

TIBETAN POLITICAL ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the Tibetan refugees, their response to the democratic set up of India and their relations with the people of India. His Holiness the Dalai Lama promulgated new constitution in 1963 and hence the executive power of the state are vested in H. H. the Dalai Lama and Dalai Lama is expected to preside over the meetings of the *Ka-Shag*. Tibetans in exile have undergone drastic changes in their economic and social organization. These changes in turn have forced them to bring changes to some extent in their administration. However, the ultimate faith in Dalai Lama as the temporal and spiritual head of the state can never be wiped out from the minds of the people completely. The change in the social organization from lord-serf relation to a more democratic one has brought much structural change in the leadership and political organization among Tibetans in India. A village leader is now elected by the heads of all the families irrespective of his economic position.

The Tibetans though have changed from their traditional way of selecting a leader to that of modern they however consider the hereditary (*Bugo*), type of leadership as the most appropriate one to hold the administrative power. The persons tracing their origin to the early kings, or noble or the lord (*ku-dra*) families are considered more appropriate for leadership. However the economic status of a person in Mundgod, as a leadership trait has lost its significance. People prefer their leader to be of high social rank. The other important factors of leadership are the qualities like education, capability of maintaining good contacts with people belonging to different provinces of Tibet, knowing their regional languages, sympathy to the poors and the depressed, boldness, selflessness, etc. The Dalai Lama being the most prominent spiritual leader of not only Tibetans now all those who believe and have faith is the political Head of a government in exile. The Tibetans in all their spirits attached to their homeland seek freedom for Tibet and seek to maintain intact their culture, traditions and customs. This fact is evident from the history of Tibetan administration.

The people of Tibet refer to their country with a respectful term *Po*, Tibbat, Tibet and other variants. The word Tibet is derived from the two Tibetan words *To Po*, meaning upper Tibet (Bell, 1928:1). Tibetans recognize Tibet into two main regions - upper region (*they-wpa*) and lower region (*meh- pa*). Tibet is

known as the 'Roof of the World' because of its greater elevation which ranges from 9,000 to 29,000 feet. It is also known as the "Forbidden land" since its leaders had traditionally opposed the entry of any outside visitors except on rare occasions (Lowell, 1962: 606).

Lowell (Ibid: 607) divides Tibet into three parts. In the south is the *Tsang-po* valley (upper Brahmaputra). This region is also called as Central Tibet consisting of three chief towns -Lhasa, Shigatse and Gyang-tse. Secondly the area to the north of the *Tsang-po* valley extending from the Trans-Himalaya to the Kunlun range, is the Chang Tang a Vast arid and windy plateau. The third distinct area is Kham, situated in eastern Tibet.

Tibet is traditionally divided into three provinces (*Chol-Kha-gsum*) U-Tsang, Khamba and Amdo. The U-Tsang stretches from the boarder of Jammu and Kashmir to the town of Sog. The Khams or Dothery province consists of the territory between the Sog and the upper bend of the Huang Ho. the Amdo or Domey province reaches from the Huang Ho to Chorten Karpo in Kansu province. Tibetans believe that their best religion comes from U-Tsang, their best men from Khamba and their best horses from Amdo.

The vast Tibetan plateau gives birth to seven major rivers in Tibet. They are the Indus, the Brahmaputra the Salween, the Irawaddy, the Yangtse Kiang, the Mekong and the Hwang Ho. 'The mountain barriers and the river gorges that provide the least approach to Tibet; and there is no easy way out of the wide encirclement of mountains. Tibet has therefore never been a thorough route for migratory peoples and the absence of easy communication facilities had tended to preserve not only the seclusion and conservatism, but also the independence and the national homogeneity of the Tibetans' (Richardson, 1962:4).

The Tibetans living in such a physical location, and culture were happy with their land in all respects. But the 1959 revolt in Tibet disturbed the calm and orderly society. Ian Buruma (2008:12) writes that "instead of reforming Tibetan society and culture, the Chinese communists ended up wrecking it. Religion was crushed in the name of official Marxist atheism. Monasteries and temples were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Nomads were forced to live in ugly concrete settlements. Tibetan arts were frozen...." He further writes that "Tibetan Buddhism was severely damaged, capitalist development has been even more devastating to Tibetan tradition.....

Tibet has been benefited from enormous amounts of Chinese money and energy to modernize the country.... But the price in Tibet has been higher...Regional identity, cultural diversity, and traditional arts and crafts have been buried under concrete, steel and glass." As a result Dalai Lama had to flee to India in March 1959 who was followed by his 80,000 subjects as refugees. These refugees were first settled in transit camps, and were later shifted to the rehabilitation settlements in different states namely Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Orissa and Maharashtra. In Karnataka there are four such settlements namely Boyalkoppe (1960), Mundgod (1966), Cauvery valley project (1971) and Kollegal (1974).

Tibet through History:

Tibet had lot of cultural links with her neighbouring countries. However it maintained individuality in matters of religion and polity. The structure of the Tibetan political and the social institutions is based on

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the Buddhist philosophy. Religion also serves as the basis of social and cultural life of Tibetans, hence Tibet is known as the Land of Religion. Puntsok Wamgyal (1975:78) says that Tibet the land of religion had its own polity and has always been governed by its own institutions and officials. Polity, the form and process of civil government in Tibet is often termed as "*Cho-si nvi-dan*" (*Cho-Srid Gnovis-Idan*). In expression "*Bo-Zhung Cho-si nvi-dan*" "*Bo-Zhung*" means "Government of Tibet" and "*Cho-si nvi-dan*" means "religion and politics," totally meaning- "The Tibetan Government of Religion and Politics".

