

Searching for Home in a foreign land: A Study of the Life of Tibetan Migrants at Shillong, Meghalaya

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Abstract: *There is a long history of the Tibetans migrants settling in India motivated by political and social situations in both the countries. From 1959 onwards they favored then Assam presently Meghalaya for their settlement as the landscape and the weather are more similar to their native place. Their migration to the place attracted many changes in both the host and migrant communities. Hence the present study is an attempt to study the patterns of life of the migrant communities and its impact the migration on the host communities and their society.*

The study finds that all the migrants are engaged in business unlike other migrants in other states they have multiple occupations, Tibetans in Shillong are all working in the same place, most of them in the shop and some of them running restaurants and none of them are working as daily wagers and agriculturists. They reside in the same place and have a very less population. It has also been found that they also have a strong sense of group consciousness and endogamy is strictly practiced among them to preserve their identity and culture.

Key Words: *Migration; Tibetans; Identity; Marriage; Culture.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Migration of population along with language has resulted evolution of human society and technology has given us the patterns of human history, with endless change and transformation (Manning, 2005). Though movement of people have been significant aspect of existing history of humanity but modern era has experienced dramatic changes in migration process over period of time. Early history had free movement of people from one part of globe to another part. Balarajan et al (2011) note that during period of “free migration” arbitrarily starts from 1840 to 1914, growing trade in goods and services were accompanied by movement of people at large scale.

The migration here is defined as permanent migration. It is distinguished from the temporary movements begins and ultimately terminated in the same place or community but, being studied for many disciplinary positions variety of terms returns migration transhumance commuting. These terms refers to circuits of movement by individual and small groups between points of origin and destination and lack any declared intention of a permanent or semi-permanent change in residence. The number of international migrants has been considerably increasing in the past four decades. It was 75 million in 1960 and has growing to 175 million 2000 (United Nation, 2006: 6a). At present 191 million people live outside their native land which is about three percent of the world population.

International migration is the result of the push factors in countries of origin the pull factor is in destination countries and the network that links push and pull factors. Migrants man are usually in high demand in areas of highly skilled and bottom paid job, where as women are restricted to traditional occupations such as domestic work and other unskilled works in services sector like wait meaning. The push factor that have forced women to migrant are family obligation unemployment, low wages, poverty, limited social and economical opportunity and the desire to expand their horizons. The pull factors of migration are freedom of mobility opportunities, financial crises in their own countries, employment discrimination in home country, the desire to escape from abusive marriages and patriarchal traditions country and from the discrimination of certain groups of women like single mother, widows or divorcees and unmarried women (UNFPA, 2006).

2. INTRODUCTION ABOUT THE TIBETANS IN INDIA.:

In order to understand the process of adaptation of Tibetan Migrants in Indian setting, it is necessary to comprehend the structure, traditional social structure. We study the Tibetans social structure and culture as a unified system and not as collections of diverse cultural traits and classes.

Tibetans in Exile In March of 1959 the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, fled to India from his native land of Tibet and started a new life in a strange and cautiously welcoming new environment. This nighttime escape from Lhasa, the

