, “good quality” school and did not “force them to learn Tibetan language or participate in processions” etc. A respondent who had studied in an Indian Public school said that, till the VIIth grade, she along with her brother had “no idea about her culture and religion” as her parents never used to “force things on them”. After this, when she “asked her parents”, they started “paying more attention” (Chime, N.T.S, 2006).

Accounts of respondents’ sheds light on the influence of the host community and its ways of life on Tibetan youth identity. As mentioned before, respondents from non-Tibetan schools observed that, as compared with those from Tibetan schools, they had largely friendly relations with the Indian community as they had “grown up” with them. They said that unlike students from Tibetan schools who “don’t socialize and look down
The image content is not legible due to the quality of the scan. It appears to be a page from a document with text, but the text is not clearly visible.
but now has to “manage half the day with the Indian community” (in college) and therefore has difficulty “in ways of communication”. She had problems speaking in Hindi and was also not very fluent in English, “sometimes getting stuck in the middle of a sentence”. She accepted that “in other ways: music, eating at the college canteen” etc, “we youngsters have the same interests” (Dechen, T.S, 2006).

Tibetan youth identities, therefore, seem to have some common elements, along with certain diversities also, depending upon experiences of refugeeism as well as individual life experiences.

**Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Tibetan Youth**

This section looks at the educational and occupational aspirations of Tibetan youth in Delhi. The table (9.1) given below provides a broad picture of a range of educational and occupational aspirations of Tibetan youth respondents pursuing graduation from Delhi University. It also throws light on similarities as well as differences amongst aspirations of students from Tibetan and non-Tibetan schools. Multiple choices/aspirations of individual respondents have been included.
Table: 9.1 Educational and Occupational Aspirations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspirations</th>
<th>Respondents from Tibetan Schools</th>
<th>Respondents from Non-Tibetan Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Higher education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Professional Courses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Ed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass.Comm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel industry</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call Centre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Hostess</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinematography</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion Photography</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion Design</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma in Tourism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Jobs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan Govt. in Exile</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in Tibetan Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Private/Govt.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. Going Abroad</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Higher education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Jobs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nine respondents from Tibetan schools said that apart from individual interest, one of the reasons for their wanting to pursue higher education, was the scholarships provided by the exile government, TCV, THF and other school organizations which “make things easier” for them. These respondents were also not very keen on going aboard after graduation as they observed that many youth from Tibetan schools go aboard, immediately after school and end up doing ‘menial jobs’ like dishwashing, babysitting, working as parcel delivery /courier boys, as ‘loaders’ etc. They observed that
only those who go aboard with professional degrees like nursing, hotel management etc manage to find “respectable jobs aboard” (Monlam, T.S, 2006).

Eight students from Tibetan schools aspired to work for the Tibetan Government in Exile, in its various departments. Six students also aspired to work as teachers in the Tibetan schools. Because there is a paucity of vacancies in the exile government, they had other alternative choices also, like working in Call Centres/MNCs etc. Amongst the reasons given for wanting to work in departments of the Tibetan Exile Government were to ‘be of help to the Exile Government’ and ‘to contribute to Tibet’s cause’, ‘close bonds with their schools’ and ‘desire to repay debts of gratitude’ towards their schools, ‘decent salary, housing and food allowances’ provided. Qualifications required for these jobs, were also said to be ‘not very high’ (aspirants have to be graduates and have to pass an entrance exam on Tibetan language and history) and this was an added factor. Other factors were the desire of the parents of respondents for them to work in the Tibetan community. Respondents also sought these jobs as they felt that they had “grown up “within the Tibetan community in Tibetan schools” and would face problems “adjusting outside” due to language and other problems (Dechen, T.S, 2006).

In contrast, students from non-Tibetan schools wanted to work in the Indian Government and private organizations, as most of them (11) were eligible to work in the former (parents being naturalized citizens of India), they also felt “comfortable” with Indians and were fluent in local Indian language(s), particularly Hindi alongwith English. Their schooling, they said had “prepared” them with skills and qualifications for life in India and aboard. They however, also aspired to “contribute” to Tibet’s cause by “being of some help” to the Exile Government and the Tibetan community.

Six respondents who came to India from Tibet to study referred to “dilemmas” about going back to Tibet or staying in India, after graduation. While their families in Tibet wanted them to return, these students said that they “felt torn” between the desire to return or to stay in India to pursue higher education and/or professional courses to get jobs here. There was also the fear that their lives would be in “danger” in Tibet and “if caught” they might be “put behind bars by the Chinese Government”. A respondent also referred to lack of suitable opportunities in TAR as compared to India. She said that she wants to work as an English teacher in Tibet but getting a teaching (government) job in
Tibet is “impossible” for students like her as they are regarded as “separatists” and “terrorists from India”. She observed that the “Chinese government prefers to take Chinese teachers with lesser qualifications” or “even Tibetans who have studied there”, as against taking “better-qualified Tibetans from India”, as they don’t want to “nurture roots from the splittist camp” (N.D, T.S, 2006). This fact is also highlighted by a TCHRD report that observes, “Sadly, if these students decide to go back to their homeland after completing their education, they will face difficulties overcoming prejudices from Chinese employers or institutions and become virtual pariah in their own homeland” (TCHRD report 2004:88).

