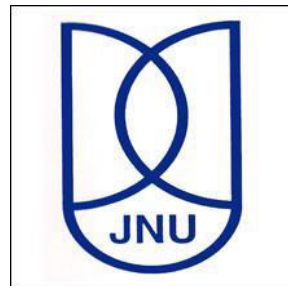


**Tibetan Community In Exile:  
Identity Formation of Individuals**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**HEMAADRI SINGH RANA**



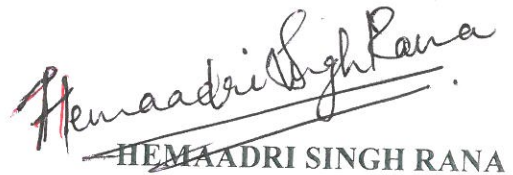
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New Delhi – 110067

2017

Date: 26/07/2017

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation, titled "*Tibetan Community In Exile: Identity Formation of Individuals*", submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, at Jawaharlal Nehru University, is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree, either at this University or anywhere else.



  
HEMAADRI SINGH RANA

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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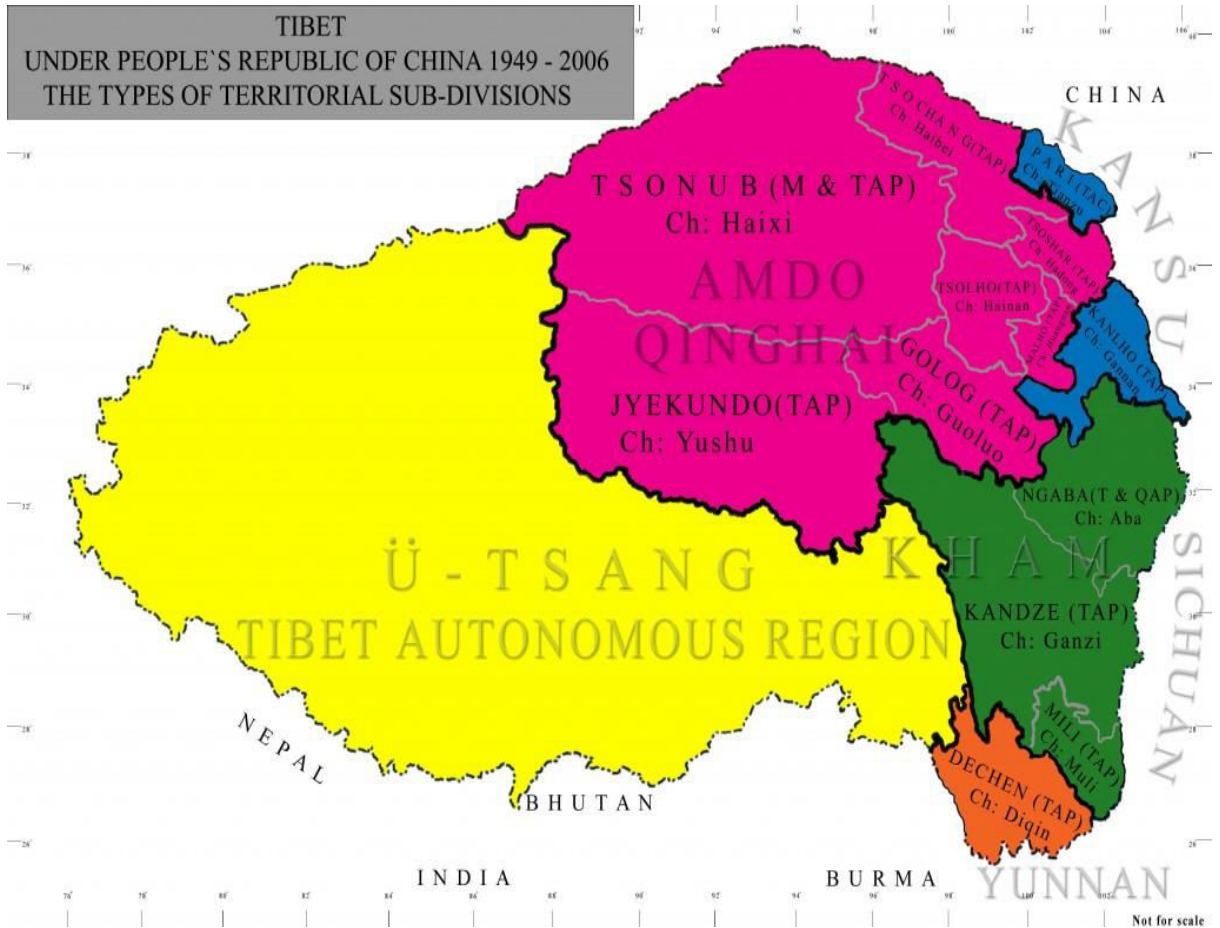
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## Maps



**Map. 1:** The map shows all the three regions which have, as per CTA's claim, originally been part of Tibet. (Source: "Map of Tibet | Central Tibetan Administration")

## **Introduction**

Tibetans, in the traditional Tibet, were settled in the central pastures of Tibet. Their settlement was primarily on the basis of common activities which included both agriculture and animal husbandry. Although Tibet remained isolated from the surrounding cultures because of the difficult geographical structure which made travelling a difficult task, it incorporated varied cultures. People followed their respective culture with no forceful conversion. On the other hand, the collectiveness of Tibetans was largely due to the common belief that their king was the ultimate link between heaven and earth. The adoption of Buddhism in following periods tied up the community even more strongly. People were more inclined towards the government of Tibet which could be credited to their faith and belief in Buddhism and Dalai Lamas of particular periods.

The society was also mainly divided between conservatives and few non-conformists, if not radicals. This marked the presence of conflictual beliefs, in a society irrevocably submitted to the His Holiness the Dalai Lama. While the dominant conservatives were reluctant of introducing modern values into the society, the non-conformists with unflinching reverence to His Holiness Dalai Lama recognised their growing relevance in transforming world. This could be traced from the fact that few families were open to send their children to pursue modern education outside Tibet. Most of these families, however, represented the upper class with quite well to do family members. The situation of Tibetans, however, drastically changed with Chinese incursions in 1950s.

In the post 1959 scenario, there has been contestation regarding Tibetan identity. While leaving their homes in the hope of survival protecting themselves from the imminent danger of Chinese aggression in 1959, myriad Tibetans crossed their borders in search of refuge. Little did they know that a light-headed relief of the Dalai Lama's support that they had carried along, would not last long because even mere survival in the contemporary world requires indispensable civil, political and social rights and entitlements accompanied with the legal status to each and every individual. Not only their physical existence was under threat, the attack was rather aimed at ending the very



identity, culture and belief system that the Tibetan society held. Although thousands of Tibetans who escaped with Dalai Lama succeeded in relieving themselves of physical threat, they hardly knew that a step across the border would still fail to resolve their other concern, that of subtle elimination of culture, confronting different forces of socialisation and processes of assimilation (or integration, in case of India).

Cultural preservation emerges as a significant task for Tibetans living in exile.<sup>1</sup> It was essential not only to establish and retain a separate identity in a country providing refuge but also to keep up the spirit and hopes – of freedom and re-establishment of Tibetan government – of Tibetans living in Chinese-occupied-Tibet. If we consider the concern widely prevalent among Tibetans is that the extinction of culture might narrow the scope left for freedom of Tibet and reclaim their space. While the older generation, concerned with the loss of cultural values in Tibetan youth, considered cultural preservation their priority, following the rationale of the Government in exile, hoping of future return to their homeland, it was the task of forwarding the same rationale into younger generation, particularly those born and brought up in India, that was responsibly taken up by the community. Tibetan youth, however, seems more and more inclined towards adopting modern lifestyles.

Studies have shown that instead of being passive recipients of CTA's decisions, the younger Tibetans have started to question its policies and decisions (Mishra, 2014; Roemer, 2010). Although Tibetans living in exile have succeeded in retaining their Tibetan essence and community, the forces of socialisation of the host country, accompanied with the wave of globalisation, have indisputably become causes of decline of Tibetan culture, if not elimination. In such circumstances, the high probability of Tibetan youth getting swayed with the relatively modern society makes the task of cultural preservation even more difficult.

While the entire community is committed to pursue this common task, knowing how significant it is for the future of community, there has been a huge disparity not only in the ages of the members within it, but the foundations of their identity, in different

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<sup>1</sup> Cultural Preservation of Tibetans has been studied by several scholars. Mallica Mishra, in her book on Tibetan education, deals with the conflictual relationship to a certain extent. Other scholars such as Sudeep Basu, Dibyesh Anand, G. Saklani have dealt with the politics of culture in Tibetan community living in exile, their representation, and the diversity within society.

social settings. Cultural preservation, identity and Tibetan freedom movement are indisputably interconnected, and intersect each other. Tibetan freedom movement has no value without the solidarity of its own people, of Tibetans. The freedom movement is not confined to freeing the Tibetan land from Chinese authority, but to reclaim the space to profess their own religion and culture without any intervention. Tibetans have been deprived of this basic right to articulate their own culture in their homeland. It is believed that the survival of Tibetan movement rests on the survival of their culture, which is solely the source of their identification as Tibetans. To save the Tibetan identity from corruption requires keeping the community's culture from extinction. However, it must be noted that despite a number of efforts to retain their native culture and identity, what was meant to be Tibetan in the past, is different from what it means today.

There are different parameters to measure one's identity. Any description and analysis of identity of an individual or a group requires how that identity is to be defined, i.e. what markers – natural, social, political or economic – are being used in the process of carving out a definition. These markers might overlap and vary in assertion with the manifestation of one form being stronger than the other. Also, the relevance of particular marker might differ for individual as well as their community. By according different significance to each of the markers, an individual forms the layers of identity using them. For instance, one might prefer being identified through her profession first, then through her sexual orientation, then with religion, and so on. With the advent of globalisation and people transcending borders and getting influenced with different cultural trends from around the world, the advancing intricacy of a person's identity makes it more daunting to construct an absolute clear cut definition. The markers used to measure one's identity are meaningless in the absence of 'mutual identification'<sup>2</sup>. The assertion of one's identity requires to be at least reciprocated in the form of identification by others.

In the era of globalisation, the transformation of individuals' culture and identity in subtle disarrayed manner relies to a certain extent on the willingness of individuals

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'mutual identification' has been used by Amy Gutmann, in her book *'Identity in Democracy'*, to signify the importance of reciprocation to establish an identity in a society.

exhibiting their volition. In such a scenario, however, people who are refugees or in exile suffer from identity crisis.

First, because of refugee being an abstract category in international law, where contextual differences among them are hardly taken into account. The refugee, as defined in refugee convention of 1951, provides refuge on an individual basis, instead of group basis. Their recognition is contingent on the common factor of 'well founded fear of prosecution'. It overlooks any other recognition on the basis of the different contexts of individual. It skips to take account of the fact that in different contexts, the causes of violence also play a significant role in defining the kind of movement, migration in groups or nuclear families. Let us consider a hypothetical situation. In a country, say, two groups exist upon which violence is inflicted for either same or different reasons. It would be completely unethical to expect same response from both the groups towards such violence. While the level of infliction of violence may differ, so does the pace and nature of migration. Neglecting the identity of the individual and the community she hails from, by categorising them under a singular category of 'refugee' amounts to an additional struggle for recognition for the person.

And second, struggling in a liminal position in the state of refuge or exile, they remain stuck between the choices of integration, through acquiring citizenship, or isolation, in order to preserve the essentials of their respective cultures. The event of displacement is heralded by the forceful disruption in their culture that causes dereliction in some cases. Fettered with the obligations conferred by the host country, there are possibilities of involuntary cleaving off of their culture and identity. In such phenomenon of radical cultural interaction where refugees get exposed to different cultures, the chances of retaining one's cultural values turn minimal. The intensity of impact of socio-cultural circumstances and the forces of socialisation of host country varies for each refugee or exilic group.

Performance of individuals' actions does not reflect absolute uniformity and are not carried out in isolated circumstances. Rather uniqueness in actions of particular group is more apparent, that is carried out in a particular context. Anthropologists often skip to

consider the culture of refugees which got carried with them after displacement.<sup>3</sup> “It is”, Voe argues, “as if culture were a novelty easily dismissed in the face of the events which have turned persons into victims. Yet, the events and the aftermath have meaning beyond the functional, instrumental forms of physical survival: it is particularly clear in statements from those who have lived in refugee status for several years (Tibetans and Palestinians) that the survival of their ethnic identity or ethos is essential, and is threatened not only by the event of flight, but also, its aftermath” (De Voe, 1981, p. 88). The maintenance of culture and ethnic identity is, thus, quite a convoluted task when a community is exposed to different cultures. As far as Tibetans are concerned, since their displacement they have notably been confronting similar threat to their culture, from the impact of new social environment, which influences the formation of their identity.

The threat of dispersion of community is also accompanied with the fear of cultural loss which manifests itself in daily practices of Tibetans’ lives where the utmost concern is the regular inculcation of values to keep them aloof of the mainstream society. The presence of well functioning educational institutions and cultural institutions assure the required task. This particular fear of cultural loss has probably been inculcated through institutions, family, peers and the Tibetan movement itself.

Keeping in view the impact that such institutions have on the members of the community, the central question that animates the research regards how Tibetans’ identity and culture have transformed post displacement. Other questions that would be looked at in order to explore the central question are: How Tibetans identify or re-identify themselves in the event of globalised world where the possibility of integration as per individuals’ choice is more likely? Moreover, as it re-ignites the debate between individuals’ choice and community’s principles, the question of how could we situate Tibetans in such debate would be dealt with, taking cognizance of their unique context where it is not just about community’s sustenance but that of a nation’s sustenance.

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<sup>3</sup> Many scholars, like Appadurai and LiisaMalkki, have criticised and emphasised the rethinking of such cultural understanding in anthropology that neglects refugees’ circumstances. Such criticism could broadly be bifurcated into two main groups: one accentuates the inevitable cultural transformations that refugees experience in host countries and the other emphasises on the subsequent need for identity as well as cultural maintenance. In both groups refugees pre-displacement as well as post displacement context is taken into account.

Such question would be investigated through the change that has occurred in the relationship of community and individual in exilic circumstances.

Liberal versus communitarian debate is not new in philosophical world. While the liberals analyzes the concepts of political theory such as justice, rights, state, etc. from the lens of individual, the communitarians does it using the lens of community and the embeddedness of individual within that community. Liberals neglect the significance of nationality, language, culture, religion, etc. which could not prevail in the absence of a community. Underestimation of the principles of community by liberals has time and again posed threat of the erosion of community. On the other hand, considering community more significant than individuals and their choices makes the latter prone to submission, even in the event of contravention of ethical issues. The description of a person's identity on individual terms or community terms remains the core of the debate.

What makes the liberal and communitarian debate significant to the case of Tibetans is the parallel that could be drawn with the arguments reverberant in Tibetans community regarding the significance of individuality, and communitarian values. Most of the young Tibetans, without any disrespect to HH the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan cultural values, do not find introducing modern standards of living into their lives or working out of the community as loss of cultural values or disruption in unity. On the other hand, the older Tibetans propose the restriction of movement of Tibetans out of the binds of community, i.e. to follow the cultural values in consonance with the one followed in traditional Tibet.

To elucidate it in simplistic terms, Tibetans living in exile are believed to have retained their culture and Tibetan identity for 57 years i.e. since their displacement in 1959. In the process of integration in the host country, the native culture of refugees is one of the first aspects that gets affected in order to stabilise their survival and better livelihood. However, in the Tibetan case, the culture has been the first aspect that has been preserved and helped in becoming the source of livelihood for them. In order to preserve culture, the essentiality for the preservation and the constant fear of its loss results in the subtle force.

The widely held belief that Tibetans have largely remained non-integrated in the Indian society has prompted high appreciation for being a 'rich culture' among refugees. An ample amount of contribution in literature regarding this rich culture has been done while only few scholars, such as Saklani and Basu, have provided a critical outlook on the belief of successful maintenance of Tibetan culture. The latter group of scholars have argued that with the changes in the political stand in Tibetan politics regarding Tibet, the representation of Tibetan culture has been politicised and commodified making it far from ground reality where youth or the second or third generation of refugees displays more openness to change and acculturation.

However, what such scholars miss to answer is that in the event of the third generation letting loose the grip of unified culture which holds the community together, the interaction between the individual and community changes, influencing their way of self identification or 'reidentification'<sup>4</sup> in a new context. This raises the questions of individual autonomy and group identity, cultural preservation and the issue of boundary maintenance for Tibetan refugees.

### **Objectives**

The purpose of reading a community and its culture is to trace out the cultural continuities and disruptions in the lives of Tibetan refugees and its impact on their existence and identity. It would also emphasize whether the need for cultural maintenance and reassurance of united existence of a nation even in exile, make it difficult for individuals, Tibetan youth in particular, to move out of their confined spaces. Therefore, the research seeks to interrogate Tibetan culture along the axis of identity and nation and its impact on the lives of the members of community.

The research would not only aim to resolve the central question of Tibetan identity in isolation but would also attempt to decipher few of the related concerns regarding the depleting culture of Tibetan society, scope of individual autonomy, the new complex ways of identity formation, and so on.

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<sup>4</sup>'Re-identification' is the term given by Amelie Rorty, in her book '*Identities of Persons*'. See, Rorty, A. O. (1977). *The identities of persons*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate traditional Tibetan society and present community in exile to understand the change in the nature and culture of Tibetan society.
2. To understand the relationship between community and individuals in the context of exile.
3. To understand how and to what extent change in socio political setting influences the formation of individual (Tibetan) identity.
4. Approaching the above question by revisiting the debate of individualism and communitarianism and different theories of identity.
5. To highlight the impact of cultural preservation on Tibetan youths' lives and check the impact on individuals' choice.
6. Finally, what concerns come to light with the constantly changing Tibetan identity, i.e., its impact on their culture and Tibetan movement.

### **Methodology**

The approach of the research subject has been basically two pronged: descriptive and analytical. The imprints of the central question of the changing relationship of Tibetan community and individual, and its implication on the individual identity could be seen in all the three chapters, where the arguments would revolve around this main concern.

The research begins by raising the issue of newly emerging Tibetan identities and practical applicability of political theory in resolving the dilemma faced by Tibetans, with regard to such identity formation. In pursuit of resolution of such query, the chapter examines the works done on varied refugee groups in refugee studies, to develop the idea of identity formation generally displayed by refugees. It explores the available literature on Tibetan community to prove the present contestations and politics operational within it, and the possibilities of formation of new Tibetan identities, as a result of such contestations.

Another concern regards the factual proof of the changes, as claimed in the beginning of this work, which the Tibetan community has over time experienced and continues to remain under the spell of such changes. The factual evidences of changes are provided

with the objective to study the nature of interaction persisting between individual and community. Such concern is dealt with in the second and the third chapters. Both the chapters shed light on the transformations that have occurred in the community as well as individuals over time, and thereby provide few explanations behind that transformation. Both the chapters are interrelated in the sense that in order to understand how displaced Tibetan community differs from the one prevalent in the traditional Tibet, the chapters need to be read in continuance.

The second chapter studies the nature and structure of community in pre-1959 Tibet with the help of the few of the renowned historians' works exploring the history of Tibet and its society. The objective of reading Tibet's history is to grasp the interaction between the individual and community during pre-displacement Tibetan society. With the use of Amelie Rorty's conception of 'essential identification', the chapter seeks to explore those features which qualifies this conception. Moving forward, the third chapter is written with the aim of studying the nature and structure of Tibetan community living in exile.

The third chapter also deals with the final concern of thesis, i.e., complex identity formation of individuals in the wake of cultural and sponsorship politics prevalent in the Tibetan community in exile. The argument of re-identification of individuals is supported by the political theories on identities, particularly by Amelie Rorty, Montefiore, and Charles Taylor.

### **Chapterization**

The research thesis is divided into three chapters.

It provides the literature review of varied research done on Tibetan refugees. It would begin by clarifying common conceptual errors and ambiguities faced during the identification of people experiencing (voluntary or involuntary) migration. It further attempts to understand and situate Tibetans' individual identity, in constantly changing circumstances and practical requirements, using few theories of identity and debate between individualists and communitarians.



The aim of the second chapter is to understand the nature of interaction between community and individual in Tibet prior to the event of 1959. It would begin by drawing the basic picture of Tibet to understand the geographical location and structure of its society through analysing the socio-economic conditions and legal-administrative system that prevailed in Tibetan society. It would be descriptive in approach to provide at length the description of the nature of Tibetan communities pre-displacement.

The final chapter would look into the transformations in the nature of community and individual relationship in post displacement Tibet and politics of culture and sponsorship in Tibetan community. The purpose of the chapter is to explore and highlight such changes that have occurred over time in Tibetan culture and influenced Tibetan identity. It would explore the continuity and discontinuity in the culture and changing nature of Tibetan community. It would investigate how Tibetan identity has turned more intricate in exilic circumstances in the process of fulfilling the expectations – which include need of being passive but patriotic, showing ‘authentic’ traditional culture but keeping up with the modern values in practical world, etc. – of various social and institutional agencies, that of the host countries, their own community, international sponsors and so on; how their identity has been moulded, bevelled, rimmed and subsequently constructed which reflects different meanings for different people. The objective of the chapter is to trace Tibetans’ situation in community and how the younger generation tries to ‘re-identify’<sup>5</sup> themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> The term ‘re-identify’ has been borrowed from Amelie Rorty who explores meanings and various concerns in the process of re-identification of individuals. See, Rorty, A. O. (1977). *The identities of persons*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

## **Chapter: One**

### **Dynamics of Tibetan Identity: Continuity and Change**

The present chapter provides in brief analysis of various studies on the Tibetan community, pointing towards different aspects of Tibetanness. The first section would begin by clarifying few conceptual ambiguities usually faced by scholars while going through the literature on forced migration. It would further lay down such categories which appropriately signify the Tibetan community and its people. The chapter constitutes four arguments: first, the terms of 'refugee' and 'exile' aptly defines the Tibetan people and Tibetan community respectively; second, the formation of new kinds of identity is possible in exilic circumstances; third, despite resistance, both Tibetan individual and Tibetan community have undergone change in new socio political setting; and fourth, stuck within the politics of culture and sponsorship, individual choice of Tibetans is being stifled. Finally, the chapter would try to understand the concept of identity and the relationship of Tibetans and their community using different theories and debates on identity, present in political theory.