The First Tibetan King was Spu-rgyal. The early works belonging to the Bon-po* period have referred to him as O'Idde Gung-rgyal. His accounts written by lama historians say that the royal primogeniture is said to have been the son of an Indian King. It is said he was born with miraculous powers. As a child he was thrown afloat in a river by the king and was later found by shepherds. After the rescue, people enthroned him (*Khri*) thinking that he was sent by God and supported on the napes of the neck (*Gnya*). He was therefore named as Gnya-Khri-btsan-po-neck enthroned ruler (127 B.C). He was the first Tibetan king recorded in the traditional Buddhist genealogies.

The first seven Tibetan kings in the royal lineage, are called "heavenly thrones." They are said to have been descended from heaven by a celestial rope. After their death they ascended back to the sky. These kings were very much responsible in bringing the Tibetan religion close to politics.

The King Nam-ri San-tsan-po, who reigned Tibet for about fifty years, beginning from 570 A. D. unified it into a strong power. At that time people were given to war plundering and lived on the simplest food and had no knowledge of the art of writing. They sacrificed animals and even the human beings to the deities. His son Son-tsan Gan-po ascended the throne in 620-650 A. D. He was titled Chos-rgyal (Religious king) by a lama historian of the period. The term "Cho" means the established religion and "Gyal-po" the established political authority, the king, that both the religious and political authorities were vested with the king. Chos-rgyal sent two of his statesmen to India to study the language system in reading and writing. One of them - the Tho-mi Sam-bho-ta, studied characters and phonetics of the Indian languages and invented Tibetan alphabets with four vowels and thirty consonants. Son-tsan Gan-po married a princess from Nepal who brought the Buddhist images to Tibet.

In 836 A. D. the king Glang-Darma came to throne. He was an anti-Buddhist, and was therefore killed by a Buddhist monk. Thus there was a loss of a central focus on feudal loyalty as no heir apparent was designated to the kingdom. This laid a foundation for the rise of local lords claiming the kingship on the class system. This led to the land owning nobility who held power and never lost their responsibility of Government with the ecclesiastic rulers. Long before Buddhism came to Tibet, the present political system of dual nature was instituted (Phuntsog wangyal, *ibid*: 80). Thus the dual natured government was formed by uniting the political authority with the religious authority.

During the thirteenth century, Tibet was divided among a number of local lords and religious leaders who ruled by right of succession. By the middle of fourteenth century, after the death of Kublai Khan the Mongolian emperor and the ruler of Tibet, the local ruling myriads led to the rise of Phag-mogru myriarchs. Their leader the Byang-chub rgyal-mtshen, conquered Central Tibet ending the Mongol control. He established the system of local administration and replaced it with the rdzong or the district

unit system- which formed a centralized authority; one based on personnel loyalty towards the Phag-mo-gru ruler of Kargyu-pa sect rather than outside military force. Tsong-Kha-pa (1357-1419) A.D. was a monk of exceptional intellectual attainments started a reformist movement and had many followers who aspired power and wealth. Thus many of the local rulers shifted their loyalty from Phag-mo-gru of Kargyu-pa sect to the reformed Gelugs-pa of Tsong-Kha-pa.

The practice of maintaining a spiritual lineage of lamas through reincarnation, came into practice in the fourteenth century, when Black hat Karma-pa, the Rang-byang rdo-rje (1284-1338) proclaimed that he would be reborn and his reincarnation would be found to be Rol-pai rdo-rje. Taking this clue the other sects also began to adopt this practice and each had its various lineages of reborn lamas. The third in the lineage of Geluk-pa, Sonam Gyatso (1543-88) was bestowed by Altan Khan of Mongolia a title Dalai (*Talai*) is a Mongol word for ocean i.e. the vast and the deep wisdom of the lama. The title was applied to the first two earlier lamas. The austerity, discipline and spiritual quality of lamas attracted number of followers, including a few influential nobles. Thus through its lay supporters the new sect gradually become involved in the political contention of the day and was looked upon as the principal rival of the dominant Karma-pa.

The fifth Dalai Lama was a man of great determination and force of character, he drew all powers into his own hands including that of the appointment of Regent, and unified the entire country under his leadership. As a result the Mongolian lost their control over Tibet, and made no effort to influence the Dalai Lama's government and the country. The conquests of the Geluk-pa went even farther than U and Tsang provinces to Mongolia. In Khamba and the Ngari all the important monasteries were incorporated into the Geluk-pa sect. On account of the flourishing career of Dre-pung, Se-ra and Gan-Dan with their many affiliated institutions the Dalai incarnation moved his court in Lhasa from Dre-pung to the *Po-ta-la*. Since then the Dalai Lama rose to prominence especially in the nineteenth century and after as the representative not only of the Geluk-pa sect, but also of the whole of Tibet.

After the Dalai Lama VIII Jampel Guatso (1758-1804) four successive Dalai Lamas died before coming of age. Dalai Lama XIII Thupten Gyatso (1876-1933) had to flee once to Urga to escape a British military expedition to Lhasa in August 1904 and Darjeeling to escape a Chinese military expedition to Lhasa in 1910, declared the independence of Tibet in 1912 and enjoyed its autonomous state till 1952. However the Chinese occupation of Tibet pressed the present Dalai Lama the XIV Ngawang Lobsong Tensin Gyatso (1935-) to flee to India in 1959 along with his 80,000 subjects as refugees.

