

A Mandate Against Mandarins

Pranjali Bandhu

This year March 10, the day marking the 49th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan people's Uprising in Lhasa against Communist Chinese occupation of their country, saw the beginning of some of the biggest protest demonstrations in two decades since 1989. That was the year of the massacre of pro-democracy Chinese in the Tiananmen Square as well as the imposition of martial law in Lhasa due to escalating pro-independence demonstrations by Tibetans. The present protest activity as earlier is not limited to the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) alone, a region comprising only 1.2 million square kilometres out of 2.5 million square kilometres of Tibetan inhabited territory, and which was constituted by incorporating Tibetan territories into neighbouring Chinese provinces of Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan and by renaming a major part of the Tibetan province of Amdo as Qinghai province.

The current protests are mass based and include various segments of the Tibetan population-monks, nuns, the nomads, farmers, school and university students, townspeople, and in some parts even horsemen. The slogans they raise proclaim Tibet's independence from Chinese imperialism, demand human rights, abolishment of China's one child per family policy, release of the Dalai chosen Panchen Lama, return of the Dalai Lama and peaceful negotiations with him for granting freedom for Tibetans. The demonstrators marching in their thousands holding aloft the banned Tibetan flag and portraits of the Dalai Lama, the late Panchen Lama and the Dalai chosen Gendun Choekyi Nyima are not always peaceful. Chinese government owned properties like banks and China Mobile-the state run telecom company-have been attacked, so also Chinese businesses and shops. Chinese flags have been pulled down from government offices and schools and replaced by Tibetan flags. Protestors have set fire to government vehicles and police stations. In the Lhasa protests of March 14, ethnic Chinese traders and their shops were also the focus of attacks. Clashes with the police and military personnel sent out for their suppression have also taken place. Demonstrations and other supportive actions by the Tibetan community-in-exile in India and Nepal and by Tibetans and their sympathisers all over the world are becoming a daily routine. The plight of occupied Tibet is in fact being put into the international limelight and has international support in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics starting on August 8. The path of the Olympic torch has seen many disruptions on its route from Athens to Beijing.

The legitimate protest activity of Tibetans is being treated by the Chinese government as the activity of criminals and terrorists acting on the behest of the "splitist and reactionary Dalai clique", which it says is a pawn of the imperialists bent on breaking up China and bringing back the dark, medieval ages in Tibet, where the Chinese government has brought development and growth through political and social reforms. In view of being in the international spotlight the repression has not been as severe and cruel as the brutality that was unleashed against freedom-fighting Tibetans, particularly against the Khampa warriors of

eastern Tibet, of yesteryears. The Chinese government does not want to escalate the outcry against human rights violations in its year of triumph hosting the Olympics. Nevertheless, images of police brutality against monks are being flashed on the Internet. Various called mobsters and rioters in the Chinese media, mass arrests, beating and other extra-judicial punishments are the order of the day. Over 100 Tibetans are reported to be killed, sometimes by shooting into unarmed, peaceful demonstrators. The number of Chinese killed is less than 10. Dissenting monks and students are bound to face repercussions for their defiant actions like expulsion from monasteries and educational institutions and secret arrests. All the three major monasteries in Lhasa were sealed from the outside world by March 12 and surrounded by hundreds of armed PAP (People's Armed Police) troops.

Mass Tibetan resistance to Chinese colonisation and exploitation is, of course, part of its history-not just since 1949-50, but even prior to that-and is bound to continue until there is a satisfactory resolution of the Tibet question. And the Tibetans will be satisfied only when they regain their lost sovereignty and have the political space to determine their own destiny.

VIOLENCE Vs NON-VIOLENCE

Notwithstanding Buddhist tenets regarding non-violence that are also being upheld by the Dalai Lama, one finds that the grassroots Tibetan resistance movement has never followed this principle in an absolutist way.

