

Tibet, India and China

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Tibet has remained one of the most isolated and closed countries of the world. However, Tibetan chronicles supplemented by the records of China, Kashmir and Ladakh provide a good deal of information of its early history. Largely a high plateau of nearly half a million square miles, Tibet is bounded by the Kuen-Lun mountains in the north and by the Himalaya mountains in the south. From China access to Tibet was difficult. It lay through Tsinghai and Sikang regions in the north west and south west respectively of China. According to Claude A. Buss, 'Eastern Tibet and Western China are separated indistinctly by these two separate regions inhabited by tribes which are among the least civilised in the entire world'. On the other hand, the routes from the south, i.e. from India, are relatively easier. The most important of these lie through the Chumbi Valley between Sikkim and Bhutan, and through Tawang, east of Bhutan. To the north-west of Tibet, there is a route from Sinkiang through Aksai Chin plateau which is a serviceable winter route, "as two invasions occurring in the early winter months have demonstrated one in the early eighteenth century by the Dsungars when they took Lhasa from the rear, and the other in 1950 by the Chinese Communists themselves"¹. East of the Aksai Chin route, is a route from Khotan in Sinkiang through Keriya to Rudok in Western Tibet.

Before the spread of Buddhism, Tibet's indigenous culture was based on the Bon religion with its belief in spirits and dragons that had to be controlled by magical rites. At the beginning of the 7th century A.D., Buddhism was adopted by the Tibetan ruler Son-Tsan Gampo, who unified the country and under whom Tibet became a strong, expansionist State. He invaded China and married a daughter of the Chinese emperor; and extended his empire to Central Asia. He also extended his dominion southward, invaded Nepal and married a Nepalese princess. A stone pillar in Lhasa records a Sino-Tibetan peace treaty concluded in the first half of the eighth century. Another stone pillar in Lhasa refers to Tibetan conquests in Western China in 763 A.D.². Both the Chinese and Nepalese princesses were Buddhist in faith. Buddhism thus got introduced into Tibet. At the same time, Buddhism spread to Tibet from Kashmir and from Ladakh.

India's early contacts with Tibet were through Ladakh. The Chronicles of Ladakh, first translated by Francke furnish the available sources regarding the boundary between Tibet and Ladakh. In the tenth century A.D., King Skyeid Mgon of the second Sakya Dynasty divided this Kingdom among his

three sons, the eldest being given the area of present-day Ladakh, the second son the area of western Tibet, and the third and youngest the regions Zaskar, and Spiti and Lahaul, of present-day Himachal Pradesh. The Kingdom of 'La-dvag' (as Ladakh was called) continued under the dynasty.

In the middle of the seventeenth century A.D., there was a war between it and the Lhasa rulers of Bod (Tibet). Ladakh had at that time taken up the cause of the Head Lama of Bhutan against Lhasa and the latter sent an army against Ladakh. The king of Ladakh had to take the help of the 'nawab' of Kashmir to expel the Tibetans and the resulting treaty of 1684 affirmed the boundary between Ladakh and Tibet "as in the beginning", i.e., when king Skyeid Mgnon gave separate kingdoms to each of his three sons and defined their boundaries. "The negotiations were held at Tingmosgang and led to a final settlement of the relations between Tibet and Ladakh. The borders then remained unchanged even after the Dogra conquest"³. This treaty held good till 1950 when China invaded Tibet and used the occasion to send an army through Aksai Chin and later absorbed it and other areas of Ladakh into Sinkiang. The treaty specifically mentioned the Lhari stream south-east of Demchok as being the boundary and gave Guge and Rh-thog in western Tibet to Lhasa "in order to defray the expenses of sacrificial lamps and prayers".

Lamaism, the Tibetan form of Buddhism, had spread to Mongolia and when the Mongol Kubla Khan became the emperor of China, relations between him and the Dalai Lama were comparable to those between the contemporary European rulers and the Pope of Rome. The Mongols later interfered in Tibetan political disputes and in 1640, Gusro Khan, the Quosot Mongol was instrumental in establishing the supreme political authority of the Dalai Lama. In the 18th century the Chinese were unable to suppress the Dsungar Mongols of the Ili region (N.W. Turkistan), while the Quosot Mongols of the eastern region of Mongolia sided with the Chinese. Lha-bzan Khan, the Quosot had set himself up at Lhasa and in 1717 the Dsungar Mongols invaded Tibet to oust him. "It was of the highest importance to the Dsungars to secure influence over Tibet because of religio-political reasons"⁴, to counteract the growing Chinese influence exercised through Lha-bzan Khan and to restore the Dalai Lama to his position. This invasion took place in the early winter months from Khotan and the force passed through the Aksai Chin area of Ladakh. They passed from Western Tibet to Lhasa, took Lhasa, killed Lha-bzan Khan and became the new ruling power there. It was to evict them that the Chinese for the first time sent a force to Tibet. The Dsungars were expelled in 1724 and the Chinese forces withdrew thereafter. It was in 1728 that two Chinese *ambans* were posted at Lhasa, and the practice Lhasa continued with interruptions till 1911.