#### **1. Conceptual Ambiguities: 'Refugee' or ' People in Exile'**

Immunity to conceptual errors is a daunting task especially for beginners in the field of social sciences where interpretation plays a crucial role in moulding the conceptual understanding. While dealing with the case of Tibetans living in India and abroad, one often comes across the conceptual query whether to call them refugees or, people in exile. The first section is attributed to provide clarification on concepts related to displacement that cause migration. The primary concern would be to resolve the conceptual query regarding the Tibetans, and would thus revolve around migratory movements of Tibetans into India, pre and post displacement.

Terms such as ‘migrants’, ‘immigrants’, ‘emigrants’, ‘asylum seekers’, ‘refugees’ and ‘people-in-exile’ are often used interchangeably and requires explanation. Although a crystal clear, well-demarcated distinction is next to impossible as the terms overlap, yet to begin with a lucid explanation, these terms could be divided into two broad groups: migration by choice or voluntary migration, and involuntary or forced migration. Migration could simply mean movement from one place to another, either internal movement or across a country’s borders, with varied purposes ranging from family reunion to acquire better environment or livelihood. All categories from migrant workers, refugees to asylum seekers fall under this broad category of migrants. The distinction among these categories is made on the basis of what constitutes the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors of such migration, i.e. reasons behind leaving a country and moving towards another country.

#### a. Voluntary Migration: Migrants, Immigrants and Emigrants

Movement of people from one place to another is undoubtedly historical. It was much frequent and easy in earlier or pre-state times due to the fluidity of borders. The stringency that one witness in contemporary times, however, in the wake of ostensible security concerns has although restricted fluid movement but have been incapable of ceasing it completely. These movements were caused by varied reasons. Although chasing economic opportunities hold high chances behind migration, other reasons include environmental concerns, lack of efficient, or unsatisfactory, governance or, other political reasons. Voluntary migration exhibit the volition of well informed migrants, regarding the environment of the receiving country, prior to the movement. A migrant<sup>6</sup> could also be an immigrant depending on their stay period. An immigrant

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<sup>6</sup>“The UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants defines a **migrant worker** as a ‘person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.’ From this a broader definition of migrants follows: *The term ‘migrant’ in article 1.1 (a) should be understood as covering all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned, for reasons of ‘personal convenience’ and without intervention of an external compelling factor.*”

See: Migrant | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/migrant/>

comes with the possibility of permanent stay with the intention of becoming the citizen of the receiving country.

Delving deep into the historical texts and research<sup>7</sup> concerning the relationship between India and Tibet, one finds evidences of voluntary migration of people between the two nations dating back to as early as 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries and continuing till the twentieth century, prior to the forceful displacement from Tibet. The year of 1959, thus, does not mark the beginning of migration of Tibetan population into India. The purpose of migration between the nations during the early centuries was particularly religious. People from Tibet used to travel India seeking religious knowledge. Padmasambhava, the renowned Indian saint who was invited to Tibet by the King Trisong Detsen, is well known for disseminating the knowledge of Buddhist scriptures and written texts in Tibet. Without any halt in migratory movement, during the nineteenth and twentieth century, people from the aristocratic families began sending their children to pursue higher education in Anglo-Indian schools. Therefore, prior to 1959 displacement, almost every Tibetan could be labelled using the terms migrants and immigrants, but post displacement, only few Tibetans who arrive using Chinese authorized visa with the purpose of either pursuing education in India, or to receive the Dalai Lama's blessings, could be categorised as migrants.

#### **b. Involuntary or Forced Migration: Asylum seekers, refugees and people in exile**

As opposed to voluntary migration, terms such as asylum seekers, refugees and people in exile are indicative of the unwillingness of a person to leave one's own country but are forced to do so. Each of these terms, however, is slightly different from one another.

According to Oxford Dictionary, the term 'exile' means 'the state of being barred from one's native country, typically for political or punitive reasons'. A person is, thus, said to be in exile when he is no longer allowed by the native country to pursue her livelihood. When we say that a government has run into exile, it means that a particular

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<sup>7</sup> Historians, like Kapstein, & Dotson (2007), while providing the history of cultural change in historical Tibet, have shown how Buddhism was established in Tibet in the eighth century.

government has been renounced by force or otherwise to carry out its political and administrative role in that particular country. Like the term 'exile', 'refugee' also signifies movement of a person out of her homeland. That is the reason why the two terms are often used interchangeably, as both the terms points to one's unwilling departure from one's homeland. There is, however, a slight difference between the two, in terms of the legal status attributed to the two words and the distinct nature of violence causing migration.

The state of exile is often confused as being the result of violence, or persecution, towards a person or government. Exile may or may not be related to explicit violence. A person could herself decide to pursue her livelihood in exile, i.e. outside her native country, if she has not been allowed freedom, say, of thought and expression or is likely to be detained or threatened of detention by the state, if she breaks the law. The detention, in this case, follows the legal procedure as per the state law. Here, violence might not be explicit or signifies any physical danger, but is rather latent or tacit. The person, or the government, is being tacitly threatened by the state, of facing adverse consequences, in case of non fulfilment of particular set of rules or conditions. In the state of non fulfilment of such conditions, the person or government is sometimes outlawed by the country.

On the other hand, the term 'refugee' is a person who leaves one's country under the 'well founded fear' of physical danger in near future, irrespective of being a law abiding person. The likelihood of persecution or physical violence of such person is more than the person being outlawed. The term 'refugee' should be understood as a status of a person, as per 1951 convention of International Law, which is recognized once the application filed by asylum seeker for asylum is passed after the fulfilment of set of procedures. The term 'asylum' is synonymous to 'granting protection' to the person in need of protection, where the government or the state is no longer in a position or is unwilling to protect its own citizens. While the term 'asylum' simply implies grant of

protection, a person who seeks protection or a safe shelter, even for temporary period, when her life is under threat is known as an asylum seeker.<sup>8</sup>

The 1951 convention defines refugee as a person who

“as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

Although the term ‘refugee’ with a political meaning emerged after the two world wars when 1951 convention was formed, the displacement of refugee is regarded as ahistorical. Opposing the dominant belief<sup>9</sup> that refugees are ahistorical categories, constructed after the Second world war, HakanSicakkan argues that the end of the Second World War constitutes the historical context of today’s notion of refugee. Sicakkan contends that historically, refugee has been defined as per the association existing between the ruler and the ruled or the state and its citizens.<sup>10</sup> The only criterion

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<sup>8</sup> According to Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), ‘everyone has the right to seek asylum’. However, no state is obligated to grant asylum to every individual under international law.

<sup>9</sup> Whenever one initiates to define who or what a refugee is, she turns to the universally accepted definition of 1951 convention. Although adopting the singular notion of definition, 1951 convention provides the most widely accepted definition of the term ‘refugee’. According to the convention, a refugee is a person who “as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”. The definition drew criticism for being Eurocentric and the instrument in Cold war era. The Geneva convention introduced the most restrictive conception of refugee in modern times by its requirements of ‘being outside the country of nationality’ and ‘persecution’ instead of ‘lack of protection by a state’. Acknowledging the convention as political construct, the convention itself detaches the refugee notion from human rights.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>10</sup> As explained in the words of HakanSicakkan, “In ancient and medieval Europe, the refugee was simply a fugitive, and this included almost everybody who needed a shelter, and particularly the slaves. In the feudal state, where the main association between rulers and the ruled was the ruler’s power and the distinction was kin and estate, the refugee concept was based on kin, estate, and power relations. Here, the excluded category was serfs. Later, the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* and the Reformation brought the coreligionists, or the culture dimension, into the conception of the refugee. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 made territorial belonging more relevant to the refugee condition. The notion of ‘political refugee’ developed during the French and Russian Revolutions, where the primary association

to identify a person as a refugee was based on the ‘lack of protection’ by the concerned government or empire even within the country itself. With the change in the relationship, the definition of refugee couldn’t remain constant. The changed meaning of refugee also included the movement across territorial borders in addition to lack of protection.

With the description of the terms used in forced migration in this sub-section, the argument would continue examining the appropriateness of these terms to categorise Tibetans, and their community, who escaped following 1959 Chinese incursions.

### **c. Question of Categorising Tibetans as ‘Refugees’ or ‘People in exile’**

Significance of conceptual clarification could be realised from the fact that it possesses the potential to ignite the politics of representation. There are two sorts of interpretations: one, how an academic or an individual outside the community represents it i.e. a person’s interpretation using objective tools of analysis and second, how the community wants itself to be represented. Because no community is homogeneous but internally stratified into further sub-groups, knowledge of the background of the one representing the community also raises a major concern. In this sub section, I would look into different terms related to migration used by Tibetans, living outside Tibet, to signify themselves and their community, and then try to categorise the community using the aforementioned definitions.

With the escape in 1959 under the threat of Chinese invasion, Tibetan government searched for asylum possibilities in India. After their resettlement in India, His Holiness the Dalai Lama penned down his experience of forced displacement in his autobiography titled ‘*Freedom in Exile: The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama*’. In his

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between the state and its citizens were political ideologies. With the adoption of Wilson’s self-determination principles in the League of Nations Treaties, nationality and territory, understood in terms of alignment between ethnic and territorial boundaries, became relevant to the refugee condition. In the treaties and in the arrangements of 1926 and 1928, the refugee was a person who did not enjoy the protection of the government of his or her country, regardless of whether s/he was outside that country. During Japan’s invasion of China in the 1930s and 40s, internally displaced people in China were referred to as ‘refugees’ in American official communications (Lee 1996). Later, article 1 of the 1933 Convention relating to the International Status of Refugees defined the refugee similarly. ‘Similar definitions were adopted for Armenian, Turkish, Assyrian, Assyro-Chaldean, and assimilated (Syrian or Kurdish) refugees.’”

work, he makes use of three terms related to forced migration – exile, asylum, and refugee. In chapter seven of his autobiography, titled *'Escape into Exile'*, refers to the path travelled to seek shelter in another state. In the same autobiography, Dalai Lama mentions the need of seeking political asylum: "I made up my mind to explore the possibility of seeking **political asylum** when I met with Pandit Nehru, which I did soon after."<sup>11</sup> Further, while showing the concerns regarding the new Tibetans who ran from China occupied Tibet, he says: "No sooner had we arrived in Mussoorie than we started to receive reports of large numbers of **refugees** arriving not only in India but also in Bhutan."

Similarly, the Tibetan activist, Tenzin Tsundue, in one of his works, also mentions himself as a refugee:

*"When I was born, my mother said you are a **refugee**.  
Our tent on the roadside, smoked in the snow.  
On your forehead, between your eyebrows  
there is an R embossed, my teacher said.  
I scratched and scrubbed, on my forehead I found a brash of red pain.  
I am born **refugee**.  
I have three tongues.  
The one that sings is my mother tongue.  
The R on my forehead between my English and Hindi  
the Tibetan tongue reads:  
RANGZEN  
Freedom means Rangzen."*<sup>12</sup>

It can be noticed that the Tibetan community, forced to move outside Tibet, is being, directly or indirectly, referred to using all the three terms – exile, asylum, and refugee.

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<sup>11</sup>Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho. (1990). *Freedom in exile: The autobiography of the Dalai Lama*. New York, NY: HarperCollins. Pg-117

<sup>12</sup>TenzinTsundue.com: Writings of Tenzin Tsundue.(n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.tenzintsundue.com/>



Although there is a possibility that the usage of these terms, in such works, were not made in particular reference to the definitions submitted earlier in this section, but it could easily be deduced that ‘exile’, here, refers to a state which is already attained; ‘political asylum’ is the state which is yet to be attained; and ‘refugee’ marks the status of a person, sort of an ‘inferior and traumatic status’ as per Tsundue’s poem.

Therefore, in order to define the people of Tibetan community, use of the term ‘refugee’ seems more appropriate because of the fact that Chinese government, although alleged of barbarous acts, did not seem to have let Tibetans leave Tibet (though attempts were made to eliminate their culture). Rather these alleged inhumane crimes by China had unleashed a terror of persecution that resulted in the forced movement of people outside Tibet. Therefore, as per the internationally applicable definition, they fulfil the requirement of ‘well founded fear of persecution’ and are unable to return in the wake of that threat. It should be noted, however, that while internationally they are recognized as refugees, in India, due to the absence of national refugee law, Tibetans are not officially recognized as ‘refugees’. They are categorised as ‘foreigners’ under the Foreigners Act of 1946.

People, in this case, could not be stated as ‘exiled’ as they are not barred from Tibet by Chinese authorities rather they ran out of fear. On the other hand, although the life threat was present in the case of Dalai Lama and his ministers but as a government, its further continuance was obstructed by Chinese government and are now officially debarred from Tibet with the claim of its political authority over it. While referring to the community or government, the usage of the term ‘exile’ seems more suitable as this particular government was not allowed to perform its administrative duties and was later invaded and obliterated by the Chinese troops. For the sake of its continued recognition as a government, the HH Dalai Lama along with few of his ministers decided to continue as Tibetan Government in Exile, on Indian land. Hence, while people of Tibet community could be referred to as ‘refugees’, the community headed by the government of the Dalai Lama remains in ‘exile’.

## 2. 'Uprooted' Refugees and Culture

The definition of the term refugee, as is observed, is generally derived from the Refugee Convention of 1951. The rationale behind the formulation of refugee law was mainly to tackle the European refugees of the Second World War, using the most preferable solution of repatriation.<sup>13</sup> The preference of repatriation, which received huge criticism, particularly by scholars like B.S. Chimni, was partly based on widely prevalent early anthropological belief regarding the space boundedness of an individual's culture and identity. It brought into question the identification basis, which till now believed to have emerged from the culture of a particular country, of an individual, who was forced to escape her homeland. This section looks into similar questions, such as what marks the identification of a refugee, the im/mutability of identity, and the responsiveness of the refugee group towards that identity.

Refugees are usually identified by the legal status under the international law which is rendered on an individual, and not collective, basis. It however covertly portrays 'refugees' as an abstract, homogenous group which crosses borders under physical threat. This abstract group, however, constitute individuals who hail from different social and political backgrounds. While they are forced to leave their belonging in their homeland, what they fail to leave behind is the cultural aspect of their respective territories which they, even after being uprooted, carry along with them. There is no international law that guarantees the preservation of culture of refugees. The sustenance of their culture is contingent on the nature of the state and respective state laws.

At the global level, the criteria of identification of a refugee, in addition to the legal recognition, as it seems, follow the widely prevalent anthropological understanding of culture and identity. Without refuting the assumption of culture being an imperative element in humans' lives for attaching meanings to behaviours, the culture in several anthropological writings is bonded with underlying circumstances as well as structural and geographical features of particular place where a particular culture is emerged. Such assumption leads to the confinement of group's identity as well as cultural possession to that particular place as being the naturalized connection between people and place

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<sup>13</sup> The Refugee Convention of 1951 provides three solutions for the refugee displacement. These are repatriation, integration and resettlement in the third country. Repatriation of refugee implied sending back the refugee to her own country once the situation gets better.

which makes culture a territorialized concept itself. The identity of an individual, or refugee, is thus, bound with the features of the modern nation state, i.e. territory, population, etc.

Many scholars, like Appadurai and Liisa Malkki, have criticised and emphasised on rethinking of such cultural understanding in anthropology. In an attempt to problematize the constructed linkages between people and culture through the metaphorical concept of 'roots', Liisa Malkki highlights the commonsensical ideas of soils, roots, and territory manifested through everyday language, non-discursive practices as well as in scholarly works. The 'commonsense' used here leads to the construction of what Malkki calls 'national order of things' that excludes the reference of refugees from the 'naturalized' concepts of nation, nationalism, etc. Agreeing with Appadurai, Malkki believes that "the spatial incarceration of the native operates through the attribution not only of physical immobility, but also of a distinctly ecological immobility" (Malkki, 1992, p. 29). The spatial significance attributed to land, territory and the culture within, also results in the metaphysical and moral consequences for the displaced people, according to Malkki. In her words, "Our sedentarist assumptions about attachment to place lead us to define displacement not as a fact about socio-political context, but rather as an inner, pathological condition of the displaced (Malkki, 1992, p. 33). Violated, broken roots signal an ailing cultural identity and a damaged nationality. The ideal-typical refugee is like a native gone amok" (Malkki, 1992, p. 34).

While Malkki emphasises upon how refugee identity is perceived amidst the 'national order of things', Gaim Kibreab (2006) explains the continuities and disruptions that occur at the time of forced displacement in the lives of refugees, and whether such a perception of refugee identity changes over time. Refugees' culture and identity have been identified with the particular place which is essentially the place of origin which provides cultural space in order to accentuate the essentialist understanding of refugees. The host country is liable for the survival and the physical protection of refugees and not the cultural one. The cultural aspect of individuals who confront displacement falls down in the priority list in order to attain a better livelihood. While pondering over the factors that influence the return movements of refugees, Kibreab argues that there are chances where few groups might undergo changes in identities and subsequently forbid their return movement. The shared experiences with other groups lead to the formation

of new social identities and transformations. While such (minority) groups transform their identity over time, there are groups which through the formation of close knit communities continue to resist such change.<sup>14</sup>

Strongly opposing the conception of immutable identity and its manifestation within a particular legitimate space, it could thus be contended that there exists the possibilities of the emergence and formation of a new identity. The change in identity, however, to a great extent, if not entirely, depends on the refugee groups' willingness to adapt to the changing circumstances. Taking account of the close knit communities of Tibetan refugees residing in India and their efforts to pursue their own culture in isolation, aloof from any outside influence<sup>15</sup>, Tibetan refugees could be said to fall under the category of one such identity, which resist change or is reluctant of being responsive to the impact of other cultures present in the host state. If, however, we follow the argument set forth by Kibreab, it would be mistaken to nullify or outrightly neglect all probabilities of emergence of new identity. This is not to make a claim of the formation of new identity being irrefutable and irreversible, but to acknowledge the existence of, even the minute, possibilities of its occurrence. Taking cognizance of such possibilities of different identity formations, the essentialist understanding of anthropology regarding individual's culture would be further repudiated in the next section.

### **3. Tibetan Culture: Continuity and Change**

New forms of identity could be the result of two distinct phenomena: subtle changes occurring through years of slow processes of evolution in an isolated setting; or sudden change in the new socio political setting. Recognizing the reluctance of Tibetan community towards the change post displacement, this section would briefly present the scholarly works which refers to the lives and nature of Tibetan community, post rehabilitation in India, in order to get the idea of efforts to maintain continuity in their culture.

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<sup>14</sup> Resistance to change one's identity and culture is not only prevalent in the case of refugees but could also be seen in the case of voluntary migrant groups who through the formation of small communities and establishment of necessary institutions continue to retain their identities. Sikhs in Canada is one such example.

<sup>15</sup> The efforts made by Tibetans in pursuit of their culture are explained in detail in the third chapter.

Opting to remain isolated from international political affairs, Tibet had always remained an appealing but mystical place for the ‘outer’ world. Intrigued with the mysticism and other related stories, what Anand refers to as *‘Tibet Exotica’* (Anand, 2010), many historians chose to spend years in Tibet to study Tibetan people, their lifestyles and culture. Many of them studied the nature of Tibetan society (Richardson, 1962; Goldstein, 2005), its structured legal system (Dotson, 2007), political history (Dhondup, 2003), and cultural history (Shellgrove & Richardson, 2003).<sup>16</sup> While historical facts help decipher the kind of culture which existed in Tibet, the literature on post displacement period describes the settlements, adjustments and struggles made on the part of Tibetans with the help of funds from governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The first official study on Tibetan settlements was done by Central Tibetan Administration in 1969. CTA produced a well-compiled report titled *‘Tibetans in Exile: 1959 – 1969’* on ten years of rehabilitation in India. The report highlights the adjustment problems faced by refugees in the initial years of settlement and various steps taken by the exiled government to resolve them. Different lists and processes of establishment of educational and cultural institutions are provided. The occupational issues were resolved by encouraging Tibetans to work in agricultural settlements as well as in small scale industries<sup>17</sup>, wherever suitable. During this decade, various monastic

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<sup>16</sup> Going through Tibetan history provides the knowledge of social and political structure of pre-1959 Tibetan society. The structure and culture of Tibetan society could be deduced through proper historical analysis by undertaking the task to explore both the periods (imperial and post imperial), instead of merely picking up the cultural beliefs and customs of present Tibetan community in exile. Only then could one make sense of the differences in pre and post displacement Tibetan community. There has been vast literature available which delve into the research ranging from the historical origins of Tibetan people and development of their community, to reigns of Tibetan kings and, later, Lamas. For instance, Brandon Dotson (2007) looks into the social and political history of Tibetan society through investigating the formulation and implementation of Tibetan imperial legal system and administrative politics. K. Dhondup (2003) in his work attempts to invoke the Tibetan past in the minds of present Tibetan youth who he believes are lost in the routine lives and activities of modern world. He provides the “necessary historical sequence” starting from the advent of Lama rule to the event of Chinese incursions. He passionately shows his urge “to recreate the Tibetan past and bring to life the characters and events that shaped the Tibetan society and its political institutions so that I can hear in my mind the echoes of the war songs of the Tibetan ancestors and share their joy of triumph and sorrow of defeat” (Dhondup, 2003, p. vii).