Non-violence is upheld by the Dalai Lama because he is a Buddhist and a professed Gandhian in political terms and both ideologies uphold non-violence. His defence of peaceful resistance is also based on pragmatic reasons. He does not think that the Tibetans would be able to militarily defeat the mighty armed forces of China on their own. Taking up arms against the Chinese is both immoral and self-destructive. However great the violence used against the Tibetans and the occupation of their country by the force of arms, violent resistance is not warranted. According to him, violent reactions will beget even greater violence on the part of the tormenters. Hence dialogue and negotiations are the only way. He foresaw the result of any violent resistance, which was large-scale massacre and defeat of the resisters. Therefore his consistent unwillingness to lead his people in a war of liberation against Communist Chinese "liberating" forces, and his willingness to compromise at every stage.

From the time of putting forth the Strasbourg proposal, in fact even prior to that, to the present he has shown his willingness to jettison the demand for complete independence and settle for a 'genuinely' autonomous status within China. But any reading of the *Five-Point Peace Plan for Tibet* shows that the autonomy envisaged in it is far more wide-ranging than what the Chinese government would ever be willing to concede considering its economic exploitative interests in retaining Tibet as a colony for its own development. For the Chinese Communist Party the degree of autonomy demanded was as good as complete independence or would pave the way towards it; it would split China as it would involve reintegrating snatched Tibetan territories back into the Tibet region. Hence the consistent fierce determination not to come to any agreement with the Dalai Lama and their denunciation of him as an imperialist stooge. By so doing they bring their own oppressed and exploited masses onto Han

chauvinistic lines and depict the struggle against the Tibetan uprising as a 'people's war' and advocate the tactics of 'tit for tat.'

The oppressed people of Tibet on the other hand, though they accept the Dalai Lama as their spiritual and temporal leader and as symbolic of the Tibetan nation, have never in their resistance subscribed fully to the doctrine of non-violence. This is reminiscent of Gandhi's role in India's freedom movement. None of the great mass upsurges associated with his name were completely free of violence, and of course the Indian anti-colonial movement was by and large marked by violent uprisings and incidents. In any case, it would be a travesty of the truth to say that India was able to get rid of colonialism peacefully. But that's another story.

The Tibetan resistance movement is fully aware of the weakness implied in a totally nonviolent struggle. The issue has been debated in the community and the following points have been raised. Victory cannot be achieved by totally avoiding the use of force and resorting only to persuasive means of overcoming the enemy's resistance. Petitioning, praying and appealing to the enemy's good sense, has not and will not achieve any tangible results. In Marxist terms an antagonistic contradiction can rarely be overcome by non-antagonistic means. Freedom cannot be begged for and will have to be snatched and through the force of arms. Those among the Tibetan freedom movement advocating violence refer to the experience of the Indian freedom movement and point out that the revolutionaries and 'terrorists' too had their role. There were the Ghadr Party, the Azad Hind Fauj and the innumerable violent Adivasi uprisings. Some of those in exile are rebelling against accepting handouts from the West and reliance on support from Western governments. They point out that these governments did nothing in the past to stop Chinese invasion and will do nothing concrete even now unless Tibetans themselves stand up and demonstrate their strength. Asking the UN to intervene now in Tibet due to the crackdown on protestors and human rights violations by Chinese armed forces, particularly by the notorious PAP (People's Armed Police) is futile. "We appealed to the UN for help when China invaded Tibet. Did it uphold our rights and come to our rescue? Did the neighbouring countries come to help us"? they query.

It is a moot point that the Buddha preached complete non-violence. The violence that the Buddha wanted to abrogate was that of expanding feudal powers wishing to incorporate egalitarian tribal territories within their kingdoms and empires. Incessant violence harmed nature, killed many innocent people, destabilised society and disturbed trade and prosperity. He did not explicitly condemn violent resistance of the people to this expansionism. He did not favour complete vegetarianism and no killing of life at all. In fact, he himself did not completely abstain from eating meat. Another angle is that Buddhism when it was adopted by the ruling strata-as in the case of Tibet-its advocacy of peace and compassion and the theory of karma were used to make the common people quiescent in the face of their oppression and exploitation by the lamas.

