

## THE DALAI LAMA AND THE TIBETAN CAUSE

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### ABSTRACT

*Tibet, also known as “Roof of the world”, is a land replete with many myths, situated on the lofty Tibetan plateau. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Tibet became a part of the ‘Great Game’ among big powers like USA, China, Russia and India. USA led a number of expeditions to Tibet as they feared that emerging communist power might extend its claws towards Tibet. And that is what exactly happened when China overpowered Tibet. Emerging with control over most of mainland, the People’s Republic of China incorporated Tibet in 1950 and negotiated 17 point agreement with 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama’s government. But when the Chinese force entered Tibet, they imposed taxes on everything including house, kettle, land and monasteries. Monasteries were vanished; monks and nuns were publicly harassed. As antithesis, by the end of 1955 uprisings had become common in Tibet. During the 1959 Tibetan rebellion, the Dalai Lama fled to India and established a government-in-exile at Dharamsala. Since then, the Dalai Lama has been cherishing and upholding the Tibetan Cause in front of the World Audience.*

**Keywords:** Tibetan cause, 17 point agreement, Tibetan rebellion, Government-in-exile.

Mythification of Tibet was initiated by Herodotus with his attribution- “Tibet is a high plateau in a mountainous region where there were gold-digging ants.” Long after that missionary expeditions continued to Tibet in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. After these philosophical and missionary invasions, in the Mid-Nineteenth Century writers and researchers embarked upon spiritual odysseys of the ‘imagined Tibet’. By the Mid-Twentieth Century, Tibet became the ‘apple of discord’ between global powers like USA and China. But Tibet stands apart for a lot of reasons comprised of its contested territory, its government in exile, and the remarkable stature of its spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

In March 1947, President Truman delivered Truman Doctrine, establishing the principles and parameters of US cold war foreign policy. His affirmation that America stood in support of 'free peoples resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by out pressure' (01), proved to have uneven application, however, with Tibet eventually providing an example.

At the end of 1947, with hopes of joining the global community, Lhasa sent a trade delegation to Delhi that would take them to Washington. The delegation requested for US dollars to finance their trip to the United States. Most significantly, the delegation asked Nehru in a private meeting 'to bear witness to Tibet's independence and sovereign status' (02). But becoming aware of China, Indian government did not support their cause but released enough money to cover their trip expenses. The delegation reached Washington and meet important officials, told that the main purpose of their trip was to improve trade relations between Tibet and USA. They arrived at US using their own passports and thus exerted some instances of their independence.

But Beijing would neither accept Tibetan autonomy nor accept any form of independence. They centred on the promise that the Tibetans would be 'reunited with the motherland'. People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered Tibet on 7<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1950 and soon defeated a town named Gartok Markham and Chamdo, a large town in eastern Tibet on the route to Lhasa. The Dalai Lama who was then a just 15 years old young boy and not officially enthroned as the Tibetan leader, now announced as Tibetan leader by the Kashag on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1950.

{Five days after PLA invaded Tibet, Mao sent a message to Nehru through his ambassador in India that 'Tibet is Chinese territory' and so as a 'domestic problem' the PLA 'must enter Tibet'.}

Dalai Lama, in the night of 16<sup>th</sup> December, 1950, left Lhasa with two tutors and member of Kashag, almost 200 Tibetans consisting of monks and high officials. It was a grueling journey of some 200 miles in a frigid temperature.

On arrival at Yatung, the Dalai Lama dispatched a delegation to Beijing for talks. But even before the Tibetans arrived, the document known as the "17 point Agreement", which consider Tibet a part of China, had been drafted.

The Tibetan leader stayed in a monastery near Yatung, had been stunned when he heard that his delegation had signed an agreement with the Chinese. He wrote: "I could not believe my ears. I wanted to rush out and call everybody in but I sat transfixed." (4)

In that situation, some of his advisors urged him to leave Tibet and take refuge in India. Through his brother Thondup, the Dalai Lama was told that the United States was willing to help the Tibetans. Washington was hopeful that the Dalai Lama would become a strong voice against communist power. The US Ambassador Henderson, had made every effort to convince the Dalai Lama that he could serve his people by seeking asylum outside Tibet.

While the US had agreed to help the Dalai Lama find asylum, India was not as forthcoming as America.

On 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1951, the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa, hoped for re-negotiating the 17 point Agreement. PLA troops had begun to arrive in Lhasa. They began to build Military Area Headquarter in Lhasa. The PLA quickly began building roads and bridges allowing the transport of food, men, military equipment etc. with the creation of the Tibetan Military District headquarters in February 1952, the Tibetan Army was incorporated into the PLA.

On 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1953, General Dwight D. Eisenhower became the president of America. He too was dedicated to stemming the spread of communism.

India and China began talks over the Status of Tibet, towards the end of 1953. The famous agreement known as Panchsheel was very much at Tibet's expense. The Chinese were eager to convince India to avoid any challenge to their claim of sovereignty over Tibet. On 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1954, the Panchsheel Agreement was signed and the Indian government accepted that Tibet constituted an integral part of China.