<sup>17</sup> In 1965, Tibetan Industrial Rehabilitation Society was established to add new methods of employment in order to speed up the process of creating self supporting community of Tibetans. The six projects sponsored by TIRS are Woollen Mill, Bir; Tea Estates, Bir&Chauntra; Limestone Quarry, Kumrao; Hydrated Lime Plant, Sataun; Fibreglass Factory, Paonta; Craft Community, Kangra.

ashrams and colleges of Tantricism were established for preserving the traditional knowledge they brought along with them and help lamas to continue to live the spiritual and scholastic life. Measures were taken to keep different sects of the community from direct confrontation in times when people were struggling for survival. Intra-religious activities within these ashrams were held for the unification of these sects. The report provided the record of activities by CTA, expenditures, investments and statements of donation, if any. Being aware of the fact that absolute abstinence from change in new environment is next to impossible, H.H. the Dalai Lama and his ministers still tried to maintain as much continuity and similar environment as they can to make adaptation easier for refugees. Acknowledging the vast differences that existed in the social order of the two countries, the report says,

“It has not been easy to change from an old order – old in every sense – and to adjust to a way of life which is not only different but materially centuries ahead of our life in Tibet. We have had to bridge this gap in a few years and there have been many frustrations, both for ourselves and also perhaps for the people who are helping us. But the progress achieved and the relative ease with which the people are adjusting to their new way of life is surely an indication that our efforts are succeeding (CTA Report, 1969, p. 320).”

While CTA report provides factual information regarding the efforts and contributions during the rehabilitation process, John Conway (1975), in another study, provides the analysis of fifteen years long stay of Tibetan community in India since its flight in 1959. He argues that despite various efforts being made to preserve Tibetan religion and tradition,

“.....the Tibetans have been confronted with two mutually contradictory pressures. If, on the one hand, they seek to keep alive the idea of return, they must somehow prevent their physical dispersion, and by their very plight, arouse the concern of the world, in the hope that political conditions can be changed in their favour. On the other hand, if the refugees willingly accept the generous contributions of relief agencies, and by their own endeavours succeed in rehabilitating themselves in their new homeland, they will inevitably be subject to pressures to assimilate or amalgamate with their host populations, with the gradual extinction of their distinctive characteristics”(Conway, 1975, p. 75).

While India with its multicultural inclinations, unlike many European countries, had provided space for Tibetans to keep their separate cultural identity, Conway speculates

other factors too which proved helpful in keeping the community from dispersion and constructing a self sufficient, independent community. Dalai Lama, being the central figure of community, is one such factor. Not only Tibetans living in settlements with close-knit ties in India visualise him as a true spiritual leader, the children of Tibetans emigrated to foreign countries, despite being less connected to their roots and following Western lifestyles, visit India to have his blessings or guidance. The position of Dalai Lama has thus overtime strengthened and not weakened. He appreciates the policy adopted by Indian government and voluntary agencies to help Tibetans maintain their own language and culture as well as create an economically independent community. The success of different settlements depended on the environment of particular state, markets available and capital provided.<sup>18</sup> Conway, thus, provides the factors keeping the Tibetan community from dispersion.

Despite the presence of such factors, however, there are visible differences that persist in the beliefs and attitudes of younger generation and older generation towards regular as well as political issues. Taking the trend of comparative analysis of Tibetans in pre and post 1959 society forward, Mohammed Fazel (1990) sheds light on such differences and examines if the younger generation of Tibetans is as contented as the older generation. He examines the validation of “universally” accepted view that Tibetans “have been ‘contented’ individuals who have enjoyed a propensity for leading ‘satisfying’ life” (Fazel, 1990, p. 42). On conducting a study in 1986 in Dharamshala, he argues that such characteristics of contentment could be attributed to their religion, i.e. Mahayana Buddhism. Through his research, he has tried to bring out the comparison between the attitudes of older generation of Tibetans (50 years and older, who had spent at least 25 years in Tibet before their flight) and younger generation (18 to 22 years,

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<sup>18</sup> While he lauds the contributions of foreign voluntary sponsorship agencies in the process of building self sustaining and viable settlements, he argues that the role of foreign agencies assisting the Tibetan refugees has shifted in recent years, with shifting emphasis from relief to rehabilitation. In his words, “Financial investment has demanded a dramatic shift in the priorities of the donor agencies. It has, on the one hand, led to the de emphasising of the Tibetans as the recipients of sporadic charity and on the other, demanded a recognition of a long term relationship not tied to the particular emergency which followed the Tibetans’ escape from their homeland. The Tibetans are no longer in a dependent status, but rather partners in an ongoing process of self development” (Conway, 1975, p. 82).

who have been born and brought up in exile) towards different aspects of life.<sup>19</sup> This was done with the objective to trace whether similar ‘satisfied’ outlook have been imparted in younger Tibetans by their elders, or the change in environmental factors has amounted to change in such ‘contented’ or positive attitude towards life.

According to Fazel, what separates older Tibetans from younger ones is an important variable, what he calls ‘Tibetan formative factor’. This factor implies that older generation had such experiences of Tibet which is unavailable to younger generations. This experience influences the choices and perspectives they hold for different aspects of life. He has observed that the satisfaction level of younger Tibetans is relatively more than the older Tibetans. “Younger Tibetans”, he argues, “have become more sensitized to the problems of the host country and view government, politics, and the community less critically than do the older Tibetans. One reason may be found in the subjective connotation that the older Tibetans attach to concepts such as politics and government, owing to their unique Tibetan formative factor”(Fazel, 1990, p. 46). Acknowledging the relative absence of institutionalized infrastructure in pre-1959 Tibet, he argues that “the formative factor in the consciousness of the older group lacking an articulated government and political infrastructural model, explains their critical attitude towards an overstrained Indian political and governmental systems and the overburdened infrastructure” (Fazel, 1990, p. 47).

Providing a number of reasons behind the differences between both the generations, Fazel, however, leaves untouched the possibility of psychological impact of displacement on the older generation which explains their lower levels of contentment with the living standards and society in India. The desire to return back to Tibet persists in older refugees who directly or indirectly complains about the new environment, implicitly pointing to the ‘perfection’ they had experienced in their native home. Such concern of the psychological impact of forceful displacement on Tibetan refugees is dealt by Vahali (2009), in her work *‘Lives in Exile’*. While claiming that exile as a

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<sup>19</sup> He has divided the different factors impacting on Tibetans’ life into three clusters: a) *extraneous factors*: including items on government, political leaders, physical condition, and community; b) *subjective and personal factors*: dealing with accomplishment, life as a whole, family life, amount of fun one has, family activity, spare time and how it is spent, neighbourhood. c) *material comfort factors*: focussing on the individual and the family’s income, job, standard of living, house/apartment, and goods and services.



paradox that can't be resolved and attempts to trace the 'living actuality' of the displaced group, she tries to reposition the Tibetans from sufferers and survivors to people who are trying to newly facilitate their lives.<sup>20</sup> She argues that trauma created through exile requires to be assimilated in order to move on and realising it to be part of the past by according it the position in the past.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Fazel's observation also emphasises on the relatedness between different socio political settings and changing attitudes or beliefs among individuals. Another point worth observing here is the changing interaction between the community, which exhibits particular belief system and guidelines, and the individual. The point of deviation from the community's beliefs and values is where settles the seeds of new identity. This new identity may or may not be entirely different from the previous one, and could possibly be subsumed within the community. With the increasing level of deviation, a remarkable change in identity could be visible, that could mark an entirely different identity. The transformations experienced by individuals, of both generations, of Tibetan community are, however, accommodated within it, exhibiting the former kind of identity. Few scholars, like Saklani, attribute such transformations in Tibetan identity to the changing patterns in the society of Tibetans.

The most comprehensive research examining continuity and change in Tibetan community is done by preeminent sociologist Girija Saklani (1984). In her book *'The Uprooted Tibetans in India: A Sociological Study of Continuity and Change'*, attempts to do a diachronic study of social change, taking up sub-structural analysis of the different strata of the Tibetan community in India. Her main thematic concerns include 'social change in the Tibetan refugees' traditional structure and institutional patterns, patterns of adjustment to the changes and differential conditioning of the first and second generations of refugees, rehabilitation policy and programmes and their implications for the adjustment process as well as for the overall goals of the refugee community' (Saklani, 1984, p. 32). In her study, she does a comparative analysis of past

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<sup>20</sup> Few of the main concerns she emphasises upon include: 'how do we position our Tibetan participants? Do we view them as victims or as heroes, as destroyed beings and psychiatric patients? How do intergenerational aspects manifest themselves as continuities or disruptions across the life span of a displaced community and its individual members?' (Vahali, 2009, p. 245-246).

<sup>21</sup> She further argues that trauma can no longer be identified with a particular event or specific life historical moment. This is because trauma also occurs in the pervasive context in refugees lives because of the life historical conditions.

and present situation of Tibetans and the structural as well as behavioural transformation occurred over time. Through her research, she shows the principles underlying the structure of Tibetan society prior to displacement, and changing pattern of society post displacement due to abrupt change in environment.

It is, therefore, undeniable that the resistance shown by Tibetan community towards change, with emphasis to continue with the pre displacement culture, has still left, though very few, routes open where implicit intermingling of Tibetan culture with other varied culture occurs. The aim of going through these works and arguments therein is to get an idea of the manner in which transformation occurred over time in the community, with its different impact on older and younger generations, and on the relationship between the individual, born and brought up in India, and community.

#### **4. Cultural Preservation and Sponsorship**

Scholars, especially anthropologists and sociologists like Saklani and Basu, have dealt with the questions related to Tibetanness, Tibetan identity and ethnic identity. They have attempted to expose how terms and conditions of what constitutes Tibetan identity have been changing in exile, through acculturation, on one hand, and cultural politics, on the other. Although they plausibly prove how Tibetan identity as a whole is gradually transforming, what remains hardly touched upon is the question concerning individual autonomy amidst the changing relationship of individual and community.

There has been, undoubtedly, a plethora of research work available on Tibetan refugees, so much that the title of 'the golden refugees' could also be accompanied with the title 'the most-researched refugees'. These researches touch upon almost every aspect and process prevalent in or is impacting their lives. While few anthropologists have focused upon the 'successful' settlement, the extent of adaptation, and change experienced by Tibetans, there is no dearth of scholarly works from other fields which, through in depth analysis, attempted to decipher the politics, cultural and other factors, underlying such 'successful' rehabilitation in different countries. These works encompass the questions regarding community survival, culture, identity, changing situation, resistance, domination and so on. While overlapping persists during the study of these concepts in

the context of Tibetan refugees, it is noteworthy that the review of these works highlights two interrelated processes of utmost necessity, that of cultural preservation and sponsorships. These two are interrelated not only because the lives of Tibetans revolve around them but also because in this case neither of these two could continue to exist in the absence of another.

With the help of the following two sub-sections, describing the functioning of these two processes, one could observe that Tibetans' lives are encapsulated around the politics of sponsorship and politics of culture to fulfil their basic needs of survival.

#### **a. Cultural Politics: Question of 'Authentic' Culture**

Unlike other refugees, culture serves the primary goal of Tibetan community which is to show solidarity through unified culture in order to claim their right on Tibet. Studies (Saklani, 1984; Roemer, 2010; Mishra, 2014) have explored and examined varied strategies contrived by Tibetan government to keep its culture from disintegration on an alien land. These strategies include creation of various cultural and political institutions to instil cultural history and values in children brought up outside Tibet. The main concern regarding cultural preservation among Tibetans, which particularly emerged in the post displacement period, was to save its 'exoticism'<sup>22</sup> (using Anand's terminology) from extinction, on the one hand and, reveal its corruption (with CTA claiming to present the authentic version) as presented in China, on the other. Cultural politics, thus, comes to play the dominant role in the process of cultural preservation, undermining the significance attached to the latter during the early years of refuge. Ahmed (2006) and Basu (2012), in their respective works, show how the question of representation of 'authentic' Tibetan culture lies at the core of the constitution of Tibetan identity. The decision regarding what constitutes Tibetan identity falls under the ambit of 'superiors' of Tibetan community, or PRC, where individuals are hardly left with any choice, and are hardly autonomous enough to deviate from it.

Syed Jamil Ahmed (2006), using the case study of Lhamo (the popular folk opera of Tibet), reveals and unravels such contested politics between Tibetan diaspora and China

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<sup>22</sup> The term 'exoticism' implies the appeal of Tibetan culture, particularly Buddhism in Western world.

activated through its practice. Lhamo is an integral part of Tibetan culture, which got carried with Tibetan people. However, the practice of this folk opera has been redeveloped by People's Republic of China in the wake of the Cultural Revolution in order to stake a Chinese claim on Tibet to demonstrate the way they 'emancipated' Tibetans. He argues that the opera has been politicised to serve different political and economic ends. Instead of inclining towards any one of these claims and assertions, Ahmed reveals how culture (here Lhamo) becomes a site of struggle and a tool of resistance and domination. He argues that there are two ways in which the Lhamo has been articulated, none of which presents the 'authentic' version of it but have commoditized it. One is practiced by Tibetan Government in Exile, which in order to gain global attention for the success of its freedom movement and to receive sponsorships, modifies it to make it more attractive and interesting. Similar attempt is made by PRC for the purpose of showing the developments that occurred in Tibet under China. The struggle is extended to the international level, where similar acts are produced by both the 'contenders' conveying entirely different meanings. Ahmed also draws the parallel between PRC and TIPA, questioning the validity of claim of the Tibetan government in exile that it is 'preserving' tradition, which PRC is obliterating through 'calculated cultural genocide'.

Likewise, Sudeep Basu (2012) also looks into the varied existing forms of representations of Tibetan culture in exile, constructed by Tibetans and non-Tibetans alike, in contrast with the dominant view that Tibetanness implies a unified culture. As against the stereotypical manner in which Tibetans are read, he argues, the community represents varied "contesting identities and practices in the diaspora" (Basu, 2012, p. 232).

The concern of representing 'authentic' culture is aimed to sustain the appeal of Tibetan religion and culture in the eyes of foreigners. While this is believed as helping the refugees in gaining sponsors, on one hand, and claiming authority of Tibetans over its culture, on the other, the correct representation and regular manifestation of culture also relates to the purpose of displaying their plight as a constant reminder of loss of a homeland, from where this particular culture emerged.

### **b. Sponsorship: An Informal Economy**

While other scholars seem concerned with the continuity and change in the social and cultural lives and psychological conditions of Tibetan refugees (as mentioned earlier), following Pierre Bourdieu's<sup>23</sup> concept of symbolic capital, Audrey Prost (2006), displaying his dissatisfaction towards the early anthropological writings on Tibetan culture which largely remained limited to examining "Tibetans' rate of adaptation to their new surroundings and their degree of acculturation" (Prost, 2006, p. 235) and successful preservation of culture in lieu of emphasising on recurring social transformations, looks into often neglected sphere of economy in Tibetan communities, particularly those established in Dharamshala. He focuses on the "growth of informal economic exchanges within this community, and particularly on the transformation of symbolic capital into economic capital" (Prost, 2006, p. 234). Showing his concerns regarding the bias towards Dharamshala<sup>24</sup> in scholarly works as embedding 'inauthentic' culture, mixed with modernity, he highlights how it also presents specificity with new ways of cultural production and development of relationship between Tibetans and sponsors in order to enhance the symbolic capital.

Prost delivers the argument regarding the prevalence of a new form of economic exchange based on the acquisition, accumulation and representation of symbolic capital quite easily visible in Tibetan communities in Dharamshala. Moreover, as Tibetan culture is highly praised for its religion, Buddhism, being considered as the dominant marker of their identity by foreigners, Dharamshala's economy is dependent on the

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<sup>23</sup> Pierre Bourdieu's bifurcation of capital and the essentiality of possessing symbolic capital plausibly elucidate the refugee situation and the effect of displacement on refugee culture. To understand the social world or the individual, there is a need to understand both. Pierre Bourdieu's framework of habitus, capital and field offers a helpful tool to analyse the relationship between the individual and the social world. In the case of refugees, it explains how the shift occurs and influences the social world of the individual thereby impacting on the identification of the individual. The refugees collide with new social field after migration and their habitus as well as capital it has acquired so far, are not product of the new social field and thus are not considered legitimate. An analysis of field or new social world also includes an understanding of how policy and social discourses construct the category of refugee, and assign particular social roles and identities while denying others. In simplistic terms, the refugees and their actions or the social connections they have developed so far are no longer considered important and legitimate in the host state. They are of no value and are expected to be kept confined to the private sphere. This makes the incorporation of refugees in the new community even more difficult.

<sup>24</sup> Dharamshala, according to him, presents a distinct exile culture, "with its own idiomatic language, local community networks, and a style of being and acting recognisable among other Tibetan exile communities" (Prost, 2006, p. 236). In his words, "the uprooted, as many described them, had grown roots" in this town (Prost, 2006, p. 236).

‘presentation and promotion of its culture’ (particularly religion). He accentuates the mutual dependency evident between foreign sponsors and Tibetans and how the responses of sponsors fluctuate over time, in case their aid is observed being used in prioritising material possessions over spiritual submissions. The economic exchange is of unique kind where the funds are to be returned in the form of symbolic capital such as spiritual threads from the families or traditional medicinal pills or spiritual advices. The idea of ‘rich refugees’ is problematic for the foreigners, and hence, Tibetans have to keep proving them that the money is spent in areas sanctioned by the sponsors, i.e. monastic education or other activities relating to their culture and not in becoming ‘rich’ by buying television or other modern materials which might deviate them from spiritual practices. The case that Prost discusses is of individual sponsors, and not that the institutional ones or organisations, which is gained from interpersonal relationships.

Not only that, sponsorships invariably lead to dependency of Tibetan refugees on aids that they at times avoid making efforts for independent life. Tina Lauer (2015) does a comparative study between Tibetans living in India and those living in Switzerland. According to her, the financial advantages enjoyed by most of the Tibetans through sponsorships have contributed in deteriorating of their relations with the local population of host country (India). Few of the Tibetans are fully dependent on the financial aid, and have begun to use their Tibetan origins as survival strategy in order to gain foreign sponsors. “Even though the sponsorship system is very common, it is linked to a number of official and unofficial demands” (Lauer, 2015, p. 173), which includes preserving culture or good grades in school to maintain consistency in the grant of aids.

It could, thus, be observed that to grasp the two processes of cultural preservation and sponsorship, and their interrelatedness, requires the knowledge of the reason behind the flight of Tibetan refugees, and indispensable goal set thereafter. The purpose of flight from Tibet, in the wake of excessive intervention of China in the internal affairs of Tibet culminating into subsequent invasion, was not only to escape threat to their lives but also to preserve their culture from obliteration. The contours of institutional – administrative, cultural and educational – development in exile, to ease the adaptation

process in new socio-economic setting, had been made in compatible terms with their culture, in order to keep their culture preserved. Establishment of these institutions could only be achieved with the aid and assistance provided by the Government of India, various NGOs and, sponsors – individual as well as organisation. Over time, sponsors have gained wider salience in Tibetan community<sup>25</sup>, fulfilling latter's pecuniary needs, ranging from individual's basic necessities of livelihood to the implementation of government's (in exile) policies for linguistic as well as cultural restoration.

Assuming such an act of benevolence in the form of sponsorship as 'free service' has proved to be nothing more than figment of human imagination. Scholars, like De Voe, and Prost, have showed how sponsorships are meant more than mere charity for well being of needy refugees, and are bestowed upon them along with a set of rules and regulations, albeit latent, to comply with. One of such implicit rules includes manifestation of Tibetan culture through varied performances, at personal as well as community level, i.e. to prove Tibetan identity on regular basis. To preserve culture, thus, requires regular sponsorships and to acquire sponsorships requires guaranteeing that the 'authentic' culture is being pursued and performed by Tibetans in exilic circumstances. These requirements bind the two processes in a way that none could be fulfilled in the absence of another.

The entitlement of financial aid to a person is therefore contingent on how much related s/he is with the community or could represent herself as part of the community. As the distance between her and community as well as its cultural values exceeds, the chances to gain such aid recede. Even sponsorships which are provided on individual basis set the similar condition of not merely being the member of community but also to follow the obligations set by the latter, reducing the space for individual choice.

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<sup>25</sup> When I refer to the term community, the reference is made to signify Tibetan community as a whole, or what many call as Tibetan nation, and not the sub ethnic groups within it.

## **5. Understanding Identity**

Amidst the ongoing cultural as well as sponsorship politics, experiences of psychological trauma of past event and transformed environment, identity of Tibetans undergo certain changes. This section looks into the understanding of Tibetan identity, undetached from Tibetanness, prevalent in Tibetan community which marks the inclusion and exclusion of Tibetans as per the outlined characteristics of Tibetanness. It would further relate such understanding with the essentialist understanding of identity, and would provide varied debates concerning identity in political theory. The section would finally argue how political theory could help shift the focus from communitarian idea of Tibetan identity and explore the possibility of re-identification of individual.

