



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Revisiting the Controversy over Status of Tibet**

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**ABSTRACT**

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*This paper attempts to explore historical contextual to understand the controversy over the status of Tibet region. Over decades, the status of Tibet region sharing borders with India and China is the subject of discussion. In 1950, Chinese Liberation Army entered Tibet and took control of it and Chinese government's official statement declared Tibet as an integral part of China. Chinese action was condemned on regional as well as international level. Chinese government refuted this condemnation as it claimed that Tibet region was part of China for last centuries and Chinese army entered the region only for consolidation of China's security on its western border. Eventually the Chinese arguments are not accepted. On the other side, India because of cultural and religious harmony claims that Tibet once was part of India. Thus the status of Tibet region is disputed.*

**Introduction**

Historically speaking Tibet during the different times remained under the dominance of different countries (BBC News, 2012, February). Under the King Ti Song De Tsen Tibet was a great power of Asia in ninth century, a vast area of northern India, Kashmir Gilgit, Baltistan and Kashgar was under its control. Even it had influence over China (Dressler, 2008).

King Ti Song De Tsen played a vital role to spread Buddhism in Tibet during ninth century. Marco polo a great historian and navigator also visited Tibet, and wrote a detailed account over Tibet. According to him, during 13<sup>th</sup> century Tibet was the part of Mongol Kingdom, twice it was conquered by Mongol King Genghiz Khan and his grandson Kablai Khan respectively in 1206 and 1226-27. Tibet formally became the part of Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). As per historical record, Yuan Dynasty expanded over region comprised of China, and Tibet. They divided the whole area into 13 provinces and Tibet was one of them. Tibet was divided further into fifteen districts and three military areas (Rowland, 1987).

Kablai Khan knew that if he wanted to keep political control over Tibet, it is necessary to develop religious links with the region. Therefore, he called Sakya Monastery, a very prominent and influential religious person of that time in his court and made him ruler of Tibet. (Rowland, 1987). Thus according to China's claim, during Mongols Empire in 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, both China and Tibet remained under Mongols influence, and control to that time when both merged as one country in 1644. During the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) China ruled over Tibet.

### **Tibet under Republic of China**

During the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) China ruled over Tibet. The Qing dynasty fell in 1912, when communist revolution commenced in China. China went through civil war and also fought against Japan. Tibet region took benefit of the situation and it declared itself as an independent state, which was not accepted by Republic of China. According to the Chinese sources, Tibet was declared a province of China from 1912 to 1949 and a commission was made at cabinet level to control Mongolian and Tibetan affairs. In 1927, the head of the commission categorically stated that Tibet was the integral part of Republic of China and consequently 9<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama and 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and many other Tibetan representatives were appointed by the commission. Dalai Lama, the spiritual head of Tibet also participated in drafting of constitution in 1936.

From 1912 to 1949, Tibet categorically remained under the control of Republic of China. It was declared by Chiang Kai-Shek in

May 10, 1943 and again in 1946 that Tibet was part of Chinese territory...Tibetans were Chinese (Lal, 2008).

A conference was held in Simla (India) in October 1913. In which delegations from Britain, Tibet and China participated heading by Sir Henry McMahon Lon-Chen Shatra and Ivan Chin respectively. During conference, McMahon suggested to divide Tibet into 'Inner' and 'Outer' Tibet. Outer Tibet would consist of Lhasa, Shigatse, and Chamdo whereas Inner Tibet would comprise of Ba-tong, Li-tang, Tachienlu and Chinese suzerainty would remain over both regions. Chinese's suzerainty was accepted by both inner and outer Tibet. (Chakravarti, 1962).

In 1914, McMahon stated that no participants in meeting could agree for the demarcation the boundaries of Tibet. Which shows that McMahon know the importance of China that without the involvement of China the conference would not be fruitful. So the political status of Tibet could not be significantly declared, without the consultation of all respective parties. In the same time, Ivan Chen informed McMahon that he did not join the conference to discuss about boundaries, because China deliberately declared Tibet a part of China. Therefore, McMahon suggested meeting only with Tibetan leaders to just save the time, even knowing this that without the participation of China, it would not be fruitful. Simla convention finally signed on July 13, 1914 between Tibet and British. China neither participated in the meeting nor signed the agreement, while giving argument that since a long time Tibet was a part of mainstream of China (Rowland, 1962). Just a line on map suggested by Henry McMahon called 'McMahon line' marked as a boundary between British India and China. All this was done in the absence of representation of Chinese Government. Thus China objected over agreement and stated that Tibet had not right to sign the agreement.