The Chinese next intervened in Tibetan affairs at the end of the 18th century to ward off Nepal's invasion of Tibet. The Gurkha forces crossed the border in July 1788 and seized the adjacent border regions. Again in 1791, the Nepalese marched to Shigatse and captured the Tshi-lun-po monastery. The Chinese emperor sent an army which crossed into Nepal in July 1792 and concluded a treaty with Nepal in 1793 under which Nepal agreed to send a mission every five years to China.

Till the 18th century, Tibet though difficult of access was not closed to the foreigners. Jesuit fathers and other Europeans had reached Lhasa and the Jesuits had been allowed to propagate their religion. The Jesuits cartographers located at Peking carried out in 1715-17 the first survey of Tibet through two Lamas who they had trained in geometry and arithmetic. The result was embodied in the first map of Tibet in the 'great atlas' of China presented to the emperor in 1718. They made a fresh determination of coordinates and heights of mountains for the Jesuit Atlas of 1721. After the expulsion of the Mongols, however, the Tibetans followed a closed-door policy and the Jesuits had to leave Lhasa. The British rulers of India were keen to explore Tibet and to trade with it, and in 1774, Warren Hastings, the first Governor General got an opportunity to send George Bogle as his representative to visit the Panchan Lama at Shigatse. He went through Bhutan and reached Tashi-lun-po, the seat of the Panchan Lama. A second representative Turner by name was also sent to follow up this early success. The contact, however, lapsed with the retirement of Warren Hastings.

In the nineteenth century, Raja Gulab Singh, the Dogra ruler of Jammu first invaded Ladakh through his famous general Zorawar Singh and attached it to the dominions of Raja Ranjit Singh of Punjab. Next, he sent Zorawar Singh to invade Western Tibet in 1841. This may have been intended to establish the claim of Ladakh to Western Tibet. It was also designed to secure the uninterrupted flow of the *pashmina* wool trade from Western Tibet to Kashmir, which had begun to be diverted through Rampur Bushair State (situated south of the Sutlej river and east of Ladakh) with the encouragement of the British rulers. Zorawar Singh's invasion of Tibet met with early success, but ended in his death and the annihilation of his army at the hands of the Lhasa troops near Mount Kailash. It was a daring feat to have carried the invasion deep into Tibet in winter. Next year, the Tibetans advanced into Ladakh and were defeated by the Dogra army. The treaty concluded in 1842 reaffirmed "the old established frontiers". Meng Pao, the *amban* at Lhasa reported the treaty to the Emperor of China who approved of a list of awards "for meritorious service in the last campaign against the barbarians and aborigines"⁵. As the quotation shows, the Chinese behaved as if Tibet was an outlying part of China's empire, and treated people of neighbouring countries such as Kashmir as "barbarians and aborigines". In fact the Chinese relation-

ship with Tibet showed that she was not able to establish any direct control over it.

In the nineteenth century, China became weak and there were increasing inroads on its authority in the coastal regions by the western powers who increasingly took over its sea trade and extorted extra-territorial rights there. When the British invaded Nepal in 1814, the Chinese sent an army into Tibet to safeguard their interests but they could not do anything when the British posted a Resident at Kathmandu after the war. Nepal invaded Tibet in 1855, but China was unable to come to the help of Tibet. From 1856 onwards, "both Tibet and Nepal functioned as independent States, and direct diplomatic relations between the two governments were re-established on their pre-1793 basis"⁶. Left to itself, Tibet became closed to the rest of the world more than ever before, till Younghusband forced his way to Lhasa in 1904.

During the "honeymoon period" after 1950, we heard sometimes of the ancient ties between India and China. There is, however, little to suggest that these two sub-continents had much to do with each other in their long past. What relations there were, were due to the spread of Buddhism in the ancient times. Beyond that, they were two separate worlds. "An extraordinary literacy and artistic activity seems to have found an outlet for itself in the little oases kingdoms of Central Asia during the opening centuries of this (Christian) era"⁷. In 2 B.C., the first Buddhist text was brought to China by a Chinese ambassador returning from a mission to the Yueh-chi (Kushan) Court. In 65 A.D., two Buddhist scholars were persuaded to come to China from Khotan and the emperor built a monastery for them. Buddhism became firmly established in China and Chinese monks visited India through Central Asia. Fa Hien, Dr. Martin Giles, the translator of his travel records, writes "practically walked from Central China across the desert of Gobi, over the Hindukush, and through India down to the mouth of the Hoogly where he took ship and returned by sea, bringing with him what he went to secure - books of Buddhist Canon and images of Buddhist deities"⁸. Fa Hien returned to China in 414 A.D.

The most famous Chinese pilgrim to India was Hieun Tsang from 629-45 A.D. who walked across Central Asia both for his outward and return journeys. He travelled extensively throughout India and in his journeys had ample time to form a judgement of the Indian people. He sums up their character as follows, "They are of hasty and irresolute temperaments, but of pure moral principles. They will not take anything wrongfully and they will yield more than fairness requires. They fear retribution for sins in other lives and make light of what conduct produces in this life. They do not practice deceit and they keep their sworn obligation"⁹.