The Tibetan State organization was land based. The ownership of the land determined the past of the members of the public. They were expected to play certain roles for the Government. It was the duty of every noble to keep his sons into public service, for which he got land from the government and rarely was he paid anything by way of salary. The basic principles of Tibetan political organization were the obligation for a noble to serve the government. This aristocracy or the nobility claimed their origin to any of the three sources. First, an ancestor was ennobled for good work done for the country. Secondly the family in which the Dalai Lama or *Tashi* Lama takes rebirth. Thirdly to their ancestry traced right back to the early kings who ruled Tibet. In all these cases they got land from the government; with attached serfs.

Shen and Shen (1953:103) say Dalai Lama is the lord of all Tibet. The relation between the Dalai Lama and his people may be characterized as between that of a lord (*Jin-da*) and his serfs (*mi-sairs*). As a lord he is to

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give protection to all Tibetans and good government; while as his serfs they owe him *Khrai*, which includes taxation and service. The *Khrai* is obligatory, whether it is in the form of taxation in money or in kind, or services, is calculated on the basis of the productivity of the land or other corresponding substitutes as owned by the church, the state and nobility.

Every Tibetan under the rule of Dalai Lama is either a subject of church if he belongs to the holy order, or a subject of the state if he does not. A subject of the state may belong to the government directly or indirectly through the nobility. A noble lord loses his serf when the latter is admitted into a monastery and the lord may claim the serf back only with the permission of the monastery or where the serf is dismissed by the monastery. Shen and Shen (1953: 104) says 'the power of the church is above all, for Tibet is a land of the god, by the god and for the god and every Tibetan is pledged to do reverence to the three Gems - the Buddha, the law and the Priesthood'.

A. Tibetan State Administration:

The state administration of Tibet operates in four levels -Central, Provincial, District and village. Though each level had certain amount of administrative independence it was ultimately controlled by the next higher authority and finally the administration in Lhasa. Now owing to refugee situation and also adoption of a new step to democratize the administration as per the new constitution, certain changes have come.

(a) His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

The Dalai Lama, who is the charisma of temporal and spiritual power, is the head of ecclesiastic and the secular state. He is considered as the early presence of *Chenresi* patron of Tibet and embodiment of compassion. He upholds the ancient tradition that affirmed his periodical descent to the land of snows for the specific purposes of watching over the spiritual destinies of its inhabitants. As a *Changchun Sempa* (*Bodhisatwa*) and one of the most highly worshipped in Mahayana Buddhism renounces the opportunity of vanishing into indefinable *nirvana*. By taking human form and undergoing birth and death he may illuminate with words and the creatures he protects. He also swiftly leads them to that state of spiritual perfection which provides them paradise or liberation within the bounds of their ability, Keeness and Karma.

Rahul (1969: 496) says the institution of Dalai Lama, being an instrument of social and political order has been a great directive force in the history and politics of Central Asia in modern times. Notwithstanding the Chinese occupation of Tibet in the summer of 1951, there is no decline in its importance and inheritance. He (ibid: 496) further says the tremendous force behind the institution lies not in its originality or novelty but in its lofty moral character and the spiritual message it holds for the people of Central Asia.

The institution of Dalai Lama with its divine authority holds the theory of reincarnation. This theory was first instituted by the Vth Dalai Lama. According to the Tibetan tradition Dalai Lama is said to be the incarnation of *Chenresi*, the compassionate lord and the patron deity of Tibet. 'About the end of the eighteenth century, the Manchus seeing how deeply devoted the people of the northern and north-western parts of China were to Buddhism and realizing the importance of the institution of Dalai Lama in

achieving their ambition to establish their control over them, decided that they should by some manipulation, put themselves in a position to influence the method traditionally employed to settle the question of succession at the passing of Dalai Lama. They therefore introduced the system of Multiplicity of candidates' (Rahul ibid: 497).

After the death of Dalai Lama (*Shingla gshes pas* meaning goes to the godly world to take rebirth for the benefit of other living creatures) he is usually reborn within a year. The search takes place throughout Tibet; where incidents of the small boys with miracles are heard. The child bears a few physical marks of his reincarnation. He must also pass through severe tests of signs showing his earlier lives. The Government of Tibet consults a number of oracles to find out the Incarnation. Among them the Nechung oracle (*Nechung Chokyong* – *Nechung* protector of Dharma) in Tibet holds considerable importance. The other oracles are *Samye Chokyong* and *Gandhen Thi Rimpoche*. When the sacred lake is consulted the regent is accompanied by Government officials and representatives from National Assembly. The boy undergoing tests, has to recognize many of the religious and the personal things of his predecessor. The Dalai Lama is given full training and is educated up to his eighteenth year in the monastery of the Geluk-pa sect. The Dalai Lama then accepts the position as the supreme temporal and spiritual ruler of Tibet. Tibetans address the Dalai Lama as *Kunden* (Presence of Chenresi), *Yishi Norbu* (wish fulfilling gem), *Chamgon Rimpoche* (precious protector), *Byewa Rimpoche* (precious lord), *Kyamgon Rinpoche* (precious saviour), etc., and never address him by his name.