In the summer of 1954, the Dalai Lama and 400 other Tibetans including his family, officials and servants travelled to Beijing at Mao's invitation. The Dalai Lama and other selected Tibetan officials attended the 7<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the state council. In that session a resolution was passed creating, the Preparatory Committee of the Autonomous Region of Tibet (PCART).

When the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa, the Tibetans were happy. But their happiness soon turned to sorrow. The Chinese imposed punishing taxes on houses, cattle, land and Monasteries.

The PLA publicly harassed monks and nuns (demonstrating that there was no place for religion in the New Tibet). By the end of 1955 spontaneous uprisings had become. Khampas attacked Chinese soldiers, wiping out Chinese garrison in Lithang, Bathang, Chamdo and Kanzu.

The Dalai Lama isolated in the Potala Palace hoped to attend the Buddhist 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Buddha Jayanti in India. It was an opportunity for him to see his family and relatives and most of all obtained advice from Nehru.

After Mao's permission to leave Tibet, the Dalai Lama arrived at Sikkim. He and the group of officials were welcomed by a crowd of people. In a meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> November, 1956, the Tibetan leader told Nehru that he wished to explore the possibility of seeking political asylum. He also pointed out that his people had grown desperate under the present condition and they were prepared to die. But Nehru explained that 'nothing could be done for Tibet at present' (05) and advised him to return home. After meeting his family, who had taken refuge in Kalimpong, the Dalai Lama made his return in March 1957.

By 1956, Nehru stood in favour of China, had begun to experience a growing 'sense of disquiet over border issues with China' (205). When Nehru saw Chinese drawn maps including Indian territory as part of China in a 'China pictorial magazine' of July 1958, he wrote to Chou-En-Lai to remind him of their past conversations. But Chou's reply was not satisfactory.

At the end of 1958, with the Chinese ambush and the capture of an Indian military patrol on the Aksai Chin Plateau became Sino-Indian relation sour. This began a costly Sino-Indian border dispute, which developed into a brief war in 1961-62. This is an unsolved problem till the present times.

Now the Tibet question has become a significant factor in Sino-Indian relations. At the Dalai Lama's invitation Nehru in 1958 decided to make a trip to Tibet and see for himself how the Chinese were treating the Tibetans. But Beijing only permitted him to get a glimpse of the situation in Eastern Tibet.

The year 1958 came to a close amidst heightened tensions in Tibet. The Chinese had demanded that the Tibetan Kashag dispatch Tibetan troops to confront the Khampas. The Dalai Lama thought 'unthinkable' to send out a Tibetan Army to fight against Tibetans whose crime was 'to

defend Tibet' (06). He wrote in January 1959, 'either by accident or design, the Chinese brought the final crisis on us.

In early 1959 the Dalai Lama agreed to accept the Chinese authorities invitation to attend a theatrical production at their military headquarters in Lhasa, located two miles from his Norbulingka Palace. The date of 10<sup>th</sup> March was set. Lhasa was crowded with people participating in Monlam Festival at that time. A rumour was spread that the Dalai Lama was expected at the PLA military headquarters and had been instructed to arrive without bodyguards.

On the morning of 10<sup>th</sup> March close to 39000 Tibetans gathered in front of Norbulingka palace. They opposed his attendance at 'theatrical event' at PLA's camp and were determined to prevent this 'at any cost' (07). A week passed and on the morning of 17<sup>th</sup> March, two rounds were fired. The Kashags and officials consulted and it was decided that the Dalai Lama would leave Lhasa. He wrote, "The decision was not a small matter; the stakes were high: the whole future of Tibet depended on it" (08). Before leaving the Dalai Lama went to his chapel for farewell-the monks praying had no idea that they would not see him again. At the altar he left the traditional scarf as his symbol of farewell. He dressed as a soldier with a fur hat and a rifle over his shoulder. A small party consisting his mother and sister made their way towards the 16000 feet Che-La pass. At the top of the mountain pass, the Dalai Lama notes he turned for a last look at his homeland.

A few days after the party left Lhasa, the Chinese began a full assault with artillery and bombs. The Chinese flag was raised over the Potala Palace on 23<sup>rd</sup> March. Hearing the news of devastation in Lhasa, the Dalai Lama had repudiated the 17 point agreement and officially proclaimed the renewed Tibetan government. On 29<sup>th</sup> March, Phala, an important official of the Dalai Lama sent a message to Washington to request asylum in India: not knowing whether or not Nehru would agree, the party began the trek towards Indian border. On their last night in Tibet, at a small settlement called Mongmang, the party learned that the Dalai Lama would be granted asylum. At Bomdila the young Tibetan leader met P.N. Menon and then went to Tezpur, where he was met by a cluster of journalists and made his first public statement. On 24<sup>th</sup> April, the Dalai Lama met Nehru at Birla House in Missouri. The meeting was emotionally charged. He had been granted asylum and would now proceed to establish his government in exile at Dharamshala.

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