



**SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE AMONG THE TIBETAN MIGRANTS
IN GONDIA DISTRICT OF MAHARASHTRA**

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Introduction

The Tibetan Plateau is a huge region of south western China consistently above 4000 meters. The region, that was a thriving independent kingdom beginning in the eighth century and developing into an independent country in the twentieth century, is now under the firm control of China. Persecution of the Tibetan people and their practice of Buddhism are widely reported. Tibet closed its borders to foreigners in 1792, keeping the British of India (Tibet's south western neighbour) at bay until the British desire for a trade route with China caused them to take Tibet by force in 1903. In 1906 the British and Chinese signed a peace treaty that gave Tibet to the Chinese. Five years later, the Tibetans expelled the Chinese and declared their independence, which lasted until 1950.

In 1950, shortly after Mao Zedong's communist revolution, China invaded Tibet. Tibet pleaded for assistance from the United Nations, the British, and the newly independent Indians for assistance - to no avail. In 1959 a Tibetan uprising was squelched by the Chinese and the leader of the theocratic Tibetan government, the Dalai Lama, fled to Dharamsala, India and created a government-in-exile. China administered Tibet with a firm hand, prosecuting Tibetan Buddhists and destroying their places of worship, especially during the time of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Tibet's history

Tibet has a history dating back over 2,000 years. A good starting point in analysing the country's status is the period referred to as Tibet's "imperial age", when the entire country was first united under one ruler. There is no serious dispute over the existence of Tibet as an independent state during this period. Even China's own historical records and treaties Tibet and China concluded during that period refer to Tibet as a strong state with whom China was forced to deal on a footing of equality. International law protects the independence of states from attempts to destroy it and, therefore, the presumption is in favour of the continuation of statehood. This means that, whereas an independent state that has existed for centuries, such as Tibet, does not need to prove its continued independence when challenged, a foreign state claiming sovereign rights over it needs to prove those rights by showing at what precise moment and by what legal means they were acquired.

China's present claim to Tibet is based entirely on the influence the Mongol and Manchu emperors exercised over Tibet in the 13th and 18th centuries, respectively. To claim that Tibet became a part of China because both countries were independently subjected to varying degrees of Mongol control, as the People's Republic of China does, is absurd. This relatively brief period of foreign domination over Tibet occurred 700 years ago. Tibet broke away from the Yuan emperor before China regained its independence from the Mongols with the establishment of the native Ming Dynasty. Not until the 18th century did Tibet once again come under a degree of foreign influence. The Ming Dynasty, which ruled China from 1368 to 1644, had few ties to and no authority over Tibet. On the other hand, the Manchu's, who conquered China and established the Qing Dynasty in the 17th century, embraced Tibetan Buddhism as the Mongols had and developed close ties with the Tibetans. On the political level, some powerful Manchu emperors succeeded in exerting a degree of influence over Tibet but they did not incorporate Tibet into their empire, much less China. Manchu influence did not last for very long. It was entirely ineffective by the time the British briefly invaded Tibet in 1904.

From 1911 to 1950, Tibet successfully avoided undue foreign influence and behaved, in every respect, as a fully independent state. The 13th Dalai Lama emphasised his country's independent status externally, in formal communications to foreign rulers, and internally, by issuing a proclamation reaffirming Tibet's independence and by strengthening the country's defences. Tibet remained neutral during the Second World War, despite strong pressure from China and its allies, Britain and the USA. The Tibetan Government maintained independent

international relations with all neighbouring countries, most of whom had diplomatic representatives in Lhasa. The attitude of most foreign governments with whom Tibet maintained relations implied their recognition of Tibet's independent status. The British Government bound itself not to recognise Chinese sovereignty or any other rights over Tibet unless China signed the draft Simla Convention of 1914 with Britain and Tibet, which China never did.

Chinese invasion and occupation

The turning point in Tibet's history came in 1949, when the People's Liberation Army of the PRC first crossed into Tibet. After defeating the small Tibetan army, the Chinese Government imposed the so-called "Seventeen-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet" on the Tibetan Government in May 1951. Because it was signed under duress, the agreement was void under international law. The presence of 40,000 troops in Tibet, the threat of an immediate occupation of Lhasa and the prospect of the total obliteration of the Tibetan state left Tibetans little choice. From a legal standpoint, Tibet has to this day not lost its statehood. It is an independent state under illegal occupation.