There are two preceptors who teach Dalai Lama the scriptures, and a number of assistants who practice with him all important religious activities. All are recruited from the Geluk-pa triumvirate of the Dre-Pung, Se-Ra and Gan-Dan monasteries, and the two preceptors are always first class incarnation lamas. Though their chief concern is religion their influence in molding the character, opinion and conduct of affairs of H.H. the Dalai Lama is tremendous (Shen and Shen, ibid: 104-05).

The Dalai Lama does not inherit any authority. But his people invest him with it so that they may be governed with prudence and integrity. For this position of the highest dignity in the country the Dalai Lama, the supreme head of Tibet is discovered and is not elected (Rahul ibid: 502). The Dalai Lama in the traditional Tibet has the supreme power over the country in all matters and his word is the absolute law. *Tsong-du-* the National Assembly, may discuss the matters and send proposals for his approval but the final decision is made only by the Dalai Lama. Dalai Lama is honoured with complete loyalty and affection by his people and they realize his immense services to his country and people. Along with secular duties the Dalai Lama exercises control in all spiritual matters. He is in authority of the recruitment of the officials and is the highest court of appeal. Along with his secular duties the Dalai Lama utilizes much of his time in prayer and meditation. Though he has absolute power he is bound by the ancient customs and traditions of the country. The austerity, discipline and spiritual quality of the high lamas have had tremendous impact on Tibetan society. The Tibetan society is cast in the mould of a harsh tradition, any departure from which is considered the height of impudence (Rahul, ibid: 503). It is the Dalai Lama who looks after his people, the administration and the welfare measures like reducing heavy taxation, mediation in local feuds, establishing the monasteries, providing facilities of education by building new monasteries and also training lay and monk officials, bringing in the appropriate law and social control.

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Traditional Tibet was a feudal state. The people remained faithful to the final authority, H. H. the Dalai Lama. There remained personal loyal relations between the lord and the commoners. Dalai Lama being the head of the spiritual and temporal power is the religious and the secular head of the state. This domain comprises both the religion and the state.

(b) The Regent (*gyal-tsab*) :

The regent (*gyal-tsab*) rules the country as the deputy of the Dalai Lama in the absence of Dalai Lama or when he is minor. The title of *De-si* was conferred by the Vth Dalai Lama to Sonam Chopel in 1642 who performed the role of a *Gyal-tsab*. This title is equivalent to that of Prime Minister became the designation of the chief administrator who survived under the Fifth and Sixth Dalai Lamas (Shakabpa, 1967:111). The term *Desi* may be rendered as political administrator of the country (Phuntsog Wangyal, *ibid*: 83).

The first person to become the regent (*gyal-tsab*) was De-mo Nga-wang Jam-pal, in 1757. The first six regents were appointed by the *Ka-Shag* – the Council of Ministers in consultation with the Government officials. Since 1875 the regents were appointed by the *Tsong-du* – the National Assembly. The regents must be a high class incarnated lamas from one of the three Lamaseries – Dre-Pung, Se-Ra, and Gan-Dan.

(c) The Prime Minister (*Lon-chen*) :

Next in the line of administration there might be one or more Prime Ministers. This position was always held by a senior lay official. This post was retained at the time of XIIIth Dalai Lama who ruled Tibet from 1805 to 1933 to serve as a link between himself and the lay council. Prime Ministers did not preside over the council but passed on its recommendations to Dalai Lama with note of their own opinion.

(d) The National Assembly (*Tsong-du*):

It came into existence in the year 1871. In the beginning it was called the “Small Assembly”, consisting of the government officials and the abbots of the three monasteries – De-Pung, Se-Ra and Gan-Dan. Puntsok Wangyal (*ibid*: 83-84) says presently there is a change in the composition of the National Assembly. The “*Tsong-du gya-dzom*”, the “Great Assembly”, besides the government officials and the Abbots, included representatives of every group and occupation of Tibetan Society: traders, shop keepers, farmers, workers etc.

There were two schools *Tse-Khor* and *Shor-kor* the ecclesiastic and the secular, which prepare candidates to serve in the Government. *Tse-Khor* composed of monk officials, *Tse-drung*, who must have been enrolled as members in any one of three monasteries: Dre-Pung, Se-Ra and Gan-Dan. Any body except those who belonged to the groups of smiths, butchers, fishermen, hunters, etc., would become the monk officers. A candidate of 10-12 years got admission in the training School, *Tse-lub-dra*; which was a part of the Secretariat. The Secretariat, under the council of Ministers was staffed purely by clergymen and maintained discipline of the monks and the restrictions of the Lama dignitaries of all sects. It maintained records of the monks and also maintained records of the monastic organizations. A few *Tse-drung*

however came from the noble families. They formed a special class within the ecclesiastical court and enjoyed higher prestige. For a serf this was the only way to become a monk officer in the monastery.

Shor-kor, the secular court, was a monopoly of the nobles. They had also a training school attached to the Finance Officer (*Tsi-Khang*). The candidates were put to the school between the age of ten and twenty and given few preliminary lessons. Soon after his training a candidate was assigned with a position in all the public functions and become the probationary officer. A commoner could work for the Government but he could become at best a clerk but never a 'ruling man' (*Pon-po*).

Now under the new constitution the situation has completely changed. Any one can become an officer in the monk as well as the lay courts or officer irrespective of his social and ritual position in the society. What he needs to possess is the required modern education and capability to become a leader or an officer. As a result many outcastes are now able to enter the monasteries and also secure high posts in the Government.