The McMahon line was publically announced in 1937 settling the border between British India and China. However Chinese official statement declared:

Tibet forms an integral part of the territory of the republic of China, that no attempts shall be made by Tibet or by Great Britain to interrupt the continuity of this territorial integrity, and that China's rights of every description which have existed in consequence of this

territorial integrity shall be respected by Tibet and recognized by Great Britain" (Dressler, 2008).

China also claimed that during British imperialism, the East Frontier Agency that is in the South of the McMahon line was the border between India and China, but India refused to accept that Chinese claim while arguing that Chinese border supposed in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh has no written prove and in past it was under the control of British imperialism. "For more than 700 years, the central government of China has continuously exercised sovereignty over Tibet, and Tibet has never been an independent state, no government of any country in the world has ever recognized Tibet as an independent state" (Dressler, 2008).

After the establishment of PRC on October 1, 1949, Beijing radio announced that PLA (People Liberation Army) would liberate all Chinese territories like Xinjiang, Hainan, Taiwan and Tibet as well (Tamimi , 2010). In 1949, China officially announced to bring Tibet under its own control because once it was a part of China.

On august 5, 1950 New China News Agency stated that Tibet would be brought back into its mother's land in order to consolidation of China's defence. It shows that Tibet was neither a part of British India nor an Independent state as Chakravarti mention in his book, "Tibet has always been an integral part of China so it had no moral or legal right to separate from its mainstream land and led an independent life" ( Chakravarti, 1962).

### **Annexation of Tibet by people Liberation of Army**

Indian foreign policy can be seen under the domination of Nehru, in the first decade after partition, one of the major reasons of China's military annexation was Indian aggressive policy toward Kashmir and Sikkim soon after her birth. Therefore, Beijing had to take some serious measure in order to bring Tibet under its control, as Tibet is its integral part.

Two type of polices were adopted by China regarding Tibet issue, "Peaceful negotiation" and "military option" delaying tactics in talks by Dalai Lama, Indian aggressive attitude, Indian influence over Dalai Lama and China's keen attitude toward Tibet, were the main

reasons behind Tibet annexation. In early 1950, Tibetans were seeking international recognition ... Tibetans obtained new arms from India and have a meeting in July with United States were going to talk about military aid (Segal, 1985). It might be the major reason, one side Tibet was delaying in negotiation and other hand they were making their defence strong. People liberation Army simultaneously attacked on Tibet from six different places in October 1950. Almost 40,000 soldiers took part in this adventure and easily defeated Tibetan local army, which consist of eight thousand, and half of them were killed just within two days (Markey, 2013).

Later on October 25, 1950, official statement of Chinese government that Tibet is an integral part of China, people liberation army just entered Tibet to keep maintain peace, to keep free from western imperialism and make its western border security strong (Chakravarti , 1962). This statement clearly stated that china wanted to control its own areas in order to consolidate its security in its western border and People Liberation Army's troops did not face any kind of resistance from people of Tibet. Thus according the Chinese government, Tibet issue was entirely a domestic matter of China.

#### **China and Tibet agreed for autonomous Status of Tibet.**

On May 23, 1951, an agreement was signed between Sino-Tibet, under that Tibet again amalgamated into its motherland, Moreover, China bring it under the control of Central Government of China, while giving her autonomous status, in return Tibet recognized People Republic of China sovereignty over it (Lal, 2008). Further, it was decided that Tibetan army would work with the collaboration of People Liberation of Army. An administrative committee was founded for the implementation of the agreement. It was also decided that China would not interference or bring any sort of alteration in political, cultural and religious system of Tibet. The agreement finally lemmatizes the powers of Dalai Lama and decided that Tibet would remain under control of the central government of China (Rasgotra & Chopar, 1997). Dalai Lama requested the Chinese government to increase his powers but it was rejected. In April 1954, India accepted Tibet as integral part of China through an agreement and at the end of same year almost all the big powers recognized Tibet as sovereign territory of China. However, we cannot ignore the Tibetan point of view.

“At the time of its invasion by troops of the people’s Liberation Army of China in 1949, Tibet was an independent state in face and law. The military invasion constituted an aggression a sovereign state and a violation of international law” (Dressler, 2008).

