Tibetan Refugees in India

ARUP BEZBARUAH
Research Scholar
Centre for Inner Asian Studies, School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (India)

ABSTRACT
Tibet, the “Roof of the World” is known for the issue of refugees. A significant numbers of Tibetan people are living outside their homeland as refugees. India is the receiver of highest number of Tibetan refugees in the world. The life of refugee is not easy at all. Refugees have to face many socio-economic and political problems. In this case Tibetan refugees are lucky enough to lead a happy and progressive life in India compared to other refugee groups. In 1959 after the Chinese invasion more than 80,000 Tibetan refugees came to India along with their spiritual and political leader 14th Dalai Lama. Presently more than 1,50,000 Tibetan refugees are living in India in 39 settlement camps. In this long stay Tibetans are preserving their own culture and identity without assimilating in Indian society with a hope to go back to Tibet again. The present study tries to see the socio-economic and cultural scenario of Tibetans in India and how they have adapted in Indian society in this long stay.

Key Words: India, Tibet, Tibetan, Refugee, Settlement, Culture, Identity

INTRODUCTION
Tibet is familiar in world politics for free Tibet movement against China under the leadership of His holiness Dalai Lama and for the issue of Tibetan refugees who are living outside Tibet particularly in India since 1959 Chinese aggression. History of Tibetan refugees is not old in international scenario. Tibet was an independent country before the Chinese invasion in 1949. In 1949 the Communist China came into existence and China declares its policy to liberate Tibet and defeated the small and weak Tibetan army in the year 1950. As a result nationwide resistance took place by the Tibetans in Lhasa on 10 March 1959, demanding total withdrawal of China from Tibet. This movement of Tibetans was dominated by China killing thousands of Tibetans in Lhasa region and destroying several religious structures of Tibet. To protect Tibet and Tibetans on 17 March 1959 His Holiness Dalai Lama along with his 13,000 followers escaped from Lhasa and sought political asylum in India (Kharat, 2003). And thus India comes into connection with the issue of Tibetan refugees. Presently more than 1,50,000 Tibetans are living in India completing more than 60 years. In this long stay in exile Tibetans have never give up their culture and identity and they are preserving it without assimilating in Indian society with a hope to go back to Tibet again.

Religion and Culture: 
Religion plays the most vital role in Tibetan society. Buddhism is the main religion of Tibetans. Very few people practice Islam and Christianity. Tibetan people follow Mahayana Buddhism. It is originated in India (Arakeri, 1998).

Buddhism flows to Tibet in the period of seventh century. From them onwards Tibet has developed a very close religious cultural connection with India. In all settlements the Tibetans have built various chorten (stupa), gompas (monasteries) or temples to practice their religion. They believe in the three precious Gems of Buddhism; Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (Saklani, 1984). In all these settlements Tibetan refugees follow their Buddhist religion with great devotion. They practice Lamaism and

monastery culture in large extent. All social cultural economic activities are evolving around religion. Religion is way of life for the Tibetans.

Tibetans are successful in exile to preserve their tradition and culture because of their political and temporal leader His holiness the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan refugees have followed all advice of Dalai Lama with full faith and devotion. The religious life of Tibetans can be seen in every aspect of their day to day life. Most of the Tibetan refugees recite Tibetan prayers with deep faith. Most of the old people in the settlement recite Tibetan prayers throughout the day and night (Subba 1988). In front of the homes Tibetans keep Tibetan religious flags. Religion is the integral part of socio-cultural and economic life of Tibetans.

Economy:
The Tibetan refugees have been rehabilitated in mainly three sectors. 1. Agriculture, 2. Agro based industries and 3. Carpet weaving and handicrafts (Kharat 2003). Most of the Tibetan refugees are farmers and nomads. In India there are 39 settlements (CTA 2015). The Government of India establishing settlements in various places of India offers land to the Tibetans for their shelter and agricultural purposes. Generally these refugees were given on an average one acre of land each by the government of India. Moreover agricultural equipments like bullocks, tractors, seeds, fertilizers and other tools of trade etc. have been given to the Tibetan refugees (Kharat 2003). The Multipurpose Tibetan Cooperation Society (MTCS) is the key organization of Tibetan refugees. It looks after all economic activities of the settlements. MTCS provides loan, financial assistance, agricultural equipment etc. to the refugees. The failure or success of Tibetan economy is highly depend on the role of MTCS and the nature.

