

Nepalis in Tibet

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To the countries adjacent to it, including Nepal to the south, Tibet has never been the closed and mysterious land it has characteristically been for more distant peoples, particularly Westerners. In fact, the entire social, cultural, and economic history of Tibet is inextricably bound up with that of its neighbors. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Nepal shared greater cultural affinity with, and had greater economic interest in, Tibet than India. There were more Nepalis in Tibet than anywhere else outside Nepal; and there were more people of Tibetan than of Indian origin in Nepal. Prior to the nineteenth century, stronger ethnic and linguistic connections existed between Nepal and Central Asia than between Nepal and South Asia.

When we speak of the presence of Nepalis in Tibet, we must do so with this historical background in mind. The first two sections of this paper, therefore, will attempt to set the historical stage for the concluding discussion on Nepalis in the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China today. I will try to redress the imbalance brought about by so many one-sided views of Tibet as portrayed in the Western press as well as among misinformed Nepalis themselves.

The Early Days

Before Europe knew or cared much about the Himalayan area, the inhabitants of the region travelled into each others' territories frequently and freely for a variety of purposes. The fact that most of the Himalayan region is traditionally populated by people who speak Tibeto-Burman languages and who have Mongoloid physical features is evident. For Nepalis, travel and interaction with the south was difficult and dangerous compared to travel towards the north, at least until the nineteenth century. The dense, subtropical forest to the south, with its diseases, wild animals, and all kinds of evil spirits, demons, monsters, dacoits and robbers was not considered by any means safe and secure. By contrast the journeys to the north,

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although certainly physically demanding, more pleasant and rewarding. Even the Indo-European-speaking non-Mongoloid Khas, who are most closely related to the Thakuris and Chetris of today than others and who live in the western Himalayas, travelled more to the north than to the south. The relative ignorance of the north Indian culture and religion among the Indo-European speaking non-Mongoloid Khas of the upper Karnali basin in western Nepal, even at the present time, reflects this situation.

The economic interdependence of these people with Tibet is very significant even today. The close cultural and economic contact of people from the Kathmandu Valley and areas around it with Tibet is, of course, well known. But even though not as well known, contacts of the people in the Himalayas along the northern border are not much less significant, nor could the safety valve that is provided by the southern slopes and valleys of the Himalayas for Tibetan populations from the very early days right down to the second half of the twentieth century be easily dismissed (cf. Furer-Hamendorf 1964, 1975).

The Vedic people from north India regarded the land beyond the Himalayas as holy, the land of the gods. The origin of the name Tibet itself is derived from the Vedic expression "Tribistapa" (heaven). People of Tibet or of Nepal for that matter do not use the English word "Tibet", but rather "Bod" in Tibetan, or "Bhot" in Nepali. But the ancient Hindus made many references to Tibet. The Mahabharata, for example, mentions Bhimsen's trip to Tibet for the purpose of borrowing gold to use during the battle of Kurukshetra. At the end, all the five Pandava brothers and Draupadi, their consort, travelled to the north on their final journey. It is an interesting cultural coincidence that the Pandava brothers had a polyandrous marriage with their common wife, Draupadi, a practice commonly followed in Tibet.

Even the father of historiography, Herodotus, mentions people from the Himalayas going to Tibet to steal gold. Writing obviously from hearsay, more than 2,400 years ago, Herodotus said that "a tribe dwelling northward of all the rest of the Indians...shorter in stature and size ... more warlike than any of the other tribes sends forth its men to steal" the gold ... [When they reach the fold] ... "they fill their bags with sand and ride away at their best speed" (MacGregor 1970:259).

Because there is little recorded history about the relationship between Nepal and Tibet before the seventh century, it is rather difficult to state the exact nature of its contacts with surrounding regions. Scholars lament the situation when they make remarks like "another neighbouring country with which Tibet has been brought into closer contact than with India, is Nepal, and here again we find ourselves on equally barren ground" (Li 1960). David Snellgrove and.

Hugh Richardson considered that "The main influences continued to be China in the east and Nepal in Central Tibet ... Relations with Nepal were very ancient indeed, but it was not until about 1590 that there is any mention of a formal treaty between the two countries" (1968:201). They state further that "... it is fairly certain that there were already trading connections between Nepal and Tibet long before the Tibetans became a recognized political power ... once we enter an historical period, Nepal begins to become a kind of half-way house between Tibet and central India." (Ibid, 1968:26).

The all time renowned Professor Tucci has put in more succinct remarks:

"Because of her prolonged relations with Tibet, Nepal was destined to leave a lasting imprint on Tibetan art. The manuscripts, often illuminated, which the abbots of the great monasteries, particularly the Sakya-pas, had copied; and the welcome extended to Nepalese artists, who enjoyed great fame in Tibet, gave rise to the Nepalese style; and this long dominated the development of Tibetan painting, especially that of Ü and Tsang. Indeed, the renown of Nepalese artists was such that even the Mongol emperors asked for their work to embellish the temples and palaces they were building. One such artist (of whom the Chinese chronicles also tell us) was the seventeen year old Aniko who, with twenty-four colleagues, went to China on Phakpa's advice.