B. Provincial Level Administration:

There were mainly four provinces in Tibet – Northern, Eastern, Western and the Central. These were administered by provincial heads – the Governors. They were the senior most officials staying outside the capital city of Lhasa. Each province was administered by a Governor (*Garpon*) coming from an aristocratic family. He was helped by a monk colleague of equal rank. Each checked the other in the administration of the province. The government orders were issued to the governor and he in turn issued the same to the district officers. His duty was to fix and collect the tax and later send the same to the central administrative body at Lhasa. The Governor was paid in kind, out of the taxes collected by him from the districts, or granted the estates with attached serfs to work on them.

C. District Level Administration:

A district was jointly administered by an administrator who came from an aristocratic family - *Thongar* or *Dzong-pon* of Lhasa, and a monk colleague. They functioned as magistrates also. The monk officer had an equal or even higher rank than the civil officer. One was expected to watch over the other so that the danger of autocracy and discrimination of the monk ad lay persons is minimized. As Dawa Norbu (1974: 27) says apart from the political motive, this system of administration headed jointly by a lay aristocrat and a lama was to keep the concept of ideal Tibetan government. Usually the district officials were posted for three years tenure.

Dzong-pon was the officer to whom the government orders were addressed. He in turn ultimately transmitted them to the village leaders (*pom-bo*). *Dzong-pon* stood above all the village leaders (of his district) and had the full authority over them. He had the authority to fine the guilty and the disobedient. His consent was necessary before a leadership could be transferred from one person to another. From time to time the leaders gathered in his office to discuss matters of public interest. Disputes between men and high authority were also settled by him.

The main duty of the district administrators was to collect taxes through their representatives *Lechen-pa* and *Shapto-ba*, and maintain law and order through the courts of law. The revenue taxes were collected

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from the village heads by sending the representatives to all the villages. The tax was collected both in cash and kind. The nobles and the ecclesiastical groups paid tax of their own including that of their serfs. The serfs of state land, i.e., the *tre-bas* and the *du-jung* (bound) paid their taxes to their respective group leaders who were responsible for the collection of the tax. Thus the serfs rarely came in contact with other officials and so were less conscious about any other form of leadership. The tax payable by the serfs was fixed and levying of more taxes by any district officer was unauthorized and such cases if any were reported to the higher authorities at Lhasa.

The Tibetan way of redistribution of tax was also fixed. The tax collected from the common man was always stored at Lhasa and used mainly for the maintenance of the monasteries and the armed forces. The commoners also got a portion of it at their needs like failure of crops, famines, drought, etc. Except the collection of the taxes the state government had no other direct administrative control on the villages.

In Tibet the state and the common people have their obligations to each other in running the administration smoothly. The head of the state the Dalai Lama, is responsible for protection of both the materialistic and spiritual life while the people in return owe him taxation in service, kind or cash. Thus every Tibetan is a subject of the state or monastery.

D. Village Level Administration:

Tibetan villages were administered by village headmen. In all the cases they were nobles. The nobles with higher economic and social status had many privileges and one among them was the right to village leadership. Their economic position helped them to spend much of their time on the official matters like maintenance of law and order in the community, while the serfs who were attached to their land, had very little free time for community matters. However, the nobles and the commoners co-operated in fulfilling their obligations towards each other and were self-contented.

A Tibetan village was a territorial as well as a social, political and a ritual unit. They were structured in such a way the members undertook mutually dependent activities combined in an organized way, for a concerted action. The village was a community of families; many of these were interrelated by ties of kinship and affinity or interwoven by lord and serfdom relationship. This proved their capacity for acting in common for the preservation of traditional customs, the maintenance of public peace and harmony, keeping up of economic stability and for the performance of ritual activities essential for material and spiritual spheres of the village as a whole.

The following were the village leaders and their status and roles:

(1) The Headman:

He was known by different names such as *Gon-pa*, *Ding-pyun* and *Pom-bo*, depending upon the dialect of the region. The post was always held by the richest person. The headman was always elected from among the rich and the commoners followed them. Most of the cases the village leadership used to be hereditary. Because once elected a person become rich, and being dominant continued as a leader for ever if he also proved honest. This position was inherited by his sons, preferably the eldest who were supposed to possess all the qualities of a leader. Or else it was given to another person belonging to the

same clan or any other person of the village who was honest and had leadership qualities. In a few cases a leader was persuaded by his followers to withdraw from his position if he was found unfit to lead them. Thus succession to headman was partly hereditary and partly on the basis of personal ability. The headman got some amount of land and the serfs attached to it, in return to his duties. One had to relinquish the land and the serfs when the leadership was transferred to another person; and this happened very rarely. The headman being away from the centers of the state and the district headquarters enjoyed high status in his village.

Functions of a village leader were to provide military personnel from his village as and when required by the Central Government and feed them when they visit the village. It was also his duty to replace old or dead soldiers. He was also a host to the officers coming from the district places. He maintained law and order in the village and in the course of this he used physical force. He helped the villagers in all their needs and necessities. To become a popular figure among the other nobles of the society generally he gave huge amount as charity. *Pom-bo* hold important position in various ceremonies arranged in the village like marriages, community rituals, etc., as a social father or the leading ritual head; and he even bore some of the expenses, incurred. Similarly he used to bear the expenses to arrange for the funeral rites of an individual if he had no heirs or kinsmen in the village.