administrative center of Tibet, came after years of increasing presence and failed negotiations with mainland China as it looked to reassert control over the area (Avedon, 1984). The Chinese government maintains their stance that this land has historically been part of China and that their return has introduced freedoms and prosperity to a suffering people (Kapstein, 2006). Counter to this is the assertion by Tibetans of the human rights violations and infringements on liberties that eventually drove many of them, and continue to do so today, to seek refuge beyond Tibet's borders (Maslak, 2008). During the 1959 Tibetan uprising, the Dalai Lama, fearing for his safety, made his move into exile and said goodbye to the only home he had ever known. Since that time, an estimated 150,000 Tibetans have followed their spiritual leader's path and have left their homeland in search of safety and temporary peace in exile communities of India, Nepal, and other locations around the world, including significant populations in the United States, Canada, and Switzerland (The Tibet Fund, 2006). The largest portion of Tibetan refugees have relocated to India and established new homes in one of the exile communities developed throughout the country. The Tibetan government-in-exile (CTA) was established in Dharamsala, a hill station in North India and home of His Holiness. There is little debate, within and beyond the Tibetan community, as to the figure that is most closely identified with Tibet and the struggle for their homeland (Lopez, 1998). His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has been described as the "primary symbol of Tibetan unity" (Kolas, 1996, p. 57) and "central to the value systems of Tibetans" (Hansen, 2003, p. 16). Not only has the Dalai Lama taken on his role as spiritual leader to his scattered people, he has also committed himself to the task of traveling the world to advocate for the future of Tibet and the welfare of Tibetans as well as spreading messages associated with Tibetan Buddhism. The current Dalai Lama has introduced a new way of thinking for the Tibetan people that has taken them from a life of isolation and mystery, to one where there is a vested interest in the promotion and education of their culture to the world community (Korom, 1997). In his book *My Land and People* (The Dalai Lama, 1962), His Holiness has confronted the past mistakes of the Tibetan people as he stated, "Tibet will never be the same again, but we do not want it to be. It can never again be isolated from the world, and it cannot return to its ancient semifeudal system" (p. 231). As a result of the Dalai Lama's efforts to reach out and tell the story of his people, recognized by his receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, the Tibetan cause has gained international attention and enlisted dedicated advocates from around the globe (The Tibet Fund, n.d.b., para. 2).

As Buddhist practitioners, you should understand the necessity of preserving Tibetan Buddhism for this the land, the physical country of Tibet, is crucial. We have tried our best to preserve the Tibetan traditions outside Tibet for almost 30 years . . . but eventually, after our time, there is a real danger that they will change, that they will not survive away from the protective nurture of our homeland. So for the sake of preserving Tibetan Buddhism . . . the sacred land of Tibet is vitally important. It is very unlikely that it can survive as a cultural and spiritual entity if its physical reality is smothered under Chinese occupation. (Lopez, 1998, p. 198)

When the Tibetan came into India both the national and international political situation was favorable to them. Although the Government of India at that time was adopting a friendly attitude towards China. It did not come in the way of the warm receiving the Dalai Lama and his followers and offer them shelter within the country. Further the Government India allowed the Dalai Lama to established his autonomous administration set up to look after the interest of Tibetan refugee and to receive fund from abroad for their rehabilitation. The fact that the Government of India has allowed the Dalai Lama and his followers to continue is perhaps also account for the Tibetans strong belief in Rang-zen. They still hope of returning to Tibet and have refused to accept Indian citizenship but that has not prevented them from searching for new avenues. A total population of 1,04,686 are residing in India in settlements as scattered communities. The planning Council, Central Tibetan Administration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in May 1994, has presented this figure. The same document also stresses on the fact that new immigrants do come to India now. Hence the figure given is not static but is dynamic. It is on the increase. As the trends suggest in 1990 as many as 2066 new refugees came to India, in 1991 it was 2725, in 1992 it was 2960 and it was 4477 in 1993. Hence the number of new immigrants entering into India is on the rise where as the number moving out of India either back to Tibet or other countries for resettlement is comparatively less.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Migration may be prompted by many factors including economic, demographic and social disparities and also by conflicts or political instability, environmental degradation or natural disasters. Studies pertaining to migration vary in scope; micro-level studies; focusing on families and individuals, the meso-level of communities and regions, and at the macro-level of nation-state and the global economy (Massey et.al. 1998; Portes 1987). The impacts of migration is dependent upon three major factors (Portes 2003). A) The numbers involved B) Duration of the movement C) The class composition.

At various points in the history of human, migration involving large numbers has redrawn the social, demographic and geographical map of the world. The cross-pacific migration in North America, invasion led by Roman empire, European migration to North America and Australia, and the Jewish exodus to various parts of the world (Braudel 1949; Pirenne 1970; Goldscheider 1986; Schama 2013). Likewise the duration of the movement has impacts. Short duration tend to produce less durable change than permanent displacements (Stark 1985). The class

composition may impact in some unsuspected ways. Although it can be argued that the higher human capital enables the migrants to express themselves and protect their cultural trait. In fact, the opposite happens because educated migrants exhibit greater flexibility and easily adapt to the receiving culture. Although migration in Tibetan community is not extensively studied in Tibetan community in Exile, this study might prove comprehensive in further studies regarding it. Current trends migration is witnessing all time high in terms of number of international migrants. Numbers of such migrants in industrialized countries are found to have doubled between 1985 to 2005. Within these two decades the numbers are found to have increased from 55 million to 120 million (Philip and Zurcher 2008).