We now come to the period of British rule in India for the first direct contacts between India and China. The introduction of opium trade brought the East India Company. The Company had a monopoly of trade with China in the 18th century and produced opium in India and exported it by sea to China. The Chinese banned the import in 1796 but trade in opium was continued through smuggling. This led to war in 1840 which lasted for two years. China was forced to allow entry of European ships to her ports.

In 1876, China had to sign the Chefoo Convention by which it was forced to give full extra territorial rights to British. This Convention also contained an article providing for the visit of a British Mission to Tibet. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Anglo-Russian rivalry and advance into Central Asia made Tibet also an area of contention between them. As Tibet was closed to the outside world, the only way to approach it was to send clandestine missions of explorers and adventurers. The other method open to them seemed to be to bolster up China's authority in respect of Tibet and to use the Chinese name and authority to gain access to Tibet. With the Chefoo Convention of 1876 in their pocket, the British tried to open a trade route from India to Tibet. In 1890, they signed a treaty with China defining Sikkim's frontier with Tibet, and providing for trade across this frontier. They followed it up with signing in 1893 a set of Regulations with the Chinese for this trade and for opening a trading mart at Yatung. All these remained a dead letter as the Tibetans refused to accept either the Treaty or the Regulations to neither of which they were a party. China was in no position to enforce these as its writ did not run into Tibet, but that never deterred the Chinese from behaving as if they exercised full authority with regard to Tibet or sign treaties about its trade or other matters.

Matters were brought to a head when Curzon became Viceroy of India. The threat of Russian advance across Central Asia was with Curzon a matter of over-riding concern. In 1899, he sent a letter to the Dalai Lama requesting for permission to send a mission to Lhasa. Curzon got no reply, tried again, and was chagrined that the second letter was also not accepted much less acknowledged. Spurring him on was the fear of rumours that Russians had made a secret deal with China permitting them access into Tibet. The British Government in London was not so perturbed by all this because it was trying to secure detente with France and Russia against the rising power of Germany, but nevertheless with the persistent raising of the alarm by Curzon, it was forced into agreeing to send a mission to the border of Sikkim and Tibet in 1903 for the limited purpose of opening negotiations for trade.

Russia was also impelled by fears similar to those of Curzon. In 1893, Dorjjeff, a Buriat Mongol and consequently a Russian citizen by birth, visited St. Petersburg as the envoy of the Dalai Lama and in 1900 he again visited

Russia and was given an audience by the Tsar at Yalta. He was a teacher at Lhasa's Drepung Monastery when the young Thirteenth Dalai Lama was receiving his education and had become a favourite with him. In 1901, Dorjief again visited Russia and this was given publicity in the Russian press. This time he was given audience by the Tsar and the Tsarina. Soldiers of the Russian "forward school" were trying to reach Lhasa and thus forestal the British. In this they had been unsuccessful and the most they had been able to achieve was the expedition of Pyotr Kozlov from Mongolia into Tibet in 1901. Kozlov had, however, met a hostile reception and had to fight his way back from Chamdo, and had evidently been no more welcome there than were the British.

Curzon sent a mission under Younghusband to Khamba Jong on Sikkim-Tibet border in 1903. When he reached there, he was firmly told by the Tibetan representatives that he must go back. Protagonists of "the great game" for mastery of Central Asia that they were, Curzon and his chosen instrument Younghusband, saw this as a convenient excuse for forcing an entry into Tibet. They were able to persuade their Home Government to sanction and advance beyond the frontier to Gyantse via the Chumbi Valley. A mixed Indo-British force under Brigadier Macdonald, armed with Lee Metford rifles and with mountain artillery, was to escort the mission. Mobility was provided by ponies and the baggage was carried by mules, yaks, etc. The Tibetans were armed only with swords and staffs and with a few antiquated matchlock muskets.

In January 1904, Younghusband moved forward from Phari in the Chumbi Valley to Tuna in Tibet. Less than ten miles away a Tibetan army was encamped at Guru. In April 1904, the British force advanced to Guru and found the Tibetan army blocking the way. The Tibetans neither took the initiative in starting a fight nor would they budge in the face of the British force. The British force was ordered to march forward and in the ensuing melee firing was started. It was a helpless, unequal fight. The Tibetans fell by the hundreds but they did not run. They lost between 600-700 dead. The expedition advanced to Gyantse and reached there on April 11. Hearing of a Tibetan army assembled at Karo La, he despatched a force on the plea that this was necessary to ensure that they did not pose a threat to the British position. Younghusband now forced the hands of Government to agree to a march to Lhasa.