Because China denies Tibetans inside Tibet the right to speak freely, it isn't possible to say exactly what their goals are - but their opposition to China's current rule is clear. China makes no claim to sovereign rights over Tibet as a result of its military subjugation and occupation of Tibet following the country's invasion in 1949-1950. Instead, it bases its claim to Tibet solely on its theory that Tibet has been an integral part of China for many centuries. China's claim to sovereignty over Tibet is based almost exclusively on self-serving Chinese official histories. Chinese sources portrayed most countries with whom the emperor of China had relations, not only Tibet, as vassals of the emperor.

Current Situation of Tibetan Refugees in Exile

After the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959, when the Tibetan refugees followed H.H the Dalai Lama in exile in India, Nepal and Bhutan, His Holiness major priorities' were the rehabilitation of Tibetan refugees, education of Tibetan children and preservation of Tibetan culture and identity. To realize these objectives it was necessary during those times to settle all the Tibetan refugees into cohesive homogenous society and setting up of separate schools for refugee children with their own curriculum. With these thought in mind, the Dalai Lama re-established his government in exile to meet both the immediate and long term needs of Tibetan people. The Dalai Lama approached the then Prime Minister of India Mr. Nehru for his assistance in the permanent rehabilitation of the refugees. Pt Nehru accepted and wrote

to the government of Indian states, requesting them to make land available to refugees. Mysore state (presently Karnataka) was the first to accept 3,000 Tibetan refugees and offered 1500 hectares of uninhabited jungle land on lease to Tibetan, thus beginning the first Tibetan settlement in exile in a place called Bylakuppe in 1960. Soon after, in 1962 second and third settlements were constructed in Arunachal Pradesh. Gradually settlements started in many different parts of India, mostly in south India. Initially groups of five persons were allotted two and a half hectare of land for building house and doing agriculture. Since number of refugees coming into exile was increasing and existing settlements were packed already. Agro- Industrial based settlements were created to accommodate the remaining refugees in India. In These settlements, Tibetan refugees partly relied on agriculture and partly on industrial activities. Unfortunately later on some of the settlements failed, largely due to lack of technical knowledge, poor management and limited funding. Since many of the Tibetans knew the traditional Tibetan handicrafts such as weaving carpet, apron making and incense work, the settlements based on these works were also created especially in northern India.

Government and Administration

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and some 80,000 Tibetans crossed the Himalaya to seek refuge in India, Nepal and Bhutan in 1959. For the organization of the refugee community, and more importantly to guide the Tibetan struggle for national self-rule, Tibetan government popularly known as Central Tibetan Administration has been set up in a place called Dharamsala- the seat of Tibetan government in exile and residence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India. It is located about 500 km North West of New Delhi in an Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. All The Tibetans, both inside and outside Tibet recognize the CTA as their sole and legitimate government.

Tibetan Government in exile since its modest beginning in April 1959 has evolved into completely democratic institution with its highest executive power elected directly by the people, the parliament in exile consisting of forty six members representing all sections of Tibetans in exile. The Dalai Lama the spiritual and temporal head of Tibet is probably the only ruler in the world, who has voluntarily given up political power step by step on his own initiative. On these very lines, the Tibetan judiciary known as the Supreme Justice Commission has been constituted.

The Department of Religion and Culture seeks to preserve and promote Tibet's spiritual and cultural heritage which is on the verge of extinction in its own homeland. The department gives back up support and services to 223 monasteries and 15 nunneries with

11067 monks and 1230 nuns. The Department of Home is responsible for all rehabilitation schemes for Tibetan exiles. It looks after Tibetan settlements and scattered communities in India, Nepal and Bhutan. The Department of Finance maintains the CTA's spending and generates revenue for running the administration. The main revenue comes from annual voluntary contribution of Rs. 46 per year from the Tibetans living in Indian sub-continent and US \$ 46 from Tibetan living abroad. The Department of Education administers 82 schools of these 64 are in India, 14 in Nepal and 4 in Bhutan. Out of the 80 schools administered by the department of education, 30 are directly run and funded by the Central Tibetan Administration of Tibetan schools of government of India. Department of Education looks after total of 16 schools. The remaining 38 schools are run by autonomous bodies such as Tibetan Children's Village and Tibetan Homes Foundation.

The Department of Security ensures the security of his holiness the Dalai Lama. The department also runs reception centres in Kathmandu, Delhi and Dharamsala to cater to the needs of new refugees arriving from Tibet. The Department of Health caters to the basic health needs of the Tibetan refugees, running 61 primary health care centres and 7 hospitals. It also looks after the Mentse - Khang, The institute for Tibetan Medicine and Astrology with its branches. The Department of Information and International Relations educates Tibetans and international public opinion on the political, human rights and environmental conditions in Tibet via print media, radio and internet. It supervises the work of the offices of Tibet in 13 countries.