While going through the literature on Tibetan community, it is observed that individual identity of Tibetans is hardly grasped as detached from the Tibetanness, which is deemed as essentially required for identification or being part of the community. Through the use of comparative tools, Tina Lauer (2005) presents the struggle a Tibetan goes through to prove Tibetan identity to their own community, which is constructed in the exilic circumstances, amongst the second generation of Tibetans to be recognized as one.

By the term ‘identity’ she refers to the Tibetan identity which is described as per the prevalent definitions of Tibetanness among Tibetans.<sup>26</sup> Examining the influences on the identities of people from different social fields, she explores various obligations set on them to preserve that identity. These obligations include opposing non-Tibetan marriage, being politically involved in freedom movement, having Tibetan language skills, following Buddhism, and accepting Dalai Lama as a significant cultural symbol and spiritual leader of all Tibetans. The rationale behind such obligations is said to maintain commonality among Tibetans to form a unified community, only source to fuel the freedom struggle. She adds that the objective is also to develop “Tibetan self understanding that could exist independently of a feeling of commonality and connectedness toward Tibetan identity”(Lauer, 2015, p. 168).

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<sup>26</sup> Lauer uses the theory of Brubaker and Cooper who “agree that the term identity has lost its meaning. For them, it either needs to mean too much or nothing at all. Instead they suggest the use of three alternative thematic groups: a) Identification and categorization; b) Self understanding and social location; and, c) Commonality, connectedness, and groupness”(Lauer, 2015, p. 170).



She argues that in the minds of older Tibetans, the image of an “ideal” Tibetan still exists, i.e. how an ideal Tibetan should act, live, dress and behave. Deviating from the articulation of ‘perfect’ Tibetan characteristics leads to exclusion within the diaspora and the categorisation of Tibetan and non Tibetan.<sup>27</sup> She proves that in studying Tibetan transnational culture, it is not correct to create neat categories using certain characteristics. There are instances where “some Tibetans in exile ironically turn away from their hereditary society to pursue their own individualistic dreams.”<sup>28</sup> Identification with a self understanding of one’s origins is sometimes independent from perceived feelings of commonalities or connectedness with other Tibetans” (Lauer, 2015, p. 184).

While Lauer investigates the lives of Tibetans in Switzerland and India, Julia Meredith Hess (2006) looks into the lives of Tibetans in US. Hess explores what impact adopting US citizenship has on the identities of stateless Tibetans and the interrelationship of state defined status of refugees/exiles/immigrants, identity formation, state policy, and activism. She also shows “how responses from Tibetans – not easily categorized as resistance or accommodation – both transform state policy and simultaneously reflect changes in cultural, national, and individualistic expressions of Tibetan identity as the diaspora expands, and thus constitute a new social imaginary, a new social world that is substantively different from the one they occupied before resettling in the United States” (Hess, 2006, p. 81). She investigates Tibetans response to the provision of

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<sup>27</sup>Tina Lauer mentions few respondents complaining about the ‘hyper positive’ views of people (in this case, Swiss) on Tibetan identity, with no regard to their independent existence and identity developed over years. So far as marriage is concerned, while Tibetans in India, with very few exceptions, considered marrying a non Tibetan out of question, Tibetans residing in Switzerland give more preference to compatibility than to similar cultural backgrounds. “Whereas in India the preservation of Tibetan culture through endogamous marriage plays an important role, second generation Tibetans in Switzerland choose their partners mostly apart from political, ethnic, or cultural concerns.” “According to the definition of the TGSL (Tibetan community in Switzerland and Liechtenstein), Tibetans who marry non-Tibetans, as well as the children of such unions, are still called Tibetan. Nevertheless, some members of the Tibetan diaspora in Switzerland do not really integrate the Tibetans with only one Tibetan parent into the community. When the preservation of Tibetan ethnicity is brought up in public, Tibetans with only one Tibetan parent often feel excluded” (Lauer, 2015, p. 178). Few respondents from Switzerland also revealed the sense of estrangement that they feel when they meet Tibetans born and raised in India. Seeing them, they feel ‘less’ Tibetan, the feeling that Tibetans in India are more authentic in contrast to the ‘Westernized Tibetans’.

<sup>28</sup> Reconnection with Tibetans in rest of world through political activism seems to be the only way to identify with the Tibetan origins. However, she argues that “recurring feeling of commonality with the Tibetan community through political activism among Tibetans in Switzerland can be blurred by a feeling of liability or duty to engage for Tibet” (Lauer, 2015, p. 180). Moreover, Buddhism which is considered as crucial part of Tibetanness in India, was observed less common among Tibetans in Switzerland.

citizenship in United States, and state's action to balance the international relations and concerns of its own citizens.<sup>29</sup>

While both Hess and Lauer emphasise on the influence of specific context in the formation of common Tibetan identity, they also highlight how distinct interactions and participation with the community decide the inclusion and exclusion of individuals, on the one hand, but also argue how belonging to Tibetan community gives the power of negotiation with the state.

It is, therefore, quite clear that what identity means for the group or community is what is bestowed upon individuals (social and cultural values) with which they make sense of their identity. While scholars have looked into how change in environment changes identity of Tibetan individual and community separately, there are two important aspects that have not received much specific attention.

First is the question of changing relationship of Tibetans with their community or vice versa, which gives rise to the second question of individual choice, i.e. how far an individual exercises her right to make decisions about her life, which in turn relates to the third question of personal and self identity, i.e. how she identifies or re-identifies herself in exilic context being a refugee. Further speculations could be made on the impact of this changing relationship on the Tibetan freedom movement. For the purpose of these two questions, different theories of identity and the debate of individualists and communitarians in political theory could be revisited.

A number of attempts have been made in political theory, as would be further explained, to grasp the meaning of identity, reaching no consensus over its signification. There are no unique well-defined criteria to define identity. Essentialist view of identity describes

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<sup>29</sup> Tibetans living in exile in India are also motivated by CTA as well as Dalai Lama to move West. According to them, movement to Western countries could provide exposure at international stage from where they could make a global appeal and plan strategies for Tibet freedom. Tibetans are accommodated in US under the 1990 Immigration Act as Section 134, Tibetan Provisions. Hess provides historical trajectory of this act and significance of Tibetans in the evolution of this Act. Preference was given to two kinds of people: either poorest of the poor Tibetans living in exile, or well educated who could be articulate about the situation in Tibet.

identity of a person in terms of social and cultural relations and experiences they share with each other. An individual could retain a 'stable' identity so long as s/he is related to or is a member of a particular community or group. The common characteristics among members of the community are what constitute the essence of their identity. Any deviation from the normal course of group behaviour or values, meanings and characteristics inculcated by it is believed to cause distortion in one's identity.

In the case of Tibetans, the available literature has hitherto equated an individual's identity in Tibetan society with the Tibetanness s/he possesses, revealing the essentialist understanding of identity that dominates the conscience of community and actors outside the community (Western admirers and sponsors). Being part of the community is imperative to receive the benefits as a refugee. One could say that even on volition, the individual could hardly move out of the binds of community. As has been illustrated in the aforementioned literature, each and every work, whether emphasising upon continuity and change, cultural politics, politics of sponsorship or psychological trauma, has in one way or another revealed a direct or indirect influence on the formation or structuring of individual's identity and identity of the group as a whole. The formation of identity is by and large gauged to the extent it impacts their survival and that of the culture to serve the larger goal of preservation and recuperation of culture they have set for themselves. In lucid terms, identity transformation distances them from not only their community but also the initial goal with which they formed their government in exile.<sup>30</sup>

The essentialist view is what the proponents of communitarianism<sup>31</sup> have also adopted. They have been ascribed to the similar idea of individual which could not and should not be detached from the 'parent' body of community, through which s/he had learned to make sense of the world. Individual identity emerges from group identity, in the absence of which the former's very existence goes down in the scale of morality and authenticity. Factors existing outside the individual in the social world play crucial role in the determination of individual identity and attaching meaning to her life. The

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<sup>30</sup> As mentioned earlier, this has also been claimed by John Conway (1975) while mentioning the plight of refugees (particularly Tibetans). He says that ceasing the dispersion of community members and efforts to keep their culture preserved are the only two ways to keep a unified identity as a group.

<sup>31</sup> Communitarianism is the school of thought which emerged witnessing the decline in the relevance of community in political theory.

capability to make ethical choices guided by prudent, reasonable decisions is developed under the care of community. The ends, served by these choices and decisions, must possess some potential contributing factor to benefit society as a whole. Common good (or what classical theorists also recognized as 'higher good') of community is prioritised over good of particular individual.

Charles Taylor provides a plausible elucidation of communitarian school of thought and shows why the distinction of ontological issues from advocacy ones is important to understand communitarianism (Hittinger, 1990). However, he parts company with other communitarians by introducing his theory of constitutive goods and strong evaluations. Agreeing that individuals are and always will be socially embedded selves, he highlights the role of philosophy in articulating the spiritual qualities of life and not merely the material and atomistic ones. Social values, language, traditions, beliefs, etc., are few 'constitutive goods' with which individuals' lives couldn't remain devoid of as the formation of their identity depends on them. While these constitutive goods are intrinsically present in individuals, for him, these must not be categorised as higher goods or in his terms 'hyper goods' which escape the process of strong evaluations. Individuals respond differently to values or goods, few focuses on the ends which fulfil desires (*desirabilia*) and others deliberate over these goods as well as ends to pursue good life. He rejects the incommensurability of goods or ends, even of constitutive goods.

While Taylor considers constitutive goods as integral to individual identity, Amy Gutmann attributes individual identity to different social markers such as communal, gender, religion, race, disability, etc. Individual's membership to a particular identity group is contingent on the social marker which is the point in focus. This implies that one individual could be attached to more than one identity group at the same time. On the basis of these social markers, she divides different identity groups into four categories: cultural group; voluntary group; ascriptive group; and religious group. She maintains that the contribution of these groups to a democracy could be examined in terms of three principles, that of civic equality; equal freedom; and basic opportunity for individuals. Gutmann seems disturbed with the claim of comprehensiveness or all encompassing feature set forth by cultural groups, on the one hand, and symmetric view of ascriptive identity group that emphasis on the identification of oneself with her own

kind only. She rejects the premise that ‘a single culture encompasses the identity of the individuals who are its members’.<sup>32</sup> Such premise, she argues, undermines the individual’s potential to ‘think, act or imagine beyond their culture’.

In stark contrast to the essentialist stand on individual identity, postmodernists deny any relationship between the formation of identity and the social world. Postmodernist theory of identity considers identities as constructed categories, which must be ‘subverted’ or undermined ‘to destabilize the normalizing forces that bring them into being’ (Moya, Hames-Garcia, & Ebrary, Inc, 2000, p. 07). Postmodernists suggest that the self has no nature. They argue that “the self can have no nature because subjectivity does not exist outside the grammatical structures that govern our thought; rather, it is produced by those structures. Because subjects exist only in relation to ever evolving webs of signification and because they constantly differ from themselves as time passes and meanings change, the self – as a unified, stable, and knowable entity existing prior to or outside language – is merely a fiction of language, an effect of discourse” (Moya, Hames-Garcia, & Ebrary, Inc, 2000, p. 6). In the book titled ‘Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism’, Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames Garcia produce a collection of essays which provide an alternative theory of identity as against both essentialist and postmodernists theories of identity. Given by Satya P. Mohanty, the theory is known as post positivist realist theory of identity. They argue that the political salience of identity cannot be undermined as even today the distribution of resources and goods is to an extent based on identity categories.

Few philosophers have also analysed the individual identity from the point of view of reidentification of individual, and essential identification. The two concepts are given by renowned philosopher Amelie Rorty, in her work ‘The Identities of Persons’. Alan Montefiore (2011) argues that Rorty’s concern of reidentification of individual raises the issues of ‘conceptual order’, while essential identification regards the historical bounds and societal embeddedness of individual. For identification of self or reidentification, he emphasises, there need to be the repeatability principle, i.e. ‘certain continuity with self identity’. The repeatability principle, he argues, must be

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<sup>32</sup> She states that “political theorists of culture such as Avishai Margalit, Moshe Halbertal, Joseph Raz, and Will Kymlicka, consider cultural identity group to be a group that represents a way of life that is close to encompassing or comprehensive”.

accompanied with some 'classificatory sense', i.e. conceptually appropriate enough to be classified. In addition to the repeatability principle, the process of self-identification must also involve certain break-point from previous identity and adoption of new identity, as in new traits or temperament. However, his point of having a break between the two identities of same individual requires to be modified, to involve the constant changes that occur over time, of which a person hardly becomes aware of. These constant changes points to the unending struggle in the process of reaching final (new) identity. The formation of identity, thus, can't be studied in a linear manner as has been suggested by Alan Montefiore, but rather an evolving and expanding process, where rupture in the previous identity might or might not occur.

The aforementioned theories of identity in political theory points to one concern, that despite the presence of such vast theories, implications of practical applicability of only essentialist or communitarian theory is visible in the case of Tibetans. The identity formation is quite intricate in contemporary times (as would be elucidated in detail in chapter three). In the phase of intermingling of different cultures and newly emerging identities, there is a need keep check on the principles of community. Tibetan community and individual could be seen as undergoing transformation, which asks for the need to set new markers of identification, in order to switch individual away from the politics on play, of cultural preservation and sponsorship, and strengthen new commonalities, say on the basis of political movement.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has summed up the scholarly works on Tibetans around the argument that despite the all time hovering concern of change in culture over the Tibetan community and resistance against it, both individuals and community have been experiencing constant changes. The trajectory of formation and identification of Tibetans identity moves in a direction, involving stages and principles suggested by Alan Montefiore, as well as few constant changes, which do not involve an absolute rupture of previous mode of living, traits or temperament. One must, however, take note of the newly emerging identities and provide space to them. While political theory constitutes a

number of theories explaining such change, there has been hardly any attempt to seek resolve using these theories.

The identity theories and debates are used to study the different ways in which identities are formed and changed in the lives of Tibetan refugees. While the present chapter makes a small attempt to introduce these theories, they would further be taken up in the concluding chapter. Taking the argument of intricacy in identity formation in contemporary times, the next two chapters would provide an analytical account of how the idea of self identification changes over time in Tibetans case.

Identifying the essential characteristics of previous individual identity in traditional Tibetan society, its nature and culture, the research would move ahead to argue, in the third chapter, how these essential features gets amalgamated with new ones, resulting in the, conscious or unconscious, adoption of new identity in the new context, and change in modes of identification. The concern of next two chapters is to show the interaction of Tibetan individual with her community in traditional Tibet, and with Tibetan community in exile.

## **Chapter: Two**

### **Society, Culture and History:**

#### **Pre-Exiled Tibetan Identity**

While the previous chapter introduced the main concern of complex identity formation reverberating in Tibetan community, the aim of the present chapter is to understand the nature of interaction between community and individual in Tibet prior to the event of 1959, which structured the individual identity during the pre displacement period. The chapter would begin by drawing the basic picture of Tibet to understand the nature and structure of its society through setting its geographical location and analysing the socio-economic conditions and legal-administrative system that prevailed in Tibetan society. The chapter would be descriptive in approach to provide at length description of the nature of pre-displacement Tibetan community. The arguments made in the chapter are: first, studying the description of geography of Tibet is imperative not only because of the disputed nature of its territory, but to have the knowledge of what we talk about when we talk about Tibet; second, despite the isolationist nature of Tibet, its culture has the imprints of the culture of China and India; third, the individuals and the Tibetan community during this period were so closely tied that the identity of individual seemed to have emerged from the community and formed on the basis of communitarian principles; finally, investigates how the nature of community differ from the modern nation state.

The term ‘culture’, used in the chapter, could be interpreted as including a number of aspects. In *The Sage Dictionary of Culture Studies*, the term ‘culture’ is defined as “a whole way of life as like a language, as constituted by representatives, as a tool, as practices, as artefacts, as spatial arrangements, as power, as high or low, as mass or as popular”. Various traditions, beliefs, literature, paintings, sculpture, dance, music, films, and so on are different ways to manifest one’s culture.



## 1. Geo-political Isolationism of Tibet

Tibet is popularly known as the ‘Roof of the World’. Such attribution is because of its location at higher altitudes along with Great Himalayas in Asia. It is located in the north eastern side of Himalayas and surrounded by highest mountain ranges on its three sides. It is a ‘bitterly cold desert which comprises an area of 471,660 square miles (1,221,601 sq. km), and has temperature that ranges between 50° F to 68° F (10° C TO 20° C) in summer, and below freezing point in winter’.<sup>33</sup> Description of Tibet’s boundaries, however, is a daunting task. While one is the geographical reason itself, another relates to the political one, i.e. the dispute between China and Tibet.

### (a) Intricate Description of Tibet

Description of the area of Tibet is highly contested and intricate. Broadly, the area of Tibet could be explained in four ways: geographically, ethnically, politically, ethnographically.

*Geographically*, Tibet is enclosed by mountain ranges of the Kunlan, the Himalayas and the Karakoram.

*Ethnically*, Tibet encompasses a huge area that includes “not only China but also India (Ladakh, Sikkim, Lahul and Spiti, northern Uttar Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh, Kinnaur), eastern and western areas of Nepal and Bhutan. Ethnic Tibet refers to the dispersed population of Tibet that follows somewhat similar traditions and customs.

The area of Tibet that has been under the authority of Tibetan monastic rule is explained as *political Tibet*. Hugh Richardson describes political Tibet as the area that “the Tibet government have ruled continuously from the earliest times down to 1951” (Richardson quoted in Goldstein, 2005, p. xii). Political Tibet has transformed over the period of time as a result of the wars with Tibet’s neighbours like China, Bhutan and Nepal; as well as the partly accomplished agreements and negotiations over time (Roemer, 2010,

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<sup>33</sup>Saklani, G. (1984). *The uprooted Tibetans in India*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publ.

p. 8-9). Few of the main events that triggered the debate over the alteration of boundaries include Tibetan independence of 1913 by the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (1876-1933), Simla Conference of 1914, invasion of People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1950, and so on.

Tibet is also defined on the basis of *ethnographic dimensions*. Ethnographic definition of Tibet includes all the areas which still incorporate the majority of Tibetan population that forms a nation sharing 'common ethnic, cultural and emotional grounds', despite having different lifestyles as per varied regions (Roemer, 2010, p. 9).

### **(b) Debate over the definition of Tibet**

There has been a huge conflict over the boundaries of Tibet. "The historical difference between ethnographic and political Tibet has become part of the representational battleground of the Tibet question" (Goldstein, 2005, p. xii). Chinese invasion of 1950 and escape of Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetans in 1959 have contributed in fuelling the debate. In the absence of well demarcated outline of Tibetan boundaries, China and Tibet place contrary claims over its boundaries.

Tibet, as claimed by Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), has traditionally been constitutive of three main regions: *U-Tsang*, *Amdo* and *Kham*. While *U-Tsang* represented the western and central Tibet, *Amdo* was the north eastern part of Tibet and *Kham* constituted the south eastern part of Tibet. The former had been the main centre of monastic rule and the latter two had been ruled by few local rulers of traditional Tibet. All the three, however, constitute the majority of population of Tibetan people with few important monks and monasteries.

The current debate over the composition of Tibet refers to the two broad regions: Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR, which includes western region of Ngari and the central Tibetan U and Tsang regions with the Tibetan capital of Lhasa) and present Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan (traditional Amdo and Kham regions). Here the distinction between political Tibet (former) and ethnographic Tibet (latter) becomes significant. While political Tibet, for Melvyn Goldstein, constitutes 46 percent of TAR, ethnographic Tibet refers to the remaining 54 percent. In the words of

Hugh Richardson, who attempts to explain the distinction between the political Tibet and ethnographic Tibet:

“In "political" Tibet the Tibetan government have ruled continuously from the earliest times down to 1951. The region beyond that to the north and east [Amdo and Kham in Tibetan] . . . is its "ethnographic" extension which people of Tibetan race once inhabited exclusively and where they are still in the majority. In that wider area, "political" Tibet exercised jurisdiction only in certain places and at irregular intervals; for the most part, local lay or monastic chiefs were in control of districts of varying size. From the 18th century onwards the region was subject to sporadic Chinese infiltration.” (Richardson quoted in Goldstein, 2005, p. xii)

The distinction is significant because the talks regarding the claim over the areas of Tibet are based on this distinction. For China, Tibet is no more than the area under the TAR which was taken over in 1950, the remaining parts of Amdo and Kham had often been under Chinese rulers. It follows that the political Tibet is the only Tibet that is the centre of debate. On the other hand, CTA claims that all the three parts which represents the ethnographic Tibet should be considered as Tibetan regions, where China had no stake and thus should be returned to Tibetan government. However, constant refusal on the part of China regarding the latter ethnographic claim of CTA has made the issue unresolvable.<sup>34</sup>

### **(c) Significance of Tibet's Location**

The description of Tibet's demographic location is necessary for any research on Tibet in order to make it clear what we talk about when we talk about Tibet. Because of the availability of different references that could be made regarding Tibet, it is necessary to point out “Tibet” that has indeed been emphasised. For this research purpose, ethnographic Tibet would occupy the centre of analysis while conducting historical and

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<sup>34</sup> After a number of failed attempts for talk or negotiation, on June 15, 1988, His Holiness Dalai Lama set forth Strasburg Proposal that was more of a compromise on the part of the Tibetans to surrender their sovereignty and rather demand for autonomy under the Chinese rule only. Such conciliatory step clearly marks a retreat from the demand of absolute independence that was fiercely abhorred by many Tibetans for it shunned the hopes of having their own nation and defeats the very purpose of what they have been fighting for. However, such steps went in vain with disinterested attitude towards negotiating statements from Beijing government. The change of events in 2008 had even forced Dalai Lama to rethink over the Middle Way Approach (MWA).

cultural investigation. The main focus, however, would remain on the communities that had escaped during 1959 displacement and settled in India post displacement.