One gathers from biographies of the more famous founder abbots that Nepalese craftsmen were often brought into paint the newly-built walls in fresco; in some cases the actual names of the artists are recorded, as in the case of those who decorated the Lhakhang built by the founder of the Ngor sect, Kunga-Sangpo (1382-1444). (Tucci 1967:100)."

There is an interesting ancient cult of Bhimsen among the Newars of Nepal. Naturally, the mention of Bhimsen's name reminds us of the Mahabharata in the context of north India. But this Bhimsen of the Newars does not seem to have very much to do with the battle of Kurukshetra, the Kauravas, the remaining brothers among the Pandavas nor indeed anything else connected with the epic at least for the purpose we are considering here. Among other things, one interesting facet of this cult is that every twelve years a living "Bhimsen" from among the Pujaris of Bhimsen's shrine in Kathmandu travels to Lhasa, as the representative of the deity and collects some gold before his return. Formerly the Tibetan government had to give a certain amount of gold to him. The last Bhimsen visit took place in 1967-1968. The Lhasa Branch of the People's Bank of China allowed a certain amount of gold to be cashed at the official rate, thus maintaining the tradition at that time. I have not yet had an opportunity to discover additional details of this tradition. The origins of these cultural

connections are buried in prehistory and mythology. There are, however, records of contact from the second quarter of the seventh century onwards.

Discussing cultural contacts between Nepal and Tibet, Norbu and Turnbull write that Srontsan Gampo, the first historic King of Tibet, recognized the value of a political marriage and allied himself first with Nepal by marrying its princess. "The Princess Bhrikuti was a devout Buddhist who brought with her as part of her dowry several valuable Buddhist images" at the time of her marriage. The Tsulag Khang, "which stands today in the middle of the city of Lhasa that has grown up around it" was built to house the images. "Nepalese architects and builders and all the necessary craftsmen were sent from Nepal for the work on the temple, the first to be built in Tibet" (Norbu and Turnbull 1968:141). They go on to say that, "In his negotiations with the King of Nepal for the hand of Bhrikuti, Srontsan Gampo had stated quite plainly that he was not a Buddhist, and did not practice the ten virtues, but that if the King so desired he would adopt the ten virtues and would further the cause of Buddhism with all his might" (1968:141).

Norbu and Turnbull also mention that with the coming of Buddhism, Tibetan religious art and writing "took on a distinctive style derived from the art of schools of India and Nepal, though in eastern Tibet the style is markedly Chinese" (1968:330).

It is also believed that along with the religious and cultural contacts maintained throughout the period there were political and military alliances as well.

During the following century Tibet suffered a setback in its development of Buddhism. It was from Nepal that the famous monk Shanta Rakshit and, subsequently, Padma Sambhava, were invited into Tibet to reestablish the religious faith. There is, however, a great deal of confusion about the place of origin of Padma Sambhava and even about the historicity of his being. But that need not distract us from the main thesis of our discussion. Whether Padma Sambhava was a historic figure or just an embodiment of a movement, the fact remains that Nepal was the source of contact, and Nepali monks along with the traders, craftsmen, masons, builders, etc., were the chief agents working actively in the early years to build up the so-called Tibetan civilization. Stein makes a similar point when he says that the Tibetan king of the eighth century "brought the Buddhist monk Shantā Rakshitā from Nepal and was ordained a monk by him with the religious name of Yeshe Wang-Po. It was in Nepal again that he is said to have met the famous saint Padma Sambhava who became the patron of the non-reformed orders of Tibet" (Stein 1972:66).

Up until the thirteenth century when Aniko, the famous Nepali architect, travelled with his band of workers and assistants from Nepal to Lhasa and ultimately to Peking where he built temples and monuments of considerable renown, Nepalis maintained very good relations at the highest artistic levels in addition to the trade that had always been one of the most important channels of intercourse between the two peoples. It was, however, with the beginning of the religious reform movement of Je Tsong Khapa (1357-1419) and his Gelugpa (Yellow Hat sect) that religious and cultural relations with Nepal were gradually pushed to the periphery. Trade and commerce began to predominate the official relationship from then on. Traditional religious and cultural ties with a definite emphasis on spiritual values began to be overshadowed by material concerns reflected in trade and commerce, although cultural ties were not altogether neglected. One other quote from Tucci will have to tell us that: "the custom of patronizing well-known Nepalese artists never lapsed; the fifth Dalai Lama kept it up and his biography cites several names under the year 1659" (Tucci 1967:100).