Tibetan Settlements in Exile

Today, after more than four decades in exile, there are now total of 12,2078 (TDS*) number of Tibetan population living worldwide. Majority of them are settled in fifty two settlements located in South Asia, Out of which thirty five in India, ten in Nepal and seven in Bhutan. There are now twenty four agricultural based settlements, sixteen agro based settlements and ten handicraft units. Besides, there are Tibetan located in scattered communities in various towns and cities of India.

Socio-Economic Conditions of Tibetans in Exile

When Tibetan first came into exile, most of them were starving or wounded, sick from the low altitude and stunned by the cultural shock of coming into distant world, with the result, many died of disease, hot climate and trauma they have undergone leaving their land. In the beginning, many of them got engaged in road construction works in the hilly states of India. Gradually, they were rehabilitated in the newly created settlements in south and central

India. Tibetans were trained in cultivating local Indian crops like maize, millet, rice and mustard and soon after, agriculture became the main source of livelihood. At the same time Tibetans have started selling winter garments especially sweaters in streets of towns and cities of India. Today sweater selling business has become dominant economic activity for Tibetans in India. Although agriculture is a major primary occupation of Tibetans especially for those living in agricultural based settlements in south India.

Percentage Share of Sources of Income

Economic Activities	% Percentage share of income	% age share of workforce
Agriculture & allied activities	8.5	26.4
Artisans and crafts	4.2	5.7
Hotels and restaurant	3.3	1.9
Organized trade or business	30.7	16.2
Professional job	0.6	0.3
Salaried employment	23.0	20.1
Small enterprises	14.1	12.1
Unorganized trade or business	10.7	11.1
Casual work	4.8	6.2

According to the Tibetan Demographic Survey, as mentioned in the table above, the largest percentage share of income that is forty one percent comes from Tibetan doing trade and business which includes selling garments and doing petty business. The salaried employment, which includes services in army, government and teaching, contributes twenty three percent of the household income, whereas agricultural and allied activities account for twenty six of the total workforce contributing a mere eight percent of the total household income. Apart from the primary sources of income, the Tibetan households also rely on subsidiary sources of income, which include income from sponsorships, government and foreign remittances. Many of the economically deprived households are either being looked after by the government or are supported by the sponsors from abroad.

In 1990's many Tibetans immigrated abroad, especially to the United States, as a result

of which their families back home have started receiving money from them. According to the official statistics, an average Tibetan household earns Rs.66800 per year, which translates into Rs. 13100 per capita per annum. Presently Tibetan people's general standard of living can be comparable to surrounding native rural communities; in some areas the economic conditions are far better than native Indian villages. Almost all the settlements are provided with primary and secondary schools, primary health care centre and cooperative societies. There are also monasteries, nunneries and temples in the settlements. The cooperatives in the settlements play a vital role in settler's life. The cooperatives procure and advance seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, market agricultural produce collectively and provide common services such as tractors, trucks and warehousing. Cooperatives also run small business ventures like carpet weaving workshops and small incense factory. Education of Tibetan children has been the top most priority of Tibetan administration right from the beginning. Today more than 84 schools are set up in India with the help of Indian government and foreign aids. With the result, Literacy rate of Tibetans has almost reached 78 percent and the literacy rate of 99 percent is in the age group between 19 and 25.

Demography of Tibetan Population in Exile.

According to the Tibetan government official statistics, there are now 12, 2078 number of Tibetans living in different parts of the world. The largest number of them is living in settlements in South Asia. Out of the total population, 85,000 live in India, 13,000 in Nepal and 1,500 in Bhutan. So far about 12,153* Tibetans have moved to other parts of the world. The Continent of USA and Canada has the largest number of Tibetans; the figure has reached up to 7000. The next largest concentration of Tibetan refugees in the west is in Switzerland with a population of about 2000.

