

Tibet – A Shangri – La, Cocooned in The Himalayas

R. SENKAMALAM & ANJU S. NAIR

ABSTRACT

Tibet is a land of mystery. It is a land in isolation, geographically and by language. These features have protected the historical heritage of Tibet and are also the obstacles that makes it impossible for the outside world to scrutinise. They only obstruct the Tibetan's own efforts to reveal the truth

Keywords: land of serenity, rock monasteries, tsampa, gompas.

Tibet is to have been known as the Altar of the Earth. It is the highest plateau in the world. First known fact about Tibet is that, it is not China, not India, Burma or Nepal. It is learnt from the hard rocks of geography that the Tibetan lowlands, stretch down and are spread over the vast shores of the seas. The sky is a pleasant sight with blue colour taken from the mountain mists. The spring snows of Tibet melt down and rush from mighty rivers. It is part of Western Europe. It is identified as the better part in half a million square miles, with a population of about six million as accounted by the Tibetan Government. Though their early ancestors are less known, they are not Chinese. They seemed to have been of the nomadic tribes. Mostly their forefathers were the herders from the eastern parts of central Asia. They resemble the Navajo Indians of the south west America. They are a separate race. Tibet's history had been recorded since the middle of the seventh century. They had taken a little of the Tang Empire on the Western sides. Had got their hands of their Chinese princess bride in marriage with King

Srongsen Gampo of their Kingdom (Tibet). Tibet had also established itself as a mass force in central Asia. The Tibetans were able to take up and administer the Chinese regions of Gansu, large portions of Sichuan and Yunnan. It was seen that the Chinese had been paying 50000 rolls of silk to the Tibetans, as an annual tribute. During their power at peak they were able to capture/seize the Chang'an region, the capital of the Chinese empire. The Chinese ruler Hwang-ti and the Great King of Tibet had ever since been in the relation as uncle and nephew. They had been in alliance and had even agreed upon a great understanding that Tibet and China shall abide by the frontiers of which they were then in occupation. With the country of great China to the east and the country of Great Tibet to the west neither side shall wage war nor seize territory.

The third known truth is that it had been a unified state since its inception, as an independent nation. So, china treated Tibet as a respectful nation, but at times was deterred. As the Tibetan culture seemed stealthily spreading, King Srongtsen Gampo, sent his minister to India. The visit was to devise a script for the Tibetan language. The new Tibetan alphabet based upon the Indian Gupta script was introduced during the King's reign.

Thus, the fourth truth about Tibet is that its language is not related to the Chinese either in structure or by history and the Tibetan culture seems to have no apparent attachment or semblance to any part of world history. Since its history in the seventh century, it had always been in an extraordinary process of absorbing and gathering various social structures into the socio-economic life of the country.

The mantra Om Mani Padme Hum was their mantra of Avalokiteshwara, the patron deity of Tibet. Every peasant, monk and traveller by the roadside would chant the mantra with a rosary in their hands and Tibetans were a unique society, hidden in the farthest mountains. The Tibetans had thus inculcated

staunch religious beliefs in search of mystical self-transformation.

Hence the fifth truth about the Tibetans is that their religion is their blood and to extract religion from Tibetans is to kill the civilisation.

The sixth truth is that the Tibetan culture is of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism and is a traditional one. Its pattern had been left un-interfered by the urbanised society. "The Tibetan society had a significant middle class, made up of stewards of the large estates, traders and lower rank government officials and army officers". – (Patt 21)

Most of the Tibetans were from the middle class. They were stewards for the officers in the army, in the estates, for traders and for many Government officials. Thus, the lifestyle of the middle class was simple, as they even held control over their family property. Hence, they could live a life as that of others in the society. Most of the Tibetan families were modest and led a decent standard of living. They could realise leisure and had fun and frolic by the end of their days work. There was no trace of scarcity for food and economic hardships.