The Colonial Shadows

As the British East India Company consolidated its hold on the South Asian subcontinent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Nepal's behaviour toward her own neighbours also began naturally to be preoccupied with the maximization, or at least the preservation, of her own political and economic interests. This period represents, for Nepal, a decisive shift away from a concentration on religious and cultural matters because of the obvious threat presented by the British. Nepal's policy towards Tibet, therefore, was also affected.

The competition between Nepal and the British government to expand trade into Tibet during the eighteenth century can be clearly perceived in the reports of George Bogle, the first British officer ever to visit Tibet as the representative of the Governor General in Bengal, Warren Hastings (Markham 1971). Although Bogle reports that Nepal's misbehaviour had antagonized the Tibetan authorities, thus presenting the British with an opportunity to exert their influence in the area, one is led to conclude that in fact both Tibet and Nepal were still considered much closer to each other, and the Panchen Lama's polite behaviour towards Bogle was only a matter of courtesy. Bogle, for example, in one of his despatches to the Governor General after his audience in Shigatse with the Panchen Lama on January 19, 1775, reported that the King of Nepal had written to Tibetan authorities that he wanted to establish factories at locations

"... upon the borders of Tibet and Nepal, where the merchants of Tibet might purchase the commodities of his country and those common articles of commerce to be transported through his kingdom, but no glasses or other curiosities, and desired them to prohibit the

importation of them also; that he desired them further to have no connection with Fringies* or Moghuls, and not to admit them into the country, but to follow the ancient custom, which he was resolved likewise to do; that a Fringie had come to him upon some business, and was now in his country, but he intended to send him back as soon as possible, and desired them to do the same with us; that he had written also about circulating his coin, and had sent 2000 rupees for that purpose ... The Lama did not at this time desire my opinion upon the Gorkha Rajah's letter, and I made no remarks upon the subject (Markham 1971:158)."

Elsewhere he reports a letter which his host the Lama wrote to the King of Nepal, requesting him to "allow all merchants, as Hindus, Mussulmans, and the four castes, to go and come, and carry on their trade freely" (Markham 1971:198). Markham summarizes the situation as follows: "A flourishing trade was carried on between Tibet and the plains of India, through the passes of Nepal ... The Kashmiri merchants carried their goods by Ladak to Kuti, at the head of the pass, to procure wool; their manufactures went thence partly for use in Tibet, partly to China by Sining, and partly to Patna by the valley of Nepal. Tibetan merchants brought woolen cloths, ponies, shawl goats, yaks, sheep, musk, salt, borax, gold, silver, and paper to Kathmandu, and the lamas sent much bullion to the Nepal mints" (1971:liv).

This situation continued in spite of the sporadic efforts of the British, as was their policy at that time, to try to drive a wedge into any cleavage that might develop between Tibet and Nepal.

There were other European visitors to Tibet who knew about China and India but who were completely ignorant of even the existence of Nepal. One such visitor to Lhasa during the middle of the nineteenth century was Huc. He describes the presence of the Nepalese population, thinking all the time that they were Indians. "Among the foreigners who constitute part of the fixed population of Lhasa, the Pebouns** (pronounced as "Pebou") are the most numerous. They are Indians from Butan" (Huc 1852:251). He did not know that it is only the Nepalis that the Tibetans refer as "Pebou." The Indians are called by the Tibetans as "Gya-kar", the Bhutanese, as "Drukpa"; the Sikkimese, as "Denjong"; the Mongols, as "Sök-Po."

Huc lets us know more about the Nepalese when he continues:

*British people were referred to as "Fringie", originally the term used by the Portuguese in India.

**Huc not being quite familiar with the Tibetan tones may have heard a slightly nazalized ending, hence the "n". I prefer to leave "n" out, the way it is pronounced in Tibet.

"The Pebouns are the only workers in metal in Tibet, and in their quarters must be sought the smiths, braziers, tinmen, plumbers, goldsmiths, as well as the physicians and chymists [sic] ... The Pebouns fabricate vases of gold and silver, and ornaments of all kind for the use of the Lama Convents. It is they also who furnish the beautiful gilt plates for the temple, which resist so well the inclemency of the seasons, preserving unimpaired their first freshness and brilliancy. The Pebouns are also the dyers of Lha-sa; their colours are durable as well as vivid; the stuffs wear out but never discolour (Huc 1852:251)."

Huc goes on to describe the nature of the people themselves: "These people are extremely jovial and childlike in temper, like children laughing and frolicking in their hours of relaxation, and singing continually over their work. Their religion is Indian Buddhism"; he does not know that there was not much Buddhism in India at the time, and he continues "but they show great respect nevertheless for the reform of Tsong Kaba, and never fail on days of grand solemnity to prostrate themselves at the feet of the Buddha-La and offer their adorations to the Tale Lama" (Huc 1852: 251-252).