Headman was responsible for the collection of taxes usually paid in kind and remitted the same to the district headquarters fulfilling his obligation of taxes, serving district officers in their transportation with the help of his people and their animals. He was also to see that all the serfs in his village were fed well by their nobles, lest it was feared that the serfs may run away to other districts and affect the territorial solidarity and prestige of the leaders and the officers concerned.

The village headman acting as the judicial head seldom allowed divorces. The parties were brought to peace through persuasion. Criminals like murders and those disputes which the headmen could not settle, were taken to the court of law-the *dzong-pon* at the district place. Guilty ones and those acted against the rules were made to offer the leaders with *chang* (rice beer) and *Khata* (scarf), sometimes cash as fine.

Though the leader had all the powers to fine or to give any heavy punishment, however the village community as a whole may not correct the action of such an official but they could express their disapproval by petitioning the case to the higher authorities and or by re-election or by blocking any future appointment. It was not only the leader who maintained or affected the common good, but all the people were also responsible for the well being of the community and were guided by the social and religious sanctions. It brought a civic responsibility and a remarkable degree of discipline in the matters of community and its welfare. In all these cases the village leaders had an important role to play. They also acted as the links between the people and the Government. The village leaders were assisted by two or three assistants (*Tse-mey*) depending on the size of the village in the administration who helped him as his personal assistant, accountant and store-keeper of food, etc.

(2) Assistant Headman (*Genjung*):

Genjung acted as the mediator between the headman and the common people. He transmitted official information to both groups. Depending on the size of the village four to five such leaders were appointed

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in a village. This position was shared by all residents of a village in turn. Sometimes he was selected after an informal discussion by the elders of the community. He acted as a leading man for his group to arrange for the rites performed to appease crop gods. Accompanied by all his people, carrying sacred books and images of the gods, he goes round all the village fields to protect the crop against evil spirits and thereby bring more fertility to the land. He also arranged for the rituals and common festivals at the village temple (*Gomba*) by collecting the contributions from his people. He also acted as the messenger between the village head and the public.

The nomads also had a leader of their own. He used to be the richest person of the group and had a high socio-economic status. He was directly linked to the leader of the village to which his group belonged. The village leader had all duties and responsibilities towards these nomads also.

A. Tibetan State Administration in India:

After coming to India as refugees the Tibetans realized that a thorough change is essential in their state administration. This was evident for two reasons that they presently lived in a modern democracy and came in close contact with its citizens. Secondly, the Chinese too had introduced a number of administrative reforms in Tibet and so if the Tibetans go back to Tibet they knew the situation will be a changed one and they should adjust to it. Keeping these factors in mind steps were taken to change the mode of Tibetan states administration. His Holiness the Dalai Lama promulgated New constitution in 1963 which is in force now. As per the New Constitution the rights and powers of H. H. Dalai Lama are defined as follows. According to Chapter V, Article 29 (i) the executive power of the state shall be vested in H. H. the Dalai Lama on his attaining the age of eighteen. Dalai Lama is expected to preside over the meetings of the *Ka-Shag* (Article 31(1)). Dalai Lama holds the authority to dissolve the National Assembly and order new elections but with due consultation with the members of the *Ka-Shag*, who are appointed by him, and the speaker of the National Assembly who is elected by the members of the Assembly.

The Dalai Lama though is not elected by the people, cannot bring his undue influence over the people or the National Assembly as the people have enough legislative authority to check the executive powers of the Dalai Lama. His Holiness the Dalai Lama may in his discretion or on the recommendation of the *Ka-Shag*, refer any proposed legislation to referendum and if the proposed legislation is approved by the two thirds of the majority of the National Assembly the Dalai Lama shall promulgate it within the period specified (Article 33).

The draft constitution promulgated by the H. H. the Dalai Lama in 1963 which is highly democratic brings not only freedom to commoners, but also reduce the Dalai Lama into a formal figure head of the future Tibetan State. In 1969 he declared that the system of governance by a line of Dalai Lamas may or may not continue, it is the will of the people that will ultimately determine the future of Tibet (Dawa Norbu: 1976:3-4). But this statement has shocked many of the Tibetans because they think that Tibet cannot exist without the institution of Dalai Lama.

Many of them who are aiming and returning to a democratic Tibet have a different opinion. There are also those who say that the institution, at present has some vital functions to perform and it should continue till an alternative institution is found or the present one may itself continue with some changes. Dawa Norbu (ibid: 4) in his editorial to the Tibetan Review commented – “It is not only the Dalai Lama’s promise which will guarantee a democratic set up, but the objective condition in Tibet will not allow a return to the old order. If such be the case one cannot see much in the present Dalai Lama’s statement. The Tibetans need the Dalai Lama most as a unifying force in their struggle for freedom. Dalai Lama might prove useful figurehead symbolizing continuity in Tibet’s history and culture. Indeed it is not necessary to abolish the institution of Dalai Lama altogether to usher democracy or socialism in Tibet. Dalai Lama for the good will of his own or for that of Tibetan peoples and also historically, it would be incorrect for a Dalai Lama to abolish the institution or succession of Dalai Lamas. Being a national institution, it might require a national consensus, whether to abolish it or not”.

