



Sethu Das

# THE TIBETAN CONNECTION

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— Tushar Gandhi, advisory board member, Friends of Tibet

**Even as the Friends of Tibet celebrates its 20th year, a Tibetan family in Fort Kochi muses on what life is like, without a homeland**

## Friends of Tibet

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### • Dan Maria

**T**enzin Norzom gazes at the painting on the wall. “That is Tibet,” she says. The scene is of a grassy slope on which two tents are pitched and a few cattle are grazing. A swirl of hazy-white smoke bellows up from a tent, and a man and his son, clad in local attire, stand next to a stream of fading blue. The mold, at the corners of the frame, indicates that the painting is old. Norzom has never been to Tibet, but this painted valley, lulled by the calm of the people and the cattle, is that of her homeland. Her father, Tenzin Jigme, was one among the many thousands who came to India after fleeing Tibet when the Chinese invasion intensified in the 1950s. Today, Jigme runs a Tibetan restaurant in Fort Kochi along with his wife and two children, after spending

years moving from one Indian city to another.

Like most Tibetans in India, Jigme and his family live a life conscious of the frays apparent in the tapestry of their culture. Most of the Tibetans who fled their homeland years ago are no more. They lived and breathed their last in India, working in construction camps, raising families in make-shift tents along the



national highways in the north. As these families grew, taking roots, the assurance of their homecoming became prayers which only a few uttered.

The rest, the children of the exile, live in a bardo, caught between reality and a horizon. Their reality is the life they lead as refugees in the country of their birth and their horizon becomes the land promised afar. “The passing of time or generations does not diminish an injustice. The fact that Tibetans are banished from the land of their ancestors and are still disenfranchised will remain an injustice perpetrated. As long as Tibetans are denied their homeland, their yearning for their country will remain and their national identity is a symbol of their struggle,” says Tushar Gandhi, advisory board member of Friends of Tibet, an organisation which voices the Free Tibet movement.

Founded by Sethu Das, Friends of Tibet was initially purposed to cultivate awareness on the Tibetan cause. Today, in its 20th year, the organisation conducts, with vigour, candlelight vigils, Made-in-China boycott campaigns, photo exhibitions, medical camps, and poetry readings across the country.

Today, there are many organisations working for the wellbeing of the Tibetan community and the conservation of their culture. Taking after the ideal of non-violence of their spiritual leader, His Holiness the XIV

Dalai Lama, these organisations work towards freeing Tibet and voicing the rights of Tibetans. The growing number of such organisations and their non-Tibetan members stands witness to the Tibetan cause gaining recognition. “The Free Tibet Movement has become a symbol of nonviolence in practice. A battle of right is being waged against the might and we must stand in solidarity with the aspirations of the people of Tibet.



India must champion the rights of the Tibetan people to free their motherland. Free Tibet must become a universal cause and India its champion,” says Gandhi, about India’s responsibility.

June 20th and July 6th are observed as World Refugee Day and World Tibet Day respectively. Yet another year added to the exile years and for these Tibetans, these celebrations become cruel reminders of time tattering the memory of their race. Today, Jigme remembers his homeland. His daughter Norzom remembers too, but only from her father’s memories. Jigme dreads the day when Tibet will cease to exist in the memory of her people. Norzom shrugs as she moves to attend the next table.

(Friends of Tibet will be organising their 69th medical camp in their office in Chettikad Beach Road, Alappuzha from July 10th to 12th. For further details, contact 9400354354, 9061354354.)