While exploring the cultural history of Tibet, David L. Shellgrove and Hugh Richardson states that Tibet had been the ‘most remote and inaccessible country in the world’.<sup>35</sup> The Tibetan civilization was cut off from the rest of the world because of the huge mountain ranges and bitter cold weather of the region. The isolation of Tibet has not only been caused due to the adoption of isolationist policy by Tibetan government in post imperial period, to remain aloof of the international sphere and politics, but could also be attributed to its geographical detachment. The geographical isolation of Tibet and less population could be considered one of the reasons behind the presence of ‘sturdy individualism’ in Tibetans, one of the characteristic features of their nomadic population (Shellgrove & Richardson, 2003, p. 21).<sup>36</sup> This isolation for several years also points to the development of ‘self reliant’ nature of the members and their respective communities.

Moreover, presence of huge mountains had also made it difficult for the foreign travellers to make a direct impact on Tibetan communities. This, however, should not imply an absolute absence of outer influence but that influence was rather at the willingness of Dalai Lamas and not directly on the society as such. Saklani (1984) argues that although Tibet was politically and geographically isolated and remained an entirely separate entity in the course of history, its neighbouring countries, particularly India and China, still has made huge influence on its religious and political life respectively. In his words, “the Tibetan culture is said to be substantially a product of the combination of two competitive cultures of Asia – the Chinese and the Indian – both having been to some extent diluted and diffused in the process of syncretisation within the Tibetan setting” (Saklani, 1984, p. 78). The introduction of foreign culture in Tibet

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<sup>35</sup>Shellgrove, D. L., & Richardson, H. (2003). *A Cultural history of Tibet*. Bangkok: Orchid Press.

<sup>36</sup>Shellgrove and Richardson, while exploring the origin of Tibetans, concede that sturdy individualism along with few other features in Tibetans points to their nomadic origins. In their words, “the legacy of this origin is seen in the extensive nature of Tibetan farming with its ever-present element of animal husbandry, in the readiness of the Tibetans to travel great distances, in their seemingly inborn ability to handle and look after horses, yak and other animals, and in their delight in open air and open spaces coupled with their sturdy individualism. But the most obvious part of the legacy is the large number of true nomads, depending entirely on their flocks of sheep and goats and their herds of yak” (Shellgrove & Richardson, 2003, p. 21). Both the authors move on to investigate the cultural isolation of Tibet.

could be attributed to its foreign relations, intercommunication with India, expedition by Britain and constant incursions by China.

## **2. Nature and Structure of Tibetan Society: Pre 1950s**

By going through the geographical details of Tibet, it is observed that though Tibet had mostly remained in isolation either due to geographical rigidity or its own policy, its society had experienced slow development, not in modern sense of the term, through on and off interaction with foreign culture. It could be considered as the society slowly in transition with its small steps moving on the path of shedding off the superstitious beliefs and overtime learning from other nations and cultures. In this section, the attempt has been made to learn about structure of society in traditional Tibet in order to understand the relationship between individual and community during that period.

History ushers the path towards the causal explanation of present circumstances. To perceive a concrete picture of present requires an unbiased narration of history that encapsulates major as well as minor events, well-concatenated in the process of production of the former. In order to develop a general profile of traditional society of Tibet, close observation of large array of secondary sources on the cultural history of Tibet is essential. While these materials lack proper analysis of common social and economic characteristics, they provide enough information regarding “the antiquity of Tibetan civilization, religion, mythology, and the peculiar form of Tibetan government” (Saklani, 1984, p. 30).

To grasp a better understanding of a group’s culture and history and to examine what and how different beliefs and customs were followed by its people, a proper knowledge of the nature and structure of that community is indispensably required. Studying the structure of a specific society sheds light on the nature of interaction between community and individual, how social relations were maintained, and how individual (social) identity<sup>37</sup> was determined. Highlighting these points helps us to identify the

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<sup>37</sup> In pursuit of the determination of individual identity in traditional Tibet, one must note that Tibet was no modern nation state in European terms. The identification of individual as the basic unit of community began after the introduction of modern state. Its traces could first be seen in philosophy which guided

*essential* characteristics of Tibetans, or what Amelie Rorty calls the '*essential identification*'<sup>38</sup> of individuals (in this case Tibetans). Essential characteristics could not only be extracted through the investigation of historical and social circumstances, but also through the culture followed by the members of the Tibetan community.

Before the incursions by Chinese armies in 1950s, monarchy and theocracy held the reins of Tibetan political structure. The kings of imperial Tibet were considered as 'god like beings' who provided the link between the god or heaven and earth.<sup>39</sup> The Tibetan kingship underwent many transformations under the influence of Buddhism in the post imperial period. However, a somewhat similar divine principle was adopted in the post imperial period. The Dalai Lamas are also believed by Tibetan Buddhist followers to be the earthly manifestations of Avalokiteshvara. Despite the presence of the logic of Buddhism, the divine principle also directs towards the similar submission of people towards their political and spiritual leader.

Few of the key characteristics of Tibetan society are discussed in this section in order to provide the idea of the basic aspects of both imperial and post imperial Tibet, which regulated the society.

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individual to take an inward turn as has been proved by Charles Taylor in '*Sources of Self*', where he traces the emergence of the idea of individualism.

<sup>38</sup> In her work '*The Identities of Persons*', Amelie Rorty speculates different questions which might come up during the exploration and identification of individual identity. One of these questions emphasises upon the 'characteristics that identify a person as essentially the person she is'. Alan Montefiore argues that 'essential identification depends largely on essentially contingent considerations of historical and social circumstances and of personal or social evaluation'. The concept of essential identification is somewhat similar to communitarian claim of 'embeddedness' of individuals, or 'constitutive goods' of Charles Taylor which forms the intrinsic part of individual's identity. However, what differs in Rorty's conception of essential identification is the absence of any claim that says such identification is immutable.

<sup>39</sup> Kings of Tibet were believed to have descended from the heaven as 'god like being from the sky using a sky rope' ("Glimpses on History of Tibet | Central Tibetan Administration," 1985). There has been a lot of research regarding the qualities of king with the help of understanding various titles and metaphors associated with him. Titles such as "*khri* (a title prefixed to the king's name upon enthronement), *lhasras* or *ldesras* ("son of gods" or "divine son"), *btsanpo* ("emperor" or "king"; literally "mighty"), *lhabtsanpo* ("god, emperor," or even "god-king"), and '*phrulgyilhabtsanpo* ("sacred god-king)". See Dotson, B. (n.d.). B. SOFJA KOVALEVSKAJA-PREIS: RESEARCH PLAN KINGSHIP AND RELIGION IN TIBET. Retrieved from [http://www.indologie.uni-muenchen.de/personen/3\\_privatdoz/dotson/projekte\\_dotson/research\\_plan.pdf](http://www.indologie.uni-muenchen.de/personen/3_privatdoz/dotson/projekte_dotson/research_plan.pdf)

### a. Polity and Law

In pre-Buddhist Tibet, Tibetans were perceived as most violent warriors of all times, with rulers warring with each other with the only policy of expansionism. Tibet had a structured legal system with two tiers in judiciary. Although the powers of judiciary were vested in the court of the king forming an extremely centralized judiciary system, very few local courts also existed to tackle petty local issues, without former's consultation. Matters of high importance were decided directly by Bsanpo, the king. Brandon Dotson provides the details of the Tibetan legal and administrative system during the imperial period when Buddhism took its root in Tibet for the first time. With the help of Old Tibetan documents, he proves that "the Tibetan empire possessed a codified set (or sets) of laws that many of the elements of subsequent Tibetan legal culture were already present at a very early stage" (Dotson, 2007, p. 17).

A prominent role is given to the jurors (*gtsang-dkar*) in deciding the cases. "The cases were first brought to the local magistrate who had trouble with the cases and submitted them to the minister of the exterior who in turn submitted the cases to the judges of the court retinue, who report back with their decisions" (Dotson, 2007, p. 34). Cases brought to court were bound to go through two trials: legal trial and the trial by divination. While few historians such as Richardson believe that divination and the use of dice was confined to few unresolvable cases, other historians like Dotson believe that it was routine part of trial procedures. Although the legal decisions were stringently centralized but the presence of local level magistrates hints towards the presence of small decentralized apparatus where the attempt to solve petty disputes took place. They had, at very rare times though, also had a say in negotiating the terms of decisions in case decisions were taken on the basis of divination and dice. The 'capital offenses'<sup>40</sup> were decided directly by *Btsang-po*.

The Tibetan administrative system was, thus, not only well bureaucratized but also possessed systemized legal procedures as well as centralized functioning. Matters ranging from local social disputes to the funding of monastic institutions were handled as per the legal procedures delineated in various texts. Dotson draws analyses of two such texts which not only provided the inkling regarding the functioning of the Tibetan

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<sup>40</sup> The cases of 'capital offences' were the cases of great importance for the Empire.

legal and administrative system but also the social relations of the Tibetan society. However, the legal stratification of society under Dalai Lamas differed from earlier models in the subsequent periods partially because of the influence of Buddhism (Doston, 2007, p. 10).

Religion played a pivotal role in both administrative and legal matters in post imperial Tibet. The centralized polity of kings was replaced with monastic organizations, rationalising the functioning of government with religious values. “The Government of the Dalai Lama was composed of lay and religious personnel, which existed for a dual cause: for temporal happiness in this world and spiritual happiness hereafter” (Saklani p 129). Tibet turned its back to violence and became one of first countries to shun death sentence.

From the above description, the legal and political affairs of Tibet could, therefore, be observed to have retained in the hands the aristocratic class. People uncritically followed their king and later the Dalai Lama. Despite being a theocratic society, Tibet did not lack well structured legal and bureaucratic system.

### **b. Religion**

While the previous sub section, with the help of few historians, has showed the rigidity of the legal and political structure of imperial Tibetan society and post imperial period, the present sub section emphasises on the role that religion played in the lives of Tibetans, and its significance.

Tibet is generally regarded as synonymous to Buddhism. Buddhist religious symbols of different kinds, ranging from spiritual teacher Dalai Lama to spinning of wheels in monasteries, cross one’s mind at any reference to Tibet. Buddhism which began to emerge in 5<sup>th</sup> century was indeed adopted as state religion as late as 13<sup>th</sup> century after reviving from the Dark Age under the king Lang Darma.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The moving spirit behind this Buddhist renaissance, which started in western Tibet, was to be found in two holy men, Rinchen Zangpo, the translator (958-1055 A.D.), and the great Indian Buddhist saint Atisa (982-1052 A.D.). These were the initiators of what Buddhist histories call the second spread of Buddhism



Buddhism played a decisive role in shaping Tibetan polity and its culture. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Tibetan Buddhism was divided into four major sects: the *rNin-ma-pa* sect, the *bKa-gyud-pa* sect, the *Sa-skyapa* sect and the *Ge-lug-pa* sect. In Tibetan setting, Buddhist principles seeped in and dominated the lives of Tibetan people. The influence of Buddhism transformed the entire society to a large extent and the principles of Mahayana Buddhism became an integral part of everyone's life.

Buddhism emerged as the majority religion of Tibet since it began to replace the native Bon religion in 4<sup>th</sup> century. In Buddhist religion, the Dalai Lamas of Tibet are believed to be the manifestations of '*Chenrezig, Bodhisattva of Compassion, holder of the White Lotus*'. The basic structure of Buddhist philosophy depends on the interconnected four noble truths. These are: (1) *sufferings* (of pain, of change and compositional pervasive suffering); (2) *sources of suffering* (karma and afflictive emotions); (3) *cessation* (extinction of causes of suffering); and (4) *paths* (seeing the final nature of mind and meditation).

Selflessness constitutes the core doctrine of Buddhist philosophy. For compassion, wisdom is necessary whose development is constrained by the barrier of afflictive emotions, which are based on our mental projections. The attributes of goodness or badness are the results of superimposition of our afflictive emotions that are produced from anger or excitement. Comprehension of state of selflessness helps achieve such wisdom.<sup>42</sup>

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in Tibet. The first spread of Buddhism was under the kingship of Songtsen Gampo (C. 620A.D. – 650 A.D.) and King Trisong Detsen (C. 755 -797 A.D.).

<sup>42</sup> Buddhist philosophy does not equate 'self' with physical appearance of a person, or spiritual soul. Self, according to Gyatso following the Middle Way Consequence School, is merely a designation or a status which is dependent on the aggregates of mind and body. The 'self' reflects the continuum of consciousness imbibed in mind and developed through series of experiences. To elucidate this in simplistic terms, if I define another person as bad or my enemy, I validate the inherent existence of such attributes in her, thereby establishing her 'self'. My analysis of hers is merely the result of antagonistic feelings that I might have developed through some sort of experience. I would rather mistakenly believe in its inherent existence devoid of any implication of that experience. These experiences or phenomena are further dependent on certain causes and conditions. Such dependence nullifies the permanent existence of self. Such non-existent self whose base is empty is known as selflessness.

Commitment to compassion and taking refuge in the Three Jewels comprise the basic requirements to become a Buddhist. The Three Jewels of Buddhism are *the Buddha*; *the Dharma*, his teaching; and *the Sangha*, community of practitioners. Buddhahood is the state when one releases oneself from afflictive emotions and negativity. Such state is reached by following the path of Dharma. Dharma has two aspects. One is the path that leads to cessation of suffering through eliminating afflictive emotions, the ultimate aim of individual. And other is cessation itself. Finally, those who commit themselves on the path of cessation to realise the actual nature of reality, the ultimate truth, forms the Sangha.

Despite being followed by large section of Tibetan society, however, Buddhism was not the only religion in Tibet. There are various studies which suggest that diversity of beliefs existed even prior to Buddhism as well as after its adoption as a state religion. Although Bon religion is considered as dominating Tibetan society prior to Buddhism, few scholars believe that people followed distinct faiths and customs in imperial Tibet. They refuse to accept the categorisation of Bon and Buddhism as only two religions that were practiced in Tibet. Instead, as opposed to creating a binary between two religions they attempt to contrast between Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions. While setting the outline of his research plan in a paper, Brandon Dotson concedes that:

“By placing the focus on royal religion and the cult of kingship – a complex of beliefs and rituals that might incorporate both Buddhist and non-Buddhist practices, and include priests from several traditions – we move beyond a Buddhist versus non-Buddhist dichotomy that has tended to crystallize Buddhism and “not Buddhism,” as two discrete categories. Obviously Buddhism (or even North Indian Buddhism in the late 8th century) is not monolithic, but the non-Buddhist category is even more problematic, since there is a seemingly irrepressible urge to fill it with something definite and coherent against which to define Buddhism. This void has been filled in the past by vague categories such as “shamanism,” “animism,” “gtsug lag,” the anachronistic projection into the past of the Bon religion, or various combinations of the above.”<sup>43</sup>

The Buddhist society was, hence, not only comprised of groups following Buddhism and Bon religion. A number of different beliefs, ways of prayers, traditions existed in

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<sup>43</sup> Brandon, ‘*Sofja Kovalevskaja-Preis Research Plan Kingship And Religion in Tibet*’.

imperial Tibet as well as Tibet under Dalai Lama. In the post exile scenario, similarly, one can find followers of other faiths within the community, like Tibetan Muslims and Tibetan Christians. Although there had been hardly any religious animosity in pre 1959 Tibet, the religious sections hold certain level of competition at the point of representation in CTA.

Moreover, it has been argued by historians like Dotson that a sort of a privilege system for monastic institutions existed in Tibetan society. Unlike the common belief, the emergence of Monastic institutions, in Tibet, did not exactly begin with the Lamas control over the state. Rather they were introduced as early as Tibetan empire ruled by kings. Although Dotson states that these monastic institutions were legally supposed to be treated a little better than the subjects of the empire, the privileges were bestowed on selected monastic institutions. There was the hierarchy of privileges concerning religious estates (Dotson, 2007, p. 51). The monastic institutions enjoyed tax exemptions, legal punishments, certain degree of administrative autonomy, immunity from fines, etc. Dotson, thus, observes that there must have been some sort of ranking of religious states which made few temples of the nobles superior than the lower rank temples and monasteries. So far as the property of the monks and that of the commoner is concerned, they were treated at par equally with each other. There were also clauses that refereed to the loans taken from the religious estates and the criteria of repayment. However, the amount of privileges bestowed was contingent on the willingness of the king of particular period. For instance, while the Lcang Lu Temple was exempted from all these legal and tax impositions, Yu-limGtsug-lag-khang and other religious estates were not.

Religion, thus, permeated in the lives of Tibetans. The above facts, notably, show that while the religious preachings of compassion and selflessness were embraced by the people of Tibet, the functioning of religion and belief system remained under the dominance of the ruler, or the aristocratic class. Next sub section also takes forward the similar concern of reverberation of religion, and its contribution in the creation of hierarchies in Tibetan society, with the repugnance shown to the people deviating from the Buddhist principles.

### c. Hierarchy in Tibetan Society

The present sub section talks about the hierarchies existing in the traditional Tibetan society, in general. It is shown that while in the imperial period, the provisions regarding punishments and relief were based on the class a person, under Lhamas rule, although such provisions were transformed to a certain extent, the hierarchical system was left unaltered.

Social class was the basis of distribution of privileges and immunity among Tibetans in Imperial Tibet. The most favourable being the class of ministers based on their respective ranks enjoyed the superior position among other subjects of the *Btsan-po* (the Tibetan ruler). Tibetan empire developed a highly codified system of law that meted out punishments according to the social class of the complainant and that of the defendant in a given case (Dotson, 2007, p. 08). The main divide in Tibetan society is between the ministerial aristocracy and the commoners. For instance, when someone is hit by an arrow or, in lucid interpretation, is injured by another person, the accused is bound to give the “blood money” or restitution as per the rank of victim and that of the accused.<sup>44</sup> Dotson concedes that the Tibetan administrations under the Dalai Lamas in the later centuries followed the similar standardized payment as per social class. However, the legal stratification was different from the earlier model because of the influence of the Buddhism.

The social system of traditional post-imperial Tibet depended on intricate web of hierarchical patterns rooted in the society. While social status depended on particular social class to which a person belongs, which was in turn related to possession of property, it was not something immutable. There were no rigid divisions attached to people since birth. The chances of upward mobility were not negligible if a person gains such “personal virtues like charisma, moral character, intellectual eminence and

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<sup>44</sup> Standardized payment of blood money and restitution was necessary in certain cases. These cases ranged from theft, attack using a dog, hunt, to any other physical harm. Compensation required to be paid was dependent, less on the harm caused and more on which social status is attacked. Blood money, however, was not always acceptable.

religious devotion” (Saklani, 1984, p. 168). The practical instances of such upgrade in the status of individuals were very rare.<sup>45</sup>

Being a non violent Buddhist dominated society, however, did result in few divisions among groups, on the basis of deviation from Buddhist principles. The hierarchy was also based on the occupations of individuals that led to the exclusion of particular group of people whose occupations were considered as menial. These categories of people were considered polluted and were not permitted to benefit the privileges of monastic education. They were also not allowed to share meals or marry in other communities. Dawa Norbu called them as ‘impure bones’ (Norbu cited in Mallica Mishra: 48).

The possession of land and religious status were the two main factors that determined the class of Tibetans. The society “closely resembled the medieval feudal order, which lacked the feelings of class consciousness due to the dualism of the socio-religious hierarchy” (Saklani, 1984, p 44).

There were broadly two main classes in Tibetan social structure: the nobility and the common people. While the former belonged to the landed aristocracy which held main official positions in Tibetan administrative system, the latter were passive recipients of commands of the former. The relationship, however, was similar to that between lord and vassal in European feudal societies, where a sort of agreement was developed between the lord and the commoners, with the exchange of services. “The lords in Tibet ruled and managed estates and not people. The relationship of individuals to the lords was strictly economic, the lords having no rights over individuals or over how they lived and what they did.” (Michel Piessel as quoted by Saklani, 1984, p. 167)

Thus, it could be noted that, the traditional Tibetan society was driven by the sense of collectiveness and cohesion essentially required to be maintained among the members of Tibetan community as a whole. This well inculcated sense of collectiveness had normalized the hierarchical structure to the extent that any deviation from it is perceived as an insult to the community and ancestors. Such normalization, as Saklani argues, had been the main reason behind the absence of any revolt against the superior lords.

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<sup>45</sup> Few practical instances of change in status from commoner to nobility was when a child was assumed to be the reincarnation of previous Dalai Lamas is born in common family.

#### d. Family

Tibetan society was a stringent patriarchal society. Virilocal marriage was a common practice in imperial Tibet.<sup>46</sup> Marriage was usually on the basis of the terms of contract set by the parents of both the families. All three forms of marriage – monogamy, polygamy and polyandrous – were permissible in traditional Tibet, with few regional and class variations. The institution of marriage was rooted in the institution of property. “Marriage is a very important factor behind the family group which in an agrarian or pastoral economy as in Tibet, conditions and correlated the tiers in the national economic structure” (Saklani, p 89). Because of scant resources and lack of fertile land for agriculture, which was the basic means of livelihood for people, the objective of marriage was related more to keep property from division. In the words of Saklani,

“In traditional Tibetan society, the family almost manifested the dimensions of a clan, particularly in the polyandrous system. In fact, the so called nuclear family was almost non-existent. The fraternal family was the most important unit of economic, cultural, political and religious activity. In the traditional family, all events of an individual occurred within the context of the family; individualism and personal freedom being almost foreign to this system. The father or the eldest male member was the repository of all authority.” (Saklani, 1984, p. 43).