In real terms total non-violence is neither possible nor feasible; people can only avoid unnecessary aggressive violence. It is justified to resort to force in self-defence. Even the Marxists/Maoists talk in terms of reactionary and revolutionary violence. The great theorist of revolutionary violence, the Algerian

Frantz Fanon, had spoken about its liberationist, cathartic aspects. It is only the reactionary exploitative classes, which while using every kind of violent, coercive, authoritarian means against the people to subdue and exploit them, who immediately raise an outcry about 'freedom' or 'terrorism' when their 'freedom to exploit' is countered by force.

The kind of violence applied to achieve freedom from oppression, which arises from rage at violation of one's human dignity and injustice should certainly be pure and as far as possible free from feelings of hatred and revenge for the enemy. Instead it should be motivated by love towards one's fellow beings and with the vision of a future society free of exploitation; it should be grounded in compassion for those who have so far dehumanised themselves as to violate their fellow creatures out of selfish desires. There need not be cruelty in opposing them and one can try to reform them, but there can be no mercy shown in taking away their power to do harm by force, for otherwise they would block the path to freedom.

Regarding pragmatic reasons that are put forward against using violent means there are examples from history where the so-called weak have vanquished the mighty-ranging from David against Goliath to the Vietnamese struggle against North American imperialism. What is needed is the faith in the righteousness of one's cause and the will to freedom. The small has ever been able to conquer the mighty. The story of imperialist conquest itself is that only. But in this case the means were truly ignoble because their cause was also such. If the cause is noble it should purify the means, which does not mean total non-violence. Of course, violence can and should be controlled and reduced to the minimum necessary; while non-cooperation, passive resistance, Satyagraha, strikes and other such tactics could be the major components of the struggle. Complete abstinence from violence leads to complete violence on the part of the enemy and is not a wise strategy. It is also exploiters among the oppressed people who would not like people to be armed, because these weapons could be turned against them also when the time comes for that

CHINESE EXPANSIONISM

Reforms and development have meant the following for Tibetans: there is a larger influx of Han Chinese and Hui Muslims into their territory. In Lhasa Chinese outnumber the Tibetans and own most of the shops and malls. The party, the army and the bureaucracy are Han Chinese dominated and controlled. Infrastructure development of roads, railways and airline services are meant for resource extraction, in which Tibet is very rich, for military purposes and to promote tourism that is again largely controlled by Chinese and benefits them. Wildlife and forests have already been largely decimated. The degradation and desertification of grasslands has happened due to either their conversion into croplands or by overgrazing to produce more meat for the Chinese market. Sedentarisation of nomads and most of the socialisation and collectivisation measures of the Chinese disregarded ecological aspects and dented earlier sustainable practices of pastoral nomadism.

After the communists came to power the Buddhist religion was reviled. Many monasteries were closed down and later religious practices were sought to be controlled by the state. Media are also largely state controlled and the education

system reinforces subalternity by giving second class status to the Tibetan language. Local arts and crafts are facing near extinction due to the social, political and economic subjugation of the Tibetans. Music, dance, drama and folklore, the Tibetan language itself suffer from sinification. Many social evils like prostitution, alcoholism and gambling have crept into Tibetan society. The colonising Chinese aim has been to cut off Tibetans from their history, culture, traditions, memories and religion by reinterpreting and modifying them to assimilate Tibet into China and make it an integral part of their country. This has been termed as cultural genocide by the Dalai Lama and has been in addition to the physical decimation of the population through repression, wrong development and population policies. The Tibetans therefore do need to throw off the Chinese yoke in order to liberate themselves.

IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION

China's integration into the global economy is affecting development in Tibet as well. The great change from an autarkic economy aiming at socialism to one which was unashamedly capitalistic and ready to 'open' itself to the western world came in 1978, when after many inner-Party struggles Deng Xiao-ping managed to reinstate himself at the helm. He put forth the programme of the *Four Modernisations*, which emphasised the development of productive forces over the revolutionising of production relations to establish a 'socialist' market economy. While decollectivisation and privatisation became the order of the day internally, externally China opened itself up to the import of foreign capital and expertise and took membership of the IMF, World Bank and later the WTO. As a result of this opening up the PRC has become the second largest user of foreign investment after the US. The entry of multinationals into China, which are accorded national treatment under WTO rules, meant competition for state-owned enterprises and worsening of working conditions and wages as well as job losses and unemployment for the workers. Piece-rated wages, contract labour and 'hire and fire' practices were introduced; there was an increase in work intensity and the right to strike was abolished in the 1982 Constitution.