As Hugh Richardson had stated – "Conditions of work were by all appearances easy. The Tibetans, although certainly not an idler, did not give the impression of being overburdened with work or with care". (Richardson 25)

The Tibetans had worked to assure their duty of service, it was considered as a form of tax. They were free to travel, to visit their relatives and even to go on pilgrimage. The citizens could live with freedom of speech and freedom of association. Yet it was a feudal country.

The monasteries, the art works, the libraries and the attitude of the Tibetans with their very strong beliefs in their religion and culture were a great threat for the intruders. These "four olds" were their sense of identity.

The monasteries or Gompas were perched on the hill tops and hill sides of Tibet. Some were more than a thousand years old. These were built in a simple style on flat ground early before the fourteenth century, when the Dalai Lama was accepted as Tibet's temporal. In early times, Kyirong in Tibet as it means, "The Village of Happiness", is described and admired by Heinrich Harrer during his stay in Tibet for seven years. In his writings he is reminiscent of having spent his evenings in the village.

The houses were made of mud brick. A thick cloud of smoke always hung over the houses. The houses were grouped about a monastery and were surrounded by cultivated fields. The river Kosi ran into the Himalaya as and into Nepal. This river was formed by two streams from the village, Kyirong. There were great peaks of about 20000 feet height. The natives were known as Chogulhari. The villagers lit butter lamps when evening crept in with darkness.

The village had "Billets" for travellers. Such a facility did not cause any inconvenience for the people and had only contributed for the taxation system. There were heavy snowfalls. During such times travellers could be spectators of the great performers from Nyeanam. There were many sandstone caves where saints lived.

Yak herds were used to plough the snow. There were valleys and ravines in and around the village. The village of "Longda" in the vicinity had a rock monastery. Red coloured temples and many cells were perched like birds' nests on the rocks, which were seven hundred feet above the valley. This rock monastery was founded by Milarepa, the famous saint and poet of the eleventh century. The secluded and glorious ambience of the Monastery enabled meditation and writing poetry for the nuns and monks who took to service for faith.

According to the author HeinRich Harrer, “the village of Happiness” really deserves the appellation. He further adds that he would build a house for him, out of red cedar wood and have one of the rushing mountain streams running through his garden. The village had around eighty houses. The roofs had prayer flags, in the five colours, representing different aspects of life in Tibet. There were stables for cows and horses on the ground floor. The butter lamps were lit up to remove the darkness.

The people’s staple food was tsampa. They prepared it in different ways. The people of Kyirong, ate rice, buckwheat, maize, potatoes, turnips, onions, beans and radishes. The village was a holy place and never an animal was slaughtered for meat. The mountains were a real wonder for any outsiders. There were hot springs in the vicinity of the village. The Tibetans took to regular bathing both in the hot bubbling spring waters and then in the ice-cold waters of the river Kosi. It was a kind of a spa for the people who frequently were visiting during the holidays, with full provisions packed for a fortnight. Some people would stay in bamboo huts, while the upper classes arrived in caravans with a group of servants for them. Thus, the whole season of holidays for the Tibetans lasted for a short period, until when the swollen Kosi River turns to melting snow to overflow the hot springs.

Monks, who studied in the school of medicine of Lhasa, were much respected for their services, in treating patients. The doctors received provisions as their fee.

The Tibetan New Year came by the middle of February, after the birth and death days of Buddha. This was the greatest event of the year. Wandering monks took alms from houses. Every house had a fresh cut pine tree with a flag attached to it. This was kept on the roof tops. Solemn recitations and tsampa were offered to the Gods. The Tibetans have their belief that their gods answer their prayers and bless them in the New Year.

Thus, they bring butter to offer in the huge copper cauldrons to the lit up. They are full of devotion and pray for their blessing. The Tibetans are thus uniformly attached to their religion and very obedient to the principles and practices of it their daily life. Theirs is simple faith. The festive celebration went on for seven days.

