

Interrelationship between Suicide and Violation of Human Rights in Tibet

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes to look at the interrelationship between denial of one's basic human rights and suicide which can be understood in the context of Tibetan people whose human rights have been dishonoured by the Chinese rule and that has led Tibetans to protest within and outside Tibet. Altruistic suicide is committed when a person is over integrated with a social community as a result of which he or she is willing to sacrifice for a cause which is beneficial to all. Tibetans have been denied of their basic human rights and this has compelled some of them toward self-immolation. Tibetans living within and outside Tibet have taken such a drastic step not only as sign of protest but also to create awareness to the world. For instance, the act of self-immolation is done by both young and old Tibetans who may or may not be monks or nuns. On the other hand, cases of excessive regulation due to oppressive regime has led some to commit Fatalistic suicide. This fatalistic suicide is demonstrated especially with regard to the Tibetan political prisoners who are treated in pathetic conditions such an example is the Drapchi prison in Tibet. Testimonies and media reports further confirm for the human rights violation in Tibet.

Introduction

This paper aims to look at the interrelationship between denial of human rights and suicide in the context of Tibetans and Chinese rule in Tibet. The violation of basic human rights of the Tibetans has led them to protest and express themselves through self-immolation within and sometimes outside Tibet. This leads us to probe what do we actually mean by human rights and how are these rights being violated by the Chinese rule against the Tibetans. The United Nations Human rights commission defined "human rights as rights that exist for human beings which are not granted by any state. These rights are intrinsic to everyone, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, colour, religion, or any other status. The right to life is the most fundamental, followed by those that make life valuable, such as the rights to food, education, work, health, and liberty (ohchr.org). However, through reports and documents the violation of the above rights can be illustrated with examples. Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, expressed concern about "continuing allegations of violence against Tibetans seeking to exercise their fundamental human rights of freedom of expression, association, and religion," as well as "reports of detentions and disappearances, excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators, and restrictions on Tibetans' cultural rights." According to the 2018 Human Rights Watch report, Chinese security forces stationed in Tibetan regions continued to monitor and severely limit religious freedom, expression, and mobility, as well as intensify monitoring of internet and phone interactions. There were at least six protests in Ngaba, Sichuan, although details are limited owing to intensive monitoring and intimidation. Tibetans self-immolate in opposition to Chinese policy. Since 2009, at least 154 Tibetans in Tibet have set themselves on fire as a form of nonviolent protest, if the immolation numbers are to be believed. Despite this, the Chinese government continues to arbitrarily detain,

torture, and imprison Tibetans using the country's shady judicial system. False convictions result in various prison terms for the activists, community leaders, and students. Human rights in China are seen as an existential danger to the country's continued dominance. To consolidate its dominance, China relies on persecution. According to Ms. Tenzin Dhadon of the Human Rights Desk at DIIR, "now is the time that government should come together and stand up to challenge against China's persecution and assaults on the international human rights system." Each year, the human rights situation in Tibet becomes worse. The Chinese government's continued use of repressive tactics against the Tibetan people is part of a larger strategy to eradicate Tibetan culture and history.

"To express will by burning oneself, therefore, is not to commit an act of destruction but to perform an act of construction, that is to suffer and to die for the sake of one's people"- TichNat, Han. Michael Biggs (University of Oxford) in his work *Self-Immolation in Context, 1963-2012* defined suicide protest on certain criteria. "First, a person intentionally murders herself or himself, or at the very least causes serious physical harm that might result in death. Second, no one else will be harmed or property will be damaged as a result of the action. Third, the act is "public" in one of two ways: it is done in a public setting or it is accompanied by a written statement that is directed at public leaders or the general populace. Fourth, unlike a suicide attack, self-immolation includes a person purposefully murdering themselves (or at least playing with death) for a collective cause as opposed to doing the act out of personal or familial concerns. A French sociologist Emile Durkheim did a ground-breaking work on "SUICIDE" explaining the cause of suicide through social factors and argued that an individual act like suicide could be linked to integration and regulation variables termed as social facts. He defined Suicide as "all cases of deaths resulting directly or indirectly from the