In the action to dislodge the Tibetans from Karo La, the Tibetans were no longer passive resisters as at Guru. They were, however, dislodged from their position by the superior fire power of the British and their casualties were as high as at Guru. This did nothing to weaken Tibetan resistance which now became more general. Spontaneously they poured into Gyantse deter-

mined to dislodge the British. But a British relief force arrived from Chumbi and the fort at Gyantse was stormed and taken by them on 6 July 1904, and the march to Lhasa was resumed. They reached Lhasa on 7th August and the Chinese *amban* who had no influence with the Tibetans, welcomed the British forces, in order to improve his own status and also to exploit the situation in the interests of China. The Dalai Lama had fled from Lhasa to avoid the prospects of negotiations and Younghusband had to negotiate with Tri Rimpoche with whom the Dalai Lama had left the seals of office. The British got Tibet's agreement to trade marts being opened at Gyantse and Gartok besides Yatung with resident British agent. When a Convention was signed on 7 September 1904, the Chinese *amban* took care to occupy a prominent position in all the ceremonies but was not associated with the signing of the Convention. Britain entered into a separate Convention with China in 1906 confirming the Convention of 1904. This recognised Chinese rights in Tibet "to an extent to which the Chinese had recently been wholly unable to exercise them"¹⁰. Thus the results of Younghusband's expedition were to give the Chinese authority a fresh lease of life in Tibet.

By the Convention of 1906, China agreed to Britain setting up telegraph lines connecting the specific marketing centres - Yatung, Gyantse and Gartok - with India. In 1908, a fresh set of detailed trade negotiations were concluded in India with Chinese and Tibetan representatives.

As a result of the Anglo-Russian detente of 1907, China had a free hand in re-establishing her influence and consolidating her position in Tibet. China now stepped up her efforts to absorb the eastern provinces of Tibet into China proper. An energetic general and administrator, Chou-Erh-feng had been posted in 1905 as Warden of the Eastern Marches and established Chinese authority in Sikiang province during the years 1905-1911. Not content with asserting Peking's authority in his own charge, he sent a young general Chung Ying to Lhasa with a 2000 strong force which reached there on the new year's day of 1910. China had for the first time in history sent a force to Tibet without the consent of Tibetans and as an invading force. Only a few months before the Dalai Lama had returned to Lhasa after his long exile since 1904. On February 13, 1910 the Dalai Lama had to flee again and this time he took refuge in India.

Side by side with sending an invading force into Lhasa, Chou-Erh-feng spread Chinese control over the Tibetan areas adjacent to India's north-eastern frontier. This was at the instance of the *amban* at Lhasa who wanted to assert Chinese authority in these remote areas of Tibet. Tibet consists of the wind-swept 16,000 feet high northern plain called Changtang, western Tibet the valley of the Tsang-po river, Amdo Chamdo in the east. In addition, there are fertile, well-watered valleys with ranges of tree-covered mountains in be-

tween in the south east. Zayul was taken by Chinese troops who marched upto Rima in 1910 which is the last town on India's north-east border, and where they engraved on a rock showing the limit of their claim south of Rima in the Lohit Valley in Mishmi territory. The Chinese now also asserted that Bhutan and Nepal were vassals of China.

The achievements of Chou-Erh-feng were the last flowering of the Manchu empire. After the death of the Empress in 1908 rivalries between the provinces and the Centre had become the norm and the empire was disintegrating. Revolution broke out in China in 1911 and its effect was not long in reaching Tibet. Chou-Erh-feng and his work were also swept away. The Tibetan troops in Lhasa rebelled and the *amban* fled. The Dalai Lama returned in triumph in June 1912 to Tibet. By January 1913, the last Chinese left Lhasa and were allowed to go home via India and the Dalai Lama reached Lhasa. The Dalai Lama now declared the independence of Tibet. As the present Dalai Lama said in his communication to United Nations in 1960, "Whatever the position of Tibet may be prior to 1911-12, in any event from the day the 13th Dalai Lama proclaimed the independence of Tibet, after the invading Chinese armies had been driven out of Tibet, Tibet was not only independent de facto but de jure"¹¹. China as a republic was no less insistent in trying to maintain and even exceed the former claims over Tibet. In 1912, the President of the republic issued an order that Tibet was to be "regarded as on equal footing with the provinces of China proper". Britain now took the initiative in redefining the relationship between China and Tibet. The British Minister in Peking presented a memorandum dated 17th August 1912 to the Peking Foreign Office on the subject. The British increased their pressure on the reluctant Chinese to accept this as a basis for negotiations and to agree to a tripartite conference with Tibet and India to be held in India.

The negotiations were held at Simla and Delhi in 1913-14 and are called the Simla Conference at which the "McMahon Line" was agreed to as defining the border between India and Tibet, east of Bhutan. The negotiations were to be about the boundary and its definition rather than about the status of Tibet. On the boundary question, there was disagreement on the part of the Chinese in respect of the boundary between 'Inner' and 'Outer' Tibet. This concept which was introduced by McMahon, the British delegate, on the analogy of a similar one followed in case of the treaty between Russia and Mongolia in November 1912, was also accepted by the Chinese Government. Even as the Simla Conference was going on, Tibet had had to maintain a force of 10,000 in Eastern Tibet and the Chinese attacked the eastern provinces of Tibet while the Conference was in progress. On 3rd July 1914, the British delegate and the Tibetan delegate signed the agreement regarding the boundary between Tibet and India, east of Bhutan, since known as the 'McMahon Line'. The conference failed to reach agreement on the boundary be-

tween Tibet and China. An agreement between Tibet and India on the border between India and Tibet was however signed on 3rd July 1914. Care had been taken by McMahon prior to the Conference to determine the alignment of the boundary between Tibet and North-East India. Survey missions had been sent in 1913 to report on the actual position in this inaccessible area. The principle of the watershed and the crest of the Himalayan ranges had been followed in agreeing to the boundary and the Tibetan delegate Lonchan Shatra had received the consent of the Dalai Lama and the Kashag before signing the agreement.

