

Uprooted: A Comparative study of Tibetan and Kashmiri Pandit Refugees

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ABSTRACT

Tibet has demurred China's occupation of their territory since inception. Self immolation is not unheard of when it comes to the struggle of Tibetan people against China for attaining autonomy in their region however; these self immolations have been on the up rise at an alarming rate since the last decade. China has formulated hard line policies for Tibet which has in turn made Tibetan people's lives miserable to say the least. However, the case of Tibetan refugees is far more devastating. China tightened policy in Tibet since 2008 and further went on to pressure Nepal to become a partner in restricting basic rights for Tibetan refugees settled there. Due to China's occupation and their atrocities upon Tibetan people, the Tibetans fled from their own country during the period of 1959-1960 to South Asia where a majority of them migrated to India.

This paper will focus on how these refugees have adapted themselves in the new physical and socio- cultural environment of their host countries. It will also compare the situation of Tibetan refugees with that of KP refugees. It tries to understand how they have adapted themselves with the host community post migration in order to sustain their livelihood in a different environment.

1. Introduction

Leaving one's place of belonging is not easy especially when it is not voluntarily. Forced migration leads to destruction in many things. One is deprived of his/her motherland and that means uprooting of culture. Migration can be physically, mentally, socially and psychologically devastating. The Tibetan refugees and the Kashmiri Pandits (KPs) refugees are the two communities who were the victims of forced migration.

Tibetan people have their own language, alphabet, folk tradition, culture, customs, art and literature different from the countries surrounding it. It follows its unique religion, Buddhism with a religious head, The Dalai Lama (Eva Neterowicz 1989). Tibet is the North east country of the Himalayas on the Asian continent, also known as the land of the Lamas. It is a landlocked country covering an area of about 7,50,000 square kilometres, sharing its borders with India, Nepal, Myanmar in the south, China in the east and Turkmenistan in the north. (Nita Sen Gupta 2012)

Tibet had to become a part of China when it was forced to sign the 17 point agreement in return of the religious rights of the people and leaving the social order intact. Although this arrangement was not met which in turn forced the Tibetan people to leave their country.

KPs are the Hindu community of Kashmir. Just like the Tibetans the culture of this community is vivid, unique and distinct. The community has its own language, social customs and food habits

The KP community migrated in 1989 due to conflict in the valley. They moved to cities like Jammu and Delhi. Many of them lived in refugee camps in Jammu.

Although migrated in their own country, still they are widely known as refugees. According to the definition given by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence." (UNHCR 1951)

A refugee is person who leaves his/her 'country, due to violence or war. Migrant is another term used by the government of India for the KP community, however there were instances when this community has raised objections for using such terms because this migration was not voluntary. They wished to be called Internally Displaced People (IDP). (Charu Malhotra 2007). IDP are those who do not cross the borders to find a safe place to live, unlike refugees they are on a run at their own home. They stay within the country under the protection of their government even if that government is responsible for their displacement.(Guiding principles on internally displaced people UN 2001)

The migration was tough for both the communities. It takes a lot of effort to resettle in a totally different region. They had to undergo the process of adaptation in the new regions they moved to. Adaptation in general terms means the process by which an organism fits into an environment. It refers to the changes that take place in response to environmental demands to individuals or groups." (Berry 1997). Hence we can say that adaptation is a process by which a social system fits into the social or physical environment. (Mitchell 2017)

The study explores how Tibetan refugees' community and KP community had to migrate in the 1959-60 and late 1980's respectively due to the conflicts in their respective regions. However one community has to cross the border of its country and the other did not cross the border, but their adaptive techniques were quite similar. This is significant to know these

communities adjusted in the new environment. The paper compares the crisis faced by both the communities, their flight in order to protect themselves and their adaptation in a different environment to sustain them.

2. Materials and Methods

The current study is a secondary study, based books, articles, journals and internet sources were used. The required data on KPs was collected for the members of the community in Delhi and Jammu by interview. The paper also uses Tanka B. Subba's study on Tibetan refugees which is thoroughly dealt with. The paper will compare the situation of both the groups of refugees on their social adaptations after their flight.