The economic conditions of Tibetan refugees were not so good till nineties. Most of the Tibetan refugees were settled in agro based settlements. Agriculture is the sole source of income for many refugees. The condition of farmers is not good in India. The agriculture is depended on nature. Drought, floods affect the agriculture every year in India. There is no proper and enough irrigation facilities available in India. So the farmers of India are living their lives in very poor conditions. The conditions of Tibetan farmers were almost similar to the Indian farmers in the initial period. Their agriculture is also rely on natural water. For the Tibetan refugees to get a good market is a major problem. In the beginning stage Tibetans were betrayed by the some cunning businessmen as they were not accustomed with the Indian money, economy and metric measurement (Palakshappa, 1978). In agriculture also they were unable to produce more crops due to the lack of climatic and geographical ideas. But later the situation had been changed with the establishment of Multipurpose Tibetan Cooperation Society. Tibetans start getting reasonable prices from the agro products. In the initial years due to the lack of modern education Tibetans were betrayed by the local businessmen. But with the development of education scenario situation has changed. At present Tibetans can do business in India without much trouble. Now the economic condition of Tibetan refugees in India is sound compare to other refugees and many poor local Indians. With their effort and assistance from the Indian government Tibetan refugees make their economic condition sound. Tibetans refugees work hard in all economic fields from agriculture to business. They have earned the techniques of agriculture and business very well. Tibetans are one of the most successful business groups in India. They mainly sell garments in various places in India. Winter garments like sweater and Tibetan winter cloths selling is the key business of Tibetans. In agriculture they produce maize (corn) in large quantity. Besides maize they produce some other valuable crops for selling. Tibetans also earn money from carpet weaving, handicrafts and from animal husbandry. Financial assistance is being provided by many international organizations and non-governmental groups from the beginning of their refugee lives.

Education:
Education is the most important asset of human being. After reaching India in 1959, Dalai Lama requested the Government of India to rehabilitate the Tibetan refugees in India. In this process he put much more importance on education. Dalai Lama believes that only education can help to preserve Tibetan tradition and culture and identity in exile. He realizes that only education can help the Tibetan refugees to lead a dignified life in exile. After the establishment of Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala, with the assistance of Indian government Dalai Lama tries to spread education to the all settlements. The Central Tibetan Administration takes many initiatives to establish schools in the various settlements located in India. The Central Tibetan School
(CTS) tries to provide good education based upon modern principles to their own Tibetan people (Mishra 2014). In the Tibetan schools along with formal education co-curricular activities on Tibetan culture, song, dance etc are taught to keep Tibetan culture alive in exile (CTSA Report 2004).

Tibetan education system introduces English as the medium of instruction keeping Tibetan language compulsory to the all Tibetan refugees. Presently in India more than 73 Tibetan schools from pre-primary to class twelve level. Tibetan refugees are the first and one and only refugee group for whom the government of India has established special central school keeping Tibetan language as a subject. Now many Tibetan refugees are studying in various prominent education institutions in India and abroad.

Medical and Medicine:

Tibetan medical system and medicine is very ancient in nature. The medical system uses the techniques like pulse analysis and urinalysis in large extent. To make medicine they use natural materials like herbs and minerals and they use physical therapies like Tibetan acupuncture to treat illness. The Tibetan traditional medical system is the synthesis of Indian (Ayurveda), Persian (Unani), Greek, indigenous Tibetan and Chinese medical system. Tibetan medical system believes that all illness results from the “three poisons” of mind: ignorance, attachment and aversion. It is linked with the Buddhist belief (Mathur, 2012). Hospitals in all Tibetan settlements are built for the refugees. These hospitals are primary in nature. Refugees have to come to Indian hospitals for major treatments.

Tibetan Architecture:

Tibetan architecture is influenced by Chinese and Indian architectures. It reflects the Buddhist influence. In almost every Gompa in Tibet, Buddhist prayer wheel along with two deer or dragons is seen. Many of the houses and monasteries are built on elevated, sunny site facing the south. Roofs are constructed flat to preserve heat and windows are kept to get sunlight. Constructions are designed carefully to protect them from earthquakes. Traditional Kham architecture is seen in most houses with wooden floors and ceiling (Mathur, 2012). In Indian Tibetan settlements unique glimpses of Tibetan architecture is seen everywhere. Anyone can get the beautiful glimpse of Tibetan architecture visiting any settlement spreading all over India.

Problems and Challenges:

Tibetan refugees have crossed more than 60 years in exile. During this long period they face many problems and challenges in India. In fact the life of refugee is never easy. Refugees have to face many more problems compare to the other citizens of a nation. On the way to India several Tibetans became weak and sick and many of them were died of hunger and diseases. After reaching India they face the problem of rehabilitation. Initially there were no shelters for them in a foreign country. But fortunately the Indian Government was kind to the Tibetan refugees. They were given shelters in various transit camps like Misamari, Darjeeling, Bomdila, Kalimpong etc. Thousands of refugees were kept in those transit camps. Though they got shelter in those camps but there they confronted the problem of over population. Due to over population in small space it was very difficult to maintain sanitation and hygiene. As a result refugees became sick. Disease like diarrhea, tuberculosis, malaria spread in the transit camps. Indian foods were also not suitable for them. At first Dalai Lama requested the government of India to settle all the refugees together in large area near to the Tibetan Frontier (Grunfled, 1987). But for the security reasons the Indian government refused to do so. And they were settled in various transit camps of Misamari (Assam), Buxa (West Bengal) etc. in this camps refugees were given free rations, clothing and cooking utensils, medical facilities etc. Despite this assistance many Tibetans died in the camps due to the sudden change of climate and their strenuous journey across the Himalayas (Kharat, 2003).

