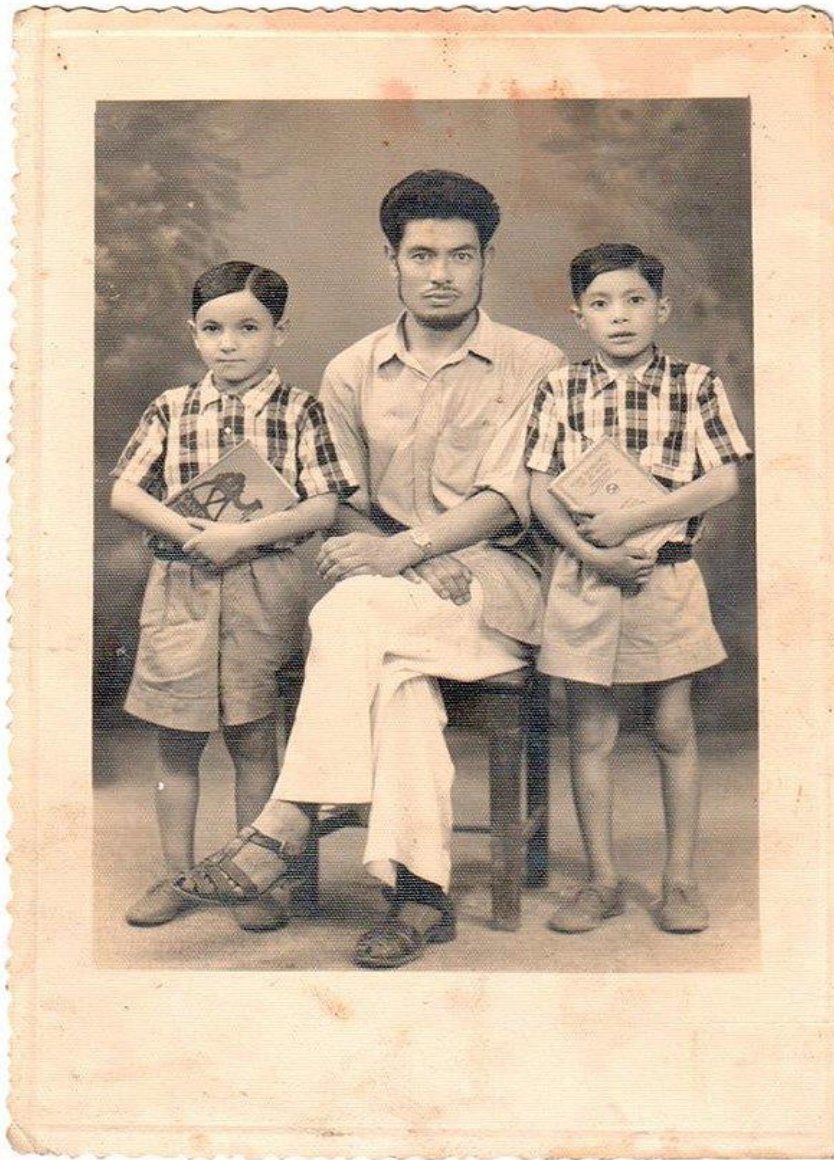


The Families That Fled Tibet With The Dalai Lama

By Soheb Ahmed Baba



The man in the photograph above is my grandfather *Faizullah Baba*. Standing left is my grand father's eldest son, my uncle, *Abdullah*, age 7, and on the right is Abdullah's cousin *Majid*.

During the **Tibetan Uprising** in 1959, fearing for his life, the **Dalai Lama** and his advisers **fled Tibet** with the help of the **CIA** and were given asylum by the Indian Government. While the world press published stories of strain in **Indo-China relationships**, very few threw light on the families that followed the Dalai Lama and fled from Tibet to India in the subsequent months. My grandfather and his family were few of the many that also fled to India to seek a better and peaceful life after the uprising. Our family, however,

weren't Buddhists but Muslim minorities living in Tibet and were often referred to as “Ka- chee” which literally means *Kashmiri* or *Kashmir*. One of the reasons that my grandfather also decided to flee was because he sensed Islam being suppressed by the Chinese Government and felt India to be more secular and comforting.

Historically, our ancestors were from Kashmir. On one hand, they were traders who would travel between Kashmir and Lhasa to exchange goods, and on the other, they preached the teachings of Islam. Many community traders married local Tibetan women forming a fusion of cultures and resulting in the gradual growth of the Tibetan-Muslim community in Tibet.

It was important for our ancestors that the young were educated in the lessons & practices it boasted and there were a few *madradas* in Lhasa but these institutes were limited to religious education. My grandfather instead wanted his kids to gain more knowledge and decided early on (before the uprising) to send the young boys all the way to Delhi, in India, to study in a school founded within *Jamia Millia Islamia*.

What fascinates me about this picture and the story, are the journeys young Abdullah and his cousin Majid, made each time they crossed over to the Indian border to study and to return during vacations. From Lhasa, they would hitch a ride with the traders, trekking through the rough terrains until the border, and then use public transport into India. Sometimes they would make a pit stop at Darjeeling, West Bengal and carry on till Delhi to attend school. They would embark on this journey back and forth each time they visited home in Lhasa.

Occasionally, my grandfather, Faizullah, would make the same journey to go and pick them up from Delhi. This photograph was taken during one of those journeys. The well ironed collared shirts and half trousers with a book in hand were perhaps important props to display at the time because quality education in Tibet was rare and only a few attained an English education.

The separations and the hard journeys must have taken a toll on both Abdullah & his parents but my dad says it was these characteristics of my grandfather that he greatly admired – His inner strength, his will power to let go of problems and his faith in the almighty. Maybe this is why my father, his siblings & cousins were encouraged to travel to far out places and pursue their dreams.

By 1962, the Indian government granted the Kachee *community* permission to settle in India and many of my relatives began a new life in Delhi, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Siliguri, Gangtok, Kashmir and Srinagar. My grandparents themselves earned a living by selling garments at one point. Abdullah, my uncle in the picture, took up teaching as a full-time profession in Kargil, Ladakh for most of his adult life. He passed away in Srinagar, Kashmir, at the age of 62.

Today, 57 years later after this photograph was taken, I, a grandson of this community is writing this testimony in Delhi, the capital of India. My sister, our cousins and I are the third generation born and brought up in this country and a city that we now proudly call home.