positive or negative acts of the victim itself who knows the result they produce". Altruistic suicide is the type of suicide that occurs when a person is too closely entwined with their social group and this intense sense of belonging compels them to end their own lives in order to save others. Such kind of individuals strongly identify with goals, beliefs that are highly integrated into the norms and customs of a society (Morgan, F1985). Therefore, the Tibetan monks who are institutionally integrated through religious scripture and practices, the absence of religious freedom is one of the prime reasons for them to take a step towards immolation. Further their identity as a Tibetan and slogan of "Free Tibet for Tibetans" creates a greater sense of commonality within themselves. Though the Dalai lama lays great importance on nonviolence amongst his Buddhist practitioners, self-immolation seems to be emerging as an alternative strategy and can be seen as a form of altruistic suicide. In 1998, a former Buddhist monk from Tashi Lhunpo monastery in Central Tibet named Thupten Ngodrup, who was sixty years old at the time, and a former soldier who was living in exile, lit themselves on fire in Delhi. This was the first known occurrence of self-immolation in the exile community (India). According to what he stated in an interview, he was ready to take part in a hunger strike that would last till death that was being arranged by the Tibetan Youth Congress. He did this "to devote his life to bring about peace and fulfilment to his miserable people" (Buffetrille, 2012). Sangay Dolma's dying message before immolation as translated by Lama Jabb was "Beloved children of the white snow / Sons and daughters of the land of the snows / Great sons of the snow-mountains / Do not forget that you are Tibetan!" Through such testimonials, instances, and the fact that Tibetans are still lighting themselves ablaze in the twenty-first century, the world is also made aware of their suffering and the denial of fundamental human rights.

The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) maintains categorically that the way the Chinese government treats Tibetans in Tibet is a violation of their right to life, freedom, and security, as well as their right to freely express their religion, culture, and ideas. For instance, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, recognized by His Holiness the Dalai Lama as the 11th Panchen Lama, has been missing since 1995 and there is no whereabouts of his location. Seventy percent or more of Tibetans are poor, and many more are on the verge of poverty or have already left their country for the exile community in search of freedom, a better life, and better opportunities for their children. Constant international pressure is necessary to persuade the Chinese government to follow the standards of human rights accords (tib.net).

"Fatalistic suicide occurs in an overly oppressive societies, causing people to prefer to die than to carry on living within their society" (Wikipedia). Such kind of suicide takes place in prisons where there is extreme regulation. According to Tsering Tsomo, head of the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, "women's suffering is much worse since China's attack on the dignity of the human person" is paired with "attack on the dignity and rights of women."

Testimony by Tibetans in exile-Like many Tibetans, Tenzin and a whole group of fellow nuns were detained for months to punish the monastery for celebration award of Nobel Peace Prize 1989 to the Dalai Lama. Tenzin spent 12 years in Drapchi Prison where she suffered both physical and mental hardships. She recounted her experience as a prisoner. The prisoners were usually beaten and tortured during interrogation. There was no medical treatment and forced division of labour. These political prisoners were frequently kept in a state of constant fear and tension because of the psychologically abusive practices used by the Chinese authorities, including false liberation, refusal to allow family members to visit on visitation days (even as the family waited outside the prison doors), constant surveillance by both common law prisoners and warders, and a number of other tactics (Rights). Drapchi prison in Tibet serves as an example of excessive regulation. Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) has documented the techniques of torture under ten heads which include both physical and psychological torture, aerial suspension, cuffs, electric shocks and exposure to extreme temperature. Women prisoners especially nuns are treated more harshly by the authorities at every stage of their confinement from detention center to prisons because they have been at vanguard of Tibetan protest against China

Conclusion-

Altruistic suicide results when there is over integration of the individuals with the society, this can be observed in the self-immolation by Tibetans to preserve their culture, tradition, strong identity as a Tibetan and slogan of "Free Tibet for Tibetans" which provide greater scope for integration within themselves against the Chinese. Torture is inflicted on Tibetans at all stages of their detainment and imprisonment. The process starts just after the arrest in police stations where officials are interested mainly in extracting confessions. So, in detention centers detainees are kept for months or years without any trial and are tortured to get more precise information. The process of torture does not stop here rather convicted prisoners are also tortured as a form of punishment for alleged breaches of prison rules. Thus, the abuse is an ongoing problem. The methods and punishment of torture have been described by a number of former prisoners who had been subjected to them. Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) has documented the techniques of torture under ten heads which include both physical and psychological torture, aerial suspension, cuffs, electric shocks and exposure to extreme temperature. Women prisoners especially nuns are treated more harshly by the authorities at every stage of their confinement from detention center to prisons because they have been at vanguard of Tibetan protest against China. Fatalistic suicide results due to the excessive regulation which can be seen in the oppressive rule by Chinese against the Tibetans. The prisons in Tibet such as serve as a good example. Thus, the above instances where Tibetans were compelled to commit Altruistic or Fatalistic suicide because there were true cases of violation of all basic rights of Tibetan community living in Tibet.

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