It is interesting that about three-quarters of a century later the British resident representative in Lhasa, Sir Charles Bell, who has also given one of the most impressive accounts of Tibet, thought that the Nepalese in Lhasa were not, as a rule, on good terms with the Tibetans. At the time he reported that there was a large colony of Nepalese in Lhasa and smaller colonies in Tse-tang, Shigatse, Gyantse, Lhatse, and at places in the province of Kongpol (Bell 1928: 118).

But Sir Charles Bell appears more charitable and understanding of Nepal's position when he says: "After the expedition of 1904 when the road was extended through the length of the Chumbi Valley to Phari and Gyantse ... Nepal's trade with Tibet has thereby suffered great injury, a fact which we should appreciate all the more when we remember the large measure of assistance which she gave us in the latter expedition: ... The 1904 expedition also opened up direct dealings between British and Tibetans, and this has reacted unfavourably on Nepal, which had at times played the part of an intermediary between the two, and had enjoyed the advantages with which such a position endowed her. Nepal in fact on that occasion helped us towards a result which has worked to her own detriment" (1928:233-234).

Although the noted British authorities were always very quick to see any misunderstanding or differences between the Nepalis and the Tibetans, they were also quick to see, as during the British expedition the leader himself saw, that "the concrete evidence that the Nepalese were on the British side would have a great effect on

the Tibetans" (MacGregor, 1970:319). One other interesting observation has been made by Amaury de Riencourt. "A thorn in Tibet's side" he says "was Nepal." He asserts that "Relations between both countries had never been good. Though there are many Buddhists in Nepal, the Gurkhas are mainly Hindus, very proud of their military traditions and contemptuous of pacifists -- Tibetans, Indians and Chinese alike. Incidents always occurred along their mutual border in spite of British efforts to settle their disputes and since the Maharaja of Nepal's refusal to help him during his exile in India, the Inmost One (Dalai Lama) had felt a deep hostility toward the Gurkhas. But Nepal, though unpleasant, was a small country; it could hardly threaten the roof of the world" (Reincourt 1950:180-181). Although these kinds of remarks display an ethnocentric attitude and an air of condescension there is a certain amount of truth in depicting the attitude of at least the courtiers and the rulers of Nepal for the particular period he talks about. One thing we do not know, and which is not often discussed, is how much Nepali behaviour, chrystalized during the past couple of centuries, was in fact a result of the entire colonial-imperial context in Asia; how much of it was the mimicry of the influential and prestigious powers.

It was obviously in the best interests of the British in India to see Nepal/Tibet relations remain less than cordial. And it made perfectly good sense to dig up all the differences that existed and nurture them. Therefore both the Tibetans and the Nepalis received all possible pressures from the British, who tried to achieve their goals at any cost, while China was too weak to do very much about it. Nevertheless, it was outrageous for the Nepal government to have assisted and escorted the British armed mission when finally it forced its way to Lhasa in 1904. It was extremely unfair to the Tibetans, particularly since a treaty existed between Nepal and Tibet at this time. According to this treaty Nepal would be expected to fight for the Tibetans whenever necessary. Article 2 of the 1856 treaty between Nepal and Tibet specifically mentioned that, "Tibet being the country of monasteries, hermits and celibates, devoted to religion, the Gurkha Government have agreed henceforth to afford help and protection to it as far as they can, if any foreign country attacks it" (Sir Charles Bell 1968:278-279).

It is certainly understandable that the Tibetans would ultimately lose all faith and trust in the Nepali government after this. Therefore all the gossip of Sir Charles Bell about the Tibetan officials being wary, distrustful, and suspicious of the Nepalis becomes a needless tautology at best. Nepalis had already slipped to an untrustworthy low in the eyes of the Tibetans. Nepal on the other hand did not care very much what the Tibetans thought about them any longer. For the glamor, the radiance, and more importantly the threat of the British Empire was too overwhelming. Hundreds of thousands of Nepali youths were serving either in the British Army or engaged in other economic activities in different parts of the empire. Nepal,

although politically independent, had become virtually an economic subordinate to the Empire by the turn of the century and certainly after World War I.

In time, the Nepali traders in Tibet were no longer trading much in Nepali goods. After the opening of the Sikkim route all the Nepali traders diverted their trade to the commerce between Bengal and Tibet. There was very little trade opportunity for Nepal. As the Nepali elites of the day began to seek education under the British system in India, which subsequently was extended to Kathmandu, the Nepal Government almost completely ignored Tibet, forgot the traditional ties, and neglected the commitments made earlier as the education system discouraged learning the history of one's own country and the true nature of its relations with the neighbouring countries. This was especially true when Nepal was governed by individuals who were concerned exclusively with their own personal interests almost to the total exclusion of any larger national interests.

Although political relations at these higher levels atrophied, the peoples of the two countries, nonetheless, continued their intercourse much as they always had. Thus, relations between Nepal and Tibet, which began deep in the hoary past, have continued to this day regardless of the ups and downs of political and state level relations.