War between China and Tibet continued in the province of Sikang till 1918 when a ceasefire had been arranged by Teichman of the British Consular Service along a line roughly along the upper Yangtse river¹². Since then an armed peace continued till 1930 when the Tibetans again forced their way to Tachien Lu, the capital of Sikang. It was not till 1933 that a ceasefire could again be arranged which restored the Yangtse river as the boundary. In view of the growing power of Tibet, the British sent a mission to Lhasa in 1920 under Sir Charles Bell. In 1921, an agreement was concluded between Tibet and Britain for the import of 10 mountain guns, 20 machine guns and 10,000 rifles with ammunition. By 1933 all of this material had been supplied¹³. Since Tibet was free from any form of Chinese control, Britain decided that it was best to help Tibet to maintain her independence.

In 1933, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama died. "By playing off China against India, he preserved our independence"¹⁴. Between 1912 and 1934 there were no Chinese officials in Tibet. The Chinese Government took advantage of the death of the Dalai Lama to send a general at the head of a mission to offer religious tributes and condolences of the Chinese Government. Having come for this purpose, he insisted on staying on as the permanent representative but was forced to leave. Two of his liaison officers however remained behind. This provoked a British request for a similar office to be established, and this was accepted. The British Mission at Lhasa dated from this time.

For seventeen years after the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, the governance of Tibet was in the hands of an interim regime approved by the Kashag. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, having been born in 1935, was too young to govern. The British Mission headed by Sir Basil Gould was able to maintain cordial relations. When the 1939-45 World War was underway, Tibet refused to allow any facilities to the allied forces to survey a route through Tibet for a supply line from India to China. When India became independent in 1947, China inquired from the new Indian Government whether the treaty rights and obligations between British India and Tibet had been assumed by the new Government. On their part, the Tibetan Government resolved to send a delegation to China when the Communists took over

China in 1949. Such was the position prior to China's invasion of Tibet in 1950.

THE INVASION OF TIBET-1950

On October 1, 1949, the Communists became the rulers of China and the Peoples Republic of China was proclaimed. Even before that, however, the Peking Radio had broadcasted on September 10 that People's Liberation Army was ready to liberate Tibet. On September 26, the Communists occupied Sinkiang. On November 24, Peking Radio broadcast a message of Mao Tse-tung exhorting the people of Tibet to overthrow the Dalai Lama. An army of over two million toughened through long years of a civil war of attrition was available to the Communist rulers as an instrument of State Policy. The first task assigned to it was to march westward and to bring back to the motherland, the non-Han regions of Sinkiang and Tibet. In their periods of expansion, China had previously always marched west into Central Asia and so it was now under the Communists. On October 7, 1950, Chinese troops launched a large admixture of Khampa irregulars from outer Tibet along-with Chinese troops. When they reached Camdo in the Kham country, the local governor (Dsongoon) who had no army worth the name to oppose them, surrendered, and was utilised by the Chinese to open negotiations with Lhasa. It is claimed by the Chinese that they also sent troops from Khotan across the Kuen-Lun mountains into Western Tibet at the same time, and that they traversed the Aksai Region on route. The sudden invasion of Tibet ignoring Tibet's position of independence since 1913, and previously of suzerainty as it had come to be termed by the British, was an unwelcome display of force against which India protested to China on October 26, 1950 conveying their deep regret that the frequent promises of the Chinese to employ peaceful methods should have been belied. The Chinese reply asserted that Tibet was an integral part of China and any intervention on its behalf was an interference in the internal affairs of China.

After the fall of Chamdo, the Dalai Lama took over full responsibility for the Government of Tibet on 17th November at the age of fifteen, and he shifted his Government to the border town of Yatung on the Indo-Tibetan border. The Tibetan governor of Chamdo had been taken to Peking and there he was made to sign a "17 point Agreement" in May 1951. This purported to guarantee Tibetan autonomy. In reality, however, any such hope was belied by the appointment of a Chinese Commissioner and Administrator of Civil and Military Affairs of Tibet. The Dalai Lama had to return to Lhasa when this Chinese General who was allowed by India to travel overland from Calcutta proceeded in July 1951 to Lhasa and"..... Within less than a year, 10,000 Chinese soldiers, both men and women, had come to the city"¹⁵ of Lhasa. At first, they were well disciplined but news kept coming

to Lhasa of the Chinese propaganda in Kham that "Buddhism is a deceiver of the people", and this and other attacks on Buddhism were disturbing to the Tibetans. Although the Chinese wished to use the name and authority of the Dalai Lama, they were at the same time determined to undermine the hold of religion and consequently of the Dalai Lama and the religious order. In 1952, the Dalai Lama was compelled to dismiss the two Lonchens (Prime Ministers) and by the end of the year "the Chinese had organised new schools for Tibetan children, 'patriotic' associations, cultural groups". Motorable roads from Chamdo to Lhasa and from Sinkiang to Western Tibet via Aksai Chin were also started. "In November 1952, the Chinese engaged 2000 labourers to develop this route into a jeep track..... and regular jeep traffic had commenced in 1953."¹⁶