Demographic studies are of great importance as there is an urgent need for continuous flow of information, data and knowledge about levels, trends and differentials of population forces. Demography, the science of population study is defined as the scientific study of human population or more specifically, the study of size, geographic distribution, age-sex structure and socio-economic composition of populations and the factors that affect the changes in these dimensions, namely; fertility, mortality and migration (Seigel, 2002). The importance given to the study of demography and its application is growing. The ethnic diversity in India provides a unique opportunity to study demographic variations among the endogamous population living in different geographical and ecological conditions. According to Misra, India has accepted, more or less willingly, over 300 000 refugees out of which approximately 100 000 are Tibetan. (Misra 2003) India, stretching from the Himalayas in the north to tropical jungles in the south with over 1 billion inhabitants, is truly a patchwork of nations. Figures of religious, linguistic and ethnic belonging are a bit risky to use since they are highly contested, but it is said that more than 800 languages are spoken by a total of about 2000 ethnic groups, some of which are struggling for complete self-rule.

4. TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE THEIR UNIQUE CULTURE:

Some authors have focused on the way the Tibetan exiles have stressed the importance of their culture and religion, rather than national belonging as Jane Ardley expresses when stating: "The issue that persist here is why the Tibetan government in exile seem content to maintain that the most pressing danger is the destruction of Tibetan culture [and religion]. The answer is surely pragmatic: the Dalai Lama recognizes that no country stands to gain politically from fighting for an independent Tibet, and so pragmatically chooses to emphasize instead the importance of the survival of Buddhism." (Ardley 2002:167).

In the early 1990s, the dramatic increase in the number of Tibetans coming to India exacerbated tensions between Tibetan and Indian communities. Perhaps the most serious clash occurred in Dharamsala in April 1994. The violence erupted after a Tibetan youth stabbed an Indian taxi driver to death during a dispute. Indian mobs looted Tibetan-owned stores and burned Tibetan government offices. India temporarily closed the refugee reception center in Dharamsala. Some Indian politicians and editorialists began criticizing Tibetans for taking advantage of Indian hospitality—and the Indian government for its tolerance of the Tibetan community.

There exists only one study of Tibetan refugee's conductor from a sociological perspective by Palakshappa (1874). Palakshappa in his study of Mundgod settlement emphasis upon the social organization of Tibetan villages, with a total number around 11 which more or less resembles the organization of villages back in Tibet. Palakshappa argues that Tibetans at Mundgod represent the case of progressive adjustment. Economically, the Tibetans have made their settlement a success. They have become so prosperous that many have been able to rebuild their dwelling with better materials. They have also acquired consumer durable goods like transistors, watches colorful clothes etc.... The prosperity of the Tibetans has come about over a period of time. From the hostility which existed 173 earlier to a situation of symbiotic relationship between the Migrants and the local people now is a story replete with inter-community nexus and networks.

5. METHODOLOGY:

Hence the present study is an attempt to study the patterns of life of the migrant communities (Tibetans) and its impact on the host communities and their society. The study is descriptive in nature. Both primary and secondary data is collected. The Universe of the study is Shillong city where we can observe the inhabitation of most of these migrants. For the present study three areas i.e. Glory plaza, Bhutia market and Tibet Market in Police Bazar area is selected purposively as most of these migrants are found in this areas. Interviews were taken from 30 shopkeepers (15 female and 15 male) selling cloths and food in restaurants. The tool of data collection was interview schedule and observation.

6. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS.

INTRODUCTION TO SHILLONG TIBETANS. In the year 1959 Tibetans from Tibet migrated to Assam, during that time Meghalaya was under one state with Assam later during the year 1972 when Meghalaya get its statehood from Assam. Since during that time the Tibetans who resides or fall under the states of Meghalaya known as the Shillong Tibetans during those time most of them resides in around the city itself particularly in the area of Jalupara, Mawprem and Barapathar. Since that time their ancestors who are the first migrated group who came from China are

staying in the same locality in the city of Shillong. The Tibetans who are staying in all this four areas in Shillong are staying in rented settlements as they are not allowed to buy any plot of land in an around Shillong. While some of them get to know the reason behind they still stay in rented because they have a hope of returning back to their place to Tibet but mostly they have accepted themselves as the residents of Shillong.

