

T I B E T R E D E F I N E D

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Pranjali Bandhu's "Tibetan Saga for National Liberation" is an extremely important work, booming, boosting and exploding the Han Chinese bellicose plunder of Tibet beneath the surface of Mao Tse Tung-Thought-Communism and the steady prairie-fire of resistance progressing towards the Tibetan struggle for independence. This book refutes and rubbishes the official versions of People's Republic of China (PRC) on the Tibetan Question. The official PRC version, as contained in Anna Louise Strong's "Tibetan Interviews" published by New World Press, Peking, 1959, states that Tibet in effect is a purchased landed property of China because "when the British seized Lhasa and enforced a treaty in the Potala Palace in 1904, the bill for the 750,000 pounds indemnity was sent to the emperor in Peking and collected from him." Moreover, the PRC says through Anna that the long past shows a Chinese sovereignty over Tibet never successfully challenged in seven hundred years and that in 1951 the Dalai Lama and the Central Government of China signed an Agreement, recognising the long past of the Tibetan people "within the boundaries of China" and Stating Tibet's present "return to the motherland." (ALSP, pp.6-7)

Pranjali Bandhu, delving deep into the history of Tibet unearthed the existence of Tibet as a state independent of mainland China for a couple of thousand years. According to Tibetan annals, the first King of Tibet established his rule in the year 127 BC. The apogee of a centralised administration in the Tibetan plateau was reached under Emperor Songtsen Gampo in the 7th century AD. Buddhism entered Tibet around the 7th century AD also. The Buddhism that got established in Tibet was based mainly on the Indian version of the gradual attainment of enlightenment as opposed to the Chinese version influenced by Taoist mysticism and quietism. Probably, the border conflicts with the Han Chinese during that period played a role in Indian Buddhism finding greater acceptability. It was during the reign of Songtsen Gampo that an era of political and military expansionism started with the aim of establishing a Tibetan Empire, and it lasted for a few centuries... It was during this period that Tibetan armies seized the Chinese capital at cha'ang-an (xian) in 763 AD, and China had to pay an annual tribute to Tibet. A peace treaty was concluded with China in 821-22 AD. Westwards, the Tibetan army advanced to the Pamirs, reached the Oxus (Amu Darya) and besieged Samarkand. The then Arab Caliph, Harun-al-Rashid, feeling that the Tibetans were becoming too powerful and posed a danger, allied himself with the Chinese to keep the Tibetans in check.

Between the 10th and 13th centuries AD, the successors of Songtsen Gampo, known in history as Yarlung Dynasty, ruled Tibet. In this period Lamaism as a special form of Buddhism made its appearance in Tibet. Buddhist monks had

achieved a prestigious position during the Yarlung dynasty. Buddhist monasteries enjoyed material support from the people and freedom from corvée and taxation by the rulers. Prior to the introduction of Buddhism, the Tibetans practised a religion, known as *Bon faith*, which was adapted and assimilated to the state religion that is Tibetan Buddhism facilitating the birth of Lamaism. Bon priests became Buddhist Lamas. With the union of the Bon faith with Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism became more acceptable to the masses. A Lama is a priest rather than a monk and the way to God was through the priests only, as in Indian Brahmanism. A merging of the feudal lords with the Lamas took place. Gradually the Lamas began to hold both political power and theocratic authority. Monasteries became cultural and economic centres.

Between 1247 and 1350 AD, a succession of 20 Sakya Lamas ruled Tibet. Meanwhile the Mongol invasion took place and in 1207, Genghis Khan conquered Tibet. His successor Kublai Khan embraced Buddhism. He instituted the post of a top Lama as the vice regent of Tibet. By 1280, the Mongols completed their conquest of China also. Tibet freed herself from Mongol rule in 1358 AD, a decade prior to China's doing the same and establishment of the Ming dynasty. The title of Dalai Lama was conferred by Altan Khan the Mongol Emperor in 1578 to Sonam Gyatso making him the third Dalai Lama by applying the title retrospectively to two earlier incarnations of his particular sect. In 1640, the Mongols once again invaded Tibet. The Mongol king, Gusri Khan, consolidated the institution of the Dalai Lama as both the supreme spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet. A system of government based on the patron-priest relationship between the Mongol king and the Dalai Lama was established. Tibet was integrated with the Mongol Empire with a degree of autonomy. Mongol troops were sent in only at times of external danger. And this continued upto the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama.