As time passed, Tibetans had begun to feel the severities of the occupation with the quartering of Chinese troops in and around Lhasa and the requisitioning of foodgrains for them. In 1953, there were open demonstrations against the Chinese and a large public meeting was held where a memorandum was drawn up asking the Chinese to withdraw from Tibet leaving only a few officials. In 1954, the Chinese persuaded the Dalai Lama to undertake a visit to Peking. Mao-tse-tung told the Dalai Lama that a 'Preparatory Committee of the Autonomous Region of Tibet' would be set up with 51 members including 5 Chinese officials at Lhasa. The composition of the Committee was an attempt to divide Tibet into several parts and give an equal status to the Panchen Lama and Dalai Lama. The Panchen Lama had also been brought to Peking and stayed on there while the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa.

The 'Preparatory Committee' was formally inaugurated in 1955 in a hall built for the occasion in front of the Potala, the ancient landmark of Lhasa and the residence of the Dalai Lama. The Foreign Minister Chen Yi came specially from Peking for the ceremony. It was obvious from the speeches that the land reform activities of the Chinese were not popular with the people.¹⁷ The Preparatory Committee remained a facade. The real decisions were taken by the Chinese officials who stepped up the policy of sequestrating the land of the monasteries in Kham province, of requisitioning Tibetans as forced labour for building roads, and of undertaking an indoctrination programme against the Tibetan rulers. In 1956, Lhasa began to get an influx of refugees from Kham province who brought tales of guerrilla warfare there.

The Chinese had tried to introduce land reforms in Kham province and reduce the power of monasteries. The people had resisted these changes, having seen their operation in the neighbouring Chinese province of Sikang which was also inhabited by people of Tibetan origin. Things came to a head in a meeting of 300 village leaders who were called to discuss land reforms

and whom the Chinese wanted to pressurise into accepting their policy. When the Kham leaders found that they were to be disarmed, they fled from the place of meeting overnight. To the Khams the arms they carried were inseparable from their person, and the attempt to disarm the village leaders was the decisive event in the start of guerrilla warfare, under the command of Asuhtsang. The Chinese asked the Dalai Lama's Government to let the Tibetan army join the Chinese army to put down the insurgents, but this was naturally evaded on some pretext or the other.

In November 1956, the Dalai Lama visited India in connection with the celebration of the Buddha Jayanti. The full extent of the Khampa revolt was not known to him when he left Lhasa. Nevertheless, the situation in Tibet was becoming insupportable and he consulted Indian Prime Minister if he could take refuge in India. In the hope of resolving the matter peacefully, Nehru persuaded the Dalai Lama to return to Lhasa after assurances by Chou-En-Lai who had also timed his visit to India to synchronise with that of the Dalai Lama. Afterwards, Mao-Tse-tung made an announcement postponing for five years the work of the 'Preparatory Committee' and keeping the land reforms in abeyance, and it appeared that the assurances of Chou-En-Lai would be honoured.

This was, however, only a stratagem to gain time. By the middle of 1958, the Chinese attitude in Tibet had hardened. The revolt and guerilla warfare in Kham had shown no sign of abating. More refugees had kept flocking into Lhasa and the population of Lhasa had doubled itself by November. The Chinese started a house census of the refugees. This forced the refugees to leave Lhasa and they crossed the river Tsangpo and went south to swell the ranks of the fighters. The guerrillas became better organised and controlled the areas south of the river right upto the border with India, and the Chinese had to bring in more troops to deal with the situation and "by the end of February 1959, nearly two hundred thousand troops had been massed"¹⁸

The situation in Lhasa was becoming restless with the vast influx of the refugees and the tales of woe brought by them, and the scarcity of foodgrains. In March, the Dalai Lama was asked by the Chinese Commander to come to the Chinese army camp to a theatrical performance.

The Lhasa people came to know and they surrounded the Norbu Lingka palace to prevent the Dalai Lama from leaving. As the Dalai Lama puts it in his autobiography. "On one side, there was the vehement protest of my people.....on the other, there was the armed might of a power and aggressive occupation force"¹⁹ and every Tibetan in Lhasa could see by then that the Chinese were preparing to shell my palace and that my life would be in danger in I stayed there"²⁰. Persuaded by the Dalai Lama to raise the siege of Norbu Lingka, the people started having continuous mass public meetings

outside the Potala on March 12, 1959. The shelling of the palace started on March 17 at 4.00 PM and the same night the Dalai Lama and a small party escaped south crossing into India at Khinzemane on March 31, 1959.