The Shillong Tibetans live a very simple life both man and women help each other in household work or even outsidings works. Their main source of income are selling clothes and running restaurants which till date have become popular among the people staying in Shillong and all over north-east particularly their products and materials which they are selling in their shops which has become very well known and famous in these places and are popularly known as Bhutia market, Tibet market and Glory plaza one of the famous shops of materials, where we can observe selling of up dated fashionable clothes both for males and females. Maximum of the Shillong Tibetans are found in these areas where their shops are located. And the rest who are running mostly a continental food restaurants are found somewhere in the market places or area in and around the city itself. It has been found that among these Shillong Tibetans their number did not increase much since the family members have only four or five members in each household. While interviewing the house owner it has been found that they practice birth control measures among them. It has also been found that the Shillong Tibetans have one Monastery in Lumparing area where everyone goes there for performing rituals and religious practice.

It has also been found that women also contribute to family income when the female stay in shop the male members used to help the household works at home. They don't depend rather complement each other. The Shillong Tibetans have separate Tibetan School for their children till class 7 in Shillong area which teach only their own Tibetan language, after their children completing 7th standard they shift their children to other branch which falls in the Tibetans Education Institute to other states in around India. Most of the Tibetans children after completing their higher studies they start to joint and open a shops with their parents or separate shop nearby their parent's shops. Marriage among them is mainly endogamous in nature as few marry outsidings their own community, there is no such restriction of choosing a life partner everyone have their own freedom for choosing or marrying. The Shillong Tibetans also participate during election but though they can cast their vote not contest in election, so they elect their own representation but not from their own community but to the Khasi people who are the main land owner of the state of Meghalaya, hence they get political support during their hardships. They have their own community organization in around Shillong so that to strengthen their community identity religious worshipping and social identity among their group are maintained from time to time. It has been found that some of their relative from Tibet used to come and visit them for couple of days and return back to their country during their religious functions. While interviewing the elder migrant's people who stayed in Shillong about their perspective towards going back to their native place to Tibet with their family members, the response was mostly negative as they are happy in the present place where they can earn their own livelihood in peaceful social setting. Whatever they earn and live in Shillong was enough for their livelihood since Shillong Tibetans are living a very simple life. One thing which was found is that even though they are far from their relative who is staying outsidings India in Tibet but the community bond is very strong among them as they love, care and respect each other, they go for worshipping in the same monasteries, sending their children to the community institute. The Shillong Tibetans have a very strong community bonding to maintain their culture, identity and traditions they teach their young ones to communicate in their own Tibetans language, in dressing up and above all to worship one God (Dalai Lama) they follow and practices his principles and ideology not only among their own community but also towards the behavior to other community groups all around the society. That's the reason which has been found from other group of communities the local Khasi people while asking questions on them how you find the Shillong Tibetans. They admired them the way how they are living and always stay connected to their own community. And they have the feeling of helping one another be it from their group or to the other community group. They live a peaceful life among them.

7. CONCLUSION:

Here we can see that Shillong Tibetans who are residing in this state they are very different from the rest of the Tibetans migrants who are settled in different part of India. Migrants here we have observed that all of them are engaged in business unlike other migrants in other states where they have multiple occupations. Tibetans in Shillong work in the same place most of them are working in the shop and some of them are running a restaurant; moreover it is also found that none of them are working as daily wagers and agriculturists. They reside in the same place and have a very less population mobility since they practice birth control measures, they are very kind and good hearted person when it's come of interaction with the different communities and people, this have been report by one of the Tibetans migrants residents and the customers who are coming for buying clothes in their shops. Women are also playing a very important role in the economy of the family and the community as a whole as most of these shops and restaurants are taken care by women. They also maintain a very good relation with the host community which has helped to sustain their relationship, as they are not competing with the members of host communities in any other occupation, but they have confined them to only this area and the occupation of shops and restaurants. It has also been

established by the study that this group of migrants have a strong sense of group consciousness which is reflected from the culture specific education they give to their members and strict practice of endogamy has helped them to preserve their identity and culture.

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