A wide range of literature has been documented on refugees. The KPs suffered social, economic and psychological problems after migration which is available in the wide range available on migration. (Tikoo 1994; Raina et al. 2008; Banal et al. 2010; Sudan 2010). Similarly, there is a plethora of information on Tibetan refugees which discusses different aspects of their lives including cultural, social, economic as well as psychological aspects. (Diehl 2002; Servan-Schreiber et al. 1998; D. M. Voe 1987).

The report by 'Legal Inquiry committee on Tibet to the International Commission of Jurists is a very important document which produced various evidences to prove the torture committed on Tibetans. It has in depth dealt with the Tibet view of the problem. The committee also found that this religious group did suffer genocide. The committee also systematically examined the violations of human rights of Tibetans by the Chinese government. (International Commission of Jurists 1960)

Tanka B. Subba systematically studies the process of adaptation of the Tibetans after their flight and how they did not leave their sense of Tibetan identity (Tanka 1990).

A study on Tibetan refugees and KP refugee has been conducted which explores the level of quality of life satisfaction between the two, suggesting that only materialistic comforts do not define quality of life but cultural bondings are also one of the major factors in determining it. The paper suggested that Tibetans have greater life satisfaction as compared to the KPs because the deprivation of the culture is more felt by the KP refugees as compared to the Tibetan refugees. (Ningthoujam et al. 2009).

It may be pertinent to note that there is very limited literature dealing with the comparison of Tibetan and KP refugees. It systematically studies the adaptive techniques of both the groups to survive in a new environment after their flight.

Background of the Tibet dispute

Tibet and China signed the seventeen point agreement in Perking in 1951. China argued that the imperialist forces for over 100 years penetrated into the country and used measures such as deception and provocations and showed unpatriotic attitude towards their own motherland. As China became independent in 1949 from the rule of imperialist powers it

formed People's Republic of China (PRC) and Central People's Government (CPG) was announced. The common programme which was passed by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the CPG declared that unity and mutual aid among all the nationalities which are within the PRC's boundary is vital to oppose imperialism. China claimed that the imperialist powers were successful in breaking away of China and hence Tibet which was earlier the part of China should become its part. China sent People's Liberation Army (PLA) to Tibet and concluded talks for the conclusion of the agreement.

Both parties agreed to the seventeen point agreement. Although the Tibetans claim that the agreement was signed under pressure and was sign at gunpoint (Norbu 1987).

The agreement clearly states in its 7th point that the Tibetans will be given freedom to pursue their Religion.

"The policy of freedom of religious belief laid down in the Common Programme of the CPCC shall be carried out. The religious beliefs, customs and habits of the Tibetan people shall be respected and lama monasteries shall be protected. The central authorities will not affect a change in the income of the monasteries." (Seventeen point agreement 1951)

But after 1951 there were a number of instances when violations of this agreement has been seen or felt by the Tibetans.

The Chinese statement on Buddhism and religion explained that A Buddhist must think of the motherland before speaking about the future of Buddhism, he should also uphold the leadership of the Communist party and should think of a more practical life by following Socialism (International Commission of Jurists 1960).

Ulanfu, who spoke as the Vice Chairman of the Nationalities affair commission at a forum of Lamas of Silingol League, Inner Mongolia, that lamas served feudal rulers in the past, their viewpoint is different from the present socialist pattern of the country and hence they must comply with the socialist thinking. Hence, demanding the support of the religious people and also acceptance of the Chinese communist party (Ulanfu 1958).

The statements recorded in the Tibetan sources are very different from that of Chinese view. Tibetans sources recorded anti religious sentiments. Dalai Lama also expressed in a press conference after arriving in India that in case of violation of the argument, the other party can repudiate it legally. He further said that because Chinese have violated the agreement he had repudiated the agreement and hence it had seized to bind the Tibetans. Dalai Lama sought held from the UN but both PRC and Tibet were not the members of the United Nations. The resolutions passed by Ireland and Malaya on behalf of Tibet was ignored by the Beijing government (Eva Neterowicz 1989)

The report by 'Legal Inquiry committee on Tibet to the International Commission of Jurists produced various evidences in this regard. The committee also found that this religious group did suffer genocide. The committee also

systematically examined the violations of human rights of Tibetans by the Chinese government. Dalai Lama mentioned in an interview with the chairman of the Legal Inquiry committee on Tibet that "in 1955, we had an interview with Mao. He told us that religion was something bad. He said two things had to be considered: (1) that the progress of the country would be set back; (2) that the population would decrease "(International Commission of Jurists 1960).