The Dalai Lama’s statement to end the institution may also mean something else. Ashok Chopra (1976:5) quoting Sinha wrote when an incarnate lama expresses his desires to enter Nirvana, i.e. when he does not like to be reborn, his followers petition him to change his mind. The incarnation desiring to stop his rebirth does not actually mean that he wants to end the institution of Dalai Lama. He may just want to lay down his political office. Further Ashok Chopra interprets the decision of Dalai Lama to relinquish his office, as he may be thinking in terms of his own Nirvana. The Mahayana conception of Nirvana differs from that of the Hinayana, in the sense the latter rests with one’s own individual self and not for the welfare of the humanity. Dalai Lama’s announcement of relinquishing his office thus would go against the fundamentals of the Mahayana system of Buddhism. Chopra (ibid: 5) further writes that Mahayana doctrine represents the *Karuna* aspect of the Buddha himself. Scholars believe that it is left to the deity *Chejen drolma* and not to the Dalai Lama to take the decision.

Tibetans in exile have undergone drastic changes in their economic and social organization. These changes in turn have forced them to bring changes to some extent in their administration. However, the ultimate faith in Dalai Lama as the temporal and spiritual head of the state can never be wiped out from the minds of the people completely. It is certain that without him and his charismatic authority, the Tibetan society cannot move properly or may not protect its traditional socio-cultural identities.

Council of Regency:

Before the promulgation of constitution of Tibet, one of the senior abbots of the above mentioned monasteries used to be appointed by the National Assembly to work as a Regent. Now, according to Article 36(2) of the present constitution of Tibet there will be a Council of Regency instead of one regent and shall consist of three members elected by the National Assembly; one of whom shall be an ecclesiastic representative. The Council of Regency exercises its executive powers during the absence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama from the state, or when he is still a minor, or in case of any disability which prevents him from exercising his executive functions, or when it is decided by the National Assembly by its 2/3 majority that the executive functions of Dalai Lama shall be exercised by the Council of Regency (Article 36 (1)). The council of Regency in consultation with the *Ka-Shag*, Ecclesiastical council and the standing commission of the National Assembly will conduct the search for the reincarnation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (Article 36 (9)). The council of Regency shall have no power to alienate any part of the territory of the state or enter into any international agreement in relation to the independence of the state

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except it is approved by the majority of the members of the National Assembly (Article 36 (10)). The duration of each Council of Regency will be of the same period as that of the National Assembly (Article 36 (8)).

The Prime Minister:

According to the present constitution of Tibet His Holiness the Dalai Lama from time to time appoints any number of Ministers as may be required. Out of these Ministers the Dalai Lama shall nominate a Prime Minister and not less than five other Ministers to be members of the *Ka-Shag*, (Article 30 (1)). No Minister shall be a member of the National Assembly (Article 30 (2)). In the absence of the Dalai Lama, the Prime Minister presides the meetings of *Ka-shag* (Article 31 (1)).

Council of Ministers (*Ka-Shag*):

Next to Dalai Lama or the Regent, on the civilian side comes the Council of Ministers – (*Ka-Shag*). This is the principal executive body. It consists of three lay and one monk high ranking officials all being directly appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The *Ka-Shag* represents both the religious and the secular communities of the country. It shall aid and advise the Dalai Lama in the administration of the state (Article 30 (5)). This council functions as a court of justice also.

The National Assembly:

According to the present constitution of Tibet 'All legislative powers shall vest in the National Assembly subject to the assent of His Holiness the Dalai Lama' (Article 38). Article 39 provides the National Assembly to consist of 75 percent of members directly elected by the people in the territorial constituencies, 10 percent of members elected by the monasteries and other religious institutions, 10 percent of members elected by the Regional and District Councils, 5 percent are nominated directly by the Dalai Lama who have the distinguished services to their credit in the field of art, science or literature etc. Each National Assembly unless dissolved shall continue for five years (Article 40 (1)). During the urgent situations the Dalai Lama may consult the standing committee of the National Assembly if the latter is not in session (Article 59 (1)). When a bill is passed by the National Assembly it shall be presented to the Dalai Lama for his consent. He either assents or withholds the bill. The Dalai Lama may return the bill to the National Assembly requesting it to reconsider or introducing any such amendments (Article 60).

Among the Tibetans in exile for the present the representatives to the National Assembly are elected by the common people. The duration of their office is for three years. The number of representatives elected from various traditional districts are as follows: (i) Lay: representatives are elected from each one of the three main provinces of Tibet – Amdo, Khamba and U-Tsang, together they are called *Choga-sum*, the three provinces. (ii) Ecclesiastic: From the ecclesiastic side one member is elected from each of the four main sects of Buddhism- *Saskya-pa*, *Nyingma-pa*, *Geluk-pa* and *Kargyu-pa*. These sects together are called as *Chulu Sheiy* – meaning four sects. One member is elected from the group of people who follow the pre-Buddhist religion- the *Bon-po*. Elections will be held once in three years in all the Tibetan settlements in India to elect their representatives. The Council of Ministers (*Ka-Shag*) also functions as the National Working Committee.

The six councils which are now functioning are:

- (1) Council of Revenue Records (*Tse-Khang*),
- (2) Council of Religious and Cultural affairs (*Cho-thenyw*),
- (3) Council of Home Affairs and Rehabilitation (*Nang-Shey*),
- (4) Council for Tibetan Education (*Te-tha*),
- (5) Office of the Publicity and Information, and
- (6) the office of the Security and the Personnel (*Meg-chi*).

The Council for Revenue Records (Finance office) and the council for Religious and Cultural Affairs are represented by four lay officials and the four monk officials each and are directly under the Dalai Lama. The other offices are headed by two to three members.

