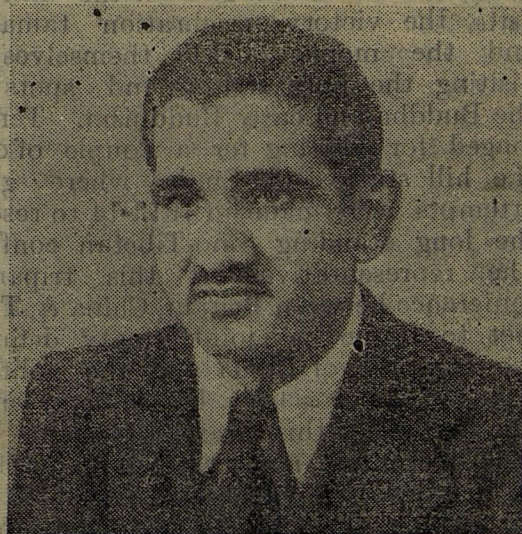


TIBETAN MISSIONS ABROAD

By
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World knows Tibet to be a 'close preserve' of lamas who for fear of losing their stronghold on their own people do not encourage them to have any political intercourse with the world. Such an attitude of aloofness, the lamas tell us, if we ask them, rests on the fastness of High Asia and the inaccessibility of Tibet herself which forbid the cultivation and perpetuity of any kind of external connections. But the lay Tibetans go out for pilgrimage and trade beyond their mountain confines and come in contact with unique advancement of mankind and science in the countries of their visits. They return home with new ideas for a new order of things in their country in place of her old lamaic set up. The lay element of the Tibetan population thus begins to long for the introduction of progressive tendencies from the outside world or keep abreast atleast with whatever transpires there. Postwar Tibetan Missions, goodwill and trade delegation, are a clear indication of such an urge of the Tibetan people for participation in world events.

Mongol delegation (in Europe) of the years 1925-1929 inspired the Tibetans for democratising their administrative institution for the first time. And the establishment of the Tibetan Foreign Bureau in 1926-1927 better say the year 1927 was the outcome of such lay attempts for power in Tibet. Of course, definite headway in this direction was made during the years following the last autocratic Dalai Lama's retirement to heavenly fields in 1933. Early in 1946 the Government of Tibet sent out to India and China a goodwill mission for conveying congratulations & complimentary presents of the Regent & the people of Tibet to the British King, the American President and the Chinese Generalissimo, through their representatives in Delhi, on their victory in World War II. In such a congratulatory mission observers saw nothing of the lay assertion or installation in the executive affairs of the Government of Tibet. For Dzasa Chhoden Tendar, the monk leader of the Mission, was always seen to be the main

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moving force behind it. While the lay members displayed keen enthusiasm for going to the grand gala of the military Tattu, the victory celebration tamasha, and the monks busied themselves in visiting the holy sights and spots of the Buddha and early Buddhism. Tendar longed for visiting for a couple of days the hill station of Simla where great attempts were made in 1913-14 to resolve the long standing Sino-Tibetan conflict. The representatives of this tripartite conference between Britain, China & Tibet met to frame a joint treaty defining the frontiers of China and the political status of Tibet. The Chinese representative initialled this draft agreement but his Government never ratified it for fear of Britain reviving her pre-1914 attitude of treating the Chinese sovereignty over Tibet as a mere 'constitutional fiction' for the officials of the British Foreign Office had then stated that Tibet did not belong, and had never belonged to China. Sir Edward Grey was of the opinion, he expressed it in the British Parliament that just as Mongolia was useful for Russia as a buffer state so was Tibet for England and that the affairs of Tibet were Britain's business and not that of China, let alone that of any other country.

The Tibetan goodwill mission in China were commissioned to seek settlement of the Sino-Tibetan boundary dispute left unsettled in 1914 and, during its one year's sojourn in China, the Tendar mission did some really useful work for creating a homely atmosphere for an amicable Sino Tibetan relationship which ended only with the expulsion of the Chinese Mission from Lhasa in August 1949, consequent to the fall of the regime of Chiang Kai-shek. Back to their land of the snows, the members of the 1946-goodwill mission inspired Tibet's cultural

delegation to the Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi during March-April, 1947 for bringing together all Asian lands and people in a permanent link of common cultural aspirations and heritage.

An edifying task indeed though such a grand cultural augury on the eve of India's independence revived the old quarrel between China and Tibet, notwithstanding the neighbourly feeling created by Dzasa Tendar in the preceding year, notwithstanding the fact that the Lhasa Government, in sending this delegation to Delhi, had no political designs on China's imperialistic policies in Tibet. The Tibetans had come down to participate in the deliberations of this Asiatic assembly on invitation direct from the Indian Council of World Affairs, the 'non-official and non-political' body organizing this conference. The Chinese delegation vehemently objected to such a participation of the Tibetans on par with the Chinaman, an objection very much against the sentiment of the Indian people. But then it was another instance of China's objections to India's policy in Tibet, objections of a China with whom nationalist India had ever been so friendly. Theiji Sampho, the leader of the Tibetan delegation, for his part stated most frankly in his address to this assembly of the Asian people that 'only religious aspirations determine the destinies of the Tibetans and shape the policies of the Tibetan Government' in all their religious and secular undertakings." The Tibetans, it may well be noted in this context, call their land "the Realm of Religion".

The repercussions of such an unhappy prelude in the matter of inter-Asian relationship have had a vital effect on peace and solidarity in Central Asia, especially the Sino-Tibetan connection during the after years.