THE STATUS OF TIBET

The invasion of Tibet in 1950 raised the question of the status of Tibet for the Indian Government. The British Indian Government had entered into a boundary agreement with Tibet in 1914 and this was being acted upon by both sides in respect of the border between the two countries east of Bhutan, called the McMahon Line. Ever since the expulsion of the Chinese from Tibet in 1911, Tibet was an independent State conducting its own external and internal affairs without any interference from China. Thereafter, India had established diplomatic relations with Lhasa without consulting the Chinese. In 1921, Charles Bell had been posted at Lhasa and in 1936 he was followed by Gould. The British had moreover arranged a truce between Tibet and China in 1918 over the war in Szechwan. Prime Minister Nehru declared in Parliament on 6 December 1950 that China's suzerainty over Tibet notwithstanding, Tibet's autonomy should remain unblemished. This enunciation of Tibet's status was denounced by China and in the interest of Indo-Chinese relations, India decided to accept the position in 1954 that Tibet was a part of China. What had changed since 1911 was not Tibet's status vis-a-vis China but its ability to impose its will over Tibet.

The Chinese also terminated the Indian political agency as well as the trading and communication facilities in Tibet soon after their arrival in Lhasa in 1952. India had trading and connected rights in Tibet which China had recognised by the Anglo-Chinese Convention in 1906. In fact, India had had border trade with Tibet over centuries, including the trade over the Uttar Pradesh passes for daily necessities, and the pashmina wool trade between Western Tibet and Kashmir. The Chinese objected to the despatch of replacements for the Indian guards at Gyantse and Yatung, seized the wireless/sets of the Indian trade agent at Gartok and prevented him from proceeding to Rudok and Taklakot. By these violent unilateral acts, the Chinese disowned the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906 and the Trade Regulations of 1908 and 1914 that China had entered into with the British and under which these facilities had been provided. Again India did not make an issue of it and agreed to re-negotiate the trading and communication facilities. The Chinese Prime Minister Chou-En-Lai suggested to the Indian Ambassador Panikkar that the political Agency at Lhasa should be transformed into a Consulate General in exchange for a similar Chinese Office at Bombay. India fell in line and an announcement was made on September 15, 1952 making this change in the status of the Indian representative at Lhasa. Formal talks were begun on 31 December 1953 in Peking to work out a new

agreement. It was known that certain Chinese maps showed large parts of India's northern areas as parts of China but during the talks, China avoided any discussion of the border question when it came up incidentally in connection with the naming of the six passes and routes for traders and pilgrims in the Utrakhand areas. They stated that "they would not touch on the boundary question".

The agreement of 1954 was important both for what it stated and also what it omitted to state. It omitted any reference to the fact that India's trading and other rights in Tibet since 1904 had been terminated. It was worded as if the rights in their modified form were being agreed to for the first time, and granted on a reciprocal basis in return for similar rights granted to the Chinese to establish trade marts in India at Kalimpong, Siliguri and Calcutta. India gave up all postal and telegraph services which had been provided to connect the trade marts at Yatung, Shigatse and Gyantse and 12 rest houses on the route from India to these marts. The Chinese on the other hand obtained facilities for entry into Calcutta port and movement through India to Tibet of such commercial goods as could not be obtained in Tibet. They were also given permission to open branches at Calcutta, etc., of the People's Bank of China. The aspects that were played up were however India's acceptance that Tibet was a part of China and the doctrine of Panch Sheel which was enunciated in the agreement as governing the relations between India and China. This doctrine however was to be honoured by the Chinese more in the breach than in the observance.

The Indian Government was guided by its desire to achieve Indo-Chinese amity when it gave up India's special relationship with Tibet, and did not stand up for Tibet's status which was that of an independent nation since 1913 when the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had announced his country's independence. India also refrained from raising the question of India's border with Tibet at the negotiations during 1953-54 although there were signs like the Chinese maps showing Indian territory as part of China, that China may have different ideas on the subject.

TIBET'S ACCESS TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Tibet has easier access to the world through India than through China proper. This may seem surprising at first, but an examination of the terrain of the neighbouring areas of Tibet and the roads leading through them will bear this out. The Chinese can go into Tibet along two routes - via Chengtu in Sichuan province in the south to Chamdo, and via Sining in Chinghai province in the north to Lhasa. Running from north to south in eastern Tibet are towering mountain ridges and torrential rivers raging through gorges which in some places reach a depth of 2,500 metres. When the Chinese oc-

cupied Tibet in 1951, they started at once to make these two roads motorable, using forced labour of Tibetans as well as their own military formations for the road building work, and completed the work in 1954. The Chinese authors of "Tibet Leaps Forward" (1977, Foreign Languages Press, Peking) state that a round trip by bus takes about twenty days.

A highway from Sinkiang into Tibet was built in 1957, because access along the two highways direct from China was difficult. Not only the terrain was difficult, but the inhabitants were fierce tribesmen who resented the inroads on their province. The difficulties involved in travelling on the two direct roads from China are highlighted by the authors of the above mentioned book as follows: (p. 89)

"More than half of the Chinghai - Tibet road was constructed on an uninhabited plateau over 4,500 metres above sea-level..... The air is thin and rarefied. All the year round there are either flood, heavy snow-fall glaciers, landslides, or cave-ins. On the Szechuan-Tibet Highway in the Pome country (in the east of Tibet) there are dozens of mud-rock flows. Early summer is the season when the mud flows are most active in melting. The famous Kushiang glaciers are permanently characterised by mud and rock slides and cave-ins..... To the east of Chamdo is the 4,800 metre mount Kachi-la..... In two or three hours as much as one or two metres (of snow) will accumulate.....the maintenance workers responsible for the Kachi-la section fight a never-ending battle against the blizzards".