The evidences which were presented before the legal enquiry committee showed four principle facts i.e. first, practice and adherence to Buddhism was not permitted in Tibet. Second, to systematically eradicate the religious belief in Tibet. Third, transferred large number of Tibetan children to Chinese materialist environment so as to prevent their religious upbringing. Fourth, killing of religious figures as their beliefs were setting out examples to others.(International Commission of Jurists 1960)

On the basis of these four principle, the committee held that these violations fall within the ambit of Article 21 of the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1951).

Dawa Norbu mentioned that the Chinese communists were zealously working to prove that the Tibetans religious beliefs are nothing more than a mirage and the monks and Sangha were professional parasites and also considered monasteries as one of the principle exploiters in the old society. Many of the monks were imprisoned because they were still practicing Buddhism. The young ones were encouraged to marry and celibacy was discouraged. Those who married were given honourable title of 'progressive' and were applauded publically and those who did not marry were left behind and labelled as backward. (Dawa Norbu 1997)

The years between 1951 to 1959 were the most troublesome for the Tibetans, due to living under constant fear they started to leave. In 1959 approximately 80000 Tibetans left from China's occupied Tibet and came to India followed by Dalai Lama and started to live in refugee settlements.

Background of the Kashmir Dispute

The Kashmir dispute stems from the Indian partition in 1947 when Pakistan came in to existence. It is a well known fact that Pakistan wanted Kashmir as its part at the time of partition; however the same was not to be. The unrest and chaos that has surrounded Kashmir since the partition has been caused by none other than Pakistan itself. The reason for creating such unrest is simple and rather vindictive, and that

¹ Article II

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

reason is the fact that Kashmir as a part of Pakistan was not acceptable to India. Causing civilisational conflicts between the Hindus and Muslims living in the valley was one such method adopted by Pakistan to cause such unrest in Kashmir.

KP's occupied high posts in the services due to the educational qualifications possessed by them. The Kashmiri Muslims holding higher positions were few. There was a widely prevalent notion that this ill fate of Kashmiri Muslims was because of KPs. There were demands by the Muslims asking for greater share in the governance and socio-economic fields. The majority of Muslims means vote bank to the government and hence a discriminatory policy was started in Kashmir, KP's were deprived of their land holdings through the agrarian reforms which deprived KP's of their age old rights in agriculture land holdings.

Radicalisation of Kashmiri Muslims was started in 1964; the valley faced armed infiltrations supported by Pakistan. The youths now knew how to handle arms and explosives. The two communities were seen divided (Dewani 2017). There were death threats issued for KPs along with rapes, bombing and killings. In total 319 KPs were killed in the conflict (Pandita 2013). Due to extreme terror and fear, the KPs had no choice but to migrate.

3. Results and Discussion

In order to mix up with the host communities they have undergone major change in order to adapt themselves with the host community. *The social system of the host society not only responds to but also acts upon the refugee social system.* (Tanka B. Subba 1990)

There are changes in both the communities which are visible to a great extent. The changes are more or less similar when we compare the dressing habits. Major changes in the dressing pattern and only minor changes in the food habits can be seen. Language is however at the cusp of extinction in Kashmiris however, the same is not the case with the Tibetans.

The old Tibetan people still wear their traditional dress but the children and the youth usually wear modern day cloths. In older generation also only the females are often seen in traditional attire whereas the males seldom where their traditional dresses. Similarly there are changes in the dressing habits of KP community as well. Mainly due to the climatic conditions the dressing habits have changed in the KP community considerably. The dresses of extreme winters can't be worn in the areas experiencing less cold. Pheran (long robe worn by men and women both in winter) is the traditional attire worn by the Kashmiris in extreme winter but due to less cold in the regions they migrated to the practice of wearing it is almost over. Hence, we can say here that geographical environment plays an important role in the abandonment of dress. However it is important to note that the host community of both the groups are also seldom seen in their traditional dresses.