WTO accession has also led to a crisis in the agricultural sector by doing away with basic food self-sufficiency. Cheap farm imports from highly subsidised agricultural economies due to WTO mandated cuts in import duties has exacerbated unemployment and impoverishment in the countryside, which had already been let loose due to decollectivisation and privatisation. This process of proletarianisation encouraging a rural to urban migration provides a cheap labour force for MNCs. Many western companies shut down manufacturing plants in their home countries and started production in China because of the vast pool of cheap labour available there. WTO entry means Western and Japanese capitalists can manufacture cheaply in China and expand their markets making huge profits that are repatriated to their home offices. Chinese capitalists also expand their market share in Asia and abroad.

High government investment in the Tibet region has also had the objective of attracting and absorbing countless unemployed and impoverished Chinese rural and urban masses in Tibet and other minority nationality regions. They are given many material incentives and privileges to migrate to Tibet as a hardship region to stem overflow to the highly industrialised and already choking East coast. The

idea is also to change the demographic composition of Tibet to integrate it better into the 'motherland'. This lays the basis for ethnic clashes and for the demand that population transfer of Chinese into Tibet should be stopped. On the other hand, this possibility of gaining employment and doing trade in minority areas provides a material base for chauvinism in the Chinese population at large and divides them from potential allies against their own oppressive and exploitative government.

Moreover, the investments in and industrialisation of the TAR has not been based on rural-urban linkages, regional comparative advantages or rates of return. Loss making enterprises are subsidised. Chinese settlers remit salaries to China, where their families mostly reside; wealthy Tibetans invest their savings in China where profits are higher. Very little is invested back in Tibet itself. Hence together with resource extraction the publicised capital inflow becomes a net capital outflow. The indigenous pastoral and farming economy which sustains the majority of the Tibetan population remains undercapitalised and poverty is common. Furthermore, China's joining the WTO has weakened the comparative advantages of the western regions in agriculture, raw materials, energy and so on. For example, China currently imports wool from Australia while its own wool producing regions in Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang and Tibet are neglected. Foreign capital invited and involved in tourism or mineral resource extraction does not benefit local people. Tibet remains a typical colony exporting raw materials and primary products and importing finished machine made goods.

The present stand of Western governments towards the Tibet issue has a history behind it. British imperialism that had conquered India preferred Tibet to be under the suzerainty of China rather than open to rival Russian or German influence. While trying to expand its sphere of influence in the Indian subcontinent it imposed a boundary between Sikkim and Tibet that deprived Tibet of large tracts of pasturage as well as places of strategic importance. Trade with Tibet involved primary products against manufactured textiles. Tibet's mineral resources were an attraction as well as its geographical location as a gateway for British made goods into Chinese provinces without paying the taxes levied at Chinese posts. After the Republican Revolution in China in 1912 the Tibetans threw out the Chinese, who under the Manchus had taken over the Tibetan government in 1910, and proclaimed its independence in 1913. The new Chinese republican government, however, claimed Tibetan territory as its own as it did Mongolia and Sinkiang. The British government now felt that Tibet needed to be treated as a buffer between itself and China, and at the same time sought its dependence on Britain. The Simla Convention that was signed with Tibet in 1913/14 without Chinese participation and consent demarcated the so-called McMahon Line-the boundary between British India and Tibet. This treaty ceded the Tawang tract to British India.

When Chinese Communist troops marched into Tibet in 1949-50 no international support was forthcoming despite an appeal to the UN, where the question was adjourned for the next 9 years giving ample time to the Chinese government to consolidate its hold. After the 1959 Uprising the Dalai Lama, who fled to India, was given refuge and allowed to set up his government-in-exile with US connivance. The Khampas who continued to wage armed guerrilla warfare

received some help from the CIA, which was slowly reduced and came to an end in 1974, as the thaw between China and the US was becoming perceptible. Their base in Mustang (North Nepal) was disbanded with the help of the Nepalese army.