### **Administrative Reforms**

Chinese government started working on administrative reforms along with infrastructural and development projects in 1950. The whole Tibet was divided into three parts for the better administration. Reforms were introduced in agriculture, education and industry. Many Tibetans were sent to China for education in order to improve their conditions. Creating a better employment opportunity, Tibetan labor force was utilized for the construction of highways, roads and railways.

Chinese state council formulated an introductory committee to discuss and take decision about the administrative structure for Tibet on March 9, 1955. Dalai Lama was appointed as chairperson of committee; the committee directly worked under state council of China and consisted of thirty members, and was ten form each administrative unit of Tibet.

In the field of education and economy China had a lot of work for Tibetan as it opened a number of schools especially in Lhasa. However Dalai Lama demanded to do more.

Dalai Lama was more annoyed over the economic system introduced by people Republic of China because this system more empowered lower class rather than landowner and monasteries. Tax system was improved and burden was released from peasant and cattle-rears and increased on nobility. Trade was also monopolized by China after Sino-Tibet agreement. All foreign exchange was controlled by China and in return education system and infrastructure of Tibet was upgraded and gradually Tibet was brought under the control of central government of china, giving maximum autonomy. A number of Chinese moved and settled in Tibet during these developments, but according to Tibetan nationalists all these development were just for the sack of military purposes not for Tibetans. The numbers of Chinese civilian and military personals were too increased till 1953,

which prevailed the situation of shortage of food and price of food items increased 30 times (Jetly, 1979).

### **Rebellion against Chinese Government**

Various uprisings can be observed after 1956. According to Indian newspaper, the visit of Nehru to Lhasa in 1958 proved like oil on burnt (Jetly, 1979). In early 1959, many Indian newspapers openly started reporting about Tibetan revolt which increased vacuum between India and China. During a monthly conference on March 6, 1956, Nehru stated that, trouble and unrest in Tibet may cause further declined the relations of both countries (Jetly, 1979). During those days, Tibet was the hot issue in Indian Parliament. Most of the parliamentarians were against the Chinese action in Tibet, except communist party of India all the political parties were in favor to review India's China policy in the light of new development in Tibet including autonomy of Tibet as well (Chakravarti, 1962). In the response of Indian Parliament, a communiqué was issued by Chinese official regarding Tibet uprising in March 1959 that mentioned: "Revolt in Tibet as an uprising of upper class reactionaries engineered by the imperialist and foreign reactionaries with their base at Kalimpong. China declared that it had never interfered in India's internal affairs or discussed them at the National people's congress and considered such discussion of the internal affairs of a friendly country to the impolite and improper" (Lal, 2008).

In 1956, revolt was started in two provinces of Tibet against Chinese army, which led to the development of military action. From 1957 to onward revolt was started in Lhasa a huge number of protester from eastern Tibet, gathered around Lhasa against government policies. An anti-Chinese and anticommunist movement was started in Lhasa on March 10, 1959, at the same day almost 300,000 Tibetan surrounded Dalai Lama in order to not move anywhere this action considered as beginning of revolt or uprising. However almost 87,000 Tibetan people were arrested, or killed into labour campus (Lal, 2008). A Chinese newspaper stated on the same day that, "Pagbalha Soinam Gyamco", a senior Lama who was the member of predatory committee of Tibetan autonomous region and working with People Republic of China was killed; a horse in the front of crowd for two kilometers dragged his dead body (Chen, 197). The whole Lhasa was locked down by protesters. They declared Tibet as

an Independent state. Dalai Lama left for India on March 17, and reached on 31, 1959 along with a number of followers. According to 'King C Chen,' about fifteen thousand Tibetan people along with Dalai Lama escaped to India. Indian government not only welcomed him but also celebrated 'Tibet Day' all over the India on March 20, 1959 (Varma, 2004). To support Tibetan struggle for freedom, conventions were held throughout the India. These two actions, "celebration of Tibet day" and "holding of convention" were considered by China that interference in their internal affairs by Indian government. Addressing to the parliament on April 27, 1959 Nehru stated, "Dalai Lama had entered Indian Territory and would be given respectful treatment while in asylum in our country. ... our deep sympathy for the people of Tibet...he felt that it would be a tragedy if the two great countries of Asia, developed their feeling of hostility against each other" Chakravarti, 1962). India never accepted Tibet as a part of China due to her own interest. In a conference in Delhi, "Nehru further stated: "Tibet should govern Tibet due to three factors;

- Preservation of the security and integrity of India
- India's desire to maintain friendly relations with China and
- India's deep sympathy for the people of Tibet. (Chakravarti, 1962).