‘The fraternal polyandry itself left a marginal scope for monogamy especially among the Tibetan farmers and herders who formed the majority of the Tibetan population’ (Saklani p 90).<sup>47</sup> It was not compulsory that girl had to be taken by boy’s family, the boy could also be taken by the girl’s family on the condition of renouncing his family name and identity in order to adopt the surname of father in law. Both the customs were widely followed with no stereotype. The latter was usually performed to inherit the property of the bride’s family, in case there are no sons in girl’s family, the son-in-law becomes the rightful inheritor of the property and not the daughter.

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<sup>46</sup>Kapstein, M., & Dotson, B. (2007). *Contributions to the cultural history of early Tibet*. Leiden: Brill. Pp. 14.

<sup>47</sup> In the polyandrous marriages, the eldest son holds the ownership of entire property and entitled to be known the ‘Father’ of all the children, and his brothers who share the wife remain as ‘Uncles’. Even the ‘unborn’ brother has the right to share the elder brother’s wife but only when he comes of his age, i.e. has crossed eighteen years of age.

An individual has usually no say in the form of marriage followed in the family, but in case he chooses to break the marriage tradition in family and moves out having his own wife and house, he loses his right over the family property and elder brother's wife. Individuals in Tibetan society had to pay off three debts: to gods, to sages and to ancestors. These are paid by living a responsible life following the customs and traditions in society and through worship and rituals.

#### **e. Women**

Various Tibetologists have celebrated the fact that in the traditional society of Tibet, women enjoyed liberty, especially social liberty, to a large extent, unlike conventional West or traditional Indian or Chinese societies. There had been no shame or stereotypes attached to virginity, chastity, and so on. However, what these Tibetologists call physical or sexual freedom, it seems women had the least choice in such circumstances, both in pre-marital stage and after marriage. The property inheritance system was mainly male dominated. Moreover, a number of superstitions were prevalent in society, for instance, a barren woman was considered as outcast and possessed by foul of witch.

Commodification of women was integral to the functioning of society. Women were considered an inalienable property of father and brother before marriage and that of husband after marriage. The society manifested a well entrenched custom of sale of women in marriage. The bride wealth, however, given to a woman at the time of marriage would remain an inalienable property of woman and would not be handed over to in-laws post marriage. This property could be used by the woman as compensation if she is tried in court for any matter. 'In the event of divorce, woman's rights were well protected' (Saklani p 95). She received one-fourth of the common property of husband, if she has son or sons. In case she has a daughter, she is entitled to one-sixth of the property. A barren woman can ask for an undefined specific amount of for what was known as 'wages for days and nights'.

Although such customs of society remain unaltered, with the advent of the rule of Lamas and adoption of Buddhism as a state religion, there had undoubtedly been upliftment in the status of women with the reforms in society. Women were granted

equal position as men. There have been studies which extols the manner in which women were treated in Tibetan society under Lamas.<sup>48</sup> They were equally active as men in the sphere of ‘business and household’. The equality could be deemed as derived from the Buddhist principles of formation of *Sangha* where women are recognised as significant and equal members of community.

The theory, however, seems incongruent with the practice. There are evidences that women in Tibet, although active in household and business, were rather passive in other spheres such as monastic education, politics and religion. They might have enjoyed equal status with men as a person but their primary roles remain confined to the household works. In the sphere of education, women from well off families received higher education and those belonging to the lower classes were given the rudimentary education to make them capable of reading the holy texts and understand the terms of business. As Saklani succinctly contends,

“Though the status of women in the traditional society was variable at different levels in the social strata, yet, by and large, they were assigned a much inferior status to the men, particularly in religious, spiritual and political spheres, which were practically debarred to women..... the medieval, agrarian Tibetan family has, within the span of a single decade, acquired some of the main characteristics of the ‘industrial family’” (Saklani, 1984, p. 44).

Analysing different terms used in Tibetan culture to address men and women, BarabaraNimri Aziz observes that even theory also reflected inferior status of women. She argues that “while men in Tibetan society are addressed as *khyo-ga*, or *skye-pa* signifying adult or manhood, the common term used for women in Tibet and amongst Tibetans living in exile is *skype-dman*, the literal translation of which is ‘born low’” (Aziz cited in Mallica Mishra, 2014).

To the extent women condition in the exilic circumstances is concerned, there is no denying the fact that the new socio-political setting influenced the gender issues in Tibetan community. The rate of school enrolment increased for the Tibetan girls with more inclination towards the modern education. Discrimination of women, however, still persists in society with the recognition of women as inferior beings and

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<sup>48</sup>Mishra, M. (2014). *Tibetan refugees in India: Education, culture and growing up in exile*.



subsequently undermining their educational and professional potential. Even the religious sphere also favours such discrimination where “in exile too girls are not selected as teachers of Tibetan Buddhism” (Mishra, 2014, p. 46)<sup>49</sup>.

#### **f. Education**

In pre-1959 Tibetan society, education was largely the privilege enjoyed by class of aristocracy and nobility. Class difference was also visible in the arena of education. Not only the monastic education but also non Tibetan education was gained only by those capable of enrolling their children in private schools outside Tibet. There were many Tibetans who received and completed their education in India.<sup>50</sup> Common people who could not afford to send their children to schools were provided timely lectures by monks at their villages but nothing like formal education was made available to them. They were made to learn enough to read religious texts. Moreover, so far as the Tibetan monastic education is concerned, His Holiness Dalai Lama the 14<sup>th</sup> also believed it to be ‘totally inappropriate’ for any leader of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This implies that education in Tibet hardly concerned the knowledge required for managing realpolitik affairs as well as the world affairs. On the other hand, it had been an attempt to emancipate the inner knowledge to beautify the spiritual being.

In exilic circumstances, the situation has remained somewhat unaltered. Although the qualification criteria to attain an official post in CTA has changed where previously the government position were confined to people of particular class; in exilic circumstances, well educated Tibetans who received education in non Tibetan schools and are able to take advantage of funds available to them could also be part of main positions in CTA. However, there is still no paucity of people who could barely afford education in

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<sup>49</sup>Mallica Mishra held interviews in the exile community of Tibet and found that female respondents provided a mixed response regarding the gender discrimination within the community. Although few showed the inclination towards the equal status provided by the Govt. in Exile of Tibet, other group believed the former’s claim as sham and recognizes inferior status attached to women in the community.

<sup>50</sup> For instance, Jamyang Norbu, one of the protagonists of Tibetan freedom movement, was one of the Tibetans who completed his education from Darjeeling’s St. Joseph’s School in India and was enrolled pre displacement.

schools funded by CTA or Indian government. Education has on the other hand stirred up the competition between different social groups to attain post in CTA.

This section has particularly focused on exploring the characteristics of Tibetan community and the nature of relationship between the individual and community. Descriptively, the section has presented the kind of society that existed in traditional Tibet, so as to make it easy to gauge the drastic changes that have occurred in displaced community.

### **3. Nature of Interaction between Community and Individual**

The above discussion of the features of traditional society of Tibet could be summarised in three points: first, Tibetan society was not an equal society, as was claimed by Buddhists, rather different forms of exclusions persisted in the society; second, religion and social class dominated almost every nook and corner of pre 1950s' society of Tibet; third, the women suffered from inferior status, in relation to man. In line of these three points, one could extract the nature of relationship between individual and community of Tibet. The individuals were, undeniably, deeply enmeshed within the principles and values of community. Conformity to these principles and norms was normalised to such a great extent that unethical actions could not easily be marked out from the ethical ones. Religion had held the soul of the individual, where the latter felt free despite being incarcerated behind the bars of customs and traditions. It was as if the criterion of formation of identity of the individual was well defined in the scriptures of religion, displaying the image of community in the individual.

While the previous section has laid down the description of the structure and nature of society in traditional Tibet, this section, mulling over the individual status in old Tibet, delivers arguments regarding the nature of Tibetan nation. It would show whether pre1950 Tibet could be called a modern nation state.

The movement of Tibetans outside Tibet wasn't only confined to the shift in the socio-political environment, but it also highlighted one another important point. Tibetan

community suffered a skip in the transformation to the modern nation state, or in the words of Saklani, “for the Tibetan refugees, at least two centuries of social change have been telescoped into one moment of history” (Saklani, 1984, p. 32). Saklani understands such shift as the development of rational thinking in ‘social organisms’ in an atmosphere entirely different from traditional Tibet, experiencing the failure of ‘traditional religious order to deliver the goods at the times of the deepest crisis’ (Saklani, 1984, p. 43).

Modern states, borrowing the definition set forth by David Held<sup>51</sup>, could be defined as “nation states – political apparatuses, distinct from both ruler and ruled, with supreme jurisdiction over a demarcated territorial area, backed by a claim to a monopoly of coercive power, and enjoying a minimum level of support or loyalty from their citizens” (Hall, 2013, p. 87). The seeds of transformation of modern state in India are attributed to the role played by colonial rule which transformed the structure of Indian state with the introduction and long process of inculcation of modern technologies and techniques of administration similar to that present in the ‘metropole’<sup>52</sup>.

So far as Tibet is concerned, it had adopted the policy to remain aloof from international sphere politics. It reflected, as could be deduced from aforementioned description, a system which possessed mixed features of absolutism as well as feudal relations. The society manifested an absence of any severe competing claims for political power in the post imperial period. The tussle between religious institution (church) and royal empires that was quite prevalent in medieval period in Europe could nowhere be seen in Tibet after the adoption of Buddhism as state religion and its proliferation.<sup>53</sup> Instead, state

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<sup>51</sup> David Held distinguishes between five main state systems with distinct features from which emerged the system of modern nation states. These five state systems, though with no clear cut separation, included (1) traditional tribute taking empires, (2) systems of divided authority, characterized by feudal relations, city states and urban alliances, with the Church (Papacy) playing the leading role, (3) the polity of estates, (4) absolutist states, and finally, (5) modern nation states, with constitutional, liberal democratic or single party politics locked progressively into a system of nation states. See Hall, S. (2013). *Formations of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Metropole’ is the term derived from Hamza Alavi while analysing the post colonial structure of Pakistan and Bangladesh. See Alavi, H. (1972). *The State in Post-Colonial Societies—Pakistan and Bangladesh*. *New Left Review*. Retrieved from <https://newleftreview.org/I/74/hamza-alavi-the-state-in-post-colonial-societies-pakistan-and-bangladesh>

<sup>53</sup> This relation has been explored in lucid manner by scholars like Swaha Das, Rajeev Bhargava and Stuart Hall.

coupled with Buddhism was the mantra through which administrative affairs were dealt with. The adoption of Buddhism had political significance in addition to the religious one.

A close historical analysis shows that on taking cognizance of the rise of anti-Buddhist factions as well as fading significance of king in administrative affairs and increasing powers of nobility in the decision-making made king TrisongDetsen (whom Sam van Schaik called 'the Dharma King') to adopt Buddhism as state religion which could re-establish king's position as the highest divine power.<sup>54</sup> This clearly implies that alternative powers, somewhat similar to those which emerged in medieval Europe and initiated the process of transformation as well as emergence of 'new ideas and concepts of political arrangement' (Hall, 2013, p. 81), were in a covert manner suppressed through providing highest priority to religious order.

In the wake of such adoption, the need of legitimacy for the sustenance of an absolutist ruler (and later in modern states) didn't lead to any trouble for the kings in imperial period as well as Lamas in post imperial Tibet because of the creation of passive majority population and their willingness to consider Tibet as *Sangha* instead of community.

So far as the foreign influence on Tibet is concerned, Tibet did have trading as well as cultural relations with most of foreign polities outside Tibet. However, the period of influence used to be small as well as there was absence of any serious intention of 'civilizing mission' which reverberated in other western colonies. Such influence could only be seen with the advent of incursions by China, particularly after 1950.

Therefore, when we talk about the displacement of Tibetan community that happened in 1959, one must take note of the nature of community which persisted in Tibet. Tibet, being a non modern state, unlike others had a community which was conservative in nature, feudal in structure, with nobility and religious leader as Dalai Lama playing the crucial role in influencing the interaction between community and individuals. Individuals who were members of the community had already been submitted to fulfil

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<sup>54</sup> See Dotson, B. B. *SOFJA KOVALEVSKAJA-PREIS: RESEARCH PLAN KINGSHIP AND RELIGION IN TIBET*. Pp. 2.along with Van, S. S. (2013). *Tibet: A history*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

the end goal to establish *Sangha* (a community that follows Buddhist principles).<sup>55</sup> Submission of the local population (which constituted majority of Tibet) coupled with restriction on introduction of modern education and values at local level<sup>56</sup> helped in maintaining the status quo. In such a society where both individuals and community worked for the same purpose adopting religious order as highest priority, the conflict between individual and community remains largely invisible, if not absolutely absent. The need of cultural preservation was one of the least concerns. However, while such argument could be placed for the then dominant Buddhist community of Tibet, requirement of cultural preservation in case of other communities of Tibet during the same period needs to be further explored.

## **Conclusion**

In the present chapter, it could be concluded that the Tibetan community's experience in exile could be perceived as distinct from other displaced communities. Historical analysis of the structure of pre-displacement Tibetan society informs the reader regarding various cultural practices and beliefs as well as legal and administrative system which were prevalent in society. Tibet had been a non modern, conservative and feudal society with well established legal and bureaucratic system functioning under the nobility and religious leader. While the interaction between community and individual could be considered smooth, less conflictual and non stringent where individuals willingly considered their religion and culture as utmost priority, individuals' identity reflected the identity of that of the community where no space was provided for the formation of identities distinct from the instructions of the community.

In the post displacement scenario, although the cultural affinity with India was relieving for Tibetans to a certain extent, it could not prove to be sufficient for cultural

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<sup>55</sup> When I refer to the non rebellious nature of members of the community, it points to the majority of local population. There were, however, few Tibetans who were also influenced with other forms of government outside Tibet such as that of Communist or democratic governments of China and India respectively. But these were only a few people who had come in contact with these governments at different times.

<sup>56</sup> The restriction was posed by religious conservatives who considered modern knowledge as threat to culture. This, however, should not imply an absence of modern values, instead it remained confined to wealthier classes who could afford foreign materials as well as education.

preservation. The next chapter would argue that over the period of 57 years, the change in interaction between community and individuals is evident taking into account Tibetan youth who seem to be drifting away from their culture. While prior to 1959 the common concern for both remained the establishment and well being of *Sangha*, in post displacement scenario the common concern has shifted to freedom of Tibet and less to cultural preservation.

## **Chapter: Three**

### **Tibetan Identity in Exile**

The previous chapter shed light on the nature of traditional Tibetan community and individual's place within it, pondering over how an individual was situated in the feudal and religious nation. Individual identity reflected the community and remained non-detachable from each other. People, with few exceptions, were highly conservative and seemed wholeheartedly committed to the Buddhist principles and tried to abide by them in every sphere of their lives. They embraced their culture and were too attached to their identity that any deviation from regular customs and traditions or centuries old hierarchical system was taken as an insult to supreme power. The community resisted any change that could devalue their traditional ways of life.

The maintenance of culture and ethnic identity is however, quite a convoluted task in a foreign country where the community is exposed to a variety of cultures. As far as Tibetans are concerned, since their displacement they have notably been confronting similar threat to their culture that influences the formation of their identity. As John Conway (1975) states,

“Like all other refugees, the Tibetans have been confronted with two mutually contradictory pressures. If, on the one hand, they seek to keep alive the idea of return, they must somehow prevent their physical dispersion, and, by their very plight, arouse the concern of the world, in the hope that political conditions can be changed in their favour. On the other hand, if the refugees willingly accept the generous contributions of relief agencies, and by their own endeavours, succeed in rehabilitating themselves in their new homelands, they will inevitably be subject to pressures to assimilate or amalgamate with their host populations, with the gradual extinction of their distinctive characteristics” (Conway, 1975, p. 75).

Being prone to these two pressures in exile, amidst their struggle for survival, one could observe inevitable transformations in not only their culture or ways of living but their

very identity. What it means to be a Tibetan today is different from what it meant in historic Tibet.

One aspect of their Tibetan identity regards their call for Tibetan solidarity for the freedom of Tibet, where their freedom movement and the country of origin are viewed as the main source of their identity.

Tibetan freedom movement did not indeed originate in 1950s. The tussle between Tibet and China has been centuries old. According to Jamyang Norbu, one of the protagonists of Tibetan Freedom Movement, Tibet proclaimed itself as an independent nation in 1913 after a year of official war when Chinese had to surrender.<sup>57</sup> The Tibet-Mangolia Treaty was signed, which emphatically rejected Manchu rule of China. However, persistent Chinese incursions since 1950 had again resulted in the occupation of Tibet. Earlier (before displacement) there was no question of stratification within people on the basis of their direct connection to the freedom movement which could largely be seen as an aristocratic and elite affair. The difference in the post 1959 Tibetan movement is an implicit exclusion of half the Tibetans from it in some cases, while in some other cases movement has also become the sphere to reconnect with other Tibetans politically through Tibet issue (Lauer, 2015).

Another aspect is the requirement of constant maintenance and manifestation of their “actual” “authentic” culture. Preservation of a unified Tibetan culture and identity is essential for the sustenance of Tibetan freedom movement. Such preservation also requires to be accompanied by its constant assertion as a group. Despite various measures taken by Tibetan community for preservation of Tibetan culture and identity,

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<sup>57</sup>With the admission of the fact that origins of Tibetan nationalism and Tibetan identity in this period have hardly been explored, Jamyang Norbu presents his own speculations regarding its origin. Tibetan resistance is not studied as the manifestation of spirit of Tibetan nationalism since it was not congruent with the Western models of nationalism. Influenced by Partha Chatterjee<sup>57</sup> who denounced the imaginative nature of anti-colonial nationalism as per Western discourse, he uses his argument that Asian nationalism might not be analysed using Western theoretical tools but it doesn't imply its non existence. Norbu argues that the influence of three (non-western) factors had triggered nationalism in Tibet: *one*, Tibet's own past; *second*, social awakening in neighbouring Asian countries, and *finally*, national leaders of Tibet. However, although he presents description of Tibetan struggle which revolves around the efforts of high rank officials and Dalai Lama and how they learned nationalism from Lonchen Shatra Paljor Dorje, the Tibetan minister and Agvan Dorjie, the Buriat Lama, that finally resulted in the proclamation of independence, it still lacks the much required subaltern and gender perspective.



it has undoubtedly undergone certain changes. Moreover, different actors and agencies have contributed differently in outlining as to what features indeed constitute Tibetan identity and the manner of their representation, rendering it more complex.

The purpose of the present chapter is to explore and highlight such changes that have occurred over time in Tibetan culture and influenced Tibetan identity. It would explore the continuity and discontinuity in the culture and changing nature of Tibetan community. It would investigate how Tibetan identity has turned more intricate in exilic circumstances in the process of fulfilling the expectations – which include need of being passive but patriotic, showing ‘authentic’ traditional culture but keeping up with the modern values in practical world, etc. – of various social and institutional agencies, that of the host countries, their own community, international sponsors and so on; how their identity has been moulded, bevelled, rimmed and subsequently constructed which reflects different meanings for different people. The objective of the chapter is to trace Tibetans’ situation in community and how the younger generation tries to ‘re-identify’<sup>58</sup> themselves in a new socio-political setting, where some of the ‘essential’ characteristics marked in the previous chapter are absent.

## **1. State and Its Agencies**<sup>59</sup>

There is an immense literature contributed to examine the complex nature and role of the state. While few scholars highlight how modern liberal state disciplines individual body and behaviour (Foucault, 1991), others take it further and point towards the development of patriarchal relations of state with its citizens, with the expulsion of dissidents or ‘bad’ citizens (Young, 2005). Yet others emphasise on the dual character of the state revealed through its functions (Mohanty, 1982; Das, 2011). Individuals bounded by the state laws, circumscribed within the borders, act and survive at the will

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<sup>58</sup> The term ‘re-identify’ has been borrowed from Amelie Rorty who explores meanings and various concerns in the process of re-identification of individuals.

<sup>59</sup> Here, the notion of ‘state’ is borrowed from M. Mohanty (The Contemporary State: An outline) who explains state as the political organisation of society, organisation of power at societal level, which also consists of institutionalist elements such as population, territory, government and sovereignty. By the term ‘agency’, I mean the institutional arrangement organised with the authorisation of state to serve a particular purpose.

of the state. As Ashis Nandy (1992) argues, modern state seeks legitimacy in the guise of a protector, in return of which it guarantees ‘security’ and ‘development’, which again could only be achieved with the willingness of its people to submit and sacrifice. From the decisions regarding the matters as personal as what to wear or what to eat, to which institution or employment to join, fall under the ambit of state power. It turns more stringent in the case of refugees, which are ‘a system induced threat’<sup>60</sup>. They are either expected to integrate in the host nation or repatriate to the native state in order to bring normalcy to the international state system. In cases where both the options are rejected for the preservation of a separate culture or a nation within a nation, they are expected to follow an additional list of do’s and don’ts and responsibilities apart from the constitutional law. The state, thus, not only structures and marks the boundaries of one’s identity but also sanctions its existence. Tibetan refugees represent one among such cases, who are expected to act in a certain way by different state actors and their survival relies on the fulfilment of such expectations. This section attempts to shed light upon the narrow definitions of ‘Tibetanness’ or Tibetan identity, by the host state and the institution organised with its ‘covert’ authorisation, Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), deviations from which is permissible only to serve their respective purposes.