Since the Deng faction came to power in China, and the process of economic liberalisation was initiated, the Dalai Lama was invited to return to Tibet and enter into discussions and negotiations on the condition that the demand for independence would not be raised. But the Dalai Lama had already moderated his stance and had begun talking about the *Middle Way Approach*, which was fully articulated in his Strasbourg Proposal before the European Parliament in 1988. Genuine autonomy was demanded in this but through peaceful negotiations. Tibet was to be a zone of peace, of *Ahimsa* and play its earlier buffer role in South and Central Asia between rival great powers. The governance of Tibet would be democratic and thus politically different from the rest of China.

US and European Union support has not been consistent for the Dalai Lama's moderate position. In the 1990s, after brutal suppression of pro-independence demonstrations, human rights issues that had begun to be taken up by the UN since the 60s were downplayed by western imperialist powers, who after all control the UN, and who were eager to do business with China. Today the situation is again slightly different. Chinese manufacturing capacity has advanced tremendously and its demand for raw materials and energy resources has also correspondingly jumped up. Every industrialised country is competing for access to limited world non renewable energy resources. Besides mineral resource treasures needed for industrial development Tibet and neighbouring Sinkiang are rich in oil and natural gas. There is every reason in a globalised world with its own kind of division of labour for the Tibetan elite and entrepreneurs to wish to derive greater benefit from their own special comparative advantages and mineral wealth and use them in national interest, which can only be done through genuine autonomy or independence. The international corporations too would have no reason to mind having direct and greater access to these resources. At the same time, the US might want to use the Tibet issue to give it greater leverage vis-a-vis the Chinese communists and get them to enact economic and political policies in US interest. These pertain to multi-party democracy and to the further appreciation of the Chinese currency to make US exports to China more competitive and help the current economic slump situation in the US economy. Chinese are the biggest investors in US treasury bonds after the Japanese, but with the falling dollar they have been diversifying their investment portfolio into the Euro zone.

But the integration between the Chinese and the advanced capitalist countries is a two-way track. China could also exert its economic muscle to remain intractable as far as the Tibet issue is concerned. The imperialist powers can make as much noise as they like right now about the need for China to negotiate in earnest with the Dalai Lama regarding greater autonomy within China and the need to make its nationalism more democratic and inclusive, and threaten to boycott the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. This fits in well with their image as crusaders for democracy in the world while following their own economic interests. However, the Chinese government may choose to stick to its

brand of nationalism and not allow western countries to intervene in how it chooses to conduct what it considers its own internal affairs. It might prefer to wait for the Dalai Lama to pass away and then have its own chosen reincarnation for the post-as it has done in the case of the Panchen Lama-who would not wield as much influence among the Tibetan masses.

Along with the pro-Tibet demonstrations there have been strong anti-Tibetan independence demonstrations in the West carried out by Chinese students. The western media is being perceived as being biased and anti-Chinese. The anti-West sentiment is expressed through a movement to boycott a French retail chain in China mainly carried by the young urban middle class. These are the beneficiaries of the economic reforms in China and its opening out to the West. The Chinese government is encouraging this brand of anti-West nationalism even while it collaborates with Western imperialism in exploiting its own masses.

The utopian dreams about a future Tibet as a zone of peace and spirituality with an environmentally sustainable economy and democratic polity as an alternative to the ills of an overly materialistic western civilisation may not come to fruition if the Tibetan national liberation movement is not able to evolve strategies in line with this vision. For this a new leadership will have to emerge within Tibet and the allies would have to change. At the moment only Chinese imperialism is targeted; the Anglo-American, German and French brands are not criticised. This is a dangerous trend. Forging alliances with anti-globalisation, anti-imperialistic forces worldwide may be of greater help to move towards the goal of a genuinely free Tibet. □□□