In 1644, the Han Chinese Ming dynasty was overthrown and the Manchus annexed China in their imperial Qing dynasty. The Manchu emperors were considered foreign rulers by the Han Chinese. The Fifth Dalai Lama visited the Manchu court as an independent ruler of Tibet. All these and more for the curious reader of Pranjali Bandhu's 'Tibetan Saga for National Liberation' explode the untruth of the PRC propaganda of the long past of Tibet showing Chinese sovereignty for seven hundred years. On the contrary, China once upon a time was a tributary state of Tibet!

Regarding indemnity the book under review shows amply clearly that the Manchu rulers capitulated to the British imperialism when the 13th Dalai Lama was steering Tibet onto an independent course since 1876 AD. Britain even approached the Manchu court for assistance in forcing Tibet to co-operate. Lord Curzon, viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905 realised the futility of trying to deal with Tibet through the Chinese government and sought to enter into direct negotiations with the 13th Dalai Lama but failed to get any positive response. He then sent troops to attack Tibet in 1903-04. Despite heroic resistance by the Tibetan Army and Tibetan people, the British Young Husband military mission

won the battle, occupied Lhasa and got the representatives of three major monasteries to sign a treaty at gunpoint at the Potato Palace. The 13th Dalai Lama however fled to China. It was at this time and as a continuation of the British imperialist gunpoint diplomacy that they forced on the decadent Manchu ruler of China the indemnity bill and realised it. However in return in 1906 in a 'Convention between Great Britain and China respecting Tibet without Tibet's involvement, The British imperial power recognised Chinese "suzerainty" over Tibet, though the Chinese government had pushed for the term "sovereignty". Czarist Russia at this point of time was involved in a war with Japan over Manchuria and Korea which it finally lost. The 1905 Russian revolution also considerably weakened the Czarist imperial power. Under these circumstances the British imperial power concluded an Anglo-Russian Convention in 1907 in which also the British *imperialism* recognised "Chinese rights" in Tibet. Pranjali Bandhu points out in her inimitable style that armed with these British imperial gifts to the Manchu rulers, foreign to Han Chinese, the PRC brazenly claims Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. It is ridiculous, absurd and totally unacceptable.

If this review of a small part of chapter 1 on whether or not Tibet is an independent nation-state is shuddering, the chapter 2 on Chinese communist invasion of Tibet is horribly chilling. Currently Tibet is a colony of Han Chinese imperialism in the guise of autonomy within the boundaries of China. Tibet constitutes 3 provinces—the West-central U-Tsang, the north-east Amdo and the south-east Kham. A large part of AMDO and KHAM was subtracted from Tibet and added to Gonsu, Sichuan and Yunan provinces of PRC. "In 1950, when the Tibetan government protested to the United Nations against the Chinese aggression, discussion on the issue in the General Assembly was postponed at the instances of Great Britain and India. The Soviet Union and Taiwan (at that time a permanent member of the Security Council along with Soviet Union, USA, UK and France) rejected any discussion on the plea that Tibet was an integral part of China. The US too did not support the Tibetan government. Faced with the military occupation of eastern and northern Tibet, the defeat and destruction of its small army, the advance of large numbers of Chinese troops towards Central Tibet and the lack of active support from any other country, the 16-year-old 14th Dalai Lama decided to send a delegation to Peking for negotiations with the new Chinese leadership. In April 1951, a 5-member delegation from Tibet arrived at Peking to negotiate with the Chinese government. What emerged from these negotiations was the "17-point Agreement" signed on 23 May 1951 about which it has been mentioned in the beginning. The manner in which this Agreement was arrived at is described by the Tibetan government-in-exile thus : "on April 29 negotiations opened with the presentation of a draft "agreement" by the leader of the Chinese delegation. The Tibetan delegation rejected the Chinese proposal in toto, after which the Chinese tabled a modified draft that was equally unacceptable to the Tibetan delegation. At this point the Chinese delegates made it plain that the terms, as they now stood, were final and amounted to an ultimatum. The Tibetan delegation was addressed in harsh and insulting terms, threatened with physical violence and members were virtually kept prisoners. No further discussion was permitted and, contrary to Chinese claims, the Tibetan