A peculiar demographic fact of the situation is that all the Nepalis who went to Tibet were males, with no females whatsoever. Many men, therefore, took local Tibetan wives once they were there. Thus, the Nepalis from mixed marriages in Tibet were exclusively from Tibetan mothers and Nepali fathers. Subsequent generations, however, could have had both parents as born-in-Tibet Nepalis. Therefore, in the course of time a large number of people of either sex who claimed to be Nepali citizens spoke only Tibetan and had never in the lifetime even visited Nepal.

Newari-speaking people have always maintained a number of Guthis -- a kind of religious corporation or guild through which a strong group cohesiveness is maintained. They followed the same tradition in Lhasa. Since ritual and commensal purity used to be a preoccupation of those Nepalis who went to Tibet, they were very careful to form their own exclusive Guthi organizations there. There were about a dozen such operative Guthis among the Nepalis of Lhasa alone. Each one of them had its own patron deities, lots of ornaments, jewelry, ritual texts, pots and pans and dishes for holding big feasts, etc. Interestingly enough they did not allow their own children from Tibetan wives to join any of these Guthis. Therefore the Nepalis born in Tibet formed their own Guthis, following the tradition of their fathers. This made for a strict economic and social division based primarily on the legitimacy of ritual status.

The Tibetan-born Nepalis remained either small peasant farmers, cattle or sheep breeders, or wage earners, while the Nepal-born Nepalis invariably remained traders and shopkeepers. Not all of them were rich or successful, but this system certainly excluded any Tibetan-born Nepali from being a successful trader. The traditional law of inheritance among the Nepalis did not allow any of them to inherit much of the property left behind by the Nepal-born merchants. The property went to the legitimate collateral descendants living in Nepal rather than to the direct descendants of the deceased living together in a family in Tibet.

This was the main reason why many of these people with mixed parentage chose to accept Chinese citizenship rather than Nepalese when they were given the choice for the first time in 1960-1962. But since then the Chinese officials have given equal opportunities for trade transactions of both types of Nepalis, regardless of whether they were born in Nepal of Nepali mothers or born in Tibet of Tibetan mothers.

In the meantime, Nepal's law of inheritance also has changed to give equal rights for parental property children born of the same fathers regardless of the mother's ritual status. This has made a big difference in the contemporary composition of the Nepali population in Tibet. One basic difference, of course, is in the number of Nepalis born in Tibet. This population has decreased from hundreds to a few dozen and only a few of them are successful traders. But this aspect will be discussed further in the next section.

The Recent Situation

In 1974, the Nepali population in Lhasa proper was about 350, with about fifteen in the suburban villages, seventy in Shigatse, only one in Gyantze, and seventy-five in Yatung. Of these, about twenty were from the Kathmandu Valley, living temporarily in Lhasa, and the same number were born in different parts of Nepal outside of Kathmandu. The others were born in Tibet either of mixed parentage or mixed ancestry of a few generations maintaining Nepali lineage. The total number of Nepalis residing in Tibet at the time Sir Charles Bell visited Lhasa in 1920 was 600-700 Newars and over 1,000 persons of mixed parentage (Bell 1924:233).

According to an agreement between the two governments, people with mixed origin were given a choice of citizenship in 1962. Those who opted for Nepali citizenship were given Nepali passports; many others opted for Chinese citizenship. Thus, the people were formally and clearly aligned on two sides for the first time in history.

A majority of Tibetan-born Nepalis of mixed origin in 1974 were wage earners; a few were farmers; one or two, livestock herdsman; about thirty-five ran small retail shops; fourteen of them owned and drove horsecarts; and about a dozen carried on international trade between the two countries under government license.

The majority of them were illiterate, and the remainder were barely literate with very little understanding of modern government, the international situation, and of international trade. At the time, in Lhasa there was only one Nepali trader who was educated to some degree and was, therefore, aware of the world outside and had some knowledge of international trade. He was trusted by the authorities in both Lhasa and Kathmandu because he was one of the few individuals who could be trusted at all levels of behaviour. There was one other reputable firm which was still doing some trade although much less than in the past. These few traders were doing relatively well although not all of them had had much education. There were a few individuals of mixed parentage who had apparently opted for Chinese citizenship in 1962 but for some reason had changed their minds afterwards and decided to apply for Nepali citizenship. One difficult case to decide was still pending as of 1974.

Remnants of Nepali institutions remain but are dwindling. There is a primary school for Nepali children at Lhasa with an enrollment fluctuating between forty and eighty. Nepali textbooks are brought from Kathmandu and the teachers are appointed by the Royal Nepali Consulate. The Thakāli (elderman) system of the older days was nonfunctional by this time. He did not have to interpret for or represent the Nepalis since each of them could approach the office personally whenever necessary and not through the Thakāli as had been the practice in the past. Because the majority of Nepalis in Tibet were born in Tibet, most of them do not speak Nepali and have not even been to Nepal.