Early in January, 1949, Dzasa Yuthok, the Tibetan delegate to the celebrations and worship of the sacred relics of the Arhants Moggallana and Sariputta in Calcutta, re-affirmed his country's cultural and religious connection with India, suggestively outlined by Theiji Sampho in 1947. His Excellency Yuthok stated: 'We are a country which administers its subjects on the basis of religious aspirations and India being the motherland of Buddhism, we Buddhists especially Tibet have had friendly relations with India from ancient times'. The Dalai Lama magnanimously donated Rs. 5 000/- to the celebrations fund of the Mahabodhi Society as a unique mark of his divinity's deep attachment to India.

And then came the traders in December, 1947. The Government of Tibet interested itself in spending the big rupee balance, acquired by selling a huge quantity of goods to India during the war years, in the purchase of certain types of light machinery from Europe and America for the development of her agricultural and cottage industries. For such purchases Tibet needed the dollar exchange. But up till now all of Tibet's foreign trade, especially her wool exports, has been conducted with the outside world through India who pays Tibet in rupees. This has not pleased the Tibetans who want and feel entitled to payment in dollars. So the Tibetan traders, Pangdatsang the real brain behind them, organised a four-man trade mission, with the blessings of the Dalai Lama, for negotiating with the Government of India the matter of Tibet's share of the dollar pool of India. A trade understanding between India and Tibet agreed consequently, worked quite smoothly till the recent ban on the export of all types

of wool from India, inclusive of "raw wool" from Tibet. This ban was imposed by the Government in July 1950 following representations made by the Indian Woolen Mills to the effect that mills were facing shortage due to increased exports to foreign markets. Hence for a full implementation of this pact, Rimshi (Depon till recently) Surkhang who was also on the 1948 mission arrived in Delhi in October, 1950 to discuss the lifting of the ban on the free export of Tibetan wool to foreign countries. Export restrictions have already been relaxed. The Government of India have informed the Tibetans that all wools of Tibetan origin, intended for foreign countries, are now getting a free export through the Calcutta port.

The members of the 1948 mission had long sojourns in China, U. S. A. and the countries of the European continent visiting there, among other things, hospitals and schools and meeting representatives of museums interested in the purchase of objects of Tibetan art. The Shakabpa trade mission in the U. S. A. was also delegated with the task of finding out the purpose of the American purchase of 10,000 yak-tails annually from Tibet. That was perhaps for satisfying the curiosity of the lamas in the matter. Tibetans, we know it, look upon their yak as a sacred animal as we look upon our cow in India. On the return home of the trade mission, after making all kinds of trade arrangements in the countries of the outside world, observers speculated that the Tibetans would start stripping their country of all the artistic things in her in order to make money. It is a pity that the famous Tibetan jewellery and valuables

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have already started coming out of Tibet consequent to the Chinese invasion of Tibet.

Mao Ts-tung's China has told Tibet many times to give up all ideas of independence and sovereignty and help from abroad. Democratic personages in Peking have advised the Tibetans to settle their old conflict by negotiations, not by warfare. China has already made an offer of 'regional autonomy' to Tibet with the Tibetan army to be organised as a part of the Chinese People's Army. These cross-currents in the Sino-Tibetan politics form the most befitting background to Tibet's seven-men political mission, which arrived in India in March 1950, enroute to Hongkong where its delegates planned to contact the Peking authority for settling the delicate question of the sovereignty of China over Tibet. But the British High Commissioner in India recalled their visas in May-June 1950 and the delegation had to return to Kalimpong awaiting further orders from Lhasa. The political situation in Hongkong at the time, the British said, did not favour the holding there of such a meeting of the Communist Chinese & the Tibetans. The British then suggested that it would not be a bad thing if these negotiations could be conducted in India, not necessarily under Indian auspices. Such a conference in that case could become the resuscitation of the incomplete Simla Conference of 1914. Hitherto the Chinese never agreed to come to negotiations over the Tibetan issue. This time it was different in as much as the Peking authorities agreed to meet the Tibetan delegation in Delhi for preparatory talks. India sent a formal note to China to settle this complicated issue peacefully and

satisfying to all concerned. "India has definitely taken up the Dalai Lama's battle on the diplomatic front" commented the New York Times (August 20, 1950). Mean whatever it may, the best chance for the Tibetans' achieving their wish to be let alone lies only in an agreement between China and India reaching a common understanding concerning the future political status of their common buffer Tibet. Foundation for such an understanding seem to have been laid well in the desire of the Mao Tse-tung's government to settle the Tibetan problem by negotiations.

The Tibetan Delegation arrived in Delhi for formal and preliminary talks with the Chinese Ambassador, General C. H. Yuan, and left back for Kalimpong on October 25, 1950 for collecting their kit before proceeding to Peking for final negotiations. But China's invasion of Tibet on such an eve seems to have cut short the Tsechang Gyalbo-Shakabpa mission for further discussions for a peaceful settlement of the Sino-Tibetan conflict by peaceful means and negotiations. Nevertheless the outline of the case remains basically the same. That is, the Chinese still claim Tibet to be an integral part of China on historic grounds no matter such grounds are valid or invalid. The Tibetans on the other hand claim complete independence for themselves. They declared their freedom, if you ask them, in the year 1911 at the time of the Sun Yat-sen revolution in China by sending away their ambans and their escort back to China, thereby ending all brands of the much disputed sovereignty of China over their land. Whatever the implication, the merits of the case seem to be logical, be it for China or for Tibet.

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