delegation was prevented from contacting its government for instructions. It was given the choice of either signing the “agreement” on its own authority or accepting responsibility for an immediate military advance on Lhasa. However, the Tibetan delegates did not have the power to sign such an agreement. Nor did they have the official seal required for the conclusion of a treaty. But the Chinese forged copies of Tibetan government seal and forced the Tibetan delegates to affix them on the document. Thus ...it (the 17 point agreement) was secured under duress.” Therefore Anna Louise Strong’s contention that the Dalai Lama and the Central Government of China signed the 17-point Agreement is an intentional false statement, a white lie. The Dalai Lama was nowhere around Peking. After several fruitless attempts to gain international support for the independence of Tibet and in the face of the Chinese military invasion the Dalai Lama, a 16-year-old-lad, fled to Dromo valley in southern Tibet. Soon thereafter Lhasa was occupied by Chinese troops. Public repudiation of the treaty was withheld. The Tibetan National Assembly, surrounded by Chinese troops, finally put the 17-point Agreement on its agenda in September 1951 and it was ratified. The Dalai Lama followed suit and returned to Lhasa. However, in 1959 the Dalai Lama fled to India and repudiated the Agreement in very clear terms on 20 June 1959 thus :

“While I and my government did not voluntarily accept the agreement, we were obliged to acquiesce in it and decided to abide by the terms and conditions in order to save my people and country from the danger of total destruction.”

Therefore, the story of the 17-Point Agreement between the Dalai Lama and the PRC is like a dreadful shocking and revolting story of a lamb against a tiger that will devour the former under any pretext. And that is about to happen. Pranjali Bandhu’s narratives are charming, logically structured and rich with historical facts.

Yet the chapter 5 on Cultural Degradation of Tibet is a fountain of pathos capturing the devastating impact on the Tibetan psyche of the Chinese interventions in the spheres of religion, education, culture and customs. Monks and nuns were publicly humiliated. They were forced to marry. Monasteries were systematically looted before destruction; scriptures were burnt. Libraries and museums were reduced to heaps of rubble. All that was valuable was carried away. Monasteries escaping total destruction were converted to piggeries, stables, public canteens, grain stores or factories. An anti-Dalai Lama campaign was launched. Yet upto 1994, despite frequent outbursts against the Dalai Lama, his religious authority had not been challenged. After that point of time his religious authority began to be questioned in the official press and Tibetan monks and nuns who were allowed to function were expected to express their opposition to the Dalai Lama. The 10th Panchen Lama died in 1989. The Chinese authorities allowed traditional Tibetan practices concerning the search for this successor. The search was to be carried out under the guidance of Chadrel Rinpoche, the abbot of Tashi Lhumpo, the seat of the Panchen Lama. Chadrel Rinpoche, was allowed to consult the Dalai Lama on this issue. Two years later the Dalai Lama announced his choice. The Chinese government’s reaction was swift and vitriolic.

Chadrel Rinpoche was arrested and the child chosen by the Dalai Lama was moved with his family to an unknown location and vanished. Chadrel Rinpoche's disciples within Tashi Lhumpo monastery were beaten and arrested. Then the Chinese government announced the installation of the 11th Panchen Lama! Such playing and caricature with the method of choosing the Panchen Lama has become an apple of discord amongst the monks in Tibet. There are many other Chinese brutalities in the spheres of Tibetan language, music, songs and dance, painting, sculpture, architecture and literature. The elegiac tales are as it were written for a requiem for the Tibetan culture—one of the world's most ancient.

It is however refreshing to know that the Tibetan struggle for independence continues unabated without interruptions. The Tibetans hope and pray that “a time will come when the sun will emerge from the cloud and shine clearly”. The struggle is by and large a peaceful one under the leadership of the Dalai Lama who says that pacifism does not mean passivity. “Ultimately”, he continues, “the Chinese have to realize that Tibet is a separate country. If Tibet was always truly a part of China, then, whether Tibetans liked it or not, they would have to live with it. But that's not the case. So we have every right to demand our rights”. In another context the Dalai Lama said, “As we are entering the 21st century, I think the basic concerns are human values and the value of truth. I think these things have more value, more weight now.” Prangali Bandhu's work, the ‘Tibetan Saga’, is truly a revelation of truth.

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*THE TIBETAN SAGA FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION

by Pranjali Bandhu

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