As described above, Nepalis in Lhasa had, through the centuries of their residence there, developed the Guthi system of worship, feasts, and picnics, as had been their style at home in Nepal. But by 1974 all the Guthis had become defunct. The only practice still prevalent was that of "Saraswati Puja" on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of Phalgun (during the latter part of January). A shrine, known as "Kamakusha" (or Saraswati) is maintained by the Nepalis on the eastern outskirts of Lhasa, which is more or less neglected throughout the year. It is cleaned up and maintained once a year just for the purpose of that particular day when the Nepalis visit the shrine, picnic, and rejoice for the day.

In order to give a fuller understanding of present-day Nepali populations in Lhasa, I will present a few case studies here. These were all recorded during 1974.

Case Study One

A few miles west of Lhasa proper and over the hill lives a family consisting of a husband, wife, and two children, all of whom carry Nepali passports. They often come to the Nepali Consulate and request assistance in settling in Lhasa proper. They know that if they come without the prior approval of the authorities, they will not receive their ration card, and everyone knows that it is pretty expensive to live there without a ration card. The head of the family says that he is a drokpa /nomad/ and that he has no land. His entire family is forced to make a living from sixteen yaks and five sheep. He pleads that the number of his livestock is not adequate and therefore living is very hard for him and his family although he has a permanent house to live in. This man and his wife look quite healthy and well fed. They are dressed in warm, heavy woolen clothes in the traditional Tibetan style. Therefore, it is difficult to believe everything he says; one has learned from experience that the method of argument used here is to apply pressure and to insist rather than reason logically. When told that Lhasa will not provide them with a more comfortable living than they have in the pasture area, the man insists that they will make a living by working on building sites as laborers. There are quite a few building projects in Lhasa that employ Nepalis of mixed parentage. Is this a better way to make a living than being a herdsman in a suburb of Lhasa? The man is not sure so he changes the subject. He, with his wife and children, would like to return to Nepal. Upon inquiry he admits that he has never been anywhere outside Tibet. He has no relatives or acquaintances in Nepal and has no savings to establish himself there initially. Neither he nor any of his family speak a word of Nepali. They do not know who their ancestors were. Finally, he agrees that his return to Nepal would be even harder for him. He takes leave with a grin.

The next time, he shows up at the consulate six months after his first visit, and he repeats the same requests. He is advised to try at the Lhasa Foreign Bureau for permission to move to Lhasa. He agrees and leaves. After a few months he returns to the consulate and reports that he has surrendered his yaks and sheep to the collective. So presently, he has no other problem except that he owes some money to some of his relatives. He wants to borrow 100 yuan from the consulate. All things considered, it does not look as though he will be able to or be inclined to repay the money. So he is given sixty yuan out of the Social Welfare Fund for Nepalis as an outright gift and he is happy when he leaves.

Case Study Two

There are a few Nepali families living in a village about a day's journey north of Lhasa proper. One healthy and decent looking young man in modern Chinese work clothes turned up at the consulate

one morning. He complained that his cow had been forcibly taken by another man in the village and he had no redress. When asked to clarify his story further, he related a tale of how he had tethered his cow on a peg by the side of his house; how the honking and roaring noise of an automobile on the road passing the village had frightened the cow; how the cow had broken the lead and run away; how it had reached the green field of his neighbour; how he had approached the neighbour with apologies and with promises to compensate him for the loss of his green crops in the field; how his neighbour had turned a deaf ear to all of his petitions in spite of his willingness to compensate his loss.

This could not be the entire story. There must be other incidents in the village which led to misunderstandings with the petitioner, I thought. And after further enquiries he divulged the other part of the story. His village had been turned into a commune and all the land had been converted into communal land except his own. He owned thirteen separate pieces of land where he worked with his family independently. The village authorities had tried to convince him to accommodate himself and his property to the commune. He did not want to do this since it was not obligatory for him as Nepali citizen to do so. He also said that he had a few Chinese citizens living in a joint household with him who were entitled to a share of the common property. They were his mother, sister, and a couple of in-laws. This made things awkward. As a result, the members of the household were not allowed to use the water from the communal canal to irrigate their land. So he had not been able to sow his field. He argued: how could he produce crops which he had to pay as tax? He was advised to seek an accommodation with other members of the village and report to the authorities if there were any real injustices. Subsequently, he went to the "Chike Lekun", the foreign office under the Lhasa Municipality, that dealt with all the Nepalis except the consulate staff, and received a peice of paper ordering the release of his cow. He came to report this to the consulate but still asserted that he would rather return to Nepal. It was explained to him that Nepal is not a safe haven for irregular behaviour. There are laws to abide by in any country. So he might reconsider the whole thing and make up his mind. The consulate would help him whenever needed. He came on several occasions thereafter but with different problems to discuss. Many of these types of problems came from the mixed families, where half the members were Nepali citizens and the other half Tibetan Chinese.