The death practice at a Tibetan burial seemed to be Barbaric. The practices were taken from its origin of deep religious motives. For them, their bodies without souls, after death, have no significance so they never wished to leave any trace of their bodies. Thus, the dead bodies of those high-ranking Lamas and nobles were burned and those of the very poor people were thrown into the river. On the other hand, when people died of dreadful diseases, their bodies were disposed by the Government paying to the special persons.

In the houses, the death mourning lasted for forty-nine days. The roof of the house had a fresh tree with a prayer flag. The roof of the house had a fresh tree with a prayer flag. Monks gathered for the ceremony and uttered prayers with own peculiar music. The Tibetans had to incur expenses. So, they usually sold their jewels or other possessions of the defunct and used the money to pay for the ritual (performances) offerings. They buy oil to keep the countless little lamps burning.

During Spring time, the farming lot of Tibetans work in the fields. They begin their work with the blessings of their religious priests. The priests come in long processions and are followed by the villagers. 108 volumes of the Tibetan bible were carried around the village. Prayers were chanted with the sacred music.

During summer expeditions the fauna of the region was different. Many different species of monkeys often migrated through the deep valley of the river Kosi. There were leopards which hunted oxen and yaks. The villagers trapped the leopards. The Tibetans had to carry a pine torch to scare and drive away

the bears. They also carried a snuff box full of powdered red pepper. They had to withstand severe winter frosts and bits and so they were bodily tough burdened with heavy work. They get into the habit of participation in competitive sports. They had regular athletic meets every year. The sports meet was for several days and the main events were horse-racing, archery and races by foot and long and high jumps. For strong men, the event was to lift and carry a heavy stone for a certain distance.

The life in village always had a great deal of variety. There were caravans coming into the village every day. People from Nepal used to buy rice from Tibetans in the village side to get exchange for salt, brought from the lakes in Changsheng region. The Tibetan herdsmen grazed their cattle on the luxuriant mountain meadows. Their herds consisted of cows and female yaks. They were grazed on the green stretches of pasture lands. The pastures were situated in the middle of wild glaciers, butter-making was quite common on these pastures in the valleys.

The Tibetan herdsmen have ferocious dogs alongside their huts to protect them from leopards, wolves and wild dogs. There was no trace of Hunger and poverty because the peasants used to work in every minute of daylight. Monks were busy in spiritual matters. The woman fold moves their own cloth and all their clothes were made at home. The village had no police. The wrong doers were publicly punished cruelly.

The seventh truth about Tibet is that the Chinese power was reducing and destroying the existence of Tibet. So, 100000 Tibetans fled Tibet in 1959 along with their leader, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They took to settle down on the mountains of India in the north and in the southern states of Karnataka. Thus, they turned to be adaptable. They were hard working, resourceful and had structured themselves for a stable life and drivelled with modest prosperity where they had taken refuge. They await their return to Tibet, their Homeland, which is on the other side of the Himalayas. Thus, they have sought to preserve

their cultural identity, heritage and religion, literature and traditional arts.

The eighth truth about Tibet and Tibetans is that, they have His Holiness the Dalai Lama as their only leader, and they adore him for his virtue, both inside and outside Tibet. The leader himself has handled the non-violent nature of the Tibetan struggle. He has been the source of inspiration to preserve their cultural heritage and always led them in the path of a democratic set up of life. Thus, he is the elected leader, popular in the Government-in-Exile.

The world does not know, has not heard and has forgotten about the Chinese atrocities in Tibet. On the contrary many world governments do not want to know about such injustice to the Tibetans, because they do want to maintain good relations with China.

The ninth truth about Tibet seems to be on awakening. They opine that human happiness cannot be derived through science and material earnings. They view science and economics theories as a tool to manage the materialistic needs. Tibetans rely for the support of eternal human values.

The tenth truth as derived by David Patt is that the existence of Tibet and survival of the Tibetans is to be made possible by human race all over the world and concludes that "the real Chinese intention was to eliminate the Tibetan identity". (Patt 226)

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