The Tanguts (Tibetans) who inhabit the Chinghai route are quite unusual to Chinese administration. From the railhead, the southern route involves a distance of 1900 KM into Tibet near the border of Arunachal Pradesh. An article by Ross Terrill in the National Geographic Magazine of September 1985 says, "The long winding road linking Sichuan and Tibet snakes along for more than 1400 miles - a two week drive". The western part of Sichuan is inhabited by the Yi (Tibetans) and other non-Hun races.

The above description of the areas and routes between China proper and Tibet will show the difficulties of access from China to Tibet. The Chinese authors quoted already describe the journey by bus as a twenty day round trip now. On the other hand, the access from India's North-Eastern frontier to Tibet is relatively easy. The port of Calcutta and the route via Nathu La in Sikkim has in fact been used by the Chinese in the past to send supplies and arms to their forces in Tibet. The main routes from India are via Jelep La and Nathu La into the Chumbi Valley. Another route from Bhutan via Phari offers Lhasa the easiest access to the outside world via Gyantse and Yatung in Tibet.

The other routes in the north-east are in the Mishmi area of Arunachal

Pradesh through Walong and Rima to *Pemako*, and the route through Tawang. Pemako is the promised land of Tibetan Legend. It is fertile and produces rice, dyes, and timber. It was not directly under Lhasa but paid what taxes it did pay to the Raja of Pome. Kingdon-Ward visited Pemako in 1935 and describes it as a province of 2,500 square miles area, inhabited by Abors of Arunachal Pradesh. "Being hemmed in on three sides by the Tzangpo gorge, and on the fourth by a snow-range where passes are open only for a few months", it remained as sort of Shangri-la. The Abors are called Lopas by the Tibetans. To the original Abors were added the Monbas of Bhutan more than a hundred years ago, and later on Kongbos, the Pobas from Pome and Kampas from Kham. The route via Tawang area, east of Bhutan was used by the Dalai Lama when he arrived on 31 March 1959 at Khinzemane after the flight from Lhasa.

In the middle sector, the six main passes for inter-border trade are named in Sino-Indian Agreement of 1954. These are mentioned as Shipki, Mana, Niti, Kingri Bingri, Darma and Lipu Lekh passes, and "the customary route along the valley of the Indus River (which) may be traversed in accordance with custom", the most important being from Taklakot and the Lipu Lekh Pass west of Nepal. The markets in western Tibet, Taklakot, Gartok and Rudok, were attended by Indian Bhotia traders. The holy lands of Mansarovar lake and Mount Kailash were visited by Indian pilgrims. Likewise in the area of Kashmir adjoining Tibet there are several customary routes, e.g. via Demchok, Chushul and Lanak-la on the east of Ladakh. These are old and relatively easy.

It has been often stated that the Chinese forces in Tibet are on a plateau and can attack Indian borders without difficulty, while Indian lines of communication to these borders are long and difficult. This may be the case, but as far as Tibetans are concerned, they have always taken the routes to India when the need arose.

Notes

- ¹Margaret Fisher and others, "Himalayan Battle Ground, P.7.
- ²Charles Bell, "Tibet past and present", Appendices I & II
- ³L. Petch, "A Study of the Chronicles of Ladakh", P. 158
- ⁴L. Petch, "China and Tibet in the Early Eighteenth Century" P. 26
- ⁵Margaret Fisher, & others - "Himalayan Battleground, page 176
- ⁶Leo E. Rose, "Nepal, Strategy for Survival", page 122.
- ⁷Gertrude Emerson Sen, "The Pageant of India's History", page 372
- ⁸M. Giles, "The Travels of Fa-Hein" - Introduction.
- ⁹Watters, "Travels of Yuan Chwang" (1904) Vol. I, page 171
- ¹⁰H.E. Richardson, "History of Tibet", p. 94 (Dulton & Co. NY 1962)
- ¹¹"My Land & My People", Dalai Lama, page 240

- 12 "A Short History of Tibet", H.H. Richardson, p. 119-120
- 13 "Great Britain, China & Tibet, 1914-21", C. Christie in 'Modern Asian Studies' : October 1976.
- 14 Mrs. Taring, "Daughter of Tibet", page 114
- 15 Mrs. R.D. Taring, "Daughter of Tibet". p. 175
- 16 Mrs. R.D. Taring, "Daughter of Tibet". p. 183
- 17 Mrs. R.D. Taring, "Daughter of Tibet".
- 18 B.N. Mullik, "The Chinese Betrayal", p. 216
- 19 Dalai Lama, "My Land and My People". p. 159
- 20 Dalai Lama, "My Land and My People", p. 163