Cast Study Three

One afternoon a group of five men called on me and introduced themselves as horsecart drivers. All except one had married Chinese-Tibetan women. The fifth had a Nepali-Tibetan wife. They

said they did not come to the consulate frequently during the past couple of years. The reason they gave was that "only the rich and selfish among the Lhasa Nepalis had influence there." People like themselves who had neither wealth nor influence were treated with contempt and indifference. But the situation had changed, as they realized, and they were encouraged to come and state their problems. Their problem was some sort of insurance against cart accidents, guarantee of their possessions, and the future security of their children. I promised to represent their case to the local authorities in Lhasa.

After this they dropped into the consulate more frequently. Their leader, who spoke fluent Nepali and made a regular habit of casually calling, gradually began to talk more about himself.

His father was a Jyapu /farmer7 from Kathmandu, and his mother a Tibetan; both of them were dead. His wife is a Khamba who had begged her way from Kham to Lhasa. He was a very poor man living on daily wages all the time in old Tibet. Since 1959 his condition had improved considerably. Now he owned two carts and four ponies, all of which were worth 10,000 yuan or about \$ 5,000. He made a good living with his horsecarts and had savings as well. He was financing the education of his oldest son who was fifteen in one of the best known boarding schools in Kathmandu. He had a private chapel in his Lhasa house where he had a number of idols as well as thankas and burned lamps every day and offered water in silver bowls. The Lhasa authorities visited his house frequently and did not object to his religious practices.

At a later date, he reported that he surrendered some of his gold and musk, which he had illegally procured some time ago as so many other people did, to the local authorities. He was then paid an official price, and he was advised to tell other Nepalis of this transaction and not to repeat this type of activity again.

Until recently, he was allowed by the Lhasa authorities to remit twenty pounds sterling every month like so many other Nepalis who were making an honest living. Incidentally, the problem actually was not one of the remittance but of convertible currency; Nepal and China do not have an official and fixed exchange rate. He said that this was then misused by smugglers and blackmarketeers to convert black money by bribing simple people to sell their money orders. When this was made known to the authorities the privilege was withdrawn. So he still had the problem of remittance. Subsequently this privilege was resumed for those Nepalis who were making money on trade, business, and other straight earnings.

At one time when asked what his Tibetan neighbours thought about the Nepalis in town, he answered, "As far as I know, in our block,

we have a very natural and normal relationship." And he added, "We work together and help each other at times when occasion arises. We Nepalis are not discriminated against. The Tibetan authorities of the block offer us help willingly whenever we need it." He added after a few seconds, "The higher authorities always seem to make sure that the Nepalis get jobs, and are treated fairly and reasonably at all times." After a few more seconds he concluded, "This was not quite the case for the past couple of years, we are having a much better time now."

Case Study Four

There was a man in his late fifties, a very old Nepali hand, who hung around the consulate for a few days when I first arrived in Lhasa. He was a Shrestha and came from Patan in Nepal. Every time he came in he began talking and continued automatically as long as he stayed. He was never coherent or sensitive to any reactions. He talked of Buddhas, future Buddhas, and of musk for a few minutes. Then he would give the amount of the bribes he had given to some former officials of the consulate. Next he would get excited and act out how he had boldly argued with the authorities in Lhasa. Then he would say he had been treated very well by the Chinese. Then he would switch topics to the state of religion, idols, thankas, silver bullion, and his wife back home in Nepal. He said there were some dishonest people in the consulate who bothered him. He did not mind bribing honest people, but he could not stand the dishonest. He was known to be the richest Nepali in Lhasa in terms of ownership of movable property. Therefore he did not mind distributing some of it because he expected it back in the next life. He suggested that he could consider any of the needs of the consulate official very favourably. The only problem he had was of his Tibetan-born Nepali wife in Lhasa. She spied on him all the time and reported everything, including his love affair with another woman. He wanted to marry the latter but the authorities did not endorse her Nepali citizenship. He expected the consul general to have courage and dignity as a representative of Nepal, the land of gods, and assist his mistress in getting Nepali citizenship, for she after all did have a Nepali as a distant ancestor. All the former officials who had represented him had profited from him. So there was no reason why the present ones should not. Besides God had predetermined everything, and had done everything. None of us should feel proud of our actions. To be sure, when he said "God", he meant "Buddha" and no one else. All the Hindu gods were the servants of Buddha. Before he got up to leave the room he said, "By the way, the thing I hate most is the visitors' book at the gate where I have to write my name and the purpose and time of my visit at the entrance. Never before in the history of Lhasa has there been a Nepali consulate where you have had to report at the gate in such an insulting manner."

At the end of one such session I told him that he need not take the trouble to come to the consulate anymore because I did not think I could do much to help him. He was enraged, he trembled and warned me in strong language, "Watch out! I have many strings that I can pull in Kathmandu including the ones in your own Foreign Ministry."