#### **a. Tibetan Refugees in India: An Insecure Survival in Foreign Land**

India is neither a signatory of refugee convention of 1951 nor its 1967 protocol.<sup>61</sup> It, thus, does not hold any formal obligation to provide refuge to displaced people under the international law. Still, India has temporarily accommodated lakhs of refugees. In the absence of any national refugee law, these refugees including Tibetans are officially considered as foreigners under the Foreigners Act of 1946, with the requirement to renew their Registration Cards (RC) once in a year. Before Tibetan displacement, India had already experienced one of largest displacements in the record of human history

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<sup>60</sup>Keely argues that refugee flow is the deviation from the normative geopolitical structure of state and threatens its sovereignty. See Keely, C. B. (1996). How Nation-States Create and Respond to Refugee Flows. *International Migration Review*, 30(4), 1046, p, 1058.

<sup>61</sup> Rajeev Dhavan enlists the reasons behind India’s position for not signing the international refugee convention. See Dhavan, R., & Public Interest Legal Support & Research Centre (New Delhi, India). (2004). *Refugee law and policy in India*. New Delhi: PILSARC.

with millions of people crossing borders during partition of 1947.<sup>62</sup> The incorporation of subsequent refugees was, however, one of the requirements of partition.<sup>63</sup>

The year of 1959 witnessed the influx of huge numbers of Tibetans from north east of Indian territory. Dalai Lama, along with his ministers and thousands of his followers crossed borders in the month of March in 1959 seeking refuge in the wake of the possibility of religious and ethnic persecution in Tibet. The provision of refuge by the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru is viewed as the plausible ethical response necessary towards the victims of Chinese aggression. The reasons behind their incorporation in Indian territory and provision of refuge are widely believed to be on moral and humanitarian grounds (Mishra, 2014, p. 32), or cultural affinities. This is accompanied by the assumption that the rehabilitation of victims of Chinese aggression reflects the ‘quick response’ of Indian government towards their problem.

On close observation, however, one could note how the card of state dualism is played by Indian government on the question of Tibetans. While Indian government has made an exception in providing huge financial aids for the establishment of offices and institutions for Tibetans, it does not officially recognize Tibetans government in exile. Moreover, unlike other refugee communities, “the rehabilitation of Tibetans was entrusted to the Indian foreign ministry, which was headed by Nehru himself. In comparable situations, the ministry of the interior took care of such matters” (Roemer, 2010, p. 64). The non recognition of Tibetan government in exile is considered as an attempt to come out clean so far as India’s relation with China is concerned. On the other hand, in establishing the offices of His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and other monastic or educational institutions, the motives of the central government, which provided funds and pleaded the state governments to provide land for Tibetans, were made to be gauged in terms of humanitarian concerns.

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<sup>62</sup> During the time when European countries were processing the initials to formulate refugee law, Indian government had already passed various (temporal) national provisions for the rehabilitation of the refugees crossing the borders and entering India. Even the Bangladeshi refugees were tackled using purely national resources only when Indira Gandhi was denied any external assistance by Western countries. Dhavan argues that such experience developed much confidence in Indian government to resolve issues without any external help.

<sup>63</sup> For migrant- refugee constituent assembly debates on art 6 and 7, see Neerja Jayal Gopal, 2013, ‘Citizenship and its Discontents: An Indian History’.

Nehru had, however, been quite reluctant to assist Tibetans, bounded by the Sino-Indian treaty with one of the Panch-Sheel obligations of not intervening in the internal affairs of each other. The Dalai Lama, in his autobiography *Freedom in Exile: An Autobiography*, concedes that “Nehru wanted to protect India’s friendly relations with China and was determined to adhere to the principles of the Panch-Sheel memorandum” (Lama. D., 1990, p. 147). He mentions about a number of failed attempts prior to 1959 event that he made to convince Nehru regarding the ill treatment of Chinese authorities in Tibet. In 1957, during his visit in India accepting the invitation for Buddha Jayanti celebrations from Indian Maha Bodhi society, Dalai Lama insisted to have a meeting scheduled with Nehru. In an informal meeting, he reiterated the concerns regarding China’s intervention in Tibet to Nehru, which he failed to communicate to him in their previous meeting in China. Nehru responded merely by setting the meeting between the Dalai Lama and Chou in New Delhi and had never intended to give a green flag to the request of assistance in the event of exile by him. Even in the initial years after the provision of refuge, he somewhat ‘aggressively’<sup>64</sup> and confusingly reminded the Dalai Lama of the short term period of refuge offered to him. The shift in the attitude of Nehru was, however, perceived by Dalai Lama as ‘his humanitarian instincts won him over’ (Lama. D., 1990, p. 149).

Nehru had received varied reactions for his handling of Tibet situation, with many trying to decipher his attitude towards Tibetans. While few accused him for breaching the Panchsheel treaty resulting in the eruption of China-India war, others embraced him for his ‘humanitarian attitude’ towards Tibetans. Using the Shain’s theory, Stephanie Roemer argues that “India’s decision to accommodate the Tibetans was determined by its own political objectives” (Roemer, 2010, p. 64). Analysing the account of domestic politics in India during the same time, she argues that Nehru’s concern was more related to calm the disappointed people of India over his stand of friendly relations with China in 1950s than to the Tibetans’ unfortunate situation. Had he remained aligned with China in 1959, his relationship with large chunk of Indian population would possibly have worsened. It was, therefore, to save his image as the political leader that explains his change of attitude towards Tibetans. “The GOI, thus, took advantage of the

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<sup>64</sup> For the conversations between Nehru and Dalai Lama, see Chapter 6 and 8 in Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho. (1998). *Freedom in exile: The autobiography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet*. London: Abacus.

thousands of newly arriving Tibetans to improve its political image in the domestic sphere” (Roemer, 2010, p. 64). But, she does consider cultural affinities as the reason behind Indian Government’s financial spending and special treatment of Tibetans.<sup>65</sup>

Recognizing the plight of Tibetans in India in the absence of an official recognition of refugees, Hess, in her study of Tibetans living in India and the United States, bifurcates Tibetans living in India into two groups: a) those who escaped in 1959 through the early 1960s, and b) the “newcomers” from mid 1980s to present. Although all these Tibetans in India fall under the Foreigner Act of 1946, the latter group, as of 1994, are not granted the advantage of obtaining Registration Certificates. Also this group is not entitled to citizenship in India. Their extended stay in India could be construed as ‘illegal’ in the absence of RCs for refugee status, citizenship of India, or proper visa from China. “This is an unofficial policy”, she argues, “an agreement between the Government of India and the Tibetan government in exile” (Hess, 2006, p. 82).

Since 1994, she claims, CTA has also been encouraging new arrivals to go back to Tibet for maintaining their physical visibility and refraining of its complete transformation into Chinese state. This policy makes exception for those who have suffered or are threatened to face violence and torture for political activism. It does not include other types of oppression such as discrimination in employment or education. However, several Tibetans, as per Hess’s observation, are still provided with accommodation in an unofficial manner by the Indian government, to keep them off-record as refugees and abstain from deteriorating relations with China. They are made to look like “officially” born in India. “The repercussions for not having these documents are very serious, including jail and the threat of deportation back to Tibet. In February 1998, 21 Tibetans were arrested in India on this basis” (Hess, 2006, p. 83). Moreover, Tibetans born in India before 1980 are also entitled to Indian citizenship which could address most of

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<sup>65</sup>Nehru’s developmental politics during 1950s, however, also refutes both arguments of humanitarianism or cultural affinities in the case of letting Tibetans inside India. Nehru’s developmental plan that had prioritised industrialisation, had resulted in the displacement and dispossession of more than two thousand families, ‘less than half of which had been resettled in last twenty five years’ (Menon & Nigam, 2012, p. 68). Few of such instances include the displacement caused by the construction of BhakraNangal Dam, Hirakud Dam and Rihad Dam. Yet it contributed huge amount of funds for establishment of CTA. Such step could be attributed to huge attention and international funds pouring in for Tibetans rehabilitation which might have made him realise the significance of Dalai Lama as an international political figure. At the same time, an unofficial assistance of United States to the Khampas and others involved in the struggle for freedom from China during that time could not be dismissed.

their grievances. Still, most of the Tibetans are disinclined to take up Indian citizenship, despite the insecurity being felt by many Tibetans who relate the provision of refuge with the 'esteem that Indian Government had for the Dalai Lama'.

Not only that, Tibetans have largely remained pawns in the hands of Indian government, which directed their mode of behaviour as per its requirement. A set of conditions were delineated with the provision of refuge to the people coming from Tibet. Keeping in view the possible deterioration of political relations with neighbouring country of China due to such decision, Indian government has instructed them to remain aloof from political activities on Indian land demanding the freedom of Tibet from China. They were advised not to use refuge to trigger any activity that could fuel freedom struggle.<sup>66</sup> They are to remain passive and non violent as their temperament is usually assumed, or otherwise were warned to face detention. On the other hand, however, it is noteworthy that Tibetan refugees were the first among others who had been recruited in the war against China by the Indian government, considering them more capable of surviving in high altitudes.

Therefore, using the presumption of Tibetans being non violent as preached by their religion, the government's perception of Tibetanness involves shaping their identity in a manner which doesn't create trouble for Indian government, i.e. to remain loyal passive recipients of government aids, as they always had been.

### **b. Role of CTA: Politics and Emerging Legitimacy Crisis**

The previous section sets forth the conditions laid down by Indian government with regard to the activities carried out by Tibetans, as per the particular perception of Tibetanness held by the Government. Moving forward in the same tone, this section highlights the politics of Tibetan Government in Exile, and the idea of Tibetanness it disseminates.

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<sup>66</sup> It is quite interesting to note, however, that prior to 1959, Tibetans had already been using Indian land to organise groups to rebel against Chinese incursions in Tibet under the organisation Tibetan Welfare Association between 1954 and 1959.

In 1959, a sudden arrival of refugees in India triggered the concern of rehabilitation and resettlement of Tibetan refugees. With the joint efforts of Indian Government as well as the Dalai Lama, these refugees were settled in different states such as Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh etc.

In the initial years, the emphasis was particularly on two issues, that of rehabilitation and resettlement, and education. The first settlements were achieved with the financial support of Indian government. Primary objective during the process of settlement was to establish similar pre-1959 context that Tibetans were familiar with to tackle the state of confusion and fear resonating amongst Tibetans in new cultural and political setting. In order to achieve such objective, Tibetan Industrial Rehabilitation Society (TIRS) was founded in 1965 to rehabilitate Tibetans in agro-industrial<sup>67</sup> settlements. Tibetans were usually peasants and nomads in pre-1959 Tibet, thus agricultural setting was believed to help them in an unknown atmosphere. “These agricultural settlements were ‘deliberately designed in such a way as to recreate Tibetan society with its core values intact’ in keeping with the popular desire and determination of the refugees which was endorsed by the government of India as a matter of policy.” Over time, their settlements got transformed into full fledged community. The refugees witnessed a number of developments in terms of employment and building of community institutions. They were settled in suitable environmental conditions, and were provided employment on road construction projects. However, after the failure of initial efforts, the handicraft based occupation was introduced in settlements.

After observing the deteriorating conditions of Tibetans in camps, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and few of his ministers decided to establish themselves as Government-in-exile (CTA) on Indian land. The function of CTA (Central Tibetan Administration) is to develop a society that resembles the old society of Tibet in the host country. Although the initial motive behind establishing such government was to assist the Tibetan arrivals in adjusting in the exilic circumstances, the ultimate aim remained not to let die the struggle for freedom of Tibet. For retaining the unity within community CTA was set up so that they could keep the administrative control, and social and cultural

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<sup>67</sup> According to Roemer, the term agro-industrial here implies that the settlements were initially based on tea estates, woollen mills, lime quarry, dehydrated lime production, etc. (Roemer, 2010, p. 71)

preservation of the community. The resettlement process was to make sure that Tibetans remain an integrated community which could only be achieved through an administrative organisation heading and making decisions on behalf of the community. The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) was officially proclaimed on 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1959. Its headquarters were shifted from Mussoorie to Dharamshala in 1960. There are two primary roles of CTA with which it was established. First was to keep the freedom struggle for Tibet ignited through organising meetings and plan various strategies towards achieving freedom. And second was to preserve the cultural symbols and texts brought from Tibet and pass the knowledge down to younger generations in order to save the 'nation' in exile from dispersion and their Tibetan identity from distortion.

The CTA is presently structured as per the 1991 Charter of Tibetans in exile. It has adopted the parliamentary system of governance which consists of the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies<sup>68</sup> (the legislature), the cabinet (or kashag)<sup>69</sup> along with other constitutional bodies (the executive) and Supreme Justice Commission. CTA plays a crucial role in the lives of Tibetans. As Roemer plausibly concludes that "the CTA structure eases the access to the international community, which in turn supports the exile Tibetan struggle worldwide and generates international support (Roemer, 2010, p. 107)".

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<sup>68</sup> ATPD keeps a check on "the election and impeachment of the cabinet ministers; the examination of cabinet decisions according to current valid policies and programs that are adopted by the assembly; laws, frame rules, regulations and policy decisions that will be enacted; the annual CTA budget and important national and international issues. Furthermore, it hears and debates public feedback, complaints, petitions and grievances and meets with envoys of international governments, parliaments, members of NGOs and with individuals to create awareness for the exile Tibetan struggle" (Roemer 2010, p. 100).

See Roemer, S. (2010). *The Tibetan government-in-exile: Politics at large*. London: Routledge..

<sup>69</sup>The cabinet consists of four ministers, headed by the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. Each minister is given the responsibility of the main Departments of CTA. The first minister, the kalon tripe (exile prime minister) heads two departments: the Department of Security and the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR). Department of Security registers and keeps account of the new arrival of Tibetans in India registered in three reception centres, New Delhi, Kathmandu and Dharamshala. These reception centres also help the new arrivals in finding employment, food and education. The DIIR, on the other hand, interact with the international actors, keeps the information of the Tibetan Diaspora around the world and bring into light the issue of Tibetan refugees. While the second minister takes care of health and finance, the third minister is responsible for the education, culture and religion, the core department for cultural preservation of Tibet. The Department of Finance has subdivisions which tackle the areas of budgeting, administration, caring and fundraising. The Social and Resource Development Fund under this department "key institution for the exile Tibetan NGOs to channel international funds from a particular donor organization to an exile NGO." The Home Department is headed by the fourth minister who is responsible for the rehabilitation of Tibetans in India, Nepal and Bhutan and works with international aid providers as well as government of India to create new opportunities for Tibetans.



The manner in which CTA functions with its own assembly and elections, it links the wide community of Tibetans not only to other states but to the UNHCR and various NGOs also. Each and every activity conducted under its authority, however, remains subordinate and at the 'goodwill' of the Indian state, which gives India power to command for changes in its structure if it deviates or clashes with Indian law and policies.<sup>70</sup>

CTA, however, still struggles to retain legitimacy for its claim of being the government in exile which represents both the Tibetans living inside Tibet as well as in exile. It has often been accused of eliminating the diversity existing within its own community during its course of manifesting Tibetan solidarity. While Indian government has its own reasons not to officially recognize Tibetans government in exile, there have been various non-governmental organisations as well as few minority Tibetan communities which are also reluctant to officially recognize the exiled community as headed by a Government. They argue that development of such a government has occurred in the absence of views of people living inside Tibet regarding the form of government. Secondly, even in exile, the 'self proclaimed' government has made continuous attempts to create a homogenous Tibetan community despite the presence of existing minority cultures within it. In pursuit of the objective to free Tibet, the portrayal of a unified Tibetan identity becomes imperative. This is accompanied with the suggestion to act as per the majority culture which originally represented culture of the Buddhist centre of Tibet, i.e. Lhasa. Therefore, in exile, Tibetanness, which comes with the identification of utmost responsibility to preserve culture, legitimizes one particular culture's representation.

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<sup>70</sup> Despite being against providing recognition to its government, Indian government has allowed CTA to function in such a manner which portrays a structural mechanism not absolutely new for India. India follows a federal form of governance (or what K.C. Wheare calls 'quasi-federal form of governance), where central government retains the reins of authority with limited powers devolved for the states. 'The basic principle of federalism is that the legislative and executive authority is partitioned between the Centre and the states not by any law to be made by the Centre but by the Constitution itself.' Similarly, panchayati raj institutions, also known as institutions of self government, were developed to make the grassroots level more democratic and participatory. The powers of the panchayat to function are determined by the state legislature. It could make plans for economic development, social justice and implement schemes for the same. It could also be authorised as per state legislature to levy, collect and appropriate taxes; maintenance of accounts and auditing of such accounts and so on. Thus, it becomes an agency that links people and their issues at the grassroots level to the state and is not independent in the sense that it draws its powers from the state legislature itself. In the same manner, CTA also functions as a sub-institution under Indian authority and provides a link between not only Tibetans and Indian government but Tibetans with international sponsors and NGOs.

Most people of Tibetan community are, however, no longer blindly committed to religious authority and, as Saklani shows, have begun to look at the CTA's decisions from critically rational point of view. They question the democratic politics of CTA behind which the politics and authority of few of the ministers take place. As has been stated in the previous chapter, the government of Dalai Lama in traditional Tibet were less bothered about the personal lives of individuals, however, the government established in exile seemed concerned with every aspect of the lives of their community members, thereby influencing their lives in every possible manner.

## **2. 'Old' and 'New': Balancing the two**

Most of the Tibetans who escaped under the threat of invasion by Chinese armies constituted only particular sections of the society who "may not be representative of the traditional society in truly statistical sense. Nonetheless, they represent the traditional structure of power and authority, as well as the cultural leaders" (Saklani, 1978). The early years of exile made Dalai Lama realise the importance of modern concepts and education from which the community couldn't be kept aloof. Although the endeavour to maintain balance between new and old was presumed to be beneficial for the community, the lack of well planned strategy and resources weakened the efforts to accomplish the same. Not only at the institutional level, but even at societal level, refugees (particularly of younger generation) grapple with balancing traditional values and modern practical requirements, with more likelihood of drifting towards the latter. The establishment of separate social setting on a foreign land to sustain and consistently induce older cultural ways of living in youth devoid of any external influence has proved less helpful in keeping them tied to the community.

This section looks into the transformation that has occurred in the structure of Tibetan community and the attempts made on the part of the community to retain the old structure.

### **a. Social Structure: Attempts to Minimise Disruption**

The visible transformation in the lives of Tibetan refugees occurred with the change in the social structure of their community including the nature and composition of families, status of women and so on. The Tibetan administration which replaced the old system of governance with a 'democratic' one initially reflected somewhat similar power structure with the ministers of kashag at top positions, under the Dalai Lama. Over time, however, the tradition of ministers, who possessed huge landed estates, holding the highest positions in the court of the Dalai Lama has been dismantled. Saklani attributes such change to the introduction of new scheme of education and availability of varied occupations thereafter in new socio-economic atmosphere. He argues,

“The pattern of social stratification, formerly based on ascriptive status, is also undergoing marked change.....With the loss of their landed power, the nobility cannot maintain its traditional status. This observation is also applicable, in large measure, to the religious hierarchy which derived its status from the control of landed estates. The class system has become more open and achievement oriented, where education, professional and occupational skills and higher incomes are becoming the main determinants of social status. The vast changes in the traditional occupational structure reinforce the loosening of the old bases of social stratification” (Saklani, 1978, p. 44).

Nonetheless, the stir in the old class system that caused upward mobility of Tibetans belonging to the lower sections of the community could not bring a remarkable change. To sustain the authenticity of historic Tibetan culture requires the maintenance of authority of certain sects. The centuries old divine principle of submission of people towards the higher spiritual authority, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, continued even in the exilic circumstances. It is still the main source of Tibetan identity. So far as education and occupation are concerned, one could not easily generalise the success in the upliftment of lower sections of community, belonging to peasants and low skilled labour. Although availability of better opportunities is irrefutable, these are still less and it is often contingent on the families and their respective family incomes where to send their children for education, preferably within the community. Education sector under the Tibetan government in exile seems to have been stuck between traditional and modern education which influences the future of children after school. Given the

educational problems (to be discussed in the next section), Tibetans are also expected to find employment within their community to avoid any dilution of their identity by remaining a closed isolated community.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the attempts to keep it a closed community, the new socio-economic setting has made its influence on the structure of Tibetan families. Saklani contends that unlike in the past, the families are no longer stringent. Provision of sufficient space for individual choices and freedom within the family which was absent in Tibet could be observed. In his words,

“Today, the family structure has undergone change in the absence of a ‘rootedness’ in family land and mobility of an order unknown in the traditional society. The power of the corporate descent group, i.e. the extended family, has been deeply eroded. The traditional, compelling subordination to common goal and common authority of the family are no longer in evidence. In the refugee communities surveyed, the percentage of nuclear family units was larger than the joint type. The polyandrous family has become very rare and there is greater freedom in contracting matrimonial relationships” (Saklani, 1978, p. 43). “The medieval, agrarian Tibetan family has, within the span of a single decade, acquired some of the main characteristics of the ‘industrial family’. However, one important difference is that the economy of the average Tibetan household is still characteristically family based, centring around agriculture or handicrafts. This in turn has an important bearing on the changing family structure” (Saklani, 1978, p. 44).

The presence of such nuclear families, however, could be attributed to the fact that most of the Tibetan ‘extended’ family members are still left in Tibet. Many young arrivals have particularly come for educational purposes either in monastic institutions or other Tibetan schools to study Tibetan culture, which is almost on the verge of depletion in Tibet.