Educational and occupational aspirations of refugee Tibetan youth in India, therefore, emerge as having their roots in life experiences in exile and hopes for the future. Students from Tibetan schools desire to stay within the folds of the Tibetan refugee community while those from non-Tibetan schools seek broader vistas in the host country as well as aboard. Youth from Tibet struggle with the choice of staying in India or going back. This whole range of diversity of aspirations of Tibetan youth in exile, therefore, needs to be recognized. The next section looks at the factors that seem to influence realization of these aspirations, particularly in terms of outcomes of education and available opportunities in exile.

**Outcomes of Education and Opportunities in India**

The major occupations of Tibetans in India have been agriculture, carpet-weaving/handicrafts, sweater-selling and other trades like running restaurants, working in the Tibetan Government in Exile and the army, teaching in Tibetan schools and secretarial work, religious education or monkhood (Norbu 1994:14). Opportunities for pursuing higher education in India with scholarships being provided (details in chapter three) exist Along with Tibetan networks of relatives, friends aboard who are willing to help students to pursue higher education or to get jobs there. Apart from these traditional career options and aspirations, changes can be noted (see Table 9.1). Working in call centers, doing professional courses like MBA, computers, journalism, public relations, airline and hotel industry etc seem to have emerged as new areas where Tibetan youth wish to venture forth, as has emerged in the study.
Constraints in higher education and jobs: The unemployment rate is regarded as “real and absolute” in the Tibetan community, with 70% of the 700 graduates passing out of Indian colleges every year remaining unemployed while the rest “manage to go aboard, manage their family businesses, or get jobs in big, Indian cities” (Tsering 2004:23). Tibetan students graduating from Tibetan schools, it seems, have been unable to utilize opportunities for economic mobility present in India. The Tibetan education system is said to be “coming to a deadlock” by schooling young people whose “professional prospects are very dubious” (Labiesse 1995:12). Respondents also admitted that the Tibetan education system does not equip children in learning and fluent use of English language and the language of the host country (i.e. Hindi) that affects their job opportunities.

The Tibetan leadership in exile is therefore criticized for devising an educational system that places greater emphasis on maintaining the Tibetan culture in exile than preparing Tibetan children for an “ever-changing” world economy (Yonten 1999:26). The education system is criticized for “bringing out only teachers, clerks and nurses” and a broadening or redesigning of the school curriculum is called for, to tackle deficiencies with a planned strategy for creation of jobs and utilization of human resources. More “vocational institutions”, “scholarships on acquiring technical skills” and “support to those starting individual initiatives” have also been called for (Tsering and Sinclair 1999:18).

Young Tibetans from Tibetan schools have been also advised to “abandon their herd mentality” (Tsering 2004:23) and seek opportunities in Indian towns and cities with the Government in Exile building hostels for them at these places providing “mental security” and “social interaction”. The youth have also been encouraged to learn “differential skills that will be required in Tibet in future and will also help them to get jobs in India” (Tsering 2004:23).

Certain rules and procedures of the host country, which require Tibetans to forego their refugee status and acquire Indian citizenship for admission to professional and technical colleges in the country, are also said to discourage students and limit their educational opportunities (Chimni 2000:405). With lack of adequate reserved seats in professional colleges in India, it seems, Tibetan students “longing for greater
opportunities” have to “become an Indian citizen against their will” (Tsering cited by Labiesse 1995:12). The paradox here is that the very educational system set up to “safeguard” Tibetan culture seems to lead its students towards “assimilation” (Labiesse 1995:12).

Proliferation of Tibetan institutes and lack of ‘secular’ Tibetan colleges is also said to highlight the problem. A fact that emerges is that undue importance on preservation of Tibetan culture has seemingly led to a lopsided approach towards education. There are many Tibetan institutes like, Astro-Medical Institute, Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, Norbulingka Institute, College of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarah in Dharamsala and Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies, Varanasi etc, (details in annexure: 8.1), that have been established to promote the cultural heritage of Tibet in exile. However, there are no Tibetan colleges (except one said to be ‘under construction in Bangalore’ by Tibetan officials) promoting modern, secular education and/or vocational training (Labiesse 1995:12). An additional problem is that most of the Tibetan culture and Buddhist studies graduates also seem to be unemployed (Tsering and Sinclair 1999:18). The decline in students pursuing monastic education is attributed to lack of interest and motivation as well as lack of employment opportunities for those pursuing such education outside the Tibetan community (TT5, T.S, H.P, 2006). Few Tibetan schools provide vocational training in India (details in annexure: 9.1) and students unable to carry on their studies, are forced to drop-out and opt for petty business or minor jobs (Tsering and Sinclair 1999:18).

Educational initiatives of the Tibetan Government in Exile, therefore, seem to have resulted in certain dilemmas. These dilemmas arise in trying to balance concerns related to preservation of culture, language and ethnic identity (or ‘ligatures’) and provision of degrees and skills that help in getting jobs to promote life chances (‘options’) in exile. These dilemmas have been explored in detail in the next chapter, based within the study’s incorporated framework. The chapter also summarizes the entire study.