Tibet is situated in a cold place. But the weather of India is not cold like Tibet. The heat of Indian soil was not appropriate for the Tibetan refugees. For them it was very difficult to bear heat in India. Due to high temperature Tibetan refugees took time to adjust with the Indian environment. In the beginning of their escape to India many refugees were died because of the heat and difficult journey across Himalayas. It was a major challenge for the Tibetan refugees in the initial period.

The situation of Tibetan refugees got better when they were shifted to the various settlement camps located in various places in India. In the initial period in the settlement camps they faced many problems. Most of the settlements were located in jungle. For them to make them livable it took time. Second one is the Indian people
were suspicious to the Tibetan refugees. Local Indians behaviour towards the Tibetan refugees were not good. It gave them trouble in the initial years in India.

Most of the Tibetan settlements in India are agro based settlements. Tibetan refugees are engaged in the agriculture. In the field they produce maize in large extent and other corps like paddy, pulse, ground nut, potato etc in some extent. In the initial years in the settlements Tibetan refugees tried to cultivate many corps like paddy, ragi, soya beans, maize, ground nut, potato, pulse etc (Kharat, 2003). But they did not get success. Their hard work went in vain in those barren lands. After the soil survey it was found that most of the land where Tibetan refugees were given settlements was not favorable for cultivation of other corps except maize. Later they started cultivating maize and got success in the maize production. Thus in the initial years in exile Tibetan refugees faced problems to earn their daily bread.

After more than 60 years in exile Tibetan refugees are still unable to go to Tibet. It is the most painful incident for the Tibetan refugees. Especially the first generation of Tibetan refugees who fled from Tibet to India with the hope that situation of Tibet would be normal soon and they would be able to return back to the Tibet soon. This hope remains as hope for several decades for the Tibetans. Many of the Tibetans come to India leaving their family in Tibet. They always want to meet their kith and kin. But they are still unable to do so. These always give them pain.

Preservation of Tibetan language, culture and tradition in a foreign country is a very challenging task for the Tibetan refugees. In a foreign country to lead a life like their home land is not always easy. The main challenge of preservation of Tibetan culture comes from within whether they are ready to carry their tradition or to give up and assimilate in the host country. Though many challenges have come to their path the Tibetan refugees become successful in preserving the Tibetan culture in exile in large extent. Establishing monasteries, stupas (chorten) in exile Tibetans are preserving their culture (Mishra, 2014). Sometimes challenge of preserving Tibetan culture comes from themselves especially from their young generation. Some young generation Tibetans are more interested towards modern life style. They don’t like to spend time in monastery they are also even not interested in to wear Tibetan dress and to follow all aspects of Tibetan life.

Though the Tibetan refugees are living peacefully in India for more than 60 years; the relationship between local Indians and Tibetan refugees are not always cordial. Conflict takes place in many places. Many times Tibetan refugees demonstrate anger against Indians. Sometimes Indian people also show disrespect towards Tibetans.

Conclusion:

The Tibetan refugees are living in India for more than 60 years. Presently more than 1,50,000 Tibetan refugees are living in India (The Assam Tribune, 2018). The Government of India gives asylum to the Tibetan refugees on humanitarian ground and for India’s cultural and religious connection with Tibet. Now in India Tibetan refugees are living in Indian settlements maintaining their Tibetan culture with a hope to return back to Tibet.

The Tibetan refugees are settled in India mainly in three sectors agriculture, agro industries and in carpet weaving and handicrafts. The Tibetan refugees are living more prosperous life in compare to some other refugee groups in India. The conditions of Tibetan refugees are better than many poor Indians. Due to the cooperation of Indian government and for the strong leadership of His Holiness Dalai Lama; Tibetan refugees are able to lead prosperous lives in Exile preserving their Tibetan cultural identity.

From the Socio-Economic perspectives it is observed that the Tibetan refugees have adapted themselves very well in India. The Government of India helps in the adaptation of Tibetan refugees. The majority of the local Indian people are also not against the establishment of Tibetan settlements in their places. The economic conditions of many Indian people are becoming sound for the existence of Tibetan refugees in India. It is seen that Tibetan refugees are the most privileged refugee groups in India. Though sometimes conflict takes place between the Tibetan refugees and Indian local people, but it is common to every society. The numbers of conflicts are very less in this 60 years in exile. So overall it can be said that Tibetan refugees are living in India comfortably. They have adapted themselves well in the Indian socio-economic environment. For the Tibetans India is their home away from home. In large extent Tibetans are living a pleasant refugee lives in India maintaining their culture and identity with a hope to go back to Tibet.

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