Although within such families, there is no more compulsion to pursue ‘common goals’ set by the head of family, there is a much greater concern in exile which is common for every member of community, i.e. to preserve their culture, has made it far less easier for individuals out of responsibility towards their nation to pursue their respective wishes, let alone ‘matrimonial relationships’. The younger generation is expected not to marry outside their community in order to forward their cultural values to the next generation.

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<sup>71</sup>Tibetan PM inaugurates new BPO for youth employment  
<http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=33862>

Tina Lauer (2005) observes that any marriage<sup>72</sup> which deviates from such expectation often leads to identity crisis for their children. “Since the Dalai Lama proclaimed that such cross partnerships should be avoided, the Tibetan community in exile seeks to follow the wish of their leader, especially the elderly Tibetans” (Lauer, 2015, p. 177). Due to the Dalai Lama's reasoning, so-called half-Tibetans and their parents sometimes face discrimination and are forced to deal with accurate definitions of Tibetan identity as a result.

To the extent women condition in the exilic circumstances is concerned, there is no denying the fact that the new socio-political setting influenced the gender issues in Tibetan community. “In their new setting, with an increased participation in economic activities, higher levels of literacy and social mobility, and with the loosening of the traditional hierarchy regulating marriage, the Tibetan woman has come to acquire a higher status” (Saklani, 1978, p. 44). The rate of school enrolment increased for the Tibetan girls with more inclination towards the modern education. Discrimination of women, however, still persists in society with the recognition of women as inferior beings and subsequently undermining their educational and professional potential. Even the religious sphere also implicitly favours such discrimination where “in exile too, girls are not selected as teachers of Tibetan Buddhism” (Mishra, 2014, p. 46)<sup>73</sup>.

Therefore, it has clearly been observed that amidst several changes, there has been constant push and pull is at work by both individuals and the community, where while at times, community tries to keep an upper hand with the efforts to retain the old Tibetan identity, simultaneous attempts could be seen on the part of individual claiming for space within the community.

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<sup>72</sup> In her case study, she particularly refers to the marriage between Swiss citizen and Tibetan living in exile.

<sup>73</sup> Mallica Mishra held interviews in the exile community of Tibet and found that female respondents provided a mixed response regarding the gender discrimination within the community. Although few showed the inclination towards the equal status provided by the Govt. in Exile of Tibet, other group believed the former's claim as sham and recognizes inferior status attached to women in the community.

## **b. Muddled State of Education**

Education of Tibetan youth was anticipated by Dalai Lama as one of the prerequisites for saving Tibet's future. Initially, it was considered essential not only to educate children but also as the source of survival to communicate in an alien country. Tibetan schools could be divided into three categories: monastic schools, Tibetan schools, and non Tibetan schools. While the monastic schools fall under the Department of Education (DOE), CTA; non Tibetan schools include convent and Indian public schools under the GOI. Tibetan 'secular' schools on the other hand 'can be divided into three major categories on the basis of the institution, which funds and administers them: (i) CTSA<sup>74</sup> run schools, (ii) DOE<sup>75</sup> run schools, and (iii) Autonomous agencies' (Mishra, 2014, p. 67).

There has been huge decline of interest among Tibetan youth and their parents to pursue monastic education in exile. Mallica Mishra, in her study of Tibetan education in exile, observes that "only 10 per cent of Tibetan children in the age – group 6-17 attend monastic schools." (Mishra, 2014, p. 103). So far as Tibetan secular schools are concerned, the main concern for the Government in exilic setting was primarily to opt a proper framework of educational system and curriculum for Tibetans who were not so well versed in English or any other Indian languages, i.e., the concern was whether to employ foreign (Indian) education or traditional educational methods of Tibet, which could form solid foundations to preserve Tibetan education, values and culture. The issue was settled with the decision to incorporate both modern and traditional features in Tibetan curriculum as well as in mode of teaching. The annual report of CTSA (1961-62) reflected the subsequent "concerns of the Government of India to formulate a syllabus that would enable the refugee children to respect their Tibetan culture, religion and history, while at the same time increase their awareness of the modern world" (report mentioned in Mishra, 2014, p. 73).

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<sup>74</sup> CTSA is an autonomous body under MHRD, Government of India.

<sup>75</sup> Department of education was established by Central Tibetan Administration to monitor the functioning and performance of Tibetan schools.

Since their rehabilitation in India, Tibetans educational system has been transformed by the implementation of three policies: (i) Three language formula (1960–1984), (ii) Tibetanisation of Education (1984-2004), and (iii) New Basic Education Policy for Tibetans in Exile (2004 onwards). Three language formula was employed in Tibetan schools to emulate the Indian education policy, where English was used as the medium of instruction with Tibetan and Hindi as second and third languages respectively.

The formula, however, failed to keep up the main objectives of Tibetans in exile, and resulted in the erosion of Tibetan language among youth who considered it just another subject to pass. The need to rejuvenate Tibetan essence amongst Tibetan children, seemingly unaccomplished with the previous policy, led to the shift to *Tibetanisation of Education*. This policy, first adopted by TCV (Tibetan Central Village) schools in 1984, shifted the medium of instruction from English to Tibetan for classes I-V. All the textbooks of NCERT for science and mathematics were translated from English to Tibetan by the DOE, CTA and social sciences included the history and culture of Tibet. After primary education, however, English again dominated as the medium of instruction and Tibetan was reduced to the level of secondary language. Tibetanisation of Education could also not succeed as per the hopes and anticipation of cultural rejuvenation and preservation.

The defects in the system got revealed in the report of *Tibetan Education in Exile: Current Status Report (1998)*. A decline not only in the academic standard but also in the standard of using Tibetan language as well as English language and methods of teaching was observed. Students found difficulty in understanding English after class V because of abruptly switching to English. Traditional methods of teaching which were particularly based on rote learning made it difficult for students to grasp the essence and significance of their own culture.<sup>76</sup> The drastic decline in the quality of Tibetan language led to the introduction of new policy also regarded as ‘fundamental policy’ in 2004.

This Basic Policy of Education for Tibetans in exile emphasised more on triggering the traditional education and Tibetan language as the medium of instruction. Unlike before,

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<sup>76</sup> “Officials of the DOE, CTA have also confirmed the existence of passive and non participatory pedagogical methods that have contributed to the decline of academic standards of English as well as Tibetan” (Mishra p 83).

Tibetan language was made the core language for students till XII with the compulsion to study traditional monastic education of Tibet which included learning mantras and lessons for the path to enlightenment. Tibetan education was prioritised over modern education, with the aim to re-inculcate the cultural values. Change in the policy of education of younger generation raised questions regarding their future in exile, which raised the possibility of increasing the level of unemployment. It no longer seemed to have any practical use.

Educational system of Tibetans in exile suffers from the dilemma to choose between pursuing practical necessity of employment for livelihood after education, and cultural responsibility to preserve traditional values and methods. In the wake of obliteration of Tibetan education and language in Tibet through Chinese policies on education<sup>77</sup>, its subtle depletion in exilic circumstances fails to serve the purpose of those living in exile. “The purpose of education is stated to be the preservation of traditional Tibetan language rather than ‘getting jobs’ for Tibetan youth. An official at the Tibetan Government in exile stated that the new education policy ‘goes much beyond’ the question of envisioning an education that is for ‘getting jobs’, as it aims ‘to enable children to get better rooted in their identity’. The education policy is also seen as committed towards producing ‘knowledge for the sake of knowledge and focused on ‘community needs’ as against ‘individual needs’” (Mishra, 2014, p. 86).<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, although older generation, following the good intentions of Dalai Lama and CTA, supports such a vision of education for their children, a huge chunk of younger generation seems to have been drifting away from the traditional ways of life. In such circumstances, while few choose to pursue education in private non Tibetan schools against the wishes of their community, others continue to send their children in Tibetan schools not only for the sake of preserving their culture and identity but also because education of exile Tibetans is tied to sponsorships which they hope could enhance the probability of opening further opportunities for their children.

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<sup>77</sup> Protest against Chinese policy to replace the medium of instruction from Tibetan to Chinese in educational system of Tibet.

<sup>78</sup> In her research of Tibetan schools, Mallica Mishra (Mishra, 2014, p. 104) observed that ‘while there are a significant number of Tibetan schools at the pre-primary levels (89); there is lesser number of schools with senior secondary levels (15) from where Tibetan students complete’.



### c. Sponsorships (*rogs ram*)<sup>79</sup>: Commodifying Culture

While the previous section highlighted the concerns related to educational system of Tibetan community, the present section looks into the commodification of culture triggered with the politics of sponsorship and culture. The interrelation between these three aspects of Tibetans' lives are perceived as contributing to complicate the process of identity formation of individual.

Writing in the 1970s, John Conway (1975) presents an overview of the initial phase of exile for Tibetans. On re-examining the role of the foreign agencies' participation, he highlights that while few agencies aimed at development of self supporting communities to achieve self sufficiency of individuals, there were other group of agencies which believed in the 'on-going obligation' to continue assisting Tibetan refugees during the rehabilitation phase. In his words,

“The provision of capital aid, through the purchase of land, fertilisers and machinery, or the purchase of looms, stocks of wool and technical equipment for the production of handicrafts, not only involves larger sums, but has shifted the emphasis from relief to rehabilitation. Financial investment has demanded a dramatic shift in the priorities of the donor agencies. It has, on the one hand, led to the de-emphasising of the Tibetans as the recipients of sporadic charity, and, on the other, demanded a recognition of a long term relationship not tied to the particular emergency which followed the Tibetans' escape from their homeland. For the majority of the agency personnel, theirs has been a welcome change. The Tibetans are no longer in a dependent status, but rather are partners in an ongoing process of self development” (Conway, 1975, p. 82).

The term 'partnership', usually used in business, points to the investment made, by the partners involved, in pursuit of a common goal, where the outcome would be of some value to both of them. The development of partnership between sponsors and Tibetans was meant to fulfil the requirements concerning mainly the sphere of education, employment, and to develop the capabilities of refugees to lead an independent life.

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<sup>79</sup> 'Rogsram' is a Tibetan term for sponsorship. Prost presents a distinction between older connotation of rogs ram which was broader in meaning referring to both social as well as financial help by community, patrons, etc., and exile rogs ram which specifically refers to foreign aid. He argues that 'although the contemporary practice of rogs ram finds cultural validation in older forms of patronage and sponsorship, the restriction of rogs ram to the context of refugee/foreign donor relationships is a new development specific to exile' (Prost, 2006, p. 240).

While the role of the former is to remove possible constraints regarding lack of resources through financial aids<sup>80</sup>, the latter is expected to take advantage of these resources which must be reflected in their performance. The continuity of financial aids is contingent on the visible improvement of performance in respective fields. Such condition set for the reception of aid, however, have become the matter of concern when the expected results which were often perceived beneficial in theory, turns into pressure, to perform well, in practice.

Additionally, it had to be essentially in consonance with ‘actual’ Tibetan Buddhist culture, observed as quite appealing by people and studied by many all around the world. The purity and authenticity of Tibetan culture whose preservation and manifestation is must for the continuation of such funds, leaves hardly any scope of not turning it into a commodity. Audrey Prost (2006), in his examination of the role of symbolic capital gained through international funds in the lives of Tibetan refugees residing in Dharamshala, observes that “Tibetanness is a highly desirable field of cultural investment for foreigners. The Tibetan nationalist discourse stressing the preservation of the Tibetan heritage on one hand, and the western cultural investment in Buddhism, on the other, happily coincide in awarding high symbolic currency to the preservation of ‘authentic’ (largely Buddhist) Tibetan lifestyles. Thus, gaining access to economic capital through sponsorship means participating in the more general agenda of cultural preservation” (Prost, 2006, p. 241).

The articulation of ‘authentic’ Tibetan culture occupies the primary space, though in the name of preservation but revealing the actual need of financial aids. Sudeep Basu also highlights that performance of festivals have become the site of articulation of authenticity in the pursuit of which local folks are often excluded from its celebration giving platform for those professionalized in the performing these festivals after years of training. In addition to this, studies have also observed that small number of youths is also becoming prone to dependency through such sponsorships.

In contrast to John Conway’s views, during her comparative study of Tibetans living in Switzerland and India, Tina Lauer (2015) observed that:

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<sup>80</sup> Most of the sponsorship agencies prefer to provide financial aids to CTA for the fulfilment of its projects, however, few other agencies choose a direct way of assisting Tibetans on individual basis.

“Few respondents admitted that they fully depend or still depend on the financial aid to foreign sponsors to fulfil their ambitions, or even to live their lives. Thus, a number of them, after finishing their education, focused completely to find new donors instead of exploring other ways to make a living.....The financial dependence thus led to some second generation Tibetans using their Tibetan origins as a survival strategy. The sponsorship system led to an intensified awareness by the second generation respondents of their Tibetan origins” (Lauer, 2015, p. 173).

The process of cultural preservation, it can thus be said, is not as simple as it seems. It comes with additional requirements to be fulfilled, which influences the construction of Tibetan identity in new ways. Rather than a simple process, the Tibetan culture has seemingly turned into a commodity in exchange of which sponsorship is provided, which on the one hand opens up various opportunities for them, on the other hand renders their survival financially dependent.

## **Conclusion**

The formation of Tibetan identity in exile, as observed in the chapter, is undoubtedly far more complex than that of historic Tibet. With the number of changes that Tibetans have experienced in the new socio-political setting, their identity formation seems stuck between fulfilling different expectations of host state and CTA (which ostensibly represents the entire Tibetan community) on the one hand, and finding ways of survival while balancing both old and new, on the other. The scope of an individual's choice is narrowed when she is dependent on sponsorships (through CTA or individual sponsors), which gauges individual's identity in terms of its authenticity. The terms of 'Tibetanness' or Tibetan identity are, thus, not set unilaterally by a single agency but through a number of ways which often obscures the diversity of identities present within Tibetan culture.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present study has attempted to set a comparison between the Tibetan community in pre-1959 period and Tibetan community living in exile in India, with the aim to understand the different ways of formation of individual identity in Tibetan community. The comparative analysis of the Tibetan community under different contextual situations was done to examine the change in the nature of interaction and the level of congruence between the individual and community.

During the analysis of the characteristics of the pre-1950s community in Tibet dwelling in traditional socio-political setting, it is observed that identity of individuals was to a great extent developed from that of the community. Being a theocratic state, there was no question of dispute arising between political institution and religious institution, unlike in the modern states. People were observed showing absolute commitment towards traditions and customs of the community. They identified themselves as inseparable part of the community, where the question of individual choice fell secondary to the principles and laws laid down by the community and the State respectively.

On the other hand, the process of identity formation of Tibetans could be observed as turning more intricate in the exilic circumstances, as is shown in the third chapter. Transformation could be perceived as occurring at two levels in the context of Tibetans: at the level of community and at the level of individual. Influenced with the host country, the changes occurring in the community are quite visible. The first and the most significant development is the adoption of democratic system in the formation of the Government in Exile. The wider gap of inequality is narrowed with the removal of class specific occupations, and with people, from all sects and class, being allowed to work in government institutions. The major change, moreover, which seems to happen in the near future, is the transformation of partially theocratic government in exile to a fully democratic system, if one believes the announcement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama of ending the centuries old title of Dalai Lama, which marked the essence of

Tibet's theocratic rule, and giving way to a democratically elected leader to take decisions on behalf of the Tibetan community living in exile.

So far as the lives of individuals are concerned, with subtle changes within their governmental structure and those experienced in a relatively modern society, Tibetans' lives have undergone a major change in values and belief system, particularly in their way of looking towards life. The shift, from the pursuit of an ideal life of non-materialism and absolute contentment to attribution of practical importance to situational adaptation for the fulfilment of pecuniary needs, seems permeating among the individuals of Tibetan community.

Despite the observable attitudinal change among Tibetans, there still exists the need to retain the connection and be identified with the community. The preferential maintenance of this connection with the community could have emerged either due to the sentiments pertaining to a common traumatic past, and the common desire to reclaim the homeland in future, or due to recognition as a refugee that helps in gaining the sponsorships. In order to maintain that connection, Tibetans often lead their lives amidst fulfilling the conditions to be recognised as a part of Tibetan community in exile. With the hope of making the freedom movement successful, and qualify to receive sponsorships in order to fulfil basic amenities, Tibetan refugees seek different ways to cope with the changing circumstances. Tibetan identity, particularly of younger generation, thus, emerges from the amalgamation of traditional and modern values, and aspirations.

What the research seeks are the answers for the questions as to why we should be concerned with the way identities are formed in the case of Tibetans, and how it matters if the gap widens between individual and community. These were the primary questions raised in the Introduction: 'the question of changing relationship of Tibetans with their community or vice versa, which gives rise to the second question of individual choice, i.e. how far an individual exercises her right to make decisions about her life, which in turn relates to the third question of personal and self identity, i.e. how she identifies or re-identifies herself in exilic context as being a refugee. Further speculations could be made on the impact of this changing relationship on the Tibetan freedom movement.'

As it has already been argued in the previous chapters that cultural preservation, identity formation, individual choice and Tibet freedom movement are not mutually exclusive, rather they often intersect each other. It is also shown that identity formation differs in different socio-political settings, for instance, in the case of Tibetans, from a staunch conservative individual to an individual open to follow both traditional and modern culture. Keeping in view the transformations that Tibetan community and Government in exile have undergone, it is undeniable that few of the, what Rorty defines as 'essential' features are lost, as prevalent in pre-1950s Tibet. It is worth noting, however, that even if such features are not fully replaced, the addition of few new characteristics should not be overlooked. Cleaved off of the rigidity that persisted in traditional Tibet in social as well as political structures, the younger generation of the community grapples with getting accustomed with both the modern and the traditional ways of life, and the older generation still seems attempting to enclose themselves within a web of principles and traditions.

While the community was once the sole root or the only identification mark for Tibetans, people in exile have more routes open for them, one amongst them is the citizenship that is being offered to them by different states. Despite the availability of such routes, there has been observed a wide reluctance within the community, particularly the 'heads' of the community or the exiled government itself, to take advantage of these options. The reason provided behind such reluctance pertains to the fear of losing the hope of freedom in the wake of changing their citizenship. Another argument prevalent in Tibetan discourse is that the common goal of freedom struggle is what forms the essence of Tibetanness, which won't be lost if one merely moves ahead to benefit from the entitlements that comes with the provision of citizenship. Undoubtedly, these two arguments point to two significant concerns: if one follows the first argument, Tibetans are bound to stick in the interwoven web of cultural and sponsorship politics, with its significant influence in curtailing individual choice. If, however, one sides with the latter argument, then what Conway calls 'the threat of dispersion' would hover over the community.

While grappling with such a sensitive question of identity, individual choice and community, I have argued, in the first chapter, that political theory could be approached to direct the path towards resolution of such concerns regarding identity, community,

and individual choice. Few political theorists, such as Charles Taylor, have attempted to explain and gauge the relevance of 'goods' in pursuit of particular ends. While discussing the social and political structure of traditional Tibet, I have tried to extract few features, marked as 'essential', for being identified as Tibetans. These features are what, in the language of communitarians, describe the embeddedness of an individual, the sources of individual identification. In the case of Tibetans, such embeddedness in their exiled community is perceived as the hallmark of 'authenticity' of being a Tibetan, if seen through Western lens.

Without uncritically following the communitarian belief of 'ends being prior to the individual', which supports the rationale of older generation regarding the Tibetanness as something emerging from the community only, it would be prudent to take into account the 'repeating principle' of Alan Montefiore (1999), and 'commensurability of constitutive goods' by Charles Taylor, while one decides over the im/mutability of identity and significance of goods in pursuit of one's ends.

In the wake of changes in exile, as has been shown, Tibetans are bound to experience and value the practical importance of modernity in their lives. Alan Montefiore argues that to include a particular action as part of one's identity, the action needs to be repeated to the extent that it becomes a common expression of one's personality. In the case of Tibetans, as previously argued, the possibility of newly forming identities should not be neglected. Rather it should be maintained that identities are not immutable in nature. Taking cognizance of the presence of these identities, the continuous manifestation of particular characteristics by Tibetan individuals needs to be examined. The examination should be held, following the repeatability principle of Montefiore, with the objective of exploring and identifying new set of markers of identification in changing situation.

It is, moreover, irrefutable to argue that the implications of remaining aloof from the impact of modern ways of life would have adversary effects. To support such isolation with the argument of embeddedness of individual makes it imperative to invoke the commensurability argument of Taylor. Taylor, while examining the applicability of commensurability on 'constitutive goods' in an individual's life, claims that in the pursuit of a particular end, in this case the freedom of Tibet, one should not remain stick

to the established goods – principles, values and features marked imperative for leading a good life – despite the goods being constitutive in their nature. Changing circumstances, for him, should not become the constraint, in the eyes of community, leading to unethical justification of the curtailment of individual from having benefits of basic rights, essential for one's survival. He argued that even the constitutive goods, which are intrinsically present in an individual, proving his embeddedness in a community, are commensurable in nature, with the only condition being its benefits are for the common good of the individuals and of the community as a whole. The individual choices should not be unethically stifled for the sake of maintaining the dominance of communitarian values, but rather the significance of such values should be gauged keeping in view the importance of leading a good life, benefitting the individuals as well as the community.

Therefore, although the issue of providing more scope to individual choice and keeping the freedom struggle stronger is not an easy question to resolve, it still needs to be looked at through different angles suggestive of new ways using different theories available. The question should be left open to varied arguments keeping in view the changing politics of Tibetan government in exile, the everyday struggle of common Tibetan refugee and the aim of Tibet's freedom.



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