He remained a frequent visitor off and on and I learned not to take him seriously. He died of heart failure after about two years, leaving all his property and problems behind. Subsequently, his property was divided between his two surviving wives, one from Patan and the other from Tibet, with the help of the Nepali Consulate and the Lhasa authorities.

Cast Study Five

Once I chanced to ask a Nepal-born Nepali trader what he thought about the attitude of the Tibetans towards Nepalis in general. I was just curious whether lay Tibetans had any feelings different from those of the authorities. According to his observations, the younger people did not have much opinion one way or another. They did not care much. But the older ones, he remarked, say "Ning Che." "What does that mean?" I asked, "Oh", he said, "that means that they are sorry for us. One old man said to me the other day 'Ning Che Buddha!' [poor Buddha!]. "Why was that?" I was still curious. "My full name is Buddha Ratna Sakya, but they just call me 'Buddha'." "I see. But why were you pitied by your old Tibetan friend?" "You probably don't know much of old Tibet," he began with a long breath, and as an after thought he added: "As a matter a fact I do not know much either myself, since I came here for the first time in 1965." Then he went on to explain that in the old days most of the Nepalis who came to Lhasa made lots of money easily and quickly. They were then addressed with the respectful term "Sota La" by everybody. The Nepalis became bankers, jewelers, traders, order suppliers, and -- no less significant -- also became attractive to Tibetan girls. But everything had changed since different commodities now were supplied by the state itself. There are large department stores where all consumer goods are available at very fair and reasonable prices. There is a modern bank to take care of the financial transactions and also there are stricter laws of marriage. There are no rich Tibetan women to wear expensive jewelry. "So" he continued, "You can see that it is just not possible to get rich quick as in the old days. And this change has been clearly observed by the older people, although the young are not aware of much of the past."

The fact that only the urban based skilled craftsmen and experienced people in business and various types of trade went to Tibet to make a living made all the difference in the general image of Nepalis in Tibet as opposed to those in Bihar, West Bengal, and

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Uttar Pradesh in India, where mostly unskilled wage earners from rural Nepal went to work as cheap labour.

The picture at present is changing very rapidly of course in both directions. Both skilled and unskilled labour is being attracted to Nepal from across the southern border. The migration pattern across the northern border is also very different now. There is only a trickle of movement on both sides of the Himalayan border.

There are only about a dozen Nepal-born Nepalis in Lhasa at present. The number of Tibetan-born Nepalis is considerably higher of course. And a great majority of them are wage earning urban labourers.

Case Study Six

There was another trader from Kathmandu who had never been in trouble since he had arrived in Lhasa. He had gone to Lhasa in 1945 as an employee of one of the biggest Nepali trading firms in Lhasa. He journeyed back and forth between Calcutta and Lhasa for a few years and finally settled down to his own business in 1960. He did not have much capital to begin with. He had started with the humble background of a small business in Kathmandu. He had some education and some experience with trade. Yet he had only this experience and honest effort in his favour. The authorities in Lhasa supported him and gave him opportunities to buy and sell with large profit margins. He said he did not quite understand the system in the beginning. So he hesitated and apologized for his inability to invest large sums of money as he did not have it. But this was no limitation, as the Lhasa authorities insisted he should just shoulder the weight and go along with them. The capital was no problem. He could make his payments only after he had finished the deal and made some profit. He did this with a great deal of uneasiness and misgiving. Less than fifteen years later he now deals with millions. He is grateful to everyone. He dropped in frequently at the consulate and discussed his business. He often said that the Nepali traders in Lhasa should have no problems. "Chinese officials have always been very generous and reasonable with us. As far as I am concerned, they have pulled me up and have lifted me from the street into my present status," he declared.

He is respected by most Nepalis in town, though a few from Kathmandu, who failed to get rich quickly, are jealous of him and do not mind talking against him. There are no more than six firms including his, which may continue to export and import. These traders are among the few who are sincerely grateful to the Lhasa authorities, our consulate, and to His Majesty's Government policies

on certain issues.

At one stage, I sought his advice on how to handle some Nepali citizens' claims for property and money they had lent some Tibetans. These Nepalis had approached the consulate and the foreign ministry for help. To this he said that no Nepali had ever gone to Tibet with a bagful of money. Invariably, they went there with empty bags and returned with full ones. Some had smaller bags and others bigger, but full they always were. During the process many Nepalis have either borrowed from or owed money to Tibetans. So if any claims of such properties are made, officially, the number of Nepalis having to return either property or money will be greater than the number of them receiving it. Thus, he concluded, it is more profitable for you not to take any action. It was decided to follow his advice.

Conclusion

It is hoped that these case studies give some representative picture of the Nepali population in the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. What happens to them in the future depends entirely upon how realistic both sides can be in dealing with them.

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