Dalai Lama in his statement on June 20, 1959 said that in 1951, while making an agreement Chinese government made a promise to him for the restoration of my status, power as a Dalai Lama but now they are not paying any kind of attention even they did not left any opportunity to weaken my position among the public. (Lal, 2008). Anyone can assume in the light of above mention reference that first; Indian support behind Tibetan revolt, Second; Dalai Lama himself gave prefer to Indian support rather than negotiation with China. Another reason behind Tibet revolt was Tibetan nationalism against Chinese communism. Dalai Lama was the key figure of nationalism as he considered God-King. The respect of Dalai Lama of people, perhaps Chinese government did not pay due respect to Dalai Lama which he and Tibetan expected that further led toward Tibet revolt.

Tibetan uprising was not only supported by Indian government but also by many other powers as well. America also supported guerrilla uprising in Tibet. (Ganguly, 2010). Dalai Lama and immigrants were gradually engaged in many activities. It may be said that Nehru had ordered his intelligence Bureau to turn a blind eye for the utilization of Indian Territory and air space by the American CIA for anti-Chinese activities in Tibet and support the rebels in Tibet. (Chakravarti, 1962). A communiqué was announced by Chinese government on March 28, that, "there is rebellion in Tibet and the center of rebellion was in Kalimpong. (area of Indian Bengal)... the rebels wanted so called independence of Tibet and raised such reactionary slogans as Drive out the Han people and independence for Tibet". (Ganguly, 2010). Moreover, it was also stated that Chinese policy based on equality, unity and gradual development toward autonomy of Tibet. Addressing parliament Nehru said "although we need good relations with China, but our sympathy is for Tibet. We want they get freedom under these circumstances." From Chinese point of view, it was not an ordinary statement issued by head of government, even after accepting Tibet as integral part of China.

#### **Exile government of Dalai Lama:**

During his stay in India, Dalai Lama continued his struggle against Chinese government for the liberation of Tibet. Soon he came in such a position to launch a revolt in Tibet while living in India, which further poisoned Sino-India relations.

The situation between the two countries was further spoiled when Nehru stated on May 4, 1959 in Lok Sabha about Chinese aggression on Tibet and asylum to Dalai Lama. Chinese ambassador highlighted attitude of Nehru regarding Tibetan issue on May 16, 1959 and said that such statements by Indian leaders would exploit India-China relations. In a parliamentary debate on September 4, 1959 many other Indian leaders highlighted the Tibetan issue and transmit it with Indian sovereignty and integrity.

Various steps were taken to improve the Tibetan situation after 1960. China also suggested Dalai Lama to live in Beijing instead of Lhasa. Lama was pursued to accept Tibet as an integral part of China. From 1979 to onward a series of dialogues were held between Dalai Lama and Central Government of China. Finally, in 1988, Dalai Lama

accepted Tibet as an integral part of China but demanded for internal autonomy, and China will look after matters related to defence and foreign affairs.

In 1980, China introduced "Open Door" reforms and boosted investment and relieved its grip over Tibet due to international pressure. Beijing claims that there is significant development in Tibet under its control.

However the Tibetans have fear that with the interference of Chinese they may lose the culture. According to a survey report in 2008, out of total population in Tibet was 40% was Chinese, not only in Gromo which is part of Ambo north of Tibet having about 200,000 population out of them there are only 3,600 are Tibetan mean only 1.8%.

### **Conclusion**

Historically speaking Tibet is controversially discussed topic. Chinese government claimed that Tibet is an integral part of China since the beginning of the Yuan Dynast. China just lost its control over Tibet in 1911 during civil war and social riots and Tibet declared as a de facto independent state. In May 1951, the 17 points of agreement under that Tibet again accepted Chinese sovereignty over it.

On the other hand Tibetan government in exile claims that Tibet has always been an independent country. When China captured Tibet in 1950, it was an independent state and had its own law. However the Chinese culture is penetrating in Tibet. The situation is going to be relaxed in Tibet. Though Dalai Lama and his supporters do not accept this situation.

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