B. Tibetan Settlement Administration and Leadership:

The Tibetan form of state administration seems to continue here at the settlement also. But, since the refugees are rehabilitated in different camps or settlements and villages of different states and in mixed manner irrespective of their original provincial and district background the administration at these levels has changed, a good deal. Dalai Lama is at the top. Along with his cabinet and its headquarters stays at Dharmasala. Each settlement is directly administered by the Dalai Lama through his representative. Each settlement is divided into several villages which are administered by elected village leaders. There are nine villages in Mundgod settlement each administered by a village leader.

(a) The Representative of H. H. the Dalai Lama (*Thon-Jeyw*):

All the villages of the settlement are administered by the representative of H. H. the Dalai Lama. *Thon-jeyw* is appointed by the H. H. the Dalai Lama's office to officiate as the local administrator of the settlement for a tenure of three years. He forms the link between the Dalai Lama, the common people and other agencies within and outside India. In running the general administration of the settlement, he takes the help of the village leaders. He often conducts meetings with them and also occasionally public meetings are also held to collect the opinion of the common people. The representative of H. H. the Dalai Lama is honoured and respected as a lord of the settlement by the commoners. He undertakes the community level administration for the Tibetan settlement, and all transactions with the Ministry of Supply and Rehabilitation, Government of India, through the Administrator and with many other inland and foreign agencies that aid Tibetans in one or the other way, are handled by him. Thon-jeyw also collects the levy of food grains from his people through the village leaders. The levy of food grains collected is submitted to the highest revenue officer in area of the state.

Thon-jeyw plays dual role in the administration of the settlement – as Chairman of the Tibetan Co-operative Society and as an administrator of the settlement. The Chairman's position is a formal one. As a representative of the office of H. H. the Dalai Lama and an administrator, he is concerned with the administration and the welfare Programmes of the settlement. His office is open for supervision by two senior officials – one monk official and another lay official from the Dharmasala.

(b) Village Leader of Headman (*Pom-bo*):

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The traditional method of Tibetan village administration based on class system has lost its significance. The change in the social organization from lord-serf relation to a more democratic one has brought much structural change in the leadership and political organization among Tibetans in India. A village leader is now elected by the heads of all the families irrespective of his economic position. Every commoner irrespective of his social or economic background gets voting right. They vote and elect a person who is educated and having leadership qualities and not necessarily coming from a noble or rich family. However, it is noticed that most of the past and present village leaders in these settlements belong to some or the other high status group in Tibet.

Now there is very less competition for leadership in Mundgod. In some cases the elected persons may not agree to take up the responsibility, because now they have to work themselves in the fields or on business for their living and they lack serfs to work for them as in traditional Tibet. Leadership position also takes one's time in visiting officials and conducting public meetings and also brings no additional income for them. Also the present situation needs an educated person to hold the office and the majority of Tibetans are illiterate. A few persons also refuse an offer of leadership owing to their low status and a feeling of no authority. The office of a village leader is for one year. But in a few cases an able leader who is liked by his villagers may be continued for several years.

(c) Sub-leader (*Chok-penvw*):

The village sub-leaders are elected or nominated by the village leader, or elected on rotation basis. A sub-leader acts as a mediator between the village leaders and the people. Once appointed he works for six months and in some cases for one year. Since he has a few official roles to perform he is classed as a formal leader. There are also some situational leaders who are constructive and innovative. They take interest to collect funds to build community halls to conduct meetings and nursery schools. They teach people about the importance of modern education and change needed to the traditional outlook. They maintain contacts with a few local officials namely the health, police, agricultural officials and teachers to undertake welfare activities and good of their people.

The Tibetans though have changed from their traditional way of selecting a leader to that of modern they however consider the hereditary (Bugo), type of leadership as the most appropriate one to hold the administrative power. The persons tracing their origin to the early kings, or noble or the lord (ku-dra) families are considered more appropriate for leadership. However the economic status of a person in Mundgod, as a leadership trait has lost its significance. People prefer their leader to be of high social rank. The other important factors of leadership are the qualities like education, capability of maintaining good contacts with people belonging to different provinces of Tibet, knowing their regional languages, sympathy to the poors and the depressed, boldness, selflessness, etc.

Now lots of changes have taken place in the Tibetan society – from lord-serfdom type to the democratic one. This however, brings the economic liberty and political freedom, but not religious. Because the Tibetans believe that their culture, its values and concepts are based mainly on the religious values controlled by the charismatic authority. To break off from the religious fold means loosing them permanently which they do not want. They say that they need the utmost control of their charismatic leader H. H. the Dalai Lama. They strongly hold the Dalai Lama as their political and religious head. Side

by side they also want to have the present systems of democratic practices but not at the cost of the tradition. The Tibetans can tolerate anything but not the disintegration of their culture, religion and the religious head. Ian Buruma (2008:12) writes that “by forcing the Dalai Lama into exile they have ensured the establishment of a Tibetan diaspora society, which might well survive in a more traditional form than would have been likely in an independent Tibet”. The Dalai Lama being the most prominent spiritual leader of not only Tibetans now all those who believe and have faith is the political Head of a government in exile. The Tibetans in all their spirits attached to their homeland seek freedom for Tibet and seek to maintain intact their culture, traditions and customs. This fact is evident from the history of Tibetan administration.

Note:

This paper is based on earlier work done by the senior author. Views expressed are those of the authors.

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