Food habits of Tibetan Refugees saw little change despite the ecological change. They still continue to have *Tsampa* (powder of barley) which is one of their favourite foods. Meat is a very important part of their life, hardly any meal goes without

it. Besides flour, wheat and rice which are their primary food, they now also consume pulses and vegetables. Rice has also become their staple diet (Tanka B. Subba 1990). In the case of KP community food is the only thing which connects the community till date. It keeps the migrated people of Kashmir connected. The youngsters are also fond of Kashmiri food. Some alterations were necessary due to the climatic changes, as the cuisine developed in order to sustain in the cold weather. *Tahar* (Yellow rice prepared on auspicious days) making is still a must in every KP household on any auspicious day. However, due to the intermixing with the different cultures, new cuisines have taken over in both the groups of refugees.

The Tibetan refugees adapted well when it comes to economic adaptation. The skills distribution of this community is quite wide. It is because of their skills they were able to adapt well in the host society. These people accepted any job and are never seen idle. In the beginning skill development was a major issue but the survival instinct made them strong to achieve self reliance. Taking up altogether new business also helped them secure livelihood. For example many refugees set up restaurants but selling different items such as *Momos* (Steamed dumpling with some filling), *Chowmien* (Stir fried noodles) and *Thukpa* (noodle soup). Similarly the unique handicraft product also makes them earn for livelihood. Quite similarly, the KPs were able to secure jobs because of their education. The KPs were an educated community and they stressed on the need of education and directed their funds for the same so that their children could achieve higher education. Some people accepted the migration was a misfortune with a positive outcome as they got better material comfort after migrating to bigger cities. Both the communities adapted well in order to settle with the host community. However the intense struggle they had gone through should not go unnoticed and be appreciated.

Language is a very important part in human life. It is important to communicate in order to survive. That is why human beings have invented language. This is one of the coping strategies for these two groups of refugee. The Tibetan refugees found some cultural similarities with the host communities. The cultural similarities helped them adapt in the new environment even if the language was not similar. They learned Nepali, Hindi and other languages to interact with the host community. Although the KP's migrated to their own country and most of them could understand Hindi which is commonly spoken in the Northern parts of India but regional language was also a barrier which they removed by learning them. They can understand languages of the host community even if they can't speak the local language properly.

However, in the case of KPs, they are now losing their language. The KP's settled in different parts of the country and they learned new languages as per their requirements. The KP

youth are losing the grip on their own language in order to learn new languages. As Kashmiri is not widely spoken and will not help them get jobs in the market. This is completely different in case of the youth Tibetan refugees. They are in very much touch with their language and still continue to use it.

The Tibetan refugees continue to celebrate their festivals which are specific to their community. But the host people also take part in their activities as a guest and vice-versa. The Tibetan refugees also take part in the activities of local people. It is right to say that they have retained their tradition but they have not strictly limited themselves to their own tradition. They have adopted host communities dress, customs and food habits.

Similarly, the KP's also had to make some changes in their social custom, especially due to the climatic change. The festive activities celebrated by them were performed according to the season in Kashmir. Few customs have to be dropped or modified in order to facilitate their adaption to the people of the host community.

4. Conclusion

Both the refugee communities, in order to adapt with the host community had undergone some changes. Both the communities had to modify or drop their customs in order to mingle in the new environment. The coping strategies adopted by both the communities' show similar traits and techniques. Dressing habits changed due to the environment or the fashion sense of the new region they migrated to. Food habits remained more or less similar since both the communities are very fond of their cuisines. It is evident that food is a very important factor in binding a community together.

Learning new languages proved very useful for both the communities and it helped them to mix with the local people. However, the KP community is now losing touch with its language. One reason can be that the KP community is scattered all over the country and it makes it difficult for them to preserve the language as the young generation is using other languages for communication with the local people. Whereas, Tibetan refugees are a close knitted community living together in specific areas in India and are still very much in touch with their language. Occupation and education was the primary focus for both the refugee group.

It is evident from the above that the process of adaptation is similar for these two communities. It would be pertinent to note here, that even though the Tibetan community had to cross borders of its country and the KPs migrated within the borders of their country, however, their adaptive techniques were quite similar. It is the basic process of adaptation which helped both the communities to survive.

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