The present study mainly focuses on the socio-economic and cultural change and assimilation of the Tibetan migrants into the local majority group. Therefore, attempt has been made in addressing these issues. The state of their economic condition and material gain are much better compared to those staying back at home in Tibet. Therefore, they feel much secured and stable though they always nurture a desire for going back to their home country. Quite significant changes have been observed in respect of their value commitment. Most of the migrants, especially those belonging to the middle and lower ages, are found adopting the values of self-aggrandizement, personal happiness, individualism, materialism, etc. A feeling of dissociation from the oldest old at home has emerged among the middle aged and the younger ones. This is the most conspicuous reason for sending the oldest old to the old age

homes coming up in the settlement area. There are some changes observed in the context of their cultural orientation. They have started putting dress material in a way the Indians do. Except on certain occasions coinciding with their tradition, on all other days they dress up like Indians. Their food habits have also undergone tremendous change. Unless in their own company, they talk mostly in local language i.e. in Hindi and Marathi. They are found celebrating Ambedkar's Jayanti, taking rallies on Ambedkar's Jayanti and PariNirvan day. They do not strictly observe all their traditional rituals and religious duties. However, they remained to be staunch Buddhist though are not seen to be inclined to all its cardinals and principles in the strictest sense. The value attached to religious education in their home place of Tibet has substantially lessened in the settlement camp. Instead, the individual development oriented or development-centric education in India has been increasingly accepted by them. They have been seen increasingly assimilated into the local community and society due to their long years of stay. Their socio-cultural assimilation is well reckoned in terms of their acceptability of the local language, food, dress material, marriage in local community, economic activities, Indian value system, and free intermingling with the local people, etc. The Tibetan community, the migrants in the Gothangaon settlement camp, want to go back to their home country provided it is declared as sovereign country with absolute control regained by Dalai Lama. The study on the whole makes contributions to both theoretical and pragmatic aspects of the situation of migration from one foreign land to another under compulsion.

New Refugees

Tibetan refugee community in exile is considered as one of the most successful refugee communities in the world. They have managed to rebuild their lives in a completely alien environment achieving almost total economic self-reliance. Tibetan Administration in exile has succeeded in rehabilitating the refugees in a cohesive society creating an environment where Tibetans have been able to preserve their age long rich cultural heritage and identity. Today, after a long period of life in exile, Tibetan Government and the Tibetan people are passing through a very crucial period. There are many challenges and issues facing the Tibetan exiled community. The most important being the advancing age of Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. Tibetan government in exile headed by the Dalai Lama has left no stones unturned to resolve the issue of Tibet peacefully with the Chinese government since long, but there has been no positive response from the Chinese side, rather they have strengthened their draconian rule in Tibet imposing strict restrictions on Tibetan people their

religious activities and Human Rights. Chinese government's population transfer policy aimed at wiping out entire ethnic Tibetan population is a serious concern for the Dalai Lama and his exiled government. The matter has become very serious with the completion of Beijing-Lhasa railway line last year. On the other hand Tibetan Diaspora faces a threat of disintegration as many of the new generation exiles have started moving out from the existing Tibetan settlements and their urge to move to the west makes the situation still worse. Moreover Tibetans already settled in the west are in danger of assimilating into the western culture and life style. Therefore many Tibetans believe that if Tibet issue is not resolved soon in future or during the Dalai Lama's life time, there is every chance of Tibetan identity being wiped out completely from the world. So the period of next ten to fifteen years is going to be very crucial for Tibetans inside and outside Tibet. As His Holiness has already reached 72 years, his growing age is a serious concern to all the Tibetan people. Some are of the opinion that there will be a leadership crisis in Tibetan community after the Dalai Lama, even though he has made all the preparation of future Tibet_ be it laying down a strong democratic institution in exile or setting a policy regarding the Tibetan issue with the Chinese government.

In exiled community, the major challenge we face today is the growing unemployment among the Tibetan youth. According to the Tibetan Demographic Survey, the unemployment rate among the Tibetan youth is as high as seventy five percent. On that, the number of school and college graduates increasing every year, about 1250 students passing out every year from the schools and colleges in India. The chances of these youth getting employment in our community are very low as total absorption capacity is just five percent. The major factor is the lack of employment opportunities in the settlements and the shift in the economic structure of refugees in exile.

Conclusion

The early refugees have adopted agriculture and allied activities as their major source of livelihood and besides agriculture, Tibetans have also started business by setting up sweater business in Indian towns and cities. But the new generation of exiles born and brought up in India which has acquired education and skills evidently are in need of better job opportunities. The new generation of Tibetans can be accommodated either in Tibetan administration service or in other services in exiled community. Thanks to the liberalization policy of Indian government, which has benefited not only the Indian masses, but educated Tibetan youths also by getting jobs easily in the corporate world in major cities, as many

Tibetan youths are presently employed in the corporate sector in jobs ranging from executive to providing customer care service. Although, it seems to solve the unemployment problem but this will have a far-reaching consequences on Tibetan community as a whole in future. Until and unless Tibetan administration in exile able to initiate sustainable rural based economy in the settlements, the problem of Tibetan migrating to other places will continue. Tibetan government in exile understands the issue and has policies to make settlement's economy sound and sustainable.

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